



**A Celebration of Superheroes  
Virtual Conference 2021  
May 01-May 08  
#DePaulHeroes**

Conference organizer:  
Paul Booth (pbooth@depaul.edu)  
with Elise Fong and Rebecca Woods



## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This has been a strange year, to be sure. My appreciation to everyone who has stuck with us throughout the trials and tribulations of the pandemic. The 2020 Celebration of Superheroes was postponed until 2021, and then went virtual – but throughout it all, over 90% of our speakers, both our keynotes, our featured speakers, and most of our vendors stuck with us. Thank you all so much!

This conference couldn't have happened without help from:

- The College of Communication at DePaul University (especially Gina Christodoulou, Michael DeAngelis, Aaron Krupp, Lexa Murphy, and Lea Palmeno)
- The University Research Council at DePaul University
- The School of Cinematic Arts, The Latin American/Latino Studies Program, and the Center for Latino Research at DePaul University
- My research assistants, Elise Fong and Rebecca Woods
- Our Keynotes, Dr. Frederick Aldama and Sarah Kuhn (thank you!)
- All our speakers...
- And all of you!

## **Conference book and swag**

We are selling our conference book and conference swag again this year! It's all virtual, so check out our website [popcultureconference.com](http://popcultureconference.com) to see how you can order. All proceeds from book sales benefit Global Girl Media, and all proceeds from swag benefit this year's charity, Vigilant Love.

## **DISCORD and Popcultureconference.com**

As a virtual conference, A Celebration of Superheroes is using Discord as our conference 'hub' and our website [PopCultureConference.com](http://PopCultureConference.com) as our presentation space. While live keynotes, featured speakers, and special events will take place on Zoom on May 01, Discord is where you will be able to continue the conversation spurred by a given event and our website is where you can find the panels. Discord is also where you can find us if you have questions or concerns, where you can meet up with others to chat. Conversations in Discord are persistent across timezones and are separated by topic, and they will still be available after the conference. You must be a registered attendee (both presenting/non-presenting) in order to access the conference Discord.

## **MEETING ETIQUETTE**

Audience members will enter each Zoom session with their microphones and videos off. Feel free to turn your video on if you feel comfortable. Please leave microphones off while the presenters are giving their presentations. At the conclusion of the presentations, the moderator will open up conversation and monitor the chat for additional questions. Feel free to use the Zoom chat during the discussion to pose questions. After the session is concluded, we will save the zoom chat and post

it on the discord thread associated with each session to facilitate further conversation (note that private messages are saved in recordings). Please note that meetings will be recorded and available for a limited time after the conference.

### **Anti-Harrassment Policy**

The DePaul Pop Culture Conference is dedicated to providing a harassment-free conference experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, or identity – and this applies in both digital and non-digital spaces. This is in keeping with DePaul University’s own Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment policies. Joining together fan and scholar communities, this colloquium is intended to be open and welcoming to all. We do not tolerate harassment of conference participants in any form. Conference participants violating these rules may be sanctioned or expelled from the conference at the discretion of the conference organizers. Harassment includes offensive verbal comments, sexual images in public spaces, deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recording, sustained disruption of talks or other events, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention. Participants asked to stop any harassing behavior are expected to comply immediately. In particular, exhibitors should not use sexualized images, activities, or other material. Event staff (including volunteers) should not use sexualized clothing/uniforms/costumes, or otherwise create a sexualized environment. Cosplay is not consent!

If a participant, attendee, or guest engages in harassing behavior, the conference organizers may take any action they deem appropriate, including warning the offender or expulsion from the conference. If you are being harassed, notice that someone else is being harassed, or have any other concerns, please contact a member of conference staff immediately. Conference staff can be identified by t-shirts. Conference staff will be happy to help participants contact hotel/venue security or local law enforcement, provide escorts, or otherwise assist those experiencing harassment to feel safe for the duration of the conference. We expect participants to follow these rules at all conference venues and conference-related social events. We value your attendance!

To report an incident (anonymously or non-anonymously), please contact either DePaul Public Safety (312.362.8400) or Paul Booth (email: [pbooth@depaul.edu](mailto:pbooth@depaul.edu) // Twitter: [@pbooth81](https://twitter.com/pbooth81) // or the official Twitter: [@DPU\\_PopCulture](https://twitter.com/DPU_PopCulture)).

## SCHEDULE

### Live Zoom Sessions, Saturday, May 01, 2021 (all times Central, Chicago time)

Central Time	Panel	Hosts and Speakers (Moderator)
11:00-12:00	Academic Keynote	<b>Frederick Aldama</b> (Paul Booth)
12:00-13:00	Lunch break!	Eat some superhero snacks!
13:00-14:00	Keynote	<b>Sarah Kuhn</b> (Paul Booth)
15:00-16:00	Featured Speaker: Writing Workshop	<b>Michael Moreci</b> , (Paul Booth)
16:00-17:00	Roundtable Discussion: Superheroes and Morality	<b>CarrieLynn D. Reinhard and Christopher Olson</b> (Paul Booth)
17:00-18:00	Live Fan Vid Show	<b>Anne C. Smith and Samantha Close</b>

### Recorded Panels (hosted on [popcultureconference.com](http://popcultureconference.com), available from May 01 - May 08)

Defining the Superhero	
Rebranding Superheroes	<b>Jon Clarke</b>
Superiterative: All Batmen are Batmen	<b>Peter Coogan</b>
Defining Superheroes	<b>Blair Davis</b>
Of Heroes and Hippies: A Reimagining of Superheroes from the Hippie Movement	<b>Ailea Merriam-Pigg</b>
Not-So Super - How Has a New Crop of Movies and Series Reinvented Our Views of Who Is Super	<b>Eleanor Pye</b>
The Real Superheroes? 'The Boys' of Supernatural and the Amazon Prime Series	<b>Lynn Zubernis and Matt Snyder</b>

### Ethics and the Superhero

The Normative Ethics of the Marvel, DC, and X-Men Film Universes	<b>Larrie Dudenhoefter</b>
Aquaman and the War Against Oceans: Comics Allegory in the Anthropocene	<b>Ryan Poll</b>

### Mental Health and Superhero Media

Is Dissociation a Superpower? Novel Depictions of Coping in Netflix's Umbrella Academy	<b>David Eltz</b>
Mental Health in Gotham	<b>Krystal Kara</b>
Harley Quinn and Joker	<b>Fallon King</b>
Silk, Superheroes, and Mental Health Journeys	<b>Lisa Rothman</b>

### Politics and the Superhero

Overcoming a Pandemic with 'Pan': Anpanman's Pertinence in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic	<b>Antonia Cavcic</b>
"I Control the Truth": Objective Truth, Fake News, and the Spectrum of Authoritarianism in Spider-Man: Far From Home	<b>Matthew Cooper</b>
Embodying the Villian: Negotiating Political Cooptations of Joker.	<b>Gavin Farrow</b>
A Spider on the Wall: Surveillance in the MCU's Spider-Man as an Analogy for Youth in the Post-September 11 Era	<b>Abby Kirby</b>
Turkish Fantastic Cinema Between 1950-1985	<b>Gurkan Mihci</b>

### Pulp, Noir, and the Gothic in Superhero Media

Reconstructing the Golden Age: A Critical Look at Sandman Mystery Theater	<b>Gordon Dymowski</b>
Batman and the Gothic in FOX's Gotham	<b>Carey Millsap-Spears</b>
The Reward You Get for Being Batman: Storytelling and Resurrection in Neil Gaiman's Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?	<b>Kristin Noone</b>

<b>Readership and Reception</b>	
Superheroes: The Ultimate Fanfiction Universe	<b>Allison Broesder</b>
Costumes, Capes ... and Cooties: Cerebus's Satirical Superheroes	<b>Dominick Grace</b>
Endgames & Doomsdays: COVID-19 and the 'Death' of Superhero Cinema	<b>Andrew McGowan</b>
Robin, Boy (Wonder) Next Door	<b>Lauren O'Connor</b>
WandaVision and the Cognitive Processes of Brazilian Fans on Twitter	<b>Daiana Sigiliano and Gabriela Borges</b>
Laughing Through Tragedy: Finding Comedy in a Post-Blip MCU	<b>William Staton</b>

<b>Representation I: Blackness and Superheroes</b>	
"While You Were Dreaming, the World Changed": Marvel Comic's X-Men's House of X/Powers of X and The End of the Superheroic Minority Metaphor?	<b>Tony D'Agostino</b>
Breaking the Buck / Reliving the Tragedy: Afrofuturism and Black Masculinity in Black Panther	<b>Danyella Greene and Abimbola Iyun</b>
Uncle Vlad's Cabin: Intertextuality Between 'Cabin 33' and Blade (Stephen Norrington, 1998)	<b>Khara Lukancic</b>
"Black Lightning's Back": The Limits of the Politics of Respectability	<b>Aseel Qazzaz</b>

<b>Representation II: New (and Old) Roles</b>	
Woke Marketing and Marvel Comics	<b>Monica Flegel and Judith Leggatt</b>
The Man with a Secret. Fashioning the 'Camp' Superman Body	<b>Zara Korutz</b>
Supersizing Diversity: A Path to More Representation in the Superhero Genre	<b>Maseri Kisa Schultz</b>

<b>Superheroes?</b>	
Michael Bay's Transformers Pentalogy as a Superhero-Film Saga	<b>Yago Paris</b>
How Godzilla vs. Kong Memes Turned Titans into Pandemic Superheroes	<b>Steve Rawle</b>

<b>Superheroes as Feminist Icons</b>	
Superhero Himbos: Wish Fulfillment and the Female Gaze	<b>Courtney Beresheim</b>
Does Victoria's Secret Sell Chainmail Bikinis?: Costuming and Gender in Comic Books Through the 20th Century	<b>Lauren Clark Hill</b>
Peggy Carter as a Feminist Icon: A Decade of Marvel-ous Impact	<b>Annika Pallasch</b>
"No One's Going to Be Looking at Your Face": The Female Gaze and the New (Super)Man in Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman"	<b>Anna Peppard</b>
"Eating nuts, kicking butts, and becoming a feminist icon: The transmedia history and actor-network theory critique of Squirrel Girl"	<b>CarrieLynn Reinhard</b>
<b>Superhero Games and Other Adaptations</b>	
How Mary Jane Hit the Jackpot in Marvel's Spider-Man.	<b>Jack Fennimore</b>
Managing the Superpowered Men: Mr. Love Queen's Choice, Otome Games and Superhero Narratives	<b>Sarah Ganzon</b>
Live-Action Heroes	<b>Kyle Meikle</b>
<b>Superheroes on Television</b>	
Mr. Stark, I Don't Feel So Good": The Disintegrating History of Marvel's Non-MCU Film & Television Adaptations	<b>Jef Burnham</b>
The Boys Gives Superheroes a Good Spanking	<b>Lisa Macklem</b>
"Be careful of the Murdock Boys, they got the devil in 'em": Navigating Redemption through Violence and Religion in Netflix's Daredevil.	<b>Rhiannon McHarrie</b>

<b>The Superheroic Narrative</b>	
The Noble Quest of Butchering Fiction: Metalepsis in Bunn's Deadpool Killology Series	<b>Lucia Bausela</b>
Superhero Time	<b>Asher Guthertz</b>
Arrow: The Archetypal Journey of Oliver Queen into Becoming A Larger-Than-Life Superhero	<b>Jim Iaccino</b>
Everyday Heroes: How the Multiverse Is Reinventing the Superhero Tale	<b>Rebecca Johns Trissler</b>
More Than Just a Sexy Body: The Subversion of Classical Mythological Frameworks in Jungle Comics	<b>Owen Smith</b>

## **Abstracts**

### **Superhero Himbos: Wish Fulfillment and the Female Gaze**

#### **Courtney Beresheim**

Superheroes have long been representations of wish fulfillment, but they can represent more than the desire for superpowers and abilities. The rise of the himbo (in 2020 particularly) showcases the cultural shift towards a strong, kind, and non-threatening love interest for many women and queer audiences. This talk will explore Thor and Steve Rogers as himbos, and their impact on audience desires.

### **Superheroes: The Ultimate Fanfiction Universe**

#### **Allison Broesder**

Everything is fanfiction. Nearly every story published, produced or distributed on some level is fanfiction. Comic books and superheroes exhibit this concept to its fullest. They are created from Greek, Roman and Norse myths most often, blended into a modern and new interpretation that echoes their ancient origin. Superheroes have been around for over 80 years. Those writing them today are writing borrowed stories – or professional fanfiction. Countless directors and screenwriters itch to present their version of Superman, Batman, Iron Man, Captain America, and the X-Men. The last decade alone has seen an explosion in new film and television adaptations – Arrow, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Wonder Woman, and Black Panther just to name a few. Superheroes seem to be the endless material that generates fanfiction like no other – both at the professional and the amateur level.

Superheroes remain popular as the MCU and DC universes continue to expand on screen, in comic books, and on television. They, in turn, inspire fans to create and explore their universes. Superheroes are the characters that make us reconsider our world through modern twists on ancient myths. They help us to relate to our world and one another through refreshing, remixing, and re-imagining the characters and their stories for our own present. Not many other genres manage to thrive, survive, evolve, and excite as much as that of superheroes. In many ways, that's what makes them truly the best kind of fanfiction of all.



### **The Noble Quest of Butchering Fiction: Metalepsis in Bunn's *Deadpool Killology* Series**

**Lucía Bausela**

Since his debut in Liefeld and Nicieza's *New Mutants* #98, Deadpool—'the Merc with a Mouth'—became Marvel's insignia for coarse humour concerning his status as a fictional character, the comics industry, and the preferences of readers, among others, but also, most notably, for doing these by means of so-called 'fourth-wall breaks'. While casual and light-hearted on the surface, the 'meta' jokes of Deadpool's self-conscious commentary are in fact rooted on ontological queries, given that they question the nature of reality and the self. These questions have been a central concern of most metafictional texts across media, and much of the research on the subject stems from the field of literary studies and narratology—as it is the case of seminal texts as those of Alter, Hutcheon, and Waugh. In spite of the fact that the field of comic studies still lacks a systematized theoretical framework to analyse metacomics, this paper aims at providing some key definitions, borrowing from narratologists and comic scholars alike. Although a review of all the metafictional devices in Bunn's *Killology* series (2012-2017) would exceed the scope of this paper, the focus will be on analysing the use of one metafictional device in particular: metalepsis, a concept introduced by Gérard Genette and later expanded by scholars such as Waugh and Pardo to refer to ontological short-circuits which create the illusion of breaking the boundaries between the world of the story and the world of the readers. In the *Killology* series, metalepsis acts as the primary engine for the plot, turning its four volumes into a complex network of fictional references which not only parody the superhero archetype and mock at the style and convention of Marvel comics, but also hint at existential questionings, thematically linking this series to the much larger web of metafictional works across media.

### **"Mr. Stark, I Don't Feel So Good": The Disintegrating History of Marvel's Non-MCU Film & Television Adaptations**

**Jef Burnham**

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is now a franchise comprised of 23 films and the MCU looms large in the future of cinema with seven more films slated for release by mid-2022. It's a franchise predicated on building and constantly referencing its own history, yet there is an entire history of Marvel films prior to the MCU that has not only been ignored by the MCU, but is also rapidly being pushed to the margins of film and television history as the once-disparate Marvel properties' film rights come under the control of Disney. Marvel has been publicly erasing, sabotaging, or ignoring those properties as developed by other studios prior to or concurrent with the MCU, as evidenced by their rebooting of Spider-Man and Marvel's cancellation of the Fantastic Four comic book series in 2015, depriving Fox's *Fantastic Four* (2015) of promotion. Other feature-length works needn't have been so actively ignored though, having fallen into relative obscurity themselves thanks to their origins in TV as made-for-television movies. The production of these feature-length, live action adaptations of Marvel Comics peaked in the latter half of the 1970s. These TV movies, in most cases, were intended to function as pilots for prospective series, and Marvel characters were licensed for six such feature-length pilot movies between the years of 1977 and 1979 alone with seven additional TV movies adapted from Marvel properties airing from the late-1980's through the early-2000's. Other Marvel features still would go straight-to-video during that time, including *The Punisher* (1989) and *Captain America* (1990). This presentation will explore how the cultural prominence of the history-centered MCU and the actions of Disney/Marvel themselves have resulted in non-MCU film and television adaptations being excised from the prevailing discourses surrounding Marvel.

### **Overcoming a Pandemic with '*Pan*': Anpanman's Pertinence in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

**Antonija Cavcic**

"Almost no one can escape the influence of the superhero: It should give us hope that superhero stories are flourishing everywhere because they are a bright, flickering sign of our need to move on, to imagine the better, more just, and more proactive people we can be"

Romagnoli, & Pagnucci, 2013). The proliferation of superhero culture during crises is indeed no coincidence and the Covid-19 pandemic was no exception. However, who or what can bring us hope, let alone seize and control an omnipotent, omnipresent and ominous “invisible” enemy? Enter Anpanman—Japan’s benevolent bread-headed superhero who sacrificially tears off pieces of his head to feed the hungry and is relentlessly fighting off his arch-enemy, Baikinman (literally, ‘Bacteria man’). In this presentation, I will examine the extent to which not only the characters, but the series’ core values of sacrifice, compassion, teamwork, and maintaining good health and nutrition, make Anpanman ever-relevant in the context of a global health crisis. Essentially, this presentation will demonstrate why 2020 needed Anpanman.

### **Rebranding Superheroes**

#### **Jon Clarke**

Spider-Man and the Avengers over 60 years old. Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman are over 80. How do characters from the early 20th century connect to new audiences? In this talk, Jon Clarke will discuss how superheroes react to changing times and remain relevant to each generation while staying true to their core concepts, or, in some cases, denying them.

### **Superiterative: All Batmen are Batman**

#### **Peter Coogan**

Superheroes and the superhero genre are particularly, perhaps uniquely, iterative, and there is no stable version of any superhero character, particularly given the multi- and trans-media storytelling, collective authorship, corporate ownership, and iconicity of the characters. Further, while an individual iteration of a superhero might be poorly executed, it is still fully that character, unlike characters in other genres and media (though Arthurian knights come the closest). This iterability is due to the character’s centrality to its genre.

### **“I Control the Truth”: Objective Truth, Fake News, and the Spectrum of Authoritarianism in *Spider-Man: Far From Home***

#### **Matthew Cooper**

Despite the presence of wall-crawling superheroes and shapeshifting aliens, the world of *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (Watts, 2019) is remarkably similar to our own. It is not the specific circumstances of this fictional narrative that necessarily feel familiar, but rather the way it taps into widespread societal anxiety over conceptions of objective truth and perceivable reality. It is a superhero narrative that dramatizes a cultural climate of rampant misinformation and its dissociating effects, a culture grappling with the omnipresence of fake news and more challenging questions of the role of objective truth and the manipulation of belief in democratic debate.

In *Far From Home*, antagonist Quentin Beck adopts the mantle of Mysterio, a supposed interdimensional warrior come to save the Earth from destructive elemental creatures. In actuality, Beck (and a team of workers) stages the cataclysmic events using holographic illusions to deceive the general public. He attempts to use Mysterio to promote himself as a superhero in order to fill a global power vacuum and upset an established world order through intentional deception and artificiality. Put simply, his illusions obscure the real and he consciously uses them to achieve political goals. “I created Mysterio to give the world something to believe in,” Beck proclaims. “I control the truth—Mysterio *is* the truth!”

Mysterio is very much a concept that transcends the individual. Mysterio is not real, both in the sense that his manifestations are holographic illusions and, more conceptually, in the sense that “he” is a simulacrum constructed and maintained by a team of people and, more importantly, believed in by others. In a very Baudrillardian sense, the image precedes the real, the supposed superhero it is

simulating. Comparisons can be drawn between this and the proliferation of fake news, specifically as fake news functions to obfuscate a collective understanding of objective truth and the nature of reality, as well as the capacity for democratic debate that depends upon it. When fake news is deliberately forwarded for specific political ends, the degradation of objective truth (unobtainable as it may be) becomes problematic and potentially dangerous.

This essay situates the dissemination of fake news as a method of consolidating power—it reads *Far From Home* as an extension of contemporary anxieties and draws comparisons between its dramatic narrative and our real-world sociopolitical climate. I discuss the concept of objective truth as an essential starting point for democratic debate, as well as how the strategic manipulation of truth can be used for authoritarian ends (i.e., how the strategic and mediated creation of reality can serve as a method of exercising power). Careless speech, fake news, and the spectacle of misinformation are presented as pervasive problems exacerbated by new media technology in post-truth society as ways of tilting the scales on what I label the spectrum of authoritarianism. This has ultimately resulted in cultural anxieties over the nature of truth and the construction of belief that certain actors have exploited for their own political gain. As Mystério seeks to control truth, reality, and our collective understanding of existence, *Far From Home* can be read as a dramatized reflection (conscious or not) of these contemporary concerns.

**“While You Were Dreaming, the World Changed”: Marvel Comic’s X-Men’s *House of X/Powers of X* and The End of the Superheroic Minority Metaphor?**

**Anthony Michael D’Agostino**

The X-Men’s saga of a subspecies of humanity gifted with superhuman powers “feared and hated” by human society has long been read as a metaphor for the experiences of racial, sexual, and ethnic minorities. This minority metaphor is a major component of X-Men’s unparalleled pop-cultural relevance in the 1990s. However, more recently, the X-Men’s “minority metaphor” has been critiqued, even out right rejected, as a form of cultural appropriation. Writer Michael Rosenberg’s X-Men story in which a mutant is killed in a scene that draws on narratives of transphobic violence, was ravaged by on-line critique in 2018, signaling a final, concentrated public rejection of the minority metaphor that had given the X-Men its progressive cultural clout in the 1980’s and 1990’s.

My talk frames the X-Men franchise’s 2019 reboot, Jonathan Hickman’s two series that are one, *House of X* and *Powers of X* (“Ten”), as a stepping away from the mutant metaphor in terms of temporality (the way the series re-conceptualizes time travel and mutant history), the series’ operative species metaphor (from that of mutants to clones), and conception of difference (how Hickman’s mutants relate to and distinguish themselves from humans). For Hickman, I argue, the minority metaphor is one of self-defeat and bad faith that his mutants reject as a form of human oppression. My talk explores how Hickman’s X-Men series readjusts the X-Men’s relationship to progressive politics, providing a launch pad for discussion about how the latest era in Marvel’s Mutant Saga can re-inform our commitments to social justice.

**Defining Superheroes**

**Blair Davis**

This talk examines the ways in which we define superheroes, both as fans and within the academic field of comic studies. We will look at some of the theoretical considerations that comic book scholars have established for how we categorize characters as superheroes, as well as some of the concerns that fans often hold with making such distinctions. In addition to questions to do with costumes, powers and abilities, we will also consider the role of genre in assessing the history of superheroes. Along with defining the superhero in an abstract sense, we will also look at some of the problems involved in making distinctions about who the first superhero might be within

any specific sub-category (such as the first superheroine, or the first Black superhero). We will do so by looking at a range of historical examples dating back to the 1930s, and will also consider superheroes not only in terms of who they are and what they can, but also where and in what format their stories were published.

### **The Normative Ethics of the Marvel, DC, and X-Men Film Universes**

#### **Larrie Dudenhoeffer**

This short presentation focuses on the ethical systems in the three major transmedia superhero franchises of the twenty-first century: Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, Warner Bros.' DC Extended Universe, and the now defunct Fox X-Men universe. I will argue that the superheroes and villains of the Marvel Cinematic Universe seem most understandable in terms of aretaic ethics: their relative virtues seem inborn, a matter of their character traits rather than their actions. Next, I will argue that the characters of the "darker" DC Universe speak more to consequentialist ethical systems: the normal characters in these films evaluate the superhumans in them with respect to the outcomes of their actions, not their motives or their innate righteousness. Finally, I will argue that the mutants of the X-Men series seem to operate according to a more deontological ethical system: the superhumans in them follow the rules of Professor X or Magneto, and the moral evaluation of them consists in examining these rules and the duties they entail. Finally, with enough time, I will discuss the ethical suppositions of these three film franchises in relation to their endings, as each one of them sets up its final act in completely different ways than its competitors. The Marvel films usually climax with a confrontation with a single supervillain in strict obedience to Hollywood's continuity formulas. This fight scene underlines the moral dispositions of the characters in them that we anyway see throughout their narratives. The DC films, though, climax with the fight scene with a digital monster that the first two acts of these films never mention—in short, the monster appears "out of nowhere." This scene ultimately vindicates the superheroes in them, as their actions save the earth and thus attest to their moral rectitude. The X-Men films, in contrast to these other two franchises, climax with a fight that sets one faction of mutants against another, so that the ensemble cast effectively splits up into those who follow one set of rules and those who follow another. This scene enables the audience to determine the motives that drive these characters to act and therefore the value of these moral imperatives.

### **Reconstructing the Golden Age: A Critical Look at *Sandman Mystery Theater***

#### **Gordan Dymowski**

Synopsis: From 1993 to 1996, Matt Wagner, Steven T. Seagle, and Guy David worked on *Sandman Mystery Theater* for DC's Vertigo line. Highlighting the nocturnal crusade of Wesley Dodds and his companion Dian Belmont, *Sandman Mystery Theater* contextualized pulp and noir tropes in a similar manner to Neil Gaiman's use of fantasy tropes in the concurrently-running *Sandman* series. Through its (then) contemporary perspective on 1930s-era issues of race, gender, fascism, and even creative/artistic efforts, *Sandman Mystery Theater* "reconstructs" the Golden Age in a non-nostalgic manner which provides storytelling and social commentary perspectives for future creators.

### **Truth, Social Justice, and the American Way: Small Screen Superheroes' Social Justice Contributions**

#### **David Eltz**

With the arrival of a new decade, the media scene continues to diversify. In addition to the silver screen, Netflix, YouTube, and even cable remain mainstays of media consumption, and an increasing number of newly emerging outlets allow for even further variance in content. One constant across them all, however, is superhero media. Superheroes are still very much in vogue, and a concurrent surge of critical analysis should come as no surprise.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson argues that it is the inevitable role of media to participate in an ongoing political discussion. Social justice, one such ongoing discussion, has long been a visible element in superhero media, even among tightly-controlled franchise films, and it has made its way to the forefront with the looser restrictions of small-screen streaming offerings. Consequently, Marvel's *Jessica Jones* unabashedly confronts issues of consent and PTSD, Netflix's *Umbrella Academy* typifies and deconstructs coping mechanisms, and even Amazon's *The Boys* makes compelling if humorous arguments about accountability in an unevenly enabled world.

This paper, pulling from Jameson's view of overarching political conversation and Frank Lentricchia's mapping of social change through criticism, regards the filmic medium as one with tremendous social power. It attempts to organize and elucidate the social justice strides being taken by small-screen superhero offerings and leverage them against their pedigree as franchise products. In particular, it examines the aforementioned series as archetypes of social justice rhetoric within a larger dialogue across the genre's history. Bearing all this in mind, the true superpower in this new decade might be the ability to enact social change on the other side of the screen.

### **Everyday Queer Superheroes: Views, Powers and the Sexuality spectrum in LIVE A HERO**

#### **Edmond (Edo) Ernest dit Alban**

Supernatural powers and monsters represent a recurrent trope in manga and anime. The notion of "superhero" in Japan is nevertheless often affiliated with specific niche-genres of media production and fandoms including the prolific scene of western drama fanzine. As such, superheroes embody a certain imagination of a global world where overseas (mostly "America") and "Japan" are connected through the merge of various conceptions of "the hero". So-called LGBT game company Life Wonder's latest project, LIVE A HERO (2020), illustrates a queer twist of this imagined global scene of superheroes.

This presentation will explore superheroes' bodies in LIVE A HERO as the basis for a queer and transcultural worldview. Life Wonders' textual and industrial practices, I argue, rely on the production of images and voices giving life to attractive superhero bodies. On a narrative scale, a superhero is defined by his/her/their body's relationship to society: they must attract the attention of citizens. Heroes (and Villans) can only exist if they are seen (live streamed) on camera. Power in LIVE A HERO emerges out of the exposition of queer bodies. On the other hand, Life Wonders relies on a transnational network of LGBTQ+ artists, storytellers, and translators to concretise their project. The corporeal images of superheroes thereby serve both a narrative and an industrial role in the creation of the game, as well as in the queer appropriation of the globalized imagination circulating through the superhero trope.

### **Embodying the Villain: The Political Co-Optations of Joker**

#### **Gavin Farrow**

Just before the film's theatrical release in October 2019, *Joker* served as the latest controversial comic book film adaptation. The film alarmed its mainstream cultural critics with its political outrage and realistic violence, often, they believed, in service of reactionary white male interests. At the same time, *Joker* became a darling of leftist and socialist circles online and in alternative news media, laying the groundwork for the film's presence in progressive international protest movements that year and beyond.

These myriad cultural readings of *Joker*, coupled with the titular character's long, complex history in popular culture as a ruthless, chaotic villain, give the film meaning beyond the film's intentions (Gross 2020). This paper analyzes the fluid, dialogic meaning drawn from the film by various cultural agents, often emphasizing the film's political implications. The paper then closely analyzes

subsequent anti-austerity protest aesthetics and actions from the fall of 2019 that negotiate, channel, and adapt Joker's iconography and themes into social movements. I first inspect the Joker's opaque ideological foundations through the history of Batman media, underscoring how they shape Joker's radical, anarchic depiction of the notorious comic book villain. This passage engages with Joker's history in previous comics and movies to underscore the Marxist, trickster, and nihilistic strains within Joker's portrayals that help inform

Joker's portrayal of its anti-hero, Arthur Fleck. Next, grounded in theoretical studies of popular cultural readings and hegemony within news media, the paper inspects Joker through its discursive function in political debate, positioned as a dangerous validation of incel culture to mainstream media critics, even as socialist circles champion the film as a scathing rebuke of neoliberal austerity. Finally, this paper concludes by analyzing the incorporation of the film's iconography and arguments into real-life protests against neoliberal crises worldwide, particularly in Chile and Lebanon. Synthesizing social movement theory with the rest of the paper's cultural focus, this final section determines the impact, intended or not, of Joker on social movements worldwide--and vice versa. Of particular interest here is the protesters' willful embodiment of Batman's arch-nemesis in order to achieve political and social goals and/or spark political dialogue.

### **How Mary Jane Hit the Jackpot in Marvel's Spider-Man** **Jack Fennimore**

Despite being the most recognizable female character in one of the most iconic comic book franchises of all time, *Spider-Man's* Mary Jane Watson isn't really counted among the most notable female characters across all of comic books. For over 50 years since she was introduced, she's mostly been portrayed as an object of desire for Spider-Man rather than a driving force in the plot in her own right. When we think of Mary Jane, we only think of her relationship to Spider-Man.

That's not the case with Mary Jane in Insomniac Games' *Marvel's Spider-Man* for PS4, where she becomes a smart, stubborn, and very brave investigative journalists helping Spider-Man thwart crime. Compared to her portrayal in the comic books, Mary Jane in *Marvel's Spider-Man* is responsible for much of the plot's progression. Her relationship with Spider-Man is also much more complex with the superhero learning how to accept her help and respect her as a partner. While she's still a secondary character compared to Spider-Man, her representation in *Marvel's Spider-Man* breaks free from the confines of her traditional role in the comics allowing her to become a hero in her own right. I argue that the strength of Mary Jane's representation is not only due to how she's portrayed in the story, but how the game's mechanics reinforce her representation as a player-controlled character.

### **"Woke Marketing and Marvel Comics"** **Monica Flegel and Judith Leggatt**

"Comicsgate" was (and arguably is still) an online conflict focused on overt social-justice storylines in comics. Inspired in part by 2015's All-New, All-Different (ANAD) campaign in Marvel comics, which saw wide-spread mantle-passing from fan favourites such as Captain America, Thor, Hulk, and Iron Man to women and people of colour, this backlash fought against what was labelled by its participants as "forced diversity," characterized as a corporate-driven agenda that sacrificed good story-telling for the sake of pandering to "non-traditional" audiences. Our recently published book *Superhero Culture Wars* challenges this narrative by situating All-New, All-Different within the long history of political story-telling within Marvel Comics.

In this presentation, we want to open discussion of how those of us who do support greater diversity in superhero storytelling (inside the pages, on the screen, and on the creative benches that produce the texts) should negotiate “woke marketing” in an age of media concentration and increased corporate control of the cultural imagination. Drawing on theories of “corporate art” and “woke washing,” we will point to deliberate diversification such as the “Marvel Voices: Indigenous Voices” special issue and the ways in which the MCU--specifically *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*--is taking up questions raised in the ANAD campaign.

We will present this as a narrated powerpoint (we can hit the highlights in about 5 minutes, though we will mainly be raising questions for discussion on the discord, as opposed to giving detailed answers).

### **Managing the Superpowered Men: Mr. Love Queen’s Choice, Otome Games and Superhero Narratives**

#### **Sarah Ganzon**

*Mr. Love Queen’s Choice*, or *Love and Producer* as it is known in China, is a mobile otome game that allows players to play as a TV producer who dates and manages men with superpowers. With millions of players in China, as well as English localization that has thousands of downloads worldwide, the game plays into the postfeminist fantasy of becoming a successful superpowered career woman as long as one manages one’s time, in-game resources, and the affections of these superpowered men well.

Otome games are a category of games that originated in Japan, marketed towards women, that have since found players, and evolved outside its country of origin (Kim 2009). Elsewhere, I have pointed out that otome games with their use of romance, in-game narrative choices, and other game mechanics tend to simulate emotional labor and convert women’s time to labor (Ganzon 2017). This paper expands this analysis and looks into how superhero narratives are used in otome game titles particularly *Mr. Love Queen’s Choice*.

Progressing through the game involves collecting and evolving cards primarily with the player character’s love interests. The process of collecting and evolving these cards revolve around in-game currencies such as gold, gems, stamina, film, heart keys, medals, and karma--all of which slowly refresh through time, and are purchasable with microtransactions. Examining the game’s narrative, gameplay and economy underscore how game apps such as these create postfeminist fantasies of becoming a powerful and successful woman as long as one has the time and money to invest in these power fantasies.

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### **Costumes, Capes ... and Cooties: *Cerebus’s* Satirical Superheroes**

#### **Dominick Grace**

Making fun of superheroes is easy, and pointed parodies and satires of superhero stories are almost as old as the superhero genre itself. With the emergence of the Alternative Comics movement in the 1980s, however, the comics world entered into what might be seen as a golden age of superhero parody. Given that superheroes dominate the comics landscape at the time, it is unsurprising that creators wishing to move away from that genre nevertheless also at least partially grounded their work in its conventions. Works as diverse as Eastman and Laird’s *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (directly informed by Frank Miller’s work on Marvel’s *Daredevil*) and its myriad far less successful

imitators, Don Simpson's *Megaton Man*, Valentino's *Normalman*, and even Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg!* (not technically a superhero book but one that nevertheless offered a satiric twist on the sort of more mainstream work Chaykin had been doing for Marvel and DC) stand out as memorable, but arguably the most extensive and incisive satirist of the superhero was Dave Sim in *Cerebus*. Largely dismissed today for his antifeminist views, Sim also, as readers offended by his views of women may tend to forget, also engaged in pointed satires of masculinity, especially masculinity as represented in superhero comics. The various manifestations of the Cockroach (initially a Batman parody but soon a handy vessel into which any number of other superheroes could be poured), referred to by Cerebus as the cootie, is used by Sim to interrogate the clichés associated with the hypermasculine superhero. Sim's deflation of the superhero includes everything from mental instability to latent homosexuality and misogyny as the hero's underlying traits. The superhero in *Cerebus* is toxic masculinity writ large—especially in his devastating parody of The Punisher as Punisherroach. In this presentation, I hope to explore how *Cerebus's* subversion of superheroes interrogates the underlying assumptions of comic book masculinities.

### **Breaking the Buck / Reliving the Tragedy: Afrofuturism and Black Masculinity in *Black Panther*** **Danyelle Greene and Abimbola Iyun**

In his article, "Black to the Future," Mark Dery raises an important question: "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?" Afrofuturistic storytelling addresses this concern by imagining a future in which African-descended people are not only recognized but are central to the cultural and technological advancement of humanity. As a feature of the big-budget Marvel Cinematic Universe, the release of *Black Panther* (2018) created unprecedented buzz as a fictional superhero text driven by a black main character. Its story interacts with history in ways that represent an imagined Africa absent of white colonial contact. It reimagines this colonial past in order to make way for a super-powered, Afrocentric future. At the same time, the film is entangled within a cultural history of media representations of blackness that have perpetuated racial stereotypes. This paper investigates the tensions underlying constructions of masculinity and blackness through both the comic book and film versions of *Black Panther*. We analyze Black Panther's first comic book *Solo Adventures* (1977) written by Jack "The King" Kirby, and the 2018 film, directed by Ryan Coogler investigating the depictions of T'Challa, the Black Panther and Killmonger, the villain. In relation to these characters, we focus primarily on the buck and tragic mulatto figures, which are two character types that Donald Bogle identifies as a part of the core types that have largely remained throughout media history. Using one of the most popular and profitable films in history, this paper asserts *Black Panther* as an important representational piece. It challenges a long-standing tradition in which black individuals have been caricatured and demeaned and confronts these representations by centering black subjects on screen. *Solo Adventures* and *Black Panther* have a lot to inform us about the media's navigation in representing Black men historically and now.

### **Superhero Time** **Asher Guthertz**

One of comics studies central and longstanding projects has been to theorize the peculiar temporal structure of the superhero narrative. As Angela Ndalianis and Henry Jenkins both note, the project of comic book continuity which began in the 1960s complicates Umberto Eco's famous formulation of Superman as trapped between the past tense of myth and the present tense of the novel. In modern superhero serialized narratives, events in one issue have an effect on the next, but because it is not in the best interests of the industry to allow popular characters to die, the continuity reboot is regularly deployed in order to forestall narrative closure. At the same time, reboots are troubled by reader's loving memories of past stories now erased from the canon, which is why virtually every reboot in the last decade has struggled to validate the collective memories of earlier generations of fans while leaving space for new stories for new readers. Queer theories of time, which defamiliarize lived experiences of temporality by describing its



normative uses and proposing its utopian possibilities, can offer comics studies new frameworks for understanding the relationship between comic book readers and a sprawling and complex narrative time.

This paper argues that the prevalence of reproductive futurism in DC Comics' depictions of its fictional universe illuminates its strategy for managing a readership base with different politics and affective relationships to the narrative. I close read *Doomsday Clock* (2019), in which Geoff Johns introduces the notion of a narrative "metaverse" and locates Superman's body during its exodus from Krypton as the rigid center of an otherwise malleable narrative timeline. The flexible time of *Doomsday Clock* universalizes its commodity (the DC Universe) while simultaneously insisting on a white male child at its center and as its permanent future – evacuating the text of queer utopian possibility. The limitations of *Doomsday's* flexibility notwithstanding, I want to insist that serial narrative itself can and should be a framework for texts which resist normative spatial and temporal boundaries. Comics books like *Far Sector* (2019) and *Eternity Girl* (2018) exemplify this possibility by probing the edges of the space and time of the shared superhero universe. I end by looking at DC's current *Future State* event whose promise of "new life for the multiverse – and a glimpse into the unwritten worlds of tomorrow" provides a sense of how the editorial team at DC Comics currently views the temporal structure of its narrative and which, I argue, has serious implications for who comic books will be marketed towards in coming years.

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### **Does Victoria's Secret Sell Chainmail Bikinis?: Costuming and Gender in Comic Books Through the 20th Century**

**Lauren Clark Hill**

The costuming choices for female protagonists and villains have been controversial since the characters' earliest appearances. In contrast to the male heroes and villains, these characters' garments have played towards sex appeal. Fantomah and Sheena, some of the earliest female lead characters, are both shown as jungle women, blonde and wearing the equivalent of a swimsuit (despite Fantomah having Egyptian origins). In later decades Marvel character Ms. Marvel (Carol Danvers) and DC character Power Girl were both shown wearing extremely high-cut leotards, with Power Girl's featuring the infamous "boob window". Female characters are frequently shown in sky-high heels and wearing impractical jewelry. Where do these costumes come from and how do they relate to the trends and fashions of the eras in which they were created?

This paper will trace the development of both comic book costumes and undergarments from the 1930's - 1990's, showing the design similarities. It will also show how perineal characters, such as Wonder Woman, Catwoman, and Black Widow, have had costume changes that mirror changes in the women's clothing industry. From girdles and bustiers to catsuits and monokinis, these costumes cover a wide range of garments, while somehow only rarely straying into the realm of the practical.

### **Arrow: The Archetypal Journey of Oliver Queen into Becoming a Larger-Than-Life Superhero**

**Jim Iaccino**

The DC comics-inspired CW superhero series, *Arrow* (2012-2020), premiered approximately one year after another similar series *Smallville* (2001-2011) ended its run with Clark Kent becoming The Man of Steel, Superman. It took approximately eight seasons for *Arrow*'s Oliver Queen (Stephen Amell) to transform himself into something greater than his original billionaire playboy image. His hero's journey would take him to the island of Lian Yu (or 'Purgatory') where he would be stranded for five years, before returning a changed man to his home of Starling City. Oliver would assume a number of different identities in his quest to finding himself, becoming first The Hood vigilante who meted out justice to the local criminal elements, then the more heroic versions of Arrow and Green Arrow who protected the city from internal as well as external adversaries, to finally the cosmic savior of The Spectre who realigned the entire multiverse of earths. Along with this superheroic transformation, he would adopt a more responsible lifestyle, marrying Felicity Smoak, serving as the mayor of Star City, adopting his biological son William, and having a daughter Mia who would take up his mantle of Green Arrow.

In analyzing Oliver's transformation, mythologist Joseph Campbell's stages of the Hero's journey will be referenced throughout the presentation. These stages include the *Separation* from one's comfortable surroundings, the *Initiation* into a series of trials and tribulations, and finally the *Return* to community with one's psyche changed for the better (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 49-243). Moreover, Oliver's death of his old self and his rebirth into "something else," something greater is what Campbell calls an "Apotheotic" moment for our hero. Sacrificing himself to save the multiverse is what makes Oliver Queen a true *superhero*.

### **Everyday Heroes: How the Multiverse Is Reinventing the Superhero Tale**

**Rebecca Johns Trissler**

Superhero narratives belong to a larger convention of science-fiction narrative which, being an historical genre, naturally lends itself to constant adaptation and reimagination in new time periods and for new audiences. The Spider-Man canon is an example of a superhero narrative that has seen a number of recent adaptations that have taken the narrative further from its canonical roots. The recent addition of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse introduces to the narrative the endless possibilities of the multiverse. With its implications of alternate histories and timelines, the multiverse allows writers and fans to enjoy new adaptations (and makes room for marginalized communities like women and people of color to gain access to the superhero narrative) without undermining Spider-Man's canonical storyline, thus restoring the narrative's everyman qualities.

### **Mental Health in Gotham**

**Krystal Kara**

Mental health is something that we have never been able to grasp fully. We have attempted to do away with those who we, as a society, have deemed not normal. With the political landscape, we have entered in the last several years, we have seen an exponential amount of suicides, people getting diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and many other diagnoses. At the same time have also seen comic books explode into the mainstream culture. One movie that got everyone talking about mental health is Joker. The Joker has been a character that has been around for decades in the D.C. universe. This character has always been a character that spurred conversation around mental health. What about Gotham in general? It seems as if mental health is something that is a topic that is built into this universe. Let's take a deep dive into Gotham's mental health and what it reflects about how culture impacts and connects to the current

state of the world. Such as how the prison industrial complex has replaced mental health institutions. Using comic books, the movies, and even the writers to understand how Gotham functions and how it impacts how we view mental health.

### **Harley Quinn and Joker**

#### **Fallon King**

Media has an essential function to tell a story in an entertaining way while attracting and maintaining the attention of viewers, readers, listeners, etc. depending on the medium and type of content. The responsibility of how the content is interpreted lies solely with each individual. A defining moment within the content is where a fan is born, and fandoms are then created. This is also a time in which the intended message of the author can possibly be misconstrued when received by members of the audience. This research paper takes a look at the fandom of the relationship between DC's Harley Quinn and The Joker. The intent is to explore and develop an analysis on the idea that the media alters our perceptions and in turn desensitizes society to real-life situations.

### **A Spider on the Wall: Surveillance in the MCU's Spider-Man as an Analogy for Youth in the Post-September 11 Era**

#### **Abby Kirby**

For over 10 years, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has offered tales of heroic do-gooders facing governmental and intergalactic threats in the post 9/11 landscape. The franchise features several surveillance intelligence modes and organizations including S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division), an governmental military counter-terrorism and intelligence agency that protects the Earth and beyond, as well as Tony Stark's advanced data compiling technology and AI assistants. With the release of Spider-Man films, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (2019), the MCU took another step towards its complex relationship with surveillance by giving teenager Peter Parker access to Karen and E.D.I.T.H., artificial intelligences of Stark's creation. Considered an "every-man hero", Spider-Man has become representative of the contradictory desires of the American public and the experiences of youth entering into a world shaped by the older generation's experiences with terror, uncertainty, and surveillance.

### **The Man with a Secret. Fashioning the 'Camp' Superman Body.**

#### **Zara Korutz**

Superheroes can be understood as mass media avatars of aspiration—metaphors that represent social and political tensions. These characters are an intellectually rich source for unpacking deeper hidden social and cultural meanings within their overtly exaggerated visual appearance. This project uses visual and theoretical discourse analysis for examining Superman's 'Camp' fashioned body which, like most Superheroes, holds ideals related to the 'American Dream'. Superman represents a manifestation of Pop-culture which provides a window into social attitudes and beliefs.

Superman will be discussed in relation to Warhol and his influence on the commodification and democratization of Pop-art. Notions of 'Camp' provides deeper insights into the praxis of masculinity and queerness using Paul Basu's (2017) notion of *in-betweenness*, is a thread of this debate, which provides a philosophical escape of a singular and fixed truth. This original discussion of previously established points seeks to explore fashion and its use of affect with Superman's identity in the provocation of becoming, performance, and representation.

### **"Uncle Vlad's Cabin: Intertextuality Between 'Cabin 33' and *Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998)"**

#### **Khara Lukancic**

“Cabin 33” by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro is featured in the short story collection, *The Penguin Book of Vampire Stories* (1987) edited by Alan Ryan. The story is about a vampire preying upon a cabin lodge. In the story the vampire takes on the “other” qualities as most vampire narratives tend to: a creature other than human. The main character, Franciscus says near the end of the story, “I’m being an Uncle... what? Not Tom, surely. An Uncle Vlad? Uncle Bela? But what else can I do?” He says this in response to hunting his own kind, as Franciscus, like the monster of the story is a vampire. However, one has learned to live by the rules and culture of humanity (Franciscus) and the other has not (the villain, Lorpicar).

Interestingly enough, this is the same tension in *Blade*. Blade (Wesley Snipes) has learned to live in the human world and abide by the human laws, while Frost (Stephen Dorff) has not. Blade and Frost standoff in a public space, whereby Frost calls Blade an “Uncle Tom,” for betraying his vampire identity and fighting with the humans, against the vampires. This tension activates all kinds of racial tensions and stereotypes from American literature, film, and popular culture.

*Blade* specifically deals with stereotypes described by Adilifu Nama in *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (2011). Nama suggests that black superheroes exist in a liminal space, whereby it is good in the sense of overall representation and visibility of black characters; but it is bad when you think of what these characters portray and the qualities these characters perform.

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### ***The Boys Gives Superheroes a Good Spanking***

#### **Lisa Macklem**

*The Boys* television series adapts the comic of the same name by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson. Showrunner Eric Kripke adapted the show for Amazon and maintains the brutal violence, epithet-laced dialogue and black humor of the graphic novel but streamlines the plot to make it more satisfying for the initial eight episode run. The comic and the show both make extensive use of the superhero comic traditions, themes, and tropes and turn them on their heads. “Supes” aren’t so super, and it’s hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys when black leather trenchcoats look so much like leather capes. There is little of law or justice on either side. Vought, the company that manages the Supes is the embodiment of corporate greed and entitlement. Hughie and Starlight as new recruits are the perspective characters, providing the viewer/reader entry into the Boys and the Seven respectively. Both characters and plotlines in the television series are less nuanced than in the comic, yet the same themes manage to emerge as Supes present one face to the public while behaving badly in private and while Vought works to spin any negative publicity that does emerge. The Boys are portrayed somewhat more positively in the series and women fare somewhat better as well. What *The Boys* absolutely isn’t is another bubblegum CW DC show, and for that, we should all be eternally grateful!

### **Endgames and Doomsdays: COVID-19 and the ‘Death’ of Superhero Cinema**

#### **Andrew McGowan**

For the past two decades, the superhero genre has achieved immense success and influence in the American movie market. Starting in 2000 with Bryan Singer's *X-Men* and then seeing a significant spike after 2008's creation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, superhero movies have become multi-billion dollar products and a staple of the contemporary zeitgeist. Like the post-World War II Westerns and MGM's musicals of the Golden Age, though, all seemingly foolproof cinematic trends eventually meet a demise. Someday, this will come for superhero movies as well, and after two decades of generic supremacy, the end might be closer than expected. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down theaters, this box-office-savvy cycle implied a nearing coda through its developmental transformations and some narrative milestones. Meanwhile, changes in the entertainment industry from streaming wars to shifting audience demographics foreshadowed an evolution in the way we consume movies in the future. Now, the pandemic has accelerated many of these changes and illustrated a hasty convergence of industry, iconography, and ideology that may result in superhero cinema losing its place as the preeminent American movie genre.

**“Be careful of the Murdock Boys, they got the devil in ‘em”:** Navigating Redemption through Violence and Religion in Netflix's *Daredevil*.

**Rhiannon McHarrie**

This presentation is a narrated PowerPoint exploring how Netflix's *Daredevil* (2015-2018) uses the character of Matt Murdock/Daredevil to navigate issues and ideas of redemption through both violence and religion throughout the series and aims to discuss what seems to be the most effective method at achieving that redemption. By analysing how the narrative shows both of these means of redemption as ineffective to Daredevil through various scenes within the show. Murdock seeks redemption through religion, yet as Daredevil he seems to pursue redemption through violence. Establishing ways in which violence and religion are utilised in the series will lead to a discussion on how Murdock's character is linked to redemption and how the way he uses the two different parts of his identity, religion (Murdock) and violence (Daredevil) to try and ascertain his redemption for the acts he commits as Daredevil and his own guilt about not wanting to give it up. Neither one grants him any kind of redemption suggesting there is a better way to achieve that redemption. This presentation presents the family as a third option for redemption and suggests this is the most effective one to the character of Matt Murdock. Religion supports this idea of the family as triumphant within the show, it is through the haven Murdock finds in religion that his mother is brought back into his life and his reconciliation with his friends take place. Whilst violence drives Murdock further away from his redemption, it is his religion that helps facilitate it through his found family. Whilst Murdock doesn't achieve redemption within the show, it ends on his reunion with his friends as the ultimate victory, therefore supporting the family as the best way for Murdock's redemption to be achieved.

**Live-Action Heroes**

**Kyle Meikle**

When *Spider-Man: Into the Spiderverse* hit theaters in the winter of 2018, it did so on the heels of other superheroic titles like *Aquaman*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Black Panther*, *Venom*, and *Deadpool 2*. *Spiderverse* distinguished itself from these titles through a fully animated “retro comic aesthetic” (Summers) faithful to its Marvelous origins—a distinction that earned the film a Best Animated Feature Oscar in 2019, after it had brought in some \$375 million worldwide. And yet *Spiderverse* scored only one Oscar nomination, and only in the Animated category, to *Black Panther's* six, and its box office receipts were nearly half that of the next highest-grossing superhero film, *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. Taking its cue from *Spiderverse* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as well as from a slew of recent live-action anime remakes, this paper asks why big-screen animated adaptations of comic books remain exceptions to the rule of live-action films, especially when (per *Spiderverse*) they could pretend greater fidelity to their source texts. Superheroes have always migrated between 2D and 3D media, but while animated comics adaptations flourish on Blu-ray and VOD—in the popular DC Universe

Original Movies, as well as on TV and streaming, in shows like *Teen Titans Go!* and *Harley Quinn*—they're scarce in theaters, with only 2017's *The Lego Batman Movie* rising anywhere close to *Spiderverse's* heights. This paper argues that audiences are far readier to accept animation as a seemingly incidental—rather than primary—strategy in adapting superheroes to the screen.

### **Of Heroes and Hippies: A Reimagining of Superheroes from the Hippie Movement**

#### **Ailea Merriam-Pigg**

Superheroes are often seen as the ultimate paragon of good, but what about when they weren't? For my talk, I'd like to discuss the introduction of the Comics Code Authority and how classic comic books featuring superheroes (which abided by the code) were negatively viewed by the creators of underground comix. Underground comix were one method by which the ideals of the hippie movement were spread across the country, but these comic creators were directly opposed to traditional bastions of the American Way, including superheroes like Superman. While some underground comix featured people with superpowers, the superheroes of these comix were the people who subverted traditional expectations and disempowered "the man." Central to this discussion is the question: "What is a superhero?" A theme repeated in contemporary comics/comic movies, we must discuss what makes a superhero and what draws us to these works. Is it the super powers, capes, and fantasy of being greater than oneself? Is it upholding the "American Way" and teaching kids to listen to their elders and be polite? Or is a superhero the one who questions authority and tradition; the person who stands up to long-held beliefs, says "this isn't right" and charts a new path? What, exactly, is a superhero?

### **Turkish Fantastic Cinema Between 1950-1985**

#### **Gurkan Maruf Mihci**

Fantastic films were a major part of Turkish Cinema between 1950 and 1985. The genre has more than 300 films. There are not only Ottoman/Turkish historical superheroes but also the local adaptations of the US and Italian superheroes fairy tales, westerns, horror, action, and comic book adaptations. These superheroes, mostly from comic books, are added to local elements and transformed into local heroes. Although major and minor film studios produced these films, these hybrid films are low-budget and fast productions. These more than 300 "cultural appropriations" can be seen as reflections of the Turkish society trying to adapt itself to the modern western world. In this research, I examine if this adaptation process can be called "Turkification". There aren't any one-to-one adaptations. Directors always added local elements, combinations, etc.. For instance: *Demir Yumruk* (Iron Fist, Dir. Tunc Basaran, 1970) character is a combination of Phantom, Batman, and Superman. Another example is *Vahşi Kan* (Wild Blood, Çetin İnanç, 1983) which is an adaptation of the First Blood but, it is not a one-to-one remake as it contains unique elements such as Motor Gang knows Karate, Human Hunters, and Zombies. This excessive mimicry is not the result of the simple adaptation process. It is the result of unbalanced power relationships, too. My aim to research the result of conflict between Turkish national identity and the adaptation process to western modernization. Consequently, this artificial and unnatural resistance occurs in the films. What is striking in this mimicry and tension relations in Turkish cinema was a closed economy, which was not supported by the government, national elites, or foreign capital. It always tried to survive with its resources. The audience, directors, and cast supported this movement. Therefore, it created its own methods to resist these economical structures while trying to survive.

### **Batman and the Gothic in FOX's *Gotham***

#### **Carey Millsap-Spears**

After 80 years of Batman stories, it is clear that Batman himself, has always been a little *Goth* in his fantastic black suits, cars, and dimly-lit Batcave, and *Gotham* is Gothic in much the same aesthetic way. More important, the series is in the Horror tradition of the Gothic akin to classic Male Gothic novels including *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. In addition to the

unending graphic Horror in *Gotham*, viewers see the unexplained supernatural, damsels in distress, and specific character doubling. It can be argued that along with the scaffolding of *Gotham Central* (2006), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), and *Batman: Zero One* (2013), Miller's storytelling from the comics *Batman: Year One* (1988) and *Batman: The Long Halloween* (1997) is a main part of the foundation for the Male Gothic world present in FOX's *Gotham*. Miller says in *Batman: Year One*, "For me, Batman was never funny" (124). Geoff Klock in *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*, explains Miller's use of narrative in *The Dark Knight* series and also notes that Miller's work with Batman is "radical" because it "complicate[s] the assumptions and structure" of the Batman story and provides "intense level[s] of realism, the hallmark of his gritty, hard-boiled work" ... (28-29). And it is important to add that crime fiction, too, has its roots in the Male Gothic and Miller presents a gritty realism in his Batman comics as does FOX's *Gotham*.

### **The Reward You Get for Being Batman: Storytelling and Resurrection in Neil Gaiman's *Whatever Happened to the Caped Crusader?***

**Kristin Noone**

In Neil Gaiman's graphic novel, Bruce Wayne, as a ghostly spectator at his own funeral, is informed by an unseen figure that "the reward you get for being Batman...is to be Batman," and the hero's afterlife, in fact, turns out to be precisely his life: he will be reborn to live, fight, and die as Batman again and again.

This is the version of Batman that Gaiman created when invited to write the "death of Batman" story for DC in 2009: a Batman who, though unaware of this fact, is for all intents and purposes immortal, as he continually repeats his heroic exploits until they come to an end, and then is resurrected to begin them anew. This portrayal of Batman functions on multiple levels. At the practical level, it allowed DC to reinvent and reboot Batman yet again at the time of writing; however, Gaiman's text—and the choice of an author known for award-winning preoccupation with modern-day mythology, narrative, and theology, from the Sandman comics to *American Gods*—also emphasizes the elements of divine sacrifice, reincarnation, and rebirth, and the relationship of those elements to popular superhero cultural narratives. Gaiman's Batman, because he will *always* be reincarnated, consequently now possesses a super-human or extra-ordinary quality. He dies over and over, but he never truly dies: a dramatic innovation for a character more often celebrated as a powerful, but not *super*-powered, superhero. This reinvention invites readers to ask why Batman's immortality is a necessary addition; I suggest that Gaiman, by linking the theme of resurrection to a text structured around conflicting and overlapping stories—the structure of *Caped Crusader* consists of a sequence of stories, told and shown in various styles, about the multiple deaths of Batman—constructs an argument for the importance of the act of storytelling and active participation as a form of resurrection and revitalization, as Gaiman's work draws attention to the literalization of *giving life to* a hero and a story via acts of participatory creation and narrative construction.

### **Robin, Boy (Wonder) Next Door**

**Lauren O'Connor**

I am currently working on a book for Rutgers University Press entitled "Robin and the Making of American Adolescence." I would like to present a section from the book about Robin's importance as the first character created to reflect the primary readership of superhero comics and what this tells us about how mid-century Americans perceived the recently-minted "American teenager."

### **Peggy Carter as a Feminist Icon: A Decade of Marvel-ous Impact**

**Annika Pallasch**

Media fans have a history of expressing their love for a fictional character through active and creative engagement, sometimes opening the door for them to thrive far beyond original expectations. Since her introduction into the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Agent Peggy Carter has had a significant impact on the franchise's overarching narrative and its fans. She has evolved beyond being a male superhero's love interest and has instead established herself as a hero of gender equality, thus making her character worthy of exploration within a modern feminist context. This essay investigates what factors have contributed to Peggy Carter's continued popularity and why the MCU's female fans have embraced her as a feminist icon. I make this argument by analyzing Peggy's canonical depiction within the MCU as well as creative fan works such as illustrations and gifsets.

### **Michael Bay's *Transformers* Pentology as a Superhero-Film Saga**

#### **Yago Paris**

Since the narrative core is the fight between two groups of extraterrestrial robots (the autobots and the decepticons) to gain control over their planet, Cybertron, The *Transformers* universe is normally thought of as a science fiction saga. However, it is possible to highlight similarities between the narratives of the autobots –the protagonists and positive characters– and those of emblematic superheroes. The aim of this paper is to analyze the *Transformers* universe from the perspective of the recurrent, classical narratives of the hero. To achieve this goal I will take Michael Bay's *Transformers* pentology –*Transformers* (2007); *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009); *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011); *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014); *Transformers: The Last Knight* (2017)– as the object of study, and will compare them with the films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the DC Extended Universe. Since both Marvel-DC films and the *Transformers* films have been produced in the golden era of the superhero blockbuster, it could be argued that both types of films have shared patterns and narratives. After having pointed out the similarities –the role of the autobots as watchmen of humans, their incapability to fit in this community, the way the population turns against them and understands them as the villains, etc.–, the paper will finish by trying to prove that the evolution of the *Transformers* universe has been influenced by the success of the superhero film.

### **“No One's Going to Be Looking at Your Face”: The Female Gaze and the New (Super)Man in *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman***

#### **Anna Peppard**

Despite being the most popular televisual comic book adaptation of the past 40 years, the superhero romantic comedy *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993-1997) has been neglected by superhero scholars. This is unfortunate, as *Lois & Clark* is an exemplary text for interrogating what Linda Hutcheon calls “the politics of intertextuality.” *Lois & Clark* is the only officially sanctioned adaptation of a male superhero developed by women—executive producer Deborah Joy LeVine from an idea by DC president Jenette Khan—to privilege romance, a connotatively feminine mode of expression. This, combined with the show's very active female-led fan community, provides an invaluable opportunity to contest continued assumptions that the superhero genre is an exclusively male preserve.

This presentation revisits the gender and sexual politics of *Lois & Clark* within the context of the “new man” ideal and postfeminist politics of the 1990s. While the show's presentation of Lois Lane is, at best, problematically feminist, there is feminist potential located in the ways it offers up Clark/Superman for a female gaze, lovingly lingering on his partially naked body and dwelling on eroticized transformations that are often facilitated by Lois. Letting Lois take an active role in dressing—and undressing—Clark/Superman renders the male superhero unusually accessible to female fans and can even deconstruct masculinity. In *Lois &*



*Clark*, both the well-dressed, sensitive new age man and the spandex-clad superman are presented as erotic fetishes, making the male superhero a living doll that can be infinitely posed and played with by fascinated female hands.

### **Poisoned Waters: Aquaman and the Anthropocene**

#### **Ryan Poll**

In the final decades of the twentieth century, Aquaman had become a perennial punchline, as exemplified by myriad television shows, including *Family Guy*, *Robot Chicken*, *South Park*, and *Spongebob Squarepants*. On *The Big Bang Theory*—about a group of self-identified nerds—when one of the central characters is forced to dress as Aquaman for a costume party, he protests: “Aquaman sucks!” When DC launched The New 52 series in 2011—a massive overhaul and rebranding of all superheroes—the new Aquaman series began by acknowledging and recognizing that Aquaman circulates as a joke. In issue one, a blogger approaches Aquaman in a restaurant and asks: “So how’s it feel to be a punchline? How’s it feel to be a laughingstock?”

Far from being a joke, this talk argues that Aquaman is perhaps the most important superhero for thinking through interlocking modern crises. More specifically, I argue that The New 52 Aquaman is a central series for charting the environmental violences endemic to global capitalism and a central figure for developing a progressive ecological imagination.

This paper examines how Aquaman—and the ocean more generally—becomes reimagined by Geoff Johns, Ivan Reis, and Joe Prado’s for The New 52 (2011-2013). As I demonstrate, comics—with their unique aesthetic of images and words colliding in unexpected ways—prove a salient medium in which the social violences now defining the oceans become legible and moreover, an important medium for developing progressive concepts that thinks intersectional between capitalism, ecology, and race.

In the wake of the ocean becoming poisoned and dead zones expanding, what does it mean to be a superhero who thinks and lives relationally between the oceans and the lands? How does The New 52 Aquaman make the systemic violences of the Anthropocene visible when these violences are largely ignored by the dominant channels of US culture?”

### **Not-So Super - How Has a New Crop of Movies and Series Reinvented our Views of Who is Super?**

#### **Eleanor Pye**

In 2013, Zach Snyder’s film *Man of Steel* introduced Clark Kent as a drifter who wasn’t quite sure how he fit into this world. When Kent did find out about his home planet of Krypton and reach out, as Superman, to military leaders to help stop an enemy, he was greeted with distrust and handcuffs. While his true-blue behavior did eventually influence the troops to work together with him, Superman’s final battle with the combatant, General Zod, led to Superman making a choice. He had to kill Zod in order to ensure the lives of others. Many die-hard Superman fans were aghast at this change in his moral code. Though he possessed super-human abilities, murder was never an option on the table. Truth, justice, and the American way always prevailed. Until now.

Series, such as *Arrow* and *Black Lightning* on the CW and *Luke Cage*, *The Punisher*, and *Daredevil* on Netflix, portray characters who are treated as vigilantes rather than heroes by those in law enforcement. On film, *Deadpool* is snarky, destructive, and rated R, though appealing to audiences young and old. HBO’s *The Watchmen* puts masks on the vigilantes, the police officers, and the bad guys; blurring the lines ever further over who is really on the right side of justice. *The Boys*, on Amazon Prime, is tossing out the rule book entirely by portraying the heroes as corporate tools who abuse their powers-- both the super kind as well as the influential kind! Society and culture has challenged our ideals of who is a “superhero”? Why now?

### **“This is for the streets, Black Lightning’s Back”: The Black Superhero in Comic Book TV Adaptations**

**Aseel Qazzaz**

Black Lightning, the first Black superhero to debut his own title in DC Comics, returned to the screens in 2018. The character was originally created in 1977 by Tony Isabella and Trevor Von Eeden and ran for thirteen issues. Nearly two decades after what Liam Burke theorizes as the “golden age of comic book filmmaking”, racialized and Black superheroes are appearing more in film and television, despite their previous absence in the genre and the adaptations. *Black Lightning (2018)*, the CW production, maintains elements from the comic books while also incorporating new elements on the show. This paper explores the representation of Jefferson Pierce/Black Lightning in the television adaptation through a textual analysis. I argue that Jefferson Pierce is the embodiment of the “politics of respectability”, a middle-class Black ideology that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Respectability politics call on middle-class Black people to “uplift the race” by promoting reform on an individual level. This ideology places the responsibility on racialized people to prove to white folks they are worthy of equal citizenship. However, respectability remains unattainable by everyone and maintains the division between middle-class Black people and the Black poor. This division is evident in the representations of Jefferson Pierce juxtaposed to his superheroic identity, Black Lightning.

### **How *Godzilla vs. Kong* Memes Turned Titans into Pandemic Superheroes**

**Steven Rawle**

*Godzilla vs. Kong* (Adam Wingard, 2021) was one of the many blockbusters whose release was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Originally scheduled for an early 2020 release, it was first postponed until November 2020, and then until the end of March 2021. When Warner Bros. released the first trailer in December near the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a proliferation of memes in response, as well as relief that the film was just the giant, dumb spectacle the world needed.

This paper explores the culture of memes surrounding the film’s anticipated release. The abundance of memes referenced everything from the political conflicts surrounding masks and anti-Covid protests, workers’ rights, as well as the inevitable “Team Monke (sic) vs. ‘Team Lizard’ face-off. Further memes also referenced other superhero movies, such as the ‘Save Mothra!’ meme that appropriated the ‘Save Martha’ one from *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Zach Snyder, 2016), and those that adopted the *Captain America: Civil War* (Joe & Anthony Russo, 2016) Steve Rogers/Tony Stark argument memes. Bernie Sanders even made his obligatory appearance following the Biden inauguration.

As Wiggins (2019) contends, memes constitute an ideological practice as well as a frame for media narratives to develop. The meme culture surrounding *Godzilla vs. Kong*, this paper argues, is no different, its proximity to the turbulent events of 2020 helping fans to develop critical and political performances that reworked existing memes based on the film's trailers. Furthermore, the appropriation of memes from both DC and Marvel cinematic universes helps us understand how we might think about both of these titans as superheroes in ways not always extended to giant monsters.

### **“Eating nuts, kicking butts, and becoming a feminist icon: The Transmedia History and Actor-network Theory Critique of Squirrel Girl”**

**CarrieLynn D. Reinhard**

Squirrel Girl started as a satire to subvert superhero tropes in a 1991 Iron Man story. Because she beat Doctor Doom in her first appearance, she became an underground fan favorite who repeatedly popped up in the background of Marvel Comics through the actions of fans turned creators, including Dan Slott, who included her in the Great Lakes Avengers. This characterization added to her

canonical position as a supervillain conqueror and helped her move from a satirical to a more serious figure. This mixture of subversive satire and empowered feminism became fundamental to Squirrel Girl's nature with the launch of her solo title in 2015, which then led to her appearing in various media (i.e. comic book, young adult novel, animated series, and even a theatrical play). This transition to transmedia character also turned Squirrel Girl into a feminist icon who appealed to girls and young women thanks to her body positivity, compassionate nature, and intelligence.

This chapter analyzes Squirrel Girl as a transmedia character by drawing on the theoretical lens developed by Nicolle Lamerichs, who positions such characters as a business model constructed by a media producer to be consumed by fans. This theoretical perspective on transmedia characters provides a foundation to understand how Disney/Marvel developed Squirrel Girl from an individual's vision to a corporate business model meant to appeal to an underrepresented comics audience: namely, girls and young women. I utilize a feminist actor-network theory approach to understand how these different entities and their power positions in this system resulted in the current characterization of Squirrel Girl. Thus, I argue that the history of this feminist superhero exists as a co-construction between individual artists, fans, and corporate interests that results in both an empowered representation of a feminist superhero and the exploitation of the superhero's fans for profit.

### **Silk and the Importance of Therapy for Superheroes**

#### **Lisa Rothman**

Superheroes are typically known for their traumatic origin stories, some great loss or pain which has put them on the path of helping others. Many have received mental health diagnoses both within comics or by mental health professionals. Superheroes are able to take this trauma and help others who are struggling; The Fantastic Four in *Private Lives, Public Faces*, Superman in *Superman: Grounded*, Deadpool in *Deadpool #20* are just a few examples. Professionals have also used these diagnoses in many different ways as "Superhero Therapy" to help frame and provide context for fans who are struggling themselves.

But while superheroes provide help to others, rarely in comics do we see superheroes receive the help that they need in return. Within this context the Silk run written by Robbie Thompson stands out. Very intentionally, Robbie Thompson shows the many stages of Silk going to therapy to deal with anxiety, anger, and other issues that developed from being locked in a bunker for 10 years to protect her family from those who sought her for her spider powers.

In the Silk comic's run the worry of friends and colleagues, her uncertainty about what is wrong or if she even needs help, and her discomfort with the idea of therapy and not always showing up for appointments are all explored. The therapy in Silk is grounded in Robbie Thompson's own experiences with therapy and with having a father who was a therapist.

Robbie Thompson's Silk run is so important because while it is important to normalize mental health issues, it is also important to normalize seeking professional help when needed. The run shows therapy realistically and not the way therapy is often shown in the media. Knowing a superhero is in therapy helps fans and readers consider seeking help for themselves.

### **Supersizing Diversity: A Path to More Representation in the Superhero Genre**

#### **Maseri Kisa Schultz**

Marvel's comic *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* and Sony's film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* depict multi-ethnic superheroes who discover themselves through agency in their costume design. *Ms. Marvel* protagonist Kamala Khan attempts to reject her Pakistani

heritage, primarily by shapeshifting into multiple iterations of Carol Danvers's Marvel persona. Kamala eventually makes her own mark on the Ms. Marvel brand by altering a burkini, uniting her cultural heritage with her own conception of heroism. In *Spider-Verse*, Afro-Latino Miles Morales also follows in the footsteps of a preexisting white superhero, Peter Parker's Spider-Man. He too becomes his own hero by re-designing his costume, spray-painting or "tagging" his Spider-Man suit. Both Kamala and Miles are children of multiple ethnic/racial worlds, and represent teens of color who feel marginalized and othered. Taking agency over their costume design allows them to discover their unique superhero identities, and in turn, a place to belong. Although skeptics could read Miles and Kamala as superficial gestures towards diversity, they are a crucial foundation for inviting more diversity into a Eurocentric genre that should better represent its globalized audience.

### **WandaVision and the Cognitive Processes of Brazilian Fans on Twitter**

#### **Daiana Sigiliano and Gabriela Borges**

Studies conducted since the late 1990s in the scope of televised serialized fiction highlight the process of plot complexification. Johnson (2005) argues that popular culture, particularly film, television and video-games greater cognitive effort from the audience, in unprecedented fashion. This process should stimulate the development of abilities such as, for example, pattern recognition, scanning and telescoping capacities, mapping etc. Johnson's (2005) theoretical approach presents direct dialogue with Feuerstein et al.'s (2010) concept of structural cognitive modifiability (SCM). According to the authors, cognitive processes involving SCM, i.e., what can be altered throughout one's life, comprises various abilities, among them attention, organization, and information sequencing. Working from this context, the current research intends to analyze the cognitive processes operating on comments published on Twitter on the day *WandaVision*'s (Disney+, 2021-) two episodes ("Filmed Before a Live Studio Audience" and "Don't Touch That Dial") was released. To discuss this issue, we used Feuerstein et al.'s (2010) studies about SCM as a lens to analyze content shared by eight Brazilian fan accounts dedicated to the *WandaVision* universe (@NacaoMarvell, @MarvelPlusBR, @BRMarvelNews, @wandamcuBR, @feiticeiraescbr, @NewsWandaVision, @TheVisionBR, @MarvelsSeries).

### **More Than Just a Sexy Body: The Subversion of Classical Mythological Frameworks in Jungle Comics**

#### **Owen M. Smith**

A fascinating, but often neglected genre of superhero comic books is the jungle comic, featuring both male and female protagonists without superabilities, but with standard human abilities developed far beyond the level of common people. Too often, these comic have been dismissed merely as the occasion for hypersexualized representations of the male and female form. However, by using Joseph Fontenrose's account of the themes of the combat myth, originally developed for analyzing classical myths, we can explore the subversion of traditional frameworks of myth interpretation in jungle comics, particularly with regard to the gender roles assigned to heroes and heroines in the context of both nature (chaos) and civilization (cosmos). A careful reading of contemporary jungle superhero comics can therefore, in combination with insights provided by Joseph Campbell for male protagonists and various theorists, such as Maureen Murdock, Elizabeth Lyon, and Valerie Estelle Frankel, for female protagonists, provide guidance for young contemporary women and men in the construction of novel world views that are relevant to life in a polarized world of conflict and disillusionment.

### **Laughing Through Tragedy: Finding Comedy in a Post-Blip MCU**

#### **William Staton**

In July of 2019, just 70 days after *Avenger: Endgame*, the culmination of over 11 years and 21 films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the world was met by Marvel's next entry in the franchise, *Spider-Man: Far From Home*. The emotional scars left by the events of

*Endgame* were still fresh, with many fans in the midst of their recovery from losing these influential characters, especially the proclaimed hero of the MCU, Tony Stark. *Endgame* concluded with gratitude, loss and the payoff of years of franchise entries. *Far From Home* had to pick up the pieces of the fandom, comforting fans who missed the characters they love, all while rebuilding the franchise after the tragedies and narrative conclusions of *Endgame*. Instead of collapsing into tragedy, the MCU decided to motivate its viewers to keep our heads up and look forward, using one of the greatest motivators during tragedy: comedy.

As the Marvel Studios title card sequence played in *Far From Home*, a familiar sight and sound reminding fans of their 11 years of emotional dedication to the franchise, we hear Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You." The words "in memoriam" fade in on the screen, imbued with the power of the Comic Sans font. The song continues as we see a slideshow of our fallen heroes of *Endgame*: Iron Man, Captain America, Black Widow, The Vision, and so many others. We are reminded of their heroic sacrifice, still fresh in our emotional attachment to these characters. As the in memoriam ends, with the superimposed flowing wings of doves and an image of lit candles proudly boasting the Getty Images watermark, we emerge on the other side of both *Endgame's* tragedy and Midtown Technical High School's in memoriam video, laughing all along the way.

This video perpetuates the MCU's ideology for dealing with tragedy: to laugh and move on. Though the entire film deals with themes of loss and finding one's place when loved ones are gone, *Far From Home* urges the audience to find humor in the present instead of dwelling in the tragedy of the past. Our entrance into a Post-Blip MCU isn't a sincere tribute to the fallen heroes, but rather an absurdist, cliched in memoriam that ends with the sounds of air horns and one high schooler stating that "sh\*t's crazy." Using Dr. John Morreal's theories on the relationship between comedy and tragedy, and the potential for relief in this relationship, I aim to better understand the ways in which the MCU deals with tragedy as it continues throughout each entry into the franchise. In my paper presentation, I hope to facilitate a more active perspective on the intentions behind humor in the MCU, and the ways in which humor helps us overcome the emotional loss of these influential characters, continuing the MCU's undaunting march forward.

### **The Real Superheroes? 'The Boys' of Supernatural and the Amazon Prime Series**

#### **Lynn Zubernis and Matt Snyder**

Classic superhero narratives portray the superheroes as inherently good, fighting evil and defending humanity. On Eric Kripke's television series *Supernatural* and *The Boys*, in contrast, the super-powered beings are more often the 'bad guys', from narcissistic angels (and God himself) on *Supernatural* to manufactured 'Supes' who care more about their social media popularity than helping people on *The Boys*. In contrast, both shows set up its human characters - the small group of mortals trying to expose the Supes on *The Boys*, and brothers Sam and Dean Winchester on *Supernatural* - as the real heroes. Without super powers, they depend instead on their wits, resourcefulness, determination and loyalty to each other to save the day - which perhaps is a lot more inspiring to the rest of us who are 'just humans' too. While most of us probably won't go up against Homelander or Lucifer, we all confront what seem like insurmountable odds at times throughout our lives, and it's helpful to have people like Huey and Billy or Sam and Dean to remind us that we humans can go up against the biggest bad imaginable and still manage to come out the other side.