Themenschwerpunkt: Comparative Masculinity Studies and the Question of Narrative

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Editorial

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While gender studies, women and feminist studies have been at least partly institutionalized and can look back onto their own history – or histories – as (sometimes contested) academic disciplines, masculinity as a subject has only much later begun to receive attention in academia. If, in the beginning, masculinity was hardly more than an occasional topic in disciplines such as sociology, psychology, history, and literary studies, it has become a field of study in its own right, at least in the United States and the United Kingdom. Since the late 1980s, masculinity has occasionally begun to be addressed in German academic discourse as well, but initially remained restricted to areas such as the military, violence, sexual orientation, body images, and sports.

This coming into being of masculinity studies as a new field of research can be explained by the fact that over centuries, in everyday life as in research, masculinity was more or less invisible, given that the traditional “overgeneralization from male to generic human experience” not only distorted the “understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also preclude[d] the study of masculinity as a *specific male* experience, rather than a universal paradigm for *human* experience”.¹ The fact that “notions of the ‘human’ are likely to obscure notions of the ‘masculine’”² explains why – notwithstanding Sigmund Freud and his emphasis on masculinity as ‘normalcy’ – in political, social, and cultural contexts, masculinity remained something of an unmarked and therefore invisible gender.

1 Harry Brod: Introduction: Themes and Theses of Men’s Studies. In: H.B. (ed.): *The Making of Masculinities. The New Men’s Studies*. Boston: Allen & Unwin 1987, pp. 1–17, here p. 2.

2 David Rosen: *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1993, p. xi.

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However, whenever masculinity has become visible in the late 20th and early 21st century, it has regularly presented an alarming picture, being frequently mentioned in connection with violent incidents such as the Anders Behring Breivik massacre in Norway in 2011, the mass shooting in Las Vegas in 2017 or shootings in universities and schools such as the Columbine High School in 1999, the Gutenberg-Gymnasium in Erfurt in 2002 and – since then – in numerous other schools in the United States. In the current debate on education, masculinity has been pronounced to be a problem for men specifically, and the latest statistics of the Federal Government and the World Health Organization (WHO) show men to be at a significantly higher risk of developing an alcohol addiction, exhibiting personality disorders, and committing suicide. Also with regard to life expectancy, chronic disorders and the need for long-term care, men have been shown to be seriously disadvantaged.³

Though we have to be cautious as far as these statistics and also the definitions of masculinity and femininity underlying these statistics are concerned,⁴ we cannot completely ignore them. Thus, if the human and the masculine seem to be drifting apart, it is exactly this difference between the universal and the specific that has been brought to light and is dealt with in masculinity studies.⁵

Unfortunately, due to a continuing and still considerable lack of awareness of the problems associated with masculinity in academia and due to a lack of exchange between the various disciplines involved, academic research is far from reaching a consensus about the factors that are most important for the ‘construction of masculinity’. These factors include biological determinism, anthropological constants and evolutionary remainders on the one hand, and socio-historic factors, education, or images circulating in the cultural imaginary as well as representations of masculinity in the media on the other. So far, most branches of masculinity studies agree that masculinity is best understood not as

3 Cf. Stefan Horlacher: *Masculinity Studies: Contemporary Approaches and Alternative Perspectives*. In: Greta Olson et al. (eds): *Beyond Gender. An Advanced Introduction to Futures of Feminist and Sexuality Studies*. Abingdon/Oxon: Routledge 2018, pp. 52–78; Doris Bardehle: *Gesundheit und gesundheitliche Versorgung von Männern*. In: D.B./Matthias Stiehler (eds.): *Erster Deutscher Männergesundheitsbericht: Ein Pilotbericht*. München: Zuckschwerdt 2010, pp. 17–27; Elisabeth Badinter: *XY. Die Identität des Mannes*. München: Piper 1993, pp. 49f.; Hans-Joachim Lenz: *Zwischen Men's Studies und männlicher Verletzungs Offenheit – Zur kurzen Geschichte der Männerforschung in Deutschland*. In: *Männer und Geschlecht. Freiburger GeschlechterStudien* 21 (2007), pp. 41–77; Rainer Emig/Antony Rowland: *Introduction*. In: R.E./A.R. (eds.): *Performing Masculinity*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, pp. 1–12.

4 Cf. the contributions by Mechthild Bereswill and Martin Dinges in this special issue.

5 One of the continuing questions here is how to highlight these current predicaments for men, but also attend to feminist concerns with men's continuing power globally.

monolithic but as plural and changing over time, that masculinity is not a given but performance, a task that has to be achieved, and a set of norms, differing according to regional, social, and historical contexts, that has to be fulfilled and embodied.⁶ Thus masculinity has to be conceived of as a plural concept, i.e., as masculinities, and it is exactly this plurality which facilitates the differentiation between various ‘hegemonic’ and ‘marginal’ types of masculinity⁷ and ultimately challenges the very relationship between man/men and masculinity, transforming it into a precarious relationship that has to be rethought.

Understandings and concepts of masculinity vary between a social or sociological given, a historical fact, a type of narration, a plot structure, a mental construct, a position taken up in relation to the symbolic order and simply a natural fact linked to a biological body. It is especially in this context that Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam’s claim in *Female Masculinity* that masculinity should no longer be regarded as the exclusive territory of men becomes more relevant than ever.⁸ Following Halberstam’s line of argument, masculinity should be understood as separate from the male body. S/he argues that while there is a “concurrence that femaleness does not automatically produce femininity and maleness does not produce masculinity”,⁹ the material effects of disassociating sex and gender have not yet been fully understood. While the – stereotypical – affinity of femininity with artifice, theatricality, and performativity is largely accepted, leading to understandings of femininity as fluid or mobile, masculinity seems to have “an altogether different relation to performance, the real and the natural and it appears to be far more difficult to pry masculinity and maleness apart than femininity and femaleness”.¹⁰

6 Cf. our overviews on research on men and masculinities: Walter Erhart: Das zweite Geschlecht. Männlichkeit, interdisziplinär. Ein Forschungsbericht. In: Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL) 30/2 (2005), pp. 156–232; Stefan Horlacher: Überlegungen zur theoretischen Konzeption männlicher Identität: Ein Forschungsüberblick mit exemplarischer Vertiefung. In: S.H. (ed.): Konstruktionen von Geschlechtlichkeit von der Antike bis ins 21. Jahrhundert. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2010, pp. 195–238; Horlacher: Masculinity Studies: Contemporary Approaches and Alternative Perspectives (footnote 3).

7 For the important and influential term and concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ cf. R.W. Connell: Masculinities. Berkeley: University of California Press 1995.

8 Cf. Judith Halberstam: *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP 1998.

9 Halberstam quoted in Annamarie Jagose: *Masculinity without Men*. Annamarie Jagose Interviews Judith Halberstam about Her Latest Book, *Female Masculinity*. In: *Genders* 29 (1999): n. pag. (online 12th Feb 2013). The following two paragraphs are based on Horlacher: *Masculinity Studies: Contemporary Approaches and Alternative Perspectives* (footnote 3), p. 61.

10 Halberstam quoted in Jagose: *Masculinity without Men* (footnote 9).

Most likely, this stems from the fact that while the relation between femininity and performativity is accepted or even taken for granted, masculinity often tends to deny its performative quality, presenting itself as non- or anti-performative or masquerading as nature. For Halberstam, male masculinity is even a “counterexample to the kinds of masculinity that seem most informative about gender relations and most generative of social change”.¹¹ S/he contends that, paradoxically, masculinity “becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body”,¹² and that it is female masculinity that has the potential to “create the most powerful and transgressive versions of masculinity”, while “much of what we take for granted about white male masculinity” is in reality characterized by the “dual mechanism of a lack of care for the self and a callous disregard for the care of others”.¹³

As a matter of fact, recent work in transgender and intersex studies appears to have complicated the relation of masculinity to gender division itself. This is also true of the categories and concepts used in masculinity studies as well as of the knowledge produced. If Kevin Floyd argues that transgender and intersex studies pose formidable challenges to masculinity studies and that these challenges should be understood as biopolitical,¹⁴ it might be worth keeping in mind that the phenomena of transgender and intersex demonstrate through the sheer fact of their existence that a cultural system that postulates the existence of two, and only two, sexes or genders has reached its limits. Thus, any system that uncritically presupposes an identity between a felt or experienced gender identity and a non-contradictory notion of biological sex has to be questioned.¹⁵ From this, it follows that for masculinity studies it is necessary to establish a common understanding of what we mean by using terms such as ‘man’, ‘male’, and ‘masculine’, and of how they are interrelated. More often than not, the meaning of masculinity does not only seem to differ from culture to culture, or from historical era to historical era, does not only differ intersectionally according to age, religion, education, location etc., but does also vary from discipline to discipline.¹⁶

11 Halberstam: *Female Masculinity* (footnote 8), p. 3.

12 Halberstam: *Female Masculinity* (footnote 8), p. 2.

13 Halberstam: *Female Masculinity* (footnote 8), p. 274.

14 Cf. Kevin Floyd: *Masculinity Inside Out: The Biopolitical Lessons of Transgender and Intersex Studies*. In: Stefan Horlacher (ed.): *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, pp. 33–48.

15 Cf. Stefan Horlacher: *Introduction: Transgender and Intersex. Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives*. In: S.H. (ed.): *Transgender and Intersex. Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2016, pp. 1–27, here p. 1f.

16 Cf. Uta Fenske/Gregor Schuhen (eds.): *Ambivalente Männlichkeit(en). Maskulinitätsentwürfe aus interdisziplinärer Perspektive*. Opladen/Berlin/Toronto: Barbara Budrich 2012; Stefan Horla-

Though masculinity studies have established themselves as an independent field of study, they are characterized by an interdisciplinary fragmentation. In fact, the plurality of the concept of masculinity (or: masculinities) has not only led to new insights but also to new questions and, at the same time, to the fragmentation of masculinity studies not only as a field of study but as an emerging academic discipline. Whereas, broadly speaking, literary and cultural studies analyse stereotypes, representations, narratives, and motives of masculinity as exterior manifestations which are either deeply anchored in traditions (fairy tales, heroic tales, folk and national epics) or fast-changing images (new fatherhood, New Lad Literature, metrosexuality etc.) propagated by modern mass media, and whereas psychology, psychoanalysis and pedagogy focus on patterns of gender identity and the inner self, disciplines such as sociology and history concentrate on historical and contemporary transformations of gender relations in societies. In all of these disciplines, different interior and exterior aspects of masculinity are brought to the fore while the question as to how these aspects relate to each other remains unanswered. As do more specific questions concerning the relationship between masculinity and the biological body or the historicity of the body as a cultural concept.

From this perspective, the social importance, topicality, and interdisciplinarity of masculinity studies do not prove to be an advantage, but a disadvantage instead. As a matter of fact, a highly differentiated and specialized form of research that fails to reach any synthesis even within its own discipline is, arguably, the rule, not the exception. Thus, differentiation and specialization – although necessary – threaten to limit interdisciplinary discourse and the international exchange of research findings. Recent research has discovered a multitude of social, historical, and local masculinities ranging from race and class via marginalization and hegemony to sexual orientation, transgender, gender-hybridity, and cyborg-technology. The emphasis on difference and plurality over the last decades has led to the assumption of the incommensurability of masculinities – up to the point where the very concept of masculinity is not only put into question but about to become meaningless.¹⁷ As Stefan Horlacher argues in his contribution, masculinity studies seems to be in some sort of double-bind: While current research has shown that in post-modern societies the construction of a monolithic or ‘singular’ male/masculine identity has become problematic and

cher/Bettina Jansen/Wieland Schwanebeck (eds.): *Männlichkeit. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Metzler: Stuttgart 2016.

17 Cf. Nina Degele: *Männlichkeit queeren*. In: Robin Bauer/Josch Hoenes/Volker Woltersdorff (eds.): *Unbeschreiblich männlich. Heteronormativitätskritische Perspektiven*. Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag 2007, pp. 29–42.

increasingly impossible, the construction of a male/masculine identity based on the premises of an unrestricted plurality has turned out to be problematic and crises-ridden as well. Thus, ‘plurality’ and ‘difference’ per se may not be seen as the solution but as having become part of the problem. Since the consequence of emphasizing plurality – so characteristic for current masculinity studies – is that the question of commonalities, shared features and similarities of these masculinities has been neglected, it seems necessary to rethink the relationship between masculinity as a concept and its plural forms.

It is in this vein that Harry Brod, one of the founders of masculinity studies, comments on the necessity of critically taking stock after almost forty years of masculinity studies: “some critical mass has been achieved, allowing for the kind of over-view self-reflection that is possible only when at least the initial trajectory of a field’s development has reached some sort of intellectual maturity”.¹⁸ Building on forty years of interdisciplinary masculinity studies, what is needed is a self-reflection of the discipline and its fields of study from a comparative perspective. Masculinity studies should not only reach out to create a synthesis of the knowledge of masculinity by critically analyzing and bringing together different, often non-interacting disciplines; masculinity studies should also develop new theoretical perspectives by working on a method of comparison that highlights commonalities while, simultaneously, acknowledging differences. This implies a more sustained geographical consideration of masculinities; that is, an analysis that can account for the ways in which masculinities are defined simultaneously in local, national, and global terms.¹⁹

The increasing fragmentation and partitioning of the field of masculinity studies corresponds and indirectly leads to the fact that numerous thematic, historical and national characteristics and potential connections have only been considered selectively and in isolation, if at all, and not in their interdependency. Therefore it is necessary to develop new criteria and frameworks for a comparative analysis with special regard to the linguistic structures, the revival, transformation, and embodiment of cultural scripts, images and narratives held in common by diverging national and transnational masculinities. One way of overcoming this fragmentation, we argue, is by using comparison as a methodological tool in order to detect and emphasize commonalities (the *tertia comparationis*, i.e., the basic features which different masculinities are supposed to share) while

18 Harry Brod: The Construction of the Construction of Masculinities. In: Stefan Horlacher (ed.): *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011, pp. 19–32, here p. 24.

19 Cf. Horlacher: *Masculinity Studies: Contemporary Approaches and Alternative Perspectives* (footnote 3), p. 65.

also doing justice to the plurality of masculinity, by working on theories and methodologies that should be suitable to bind the inner and exterior aspects of masculinity together. Here, as in other fields of the humanities, a shift in focus in many of the disciplines dealing with masculinity and gender towards narrative modes and structures, i.e. to stories and genres as the paramount components of historical and current constructions of masculinities, should be taken into account. The advantages of an approach according to which men acquire masculinity by being forced into a narrative script, by performatively acting out a narrative script, that is an approach that brings into play imaginary role models – examples, images, narrations – which circulate among individual ‘men’ and official images of ‘masculinity’, such an approach effectively manages to combine literary, social, and historical sciences.²⁰

The contributions in this special issue of *IASL* were part of a conference organized by Walter Erhart (Bielefeld/Germany), Stefan Horlacher (Dresden/Germany) and Victoria Robinson (York/UK) at the Centre of Interdisciplinary Studies (ZiF) at Bielefeld University (January 20th – January 23rd, 2016). The first aim of this conference (“20th- and 21st-Century Narratives of Masculinities: Commonalities and Differences in Constructions of Masculinity”) was to gather disciplines that have done significant research on masculinities in the last decades, thus giving them the opportunity to outline contemporary approaches and perspectives within the field. A second aim was that these disciplines should provide material for comparing different theories of and approaches to men and masculinities. Exploring the plurality of masculinities across the disciplines should make it possible to make those masculinities comparable and to study their differences as well as their commonalities across a wide range of epochs, societies, and regions.

While there are numerous biological and sociological theories, public discourses and philosophical concepts that, up to this day, have shaped notions of masculinity as a unified gender, a sex that is one, recent research has explored differences not only according to history, class, and race but also by broadening the national and spatial boundaries of masculinities.²¹ At our conference, for example, Jeff Hearn presented his theories and findings of the on-going prolifera-

20 Cf. Erhart: *Das zweite Geschlecht* (footnote 6), pp. 203f.

21 Cf. Jeff Hearn/Keith Pringle (eds.): *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006; Stefan Horlacher/Kevin Floyd (eds.): *Post World War II Masculinities in British and American Literature and Culture. Towards Comparative Masculinity Studies*. Farnham: Ashgate 2013; Stefan Horlacher/Kevin Floyd (eds.): *Contemporary Masculinities in the UK and the US: Between Bodies and Systems*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2017.

tion of global masculinities²² while José Maria Armengol Carrera (Madrid), Ofer Nordheimer (Tel Aviv) and Alexander Wöll (Frankfurt/O.) emphasized the specific circumstances and different traditions of hegemonic as well as marginal masculinities in Spain and Portugal,²³ Israel,²⁴ and Ukraine.²⁵

Pointing out the importance of neglected national territories for a comprehensive and broad analysis of contemporary masculinities gives weight to the plurality of existing masculinities, but, at the same time, acknowledges common features in breaking away from an equally 'traditional' masculinity of the early and mid-20th century. Therefore, interdisciplinary research should focus on commonalities, parallels, affinities, and similarities that account for a common structure of masculinity as the field's object. In the following contributions, initially presented as papers on our conference, different disciplines with different methodological approaches propose new possibilities and innovative ways of pointing to the plurality of 'masculinities' without losing sight of commonalities and common features that make masculinities comparable in the first place. By delineating differences and similarities between men and masculinities, a new comparative approach to masculinity studies may as well enable the field to draw on disciplinary insights while simultaneously making their objects and results compatible.

Stefan Horlacher's contribution focusses on the narrative structure of masculinity as an essential tool to analyze differences and commonalities of past and contemporary masculinities (*"From the idea that the self is not given to us..." – On the Relevance of Comparative Approaches, the Importance of Narrative and the Knowledge of Literature for Masculinity Studies*). His article argues in favor of a wide understanding of narrative that is not restricted to literary and cultural artifacts but spans from the construction of individual (gender) identity via biographical, material, and embodied social processes and practices to collective national identities and images. Horlacher contends that one way of conceiving of the wide plurality of differentiated masculinities outlined above is an understanding of masculinity as having a largely discursive or narrative relational

²² Cf. Jeff Hearn: *Men of the Worlds. Genders, Globalizations, Transnational Times*. London: Sage 2015.

²³ Cf. José Maria Armengol Carrera: *Queering Iberia. Iberian Masculinities from the Margins*. New York: Peter Lang 2012.

²⁴ Cf. Ofer Nordheimer: *Eros and Tragedy. Jewish Male Fantasies and the Masculine Revolution of Zionism*. Brighton/MA: Academic Studies Press 2014.

²⁵ Cf. Alexander Wöll: *Männlichkeitsforschung in Russland und Ostmitteleuropa*. In: Stefan Horlacher/Bettina Jansen/Wieland Schwanebeck (eds.): *Männlichkeit. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Metzler: Stuttgart 2016, pp. 42–51.

structure and as consisting of complex, differentiated, and dynamic subject positions. From this perspective, it is important to focus on the relationality and interdependency of masculinities by paying special attention to stories and genres as the paramount components of historical and current constructions of masculinities. In accordance with the shift from “representational to ontological narrativity”,²⁶ narratives are not considered as representations of identity but as constituting identity and bringing forth communities. Moreover, since “social life is itself *storied*”, narratives can be regarded as “an *ontological condition of social life*”²⁷ which exemplarily manifests itself in literature and the arts. It is here that a plethora of narratives of masculinity becomes ‘visible’ or ‘graspable’ in a reading process that is conceptualized as an act of imagining and as a process of transfer during which readers perpetually ‘stage’ themselves (and this involves their gender identities). In other words: Narratives have a performative function, and this function allows for a variety of new masculine gender identities that become available through their very conception in literature and the arts.²⁸

In a final step, bringing narrative and comparative masculinity studies together, Horlacher argues that masculinity can be conceived of as a) a historically contingent, variable narrative structure that is striving for coherence (not ‘truth’ or ‘veracity’) and characterized by a precarious emplotment and a constant negotiation of change and mutability; b) a (temporary) overlap and intersection of attributes, forms of behavior and practices which are considered ‘masculine’ at a certain point in time, in a given cultural context and at a specific geographical location; c) an intersectional configuration which may differ according to age, ethnicity, health, religion, social stratum etc. and which is characterized by absence and lack at its center.

However, narratives do not only offer new and innovative models and blueprints of masculinity, but they also order, regulate, and govern masculinity by showing – in all kinds of popular media, representations, and discourses – how to properly act and perform as a man. These narratives also transfer ideas and

²⁶ Winfried Fluck: Reading for Recognition. In: New Literary History 44 (2013), pp. 45–67, here p. 50.

²⁷ Margaret Somers: The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach. In: Theory and Society 23 (1994), pp. 605–649, here pp. 613f.

²⁸ Cf. for example Martin Blawid: Von Kraftmenschen und Schwächlingen. Literarische Männlichkeitsentwürfe bei Lessing, Goethe, Schiller und Mozart. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 2011; Toni Tholen/Jennifer Clare (eds.): Literarische Männlichkeiten und Emotionen. Heidelberg: Winter 2013; Thomas Boyken: „So will ich dir ein männlich Beispiel geben“. Männlichkeitsimaginationen im dramatischen Werk Friedrich Schillers. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2014; Josep M. Armengol et al. (eds.): Masculinities and Literary Studies. Intersections and New Directions. New York: Routledge 2017.

patterns of how to perceive and how to deal with ‘masculine’ behavior in times of transition and transformation. In this respect, the narrative of ‘crisis’ has become one of the most powerful – and privileged – narratives of masculinity,²⁹ notwithstanding the fact that historians have suggested that masculinity has always been in a state of crisis and that crisis itself might be part of the narrative that masculinity is made of.³⁰

Mechthild Bereswill, in her contribution to this special issue (*Boys – the Disadvantaged Gender?*), shows that the contemporary public discourse on the crisis of masculinity has established a ‘narrative pattern’ concerning the disadvantage of boys within supposed predominant ‘female’ spaces, especially in familial and educational environments. A dominant part of this discourse is focussed on biological and psychological differences between men and women but also on ‘a presupposed sameness between men’. While this traditional and still popular view distributes differences between the sexes and sameness within one sex, recent sociological accounts transfer the question of differences and commonalities into the sphere of each gender/sex itself.

As Victoria Robinson points out (*Men’s embodied occupational narratives: An empirical study revisited*), differences, plurality, and multiplicity should not only be arranged and distributed as expressions of different masculinities across historical times or social scales but also as part of each man and each masculinity at a given time. Coined as ‘masculinity in transition’, different patterns and narratives of masculinity arise according to the life cycle, to specific locations, spaces, and situations. They are joint up and anchored, though, by ‘embodied narratives’ that are coordinated and made comparable by the ‘lived experience’ of an embodied self. Like the readers’ experiences outlined by Stefan Horlacher, each of these embodied selves – in Victoria Robinson’s case: firefighters, hairdressers, and real estate agents – is facing multiple versions of masculinity without losing a sense of the coherence, the similarities and commonalities that structure and add up to a life’s ever-changing masculinity. Bodies – that might be one of the lessons drawn from our contributions – are neither biological givens

29 Cf. Elahe Haschemi Yekani: *The Privilege of Crisis. Narratives of Masculinities in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Photography and Film*. Frankfurt/M./New York: Campus 2011; Mechthild Bereswill/Anke Neuber (eds.): *In der Krise? Männlichkeiten im 21. Jahrhundert*. Münster: Dampfboot 2011.

30 Cf. Erhart: *Das zweite Geschlecht* (footnote 6), pp. 173–176, 218–225; Toni Tholen: ‘Krise der Männlichkeit’. Zur Konzeptualisierung eines häufig verwendeten Topos. In: T.T.: *Männlichkeiten in der Literatur. Konzepte und Praktiken zwischen Wandel und Beharrung*. Bielefeld: transcript 2015, pp. 45–49; Stefan Horlacher/Wieland Schwanebeck: *Die Krise der Männlichkeit, oder: Die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*. In: Boris von Heesen (ed.): *Männeraufbruch 2019*. Darmstadt: MensLit (forthcoming).

nor neutral, blank and pre-gendered sites upon which discourses, socio-historical scripts or heteronormative norms are written, they rather form complex territories where biological, anatomical, historical, and cultural forces are inscribed, mixed and tangled up.³¹ Bodies are those heterogeneous sites where external and internal dimensions of gender constructions meet precisely by being woven together into the felt experience of a gendered body.

Taking up some often overlooked aspects of Freud's initial theories, Ilka Quindeau's account of recent psychoanalytical approaches to masculinity (*Masculinity Concepts in Psychoanalysis*) confirms the importance of a bodily gendered space that is made out of anatomical structures, physiological processes, and psychosexual fantasies. Instead of opposing masculinity and femininity, this new form of psychoanalysis attributes gender to different relations of a 'gendered inner space' that – despite culture's fixation on external male genitals for example – has to be explored and expressed by women and men alike. Like the transitions of men's lives that have to be integrated in the lived experience and the narrative(s) of each man's life, the psychic and psychosexual processes of embodied masculinities form a set of continuous on-going transitions between father-and-mother-identifications, between 'phallicity' and 'genitality', between outer and inner genitals as well as between feminine and masculine structures and narratives.

A lot of psychoanalytical terms can be used in a transdisciplinary way to approach and get a hold of the inner lives of men revealing multiple subject-positions of a gendered self as well as not only common anatomical, but also shared psychological and emotional structures and patterns of men's lived and embodied experiences. These experiences are influenced and gendered by language and discourses that describe and denote practices as 'masculine' in the first place. Thus, before we start to compare masculinities, we should lay out a groundwork of concepts that are used and carried out to shape the notion of masculinity across time and space. Those "traveling concepts" as coined by Mieke Bal³² and adopted here for masculinity studies by Toni Tholen (*Narrating the Relation between Masculinity and Care in Modernity. Perspectives on a Transdisciplinary Problem*) travel through different historical, social and theoretical contexts and media as well as disciplinary boundaries. 'Care' as a key concept of contemporary theory and numerous economic, social, and political practices and

31 Cf. Josep M. Armengol (ed.): *Embodied Masculinities. Towards a History of the Male Body in U.S. Culture and Literature*. New York et. al.: Peter Lang 2013.

32 Mieke Bal: *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide*. Toronto/Buffalo/London: Toronto UP 2002.

interventions³³ includes a history that deals with exactly those gendered differences and similarities that were used to define men's place in society. While Mechthild Bereswill looks at a powerful public discourse on the femininity of 'care', Toni Tholen traces a history where 'care' as a basic concept has always been attached differently to masculinity and men – sometimes warded off, sometimes incorporated by being split in masculine and feminine parts, sometimes, especially today, created anew as a political concept and, at the same time, as a lived experience of men. As an embodied narrative in the sense of Victoria Robinson's analysis, care might be built into men's narratives in a new and different way. Not by chance, Toni Tholen refers to literature's power to highlight emerging new practices of masculinity thus enabling a set of narrative and cognitive as well as emotional dispositions and attitudes to be adopted by readers. Thus, already in the examples offered by Tholen, new forms of differences and similarities appear that make men and masculinities comparable according to their practices of care and the embodied narratives that will stem from these practices.

The historian's task might be to point to the historicity and changeability of gendered concepts and perceptions. As Martin Dinges demonstrates, the public and medical practices of men's health and awareness towards their bodies, even men's practices concerning their health and their bodies, have changed drastically just within one hundred years (*Man: From Healthy Model To Deficient Creature*). The medical discourse on women's 'weaker' sex and their 'weaker' bodies, having been established firmly over centuries, made it easy for doctors and medical experts to overlook obvious empirical facts like mortality rates (by simply not taking gender into account while reviewing the data). Today, on the contrary, men are considered 'health idiots' because they presumably neglect their health and their bodies altogether. While Martin Dinges reconstructs the changing historical, personal, and professional attitudes to men's health, at the end of his article he points to a contemporary awareness of men towards their bodies thus indicating another shifting of these common lived experiences of men.

Men's attitudes to their bodies may vary and change individually, but they are closely tied to discourses, images, and practices that create those corporeal realities and embodied experiences that make up men's lives and masculinities. Male bodies are not only formed by widely distributed images and scripts of

33 Cf. Irmgard Diewald: *Männlichkeiten im Wandel. Zur Regierung von Geschlecht in der deutschen und schwedischen Debatte um 'Männer in Kitas'*. Bielefeld: transcript 2018.

masculinity but also by historical and political narratives that direct masculine bodily behavior as well.

As Jennifer Kapczynski argues (*Posing As a Democrat: Scripting the Male Body in West German Films of the 1950s*), the re-orientation of male body language in Germany after 1945 as represented in cinematographic representations may be a clue to relate constructions of male bodies to differences and similarities of men's places in society and politics. Taking popular after-war-movies as a starting point, Kapczynski shows that the body formations and body practices of actors and heroes were connected to political and ideological ideals, in this case representing 'excessive' disordered national-socialist German and 'relaxed' democratic American male body performances. Male bodies, in general, form a prominent site of transferring political and social discourses: The spectator, while seeing and comparing these cinematographic bodies, gets aware of social attitudes and political gestures, even starts to re-organize his own body thus following political ideas and norms by – maybe subconsciously – changing his embodied postures.

The frameworks of making masculinities comparable may vary according to aesthetic, psychological, medical or political points of view; these *tertia comparationis*, however, always bring differences and similarities into play, thus creating commonalities that reduce the multiple forms of masculinity. Therefore, while emphasizing the plurality of masculinity, it is equally productive and necessary to trace common frames, scripts, and patterns whereby these plural masculinities are structured and organized – as bodies and narratives, through behavior, concepts and representations. Between identifying the core of a true masculinity being anchored in biology or (neuro-)psychology on the one hand, and a fluid multiplicity of masculinities on the other hand, the middle ground of historically and socially variable commonalities might be discovered by a twofold comparative practice: first by looking at narratives where actual comparisons of men and masculinities have taken or take place,³⁴ second by comparing different narratives and versions of masculinity within history, visual representations, and narratives.

As Walter Erhart's contribution suggests, looking at masculinities in this comparative way yields surprising results. By comparing three versions of a single narrative, the reading of literary and cinematographic versions of one single American Western story (*Comparing Masculinities: "True Grit", 1968, 1969, 2010*) not only points to an obvious plurality of masculinities within a genre that was

³⁴ For a theoretical framework of these comparative practices see Johannes Grave: Vergleichen als Praxis. Vorüberlegungen zu einer praxistheoretisch orientierten Untersuchung von Vergleichen. In: Walter Erhart/Angelika Epple (eds.): Die Welt beobachten. Praktiken des Vergleichens. Frankfurt/M.: Campus 2015, pp. 135–159.

once considered to represent one single and classic formula of hegemonic masculinity, it also detects different common narrative frameworks in each version of the story. Instead of a teleological history of a masculinity leading from patriarchal masculinity to its crises and dissolutions, instead of sorting out hegemonic classic images of the 'Western Hero' and subordinated marginalized 'other' masculinities, the literary and cinematic narratives of the *True Grit*-stories reveal different perceptions and frames where masculinities are situated and where their representations are pointing to as a reference point. There are different *tertia comparationis* that serve as a common basis for defining, judging, and comparing masculinity – be it a nostalgic vision of society gone by, a family narrative or the threatening and destructive 'other' side of civilization. Masculinities enfold as plural, indeed, but they vary according to common perceptions, frames, and narratives that bind together internal and external features of masculinities and materialize within those bodies that make up men and masculinities – be it on screen, in the reader's imagination or as embodied performances and experiences.

The re-orientation of masculinity studies towards comparative practices and embodied narratives – as documented in this special issue – may contribute to a turn in current theories on gender and masculinities. Not by chance, contemporary societies, while facing the paradox of persistence and rapid change in gender and family relations as well as in the construction of masculinities,³⁵ move between widely established norms and images of masculinity and a wide range of different orientations, dispositions, and modalities that make men and masculinities compatible and available for a lot of different ends.³⁶ By moving away from the supposed opposition between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities, recent studies discover not only differences and change but the paradox of reinforced gender performances and equally processed forms of 'undoing' gender.

Masculinity, today, is neither part of an old persistent 'hegemonic' tradition nor an available element of a newly celebrated multiplicity, it rather appears in those commonly shared lived experiences and embodied narratives that constantly navigate through the established assumptions and the multiple dispositions of being gendered in this way (or not). Instead of scaling masculinity along

35 Cf. Andrea Maihofer: *Familiale Lebensformen zwischen Wandel und Persistenz. Eine zeitdiagnostische Zwischenbetrachtung*. In: Cornelia Behnke/Diana Lengersdorf/Sylka Scholz (eds.): *Wissen – Methode – Geschlecht. Erfassen des Fraglos Gegebenen*. Berlin: Springer 2013, pp. 313–334.

36 Cf. Lothar Bönisch: *Der modularisierte Mann. Eine Sozialtheorie der Männlichkeit*. Bielefeld: transcript 2018.

the lines of power, hegemony and heteronormative ideas, the notion of differences and similarities – between genders, between men and masculinities – becomes more important thus pointing to comparisons and comparing as objects as well as tools of masculinity studies. As always, current changes in society and gender relations open up new and different approaches to history and theory. By suggesting a move towards comparative masculinity studies and by focussing on the importance of embodied and non-embodied (or not-yet-embodied) narratives, that is on stories, plots and discourses of masculinity that make up our culture, the contributions of this special issue want to offer material and further thoughts for these new prospects and avenues of research on gender and masculinity.