MASCULINE IDENTITY IN CRISIS IN HOLLYWOOD’S FIN DE MILLENNIUM CINEMA

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List of Contents

Abstract 3
Copyright Statement 4
Acknowledgements 5

INTRODUCTION 6

CHAPTER ONE: On the Road to Crisis 32
America de-tools 33
The New Man 36
The Metrosexual 42
Masculinity in crisis: the elegy 43
The New Lad 47

CHAPTER TWO: Crisis, work and consumption 53
Shopping and hyperconsumption 66
A relationship of dichotomies 75

CHAPTER THREE: Crisis and Violence 89
The body 91
Violence as (re)masculinisation 94

CHAPTER FOUR: Crisis, Sex and Sexuality 114
The phallus fights back 121

THE CONCLUSION 138
From film to culture 154
Final reflections 164
Limitations of the study 169

Bibliography 174
Filmography 188

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At the turn of the millennium, cultural and gender commentators were announcing that an apocalypse was under way. Men were changing. Patriarchy was crumbling. Masculinity, in short, was in crisis. Inaugurating a collective of ‘masculinity in crisis movies’, this thesis contends that Hollywood cinema also had its own relationship to the millennial crisis in masculinity. A relationship that was in fact so prevalent and extensive, that it came to the tune of 23 titles all released in the fin de millennium moment. Each film replicating the terms of wider cultural discourse, each with a representational concern with the crisis and the apparent ‘masculine malaise’.

The thesis also proposes that a dichotomous structure underpinned this cinema in which two altering identity complexes were voiced. On the one side, a presence that is distinctly feminine, where existential suffering is relieved through consumerism and conformity; whilst the other, which vitally is (re)-presented as the ‘preferred’, offered a deeply masculine, often hyper-sexual, anarchic and more violent presence. This thesis will seek to investigate these representations, whilst attempting to place them in a broader macro sphere of American socio-cultural history and commentary.

From visceral male anger spectacles like Fight Club (1999) and American Psycho (2000), to ‘New Man’ white collar bashing in Office Space (1999) and American Beauty (1999), this cinema seemed to be in direct dialogue with a larger, and vitally elegiac, commentary on masculinity-in-crisis.

By marking key distinctions and comparisons between ‘masculinity-as-experienced’ in socio-cultural and historical readings and ‘masculinity-as-represented’ in textual approaches to the films and their surrounding paraphernalia, this work engages with both the real and reel at the fin de millennium moment. The thesis demonstrates why the concept of a single, fixed and unified ‘authentic’ definition of masculinity may be untenable, and why perhaps this cinema seemed to struggle to avoid essentialism, irony and self-parody as fragmented characters seemed to offer equally fragmented promises of redemption through ‘traditional’ displays of masculinity.

What were the origins of the ‘crisis’, and how far was the crisis an actual or primarily a discursive one? Did this cinema help create or propel the crisis rather than sooth it, and how did the representation of ‘schizophrenic’ or ‘bipolar’ masculinity speak to the crisis and its audiences in general? Why did this section of Hollywood cinema decide to re-present these identities and what, if anything, can we learn from them? This research seeks to provide answers to these questions.
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Introduction

In 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Susan Faludi, one of the leading feminists of her generation, hit both popular and scholarly bookshelves with her ambitious 600-page examination of men and masculinity at the turn of the millennium in the United States. She called the book *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. The book consisted of a mixture of cultural and historical readings, with detailed accounts, interviews and conversations with a diverse catalogue of American males: American football fans, porn actors, war veterans, films stars, astronauts, shipbuilders, Promise Keepers, Citadel's, the Spur Posse, Los Angeles gangbangers, lads’ magazine editors and teenage boys.

What she found on her listening tour of men was a feeling of irrelevance; a profound sense that yesterday's fathers had prepared today's sons to enter a completely different world from the one they ended up in. Not just in the sense that the economic turn had shifted men from physical manufacturing labour to service, or the implicit irony of men creating the machines that would eventually replace them. Faludi’s sense of *betrayal* had deeper more cultural roots.

“All that is left then –”, said Faludi in an interview relating to her book in *The Guardian*, “if you can’t get your masculine confidence from work, family or having a place in your community – is the physical. Much later than women, men have had to try to find a place in ‘ornamental culture’, where appearance, sex appeal and celebrity – however tenuous – is what counts, is what makes you feel powerful.”¹ She writes: “In truth, despite all their wartime heroics, the fathers abandoned their sons, however inadvertently, in an image-based, commercial-ruled world that they had largely created in their post-war haste to embrace the good life” (Faludi 1999: 37).

For Susan Faludi this ‘new’ world is not only confusing for men who grew up with, but never really fully inherited, traditional or conservative forms of masculinity, but it is also a world that is ultimately empty. Faludi asserted that this is the slow (and painful) death of “traditional” masculinity in favour of ornamental culture and image, leading to an obliteration of the ‘rooted’ self and a real sense of masculine purpose. That post-war legacy of the so-called good life had shifted men from serving active, heroic, innately breadwinning and often confrontational roles, into passive, ornamental roles usually assigned to women according to the norms that have previously governed gender roles. Indeed, that passive image-obsessed world, for Faludi, is one with which women are very familiar and so is implicitly a world which has feminine connotations. But that is not to say that Faludi believed women are completely at ease in ornamental culture, or at the same time do not feel the an echoing sense of emptiness in this position either. In fact Faludi’s previous and award-winning book, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (1991) had already dealt with that very phenomenon (in addition to men’s subtle and not-so-subtle resistance to feminist progress). But now at the end of the millennium, for Faludi the tables were turning on men.

Ornamental culture had succeeded in pervading the ‘masculine terrain’. In the wake old jobs were lost; ‘masculine spaces’ once filled with miners, dockers and engineers were left barren or ‘converted’ to penthouse homes and middle-management sites for the newly saturating white collar; while the modern American male was increasingly under pressure to conform to commercial cultures of style and appearance. She declared that a cultural apocalypse was underway. Men were under siege from the changing landscape of the masculine terrain and the expectations that followed. The title of her book told the tale most succinctly, men were being ‘stiffed’, and Faludi was not alone in her diagnosis.

Two other related seminal takes on masculinity appeared in 1999. The first was Susan Bordo’s The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private (1999), which followed a long line of new studies in the changing site and
representations of the male body.\textsuperscript{2} The second was Ros Coward's *Sacred Cows: Is Feminism Relevant to the New Millennium* (1999) which became part of a growing body of post-feminist literature suggesting that in some way ‘masculinity’ is a much more complex phenomenon than earlier feminists had insisted. The two works became pertinent as popular takes on millennial masculinity and as part of a literary trend engaging with an apparent transition from traditional and conservative to New and fractured modes of masculinity. Whilst Faludi argued that the traditional sense of patriarchal masculinity was ebbing away to commercial and ‘ornamental’ forces, Susan Bordo maintained that cosmetic surgery and androgynous fashion were turning masculinity into a fluid, problematic category. Coward meanwhile, asked a pertinent but provocative question: when looking back on the achievements of feminism, “Is it now holding us back?” Is it demonising men and denying them the right to understanding and equality in a world that is perhaps far harsher for them than ever before?

These somewhat provocative questions were not entirely new. In fact, examinations and media diatribes on underachieving boys, deserting fathers, Viagara, the boom in male plastic surgery and cosmetics, the apparent explosion of young male suicide, crime and youth delinquency, indeed a whole repertoire of examinations of the modern male were dominant themes of the decade. From early forays into Men's Studies, most notably American poet Robert Bly's seminal *Iron John* (1991) marking the beginning of the men's mythopoetic movement, to an ever growing body of work covering all aspects of masculinity including: commentaries and examinations on 'New Men' as shoppers;\textsuperscript{3} dissections on men and violence;\textsuperscript{4}......


studies on the relationship between men, masculinity and crime;\(^4\) studies on the altering readings and representations of men’s bodies;\(^5\) detailed defensive accounts on traditional masculinity;\(^7\) a litany of candid titles on the apparent changing face of masculinities;\(^8\) postulations on masculinities in the future in Hill’s (1997) *The Future of Men*; and perhaps the most provocative and telling of all, the *End of Masculinities* altogether from MacInnes (1998) in a book of the same name.

By the decade’s end, the popular presses had also begun to join the tirade, whipping up a frenzy of reports and dissections on the apparent troubled male and the loss of traditional manliness at the site of masculinity. In 1999, Faludi herself was placed on the front cover of American weekly, *Newsweek*. Inside she was given space for a lengthy 11-page excerpt from *Stiffed*, (after being serialised in the British publication *The Guardian* in the start of September 1999) with no fewer than four sidebar articles and an additional


interview with the author. Meanwhile, and also in 1999, Janny Scott of the *New York Times* considered the ‘Masks of Masculinity’ in an article that proposed gender is not inborn but simply a performance.

Other articles oscillated from serious portraits of men (or boys) in crisis like “The troubled life of boys” in the *New York Times* in late August 1999, to *Newsweek’s* playful headline question, “Is manliness natural or a social construct that causes wars and sport utility vehicles?” Whilst somewhere in the middle came a scrambling for a host of *prognoses* to the apparent crisis, including one of the most profound, stating that GI Joe action dolls have “bulk[ed] up” so much in the last 30 years that they now “harm the self esteem of boys.”

Consequently, by the turn of the millennium the notion seemed clear to all those who commented on it; masculinity appeared to no longer connote ‘stable’ traditional or conservative values. ‘Masculinity’ as we knew it was in trouble. Masculinity was in crisis.

However, other voices, though less vocal, were also making comments on the masculine malaise; voices that were much less sympathetic to portrayals of men in apparent ‘crisis’ at the turn of the millennium. In fact, James Heartfield (2002) has insisted that roughly three distinctive takes had become most prominently voiced in the cultural dialectic surrounding the crisis at the end of the last millennium. For Heartfield the elegiac readers of the crisis who saw masculinity as only ‘defeated’, including Robert Bly’s (1990) seminal *Iron John* and David Thomas’ (1993) *Not Guilty: In Defence of Modern Man*, and the additional cluster of plaintive accounts that emerged at the very turn of the millennium, such as, of course, Susan Faludi’s (1999)

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*Stiffed*, Ros Coward's (1999) *Sacred Cows*, and Sommer's (2000) *The War Against Boys*, were only one part of a wider dialogue on the masculinity in crisis issue. As the thesis has already noted, these expositions have generally tended to be more sympathetic towards men who they viewed as *losing* the sex war merely as *victims* of cultural, political and economic change. They were, however, disturbed by an alternative viewpoint made vocal by those who were distinctly unsympathetic to the masculine dilemma, those who, in short, characterised masculinity as intrinsically pathological. Amongst them we can include Roger Horrocks’ (1994) *Masculinity in Crisis* and William Pollack’s (1998) *Real Boys* for example. These accounts pursued that the very definition or promise of masculinity is problematic in any issue. Psychotherapist Roger Horrocks, for example, asserts that men are trained to be rational and violent and to shut down whole areas of existence and feeling, thereby noting how men can become imprisoned by definitions of masculinity in the first instant. In doing so Horrock’s and those others who deemed masculinity as pathological undermined a call for resistance to uphold previous ‘norms’ and definitions.

Further, there was also a third perspective to the crisis of masculinity, those who said in fact there was no crisis at all. Despite arguments to the contrary, women are still the losers of the sex war, stated Germaine Greer (1999) in *The Whole Woman*. Although women have indeed come a long way in the last thirty years – certainly since her polemic *The Female Eunuch* – for Greer and other feminists, such as Sally Robinson (2000), the increasingly popular notion of women ‘having it all’ and/or ‘getting it all’ had disguised the persistent discrimination and exploitation that seemingly continues to exist for women. For these cultural readers the plethora of literature and media commentary on the masculine crisis were merely shadows cast to guise the reality of real gender inequalities.

For the ’masculinity as pathology’ camp and the ‘counter-crisis’ opposition, who consequently saw the crisis as not only a chimera, but moreover a shadow to disguise the ‘real’ hurt and discrimination in the cultural moment, the elegiac accounts, by sheer inference, seemed evocatively
hegemonic and patriarchal. More than this, they appeared as defenders and exponents for the very pathology these accounts were alluding to, in which everybody but white, middle-class, heterosexual men were to blame for the situation white, middle-class, heterosexual men were currently facing.

However, whilst almost all cultural and gender commentators were acknowledging that at least the issue of a crisis of masculinity deserved some kind of commentary – whether to observe, examine or deride – few have noticed, that, as I propose, Hollywood also had a very definite relationship to the apparent crisis in masculinity in the fin de millennium period. Indeed it is my contention that Hollywood’s relationship to the millennial crisis in masculinity was in fact so prevalent and extensive, ubiquitously crossing a number of genres and studios, that it came to the tune of 23 titles all released in the fin de millennium moment – that is between early 1999 and mid 2000.

Each film would be closely tied to the masculinity in crisis cultural phenomenon, offering a distinct and overlapping representational concern. Reflecting the cultural commentary of the period, and more specifically as the thesis will detail, the elegiac accounts of Susan Faludi et al. it is this concern, understood by the way in which films replicate the terms of wider cultural discourse, that is the central focus of the thesis.

To begin my proposition of this fin de millennial masculinity in crisis cinema, five prominent films seemed to be in perfect synthesis with Faludi’s analysis of the period, particularly her concerns about New work practices. Mike Judge’s Office Space (February 19, 1999), the Wachowski brothers The Matrix (March 31, 1999), John Swanbeck’s The Big Kahuna (September 16, 1999), David Fincher’s Fight Club (October 15, 1999) and Mary Harron’s American Psycho (January 21, 2000) produced a collective account of white-collar discontent throughout America, lamenting that man’s ‘authentic’ place in the world had become lost in a landscape of commodities and images, or to borrow Faludi’s phrase, ‘ornamental culture’.
Whilst *Office Space* and *The Big Kahuna* satirised the late twentieth century workplace as hollow and confining for its central, all-male, protagonists, *The Matrix* delved into the science fiction genre to reconfigure the entire universe as a broad spectrum of “unreal”, “simulated” realities of control and restraint. A world in which men in particular (see Chapter Four) are starkly ‘distracted’ from a ‘real’ world which is presented as both violent and barren. At turn of the millennium, *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* offered some of the most violent sequences in mainstream Hollywood cinema as both films initiated teleology’s of violence in their ‘therapeutic’ takes of masculine ‘regression’ in favour of increasingly dominant forms of supposed ‘effeminacy’ through consumption. They essentially set up a dichotomous split between masculine and feminine, a Manichean split that continued to reverberate thematically and narratively across the cinema. *Fight Club*, in particular, was so pervasively tied to the essence of Faludi’s thesis that a journalist later asked if she had been paid as a consultant on the film.14 For her part, Faludi labelled the movie “Thelma and Louise for guys” in keeping with the tonality of its gendered commentary, and “an incisive gender drama” exposing her critical alliance with the film.15

Due to the fact that it is impossible here to analyse all 23 films in the group with the same level of integrity these core films, or at least four of the five, *American Psycho, American Beauty, Fight Club* and *The Matrix* (those which Jeffrey Sconce (2002) has labelled more ‘cerebral’ or “smart” movies) will make up much of the more critical examinations throughout the thesis. That is not to say that other films in this cinema will not be examined in some detail throughout. However, where an effect takes place across the broad scheme of cinema, often these films will stand as emblematic to that whole in these discussions. As indicative of movies in which more ink has spilled than any others, it also seemed most appropriate in a popular cultural study to make these films most prominent in the investigation.

As *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* relieve their protagonists from the bondage of consumption through means of regressing towards a kind of primitivism, other films such as Jon Turteltaub’s *Instinct* (June 4, 1999), with its tagline “nothing is more savage than civilisation”, along with Disney’s imagining of the classic tale *Tarzan* (June 18, 1999) also seemed to implicitly endorse the same primitive kind of nostalgia. *Analyze This* (March 5, 1999) along with Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia* (December 8, 1999) also showed a therapeutic need for its respective protagonists to reinstate a sense of repressed manliness as Paul Vitti (played by the iconically virile Robert De Niro) in the former showed us how even mob bosses are becoming insecure and unstable in their masculinity. Meanwhile, *Magnolia*’s Frank T.J. Mackey (Tom Cruise) evangelically stated that the “cock is king” in vitriolic self-help seminars for emasculated men eager to reinvigorate their sense of ‘manhood’.

Also in 1999, Michael Apted’s contribution to the James Bond franchise, *The World is Not Enough* (November 8, 1999) sealed the message on conspicuous consumption, whilst at the same time offering all the usual machismo of steadfast male heroism as Bond (Pierce Brosnan), yet again, saves the world from impending destruction. The film’s accompanying tagline plays to the enduring stability of the ‘traditional’ model, “As the countdown begins for the new millennium there is still one number you can always count on.” It was an effect that was offered with even more realised rigidity in Brian Helgeland’s directorial debut *Payback* (February 5, 1999), in which the ultra-hardened Porter (Mel Gibson), takes quest for reparation for a financial loss and a vitally more important masculine betrayal that he endures in the films opening sequences.

*Play it to the Bone* (December 12, 1999) offered more interplays of sex, violence and *Fight Club*-styled pugilism, as stoic masculinity represented by Vinnie Boudreau (Woody Harrelson) meets its feminine counterpart, Cesae Domingues (Antonio Banderas), quite literally in the ring. *8mm* (February 26, 1999) was the first of two offerings from Joel Schumacher, a stalwart of the angry male narrative, which forged another fractured binary between its
central male characters, the resiliently masculine Tom Welles (Nicolas Cage) and the hyper-sadistic Machine (Chris Bauer).

This is a thematic issue also confronted by Spike Lee’s *Summer of Sam* (July 2, 1999), which deals with notions of anarchy, psychosis, violence and sex. The serial killer’s madness is paralleled with the internal struggles of the film’s central character Vinny (John Leguizamo) who is shown ill at ease with his own masculinity along with almost all of the film’s other male characters. Stanley Kubrick’s final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (July 13, 1999) also took on the darker side of sex, this time in the upscale world of the American elite, as an emasculated New York doctor (Tom Cruise) ruses his way into a ritualistic masked orgy and a dark world of male paranoia, securing the apparent limitless, classless spaces of men in crisis in the *fin de millennium* cinema. Meanwhile Jay Roach’s *Austin Powers: The Spy who Shagged Me* (June 8, 1999) and Paul and Chris Weitz’s *American Pie* (July 9, 1999), both released in the month prior to Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*, placated a kind of safe but insecure platform of troubled phallocentric masculinity with sophomoric depictions of men (and boys) in trouble with their “wieners”.

Post-structural representations of gender ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ seemed to manifest towards the end of the year with Kimberley Pierce’s *Boys Don’t Cry* (October 1, 1999), Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (October 29, 1999), Joel Schumacher’s second film in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema *Flawless* (November 24, 1999) which also starred a Robert De Niro in a position of troubled masculinity, and Anthony Minghella’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (December 12, 1999), each portraying gender (and sexuality) as fluid. In doing so they seemed to confront the whole consciousness of the cinema with overt examples of otherwise implicit men-in-waiting and uncertain males, all before leaving somewhat conservative and inherently heteronormative taste in the mouth in which each of the ‘gender-bending’ protagonists find a disturbing sense of closure or end.

However, Kinka Usher’s *Mystery Men* (July 22, 1999) seemed to altogether parody masculine anxiety from within the cinema itself with its take on
inept amateur superheroism with the provocatively titled protagonist Mr. Furious (Ben Stiller) taking the central position. Such was the prominence of the millennial masculinity in crisis cinema, that by the summer of 2000, this cinema was to take a satirical look at the complex in the Farrelley brother’s Me, Myself and Irene (June 15, 2000). Mirroring the dichotomy of Fight Club’s Tyler Durden/Narrator, Jim Carrey portrayed a masculine/feminine schizophrenic who battles throughout the film to obtain a stable sense of masculine self.

Following the short descriptions above of the 23 movies in question, it is apparent, and will become more so, that the direction in which the cinema was following towards a fin de millennium crisis of masculinity was elegiac and inherently Faludian. Though, as Heartfield (2002) has asserted, there were three alternative viewpoints to pursue on the apparent masculinity in crisis issue circumventing the period (the elegiac, those who saw ‘traditional’ concepts of masculinity as intrinsically pathological, and those who denied the crisis altogether), Hollywood, and with quite stark singularity, took to the plaintive. In doing so they replicated not only the terms of the crisis from wider cultural discourse per se, but represented a more precise and nuanced elegiac discourse, a discourse that stated, at least implicitly, that there is not only a masculine ideal or standard and thereby a definition of masculinity, but that this standard could be found in so-called ‘traditional’, ascetic, and physical dimensions. The elegiac accounts expressed a rooted sense of self and its location could be found primarily in a nostalgic, blue-collar, inherently patriarchal past; effects of which will be uncovered throughout the thesis. The reasons as to why this Hollywood cinema would chose to take this solitary elegiac path will be examined in detail later in the thesis, but for now it is simply important to make this distinction clear.

As a whole, each of the 23 films seemed to lament a kind of death of the traditional, essentialist ‘alpha male.’ They then seem to will him back to life through distinct modes of violence, hypersexuality, consumer anarchy and/or other cultures of so-called ‘traditional’ masculinity. Resurrections
were made through the propagation of nostalgia and hyper-masculine myth. The cinema seemed to oscillate between weepy tales at the site of his obituary, in films like *American Beauty* and *Magnolia*, whilst other films like *American Pie*, *Mystery Men* and *Me, Myself and Irene* seemed to enjoy an interplay with the supposed cultural state of masculine anxiety and crises with riotous fun, irony, parody and satire, but still perhaps with enough synthesis to the cultural discourses they surrounded to still leave a political message at their undertones.

Indeed even the more playful takes on the masculine crisis tended towards stark themes of sex, sexuality, violence and consumption. And yet, as has been asserted, the extent, temporal proximity and the similarities of the films I have outlined went largely unnoticed by critical film scholars and cineastes. My cultural historicising of the *fin de millenium* moment and its cinema has exposed the sentient need for a more nuanced study of the period. In short, there has been no sustained or detailed study of millennial masculinity in Hollywood.

This is not to say that the *fin de millenium* moment has not been recognised as a vital period in Hollywood history; 1999 has, in fact, been recognised for its breakthrough aesthetic and structural innovations. Described in an *Entertainment Weekly* cover story titled, *1999: The Year That Changed Movies*, the article begins:

“You can stop waiting for the future of movies. It’s already here. Someday, 1999 will be etched on a microchip as the first real year of 21st-century filmmaking. The year when all the old, boring rules about cinema started to crumble. The year when a new generation of directors – weaned on cyberspace and Cops, Pac-Man and Public Enemy – snatched the flickering torch from the aging rebels of the 1970s. The year when the whole concept of “making a movie” got turned on its head.”16

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Using evidence of the “muddy hyperrealism of The Blair Project” and “The freak show of Being John Malkovich, as well as the way time itself gets fractured and tossed around in The Limey and Go and Run Lola Run”, the article continues to dissect the year in almost exclusive textual scrutiny. “Were you prone to theatrical pronouncements, you might say that not since the annus mirabilis of The Wizard of Oz, Gone With The Wind, and Stagecoach [1939] has Hollywood brought so many narrative innovations screaming into the mainstream.” But not a single mention of the cultural and gender relationship that the year’s films also seemed to inhabit is mentioned in the article.

Although Gordinier, the author of the article, is lucidly coherent in his examination of the altering textual narrativity and new methods of visual play in 1999 cinema, the article also accentuates how cultural relationships between film and society came to be increasingly lost behind, what was for critical film theorists such as Douglas Kellner and in a similar gendered take, Susan Faludi, a decade of textual and aesthetic privileging.17

It also forms an ancillary meditation to those others who have seen the end of millennium moment in Hollywood as a trend only towards apocalyptic cinema that seemed to relate to the non-cultural but very real apocalyptic fear that filled the air with the Y2K scare and an end of world fever dawning in the conspiratorial social imaginary.18 Indeed, the end of millennium saw

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17 For Douglas Kellner, and of course as Susan Faludi has underscored in her critique of ‘ornamental culture’ in Stiffed (1999), the cultural fabric of life itself had become that of near ‘spectacle’ in the 90s, in ways in which the ‘spectacle’ was defining and continuing to define our era. See chapter ‘Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle’, in Kellner, D., 2002. Media Spectacle. Routledge. And of course, in addition, the 90s had also seen the rise of ‘spectacular’ cinema in both its blockbuster formats in films like Spielberg’s Jurassic Park (1993), James Cameron’s Titanic (1997) and George Lucas’s Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace (1999), the biggest box office draws of the decade, and in the rise of the ‘indies.’ No more so than its most famous poster boy of the 90s, Quentin Tarantino and his visual internecine bloodletting, Pulp Fiction (1994), a film in which no other ’90s film has also had more ink spilled over.

an influx in cinema that showed the world's end as imminent. Peter Hyams' *End of Days* (1999), Robert Marcarelli's *The Omega Code* (1999), Kevin Smith's *Dogma* (1999), Rupert Wainwright's *Stigmata* (1999) and Roman Polanski's *The Ninth Gate* (1999) were films which did in essence, (with exception perhaps to Kevin Smith's *Dogma*), draw on classical notions of spectacle and even familiar 'spectacle' stars (no more so than the atavistic Arnold Schwarzenegger in *End of Days*) as well as tropes from the more definitive schools of action and spectacle cinema. It is an effect that perhaps the reviews of the films exposed more than any other standard, and again highlighted the way that readings of the year's gender narratives were hijacked by spectacle cinema and their almost obligatory negative blanket readings.19

Arguably then, the *fin de millennium* movies examined in this thesis may have got lost behind the more 'visually' obvious apocalyptic cinema, a cinema that was largely for the critics, codified in action and spectacle imagery no longer sustainable or even relevant, lest thought provoking, for a modern audience. Indeed, prominent media theorists like Vivian Sobchack and Rikke Schubart and cultural critics Henry Giroux and Imre Szeman have argued that the nineties, certainly in comparison with the 1970s, has been a period of cinema largely void of any serious social and political commentary. Instead they see a general privileging of an aesthetic cinema, especially in the context of violent or action movies of which the majority of the films I examine in the masculinity in crisis cinema form a key part.

This context can be seen in Vivian Sobchack’s oft-reprinted 1974 article ‘The Violent Dance: A Personal Memoir of Death in the Movies’, in which she

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19 For example, Michael Atkinson’s *End of Day's* review in the *Village Voice* read, “85 percent explosions and editing idiocy (a window can't break without director Peter Hyams cutting between five different angles) and 15 percent Arnold trying to grow a third dimension.” Whilst Nell Minow’s succinct response was “Tired dud of an over-the-top violent action movie”; and Dragan Antulov seemed to sum up the mood on the end of millennial action/spectacle cinema: “*End of Days* isn’t complete waste of time but all those who watch it would probably agree that this film’s days were numbered long time ago.”
argues that the violent American films of the 1970s “merely reflect our search for meaning and significance – for order – in the essentially senseless” (cited in Prince 2000: 117). Her fundamental point is that the chaos and senselessness of real-life violence in American society in the 1970s directly influenced how film violence was viewed and understood at that time. Twenty years later, in an afterword to her original article, she notes that she no longer feels the same way. She ties her altered view of film violence to the change in the representations themselves: ‘Violence on the screen and in the culture is not related to a moral context, but to a proliferation of images, texts, and spectacle’ (Sobchack cited in Prince 2000: 124).

Sobchack’s view is echoed by Rikke Schubart (2001) who also noted a substantial shift in the action film of the 1980s and ‘90s away from passion (elements of the film related to plot, myth, psychology and emotion) and towards acceleration (elements of spectacle, affect and exhilaration) (ibid: 93). Further Henry Giroux, who has perhaps written most extensively on the context of millennial masculinity in cinema, further dismisses the social and moral messages and apparent cultural symbiosis in favour of privileging the films’ aesthetics. As a consequence he seems to be another in a long line of media theorists who have come close to recognising millennial masculinity in crisis, but have failed to give a more complete reading in favour of obsessing over aesthetics, to the real detriment of a comprehensive study of the cultural and social objectives of the fin de millennium cinema. Though this thesis leans towards Giroux’s assertions here, he fails to at least offer the redemptive clause that the cinema is making towards its machinations to violence, and undermines the fact that the cinema may be at least attempting to represent a pathway out of the masculine malaise. This is an effect I examine in detail in Chapter Three.

Henry Giroux also falls short on breadth of millennial masculinity in Hollywood cinema. Reading only Fight Club and American Beauty in any critical depth in relation to the apparent cultural crisis, he also allows for other films like Gladiator (2000) to transcend the compass of the modern
moral situation, imbricating all three as one and the same. Even a political film theorist like Paul Watson, who more fluidly sees a motion of Hollywood towards cultural gendered anxieties at this time, offers only a “therapeutic reading” of two films he collates as “narratives of male pain and suffering” (cited in Davies and Wells 2002: 14), bridging a gap only between Fincher's *Fight Club* and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* and then adding other films like Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* (1993) to his collective. Thus in essence like so many others, Watson has failed to see both the extent of the masculinity in crisis cinema and its specific relationship to time, alternatively taking the masculine in crisis movies as sporadic or nuanced and not part of a much larger, more pervasive cultural dialogue.

The end of millennium temporal fixing as a period of climatic and collective masculinity in crises in Hollywood cinema is one of the central issues this thesis attempts to expose and address. Christine Holmlund (2008) in her *American Cinema of the 1990s: Themes and Variations* perhaps comes closest to this. Part of a longer edited book historicising Hollywood in the 90s, like Watson’s account above, Holmlund’s own chapter on Hollywood in 1999 does see an, albeit concise, realisation of “millennial masculinity”. But while she enlists *Fight Club, Magnolia, The Matrix, Being John Malkovich*, and *Boys Don’t Cry*, from my list (leaving absent 18 other texts recognised in this thesis), she also extends this to two ‘other’ films – Trey Parker's *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999) and David O. Russell’s *Three Kings* (1999) – films which I believe actually stand outside of this modality. Whilst *South Park* is a movie that admittedly is in dialogue with *some* of the thematics of the films I examine, most notably its post-Columbine media censorship commentary (see below), as well as its fervent illustrations of misogyny and sexist exchange, the film seems to be in more exacting consultations with satirised *national* anxieties than gender anxieties. As Matt Stone, the co-creator of *South Park* and co-writer of the *South Park* movie asserts on the
film, “If there is an overriding message ... it’s just to question authority” (Holmlund 2008: 235).

In addition, whilst *Three Kings* is almost certainly an indictment of late-nineties consumerism – in a hidden Iraqi bunker, the protagonists stumble upon typically western luxuries; exercise equipment, Rolex watches, brand named fashion, mini-stereos, televisions and jewellery, as well as the gold that becomes the contentious narrative thread that runs through the film – the films ideologies of parodic ‘kingship’ really are pertaining to *national* ‘kingdoms’ rather than patriarchal. In short the film is more an indictment of the US presence in Iraq than modern man’s anxiety with his gender.

However, despite offering alternative and less comprehensive understandings of this millennial moment in Hollywood, I engage with the same methodological approaches of the above theorist’s to begin my own *cultural* examinations where they left off. This is in addition to earlier expositions of masculinity in film. Indeed, I am particularly indebted to Yvonne Tasker’s (1993) *Spectacular Bodies* and Susan Jeffords (1994) *Hard Bodies* here, whose approach to film, gender and its cultural relationship to time, i.e. the 1980s muscular cinema, has largely informed my own cultural approach to the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. The way these critics move from textual film analyses to cultural context and back again has regulated much of the shape of my own examination here.

Indeed in a similar proposition to Tasker et al. I propose that film scholars and gender theorists alike consider another crisis of masculinity in Hollywood cinema with the same level of examination and intensity as Tasker et al. have applied to ‘80s muscular cinema. A very definite and significant crisis of masculinity was represented in Hollywood during a twelve-month period spanning the turn of the millennium. In that single year, filmic cultural representations of men in crisis were so recurrent that their volume has arguably eclipsed any other year of any other decade. This

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20 Of course, it is also possible to add *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999), with its satirical portrait on the ‘rise of Satan’, to the long list of the millennial apocalypse films of the period I outline above.
thesis is intended to make that first real connection and subsequent examination.

In this way, this thesis demands that the emergence of this cohort of movies is explored for their critical, theoretical and cultural mechanisms that are at once inter-locking and unprecedented in Hollywood; whilst at the same time considering why the millennial moment was ripe for the appearance of such a strong and consistently recurrent set of thematic ideas within a wide selection of pictures in a short space of time. In short, how do we understand the historical emergence of these films and the apparent crisis of masculinity that surrounds them?

As MacInnes (1998) has insisted, masculinity is shaped and expressed differently at different times in different circumstances in different places by individuals and groups, and in this regard, we may also think of masculinity as the sole property of social ideology. More than this, it is undeniable to resist the fact that as Roper and Tosh (1991) assert, masculinity has a history, one which reveals a complex interweaving of both imagined and lived masculinities and where competing forms characterise different historical periods and locations. I consequentially explicate the socio-cultural history of masculinity, and it's assumed pending crisis, in the *fin de millennium* moment in the United States. Not treating masculinity as ahistoric, but placing it within an historical context and in light of the conjunctural cultural, social and economic circumstances in which masculinity came to be understood as in a state of crisis at the turn of the new millennium.

It is in this regard that the thesis also differs in perspective to film theorist Donna Peberdy (2010), perhaps the theorist whose work comes closest to this examination in that she does recognise a cognitive 'split' in the representation of masculinity at the end of the millennium. Peberdy dismisses film scholars like Susan Jeffords, Fred Pfeil or Richard Stark for example, who have discussed masculinity in popular American cinema as a reflection or embodiment of a specific cultural moment or decade.
“Ultimately, these position pieces argue that [...] masculine tropes [...] emerge from a critical convergence of events shaping masculine identities during specified periods” asserts Peberdy 2010: 237.

"Seeing divergent examples of masculinity dominating at different historical moments, however, ignores the part each male trope plays in the identity formation of the other. In fact, by separating them in this way, Jeffords, Pfeil, [et al.] do not address the possibility that male identity exhibits both hard and soft masculinity at the same time" (Peberdy 2010: 237).

However, this is as far as Peberdy takes it. She fails to acknowledge that there is still a separation and a clear distinction made between the two modalities even within the same person. Characters do not oscillate back and forth from masculine to feminine, or to use Peberdy's terms, Wild Man to Wimp, but rather the journey is almost always a singular (and linear) action, especially in the fin de millennium cinema. Further, there is also an inherent political weighting on each dichotomy. The Wild Man does not equate to the Wimp in terms of textual scale or in terms of ideological projection of masculine ‘authenticity’, an effect I come to in more detail in Chapters Two and Four. In addition, I would also like to advance that a cultural timeframe still governs the polarity, if we agree at least that there is one. The ‘battle’ between Wild Man and Wimp, masculine and feminine is still strapped to the cultural moment in which the representations are pursued. One will always ‘win’ out to the other. When and how this happens is closely tied to the historical moment. Consequently, Peberdy, who the thesis will continue to engage with (see Chapter Four in particular), fails to examine the political distance between this polarity in her examination and the cultural history that governs it.

Indeed, in contrast, as Berger et al. (1995 cited in Beynon 2002: 2) has asserted, “... masculinity can never float free of culture: on the contrary, it is the child of culture, shaped and expressed differently at different times in different circumstances in different places by individuals and groups”. Consequently, by undertaking a social and cultural-historical analysis, I draw on the specific historical conditions under which US society, and in
particular its men, came to believe in ‘masculinity’s’ *particular* ‘definitions’ and promises offered at that particular time, and the implicit consequences that these had on its males. In this regard, by widening the scope and dimension of my examination, taking both cultural history and film to task, my work advances much of the very limited work on this issue that has come before it.\(^\text{21}\)

More precisely, the thesis employs much of the methodological practices of such cultural theorists as John Beynon (2002). Beynon makes key distinctions between ‘masculinity-as-experienced’, ‘masculinity-as-enacted’ and ‘masculinity-as-represented’, in his study of masculinities and culture in modern western civilisation. In the latter he refers primarily to depictions of what it is to be a man in media texts such as films, literature, men’s magazines, advertisements, and television. Through a cultural approach to masculinities that involves looking at the spaces, drifts, differences and similarities between masculinity as lived and masculinity as represented, this thesis also borrows greatly from Beynon’s methodology of cultural and historical readings, in addition to relaying and revising some of his own actual readings of masculinities in the 80s, 90s and *fin de millennium* moment.

Methodologically, I also employ audio and visual textual analysis in my examination of the movies within the proposed masculinity in crisis cinema, and the surrounding dialogues that relate to them. I examine the various films’ iconographies, motifs and settings alongside performances, set dialogue pieces and archetypal patterns of behaviour, such as the continued expressions of fistfights, or textually, the visual depictions of bloodied bodies. I do so to help construct not only a comprehensive textual reading of the individual films, but to also build a wider portrait of how the films interrelate textually with each other.

\(^{21}\) Christine Gledhill (cited in Carson et al. 1994: 110) has commented that, in this sense, feminine, and by implication masculine, meaning is not immanent in the world waiting to be revealed, but rather it is a social-sexual dynamic being produced by history.
I also make some broader examinations of how the real interacted with the reel at this cultural moment. For example, in Chapter Three I explore the relationship between the Columbine High School Massacre in Littleton, Colorado which took place on April 20, 1999, and the Wachowski brothers The Matrix which was released just a couple of weeks before the massacre took place. The aesthetic display of The Matrix’s Neo (Keanu Reeves) in black trench coat firing dozens of automatic weapons while his ‘partner’ Trinity clutches a duffel bag filled with even more artillery, was a remarkably similar ‘aesthetic’ to that of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris who also sported black trench coats to conceal their expansive artillery, and clutched a duffel bag concealing even more. At least that was how it was seen in the eyes of a critical media who of course immediately pounced on the ‘connection’ in the days after the massacre took place. However I only make cultural readings to these events. Staying with the focus of a cultural study I do not explore any kind of media effects issue here. I explore how the relationship between this real event and the cinema as a whole were made vocal in the popular presses who adjoined the representation of angry white males circumventing the cultural moment with these movies that seemed to be telling their stories. In doing so I do not make my own private judgements as to correlation, but rather use the events as a device to expose how the media and cultural voices were pertinent to the readings of these films (at that time) and furthermore, how they have been parcelled together to form a gendered dialectic of a disaffected male generation. Indeed, I explore how these events became embroiled in the same language of cultural crisis, where, staying on the cultural pulse, the masculine malaise, reverberating in both film and event, echoed in cultural readings.

I also explore the seemingly contradictory anti-consumerist, anti-commercial tenets that run throughout this masculinity in crisis cinema. I critically examine how Hollywood’s industrial commitments and constraints further shaped and often undermined content and meaning. I examine how Hollywood, that ubiquitously commercial magnate, dealt with the ideological conflicts of implicit self-critique and political compromise. In this
way my thesis also takes an extended path towards more pragmatic industrial analyses. How do the films deal with the outstanding indictments of re-masculinisation through violence for example, and how do they regulate the commercial and ideological compromises they make in their endeavour to stand as somewhat ‘anarchic’ texts? These kinds of questions will be asked throughout the thesis.

My approach to the thesis was also bolstered by my ancillary research in the British Film Institute (BFI) archival library. This offered invaluable information from various press books on the cinematic releases, in addition to an extensive collection of journal-based critiques on the individual movies I examine and, most importantly perhaps, the associated film ‘paraphernalia’ that surrounded the movies in the cinema I examine. At times quietly illuminating, they often lead to some of the most profound and seemingly contradictory, ironic and capricious facets of my examination, such as the Patrick Bateman action doll from *American Psycho* (2000) and the *Fight Club* (1999) video game, both products of films that ironically draw on the pertaining issue of repetition, imitation and consumption as enemies to the ‘masculine essence’ (see the concluding chapter).

However, a *cultural* examination does not take place in film archives but rather takes place in the interconnection of reel with real worlds. That being said, I concentrated my archival research on that which was necessary to the study; the outer layers of the ‘popular’ and louder cultural voices of collective social imaginaries. In short, my research in the BFI propped a comprehensive study of the popular film texts whilst restricting esotericism to creep into this, a popular cultural study.

In **Chapter One** I begin the cultural and historical examination of the crisis and its manifestations. As I have outlined above, as the twenty-first century approached, masculinity was being placed under the microscope as never before. Consequently, I begin an historical journey from the inceptive stages of the crisis to the moment of its apparent representation in the *fin de millennium* cinema.
In **Chapter Two** I begin to critically examine the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. This is undertaken systematically in relation to the key epithets I have already outlined; work and consumption, violence, and sex and sexuality. Through this approach, the thesis will motion through the films thematically, allowing for a syntactic picture to build between the films in my proposition of a body of *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema as well as allow for any collisions, distinctions or similarities between the movies to be revealed.

In addition, through this kind of approach, I am also able to succinctly relate the films to their historical moment, allowing the syntax of the films themes to resonate across historical spaces and allow for overlaps between time and space for those movies that seem to pre-empt, lament or even prophesise any cultural manifestations.

Chapter Two begins therefore with an examination of how the cinema came to represent the cultural changes in the ways men *worked* and the new patterns of *consumption*. In this chapter, the thesis examines how the masculinity in crisis cinema came to offer systematic representations of men ‘trapped’ in cubicles and/or hyper-materialistic constraining suburban dwellings, working, what the films position as, distinctly emasculating jobs whilst underlining a proposition that ‘authentic’ masculinity is placed in ascetic or blue-collar work zones.

In addition to the film’s implicit representations of the suffocating white collar, the thesis also details here an examination of how distinctly feminised, metrosexual and material-obsessed men, were offering an antithetical model of masculinity that would form part of a dyadic masculine/feminine collision that continues throughout the narrative and archetypal structures of the cinema, an effect in fact that seems to mirror the plaintive accounts of the moment. It is from this underlining position that the examination here also concerns itself with how men who come to represent the feminine side of the male dichotomy are shown to be weak,
passive and, most importantly fragmentary, making visual and explicit the elegiac cultural accounts of crisis.

Indeed, as well as corresponding thematically to systemic motifs of violence, consumption, and sex and sexuality, I argue here that the ‘crisis’ is also told quite forcefully through a structural ‘split’. Within this structure, the central character or characters are held in systems of opposition: masculine versus feminine. It is a textual effect that crosses all the masculinity in crisis cinema I examine from the millennial moment, providing a platform from which all other more nuanced and diverse themes and narrative strands develop. Further, it is within this initial intervention of the films textual elements that I begin to open up my examination of this effect. Here the thesis begins to reveal how the fin de millennium cinema was perhaps not only articulating the apparent crisis of masculinity through representation and its subsequent dichotomous divisions, further perpetuating the elegiac reading of the phenomenon, but may also in fact be part of a more pervasive dialogue, or even conceivably pedagogy, that offered male readers of the cinema a viewpoint for escape. In fact, this chapter underscores that possibly one of the most important readings of this fin de millennium cinema is that it seemed to hope to resolve the so-called emasculatory forces. The chapter then finally moves to examine some of the ideological and industrial limitations and problems, detailing a discussion of the frailty of these approaches.

Chapter Three moves on to address the theme of violence and its position as another central modality of re-masculinisation in a large body of the fin de millennium cinema. It attempts to conceptualise the different ‘uses’ of violence as an action modality to authenticate a kind of masculine renewal against the clutches of supposedly feminising forces of ornamental and image cultures. Examining both outer- and inner- directed violence, this chapter addresses how patterns of masochism, in particular, emerge in the cinema as a seemingly potent way to both halt and stand in opposition to the feminine code, whilst again, like all chapters in the thesis, taking a reflexive approach to the limitations and problems of this approach.
Finally, **Chapter Four** addresses themes of *sex and sexuality* and the apparent re-configuring of modern man’s place within these cultures. It argues that the cinema pursued a series of hypersexual and pre-feminist representations and performances with a continued intention to re-claim so-called authentic masculinity and, more precisely here, the ‘phallus.’ The hyper presence of the phallus and its relating codes of power, dominance and virility, which came to represent a powerful force of opposition to the New politics of looking and the increasing sexualisation of men around the *fin de millennium* moment, will be examined here alongside this surrounding cinema.

As the thesis draws towards a **conclusion**, the final chapter addresses the limitations of Hollywood’s *fin de millennium* cinema in a more globally reflexive examination. Important questions concerning the inherent commercial nature of Hollywood as an industry are posed. The thesis asks how a commercial and aesthetic cinema can fully hope to resolve the problem of self-critique intrinsic to its narrative and thematic logic before these issues are brought to a conclusion.

In essence this thesis is an examination of *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis in its reel and cultural manifestations. Why had this crisis come about, how *real* was the crisis, and how was this Hollywood cinema to play a role in its dialogue?

Once the thesis locates the crisis (Chapter One), it then moves on to examine Hollywood’s relationship to and within it. The thesis examines the internal and external tensions that surround the masculinity in crisis cinema and asks how they relate to the popular cultural debates, commentary and, at times events, that surrounded the masculinity in crisis issue at the turn of the millennium. Where do the films place themselves in relation to the cultural commentary? What is their relationship to the popular cultural debates? How conscious is this relationship? And further to this, what is the relationship between life-as-lived and life-as-represented in this epochal moment of modern socio-cultural history?
The importance of the thesis is therefore not only to be found within the examination of the *fin de millennium* texts, but also in the global spaces that surround and seemingly interact with them; examining the relationship and fissures between cinema, gender and identity politics in this particular time of Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, although specific in its context here, the thesis may act as a forum in which we can exchange other ideas, contexts and interplays on the role the Hollywood film industry plays in identity politics in general and the limitations inherent within its industrial praxis.
CHAPTER ONE: On the Road to Crisis

Before the thesis begins its critical and cultural examination of the proposed fin de millenium masculinity in crisis cinema, this short chapter will motion historically through some of the most important cultural, political, industrial and economic changes and developments that seemed to forge this watershed moment in identity politics. Of course, any such relaying of history will always be necessarily contracted, but it is important here that some of the major structural and cultural changes and phenomena are highlighted in order to give an exposition of the origins of the so-called crisis in masculinity, in an attempt to interpret and explicate how the crisis and its indicative cinema came to be.

Historically centred, the chapter will begin its examination in the 1980s and early 1990s. It seems most appropriate to draw on those more immediate moments where the revelations of the crisis seemed most determined and imminent. Crucial changes in industrial policy and practice, important developments and accomplishments in second and third wave feminism, the economic boom of the commercial and service sectors and the transformation of the politics of consumption, seemed to coalesce in the moments directly preceding the turn of the millennium, rocking the so-called ‘traditional’ masculine model with arguably more fervency than ever before. The cultural relevance of those moments that directly preceding the crisis simply warrant the central focus here, and it to these factors that the thesis takes to its examination in this chapter.

Beginning with an examination of the economic and industrial change, the chapter then considers the emergence of ‘New’ models of masculinity. Seemingly facilitated by prominent adjustments of certain cultural, feminist and political externalities, the chapter examines the inception of the ‘New Man’ and his ‘metrosexual’ contemporary, respectively. Weaving the way through popular, scholastic, feminist and cultural discourses, the chapter
eventually reaches the historical moment in which, at least according to those elegiac cultural voices, masculinity was deemed to be in a critical state, and the moment in which this Hollywood cinema was to make its intervention, the turn of the millennium. So what were the cultural, industrial, economic and political changes that saw the emergence of the male in crisis? Before we understand the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema we must understand the factors that may have influenced its inception.

**America de-tools**

After the economic turbulence of Reagan’s 1980s, a decade which saw the president weather the storm of a violent recession, record high interest rates, record unemployment and back-to-back energy crises, the 1990s was considered a period of economic stability in the United States (Kallen, 1999). Though early in the 1990s the U.S. economy sank into recession, it quickly recovered, and rebounded with the longest running economic expansion in the Nation’s history. By 1992, after the slippage, real gross domestic product (GDP) escalated and would continue to do so throughout the remainder of the ’90s, while strong employment growth also resumed later in the decade.22

But while America may have emerged as an increasingly affluent and stable economy in the ‘90s, some of the methods by which the U.S. had mobilised this period of expansion were increasingly perceived as having deep social and cultural ramifications on its working population, especially its men, where the problem was deemed most salient.23 Although a number of reasons have been pursued for the growth of the American economy in the

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1990's – such as increased investment in the ICT sector, a decline in information technology prices, low inflation and a buoyant stock market – gender analysts and cultural and political commentators were aroused by the socio-cultural inference. Focus began to turn to how America's working men were being affected by the new economic and industrial climate. Indeed, America's labour force faced some marked changes in the late '80s and 1990s. Continuing a long-term trend, the employment divide between the goods and service producing sectors of the economy widened. America was 'de-tooling', and on mass. Primary manufacturing, farming and blue-collar industry, those age-old tenets once considered the cornerstone of a stoically masculine workforce (Halle, 1984; Zamir, 2011), were being replaced by burgeoning service and commercial industry, and at an unprecedented scale.

Global forces and technological innovation have been largely held responsible for the trend. To put it succinctly, it was simply cheaper for many operations to take place on 'lower cost soil,' while equally technological advances meant that much of the necessary 'hands-on' labour was increasingly mechanised, leaving American men, those most closely tied to these industries, often literally, redundant. Steel mills and factories were closing due to cheap labour and production costs in foreign territories, America's largest auto-manufacturer, GM Motors for example, were laying people off by the thousand as they downsized their product line and invested heavily in automated manufacturing, whilst mining and other 'muscle' industries also took massive blows. In their place stood strip malls, retail parks, office buildings, hotels and barren brownfield sites (Kallen, 1999: 8). In short, while America opened the doors to global expansion and technological innovation in tending to its economic satisfactions, it closed the doors to many of its hands-on, hands-dirty industries, and it was, for

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many, a long goodbye to their long participated social and cultural positions and platforms.

Meanwhile, America’s women were shuffling into new patterns of post-industrial employment, as expanded global economies, the decline of manufacturing industries and the further rise of the service sector, were contrastingly the vehicles in which many women were increasingly gaining entry into the labour market (McDowell, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Moghadam, 2005; Blackwelder, 1997). Furthermore, radical changes purported by the feminist movement also made transition more perennial as equality in the workplace became increasingly realised (Faludi, 1992; McDowell, 2003).

Where men were once considered the stoic breadwinners and the unshakeable patriarchs of both public and private realms, with physical industry once considered the cornerstone of the American masculine idealism (Kimmel, 1996), women were increasingly catalysed into the workplace and were consequently assuming more dominant roles at work and at home (Wilkinson et al., 1997).

In Redundant Masculinities, geographer Linda McDowell (2003: 3) asserts, “waged employment, identified as a core element in the social construction

\[\text{25 By 1992, a moment itself dubbed "the year if the woman" in popular culture after the election of a number of female Senators in the United States, women experienced their highest labour force participation rate of all time at } 57.8 \text{ per cent. They also accounted for 6 per cent of total labour force growth between 1982 and 1992.} \text{(Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, June 1993. See <http://feminism.eserver.org/facts-on-working-women.txt>)}\]

\[\text{26 Even by the early 1980s, it was increasingly being perceived that women were meeting many of their goals and succeeding in changing social attitudes towards gender roles, repealing oppressive laws that were based on sex, integrating certain "boys' clubs" such as Military Academies, single sex-colleges, and the Supreme Court, in addition to making illegal gender discrimination. Second and third wave feminism had purported many of these achievements. Of course this is just an overview, but perhaps the most important changes in gender politics that prefixed the fin de siècle period were amongst the most significant legal victories, including a 1967 Executive Order extending full Affirmative Action rights to women, Title IX and the Women's Educational Equity Act (1972 and 1974 respectively), the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (1974), the Pregnancy Discrimination act of 1978, the legal prohibition of no-fault divorce (although not allowed in all States until 2010), a 1975 law requiring U.S. Military Academies to admit women, and many Supreme Court cases for equality. For a critical survey of the dominant trends in Anglo-American feminism since 1968 see Imelda Whelehan's (1995) Modern Feminist Thought. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.}\]
of a masculine identity, has altered in its nature and form and, in particular, in its association with masculinity.” Indeed the transition, that which has since been dubbed, the ‘feminisation of employment’ by cultural commentators, notably Jensen et al. (1988) and then repeated by Yandle (1995), has meant that men could no longer rely on the certainties of their ‘social construction’ as breadwinners and women as primary dependents and homemakers. With the gradual yet fervent shift to outsourcing manufactured products, the United States economy was, and still is, ever more reliant on service work, which in itself has traditionally been most aligned with femininity (McDowell, 2003).

Yet amongst the industrial and economic changes in the lives of America’s male workforce – the slippage of blue to white-collar, manual hands-on labour to cubicle dwelling and service providing – there was also the cultural emergence of a New masculine ideal, coalescing with the economic and industrial transition. Indeed, amongst the change, popular discourse was already championing the emergence of a “emotionally-expressive,” “New Male” who rejected the hard stoic idealism of the puritanical Reagan years and could accept and embrace the New, seemingly less forbearing masculine code.

**The New Man**

The ‘New Man’, as he was most commonly dubbed in popular discourse, was imagined as the very product of this altering cultural climate. Whilst reactive to the industrial and political change, the New Man also appeared indicative of the increasingly ubiquitous feminist and pro-feminist discourses that were seemingly attempting to get men “in touch with their feelings” whilst trying to “revise or re-envision the unidimensional cultural code of traditional male identity” (Tomasulo, 1996: 4).

Heralded as being sensitive to the needs and subjugation of his ‘sister’, the
popular presses made vocal his apparent “emotionally-expressive” qualities, his willingness to undertake certain domestic “responsibilities” and accentuated how he was “heavily involved in parenting” (Messer, 1993: 723-4). As Richard Sparks (1996) had understood, previous, taken-for-granted, definitions of masculinity no longer stood static in the 1980s and ’90s, and the “New Man”, appeared to fracture the idealism of the “inexpressive”, “hypermasculine” tropes (Messer, 1993: 724) of traditional male subjectivity with the utmost fervency.

Literature on the so-called crisis in male subjectivity appeared alongside the emergence of this “New Man”, as evident in such titles as Sylvia Strauss’ *Traitors to the Masculine Cause* (1982), or Jeff Hearn’s *The Gender of Oppression* (1987), leading to Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner’s collection of essays, *Men’s Lives* (1992), and other such valedictory titles as John Stoltenberg’s *Refusing to be a Man* (1990). Although appearing often somewhat compromised and only in a limited number of films, Hollywood also aligned, at least some of itself, with the emergence of the ‘New Man’. Against the tide of phlegmatic muscular heroes which seemed to dominate ‘80s visions of masculinity in Hollywood, certainly in its most popular genre, action,28 early cinematic visions such as David Lynch’s *The Elephant Man* (1980), Steve Gordon’s *Arthur* (1981), Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* (1982), Milos Forman’s *Amadeus* (1984) and Bruce Beresford’s *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), seemed to emphasise “the dissolution of a stable site of mastery” and “the ideal of masculinity” (Joyrich, 1988: 142). Such gender-bending films as Sydney Pollack’s *Tootsie* (1982), Stan Dragoti’s *Mr. Mom* (1983), Leonard Nimoy’s *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), and later Chris Columbus’ *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) also stood alongside the New Man discourse, similarly encouraging audiences to consider men as sensitive and nurturing partners and fathers, rather than as unemotional, work-obsessed

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breadwinners or hypermasculine warriors. For many more sanguine commentators, the New Man was seen as a symbol of progressive gender politics. Purported by the steady decline of traditional would-be-deemed masculine industries, the “dawning of the ‘new-man-as-nurturer’, with his anti-sexist, caring, sharing characteristics” was seen as “an upholder of individualism and a bright new future for a more diverse masculinity” (Beynon 2002: 115).29

The 1990s saw this characterisation develop further in both global cultures and in Hollywood representation. The isolated cases for subversion against the hegemonic model in ‘80s Hollywood were increasingly becoming prominent in the next decade (Krimmer, 2000). Susan Jeffords was one of the first to notice. Writing in 1993 she proposed, “… there is already evidence that this emphasis on externality and the male body is shifting focus. In the 1990s, externality and spectacle have begun to give way to a presumably more internalised masculine dimension” (Jeffords, 1993: 245).

The sensitive male seemed to further supplant the retributive masculinity of the gritty muscular action hero as the masculine ideal. That is not to say that the New Man had simply locked down and transposed the ‘hard body’ Hollywood canon; the personas represented by “The Terminator,” “James Bond” and Die Hard’s “John McClane” all made their mark on 1990s cinema, but there was a definite lean towards a more ‘sensitive’ heroism in the movies (Gates, 2006: 146).

In a reflection of this shift, actors who played action heroes in the 1980s found themselves playing new roles in the 1990s. Although the hard-body heroes of the 1980s – Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson – continue to thrive on the big screen in the ‘90s, they tended to do so in more ‘sensitive-man’ roles, while other muscular heroes, once sent to re-establish a patriarchal and phallic masculine foothold of their own, were left out to dry in the wake of change: Harry Callahan had finally un-chambered his .44 Magnum in 1988 with the last of Dirty Harry cycle of movies, The

29 Emphasis mine.
Dead Pool, a gun he had been wielding since 1971; John Rambo had taken off his headband, uncocked his assault rifles, dismantled his rocket launcher and finally left Vietnam behind in the same year with the (then) finale of the Rambo Trilogy, the précising tagline summing the change in mood – “The first was for himself. The second for his country. This time it’s to save his friend” – nodding to what was seemingly becoming a more sensitive vision of masculine interiority. Even the ever-dependable Arnold Schwarzenegger began to send up his self-perpetuating image in 1988 in his role as sensitive ‘male-ideal’ Julius Benedict in Twins (1988) followed by Kindergarten Cop (1990)30, and a series of action pastiche/parody movies spawning into the potently apt Last Action Hero (1993), True Lies (1994), and finally non-action film Junior (1994) where he portrays pregnant scientist Dr. Alex Hesse. Even the Terminator, Arnie’s fortified resolve for “serious” action, had shifted sides in Terminator 2 (1991) to a more sensitive, humanistic, sympathetic and, at times parodic, hero. Meanwhile, the atavistic Bruce Willis also hung up his gun to play an emotionally vulnerable detective in Mercury Rising (1998), and later a child psychologist in The Sixth Sense (1999). In the meantime films like James Cameron’s Titanic (1997), Todd Haynes’ Velvet Goldmine (1998), Brad Silberling’s City of Angels (1998), Joe Johnston’s October Sky (1999), Tim Burton’s Edward Scissorhands (1990), and Richard Linklater’s Before Sunrise (1995), (starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Ewan McGregor, Nicolas Cage, Jake Gyllenhaal, Johnny Depp, Ethan Hawke respectively), catapulted a new breed of Hollywood talent into the realms of ‘sensitive stardom’.

Whilst this was again perceived by many as yet another victory for the pro-feminist and post-structural gender theorists and commentators, others such as cultural and contextual theorist Pamela Church Gibson (2004), saw the increasing motivation to (re)present ‘sensitive males’ only as indicative

of commercially crafted and media conjured fantasy; a fantasy that has little to do with progressive feminist agenda or other such proponents of social or cultural progress, but rather one that realises restricting forms of commercially embedded masculine idealism. Indeed the emergence of the new breed of sensitive males were all strongly tied to an emerging pin-up culture, in turn solidifying the alliance of Hollywood’s perception of masculinity with commercial trends. Stating, “Now, with the shifts in fashionable body shape over the past decade or more, the wildly exaggerated musculature of the bodybuilder has been replaced by the subtler tyranny of the highly-toned torso currently on display.” Gibson proposed Hollywood was simply ‘selling-out’ to a new visual masculine aesthetic (Pamela Church Gibson, 2004: 177).

Indeed more accurately, something more profound was happening to the New Man, and it preceded his Hollywood manipulation, as the masculine code once again took another turn in identity politics. The ‘new man-as-nurturer’ was increasingly appearing as something of a chimera for a growing number of social and cultural commentators. Amidst his very ascendency, cultural thinkers were noticing a transformation.

Though initially recognised as distinctly pro-feminist and benevolently altruistic, with a definition that first appeared to arise almost purely out of gender politics, (Beynon, 2002), for many cultural theorists, the New Man was to evolve under increasing co-option from the commercial sector, which applied a overhanging narcissistic and increasingly sexualised tendency to his complex. The fall-out of neo-liberal, market-led policies had also infiltrated the identity construction (Chapman, 1988; Mort, 1996).

Whilst the number of shopping malls and retails parks increased, with the growth of the commercial sector and the promotion of shopping as a primary ‘leisure-pleasure’ activity (Beynon, 2002: 107), ‘image industries’ like advertising, media, promotion and public relations were also burgeoning in the process. And with more money circulating in the commercial sector than ever, men were increasingly targeted as new
partakers in commercially contrived consumption.

Increasingly segmented men’s fashion retail outlets and style and fashion magazines proliferated (Nixon 1996) providing both commentary and stimulus for a new visual representation, as the fall-out of “the commercial narrative of gender” (Mort 1996: 113) exacerbated the traditional code of masculinity even further. Increasingly, character came as part of the fashion statement, as a whole new range of commercially driven masculinities performed through fashion were realised. As Edwards (1997: 55) put it, “masculinity [was] no longer simply an essence or an issue of what you do, it’s how you look.”

Yvonne Tasker (1993: 110) evaluated the situation in cultural terms: “The invitation extended to western men to define themselves through consumption brings with it a consequent stress on the fabrication of identity, a de-naturalising of the supposed naturalness of male identity”. And such was the transition, that for Chapman, one of the earliest purveyors of ‘the change’, the ‘sensitive man’ (the product of feminism) was actually “killed off” by ‘commercial man’ (the product of industrial change) so that even by the mid-1980s, “the nurturant tadpole” had already become “the narcissistic toad” (Chapman, 1988: 232). For Chapman et al., without the nurturant code as his bedrock, the New Man became widely regarded as little more than “a gleam in an ad. man’s eye” (ibid: 228).

As John Beynon has expressed, “If the new man as nurturer was emblematic of the late 1960s and 1970s, the new man as narcissist”, that which he was to increasingly become, “was a direct outcome of the market-led policies that have been pursued in the United States and Western Europe since the 1980s era of Reagan-Thatcherite economics” (Beynon, 2002: 119); further

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31 Perhaps his transition can be mediated most determinately by the inherent commodification of the New Man to the commercial sector; eternalised as a commercial accomplishment no more so perhaps than by the litany of commercial photography of men holding babies, pioneered by Athena’s ‘L’enfant’, (‘Man and Baby’) – “It took only 20 minutes to shoot and became the biggest selling poster in British history”. Milmo, C., 2007. The curse of ‘Man and baby’: Athena, and the birth of a legend. The Independent. January, 16.

32 Emphasis mine.
insisting that that the biggest influence upon masculinity in Britain and similar western cultures since the 1980s has not been feminism, but the commercial (ibid.: 97). By 1994, such was the transition, that those who were accentuating the apex of the commercial and narcissistic mode were garnering themselves a new name.\textsuperscript{33} Much like the “yuppies”, that sociocultural category of material decadence of the 1980s, they were attached to geography, but also sexuality.

**The Metrosexual**

Further puncturing the increasingly nebulous and highly contested definition of the New Man, the “metrosexual” came to ‘pervert’ the politics of looking like no other. “Metrosexuality is by all accounts an aesthetic sexuality,” asserted journalist Mark Simpson, in his parody “outing” of British football star David Beckham as a metrosexual in 2002. “How do I know? … to determine a metrosexual, all you have to do is look at them. In fact, if you’re looking at them, they’re almost certainly metrosexual” (Simpson, 2002).

This newest of new men had become increasingly apathetic to all things not furnishing or surveying his reflection. His clothes and body were the pegs on which to hang identity de facto. A tour de force of consumption, male sexualisation and narcissism, his name even reflected his geographical concerns to be “within easy reach of a metropolis – because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are.” And as Simpson continues, “He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference” (Simpson, 2002).

\textsuperscript{33} The first appearance of the word ‘metrosexual’ in print has largely been attributed to journalist Mark Simpson in the UK national newspaper the *Independent*, November 15, 1994.
The realisation of the, male-targeted, consumer machine *par excellence*, he was, and still is, the new man as narcissist ‘mark 2’. Borne from the ever-evolving world of hyper consumption and vanity-directed masculinity, he was inherently commercially and economically crafted. As Simpson concludes,

"For some time now, old-fashioned (re)productive, repressed, unmoisturised heterosexuality has been given the pink slip by consumer capitalism. The stoic, self-denying, modest straight male didn't shop enough (his role was to earn money for his wife to spend), and so he had to be replaced by a new kind of man, one less certain of his identity and much more interested in his image – that's to say, one who was much more interested in being looked at... A man, in other words, who is an advertiser's walking wet dream" (Simpson, 2002).

The metrosexual was seen as the apex of an emerging culture of increasingly narcissistic, aesthetic and “ornamental” values amongst men, in which a hierarchy of masculinities based increasingly on appearance, cultures of celebrity, and implicit media fuelled-consumption were usurping more traditional masculine divisions based upon work roles, ownership and sexual orientation (Faludi, 1999).

**Masculinity in crisis: the elegy**

By the end of the decade, the inroads of feminism, coupled with structural transformations of Western capitalism, the increased participation of women in the service-, commercial- and information-sectors and the increasing fervency of image based cultures impressing on male identity, appeared to produce, what was for many, a perversely critical state of masculine identity (West, 2000).
Whilst some have simply dismissed the changes of masculine identity, as merely commercial indulgences, other more critical and distinctly elegiac accounts appeared in the popular and scholarly presses. They expressed that the New, increasingly narcissistic and increasingly sexualised man’s rise and the traditional stoicism of the ‘old’ man’s fall, was initiating a forceful state of crisis of masculinity.

In Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man (1999), Susan Faludi, perhaps the leading commentator on ‘the crisis’ from within the fin de siècle period, has maintained that “masculinity crisis” is a product of “our history,” a history in which men’s lives gained meaning insofar as they participated in and were “part of society.” “We have changed fundamentally,” writes Faludi, “from a society that produced a culture to a culture rooted in no real society at all.” She continues, “Where once we lived in a society in which men in particular participated by being useful in public life,” she writes,

"we now are surrounded by a culture in which people play almost no functional public roles. The old model of masculinity showed men how to be part of a larger social system. It gave them a context and it promised them that their social contributions were the price of admission to the realm of adult manhood. That kind of manhood required a society in order to prove itself. All of the traditional domains in which men pursued authority and power – politics, religion, the military, the community, and the household – are societal."

35 Faludi was in fact positioned on the front cover of leading US weekly, Newsweek on September 13, 1999, shortly after the release of Stiffed, where inside she was given space for a lengthy 11-page excerpt from the book, with no fewer than four sidebar articles and an additional interview with the author. The novel was also serialised across the Atlantic in the British publication The Guardian in the start of September 1999.
In this sense, the “key to masculinity” is “public usefulness.” Yet, the “ornamental culture” of today, which according to Faludi, is an unhealthy and pervasive emphasis on style and appearance rather than ‘substance’, an effect which had bled from both a lack of utility of the traditional masculine model as well as from sophisticated image industries, provides men with no sense of public usefulness at all.\(^\text{39}\) It “pretends that media can nurture society, but our new public spaces, our ‘electronic town squares’ and ‘cyber-communities’ and publicity mills and celebrity industries, are disembodied barrens, a dismal substitute for the real thing ... Constructed around celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment, marketing and consumerism, it is a ceremonial gateway to nowhere."\(^\text{40}\) Men once filled socially useful roles, and felt manly as a result, but according to Faludi, “since the ascendance of ornamental culture, it’s every man for himself, may the vainest man win” (Liebert, 1999).

Placing this in a macro social and historical context, and one that includes the new dynamics of work practices, Faludi writes, “So unlike his father, today’s man grew up with no honourable war to fight (no fascist-defeating second world war) and no frontiers to break (only the final frontier, space, which turned out to be nothing at all); he did not have a job for life, or even a useful sort of job; he couldn't count on being a useful member of his family”.\(^\text{41}\) The “ornamental culture” tells men “manhood is displayed, not demonstrated. The internal qualities once said to embody manhood – sure-footedness, inner strength, confidence of purpose – are merchandised to men to enhance their manliness. What passes for the essence of masculinity is being extracted and bottled – and sold back to men”\(^\text{42}\) Faludi concludes that men now existed within the domain of the “beauty queen,” “trapped in Miss America’s boudoir. She was now their rival, not to be won over by a

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show of masculine strength, care, or protection, but only to be bested in a competition where the odds did not seem to be on the men’s side.” In this view, the pervasive underlying problem is consumerism, a consumerism that creates an “ornamental imprisonment,” “enslavement to glamour,” or a “merchandised façade.”

In essence then, Faludi’s elegiac account placed masculinity in a state of crisis by impressing the increasing lack of utility, worthiness or simple place for the traditional masculine model. Whilst the metrosexual, or New Man, offered more casual, “ornamental” or aesthetic-bound approaches to parochial, “customary” models of masculinity, the stoically masculine and the ‘traditional’ male, who crucially for Faludi et al. stands as a more stable platform of masculinity, would be left increasingly at odds in a society that found him accelerating towards redundancy. But this was not just in the workplace, his image too had become increasingly seen as pathological in the liberal feminist scholastic and popular presses. His utility whether at work, in battle, or in the home, was increasingly compromised by a growing sense of his un-worth in the cultural and industrial structure. Furthermore, that men were increasingly placing this lack of utility and worthiness in the faith of consumption, celebrity, and image, was only accentuating this critical state even further. Indeed, Faludi was not only seeing the steady fall of ‘traditional’ and stoic masculinity but she also envisioned that it was being “sold” back to men as quickly as it was extracted. What was once the very essence of masculinity for Faludi had now been replaced by its commercial and aesthetic reflection. A fractured mirror found in bottles of cologne, gym memberships, sports equipment and in a plethora of sophisticated marketing campaigns. But what is perhaps most vital here is how Faludi asserts that there was once a secure sense of masculine essence. Indeed her entire postulations here are built upon it. For authentic

masculinity to be lost, it must have had an authentic definition in the first instant.

Faludi, however, was not alone in her plaintive take on the masculine malaise. The tone of the early elegiac accounts including Robert Bly’s (1990) seminal Iron John and David Thomas’ (1993) Not Guilty: In Defence of Modern Man, coalesced at the fin de millennium moment to induce such works as Ros Coward’s (1999) Sacred Cows, and Christine Sommers’ (2000) The War Against Boys. Seeing masculinity as defeated, these expositions generally tended to be more sympathetic towards men who they viewed as losing the sex war merely as victims of cultural, political and economic change.

Indeed, towards the latter half of the 1990s the American book market was swamped with new elegiac publications on men and masculinity. While the authors of these studies were often affiliated with different interest groups and therefore pursued different agendas, their assessment of the status of manhood was undeniably similar. In almost all of these texts, masculinity emerges as a concept under siege. Modern manhood, so it seemed, was in a state of crisis (Berger 1995: 70; Connell 1995: 207; Faludi 1999: 6).46 For many cultural commentators, the position forced the emergence of yet another modality of masculine identity, and one that would turn the progressive movements of gender politics on its head.

The New Lad

46 This is of course with exception to the other readers of the crisis (see James Heartfield’s (2002) reading of the crisis in the Introduction). However, even those who saw masculinity as pathological, for example, still generally agreed that a change was afoot, if not only by the very fact that the emergence of critical discourse on masculinity in crisis had become so prominent in the cultural dialectic.
It was in light of the increasing sublimation of the stoic masculine code in favour of an increasingly feminised and seemingly effeminate other, that the elegiac accounts of masculinity began to accentuate a cultural need for men to re-grasp their sense of manhood (Levant, 1997; Coward, 1999) and equally those seeming to attack men’s stance of victimisation (Robinson, 2000) that a further would-be backlash became evident.

In addition to the ascent of the New Man, with his seemingly progressive, but admittedly ambiguous, relationship with the pro-feminist, post-structural accounts of the second and third wave, the 1990s also marked something of a reversal in gender politics. There was an attack on the self-conscious gentility of the 1980s New Man and a projection of a far harder and distinctly 'laddish' masculinity (Beynon 2002: 108-9). Born in British magazines (Gill, 2003) a culture of ‘New Laddism,’ or simply ‘Laddism,’ reared his somewhat less genteel face on the cultural landscape.

He was pre-feminist according to sociologist Tim Edwards (2006) in Cultures of Masculinity, borne out of a predominantly heterosexual counter-culture that viewed the current assertions of masculinity increasingly commodified and thereby nullifying man’s ‘authentic’ “essence”. They appear anti-aspirational and anti-obsessional, hostile to the ‘narcissism’ of the ‘new man’ (‘grooming is for horses’) remarked Loaded’s James Brown, (widely considered the godfather of the New Lad editorial)47 and implicitly individualistic, hedonistic and sexually predatory.48

47 To mark the one of the leading ‘lad mag’ publications, Loaded, distinctiveness from the other (more upmarket) men’s titles, the magazine deliberately focused on sport, cars, drinking and music. In an early editorial, James Brown, one of its founders, commented: “Loaded should be rammed full of the things that people go on about in the pub and stuff like health and perfume should be left to the adult mags. Remember, grooming is for horses” (Loaded, July 1995).
48 Though no direct translation in the U.S. cultural vocabulary, “Frat Boy Nation” has been offered as the US equivalent. See Sacremeto Bee article “Frat Boy nation: A New culture of Chauvinism buries the sensitive guy” in which popular culture writer J. Freedom du Lac (2002) identifies a new (or rather recycled) form of masculinity being marketed to white men ages eighteen to forty. As Nylund asserts in Beer, Babes, and Balls, “This mediated masculinity, similar to the “new lad,” is typically seen as a backlash against the sensitive, pro-feminist male… Men, according to this media-created construction, should return to a traditional phallocentric masculinity that includes displays of sexism, consuming large quantities of alcohol, machismo, and hedonism – a return to a “frat boy nation” (Beer, Babes,
By the middle of the decade, the New Lad had pervaded popular culture not only in his birthplace, the UK, with TV shows like *Men Behaving Badly* (1992-1998), *Game On* (1995-1998) and *Fantasy Football League* (1994-1996, 1998 and 2004) presenting images of Laddishness dominated by the prototypical “male pastimes” of drinking, watching football, and sex, pursuing the format further into the popular imaginary, but he had also headed across the Atlantic to a seemingly anticipating U.S. In fact, by the latter part of the decade, New Lad magazines, the hub of laddish culture, had outstripped the sales of not only more ‘feminine’ male ‘style’ rivals, but even women’s magazines were lagging in comparative sales. *MAXIM*, the *Loaded* of the United States, had the best circulation figures ever for any US glossy magazine, reaching a circulation of 2.5 million by the end of the decade. It followed a cultural pattern that, for media scholar Amy Aronson (2004: 257), has deep historical routes. In fact, “Many [magazines] have been launched at times when masculinity was under cultural siege” asserts Aronson, who details that even the first successful men’s magazine, the *Saturday Evening Post* (1821-1969), had a vital relationship with masculinity in cultural disarray.⁴⁹

Perhaps the cultural archetype can be summed up most succinctly in the blurb for the launch of one of the most popular exports of the period. Given their subject matter, it was appropriate that Goodwin and Rushe (1999) adopted a distinctly laddish tone to record the launch of *For Him Magazine* (FHM) on February 2000, in the United States:

“The troops are being assembled, the invasion plans are well advanced and the general is in place... to launch if not a full-frontal assault at least a semi-naked one, to liberate the sensibilities of the all-American male... For Uncle

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⁴⁹ Once a struggling general-interest weekly, the *Post* was adapted by leading women’s magazine publisher Cyrus Curtis to become an ‘interpretation’ of men’s gender role against challenges posed to it by turn-of-the-century change, including the closing of the frontier, the rise of corporate capitalism, and activism by middle-class women (Damon-Moore, 1994 cited in Aronson 2004: 527).
Sam, the count down to the acceptable face of totty-time has begun... a guy’s a guy, wherever he lives... A testosterone-charged British sperm is swimming across the Atlantic... If the American ‘new man’ was ever house-trained by feminism to be considerate, sensitive and interested in women’s minds rather than their bodies, he is about to be led astray” (cited in Goodwin and Rushe 1999: 32)

Making loud the ascension of the New Lad here, FHM became just one of many New Lad publications that found massive success in the United States. The publications spoke to a disaffected culture in a way that denied or even refrained from acknowledging any challenges to the patriarchal and ‘traditional’ masculine stronghold. They turned their back on the notion that men had lost their seat in patriarchal culture. Unlike Clare (2000), who has asserted, “patriarchy has not been overthrown, but its justification is in disarray”, the New lad pursued that patriarchy neither lost nor ever was in crisis. With it also came an array of ‘boys will be boys’ cultural products and manifestations, no more riotous perhaps than MTV’s Jackass (2000 – 2002) (see Conclusion), which, led by the self-titled Jonny Knoxville its co-creator, witnessed a group of male 20 something’s performing dangerous, crude and self-injuring stunts and pranks when the New Lad arrived in the United States.

The strength of independence of the New Lad and his communal solidarity amongst his fraternal brothers, platforms a system of empowerment amongst the supposedly emerging ‘feminising’ culture at the turn of the millennium. He was both essentialist and pre-feminist and within that logic dislocated much of the progressive gains of women and the feminist movement by a simple refusal to take on or accustom himself to their ideologies. In so doing, he re-engaged with old codes of oppression and formed a distinct counter to the New changes.

As the New Lad flourished at the end of the millennium, colliding and coalescing alongside the more seemingly effeminate and image-centred subjectivity of the New Man and his metrosexual contemporary, masculinity,
it seems, was in a state of cultural disarray by the *fin de siècle* moment. As Murray Pomerance (2001: 4) has asserted, “Two things can be said broadly about gender as a socially attributed characteristic, at the end of the twentieth century. It looks different than it did before, and its looks, as symbols to be read as verisimilitudinous, are more problematic”.

In 1999, coinciding with the release of Faludi’s elegy *Stiffed* along with a large body of the plaintive titles outlined above including Ros Coward’s *Sacred Cows* (1999), Hollywood was to make its intervention into the masculinity in crisis discourse. Twenty-three films coalesced to form a body of masculinity in crisis cinema.\(^{50}\) The elegiac tones of ornamental imprisonment, the increasing force of pervasive image cultures, the cultural saturation of the white-collar male, and the fragmentation of the masculine/feminine binaries would form much of the narrativity and dialectic meditation.

How this Hollywood cinema made this intervention, and what, if any, cultural reverberations they had will form the basis of the examinations that are pursued in the next three textually analytical chapters. Consequently it is to this next chapter that the thesis turns to critically examine the *fin de millenium* masculinity in crisis cinema’s machinations towards those stoic tenets of traditional masculinity, labour and production, and the interrelationship with their would-be-feminine and oppositional white-collar and consumptive subjectivities. The chapter will seek to answer some vital questions. In its somewhat elegiac meditation on the masculinity in crisis phenomenon, how did the *fin de millenium* masculinity in crisis cinema negotiate the temporal demise of the blue-collar manufacturing and

\(^{50}\) Just to remind the reader of the films, they are as follows (in date of release order): *Payback* (February 5, 1999), *Office Space* (February 19, 1999), *8mm* (February 26, 1999), *Analyze This* (March 5, 1999), *The Matrix* (March 31, 1999), *Instinct* (June 4, 1999), *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (June 8, 1999), *Tarzan* (June 18, 1999), *Summer of Sam* (July 2, 1999), *American Pie* (July 9, 1999), *Eyes Wide Shut* (July 13, 1999), *Mystery Men* (July 22, 1999), *The Big Kahuna* (September 16, 1999), *Boys Don’t Cry* (October 1, 1999), *Fight Club* (October 15, 1999), *Being John Malkovich* (October 29, 1999), *The World is Not Enough* (November 8, 1999), *Flawless* (November 24, 1999), *Magnolia* (December 8, 1999), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (December 12, 1999), *American Psycho* (January 21, 2000), *Me, Myself and Irene* (June 15, 2000).
physical industries, and how did it reconcile his supposed *feminisation* at the increasingly pervasive site of his white-collared, increasingly consumption-driven counterpart? How did this Hollywood cinema relate to, and represent, the overriding capitalist financial imperatives that seemed systemic to the rise, and perpetuation, of the white-collar sector? And further, how much of all this aligned itself with the New Man or New Lad modality?

This next chapter will also seek to examine the weaknesses, imperfections and limitations of these cinematic intentions, and in doing so will highlight the, at times inherent, flaws and impediments of Hollywood’s industrial praxis, in the process illuminating how social imaginaries and cultural ideals collided with private and public spaces and consciousnesses.
CHAPTER TWO: Crisis, work and consumption

Based on Donald E. Westlake's 1962 thriller The Hunter, Brian Helgeland's Hollywood debut film Payback (1999) tells the story of Porter (Mel Gibson), a low-level criminal who has been shot in the back, literally, by his best friend and co-malefactor Val Resnick (Gregg Henry) and his double-crossing wife (Deborah Kara Unger), over a seemingly paltry $70 grand. When Porter comes round, after first having the bullets removed from his back by a drunken, would-be-surgeon, he plans his revenge, or 'payback,' to which the movie's title alludes.

Westlake's text had already been adapted for film, under the title Point Blank, by British filmmaker John Boorman, just five years after the original novels release in 1967. In Pauline Kael's now famous review of Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde (1967) for the New Yorker in 1967, in which she announced a revolution in cinematic taste, claiming "our best movies have always made entertainment out of the anti-heroism of American life," she also alludes to Boorman's Point Blank in the commendation: “A brutal new melodrama is called “Point Blank,” and it is”. The film, like the novel, was shockingly violent. But it was also stylish. Combining elements of film noir with touches of the European nouvelle vague, Boorman created an aesthetic of nervous, time-fracturing disconcertion, using colour and space to create both paranoia and a deep sense of romanticised fatalism.

Helgeland's 1999 film also draws on many of the audio and visual textures from Boorman's “ultimate cool tough-guy film of the 1960s” (Luty, 1999: 131); the menacing and paranoiac camera play, the claustrophobic mise-en-scene, the pervasive soundtrack and exaggerated audio treatments, were all re-used to place the audience in the same dark, menacing world. Equally, the film also delivered on the violence. In fact, on all accounts, it upped the ante.

Porter, (or ‘Parker’ as he was branded for *Point Blank*), already cold, viciously cunning and with a machine-like detachment from social morality, had his dark noir characterisation turned near pitch black in his *fin de siècle* reimagining. Playing with the genre, *Payback* borrows and then heightens key tropes from period Depression noir as Porter classically voice-overs a screen aesthetic made up of the coldest of colour washes, in a set comprising almost exclusively of back alleys and confined dingy hotel rooms of an unnamed big city. The film also adds some modern touches, most notably a more frenetic cutting rhythm, but it is within the films recalling of the grittiest tones of hardboiled noir, and with it, by almost implication, a sentient air of masculine nostalgia, “when men were men”, that the film really pledges its allegiance. As David Luty (1999), who also notices the invocation, asserts, “*Payback* works very hard to instil a modern, hip, noir feel that pretends to be tongue-in-cheek homage but is really a resubstantiation of the hero’s superior masculinity” (Luty, 1999: 131). Luty (1999: 31) continues, ”In voice-over, we hear Porter’s tough-guy philosophy spoken in an unemotional, matter-of-fact tone that rivals Fred MacMurray’s as Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (1944). “Nice guys are fine,” Porter says as we see him casually bumping people out of his way on the street, “You’ve got to have someone to take advantage of, but they always finish last.” As Luty alludes, however, *Payback* has also been read by many as parodic, sending up this kind of masculinity as it were, due to the near-obtuse application of such seemingly cliché effects in its pursuit to stand for a mimetic period noir. The noirish set-pieces and now retrospectively clichéd dialogue for many gave the film a sense of self-aware satire, and even led to the film being read as mindless entertainment “of the popcorn variety” by critics such as Peter Travers’ of *Rolling Stone*, “riddled with cliché and impossible situations”, “generic selfconsciousness” overdone by “excessive violence”. *Chicago Sun-Times* movie columnist Roger Ebert also accused the film of being “more interested in style than story” for example. However, 

52 The film was in fact shot with a bleach bypass process. Cited on the extras section of the *Payback* standard edition Warner Bros. DVD.
these readings tended to ignore the political effects of the mimesis in favour of a purely textual criticism. The “impossibility of the situation” and the self-conscious rejuvenation of such effects are more precisely the exact intention of director Helgeland, not simply a fall-out from an unworked narrativity and simple textual copy-cating. The film is intended to be read as a homage to the kinds of male heroism that seemed so endemic to this pre-feminist period of filmmaking. Further, as these clichéd pieces are delivered deadpan and underscored by horrific scenes of vitriolic violence in both the aesthetic and coarse dialogue (see next chapter), the seriousness of the film’s motivations to induce emotive responses to the film from its audience cannot be overstated.

The film, in short, becomes understood as evoking not only previous definitions of retributive masculinity – a violent detachment, a hypermasculine presence – but also by a re-invocation of Hollywood’s own historical definition or rather ‘classification’ of stoicism; when masculinity was arguably, or at least nostalgically, more threatening, its definition more permanent and its code less tolerable to penetrations from women and Others.54

Vitally, however, Helgeland also introduces another contextual, and by implication, ideological, change to both the original literary text and the ‘67 film adaptation, a change hinted in fact by Helgeland’s choice of new title. The film vitally deviates in relation to the issue of what, or rather how much, the “payback” is to be. The original scam, which costs Porter $93,000 way back in Boorman’s 1967 Point Blank is made significantly more remarkable in Helgeland’s film. Not by the heightened scale of the extortion, but rather the opposite. The high stake $93,000 shakedown in ‘67 emphasised in the intonation “Only 93,000 belonged to him” to which is retorted “Only 93,000!”; is suggestively dropped to $70,000 in 1999. “Hell, my suits are worth more than that,” exclaims Fairfax (James Coburn), one of the

54 Ibid.
Syndicate, Porter’s archenemies, vice-president’s, chiding Porter over his motivations for requital.

The relevance of the change is really in its ‘un-worth’ or ‘un-value’ to the hero. In fact, the value-added running joke of the ‘new’ text is that no one can believe Porter is taking such a beating and repeatedly putting himself in the gravest of danger for a paltry $70,000. The film as such removes money as the main motive for retribution in its departure here from the original text(s). Porter comes to represent a form of ascetic masculine morality, a morality seated around restraint and unaffected virtue. In the projection of Porter as masculine ideal – his ability to stand up to the most visceral of beatings, his desirability in the eyes of the film’s female contingent, not to mention his status as the film’s (anti-)hero – is also an explicit implication that ‘real’, tough-guy men, do not need material possessions or an ornamental image to bolster their sense of masculinity. His is an ascetic hypermasculinity.

However to further the claim, and herein sits the film’s dichotomous structure, he is ‘violently’ pitted against a binary: the ‘Outfit’, or ‘Syndicate’ as it also dubbed in the film. The Outfit are the films distinctly corporate-guised villains who top the chain of command for Porter’s retributive drive and who come to represent the speculative ‘fall of man’; the decadent, commodity driven, feminised council, who rally around systems of dependence and conspicuous finance for a sense of security, a security the film has Porter exude. Indeed, the film creates a dichotomous structure to underpin its ideological machinations. It attaches a heroic value to the asceticism of hypermasculine Porter and a distinctly passive, ‘feminine’, villainy to the material attachment and dubious white-collar values to the film’s antagonists in the Outfit.

This distinction is most often made visually. Second Outfit vice-president Carter (William Devane), dressed in a tailored pin-stripe suit, is shown in one carefully choreographed scene attentively applying Vaseline to his lips before wiping his hands with a starch white towel passed to him by a male
servant whilst deliberating over a ‘business matter’. The scene that precedes this of course shows Porter single-handedly breaking into Val Resnick’s hotel room, before viciously beating him whilst denying the advances of a beautiful escort/gangster (Lucy Liu). The inference is made clear, least of all by the suggestive cross-cut. Porter represents the stoically strong and independent hypermasculine male, whilst Carter, who comes to represent the commodity fuelled contingent, held here in direct juxtaposition, is shown to be a feminine, decadent fraud to masculinity.

The same distinction is also made with vice-president Fairfax’s characterisation. He is shown with the continual presence and the extra security of bodyguards, in addition to hyper-commercial accoutrements of gator-skinned designer luggage and, as the dialogue above indicates – (“hell my suits are worth more than that” in relation to Porter’s pursuit of a meagre $70 grand) – expensive clothes. Both are offset against the battered, bruised Porter, who wears all but the same clothes throughout the entire film, oscillating between a suit he buys with a stolen credit card near the start of the film and a prototypical John McClane-styled white vest, though both, like Porter himself, become battered, torn and shredded by the films end (see Chapter Three).

In addition, Porter, who Mel Gibson himself has described rather curiously as a regular “blue-collar guy” in the films supplementary material, also contrasts with the Outfit in terms of ‘work.’ Porter may represent an anti-heroic criminal element in the film, but it is rather to the tenets of manual labour that Porter exacts his payback. With little more than a stoic endurance for physical pain and hard work, Porter claws his way into the offices of the Outfit only for the white-collared antagonists above to be revealed.

55 On the extras section of the Payback Warner Bros. standard edition DVD, Mel Gibson in an interview to camera, whilst nonchalantly shrugging, describes Porter’s backstory: “He was a marine, you know. He was a grunt, you know. A blue collar guy.”
Meanwhile the soundtrack further makes solid the inference. Near the opening of the film, James Brown’s acclaimed ‘It’s a Mans World’ plays over a static lowangled medium shot of Porter ascending a steel staircase, expanding Porter’s presence in the frame. However the music fades to a distant hum before Brown’s attendant requisite “but it wouldn’t be nothing without a woman or girl” is made vocal. Porter is a ‘real’ man, and he stands alone in this his world. The film quite clearly has something rather potent to say about the sites for masculine renewal through asceticism and the virtues of ‘hands-on’, blue-collar ideologies. Not only do these tenets help Porter find retribution for the betrayal he endures at the start of the film, but they also expose an inherent emptiness and a vital insecurity in the position of the ‘hands clean’ (literally in the symbolism of the above example with Carter’s starch white towel), white-collar, commodity centred masculine, or rather ‘feminine’, positions.

Indeed, the Outfit, the diametric opposition of the stoic, stomping, independently hypermasculine Porter, seems to pose symbolically as the heightened-made-criminal representation of an engorging and morally corrupt world of white-collar corporate and bureaucratic enterprises; an enterprise that has no feelings or empathy for individual wellbeing, but rather makes global its drive to only make money and offer only surface assurances of wellbeing. The effect becomes isolated in captions like, “The Outfit is not unreasonable, Porter… but no corporation in the world would agree to what you’re asking”, or “We have an investment in you Resnick, of time, money and training, so assisting you, in a way, would be protecting our investment … and that is always good for business”. As such Payback plays right into the elegiac cultural dialogues of the fin de siècle masculinity crisis and makes its alliance towards the ‘traditional’ model known. Indeed, the theme of individualism versus the white-collar ‘corporate bureaucrats’ underlines the thematic strand of the film and addresses much of the elegiac pulse of the masculine malaise especially in relation to New modes of work and consumption. Mirroring the accounts of Linda McDowell (2003) or Michael Kimmel (1996) for example, the film implicitly asserts that a more
'authentic' masculinity, once found in the blue-collar work zones and in a more ascetic, less 'hands clean' culture, has ebbed away to corporatisation and an increasingly capitalistic and commercial villainy. Found in Payback as a virtual dichotomous world of ‘authentic’, stoic, hard-working, ascetic man versus the ‘feminising’, ‘feminine’ capitalists, who hide behind a commodity fetishism whilst at the same time endorse it, the film realises and impresses a two-fold ideology – ‘real’ men are tough men and secondly, that ‘real’ men should disengage with the villainy of corporate capitalism and material attachment, whilst those who do not, or worse those who seek to become a part of it, are villains to the authentic masculine code itself.

Mike Judge's Office Space (1999) plays a much more open and less symbolically charged hand when it comes to represent the apparent ‘villainy’ of capitalist excess and the negative effects of the burgeoning white-collar economy on the masculine code. Stemming from the penetrating tagline, “work sucks”, the film imbues a deep sense of malaise amongst its band of emasculated cubicle-dwellers who work for faux software company Initech. Whilst the early focus of the film stays on the disgruntled co-workers Michael Bolton (David Herman), the unpronounceable Samir Nagheenanajar (Ajay Naidu) and the increasingly unsettled Milton Waddams (Stephen Root) headed by lead protagonist, programmer Peter Gibbons (Ron Livingston), attention turns to two consultants Initech have contracted to assist in the company's corporate downsizing. “The Bobs” (John C. McGinley and Paul Willson), as they become informally known since they share the same first name, begin to relentlessly check the overwhelmingly male workforce for the least productive ‘cogs’ in the Initech machine. Absent of regard or sympathy to either the fiscal, or more importantly for the film, the private security needs and satisfactions of its male workforce, they scour the company’s white-collar employees for compulsory ‘redundancy’. The underlying implication of course is that there is no (male) solidarity in today's burgeoning white-collar service industries, where margins of profit are the only guiding entities.
Indeed, like Helgeland's *Payback*, *Office Space* presents a dichotomous structure to catalyse both its narrativity and ideological make-up. Amidst the film’s appetite for critique, *Office Space*’s host of bureaucratic authority figures come to represent the film’s antagonists. Represented as robotic, neurotic and dysfunctional, the Bob’s, alongside Gibbon’s line-manger Bill Lumbergh (Gary Cole), manifest a sense of entrapment and hostility for the male protagonists in the film. In the end, Gibbons is forced to consider an elaborate ‘escape’, in an albeit comedic Ferris Bueller-styled getaway, from his solitary and confining work station.\(^{56}\)

Divine intervention eventually grants Gibbons a more permanent sense of freedom, when, upon the advice of his cheating, self-centred, fork-tongued girlfriend Anne (Alexandra Wentworth) (the secondary platform of emasculation in the film – see Chapter Four), he visits hypnotherapist Dr. Swanson (Michael McShane), to whom he confesses his miserable position. In response, Dr. Swanson puts Gibbons into a state of ecstatic bliss, silencing his anxieties about work and his oppressively ‘empowered’ girlfriend, freeing Gibbons from obsessing about making a white-collar ‘living’ and other such apparently emasculatory impediments. However, before bringing Peter out of the hypnotic spell, Swanson suddenly falls victim to a fatal heart attack and dies instantly in his office chair, vitally leaving Gibbon’s desires for ‘freedom’ unbroken. Old, feminised, emasculated Gibbons, who obsessed about inconsequential work problems in his confining cubicle, is given a second chance to recharge his ‘traditional’ sense of masculinity. No longer feeling the need to fulfil his ‘contractual’ relationship to Initech or his caustic girlfriend, he finds the freedom of doing nothing. Gibbons in fact dissipates both and simply stays in bed, alone.

When Peter Gibbons finally returns to work, still beaming from his sense of newly found freedom, his ‘constraining’ white-collar is literally replaced by a casual open-neck green work shirt and jeans. Still feeling aggrieved with the

\(^{56}\) In fact this visual aesthetic and narrative play of escaping from the work cubicle is also repeated in David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999), the Wachowski brother’s *The Matrix* (1999) and Sam Mendes’s *American Beauty* (1999).
level of bureaucratic insensitivity at *Initech* and feeling increasingly hostile to the callous functions of the corporate downsizing, Gibbons hatches a plan to salve the impending fate of his friends and colleagues Michael and Samir, who unlike Peter, are set for certain redundancy. In coherence with the films ideological stance, positioned in a cannily suggestive ‘blue-collar bar’, Gibbons realises his philosophy reaches far beyond *Initech’s* walls. “It’s not just about me and my dream of doing nothing. It’s about all of us together,” he presses to co-worker Michael during his epiphany. “We don’t have a lot of time on this earth. We weren’t meant to spend it this way. Human beings were not meant to sit in little cubicles staring at computer screens all day.”

His plan realised, he devises to inconspicuously extract money from the company by planting a virus in the account system to embezzle fractions of cents in each financial operation into his own account. Embezzlement becomes the means and ends to a secured liberty and a sense of freedom, but not before the film places some ‘white-collar rage’ in parodic, but potent, visual and audio aesthetics.

Against Geto Boys gangster rap anthem, the contemptibly titled ‘Die Mother Fuckers’, which sets the hyperbolic tone for the newly realised, ‘re-masculinised’ band of co-workers, Gibbon’s, Michael and Samir take the iconically malfunctioning office printer to an empty field and smash it with excessive vigour. After a series of gratuitous slow-mo exposition shots of the destruction, they walk into the sunset, as it were, clutching the cables and plastic debris as if they were arteries and entrails – the death of corporate white-collar subservience made complete. The non-diegetic soundtrack pumps more hardcore anthems over another parodying screen aesthetic, as

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57 Gibbons in fact was offered a promotion in a comedic scene of the film in which, during his appraisal with the “Bob’s”, his unfeeling, phlegmatic and brazenly honest answers to ‘corporate questions’, make them believe he an ally that may “rat out” the weak cogs for them. However, more accurately his answers vitally counterpoint the autocratic and stiff white-collar assembly of global and corporate bureaucracy and in his plaintive commentary he speaks for the white-collar masses, spelling out the apparent miserable state of the modern workingman. He sardonically states, “... in a given week I probably do about 15 minutes of real, actual work” and further that “the question is motivation”. He simply “doesn’t care”.

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a second Geto Boys number, ‘Damn it feels good to be a gangster’ plays sardonically over a montage of the corporate rip-off, proposing implicitly that going against the white collar system can provide an anarchic kind of pleasure.

Though *Office Space*’s feminised white-collared authority figures form the central antagonists within the film, whilst Gibbons and company form the awakened re-masculinised others, the binary of traditional blue-collar masculine freedom versus the corporate, potently emasculating, white-collar counterpart is perhaps most accentuated by a supplementary secondary character, Gibbon’s neighbour Lawrence (Diedrich Bader). A stalwart of blue-collar industry, Lawrence works in construction and becomes the realised model for ‘authentic’ masculinity once Gibbon’s plans for embezzlement, almost inevitably, go awry.\(^5\) As Gibbons realises a less transient root to freedom, and by invocation a more complete sense of masculinity, may be found through the practice of a kind of labour that involves “getting exercise” and “working outside,” a job that in effect gives him a sense “public usefulness” (Faludi, 1999), he eventually joins Lawrence and the construction industry in the film’s closure, extending the film’s dichotomous structure of the white-collar versus blue-collar, hands-clean versus hands-dirty and feminine versus masculine, eternalising the latter in the climax.

*Office Space* once again therefore addresses the blue versus white collar dualism and takes the virtual dichotomy of Helgeland’s *Payback*, realised only in the symbolic blue (as Porter), white (as *The Outfit*) to more tangible, less implicit levels; in short to the very workplace itself. Ordaining Lawrence as the film’s final ‘model’ for a sense of stability in identity construction, the film suggests that Gibbons’ way to a sustainable sense of stability and happiness can be found by becoming part of the ‘hands dirty’, blue-collar, workforce, but also vitally here, a lean on the New Lad modality. Indeed,

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\(^5\) Michael in fact commits a mistake in the virus software he has created and instead of slowly accruing fractions of cents over a steady period of time, they end up stealing huge amounts all at once.
whilst representing the stoic blue-collar worker, Lawrence also embodies a distinctly New Lad characterisation in his representation on screen, a characterisation that in fact becomes reiterated by the film’s protagonist Peter Gibbons in Office Space’s closure. Continually slumped in his easychair with his beer in one hand and his television remote poised for scanning through pornographic videos with the other, Lawrence asserts a series of New Lad standard phrases. The first time in fact he appears on screen he calls out, “Hey Peter-Man! Check out Chanel Nine! It’s the breast exam! Check out this chick!” In the same scene, when asked by Peter Gibbons what he would do if he had a million dollars, he retorts, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, man. Two chicks at the same time”, prompting laughter. However, as the film takes Gibbons through his redemptive journey to re-masculinisation, he eventually assimilates Lawrence’s modality, and although his projection is realised in a representation that lacks the same levels of coarseness, his alliance to the New Lad modality is made clear by his following of Lawrence’s blue-collar career path and furthermore symbolically by his mimetic repetition of the same phraseology: Lawrence’s continual assertion of “Fuckin’ A” is repeated by Gibbon’s in fact providing the last line in the movie, eternalising his transition to the same New Lad modality.

Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) in Sam Mendes’s multi-award winning drama American Beauty (1999), like so many other protagonists in this cinema, also takes a more penetrable stab at the culture of the commercialisation of masculinity and the supposed white-collar shackles of the service sector. With its narrative and thematic shape also mirroring the elegiac accounts of masculinity in crisis, American Beauty however, makes a much more convoluted stab at interrogating the apparent feminisation of the masculine code. Burnham, the film’s protagonist, leans more precisely on nostalgia and regression.

Whilst the young gen-xer’s may have inherited a world in which men no longer have a sense of belonging (Faludi, 1999), middle-aged Lester Burnham’s characterisation attempts to prove that equally those men who have had to step up and into an altering world of masculine disparity may
also feel the force of change. Like Office Space’s Peter Gibbons, Burnham is also confronted by the emptiness of cubicle-dwelling, working as a magazine writer in an unnamed city. Further, like Payback’s Porter, Burnham is also confronted by the hollowness of material obsession and consumption, a hollowness that is seemingly embraced by those around him. His emasculatory wife Carolyn (Annette Bening) (yet another ‘castrating’ female in this cinema, See Chapter Four) comes to stand in as antagonist to his idealisation of a new, or rather old, masculine self.59 Caught in an “ornamental” world of surfeit commodity consumption and surface, Carolyn in fact regards status and surface so highly that, deeply cast in an abyss of commodity and material fetishism, she has an affair with her more successful business rival, Buddy Kane, the self-titled “Real Estate King” (Peter Gallagher) in hope to acquire both more material gain and social status. This is in complete contrast to Burnham who at the same time and in complete contradistinction actively attempts to free himself of his possessions and status (see below). Further, Carolyn also offsets another dichotomy. She is symbolic of both the white-collar, commodity-hungry value system and as is also shown to be yet another betraying, emasculatory female; an echo from Gibbon’s first girlfriend, Anne, in Mike Judge’s Office Space and as we shall see, Payback’s Pearl (Lucy Liu).60

Meanwhile Mendes attests a compelling but closeted superficiality surrounding the aura of the white-collar suburb in which they his characters live their white-collar suburban lives, through a determined visual treatment. He creates a kind of decaying Lynchian-styled mockery of the suburbanite middle-class dwelling. An aerial shot of Lester’s suburb sorrowfully narrated with “This is my neighborhood. This is my street. This is my life”, at the start the film, prefixes its importance as a place of constraint. The iconic white picket fence that so neatly hedges in the neighbourhood alludes only to the fabricated, hyper-real, promise of

59 It is also important to note that American Beauty, along with Joel Schumacher’s 8mm (1999), is one of the stand alone films in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema where the protagonist is married.
60 This is an effect the thesis comes to in more detail in Chapter Four.
American good-living and security; a kind of ‘candy floss’ habitat, seemingly sweet to taste, or rather look at, but immanently devoid of substance, an allegory of course for Burnham’s material existence. The fence in fact becomes just one of the many symbolic cages that sees its protagonist trapped by his “ornamental” existence. Indeed, director Mendes has labelled American Beauty a rites of passage film about imprisonment and escape, a film in which the monotony of Lester’s existence is established through his monotone voice over, his grey bland outfits, and his nondescript workplace. In these early scenes, he is often framed as if ensnared. He masturbates in the confines of his shower, which evokes a kind of jail cell, and becomes one of the first of many such frames in which Burnham appears to be trapped behind glass or bars. One of the most potent examples, in addition the white-picket fence, appears when Burnham’s reflection is made on his computer screen behind columns of numbers, making him appear “confined [and] nearly crossed out”.

As Burnham attempts to salve his sense of entrapment, steps towards freedom, involve ‘retreating’ back to adolescence and to a time when he could “see his whole life ahead of him.” Indeed, the film implicitly alludes to the innocence and freedom of a pre-commercially driven youth throughout. Driven by an early ’70s soundtrack that also revives a certain feel of liberation and self-determination – compiling of The Guess Who’s 1970 track ‘American Woman’; Free’s 1970 anthemic ‘All Right Now’; Bill Withers’ 1972 hit, ‘Use Me’; and The Who’s 1971 ‘The Seeker’ – Burnham outwardly regresses to escape the various emasculating ‘prisons’ director Mendes builds for him.

Eventually Burnham trades his writing job for flipping burgers, he shakes off the confining decadence of his suburban home for his annexed makeshift garage-cum-gym (where he also re-starts smoking pot), and he trades his

63 Ibid.: 119.
emasculating, commodity-hungry wife for idolising his teenage daughter’s best friend, Angela (Mena Suvari). Amidst this Burnham also begins to stamp his authority on those around him, particularly the film’s female contingent. As Haussman asserts, Lester tries to “regain a voice in a home that [only respects] the voices of mother and daughter.” He lambasts his wife for her overt materialism and acts indifferently when he discovers her infidelity; whilst to his daughter he begins to exert a more authoritarian rule. However, in the end it is Burnham as ‘man-child’ that exposes the film’s ideological wish to turn back history, as it were, to not only a time when life was simple and materially absent but also to an era of pre-feminist empowerment. By invocation of Burnham’s re-masculinisation of the home space and in his dissent of the emasculating white-collar workplace, Burnham regresses to a time when ‘real’ men were in control.

**Shopping and hyperconsumption**

Though all the films in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema, particularly the ones this chapter has been examining here, have an explicit connection with the cultural dialogues surrounding changes in the male relationship to consumption and the burgeoning white-collar industries, it is the Wachowski brother’s *The Matrix* (1999), David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999) and Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000) where consumption, or more precisely, derisible accounts of consumption, get the most explicitly *theoretical treatment* in the *fin de siècle* moment. According to scholastic readers of these films, they evoke not only allegories of iconic popular culture and literature, from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (*The Matrix*) to Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (*American Psycho*) for example, but for those who have written on them, the films also offer a

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64 Ibid.
65 It is also potently telling that Carolyn’s affair with the materialistic Buddy Kane (Peter Gallaher) ends because Buddy is concerned that he may have to face a potentially expensive divorce.
further intellectual evocation of some of the most prominent philosophical thinkers in the western canon; Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx, Adorno and postmodern thinkers such as cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard and American author and essayist Don DeDillo have all been critically attached to these three films.\(^66\) By invoking certain tenets of that loaded and slippery term the ‘postmodern,’ including further narrative plays of hyperbole, bathos and irony, these three films take an intellectually distinct but overlapping handle on the principles of work and consumption and their implications on masculinity.

In addition to \textit{Fight Club}'s the Narrator (Ed Norton) working for yet another white-collar company with more than a dubious sense of social morality,\(^67\) in \textit{Out of the Past, Into the Supermarket}, Erik Dussere (2006: 23) asserts that \textit{Fight Club}, also has a complicated but deriding relationship with consumption. For Dussere, and we can extend this to the other two films here, \textit{Fight Club} took the supermarket and consumer culture, to that “contemporary imaginable space that we generally refer to as the “the postmodern.”” Dussere (2006: 18) states that “The evolution of [the] consumers’ republic runs parallel to the evolution of the supermarket, which can serve as a kind of microcosm for American consumer culture” in general. The kinesis of the supermarket to hypermarket marked both its \textit{literal} ascent in size and its \textit{figurative} ascent in value. Super became hyper in name and ideology. There is no need to go to the supermarket anymore because the supermarket is everywhere and Dussere positions this worldview onto his reading of Fincher's \textit{Fight Club}. For Dussere (2006: 23-24) the film suggests that American culture has become entirely suffused by commerce; “The concerns about marketing in the 1960s have become a conspiracy that is both ungraspably huge and so pervasive that our identities are completed by it”.


\(^67\) He is in fact an insurance re-call co-ordinator whose principle job is evaluating whether it will be cheaper for his car company to recall faulty products or settle lawsuits in or out of court to those parties harmed or killed due to the fault.
The reification of “What kind of dining set defines me as a person?” asked by the Narrator near the beginning of Fight Club, seems to mark this claim most completely. But it is to the following scene in which the Narrator walks through his apartment as catalogue-styled descriptions of his furniture complete with price tags that float around him, that marks his hyper-real vision of the world through a conspicuous lens of commodity fetishism and hyper-consumerism. The scene suggests there is no longer any space, home or otherwise, outside the pervading reach of consumer culture, a near-perfect example of Baudrillard’s precession.

Trapped in the virtual simulation of the hyper-real consumer machine, the Narrator fragments. He is unable to sleep, unable to function and is lost in what is represented as a vacuous world of nothingness. But this all changes when he meets “anti-consumerist provocateur” Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), a handsome soap manufacturing travelling salesman, who shows him the way to freedom. Cementing the ‘group’ nature of the fin de millennium cinema Durden displays a clear hatred towards the burgeoning white-collar service industries, urges familiar codes of asceticism, blue-collar productive values, and offers a clear sense of nostalgic anarcho-primitivism.

Following the dichotomous modality of the films examined so far, Tyler forms the antithetical ascetic, ‘traditional’, hypermasculine counterpart to the Narrator’s deadening feminised self and again it is the film’s clever use of archetypal doubling that sets the critique in motion. In fact, the film’s revelation that Tyler and the Narrator are the same person in the later stages of the movie only accentuates the ideology behind this dyadic structure. Tyler is in fact a projection of the Narrator’s repressed ego-idealised self. “All the ways you wish you could be, that’s me” says Tyler, “I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not.”

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awakening sits the logic that feminised man is repressing a more perfectible hypermasculine self.

The film is made up of instances in which we are to see the emptiness of feminised man in action. In an attempt to liberate the Narrator from his life of ornamental consumerism in excess, Tyler eventually, but initially unbeknownst to the Narrator, blows up his decadent condo, leaving debris of a material existence on the sidewalk. Noticing his imploded refrigerator amongst the debris, the Narrator asserts “how embarrassing... a house full of condiments and no food”, another suggestive nod to the ‘un-nourishing’ worthlessness of the surface. Later in the film comes the Tyler/Narrator confession for the damage: “The liberator who destroyed my property has realigned my perceptions,” asserts Tyler in the ear of the Narrator whilst he talks on the phone to the police through a bloodied lip from an earlier fight. Tyler and increasingly the ‘un-awakened/awakening’ Narrator see through the facade of consumerist culture, with its meaningless devotion to materialism and self-improvement. He is eventually given to grand pronouncements: “It’s only after we’ve lost everything that we are free to do anything,” and “The things you own end up owning you.”

He invites the Narrator to stay in his den of asceticism; the crumbling, decrepit, broken dwelling of 420 Paper Street, a house disconnected from the media landscape and supposed ornamental cultures. Freedom, the film suggests, is to be found in asceticism, destruction and irreverence. Commodity culture and a white-collar existence are shown to be quite clearly the enemy of not only a more stable existence but also, more importantly, an authentic masculine essence. It is a position that becomes accentuated in various moments of the film, least of all in Fight Club’s central premise, the fight club itself; Rule Number Six – no shirts and no shoes – and it is literally away with the white collar and on with the masculine quintessence.69

69 The next chapter explores the values of violence in more detail.
However, it is *Fight Club*’s political motion to Project Mayhem that holds most relevance in an examination of the film’s approach to work and consumption. Making the private wishes and escapes of these ideologies global, in Project Mayhem, Tyler Durden establishes an anarchic political branch for his fractured followers to attach themselves to after the violence of the ‘club.’ Their ‘new’ goals are to smash multi-national, corporate agencies, and cause ordered havoc and chaos on an unrelenting commercial culture. Global corporate capitalism takes the biggest brunt of the anarchy. In critical correlation with Jay Roach’s *Austin Powers*, for instance, (see below) according to David Fincher, there is a Starbucks coffee cup visible in every shot of the movie, a purveying sign of the ubiquitous commercial image.70

But whilst *Fight Club* seems to mirror the cultural dialectic of masculine malaise in the *fin de siècle* period, here the films synthesis with the ‘real’ is also made remarkable. So much was *Fight Club* on the pulse of the cultural moment, that just weeks after the films release, the infamous ‘Battle in Seattle’ World Trade demos made *Fight Club*’s virtual fiction a literal reality. Targeting corporate properties in downtown Seattle, a black block contingent that seemed to mirror the requisite “black shirt... black pants... black boots... black socks... and one black jacket” uniform of Project Mayhem took *Fight Club* to the realms of near blueprint. In a subsequent communiqué, they listed the particular corporations targeted, which they contend to have committed “corporate crime” with Starbucks, of course – held as “peddlers of an addictive substance whose products are harvested at below-poverty wages by farmers who are forced to destroy their own forests in the process” – playing a dominant villain.71 With no real time for

71 The communiqué read as follows: “Fidelity Investment (major investor in Occidental Petroleum, the bane of the U’wa tribe in Columbia) Bank of America, US Bancorp, Key Bank and Washington Mutual Bank (financial institutions key in the expansion of corporate repression) Old Navy, Banana Republic and the GAP (as Fisher family businesses, rapers of Northwest forest lands and sweatshop laborers) NikeTown and Levi’s (whose overpriced products are made in sweatshops) McDonald’s (slave-wage fast-food peddlers responsible for destruction of tropical rainforests for grazing land and slaughter of animals) Starbucks (peddlers of an addictive substance whose products are harvested at below-poverty wages
immanent mimicry, the Battle may or may not have been directly influenced by *Fight Club*, but as Windrum (2004: 304) has asserted, it did “allow one to see the ideological forest over some allegedly violent trees”.

The virtual mimesis of the event cast on the world stage not only connected *Fight Club* with a more globally political discourse, suggesting that the movies here also belong to a wider, culturally embedded, critique, but through the use of a forceful gendered plotline the film also made potent the connection between capitalism and masculinity. The film presented an exaggerated notion of conspicuous consumption and corporate capitalism, not only as a humanitarian concern, but also as particularly antagonistic to the *masculine* essence, connecting the malaise of the socio-economic with the culture of gender (see also Chapter Three on Columbine).

The evil of ‘techno-corporate’ domination is taken into hyper-real realms in *The Matrix* (1999), the first entry in the Wachowski brother’s three-part sci-fi epic in which Thomas Anderson’s alter ego Neo (Keanu Reeves) must save the ‘unplugged’ *real* world from The Machines. Once subservient to the ‘needs’ of capitalist man’s efforts to produce more, and with less ‘manpower’, the Machines had become sentient, taking over the future world in the process. People have become mere power sources placated with computer-generated versions of life. “History’s irony”, to paraphrase Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), reads as an echoing hyper-real valorisation of the plaintive accounts of Faludi (1999) and more precisely Linda McDowell’s *Redundant Masculinities* (2003) for instance, who has written on the masculine malaise at the site of increasing technocracy.

Further to Durden’s pledges in *Fight Club*, in *The Matrix*, asceticism and a masculine reclamation of the domestic and private space is taken a stage further by virtue of the conventions of the sci-fi genre. Counterpointing the

fact that it is actually around the year 2300, ‘unplugged’ and on board their ship the Nebuchadnezzar, the crew eat a form of gruel and sport torn, undyed, handcrafted woollen fabrics. Meanwhile, their one remaining sanctuary of hope, Zion, the last ‘Real’ place in the ‘unplugged’ world, (although not seen until the next instalment) is shaped by its dry, rocky, almost-prehistoric landscape. Here public and private satisfactions are granted through the simplicity of communion, tribal dance and song, in which primitivism and asceticism are made utopian. Furthermore, physical conflict and manual labour are ascribed into the very epicentre of the new/old world, while “the Resistance’s” steel-clad ship, visually suggestive of the manual blue-collar spaces of the once industrial west, counterpoint the ‘fabricated’ technocratic territories of the world as they know it – the capitalist, surface, feminised and consumerist dimension of the Matrix – a world now seemingly so artificial, un-nourishing and un-real, that it no longer has a place in Reality.

At the beginning of the films second act, Cypher (Joe Pantoliano), one of the unplugged crew members, comes to betray the Resistance, and in doing so, visually exposes the divisional and ideological spaces between the free, ‘concrete,’ ‘unplugged’ world and the ‘artificial’ Matrix. Sitting in a sumptuous restaurant, surrounded by all the token accoutrements of material decadence, Cypher, whilst smoking a large cigar and chewing on a huge fillet steak, sells out his crew for his thirty pieces of silver: “I want to come back rich ... and someone important ... like an actor” bargains Cypher with one of the Machines. And seemingly Cypher’s material wish assumes all the principle tenets of Susan Faludi’s (1999) thesis, where ornamental culture means endorsing celebrity and conspicuous materialism. The camera then suggestively cross-cuts to the steel-insulated Nebuchadnezzar revealing the authentic heroes who are shown dining on “a single celled protein combined with synthetic aminos, vitamins, and minerals.”

“Everything the body needs,” asserts Nebuchadnezzar pilot Dozer (Anthony Ray Parker). Of course the juxtaposition is potently suggestive.

The juxtaposition in fact between needs and material desire, is an effect that evidently reverberates across the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema. But perhaps no more so than in Mary Harron’s controversial thriller, American Psycho (2000). Like Fight Club, American Psycho was originally penned by one of the emerging “blank fiction school” writers (Chuck Palahniuk, 1996 and Bret Easton Ellis, 1991 respectively) who, in contingency with the elegiac cultural accounts, were strong petitioners of the cultural change on America’s men. The blank style seemed perfectly attuned for a critique that envisioned America’s men were increasingly hollowing out of their masculine essence. For instance, a central part of the blank fiction method is the delineation of ‘undeveloped’ characters, characters that vitally lack both backstory and critical description. An acute example of this of course is the titling of Fight Club’s central character as only the Narrator. In a film about consumer-era depersonalisation, onomastically reducing him to a function of discourse is a highly suggestive plot detail (Windrum 2002: 305). Indeed the blank style allowed for an excavation of the ‘hollowing out’ process in motion, as the flat, malcontented prose and descriptive language would echo the perceived emptiness of the New modes of masculinity. When translated into visual texts, Mary Harron’s saturated colour palette, complimented by somewhat ‘deadpan’ performances from each of the cast members in the film, mirrored the ‘blank’ style, making the characters appear distinctly flat and robotic. In the same way in Fight Club (1999), Fincher’s roaming camera probes into decaying rooms of anonymous males, where suggestive dark shallow frames that peer in at dejected everymen make them look pitifully lifeless and unimportant.

In Harron’s *American Psycho*, protagonist Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale), like the Narrator in *Fight Club* and many the other protagonists this chapter has examined, appears unconsciously trapped by both his white-collar status at work, and by the strong pull of a pervasive consumer and commodity culture. In the daytime, Patrick is the hyper-realisation of the ‘feminine’, commercially conforming, every-yuppie. Bateman wakes up in the morning, has a vast beauty and exercise regime and takes himself to work as a white-collar, high paid stockbroker specialising in ‘mergers and acquisitions’ on Wall Street. He takes lunch in expensive restaurants, occasionally with his fiancé Evelyn (Reese Witherspoon), whose *function* it seems is only for the sake of *appearances*, which is really what Patrick is all about. Indeed, one of Patrick’s mantras, “I just want to fit in,” is repeated in these quiet moments of the film. After work he visits the gym, or tanning salon and returns back to his minimalist ultra-modern penthouse apartment in an exclusive district of Manhattan.

While Patrick Bateman may *appear* ‘normal’ in the day, moreover *conforming* in his world of material obsession, at night however, Bateman lets his self-labelled “mask of sanity” slip to reveal a sadistic, violently virile, psychotic killer. He tortures, stabs and maims his way through these intersecting portions of the film with little provocation required other than the fact that his victims complicate his vision of, or his position within, the consumer canon. Indeed, *American Psycho* has a narrative rhythm of two, deeply intertwined, forms of seriality – murder and commodity fetishism – but both are implicated with a savagely potent sense of conspicuous consumption.

As the film progresses it becomes clear that Patrick encodes everything around him in a commercial language and everything to Patrick is given a commercial aura. Related to his obsessive consumerism is his obsession with brand names for example. He drinks not water but Evian, he doesn’t wear a suit but rather a Valentino suit and so on. But further to this, Bateman “the conspicuous consumer run amok” (Kauffman 1998: 250) also begins to treat people in the same way. Here marks the beginning of his
psychosis; Patrick really does encode *everything* around him with consumer value. Bateman becomes “represented as the product of unrestrained consumerism in a society of the hyperreal” (Allue, 2002: 88), and such is the force of Bateman’s consumption that it becomes implicitly cannibalistic, both literally, (he feeds off the brains of one the prostitutes he consumes), and figuratively, (he fucks, kills, rapes, and discards). He ‘gorges’ on humanity itself without a care for the consequences. In essence, Bateman becomes a violent personification of the consumer machine.

Indeed, consumption becomes a form of death, even for Patrick himself. The more Bateman cannibalistically consumes, the more he fragments and breaks down until all that is left is the “idea” of ‘real’ person. “There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction” self narrates Bateman, “But there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping you and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: I simply am not there.” As Young asserts, “Patrick has been so fragmented and divided by his insane consumerism that he cannot “exist” as a person” (Caveney and Young 1992: 104). Much like Fincher's *Fight Club*, the film as such shows that the promises of consumption lead only to fragmentation and nothingness. But unlike the Narrator, Patrick never salves his condition, quite simply because he never stops consuming. The message once again is explicit. ‘Real’ men, ‘authentic’ men cannot *buy* their way out of crisis; to do so in fact is to perpetuate the problem conspicuous consumerism started.

**A relationship of dichotomies**

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74 In a similar sense, Annesley (1998: 16) has said that in *American Psycho* the word “consume” is used in all of its possible meanings: purchasing, eating and destroying.

75 Making explicit the link between capitalist commerce and violence, Kauffman (1998: 250) explains that, curiously enough, stockbrokers from companies like Merrill Lynch or Pierce (whose equivalent in the book is Pierce and Pierce) have long referred to their clientele with the motto of “Murder’em, lynch’em, pierce’em, fuck’em and forget’em” (cited in Allue, 2002: 87).
It is becoming clear that a binary or dichotomous structure underpins the critical discourse in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. Brian Helgeland's *Payback* creates a pseudo blue-collar/white-collar dichotomous structure to underpin its ideological position, attaching a heroic value to the asceticism of its hero and a villainy to the material attachment of the film's white-collar contingent. Mike Judge's *Office Space* also enlists a dichotomous duality, as white collar bosses collide and contrast with those wishing to escape their material values whilst Lawrence, the films archetypal New Lad, poses as the stalwart of the blue-collar *in extremis*, as his supposed freedom offsets the values of the emasculatory white-collar counterparts therein. *American Beauty* also confronts the emptiness of cubicle-dwelling and the villainy of material attachment through its dichotomous structure, as Burnham's realised asceticism stands in opposition to his wife's obsessional sense of material and status acquisition.

In fact the dichotomous narrative arc and archetypal doubling runs completely across the broad scheme of the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. Even within the films that actualise a seemingly uncomplicated form of unbroken, stoic, traditionally phallocentric and Heroic masculine agency, akin in fact to Hollywood's '80s model of muscular heroism for example (see Tasker, 1993 or Jeffords, 1994), the protagonists still have to battle against oppositional commodity hungry, often feminised, villains in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. For example, the atavistic James Bond, who may prototypically fight against the forces of a crazed megalomaniac seeking world domination, is placed into a context that more than usually centres around conspicuous consumption and its apparent betrayal to the masculine essence in 1999; *‘The World is not Enough’* pitches the movie’s laconic stance. The movie’s narrative arc centres around Bond’s quest to put an end to literally ‘unfeeling’ Russian terrorist Victor ‘Renard’ Zokas (Robert Carlyle), who after being shot in the head, survived with the bullet irretrievably embedded in his brain. While the bullet slowly destroys Renard’s nervous senses, slowly killing him in the process, it also makes him impervious to pain. Driven by the films femme
fatale, Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), Renard’s mortal wish is to sabotage a Russian oil pipeline with a nuclear explosion so that Elektra’s unaffected supply will dramatically increase in value. Even though his death is inevitably imminent, his last quest is still centred on financial gain. The archetypal doubling made complete, both Bond and Renard have an enduring sense of masculine prowess, however one is motivated by money and greed, the other only by retributive masculine agency.

Jay Roach’s *Austin Powers* (1999) equally reveals a narrative arc that pits the hero, another agent with agency, against a dark evil that surrounds itself in conspicuous commodity consumption. The not-so-subtly-named villain Dr. Evil finances his wicked deeds in the film with wealth acquired from his previously unknown start-up company “Starbucks”. His headquarters in fact sit within the Space Needle in Seattle, which happens to be decorated with the Starbucks logo. With his plan to vaporize Washington, hold the world hostage, and worse than this, steal Austin Power’s *mojo*, his male “life force”, the message seems clear, albeit amusingly exaggerated. Starbucks, iconic as a multi-national service corporation that uses dubious methods to expand and maintain their market domination, seems to be spirited here to be stealing everybody’s mojo. Not only does the film appear to be implicitly saying that corporations like Starbucks are destroying a sense of local community, but there is also an inference that Starbucks, or rather the idea of huge multinational corporations are destroying our sense of manhood. *Austin Powers* on the other hand embodies the very essence of the, (albeit again hyperbolic), sensibilities of the phallocentric masculine code, he is a denizen of swinging London, a tough international espionage agent, and a fashion photographer with access to beautiful women. Power’s heroism comes to represent a masculine traditionalism that contrasts with Evil’s capitalistic and seemingly emasculatory enterprise, once again enlisting the

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dichotomy and what we may want to label the pedagogical machinations of the cinema.77

Indeed, even when the movies have closures that do not appear to follow their previous or dominant rationalisations in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, in American Beauty and Fight Club for example, where the death of the masculine, or Wild Man, is realised, quite literally, the cinema stills seems to follow these dichotomous codes and in doing so seem to urge their respective audiences to seek the more masculine standard. The newly realised, newly rejuvenated Lester Burnham dies at the end of American Beauty, right in the heart of his 'remasculinisation' process for example. Material- and woman-hater Tyler Durden is also vanquished at the end of Fight Club but yet these movies really fail to deliver the 'death' of this characterization, or even tip the balance on the polarity, with any kind of real of authority or conviction. While it may be tempting to conclude that these films fail in their promises to uphold traditional and ascetic masculine values as the authentic route to re-masculinisation and ‘masculine authenticity’ by killing off this modality and seemingly its ideological position with it, to take this route without critical consideration is to ignore the textual and ideological aura of not only the characterisation, but also the films as a whole. To refuse to acknowledge the Narrator's "joyous, libidinal, revolutionary peak" as Windrum (2004: 306) puts it, where Tyler is rampaging through Fight Club asserting himself somewhat as the film's real protagonist, is to also ignore the audiences own sense of emotional involvement or investment with the film. The film audience's cult fascination with Tyler is much stronger than their fascination with the Narrator, as is evidenced no more so than in the extra-textual literature that surrounds the

77 The argument of an unequal dichotomy in the representation of the masculine and feminine has however been fervently disputed in a recent work by Donna Peberdy (2010) who insists, against the flow of this assertion, that this dichotomy is a system of interdependence with “each masculine trope reliant on the other for validation and definition” (Peberdy 2010: 233). It is a counter argument that thesis comes to examine in detail in Chapter Four of the thesis.
film, which almost always involves a reinvocation of Tyler Durden and his philosophy and aesthetic, whilst saying very little about what is essentially the film’s ideological catalyst, the Narrator, in the process. In the same way, the closure of Mendes’ *American Beauty* in which Lester Burnham is shot and killed does not in any way shadow the audiences cult fascination with Burnham’s characterisation and ascetic ideologies especially when given such a strong and memorable visual treatment for the film’s first 115 minutes of the 122-minute total.

Moreover, Henry Giroux (2001: 26) claims that *Fight Club*, for instance, continues to valorise Tyler and the Space Monkeys after the movie’s closure and only poses a meagre, ineffectual critique when, at the end, the Narrator disavows his actions in “a meaningless gesture of resistance,” – “I’m sorry... you met me at a very strange time in my life” – since immediately following this disclaimer a massive explosion occurs in which a series of skyscrapers crumble as a result of Project Mayhem’s terrorism. More than this Tyler is also forcefully re-invoked, as at this moment an image of a half erect penis that Tyler had earlier spliced into a cartoon film in an unnamed auditorium which is superimposed for three frames before we cut to credits, suspending the death of both Tyler and his system of political resistance and brand of remasculinisation.78

The position that this thesis takes on these somewhat Euripidean *deux ex machina* endings (an issue the thesis confronts in more detail in the concluding chapter) therefore is one in coherence with Giroux’s reading here. Though both Lester Burnham and Tyler Durden are vanquished by their respective films’ ends, it says nothing of their material ideologies in the social imaginary that vitally outlive their mortal screen presences and indeed the Narrator’s or Burnham’s wife, neighbour or anybody else in these films. The *hollowness* of dropping out is not enforced quite as loudly as the proposed opportunities this ideology may beckon; there simply is no ideological or lasting symmetry between what is quickly offered at the end

78 The concluding chapter continues to examine and evaluate these closures.
of these movies and what is apportioned to the majority of the film’s “joyous libidinal” moments, and in this sense the films may appear ideologically conservative once completed but their anarchic branches once embedded in the films, reach far beyond the closure.\textsuperscript{79}

Before the thesis continues to examine other elements of the \textit{fin de millenium} masculinity in crisis cinema, it is important to first fully consider and rationalise the textual, ideological and cultural ramifications and resonances examined in this chapter so far. One of the first inherently problematic effects of the \textit{idealised} tenets surrounding the apparent ‘masculine essence’, offered in the representation of ascetic and ‘drop-out’ counter-culture protagonists here, is just that, they are intrinsically idealistic. As a consequence, the ideological framework seems both unworkable and discriminatory by design. More than this the cinema seems to discriminate by the very same categories they deride. The drop-out and retreat to asceticism strategies that \textit{Fight Club}, \textit{The Matrix}, \textit{Office Space}, \textit{American Beauty} explicitly employ (and to add to this \textit{Instinct} (1999), \textit{Tarzan} (1999) and so on), and which other films in the collective are complicit to by proxy – i.e. by revealing a speculative disharmony between men and commodity capitalism as in films like \textit{American Psycho} and \textit{Payback} – rely on either fantastical departures from reality, or inherent, and contradictory \textit{financial} and \textit{capitalistic} props. Essentially, pragmatism is overridden by a distinctly utopian, and perhaps even capitalistic, idealism.

To demonstrate, there is an engagement with the supposed ‘problems’ of white-collar work and conspicuous consumption – they are shown to be isolationist, fragmentary, entrapping, with apparently feminising properties – but there is no real reactionary or \textit{structurally} ‘workable’ \textit{alternative} given that is distinguishable from the current form. The underlying problem seems to be that the \textit{structural} workings of capitalism, those that are imbricated in the malaise as emasculatory forces, are not destroyed by the

\textsuperscript{79} As Chapter Four reveals, far beyond the simplicity of Peberdy’s implicit claim of a dichotomy of equality also.
films ascetic promises. In the end their asceticism proves temporary, idealistic or both. How long does fight club operate before the Narrator has to hatch to plan to extort his white-collar wage from his boss? The club in fact could not run without it. Indeed, the scene in which the Narrator literally beats himself to near-unconsciousness in his boss’s office to extort money in exchange for silence may provoke a sense of titillation from the audience but it is decidedly paradoxical to the films ideological machinations. How can the audience resolve the contradiction of ‘drop-out of your white-collar work’ strategies when the very white-collar salary the Narrator makes in this position he needs to keep fight club functioning? In addition, and following the same pattern, how long does it take for Office Space’s Peter Gibbons to realise his dream of doing nothing will only become a reality if he embezzles money from his white collar employer? Further, and quite astonishingly, Lester Burnham in American Beauty also blackmails his boss to the sum of $60,000 so that he can live the ascetic lifestyle he desires. This is before we get to unrelenting criminal and professional thief Porter in Helgeland’s Payback who steals a wallet full of credit cards, and essentially the financial status, from a white-collared businessman in the opening sequences of the movie no less. Further, this unbreakable and contradictory expedience can also be deconstructed in more transparently pragmatic forms. As Jon Turteltaub’s Instinct recalls a certain anarcho-primitivist vision of authentic masculinity, Ethan Powell (Anthony Hopkins) takes, or rather retreats, to the African jungle in the films closure, recalling a Bly-like call for primitivism through his desire to de-clutter his life of all material values and ornamental cultures. But unresolved questions such as how did he have the money to purchase the flight, how did he get to the airport without a car and so on may be partially indulged by our suspension of disbelief once in the movie theatres, but remain floating in the air if we fully take in the films ideological messages.

Further to these seemingly paradoxical accounts of blue-collar values relying on white-collar finance, there are also further overhanging notions of utopian, or rather middle-class, idealism. When Tyler bursts through the
door of a convenience store in Fight Club and forces Raymond K. Hessel (Joon Kim) into a parking lot at gunpoint before announcing his imminent death, only to free the clerk on the condition that he return to college and work towards a professional career as a veterinarian – Hessel’s private dream – how much is he ignoring the financial practicalities of a working (class) man’s life? Henry Giroux (2001: 11) also noticed the ideological leap, deriding Tyler’s apolitical notion that choice is “an exclusively individual act, a simple matter of personal will that functions outside existing relations of power, resources, and social formations.” The parodic Patrick Bateman of American Psycho perhaps exposes this crass sense of idealism most potently. Urging a black vagrant to simply “Get a job” exposes Bateman’s fractured ignorance to the structural problems of employment and is an erasure of important social and economic realities.

The whole notion seems to fit in perfect synthesis with Dyer’s/Marcuse’s analysis of the relationship between the ideals of entertainment and those of capitalism. Firstly initiating the simplicity of dominant ideological production and prohibition with, “Class, race and sexual caste are denied validity as problems by the dominant (bourgeois, white, male) ideology of society. We should not expect show business to be markedly different”, Dyer exclaims that “there is one further turn of the screw” in the entertainment/capitalism relationship:

“the ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet. This abundance becomes consumerism, energy and intensity, personal freedom and individualism, and transparent freedom of speech. In other (Marcuse’s) words, it is a partially ‘one-dimensional’ situation. The categories of the sensibility point to gaps or inadequacies in capitalism, but only those gaps or inadequacies that capitalism proposes itself to deal with. At our worst sense of it, entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism” (Dyer 1999: 377)

From Dyer’s proposition then, although the films emphatically compromise their own premises, this is no more an ideological cheat than the majority of mainstream Hollywood movies. The fin de millenium cinema in this regard
quite simply falls for a familiar trapping in the entertainment formulation. However, this misgiving seems all the more important here because of how radical its initial premise is. It is a cinema that appears to position itself in direct opposition to the modern capitalist model; a model that it proposes as not only antagonistic to the ‘progress’ or ‘stability’ of mankind, but more precisely, as antagonistic to masculine ‘authenticity’ and identity. The contradictory nature of this effect is perhaps quite coherent and speaks eloquently of not only the crossroads facing modern genre films, but also of the very nature of the postmodern text. However, when this cinema fails to truly undeliver these kinds of messages in its narrative and ideological make up, preferring instead to let the ‘pleasures’ of capitalism and the ‘freedom’ it grants, albeit implicitly, reverberate across its apparent ascetic, anarchic and blue-collar imperatives, it haunts the film’s ideological make-up and coherent narrativity to a point it can no longer return from.

Further to this, there is also another inherently related ideological limitation to the cinema that one must address here. All the films seem to assume a very neatly caustic relationship between men and capitalism and consumption in the first instant. The cinema is built on an underlying logic that consumption and white-collar work practices are antithetical to the so-called ‘masculine essence’. Seeing consumers merely as dupes of advertising is increasingly more difficult, as is in fact assuming that workers are simply bearers of false consciousness imposed on them by the ruling class. With the legacy of Gramsci on much of the left, it is far less acceptable to refuse to take the ‘consent’ of people to consumerism seriously and to fail to try to understand its complexity. Moreover, the way that the cinema makes comment on consumption more than whispers of its intimations towards a distinctly middle-class ideology.

“One reason to pay especially careful attention to the politics of consumption today is that both globally and within individual countries the gaps between the richest and poorest segments of the population are widening” asserts Crystal Bartolovich (1998: 223). “Most of the planet still struggles to obtain basic subsistence; for them, consumption of mass
consumer goods is not even an issue. Even in wealthy nations, the consumption capacity is eroding for large numbers of the population.” Bartolovich then goes on to cite Richard Barnett’s (1994: 754) following statistics to emphasise this point:

“In recent years an estimated 18% of American workers with full-time jobs earned poverty-level wages... Every other black baby in America is born into a family living below the poverty line... Since 1973, the number of American children has increased 50%, so that 22% now grow up poor, and the number keeps increasing”.

Perhaps expecting any Hollywood film to concern itself wholly these daunting criteria is a little naïve, but it also relates to more global disparities within the culture of masculinity in crisis dialectic itself. Indeed, this ideology more forcefully springs from the reiteration of the elegiac cultural commentary, rather than the industrial commitments of entertainment canon.

The logic follows, rather flows, from the plaintive criticisms of Faludi et al. in the fin de millenium crisis critiques, and more precisely perhaps, as has been intimated, the call for masculine ascetic or anarcho-primitivism, stemming from such works as Robert Bly’s infamous Iron John (1991) and the mythopoetic men’s movement. Bly of course began running all-male workshops to reintroduce men to ‘the deep masculine’ in the late 1980s. Soon after he was also leading wilderness weekend retreats where men dressed in tribal masks and wild-animal costumes, beat drums and rediscovered ‘the beast within’ (Faludi 1991: 318); rural gatherings, staged as a response to consumer culture, the perceived ‘feminisation’ of society, and feminism (Peberdy 2010: 234). Of course the cinema never makes machinations towards the alternate view, that for many feminists and other critics of the mythopoetic men’s movement, the Wild Man (as Peberdy labels him) signifies the destructive nature of masculinity, its pathology; ultimately “nativist, separatist, homophobic, and expressed through concocted myths of ancient men’s rituals” (Connell 1993, 619 cited in Peberby 2010: 236).
It is an effect that would seem obviously derisible in most feminist takes on the crisis, but one in fact that crosses over in the implicit discourse of the elegiac accounts. Even Susan Faludi who at once panned Bly in her award winning Backlash (1991),\textsuperscript{80} leans towards his vision in her fin de millennium offering Stifed in 1999. Indeed, as Chapter One and the Introduction revealed, Faludi’s thesis asserts that American men have been sold an ornamental and commercial culture in which they have been ‘stiffed’ by being denied the opportunity to fulfill their true masculinity. Faludi locates much of the great betrayal historically, but also nostalgically, in the dislocations of ‘real men’s work’.

Donna Peberdy underscores this hagiography:

“Representations of male instability ordinarily exist apart from dominant or normative constrictions of masculinity, and they are often characterised by a desire or need to “return” to an earlier, more secure cultural moment for men. This idea is at the heart of Iron John, which admires the stoicism of the “fifties male,” bemoans the feminine “soft male” of the 1970s and calls for men to uncover the “deep” masculinity inherent in all men that has been hidden as a result of social and cultural changes of the past few decades, particularly feminism” (Peberdy 2010: 236)

In this way, asserts Peberdy, Bly’s work “appears to conform to a wider pattern in film and masculinity studies in seeing masculinity as either “hard” or “soft”” (ibid). But we must also read this valorisation of a dichotomy, with a more perfectible form, with the elegiac accounts of the crisis de facto.

Further, as the thesis has acknowledged, Faludi’s (1999) Stifed, Coward’s (1999) Sacred Cows and all the other elegiac accounts on masculine malaise at the apparent disease of male consumption and modern work practices seem evocatively misplaced when positioned in the direction of Other males. In fact could one not say that many urban black or Hispanic men, for example, have perpetually been in a state of enforced crisis, especially if this

crisis is largely defined or signalled by poor opportunities for employment? Frequently subjects of profound discrimination, the workplace in fact has often held a more hostile tension for Others than perhaps the predominantly white men in white collar jobs could ever relate to. Eternally underrepresented in almost every job pool, with exception to the lowest paid, they are supplanted here by white suburban middle-class men, who in relation to the complaints of Others, and indeed women, (an issue the thesis will come to later), have only an marginal axe to grind in relation to actual scales of disparity as the above figures from Bartolovich have indicated. Indeed, the crisis of work in the fin de millennium moment is formulated as a plight of the white collar. Work has become too easy. Men no longer use their hands to make a living. Machines, and women, have become a dominant part of the workforce (McDowell, 2003). But at least there is a workforce to a speak of, and one in which pay and working conditions far from exceed the expectations of those forced in work in lower job pools. Already alluding to the suggestion that the crisis of masculinity may well have been in fact more precisely a white, distinctly middle-class phenomenon, an effect echoed in the cinema examined thus far, it is also readily apparent as to why there was so much drift and disparity between the elegiac and plaintive camps of Faludi et al. and those found in the commentaries of those who deemed masculinity as pathological or who envisioned no crisis was taking place at all (Greer, 1999; Robinson 2000).

These fundamental issues lead us to already ask an important question: Do all men see the crisis in the same way? And if not, to borrow a line of inquiry initiated by Yvonne Tasker (1993: 103) in a different context; “…whose fantasy, [or perhaps rather utopia] is at stake in the evaluation?”

As these problems and limitations have already shown, this Hollywood cinema’s road to what may seem to be answers for the crisis is a muddy and deeply, often inherently, problematic terrain. The films seem to hope to find an unassuming language of material asceticism, turning their back on white-collar, media-fuelled Dreamscapes, instead pursuing a narrativity that follows a pattern of retreat, regression and nostalgia to old blue-collar or
‘drop-out’ values. But difficulties had arisen here. One is textual, perhaps even industrial, and has to do with the cinema’s propensity to offer only idealised and often distinctly unrealistic modes of dissent; whilst the other is cultural and ideological and stems from a distinctly elegiac practice of idealism; an idealism that excludes Others and seems both middle-class and inherently patriarchal in value given its non-recognition of the structural and economic limitations of real poverty, real unemployment, and structural limitations to the consumptive practices the films deride. However it is a practice that seems to be at the heart of the elegiac accounts of the masculinity in crisis issue and its surrounding cultural commentary. Seeming to replicate these anxieties and desires, the films also fall short of offering a wider understanding of what this crisis actually is and how in reality it may only be applicable to the dominant, patriarchal classes. Consequently, questions have already been provoked. Whose crisis of masculinity is it that this Hollywood cinema is connecting with? And further, what value can this cinema’s machinations for re-masculinsation have if they are so inherently unworkable?

The examination has also revealed how the ideological imperative of material asceticism had pragmatic holes and complications, while at the same time also exposed the fatalist assumption that men can only have a top-down relationship with consumption. But perhaps they revealed something deeper about the problematic terrain of the male in crisis cinema altogether, an effect that may reverberate in fact from their apparent lean on the New Lad subjectivity in certain moments of the films (a complication that the thesis will examine with more clarity in the conclusion). It seems to assume an escaping space from a non-negotiable and singular definition of masculinity; a definition in fact that may not be tenable.

The next chapter continues to examine the language of the fin de millenium cinema, and in extension to this chapter, which has already hinted at some of the issues surrounding this effect, the focus will is on Violence. Perhaps the most controversial tenet of the masculinity in crisis cinema, violence seems to have a place in the fin de millenium moment, both in these films
and in the surrounding culture, that seems quite unique to this cinema and
to this period of cultural history. Where this chapter revealed how Mary
Harron’s *American Psycho* had attempted to expose the horrors in the
‘violence of consumption’ in its parodic and exaggerated hyperreal account,
the next chapter examines how a large body of the *fin de millenium* cinema
conversely ‘use’ violence to authenticate a kind of masculine renewal from
the clutches of supposedly feminising forces of change.
CHAPTER THREE: Crisis and Violence

1999 was a distinctly violent year in America’s national history. As the last chapter detailed, the country was rocked by violent political anarchy at the ‘Battle in Seattle’ World Trade Demos in November and we can also add to this, amongst other notable events, a night of civil disobedience in uptown New York at Woodstock ’99 in July. As the thesis has begun to demonstrate, these events also interplayed with America’s film industry, and often in condemnatory ways. Not only had the critical presses noted some seemingly apparent textual interplays – especially between the black bloc demos of the ‘Battle’ and its visual symmetry with Fight Club’s Space Monkeys and Project Mayhem, for example (see last chapter) – but there were also some tangible industrial reverberations felt from the violent events that unfolded. Signalled by a postponed release date for David Fincher’s Fight Club, in addition to other industrial and censorial effects detailed later in this chapter, much of the moment’s violent cinema seemed to open up new and old debates surrounding examinations on violence and media effects in this somewhat epochal year.

These debates were no more vocal than those surrounding perhaps the year’s most violent domestic occurrence; a tragedy that saw 13 people killed, and 24 others seriously injured: the High School massacre of Littleton, Columbine, the biggest High School massacre in American history. It was an event that became shrouded not only in a language of despair, but when positioned in the cultural matrix, like the Battle in Seattle as demonstrated in the previous chapter, a language also of cultural crisis. Read by many as an exposition of the fissures of a new disgruntled male contingent, the event was also marked for its pathology, an apparent re-affirmation of self-actualisation by means of violence, much to the derision of many cultural commentators who pinned much of the violent ideology on the cinematic ‘spectacles’ permeating the cultural space at that time. It is an effect this chapter will come to in detail shortly.
Indeed, although some of the most viscerally violent cinema in Hollywood history, critiques surrounding the violent aesthetic of the fin de millennium cinema in general were almost always eclipsed by the ink that was spilled over the moral and cultural panic that the films apparently stimulated. Complaints about stylistic amplitude were shadowed by what was considered the underpinning morality of the behaviours themselves and as such recalled an, arguably earlier, more historic, style of film criticism. The reason for the moral consternation seemed quite simple. Much of the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema seemed to be suggesting, at least implicitly, that violence could be used as a way to assert ones masculine prowess, or more precisely, that violence can be used as a form of re-masculinisation.

Following on from the previous chapter, which examined the apparent cultural transition and its relationship to work and consumption, this chapter starts by detailing how the male body became the primary site, or rather canvas, at which the apparent cultural ‘emasculating’ process had taken place, concerning this time the image of maleness. After detailing how the male body had come to be a passive object of desire, this chapter examines how the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema seemingly attempted to ‘re-claim’ this space through violent means, and by doing so, reinstate a stoic sense of masculinity. Indeed, rather than just an assertion or display of masculine prowess in order to qualify a masculine presence to work through the malaise, like the drive to ascetic cultures examined in the previous chapter, this chapter also reveals how violence, and in particular violence of a masochistic or self-destructive nature, became a modality of resistance against ‘feminising’ forces in the fin de millennium crisis cinema.

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Kendrick (2002: 14) argues, for example, that critiques on film violence have become increasingly based on screen images rather than ideologies: “... when viewers complain about the level of violence in the movies, they are usually talking about the stylistic amplitude, not the behaviours themselves, which marks a significant change from the early years of cinema when would-be censors were more concerned about the behaviours depicted”.
The body

In the early 1980s, a host of explicit, dramatic, and extremely public changes to the male ‘image’ began to appear. They have “turned men into stone”, claimed Herbert Muschamp in 1999 in the *New York Times Magazine*, “in which men assume the passive role once assigned almost exclusively to women”. In reference to one of the most early and “flagrantly erotic” campaigns on male eroticisation and objectification, the 1983 Calvin Klein underwear ad campaign, in which an image of male model Tom Hintnaus stood passively towering over Times Square in nothing but his tight white Calvin Klein briefs, Muschamp claimed that we had witnessed the emergence a “Cult of the Beautiful Boy,” representing the “most revolutionary tools yet devised in the history of consumer manipulation.” Identifying this change in the male image as “beefcake for the masses,” Muschamp concluded that the change represented “acceptance” of a new “all-American” role for men by “the cultural mainstream.”

Where once images of women dominated advertising and magazine spaces, increasingly men’s bodies were taking their place alongside females on billboards, in fashion photography, and large circulation magazines. However, as Muschamp’s early reaction had illustrated, it was not simply that the number of images of the male body had increased. More significant was the emergence of a new kind of representational practice in mainstream popular culture, a practice that depicted male bodies in idealised and eroticised fashions and formats, coded in ways that give permission for them to be looked at and desired (Moore, 1988; Simpson, 1994).

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83 That is not to say that the idealisation of the male body was a new phenomenon. Perhaps the best-known examples of body idealisation are the classical Greek and Roman sculptures. In addition, early bodybuilder and pioneer of physical culture, Eugen Sandow, became internationally famous in the late nineteenth century by posing as the classical idealised man. “Sandow’s success as a performer of masculinity suggested the changing status of gender in the modern world. His physique was widely interpreted not simply as an individual achievement but as a reaffirmation of male identity at a time when it seemed to be losing authority and coherence” (Kasson 2001: 76).
Indeed, the coding of the male body “to be looked at” (Mulvey, 1975) disrupted conventional patterns of ‘looking’ per se, in which “men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger, 1972: 47). Away from the classic and somewhat essentialist cultural perspective, the male (and his body) had become an object of the gaze rather than simply the bearer of the look. Further, the toned, sculpted form became culturally perceived as the body exemplary, his was the body to have and behold. However, his body was also instinctively passive. “Men are meat,” declared Dotson (1999: 3) in 1999

“... their naked bodies hoisted up on larger-than-life billboards, flashed across movie and television screens, frozen in print advertisements, displayed on props and playthings in music videos, begged for in pornography, silenced in erotica, shamed into dieting, chopped up in cosmetic surgery centers. Words such as objectification, glorification, exploitation, and stereotyping come to mind. These words once rang as battle cries from women who were sick and tired of having their bodies turned into plastic toys. These words that help spark a movement toward equality are words of war.”

As Chapter One has examined, a variety of explanations have been put forward to account for this shift in ‘visual culture’, variously crediting feminism, the style press, and new patterns of consumerism, and we can add to this the marketing of heterosexual women’s desire (an effect that will be examined in the next chapter) with responsibility (Nixon, 1996; Mort, 1996; Moore, 1988; Simpson, 1994; Featherstone, 1991; Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Edwards, 1997). But while the reasons for the shifts in visual culture remain contested and largely speculative, there is widespread agreement that a significant change had at least taken place in which men’s bodies had gone from near invisibility to hypervisibility in the course of a decade.

What was also clear was that in 1999, a section of Hollywood cinema made its intervention into these debates. The fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema vehemently petitioned, and waged their own “war”, to borrow from Dotson (1999), with these burgeoning ornamental and image cultures.
Representing the emerging cultures as forcefully incompatible with being a \textit{real} man and inherently defamatory to the masculine essence, they challenged the new patterns of looking and its imbricating relationship with new modalities of consumption.

\textit{Fight Club} director David Fincher seemed to set the tone, extending the logic of Dotson’s “Men are meat” with an assertion of participatory passivity when he asserted in \textit{Film Comment}, “We’re designed to be hunters and we’re in a society of shopping. There’s nothing to kill anymore, there’s nothing to \textit{fight}, nothing to overcome, nothing to explore. In that societal emasculation this everyman is created.”\textsuperscript{84} The complex has also been reiterated by feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1999: 179), who, whilst finding some liberating qualities in the emergence of the eroticised male, seems to agree with Fincher’s tonality insisting that while “Feminists might like to imagine that Madison Avenue heard our pleas for sexual equality and finally gave us ‘men as sex objects,’” what has really happened is that “women [and not men] have been the beneficiaries of what might be described as a triumph of pure consumerism – and with it, a burgeoning male fitness and beauty culture.”\textsuperscript{85} Here Bordo exposes the breadth of the complaint, at least concerning commercial culture, to reach far beyond the simple elegies of those plaintive readers of the masculine malaise in the moment.

In the ecstatic blood rites of \textit{Fight Club} and much of the other the \textit{fin de millennium} cinema however, the emasculated, image and material obsessed, and acutely ‘feminised’ modern man – the maître ‘d in \textit{Fight Club}, the cubicle dwellers in \textit{Office Space, The Matrix, American Beauty} and, we can now add to this, the male pin-up – was to find the meaning corporate and commercial society denies him. Distinctly Faludian in their lament, particularly her conclusion that men now existed within the domain of the “beauty queen,”

“trapped in Miss America’s boudoir” or in “ornamental imprisonment”, the films attempt to deliver a very violent, at times masochistic, way out.\textsuperscript{86}

But how did this work? And furthermore, how can we assess the proposition? Can we ever defend violence, or is it always a politically deadening and inherently suppressive source of action? And to add ideological question, or rather repeat it, in reference to another scheme of movies with violent, somewhat masculinist, cinematic representation: do these ubiquitous [violent] images “repeat, mourn, or hysterically state a lost male power?” (Tasker 1993: 109).\textsuperscript{87} The next section of this chapter will begin to examine the textual representations of such attempts of re-masculinisation in the \textit{fin de millennium} masculinity in crisis cinema and, whilst answering some of these questions, will begin to engage with some of the ideological imperatives that seemed to underline this discursive notion of violence as redemption. In addition, this section will begin assessing if these ideological propositions replicate the terms of the wider cultural discourse and, further, will examine the apparent complications that this modality seems to offer.

**Violence as (re)masculinisation**

It has been well documented and almost always with a tone of censure in the scholarly and popular presses, that Tyler Durden, the “Nietzschean Robin Hood,”\textsuperscript{88} sanctions the use of violence to restore a kind of masculine dignity to the supposed benighted American male. The virtual panic of the Narrator's ornamental anxiety, “what kind of dining set defines me as a person” (which is distinctly proposed as a feminine anxiety) is obliterated by the more pertinent and visceral realisation of destruction and pain.


\textsuperscript{87} It is a question originally referring, of course, to '80s 'hard body' action cinema.

*Fight Club*, in addition to much of the other representations of violent practices in the *fin de millennium* crisis cinema, inverts the values of the feminised corporate world – which for them is cold, lifeless and sterile – to a corporeal and destructive world – which is potently alive, primal, dangerous and seemingly hypermasculine. The men in the ‘club’ attain not only a kind of high through flirting with violence, but also a sense of freedom and liberation from their caged lives. Further to this, the underlying implication as Ridley (1999 cited in Beynon 2002: 133) somewhat joyously trumpeted, is that “Real men are biologically pre-disposed to aggression”, jousting that *Fight Club* itself was a refreshing relief from the stultifying influence of “pansy new men” in touch with their feminine sides and all-too-willing to express emotions, in which he had been “lectured too often from the screen that men can be redeemed by touchy-feely therapy”.

Following the language of biological determinism, the film suggests that violence may be the ultimate form of proof of hypermasculine virulence; and not only in ways of authenticating ‘being’ a ‘real’ man, but also in the secondary of not being a ‘woman’, against the riptide of feminisation. Indeed, beyond *Fight Club* the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema suggests, that not only are modern men physically and mentally ‘soft’ because they have been seduced into abandoning traditional masculine values, but they are also consequently no longer ‘real’ men as a result.

The suggestion seems inherently similar to the ‘80s Hollywood muscular action model in which Richard Sparks (1996: 348) has proposed that the way the ‘hard body’ films of the ‘80s “dignify and celebrate the suffering and striving of their leading men” may be in actual fact “quite centrally indicative of durable sensibilities regarding the qualities and virtues seen as defining manliness; and moreover, that some of the more drastic reaffirmations of rugged masculinity [in this cinema] are in reaction against instabilities in current notions of masculine gender identities.” In short, the muscle cinema was ascribed as an agent of reaffirmation, a symbol of defiantly stoic, ‘traditional’ and retributive masculinity against the increasingly threatening
fissures of gender change and national and patriarchal authority (Jeffords, 1994).

But where the ’80s canon places violence alongside an exterior request in the narrative make-up of the movie – for example on a mission to save a captured family member (Commando, 1985) or rescue hostages (Rambo: First Blood Part II, 1985; Predator, 1987; Die Hard, 1988) – what marks much of the fin de millennium cinema as rather unique is that violence is not incidental to such exterior requests. The violence contained in the ‘80s “muscle cinema”, as Gronstad (2008) has suggested, seems unavoidable yet accidental; that is, the characters of these earlier narratives become enmeshed in the vortex of violence while pursuing other ends and activities. The principal attachment of Fincher’s, Harron’s, Helgeland’s, the Wachowski brother’s heroes and so on, on the other hand, is to the teleology of the violent modality. Violence becomes a means to its own ends. The interiority of violence is evident in Fight Club, American Psycho, Payback, The Matrix, Turteltaub’s Instinct, the gruelling 10-round savage draw in Play it to the Bone, and so on. Even in the ‘fin de millennium’ Bond film, violence is given more interiority by virtue of the dichotomy the film creates by setting (mortal) Bond against the villainy of literally ‘unfeeling’ Victor Renard (see below). Indeed, violence is both the method and the cure for the pervading masculine malaise in much of the fin de millennium cinema.

To elaborate, and to move more precisely towards the kinds of violence these films contain, whilst stellar sadism is gratuitously employed as the protagonist’s apportion massive and skilled punishment to their feminised and ornamental enemies as distinguished in the last chapter, in addition to this, and perhaps more importantly, the cinema also attest to a culture of masochism. The importance of suffering as an essentially manly trait is emphasised in line with the films devotion to ascetic cultures. Not only must sadism align with masochism as Brown (2002: 123) has asserted – “in constructing a superior and unified image of masculinity” – but importantly another marked difference is made here between the fin de millennium violent cinematic discourse and those that have preceded it, and it is further
linked to the function of the violence rather than the cause. As Yvonne Tasker (1993: 116) has insisted on ‘80s action cinema, “While the [archetypal] action hero is repeatedly subject to suffering within the narrative of which he is centre, it is his triumph over his suffering that has been critically emphasised” (Tasker 1993: 116). This is not the case in the violent films of the fin de millennium cinema however, and this is crucial. Rather it is the suffering itself that has the central focus. Tyler’s brutal, near-biblical, beating for ownership of the fight club space in the basement of Lou’s Tavern for example, proves not only his ability to take a beating, but potently his desire to. He invites injurious destruction to his body imaginary and face until under the blood and gore they are distinctly unrecognisable. “I wanted to destroy something beautiful” relents the Narrator after exerting a similar kind of punishment on the aptly named Angel Face (Jared Leto) in one of the ‘club’s’ organised fights. “Even the Mona Lisa is falling apart,” asserts Tyler in another scene as the Narrator plucks a loose tooth from his bloody mouth into a mouldy bathroom sink in Paper Street. The film essentially problematises the notion that masochism is passive, rather, Fight Club inverts the psychoanalytic discourse, vis-à-vis Freudian models, by using masochism as a form of powerful dissent.

Indeed, the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema in general attempts to reclaim the body politic by implicitly turning their back on it. Men’s bodies, the canvas on which the kind of ‘feminisation’ this chapter has earlier detailed has taken place, and where, for the elegiac readers of the altering state of the body politic, much of the war between masculine and feminine occurs, makes it a logical place for destruction. To destroy the body is to destroy the feminisation. As it was for commodities and decadent domestic spaces in the last chapter, irreverence also takes extension to the body-image. In their drive for masochistic ‘cleansing’, they systematically punish the body, in effect for being on display, for being ‘feminised’. They take the body imaginary of the ‘90s commercial, feminine world and they alternatively pummel it. The films implicate their protagonist’s bodies in another kind of body ‘project’: that of regulating ‘normative’, ‘traditional’
masculinity. Against the New Men and metrosexual ‘types’ which privilege the commodified body and beautify the male aesthetic, these men align with the antithesis, they essentially de-commodify the body; they punish it reflexively and in the literal sense and align with the (self) destructive.

It is the sentiment of violence that holds relevance here. Durden and the ‘club’ invite pain and injury to assert a sense of ‘ascetic’ manliness. “Fight Club wasn’t about winning or losing,” asserts the Narrator in voice over. “When the fight was over, nothing was solved. But nothing mattered. Afterwards, we all felt saved,” he muses while in awe of a puddle of his own dripping blood. Indeed, as the film’s revelation reveals, fight club began with only one man and his fists taking pleasure in punching himself in the face and body in an empty parking lot. It is indeed this invitation to injury, and against the logic of the need to be victor, that both established the club in the first instant and perpetuates its growth and swelling number of members.

In the same sense, as the last chapter revealed, Helgeland’s Porter’s “payback,” in the 1999 film of the same name is not about the money but about his willingness to take a beating in order to get his retribution. “Pain is the whole point of Payback,” claims Australian journalist Lea Bronwyn (2004). The claim seems both secure and logical when held against Porter’s masochistic journey through the film. He is shot in the back in the film’s opening segment, has the bullets removed by a drunken would-be, physician, he is run over by a car and is beaten up by the mob, a violent Chinese gang and two corrupt police officers, before his toes are smashed with a sledgehammer. Levy agrees, even in a way that the violence of Payback usurps the films generic conventions; as the film review title in Variety declares, “Payback forsakes noir for gore” (Levy 1999: 74). So excessive and so repetitive is the violence that Porter is subjected to that a

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89 We can also add a near-mirroring sentiment in fin de millennium masculinity in crisis Ron Shelton’s Play it to the Bone (1999), a film in which two best friends, Cesar Dominguez (Antonio Banderas) and Vince Boudreau (Woody Harrelson), compete in a 10-round boxing title match, only to take ultimate satisfaction in the contest being decided a draw.
New York Magazine review wondered, “we’re never entirely sure if this avenger isn’t on his rampage in order to get the crap beat out of him” (Rainer, 1999). And diegetically, “He doesn’t want to say anything. He just wants to get himself beat up, that’s all,” exclaims frustrated outfit Vice President Fairfax at Porter’s resistance, just after he has sustained a massive beating whilst tied to a chair in a disused warehouse, and just before, in fact, the toe smashing.

Also in The Matrix, Neo must suffer the pain of rebirth and body plugs before he can be awakened in the ‘Real’ world. He must even invite injury to the point of his ‘virtual death’ in order to prove he is the ‘One’ in the films climax. But perhaps the most acute example in this cinema can be offered by the dichotomous characterisations represented in Michael Apted’s The World is Not Enough, where unlike Bond, Renard, the films paradigmatic villain, is literally unable to feel pain and consequently is rendered as not only a sadist, but also outwardly cowardice, and by invocation ‘feminine’, in the film. Indeed, it is an effect that in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema separates heroes from villains. The inference is that he is less of a man than Bond, who puts his mortal body at risk, whilst Renard simply cannot complete the same transaction or level of hypermasculine heroism.

There are some clear ideological problems, however, with this kind of promise of masculine renewal through an assertion of violence. One of the first issues that must be taken into consideration here are the machinations behind the use of violence itself in the context of the culture in which it is ‘displayed’. While violence may use all the visible aspects of male utility – strength, decisiveness, courage, even skill – its actual effectiveness in regards to actual change is rendered rather vacant and incidental. The violence contained in this cinema stands in for action and re-masculinisation and is also an act of concealment, a threatening mask that hides a kind of lack. Indeed, the assertion that this kind of violence can be used as a form of redemption seems rather clinically empty when the violence has no real use or utility, other than to induce a performance of a temporary mechanism. They are violent as a means to cover up their emasculation, rather than
address it. To take *Fight Club* as a case in point, Tyler Durden/the Narrator organises fights where the men orchestrate a sense of masochism as a middle finger to the feminising propensity of image-culture and ‘soft’ emasculating white-collar living. But then they put their white collars back on, quite literally, and leave. Throughout the film the Narrator stresses messages like “When the fight was over, nothing was solved, but nothing mattered” and “You weren’t alive anywhere like you were there. But fight club only exists in the hours between when the fight club starts and when fight club ends”, and inadvertently he uncovers the deferred, incomplete and fragmentary nature of the violent action and its underpinning ideology.

When Porter invites injury in *Payback* as a way to seemingly up his virility and evidence that he has not been affected by the ornamental cultures of those around him, he has to perpetually take this route in order to realise the ideology. The promises of re-masculinsation are endlessly deferred. He takes only momentary solace in the pain and bruises which is why in effect they are habitually and endlessly performed. We can add to this *The Matrix*’s implicit confrontation with re-masculinsation where Neo is only shown as Heroic in the films battle sequences. Also in boxing narrative *Play it to the Bone*, a measured sense of virility is only offered in the temporal moments of the round. Violent masochism is only a sticking plaster for the real problem that, yet again, seems to come down to an incoherent and deficient in handling of the cultural change. Masculinity flows through utility not re-enactment. Though appearing to authenticate virility through performed and regulated codes of punishment they have no apparent intrinsic use or value. The methodology is still just as defunct and un-functional as those codes they deride.

In reviewing the violence in David Fincher’s *Fight Club*, for example, Henry Giroux cautioned that the violent acts in the film are “reduced to acts of senseless brutality, pathology, and an indifference to human suffering. Reproducing such hackneyed representations of violence (‘senseless,’ ‘random’), they conclude where engaged political commentary should begin” (2001: 38-39). In fact cultural theorist Henry Giroux has continually
voiced his discontent for how he sees that representations of violence in contemporary Hollywood cinema have been a major factor in the “re-emergence of a new kind of reactionary politics, cynicism and an erasure of important social realities” (Kendrick 2002: 20). Jennifer Barker (2008: 175) also asserts that *Fight Club* shares with other late twentieth-century blockbusters “the practice of stylistically invoking politics and realism without connections to their complex machinations: spectacular violence replaces political dialogue and detailed physical grittiness substitutes for actual realism.” In *Fight Club*, “the heterosexual white male, betrayed by corporations and bureaucrats, can only restore his natural superiority via his body,” cautions Barker, “which prevails even though it is pummelled, tortured and wounded” (179).  

Giroux and Barker therefore see only a lack and a kind of emptiness in the assertions of violence and masochism. Indeed, if the vehicle to re-masculinisation is not attached to a more perennial and unbroken form of change it cannot sustain any real *utility*. 

To continue, Tyler Durden and the Narrator step on a bus in *Fight Club* and are confronted by a poster advertisement for fashion giant Gucci. It shows the toned oiled headless torso of a male model, dressed only in his underwear. The Narrator, now well on his way to ‘freedom’ immediately snubs, "Is that what a *real* man looks like?" Tyler retorts, “Self-improvement is masturbation, now self-destruction…” Though the statement is left open, the audience is left to observe that Tyler is enforcing a conceptual reading that the use of such surface rituals are only masturbatory compared to the real *indexical* testaments of authentically virile masculine pursuits, such as the fighting he propagates throughout the film. But does fight club, that is the ‘club’ itself, really deride these codes? Is the fighting in *Fight Club*, and to extend this to the other films in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema, the violence in *Payback*, the violence contained in *Instinct* and so on,

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90 Emphasis mine.
91 The image is remarkably similar in fact to the one of male model, Tom Hintnaus, Herbert Muschamp (1999) describes above as ushering in the “Cult of the Beautiful Boy,” and “beefcake for the masses,” for “the cultural mainstream.”
really the **indexical** ‘coitus’ of masculine virility? Without the promise of structural change, is it any more than a masturbatory than the image culture that they deride? In short, the film essentially derides its own codes. However the code also echoes something even more perverse than this. If the masochistic vehicle to re-masculinisation requires repeated and endlessly deferred advances, as this chapter has already revealed, in this way the violence is like commodity culture itself – a temporary promise, regulated by a deferred climax.

However, that being said, because the films are bound by codes of performed masculinity, that is they allow anyone to participate in the promises of these, albeit temporary, forms of re-masculinisation, they do allow a certain degree of what we could label existential freedom. For example, although the fixes are temporary in Durden’s fight club, they still allow an open space for men to join in the ‘display’, an effect that can be seen represented textually perhaps by the club’s swelling numbers. However, it was an effect that was also echoed in ‘Reality’, when ‘real’ ‘fight club’s’ began to pop up around the United States and beyond after the films release. While some may have found the liberty of the clubs as exhilarating as Fincher’s fight club members, for many other cultural observers the clubs signalled a threatening and dangerous subculture, and indeed there has to be a caution to a philosophy that implores violence as redemption. In fact, it was *Fight Club*’s propensity for imitation that stirred many critical positions on the violence exhibited to scold the film. But Fincher’s *Fight Club* was just one of many media texts rebuked in the press around this time for its position on violence. Its critique was supplemented in fact by a more general decry of public pugilism. Bare-knuckle boxing, the antecedent of the film’s ‘club’, for example, took to the critical stage across the Atlantic in the UK, following an apparent insurgence of illegal contests in which the *Independent on Sunday* claimed, also in heart of the *fin de millennium* moment, “You’d be surprised at the background of some of the followers. Lords, businessmen, politicians, even high-ranking cops will travel the country to see two men pit their wits

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against each other”.

So great was the concern of what was seen as a threateningly violent male uprising, that amidst the release of Fight Club, a graphic British documentary about the sport by award-winning filmmaker David Monaghan, Bare Fist, was banned by British Board of Film Classification, namely for its promotion of “gross” violence.

Moreover, while Fight Club was passed by the appropriate censorship bodies, much to the contempt of the Bare Fist director who saw the violence of his film as “tame” by comparison, it was in reality, in the UK at least, only after the same censorship body, the BBFC, had imposed certain cuts of their own. Fight Club approached the BBFC with an ‘18’ certificate request from its distributor, 20th Century Fox, but there were concerns under the existing guidelines about the glamorisation of violence and the potential for encouraging an interest in organised bare-fist fighting. The final decision was the film required cuts of between six and seven seconds to two scenes, both of which, it was felt, focused on the pleasures of violence. The first cut was in the scene where Lou thrashes Tyler Durden in the basement of his club, and consisted of an instruction to reduce the heavy and explicit punches to the head during the one-sided fight. Reductions in violence were also required in the scene where the Narrator fights Angel Face. Here some of the images of blows to the face at the end of the fight were removed, again surrounding concerns of gratuity, and attached to this, moral infringements of masochistic/sadistic thrill-seeking.

As the BBFC proved, it wasn’t just that Fincher’s film simply imbued a violent aesthetic that got the critical society so worked up upon Fight Club’s release, although as the thesis details below the aesthetic portrayal of violence did stir up some serious denunciation in the critical presses. In a

93 Ridley, Y. and Goodchild, S., 1999. Bare knuckle is all the rage, Independent on Sunday, 19 September.
94 Andreas Whittam Smith, the new BBFC president, said Bare Fist promoted “gross” violence, including how to lace bandaged fists with glass fragments for lethal effect. Cited in ibid.
95 Ridley, Y. and Goodchild, S., 1999. Bare knuckle is all the rage. Independent on Sunday, 19 September.
96 See <http://www.sbbfc.co.uk/CaseStudies/Fight_Club>
film where in actual fact only one person dies, the intimation of the ideology behind the violence seemed to be of most concern. It had become an issue of moral objection not just aesthetic dissatisfaction. Indeed, as the chapter has detailed, whilst the film showed viscerally violent content, behind the violent imagery sits a serious implication that a cure for the masculine malaise, the elegiac voice behind the crisis-in-masculinity dialogues, resides quite heavily in re-masculinisation through violence. By extension, as the thesis has also detailed, it is an assertion that almost all the fin de millennium crisis cinema underscores, at least implicitly. From Kinka Usher's Mystery Men to boxing narrative Play it to the Bone, the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema seemed to attach a dogmatic principle of violence with masculine renewal. The problem with that of course when coupled with the propensity of imitating these codes is what we are left with is a cinematic projection of an unsecured assertion that violence could offer a path to redemption and a way in which to dispel your masculine dissatisfaction. For many cultural commentators, the effect seemed to surface in the most terrifying of ways where a similar invocation of violence with masculine renewal was already a resonating in the ‘real’ cultural moment. In fact for author and anti-sexist campaigner Jackson Katz, and filmmaker and communication scholar Sut Jhally (1999) the synthetic promise of masculine renewal through violence was causal to the seemingly cultural rise of white, suburban male violence in the period.

Shootings that seemed to make no sense, where many of the victims were shot seemingly at random, began to occur in high schools across the United States in the late 1990s. The trend really began on February 2, 1996, in which Barry Loukaitis, who shot three students and his teacher at his High School in Moses Lake, started an endemic cycle of school shootings. With dozens of similar incidents occurring by the end of the decade, it was in Littleton, Columbine that the school shootings would be taken to another extremity. On April 20, 1999, right in the heart of the fin de millennium moment, 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold, embarked on a massacre, killing 12 students and one teacher. They also injured 21
other students directly, and three people were injured while attempting to escape before the pair then committed suicide.

Critics made a more than casual reproach of media influences and spectacles they said to influence each of the tragedies. And though age-old and ubiquitously undetermined, they found potent evidence, particularly in the Columbine Massacre. Posed in the critical and popular presses as a cultural echo of increasingly violent representation in the media industries, the Columbine Massacre opened up a whole new set of debates on media effects. Particular exception in fact was taken with one of the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis films. The Wachowski brother’s *The Matrix*, was considered to be a *direct* influence for Klebold and Harris, seen for many in the *aesthetic* interplay between the high school killers – who had reportedly seen the film just a few weeks before the massacre took place – and the onscreen protagonists Neo (Keanu Reeves) and Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss). As Neo entered a large public building, indiscriminately firing a series of automatic weapons sporting a black trench coat and armed to the near point of absurdity, an equally violent Trinity who clutches a duffel bag holding even more artillery closely follows him; so too grainy private-made-public images of Klebold and Harris from closed circuit cameras and berated hysterical eyewitness accounts mimetically reflected the same imaginary.

Such was the media fascination with assigning, at least partial, accountability with *The Matrix* for the incident, that production company Warner Bros were forced to only give the film its ‘home release’ on DVD format rather than VHS. With the DVD market still in its infancy, the hope was that it would quell young people purchasing the film. Though it failed to produce the effects of its intended outcome, becoming paradoxically a colossal big seller, topping the year-end charts (Clover, 2004: 49), the actions of Warner Bros did go a long way to establish the symbiotic overflow between fact and fiction in this cultural moment, or at least a cultural reading of it. In fact, the whole notion seemed no more pertinent in the cementing revelation that Klebold and Harris believed ‘new violence’ icon Quentin Tarantino or even Steven Spielberg would make a film about their
homicidal exploits, blurring the distinctions between real and reel and the cultural overflow at this time (Larkin, 2007: 176).

The propensity of the school yard shootings to seemingly echo the media spectacle, therefore, made the films at the fin de millennium moment all the more pertinent for the critical academe. They were quick to highlight the dangerous and problematic assertions that the films were invoking, not only in the visual but also what has been established here, an underlying implicit ideology that a sense of masculine renewal can be assuaged through violence. Indeed, the schoolyard shootings seemed inherently linked to the masculinity in crisis issue in general. This was certainly the reading of Jackson Katz and Sut Jhally, who made an appeal that the events must be looked at in terms of the relationship to masculinity. In The Boston Globe May 2, 1999 they asserted:

The events at Columbine High School 12 days ago have plunged us into a national conversation about “youth violence” and how to stop it. Proposals came last week from all corners - the Oval Office, Congress, living rooms across America. That we are talking about the problem is good; but the way we are talking about it is misdirected.

It is tempting to look at the murderous attack in Littleton as a manifestation of individual pathologies, an isolated incident involving deeply disturbed teenagers who watched one too many video games. That explanation ignores larger social and historical forces, and is dangerously shortsighted. Littleton is an extreme case, but if we examine critically the cultural environment in which boys are being socialized and trained to become men, such events might not appear so surprising.

Political debate and media coverage keep repeating the muddled thinking of the past. Headlines and stories focus on youth violence, "kids killing kids," or as in the title of a CBS "48 Hours" special, "Young Guns." This is entirely the wrong framework to use in trying to understand what happened in Littleton - or in Jonesboro, Ark., Peduach, Ky., Pearl, Miss., or Springfield, Ore.

This is not a case of kids killing kids. This is boys killing boys and boys killing girls.
What these school shootings reveal is not a crisis in youth culture but a crisis in masculinity. The shootings - all by white adolescent males - are telling us something about how we are doing as a society, much like the canaries in coal mines, whose deaths were a warning to the miners that the caves were unsafe.

They continued,

Looking at violence as gender-neutral has the effect of blinding us as we desperately search for clues about how to respond.

The issue is not just violence in the media but the construction of violent masculinity as a cultural norm [...] the culture produces a stream of images of violent, abusive men and promotes characteristics such as dominance, power, and control as means of establishing or maintaining manhood.

Making a virtual connection here between not just how the aesthetics of violence are interplayed in media discourses in ways that provoke imitation, but also how the ideologies of violence can be used as a way of “maintaining manhood”, Katz and Jhally point to the intrinsic political and cultural problematics, therefore, of the fin de millennium cinematic model. It may be possible here to read the cinema and its intimations of violence as (masculine) redemption as a cohesively dangerous (mal)practice. This is not to say that the thesis leans to an assertion that the tragic events of Columbine were indexical of the cinema, that is that the cinema informed and urged Klebold and Harris to commit the atrocities, but rather that the cinema is a representation of the same ubiquitously gendered ideology where both the event and its virtual representation underscore the same ideological footing, and echo around each other in a similar language. The events of Columbine and the ideologies impressed on the screen in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema seemed at least to stem from an inherently similar foundation, a foundation vitally related to masculine renewal.

However, perhaps a more obvious point is being missed here. If Hollywood cinema in general did not systemically play to the aesthetic values of pin-up
culture and male body idealism in the first instant, they would not have to invest so much time in much of the fin de millennium cinema trying to ‘undo’ these codes. In essence, the movies would not have to worry about the implicit projection of media styled idealisations of aestheticised, ornamental bodies if they were not complicit to these standards in the first instant. They construct exemplar bodies in the aura of the films diegetic and the all-important extra diegetic fan cultures and spaces and then try to devour them in the same diegesis, but it seems there is something inherently wrong with the foundations of this practice in which they offer a cure for their own poisonous tendencies.

Moreover, this practice makes the cinema distinctly unconvincing in its fascination with parodying the ideologies of “is this what a man is supposed to like?” mantras as Durden/Pitt mocks in Fight Club when he notices the poster of a Gucci underwear ad showing a rippling semi-naked male torso (see above); the image is just too oxymoronic for contemplation – his body looks, and to a large degree is framed, just like Tyler’s performer Brad Pitt. Further, although Fincher declared that he did not want Pitt’s pin-up star status to drive the films point of sales, arguing that the film is antithetical to such drives,97 he was clearly being naïve. The Hollywood industry itself is driven by such commercial and pin-up cultures. As Hollywood is bound by the logic of star imagery, they endure a bitter but inherent problematic here, in all their proclamations to the antithesis, heroic men are also beautiful men in much of Hollywood’s cinema; an effect even the fin de millennium cinema falls victim to and to the most contradictory of outcomes.

There is a less threatening, but equally well-trodden, problem with the intellectual foothold of the fin de millennium cinema’s gravitation towards masochism. As this chapter has examined, in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema’s hopes to absolve the male pin-up and image-based culture that it deems is “turning men to stone”, even more caustically

for the pleasure for an increasingly dominant and empowered (heterosexual) female contingent, they habitually have their protagonists beaten up, or invite injury to prove a stoic sense of masculine sensibility and to prove feminine the passive alternative. However, Jeffrey A. Brown (2002) has exposed an inherent problem with this kind of invocation. In a work examining “The Tortures of Mel Gibson”, and therefore a piece inherently tied the fin de millennium cinema and his role as Porter in Helgeland’s Payback, Brown realises that “the visual evidence of physical suffering on display in Gibson's films enhances his sex symbol status by clearly positioning the character's masculinity as undeniably heterosexual and authentic” (Brown 2002). In fact for Brown, “Gibson’s persona as a male ideal is dependent on both his status as a tough guy and as a sex symbol, and it is his characters’ ability to withstand and even laugh in the face of torture that makes the two sides compatible; that incorporates the momentary disempowerment within a symbol of greater manliness. Indeed, Gibson, [like Pitt, Reeves, Bale and so on] is forever “...being bashed. [But] bruises and lacerations are central to his image, and pain buys him admiration, sympathy and sex appeal. The more masochistic, the more manly”.\(^98\) Indeed, Brown exposes an implicit problem here, or rather contradiction. The films want to use masochism as a defence to objectification, but as Brown here asserts, much of the fascination with the pin-up heroes is driven by such masochistic aesthetics. Brown, as such, not only proves the invocation is unsuccessful, but also exposes how the praxis is built on a false logic.

In fact, the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema’s seeming inability to extract itself from the trappings of the objectified male body echoes throughout its genres. “Even though I’ve seen almost every animated film since Bambi I won’t be paying $9.50 this summer to see Tarzan,” stated Kevin Colleary of the New York Times (1999):

“This has nothing to do with the quality of the movie itself, which critics have almost universally praised. No, my problem is that this new Tarzan

\(^98\) Emphasis mine.
has the exaggerated musculature of too many male cartoon characters and toys. These ubiquitous images create an unrealistic and unhealthy model for young boys. Tarzan could be an excellent model for boys and girls, showing the need to be active and physically fit. He grew up exercising regularly, eating right and swinging through the jungle. It would be refreshing to see a well-proportioned Tarzan. Instead we have a hyperpumped Tarzan. A body like his could have been created only in the thoroughly modern jungle we call a gym.”

Colleary alludes to just how much the fin de millennium cinema, rather than dislocating the image-obsessed logic of supposedly feminising cultural forces, actually purported them. The “hyperpumped” bodies, which were complexly ‘designed’ to at once expose masculine virility and at the same time allow for their aesthetic disavowal as proof of an un-feminised essence, also unavoidably propelled the supposed feminised space.99 Although perhaps not as pervasive and immediate as Fight Club and American Psycho, the body exemplary is unavoidably stitched into many of the films of the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema. American Pie, American Beauty, Eyes Wide Shut, Magnolia, The Matrix, Play it to the Bone, The Talented Mr. Ripley, The World is not Enough and, as Colleary has illustrated above, even Disney’s Tarzan could not motion away from the contradiction.

American Psycho’s ideological message is to impel its audience to read only perverse signs of vanity in Patrick Bateman’s hyper-narcissistic and decidedly ‘effeminate’ beauty regimes and workout sessions. Patrick parodies the New Man masculinity by presenting its heightened version, the New Man as narcissist in excess. But how can the film hope to hold out on this assertion once Bateman’s/Bale’s body is valorised in the aesthetic. Like Durden/Pitt, held against the Gucci ad on the bus in Fight Club, his body is identical to the ‘exemplary body’ of the New Man (Gill et al, 2000) the film is

99 As Yvonne Tasker had stated on the inherent limitations of the muscle cinema of the ’80s, bodybuilding can be seen to “signal a disturbing narcissism, a narcissism which is inappropriate to familiar definitions of manhood” (Tasker 1993: 78)
deriding. Although the intention is parodic, much of this gets lost in the visual praxis. *American Psycho* may try to show the dislocated feminised logic of pumping muscles entirely for aesthetic purposes in Bateman's gruelling routines, but this philosophy is missed in the way the images are incapable of refraining from drawing us into the body aesthetic not its parodying. Irony, parody or whatever the filmmakers lace the constructions of their muscular protagonists with, become inherently difficult to read through the noise of the image. It is an effect that can actually be evidenced by the number of ‘workout’ blogs and fanzines that have surrounded both imaginaries of Tyler Durden and Patrick Bateman for example, across a variety of extra-media spaces.100

Furthermore, the foundational decree that men are frustrated by the New dynamic of metro-sexual politics that surrounds them as it has created a culture of ‘men looking at other men’ (Mort, 1996; Nixon, 1996 cited in Edwards 2008: 170) that seems to cement to the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema’s draw to ‘irreverent’ male images and masochism, also seems inherently oxymoronic when the films spend so much time trying to prove what in a sense ‘real’ men *don’t* look like. In short the films draw so much attention to the outward appearance and surface of its masculine heroes, even if they try to ‘cover up’ the body ‘exemplary’ with blood, cuts, scars, gunge and body plugs as if these entities of surface alone are those that make a man. Though the examples above have illustrated that they seem to fail in this attempt, it is telling that the films see one of the valid ways to resolve the malaise is through a punishment of the *surface*.

Further, it is also worth examining another problematic feature of the method in any case. Though Dyer (1982) has asserted along with Neale ([1983] 1993), (following the lead Rodowick (1982) and Willemen (1981)),

100 See for example, ‘Tyler Durden: Brad Pitt Workout’ in: <http://www.bradpittworkout.com/fight-club/brad-pitts-fight-club-workout/>; See also the forum space for Bodybuilding.com, with threads: Tyler Durden Workout; Goal: Tyler Durden body; Anyone know how to get Tyler Durden abs? in: <http://forum.bodybuilding.com/showthread.php?t=601054&page=1>; and the Tyler Durden Workout in leading publication *Men’s Health* community forum in: <http://www.menshealth.co.uk/community/forums/thread/997866>
that a body in action or a body surrounded by ‘signifiers of masculinity’ can
disavow passitivity and feminisation, not only does this assertion stem from
a false (and essentialist) logic that all unmotivated displays of male stars
necessarily feminises them, but it also exposes the inherent dramaturgy
surrounding the entire notion of masculinisation in the cinema. Proof is
performance and performance is proof. The assertion is unstable. Moreover
bodies, even when torn, must be ‘framed’ in the same way as commercial
imagery; to “sell” masculinity rather than to let it flow. The films essentially
participate in ‘doing’ masculine not ‘being’ masculine.101. Cuts, scars,
lacerations become a form of visual proof alone. Another form of image and
symbol purveying only sign values. The irony of course is that the surface
picks up the tab. Without the structural change, and perhaps already lost in
the materiality of the image, despite calls for otherwise, the films continue to
commodify violence itself and within that, commodify the aesthetics of
violence. They may function on an immediate level to overcome the visual
and aesthetic beauty myths surrounding an increasingly passive male, but in
the end their function is realised under the same ideological praxis.

Scenes flash up of the Narrator's everyday life in *Fight Club*. He passes men
with black eyes in his office photocopying room and bandages on their faces
in cafes, they do not speak, but they 'know' asserts the Narrator, and nod at
each other without a word. They outwardly wear their bruises, bandages
and scars as signs of identification and freedom, in turn denouncing male
‘beauty’. Indeed, they are worn, not hidden but promoted, not treated but
exhibited. In effect they become the very motif they were set to destroy –
they become symbols of masculinity, symbols of worthiness rather than
worthiness itself – worn like Patrick Bateman’s Valentino suit, or Oliver
Peoples reading glasses, coordinated like the Narrator's "Johanneshov
armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern". And like labels, like symbols,
they propose to tell us something about the wearer, the commodifier – this
is a man – how do we know – we can see it.

101 Of course that is assuming that masculinity is or rather has an essence, an effect the
thesis comes to in the Conclusion.
More than this, such is the irony that the invitation of the violent aesthetic as public image was also extended to haute couture fashion lines that proceeded the films. So much does Fight Club blur the distinctions between ascetic and violent masculinity and its aesthetic reflection, that in January 2000, completely abandoning the ideology in favour of a totalising of the visual aesthetic, Donatella Versace presented a runway show in Milan with a “Fight Club theme”. That theme apparently translated into “camouflage-print suits, as well as shirts and jackets, with razor blades sewn onto them. There were also tight, low-slung leather pants loaded with zippers”, asserted a bewildered Ginia Bellafante (2000) of the New York Times style section. “Few other marketers have topped the Versace’s in the realm of objectifying men and holding them to unattainable standards of, well, beauty. For Ms. Versace or any designer to grapple with the movie’s meaning would really require abandoning the whole spectacle of a men’s fashion show.” Indeed, Donatella Versace here had envisioned the display of men’s bodies in action in Fight Club in an aesthetic language that valorised a presentation of a ‘masculine look’, rather than an expression of not-to-be-looked at, vis-à-vis Mulvey, as the film’s ideological imperative seems to be asserting. In short, Versace’s runway show reveals the instinctive restrictions of Fight Club, and much of the other fin de millennium cinema in this regard, where they rely on surface and aesthetic remedies to changing cultural standards.
CHAPTER FOUR: Crisis, Sex and Sexuality

In the previous two chapters the thesis has examined how the fin de millenium movies retaliated to the steady ascendency of the, supposedly, more feminine and commercially embedded New Man, his metrosexual offspring and his further problematising of the traditional model of masculinity. Through an application of retributive masculine codes – violence, asceticism and irreverence – the films ‘retreat’ and ascend to an often nostalgic and at times mythical, stoically masculine climate where the male and his body is re-inserted in arenas of post- (The Matrix), pre- (Instinct, Tarzan) or anti- (Fight Club, Office Space, American Psycho and so on) capitalist destruction, punishment and anti-feminist angst that place him at the site of opposition to effeminacy and femininity per se.

The thesis has also examined how physicalised and destructive masculinities, particularly those that are inherently violent, may also be an entrance into a more immediate and fervently visceral language of dissent, a language that could penetrate through the saturation of the New Man’s image, held hostage to feministic and emasculated standards, and in turn could (re)situate man as head of his ‘normative’ castle.

However, the last chapter also exposed how the films aesthetics of scarred and mutilated bodies for example, particularly in relation to Payback and Fight Club, but also inherently linked to other films in the fin de millenium masculinity in crisis cinema such as The Matrix, 8mm, Play it to the Bone and so on, could also contradict and compromise much of the ideological fabric that is used to bolster such assurances. The chapter revealed how the scar, cut or bruise stood only as a motif for virility rather than virility itself; ironically, much in the same way that clothes, possessions and the body as a whole have become an index of identity de facto in the culture of commodity and image industries.
Further, the last chapter also revealed how the *fin de millennium* cinema, and we can perhaps add to this popular western cinema in general, authorises and then perpetuates masculine hegemonies in the first instant, in this case setting a standard that not only seems potently idealistic, but also, and to add the irony, a standard that has little distance from the New culture of male objectification and sexualisation.

In this next chapter, the thesis continues to further interrogate the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. Here, the thesis places a determined focus on how the *fin de millennium* cinema contended with the third and final elegiac testament of crises in the *fin de siècle* moment; the apparent re-configuring of modern man’s place within the cultures of sex and sexuality. In an arena that seems potently discursive, following an examination of how masculinity had become a much more image based experience as the United States headed towards the millennium, the chapter begins with an exploration of how women were increasingly perceived as becoming more powerful in social-political and economic spheres. Examining both the popular and the political here, the chapter explores how cultural and social changes that saw the apparent rise of the female in public and private spaces, resulted in what was for many the cornerstone of the masculine malaise in the *fin de millennium* period; phallic insecurity.

Akin to the previous two textual chapters, this chapter will seek first to understand the cultural manifestations of the anxiety. The chapter will then go on to explicate where the *fin de millennium* cinema stood in relation to these cultural manifestations and, further, how it would (re)present them in its representation of the crisis. Again pursuing how the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema constructed a structural dichotomy between masculinity/femininity and, as this chapter also reveals, an added essentialist modality of male and female, the chapter then goes onto impress that even when this cinema seems to be expressing a kind of post-structural ‘gender performativity’, vis-à-vis Judith Butler (1990), the films still seem to offer conservative and ‘conformist’ representations. Taking Gaylyn Studlar’s (2001) exposition of Tom Cruise as a performer who expresses both “hard”
and “soft” modes of masculinity, and more specifically Donna Peberdy’s (2010) framework of Frank T.J. Mackay (Tom Cruise) in fin de millennium male crisis movie Magnolia (1999), as indicative of, what she labels, ‘bipolar’ masculinity, the thesis locates a restraining clause to their argument here. Whilst Cruise/Mackey may underscore a bipolarity of masculinity in Anderson’s drama-epic, for example, the representational balance of this co-existence is not be without a distinct inclination towards the more masculine in the duality, an effect Peberdy fails to valorise. Further, Studlar’s reading of Cruise’s performance of “authentic masculinity” as signalling the overtly feminine also seems vitally strained in this epochal era, an effect the chapter challenges in detail here. The chapter then closes with a further interrogation of seemingly post-structural cinema at the end of the millennium. The cinema that is examined here, on the surface at least, appears to counter the dichotomous essentialism. Including such titles as Flawless (1999), Boys Don’t Cry (1999), Being John Malkovich (1999) and The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999), this examination reveals that there are still some nagging concerns of a conservative heteronormativity that mark the ideological underbelly of these films.

As the thesis has examined (see the Introduction and Chapter Three), masculinity became much more of an image-based experience towards the end of the millennium. “As the 80s got underway” asserts cultural theorist John Beynon (2002: 103), “the commercial exploitation of men-as-sex-objects became very big business. The voyeuristic sexualisation of the female body, its packaging as visual erotica, was now transferred to the male body with the same ultimate purpose in mind – to sell, sell, sell.” Indeed, as Faludi (1999: 415) laments in Stiffed, “The gaze that [now] hounds men is the very gaze that women have been trying to escape”.

The last chapter revealed that violence was just one of the ways in which the men in the fin de millennium cinema attempted to turn their back on such change, or rather rise above it, as the male screen heroes were viscerally beaten in a defiant assertion to not only ‘punish’ the body for being on display, but to reveal how their willingness to do so meant that they stood
hostile to so-called ‘effeminacy’, the feminising codes of male beauty industries and the New codes of male narcissism. What is of concern in this chapter is how the fin de millenium cinema attempted another overlapping modality to regress such emasculating changes in image cultures, and by extension, to alter the dynamics in which women were increasingly finding sources of empowerment from the transition.

“Increasingly in the United States we are seeing women engaging in behaviors that have previously been the province of men only, and we are also seeing men’s resistance to this encroachment of their space”, asserts Judi Addelston (2008: 337).

"Women have entered The Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute, two previously all-male colleges who fought a six-year battle in the courts to prevent women from entering ... Although it is not explicitly stated, women fought in the Gulf War in positions of combat. Women have slowly, yet increasingly, been swelling the ranks of firefighters and engineers, police officers and tenured full professors. Women in the United States now have a professional basketball league, and women's bodybuilding has taken off as a competitive sport. Couple this with a de-industrialized workforce, another traditional proving ground for masculinity now defunct, and we see that men have to find new ways to prove masculinity.”

Addelston here quite cohesively breaks down the emergent movement of women into traditionally male spheres and underlines the cultural redundancy of the men who once occupied these spaces in solitude as a result. In addition, various popular, political and cultural models also placed women in increasingly powerful roles in the fin de millenium period and the 1990s as a whole. In addition to record numbers of women becoming top CEOs in the corporate world, President Bill Clinton had also ensured that women would reach great heights of power in the U.S. government, as record numbers of women were elected to high office in the U.S. government. The most prolific being (his wife) Hilary, who became the most openly empowered and politically powerful First Lady in American history, with Madeleine Albright and Janet Reno taking two of the cabinet's top
positions as United States Secretary of State (#1), and United States Attorney General (#4), respectively, leading 1992, for instance, to be dubbed the “Year of the Woman” in popular discourse.

Meanwhile in popular culture, women were also turning the politics of looking to the direction of their own subjectivity. For example, Susan Bordo (1999: 144-145) asserts how a certain 1994 Diet Coke ad paved the way for a new modality in what was considered explicit female voyeurism. When male model Lucky Vanos took off his shirt and slowly devoured a can of Diet Coke, the drama of office windows full of waiting and watching women leering while Vanos slowly undresses to cliché strip-show music “felt like the turning of the tide” (Bordo 1999: 145).

“The twenty-first century male finds himself good for nothing else than to render his services as a stud” asserts moral theologian William E. May (2009). Increasingly male passivity and sexualisation became the clarion call of a whole host of other female-empowering popular cultural products. When Sex and the City first aired on June 6, 1998, just pre-ceding the fin de millennial moment, the provocative text seemed to joyously depict the cultural transition for women. As Samantha Jones, (Kim Cattrall), Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), Charlotte York (Kirsten Davis) and Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) took to the screen as the voice of a new empowered, active and sexually promiscuous body of New women, Sex and the City became one of the highest rated sit-coms of all time.102 But that is not to say that everybody was at ease with the new format Sex and the City provided.103 Reactions were divided to the new modality. In an article in the British broadsheet the Guardian, journalist Charlotte Raven (1999) wrote a distinctly hostile article on the television show and its surrounding cultural position on the new dynamic. Under the provocatively titled headline ‘All

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102 Sex and the City has also garnered massive critical acclaim. Over its course of six seasons, the show has been nominated for over 50 Emmy Awards and 24 Golden Globe Awards winning seven and eight times respectively.
Men are Bastards’, Raven explained how she could not believe how restrictive and emasculating the show is to men. The article closes with,

“The modern man-hater hates specific men but worships the idea of masculinity. From the Diet Coke-break girls to the thirtysomething fans of Mr Darcy, women – grown women – are deserting the real in favour of a fantasy landscape in which men measure up. The fact that they don’t in real life has less to do with men’s real failings than the way these are regarded by women who believe that perfection is gettable. They’ve got the car, the spike heels and the job so why don’t they have a right to expect the perfect man to match? Someone should tell them, perhaps, that people aren’t coffee machines”.

Cultural theorist Mark Simpson concurred. For Simpson (2002) ‘female “Sex and the City” metrosexuality’, as he dubs it, is emasculating straight men in the west. “Female metrosexuality is the complement of male metrosexuality, except that it’s active where male metrosexuality is passive. No longer is a straight man’s sense of self and manhood delivered by his relationship to women; instead it’s challenged by it. Women are still monarchs of the private world, but increasingly assertive in the public world too”.104 It seems by implication, one can extend Raven’s line of women “worshipping the idea of masculinity” in men even further than that of outward desire. Women are becoming the masculine sex, asserts feminist critic George Gilder. “The principal tenets of sexual liberation or sexual liberalism – the obsolescence of masculinity and femininity, of sex roles, and of heterosexual monogamy as the moral norm – have diffused through the system and become part of America’s conventional wisdom…” (Gilder 1992: ix). But for Gilder this transition has led to not more freedom for men, as it follows that they have always had a strong sense of sexual freedom, but rather more freedom for women, freedom in fact to no longer need the assurances of a man. Indeed if the concepts of masculinity and femininity coalesce, or the divisions disappear completely as popular pro-feminist discourse seems to be

increasingly promising, the essentialist dichotomy also dies with it. Masculinity as active, commanding and powerful and femininity as passive, subservient and weak, loses its supposed essentialist attachment to their binary male/female counterparts. For Gilder et al. this is the cultural turn that has placed men in crisis. Men need "...signs and assurances that women really need [their] own submission to them, that they are as dependent on his masculinity as he is on their femininity” (Gilder 1973: 205). In other words, that they are as dependent on their strength as they are on women’s weakness.

Anthony Clare (2000: 3-4) summed up the cultural position arguing that top of the list for growing male dissatisfaction is the growing assertiveness of women. “As a consequence of the feminist revolution, so this argument goes, women are no longer prepared to be the property of patriarchal men. In this feminist revolution, male power is being overthrown. Men, like colonists seeing their empire crumble, don’t like what is happening.” He continues, “The colonists have not been displaced but the colonised are planning, discussing, organising, and, in a number of small, well-planned uprisings, have demonstrated their capability. There is a sense, certainly in the outlying areas of the patriarchal empire, that the time for male authority, dominance and control is up. Beneath the surface, male power is being subverted.” (Clare: 2000: 4). Clare also takes time to examine the symptoms of this cultural disjuncture and like Gilder above, after little deliberation he makes a succinct connection: *phallic insecurity*. Making clear his distinction, he furthers,

"Phallic refers not merely to the penis but incorporates notions of potency, virility, manliness, strength and power. It has been seen as the 'signifier of signifiers', the mark which positions the individual as male and locates him in terms of authority, control, dominance. The phallus 'signifies what men think they have and what women are believed to lack' … phallic man, authoritative, dominant, assertive – man in control not merely of himself but of woman – is starting to die, and now the question is whether a new man will emerge
A symbol of male potency, strength, authority, and dominance and of maleness itself then, the phallus became one of the primary ways in which the *fin de millennium* cinema engaged with the supposed crisis of masculinity at the end of the millennium. Often making literal the cultural threat of castration, the phallus is used as a symbol of male virility in much of the male-in-crisis cinema, but not just this – and much in the same way that violence was also used in this cinema (see last chapter) – a symbol of also not being female, and as such in their essentialist dogma, not being feminine. Much of the cinema becomes complicit to a litany of phallic references, symbols and assurances and moreover motions towards a hyperreal modality of the *active phallus*, an effect the following part of the chapter will begin to examine in detail.

**The phallus fights back**

Peter Cattaneo’s *The Full Monty* (1997) was perhaps the antecedent of this kind of cinema, drawing an analogy between private phallicism and public usefulness and linking phallic potency with redundancy. But where the *Full Monty* ended with the notion that “men must bond, share, emotionally relate, must reveal themselves in full nakedness to each other and to women if they are to be fully human” (Clare, 2000: 6), the *fin de millennium* cinema takes a very different, almost antithetical, approach.

Stanley Kubrick’s final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) attests to the problem of phallic insecurity in a dark, hostile world in which protagonist Dr. Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) is taken through a series of sexual jolts beginning at an upscale Christmas party in which two models make sexual advances on him, before he casually watches a Lothario try to pick up his tipsy wife. The next night, while smoking marijuana, and as such heightening the sequences paranoiac feel, his wife, Alice (Nicole Kidman) asks Bill if he is ever jealous...
of men who are attracted to her. As the discussion gets heated, Bill declines, stating that he thinks women are more faithful than men and his indifference to the Lothario the night before secures this answer. However, Alice rebuts him, telling him of a recent fantasy she had about a naval officer they had encountered on a vacation. Therein Bill’s sense of phallic security starts to crumble. Alice’s confession disturbs not only Harford’s marital peace of mind, but under the strain of Bill’s realisation of Alice’s empowerment, he also starts to question his position as a phallic male and women’s attitudes in general towards sex. It marks the beginning of Harford’s spiral into an increasingly amoral world of sexual misadventure.

Driven to seek answers to these questions and in some way salve his insecurities, Harford becomes obsessed with lust and carnality. In the process, a deceased patient’s daughter throws herself at him; a prostitute takes him to her flat; he interrupts men having a sex party with an adolescent female; until eventually his odyssey takes him into a disturbing world of sex-play at a masked ball of unbridled sexual hedonism. In the dreamscape world Kubrick creates, each of these encounters represent manifestations of Harford’s deepest sexual fantasies and fears. His fantasies include group sex, sex with a teenager, sex with a prostitute, sex without strings. His fears include disease, homosexuality (evidenced in the brutal and brief encounter with the gay-bashing gang mid-way through the film), and most of all: discovery. Discovery of his insecurities, which might reveal his true nature to the world; discovery that maybe he is really a pretender of the deep masculine, that he does not really belong, and is not worthy after all.

However, it in this transitional journey from phallic paranoia to sexual hedonism, that the film implicitly resolves Harford’s phallic insecurities therein. Indeed, Kubrick seems to counteract these insecurities by placing Bill at the centre of numerous sexual jolts and adventures, at which for the most it is he is who is potently desired. When Harford receives sexual advances in almost every situation he is positioned in within the film, the film seems to rather attest to a more normative phallocentric narrativity. So much in fact does Kubrick prop Harford’s sexual prowess at the centre of the
film, that upon discovery of intrusion at the masked ball a beautiful
prostitute, who Harford had saved in an earlier scene, risks her life upon
their second encounter, re-affirming Harford as both patriarchal hero and
dominating male. Added to this of course is that textually the film places
near solipsistic focus on Harford, who in turn takes all of the film’s textual
energy and screen time, therein forcing the viewer the to eternally
empathise with its hero.

When Cruise plays a very different male in Paul Thomas Anderson’s
class-based drama Magnolia (1999), he quite literally inverts almost all
of the insecurity of Harford’s phallic position, at least at the start of the film.
“The cock is king!” boasts Frank T.J. Mackay (Tom Cruise) during his pick-up
self-help program, the provocatively titled “Seduce and Destroy” in
Anderson’s 1999 critically acclaimed movie. Whilst eagerly gyrating his
pelvis he teaches an enthused all-male audience “How to turn that ‘Friend’
into Your Sperm Receptacle.” “WE ARE MEN!” shouts Mackay, “Come August
we like to celebrate, suck my big fat fucking sausage!” He takes the men on a
unrestrained journey to hyper-virile masculinity, in so doing denying any
threat of emasculation offering a violent promise of sexual security whilst
repeatedly gesturing to the phallus. In one scene, whilst Frank is being
interviewed by an African American journalist, named only Gwenovier
(April Grace) in the films credits, he strips off his shirt and does a back flip to
reveal what seems a huge bulge in his pants. He exclaims, “I’m a fucking
action hero.” Mackey explicitly links the phallus with power here. Indeed, as
Thompson and Holt (2004: 316) have asserted, “A biological marker of
phallic maleness, the penis serves as a metonym for patriarchal privilege,”
and Mackey/Anderson utilises this somewhat essentialist code to assert his
sense of power in these scenes.

Indeed, Anderson initially appears to be offering a hyper-virile, hyper-
sexualised phallocentric male to his audience, to appeal perhaps to the
sensibilities of the cultural crisis and its ensuing elegiac dialogue. The initial
representation seems to assert that the phallus still holds all the power, that
phallocentric masculinity still reigns supreme and his casting of Tom Cruise,
the all-American, every-hero, seems only to confirm this reading. However, this becomes complicated by the introduction/imposition of journalist Gwenovier, mentioned above. Distinctly unimpressed with Mackey’s phallocentricty, she undermines it. She uncovers his real past as the interview turns hostile – his real name is Jack Partridge, he and his mother was abandoned by his father Earl, whom he earlier lied was dead, leaving Frank to take care of her when she became ill and subsequently passed away – and motions that Mackey himself is a façade and a pretender. Castrated and silenced, saying only “I’m sitting here quietly judging you”, Mackey returns to the stage. He then unleashes his castigation to the ravenous, all-male, crowd: “You see what a society does to little boys. We are taught to apologize ... I will not apologize for who I am! ... for what I need! ... for what I want!” The defence seems somewhat desperate and, driven by anger, appears distanced from his earlier, somewhat sophomoric, appeals for male sexual dominance. Mackey never recovers from there on in, until at the end of the film, reunited with his father, he becomes the antithesis to his initial projection. Broken, still and passive, he breaks down sobbing by his dying fathers bedside, lamenting on how he has been let down:

Earl. You don’t look that bad. You prick. “Cocksucker.” That’s what you used to like to say, right? “Cocksucker.” But you are a cocksucker, Earl. It hurts, doesn’t it? Huh? You in a lot of pain? She was in a lot of pain. Right to the end, she was in a lot of pain. I know because I, I was there, Earl. You didn’t like illness, though, do you? I was there. She waited for your call. For you to come. I am not going to cry. I am not going to cry for you! You cocksucker, I know you can hear me. I want you to know that I hate your fucking guts. You can just fucking die, you fuck. And I hope it hurts, I fucking hope it hurts. Why didn’t you call? I fucking hate you. Goddamn you, you fucking asshole. Oh, God, you fucking asshole. Don’t go away, you fucking asshole! Oh, God, don’t go away, you fucking asshole!

It is because of this transition and Mackey's/Cruise’s apparent motion from “wildness to softness” that both Donna Peberdy (2010) and Gaylyn Studlar
see a bipolarity in the masculinity of his characterisation.\textsuperscript{105} “In \textit{Magnolia}, Cruise’s movement from Frank T.J. Mackey’s manic misogyny to Jack’s emotional hysteria at his father’s bedside present masculinity as a performance” asserts Donna Peberdy (2010: 231), also insisting that masculinity in the film is “bipolar”, “simultaneously exhibiting hard and soft modes” (ibid.). Further, Gaylyn Studlar (2001: 173) locates this bipolarity as a motion from a “performance of manliness into “authentic” manliness through an incorporation of qualities – gentleness, self-control, compassion – that might be regarded as “feminine””, claiming, “It is not his physical but his moral nature that must be changed”.

However, both these distinctly overlapping assertions appear incoherent when faced against the \textit{ideological imperative} of the cinema here and furthermore this is not distinct only to \textit{Magnolia}, but is rather a trope of the \textit{fin de millennium} crisis cinema as a whole. While Peberdy presents this dichotomy as a system of interdependence with “each masculine trope reliant on the other for validation and definition” (Peberdy 2010: 233), announcing some kind of equilibrium between the two positions, she fails to foreclose on an issue that this thesis has made explicit throughout. This ‘struggle’ is one that is heavily one-sided. They may be dependent on each other for their existence, just as darkness needs light for definition, but beyond this, the balance is far from equal (see also Chapter Two). They may be made of two parts, but in the Wimp/Wild man, feminine/masculine dichotomy, the Wild man – at least in the \textit{fin de millennium} cinema – always wins.

All of the sophomoric ‘hamming up’ of the ‘Seduce and Destroy’ programme and its vitriolic front man, read by many as a satire of a masculinity lost, is a ruse not to show the inauthenticity of the hypermasculine, phallocentric position, but rather to expose how phallocentricity has been quashed in recent cultural history so that men now must attend these kinds of

\textsuperscript{105} Studlar (2001) in fact does not only witness this bipolarity in Anderson’s \textit{Magnolia}. She rather sees it as a trope of Tom Cruise’s characterisations that cross almost all of his cinema.
seminars, fronted by these kinds of hopeful ‘pretenders’ in order to re-
gather any semblance of masculine virility they can foster. This is why, in
fact, Mackey is exposed as a fraud by a woman, the New holders of the
mirror to the masculine essence, and why also all but two females in the film
have only first names in both the diegesis and the film credits. *Magnolia* is a
film about men. It is a film about the socio-cultural challenges faced by men.
It is a dialectic on the modern masculine malaise in a culture where absent
or inadequate fathers have abandoned sons quite literally in a world in
which they are no longer the patriarchs, at work, or home or even in the
bedroom. Anderson wants to expose the modern male in effect as
fragmentary, disturbed, as a generation left wanting by absent fathers,
whilst women make up the gains of the cultural loss. As such the film aligns
with the elegiac Faludian perspective. Studlar may read an authenticity in
the transition to “feminine” in Cruise’s performances de facto, but this
theorisation does not sit comfortably in his characterisation of Mackey in
*Magnolia*. Here in actual fact authenticity is represented as lost. The
“feminine” that he is to become is only a reflection of his emasculation. The
film in fact is as elegiac as the rest of the crisis cinema of the moment, if not
more so. It is a near-blueprint of Faludi’s seminal thesis.

However, aside from an empathetic realisation of an increasing struggle for
a phallic security in the *fin de millennium* cinema as exhibited in *Eyes Wide
Shut* and *Magnolia* above, the emasculated male’s efforts to portray a stoic
sense of manhood is often more directly defined by sexual conquests, or
indeed sexual aggression, in the masculinity in crisis movies. Consciously
aware of his pervasive castrated status, it leads to a more openly outward
display of sexual aggression in order to satisfy the desire of denying his
casted position, much like Mackey’s early carnation in the latter film
above, only this time without the same level of struggle. Jay Roach’s
characterisation of Austin Powers also resonates much of the same tonality
as Anderson’s early carnation of Frank Mackay for example. A global quest
from the first in the *Powers* series, *Austin Powers: International Man of
Mystery* (1997), motions to a global-private quest in *Austin Powers: Spy Who
*Shagged Me* in 1999, as evidenced, in fact, by the tagline for the latter: “*First, he fought for the Crown. Now he's fighting for the Family Jewels.*” The film sees Dr. Evil use a time machine to travel back to 1969 to remove Austin Powers’ *mojo*, an essence that the film implicitly underscores is representative of Powers’ phallic heroism. The now sexually impotent Powers, with the help of alluring agent Felicity Shagwell, must recover his “vitality” so that he has can save the world from impending doom as he cannot be heroic without it. It becomes evidenced in such dialogue as:

**FELICITY**  
Austin, you've done it! You got Dr. Evil!  
**AUSTIN**  
Of course I did, baby, I got my mojo working overtime.

And in other such sequences like:

**DR. EVIL**  
It looks like you have a choice, Powers: save the world, or save your girlfriend.  
[Austin is torn. He looks back and forth between Felicity and the laser which is on the other side of the room.]  
**AUSTIN**  
I've got my mojo back, man, I can do both.

Moreover, the film’s closure takes this concept of the phallus as a marker of heroism even further, implying that a man’s phallus can never be stolen by any such emasculatory forces, and in doing so pursues that it has eternal dominance instilled:

**FELICITY**  
Austin, you did it!  
[They embrace.]  
**AUSTIN**  
Uh-oh.  
(beat)  
I think I just got my mojo back. Really.  
**FELICITY**  
Austin, you had it all along. No one can take your mojo away from you!
And with that the film heads towards its closure, securing the logic of an undeniably forceful and eternally revered phallic masculinity; a phallic masculinity, in fact, that is ‘unstealable’ and ‘unvanquishable’ no matter what trials it faces. In addition, in the film’s, albeit comedic moments, The Spy Who Shagged Me also saturates the viewer with visual images of the phallus in its phallocentric polemic. Powers’ phallic-shaped chest hair, rocket and so on all go to reinforce the pervasive power of the phallus. David Fincher's Fight Club also advances the same visual motifs and phallocentricity. The film is flooded with loaded phallic objects and references. For instance, the film contains what Windrum (2004: 308) calls “the almost superfluous and plenitude-signifying lit cigarette”, a cigarette that Marla Singer holds in front of Tyler’s crotch while attempting to unzip his fly. The inference of course being that Tyler’s phallus is as active as the “lit” cigarette, whilst Marla the film’s only notable female, is left only to hold the mirror to it. There is also an insertion of a subliminal shot of a half-erect penis that Tyler, while working part-time as a projectionist, splices into a kid’s movie. As the camera cuts to the audience, a little girl is shown sobbing, a response that may suggest “female terror at being assaulted with such aggressive male imagery” (Windrum 2004: 308) and as such also induces an active message of male power and domination.106 After the splice in the projection booth, Tyler admires his work, both diegetically and to camera, with a satisfied “A nice, big, cock” further cementing his fascination with the potent phallus.

Further to this, a secondary literal and figurative castration is also presented as the film’s overhanging threat. Indeed, there are nagging fears of castration and phallic mutilations that pervade the film throughout. The first support meeting that the Narrator attends is a testicular cancer group; after Tyler Durden blows up the Narrator’s condo, he tells him that it could be worse: He could “have had a woman cut off his penis as he slept and thrown

106 The Conclusion also has reveals more details on this.
out the window of a moving car” making clear reference to John Bobbit’s famous private-made-public castration in 1993. Project Mayhem, the Club’s political faction, also enlists the threat of castration as punishment to ensure that the masculine ‘regulations’ required, namely an unremitting sense of discipline and asceticism, therein are met. Essentially the penis/phallus is used as both a disruptive force and as a signifier of power aiming to disturb any ‘soft’ feminised activity, such as apparent weakness, and a litany of apparent decadent foulings, as marked by the expensive restaurant Tyler moonlights in so he can urinate or masturbate in their food. Helgeland’s *Payback* utilises a similar kind of symbolism when Porter’s genitalia, or to continue in the suggestive language of the signifier, ‘manhood’, is also threatened on the hood of a black saloon. Indeed, the removal of the testicles/male signifier becomes the signature of symbolic emasculation, the leitmotif of the crisis itself, an emblematic sign of the pervasive cultural threat of feminisation and the end of ‘traditional’ manhood in much of the *fin de millenium* masculinity in crisis cinema.

Further, in the essentialist codes that these films seem to operate in, this threat also becomes attached to the female herself, to which *Fight Club* targets Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter) as its centralised symbol of the threatening rise of a female power. “To continue down a redolent path of feminist theory”, asserts Windrum (2004: 309) on the filmic and cultural matrix,

> "one can also note that if phallicism is textually desired at present, then the representation of woman – bearer of the lack and site of castration per Lacan, Laura Mulvey, et al – should suggest threat and contamination. How else to account for Marla constantly being invoked by the Narrator as a destroyer, “a predator posing as a house pet,” or at best a nuisance, “a scratch on the roof of my mouth that won’t heal”.

Henry Giroux also states, “From the first scene of *Fight Club* to the last, women are cast as the binary opposite of masculinity. Women are both the other and a form of pathology.” Indeed, in the very first scene in *Fight Club*
in which the Narrator is mumbling “vowels” with Tyler’s gun in his mouth (which, through the film’s disjointed narrative structure, is also the end of the film) the Narrator laments, “Somehow, I realize all of this – the gun, the bombs, the revolution – is really about Marla Singer” lending complete responsibility to Marla, absolving Tyler himself (the gun holder) in the process. In addition, Tyler, whilst soaking in a bathtub of dirty water, laments, “We are a generation of men raised by women. I’m wondering if another woman is what we need”. This effect cannot be overstated; Fight Club, and indeed all of the films in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, perpetually merges feminisation, and its apparent threat to the masculine essence, with women. Of course we can add to this position here, as has been made implicit throughout the examination in this thesis, American Beauty and Lester Burnham’s emasculating wife; Office Space and Peter Gibbon’s emasculating girlfriend; even American Psycho’s Patrick Bateman has an emasculating fiancé in Evelyn, and so on.

Indeed, not only are women condemned to playing small, secondary roles behind a wall of all-male protagonists and near-solipsistic male camera subjectivity, but the cinema often makes a suggestion that there is too big an opportunity for women to become ‘fakers’ on the highway to masculinity and to take on a masculine subjectivity. Fight Club’s Marla Singer, for instance, becomes a ‘faker’ of masculinity quite literally as she attends all-male therapy sessions including, and with deliberate absurdity, a testicular cancer support group, seemingly unnoticed by everybody in the room. However, and here holds a further insertion of Freudian essentialism, Tyler Durden, the film’s supposed idealised masculine par excellence, fetishes his castration threat and “sport fuck[s]” it, quite literally, whilst the soundtrack plays near-slapstick amplified ‘sex noises’ which include heavy spanking. In these encounters, Tyler also wears a rubber glove, which not only marks his sexual encounter with Marla as merely ‘riotous fun’, but also implies more

\[107\] It is also worth noting that Marla is styled in the conventions of classic femme fatale throughout. She dresses in black lace, wears rouge lipstick, and has a distinctly cold pallid complexion.
scathingly that she is a disease or infection requiring not only assertions of hostility, but further safeguards from her female causticity, and in so doing the film completely separates Tyler from any kind of romantic and co-dependent relationship with her. The aggression embedded in his language also assumes a strong sense of domination, power and authority by the fact that she, that is the female, means nothing to him but sport and sex. In equal pairing, the sadomasochistic Pearl (Lucy Liu) in Helgeland’s Payback also represents the causticity of the female, whose language of violence and sexual authority problematises both Porter’s journey to redemption and the films ideological foothold, until Porter quite literally dismisses her sexual advances in which she near begs for him, and in so doing nullifies much of her sexual frisson.

The seeming exception to this rule in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema seems to be the characterisation of The Matrix’s Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss). Stoically active in the film and taking a relatively large portion of screen time, Trinity is also involved in a real relationship with Neo. However, in the aesthetic reality of the film, Trinity too is rendered somewhat as a fetish, not least by her costume. Throughout the film she adorns clinging, shimmering, latex outfits that clutch to the curves of her body and in so doing aligns much of Trinity’s screen presence with aesthetic fascination and fetishism. Her body, packaged for visual display, means that, much like Pearl’s characterisation in Helgeland’s Payback above, she appears dressed for passivity and objectification even when active.\textsuperscript{108} Furthermore Trinity’s critical importance in the diegetic is also marked by her desires towards Neo (Keanu Reeves), which in fact, upon the prophecy of the Oracle (Gloria Foster), mark him as the ‘One’ in the film. Neo holds the phallic value in The Matrix, whilst Trinity is left even in the tension of the films narrative revelation, to only admire Neo’s power and strength. Though she may have an active screen presence in some scenes, her potency in fact,

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\textsuperscript{108} Of course throughout the film Pearl is dressed in hyper-erotic sadomasochistic costumes of rubber and latex to affirm her characterisation in the film.
is rendered rather passive when positioned against the totality if the films position towards dominance and action.

Further, there is also an effect more literal happening in both the textual space and the ideologic. Behind the assertion that the feminine, femininity and the female are enemies to the masculine essence, sits a prevailing logic that Donna Peberdy (2010: 236) has also underscored in her analysis of Anderson’s *Magnolia*. “The recuperation of masculinity for the contemporary man ultimately depends on the extrication of the boy from the mother, the husband from the wife, the man from the woman, and it is only in the company of other men that man’s “inner warrior” can be revealed” asserts Peberdy on Frank Mackey’s realisation of a more perfectible future for men. “Like the spiritual leaders of the mythopoetic movement, Frank adopts the role of initiator, leading men through the “bucketing out process” where they must reject their softer, more feminine side, toward a manhood defined by virility, potency, heterosexuality, power, and domination over women. Like Bly, Frank blames an increase in female power for the softness of men, but Frank takes it one step further treating women as objects to be toyed with for men’s enjoyment and thereby demeaned” (Peberdy 2010: 242)

Indeed, *Magnolia*’s Frank Mackey, and we can easily add to this almost all of the films in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema, realises an assertion that echoes Robert Bly’s (1991) seminal intervention into men’s studies. “While Warren Farrell and even neoconservative men like George Gilder at least sought to be heard by women,” asserts Susan Faludi in her feminist study, *Backlash*, “Bly believed strict separatism was the soft male’s only salvation” (Faludi 1991: 318). Again confirming the resonating reiteration of the elegiac accounts of masculinity in crisis, the effect leaves women, or at least a real relationship with them, absent from not only the cinema, from any adaptative strategies or apparent remedy of the cultural change.
So far this chapter has examined how much of the *fin de millenium* crisis in masculinity cinema attempts to reclaim the phallus, as it were, from the supposed feminising cultures that have caused male objectification and sexualisation. It has also detailed how the phallus is positioned in the cinema (at times literally) as a potent symbol of a dominating and decidedly superior masculine presence. In addition, the chapter has also revealed how female characterisations are also marked by their problematising of the masculine essence, as markers of a cultural feminisation in which an essentialist logic re-affirms the structural values of the masculine/feminine, male/female, active/passive binaries. Furthermore, the female characters that do feature in the cinema and exude an element of active screen presence become either fetish or “sport” by the film’s narrative or aesthetic approaches and treatments to her characterisation.

Of course it is quite clear that this dogma is not only essentialist and anti-feminist, but these ideologies are also quite simply out of touch with the modern real world. Making women passive on screen does not make them passive in the real world. In addition, accentuating the phallus to further make the female submissive does not make any permanent resolutions here either. It is yet another ‘cover up’ or act of concealment that simply ignores the cultural change. In the last chapter the thesis asked, vis-à-vis Yvonne Tasker (1993: 109), whether the ubiquitous images presented in the *fin de millenium* masculinity in crisis cinema “repeat, mourn, or hysterically state a lost male power?” Perhaps this can be answered even more concretely here. Donna Peberdy (2010: 240) asserts, “The mythopoetic men’s movement (and the same could be said for the Million Man March a few years later) demonstrates the idea of masculinity as a collective experience, whereby groups of men come together to “reclaim” and “reassert” their manhood that involves the containment of the Wimp and what the Wimp represents: the feminine (women are excluded from these gatherings)”. In this way, the mythopoetic men's movement, and we can add here this cinema, can be seen as a form of “protest masculinity” which according to Gwen Broude (1990, 103), “represents an unconscious defensive
manoeuvre on the part of males who are in conflict about or insecure about their identities as males” (Peberdy 2010: 240). Consequently, what seems to be only empty, derisible acts of symbolism and representation, that seemingly contain women as either absent, threat or fetish, may also be read as defensive acts of protest that seem to mourn the death of the phallic male rather than resurrect his presence and cannot resolve the seemingly perennial changes to the gender landscape. What we may be witnessing in this cinema are not signs, signifiers or representations of a masculinity in empowerment but rather, inadvertently, one in disarray?

Having said the above, the turn of the millennium also saw Hollywood release a number of films that embodied a series of seemingly post-structural gender models. Spike Jonze’s Being John Malkovich (1999), Kimberley Pierce’s Boys Don’t Cry (1999) Anthony Minghella’s The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999) and Joel Schumacher’s Flawless (1999) all reflect alternative models of the male/female, masculine/feminine, active/passive dichotomies. Each of these films showcase gay, lesbian, transvestite, transsexual, transgender and intersexed characters as secondary and lead protagonists. Though the latter films are testaments to the often cold, sombre realities of gender-bending, an issue the thesis comes to in a moment, Jonze’s Being John Malkovich takes to the hyperreal in its more reflexively utopian sci-fi portrayal of gender as a fluid and mobile construct.

However, it is the contention here that these films not only fit alongside the other fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, but that they also critically affirm the dichotomous dimension outlined above. Aside from Jonze’s hyperreal Being John Malkovich, the other films in this paradigm confront the problem of gender-bending and homosexuality almost solely in their narrativity. For example, Kimberley Pierce’s critically acclaimed Boys Don’t Cry, is a film drama based on the life story of transgender male, Brandon Teena (Hillary Swank) who was raped and murdered on December 31, 1993 by his male friends after they found out he had female genitalia. Joel Schumacher’s second film in the proposed fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, Flawless, follows an ultraconservative security guard Walt
Koontz (Robert De Niro) who after suffering a debilitating stroke is assigned to a rehabilitative program that includes singing lessons with the pre-op transgender drag queen named Rusty (Philip Seymour Hoffman), who lives next door. His phallic security threatened by literal and figurative impotence because of his stroke, Walt re-gathers his decidedly ‘masculine’ confidence whilst drag queen Rusty is perpetually held as the film’s victim.\textsuperscript{109} Beaten, abused and without a satisfactory ending in sight, Rusty is left behind the Walt's potently hetero ascendency.

Finally, Anthony Minghella’s psychological thriller, \textit{The Talented Mr. Ripley}, based on Patricia Highsmith’s acclaimed 1955 novel of the same name, reveals a relationship to homosexuality that results in the creation of an almost poststructuralist ideal of genderless identity in \textit{Ripley}. It is a potential left unexplored by \textit{Purple Noon} (1960), the first film version of the novel, but akin to the other films examined here, \textit{The Talented Mr. Ripley} also ends in violent tragedy; a tragedy which is felt the hardest by the film’s only overtly homosexual character who dies at the hands of the increasingly fragmentary protagonist.

With each of these films tragically framed and with unsavoury endings for each of their post-structural protagonists, it takes the hyper-reality of Jonze’s black fantasy-comedy film \textit{Being John Malkovich} to transcend the heteronormative patriarchal model in the \textit{fin de millennium} masculinity in crisis cinema. However, with a premise that seems so bizarre – Lotte (Cameron Diaz) finds it much easier to simply step into a portal on floor 7½ of a super low-ceiling office building and become John Malkovich than go through the sexual realignment surgery she initially contemplates – it seems that the position is made systemically phantasmagorical by its hyperreality and journey into the surreal. Further, in addition to being a film in which gender and identity freedom is granted only via a portal in an office building, the film hardly steals a phallocentric presence from its virile

\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, Koontz is shown to be suffering not because of the stroke but because of its inference. He can no longer assert himself as the alpha male and cannot fulfill any sexual relations.
protagonist. The film really begs more prevalent questions that affirm the film’s heteronormative phallocentricity than displaces it: Why does everybody want to be John Malkovich in the film? The answer, quite simply, is because John Malkovich embodies all of the characteristics of the potent phallus; the embodiment of “potency, virility, manliness, strength and power” (Clare 2000: 9).

On the whole, the fact that these seemingly post-structural films must go to hyperreal lengths to bring ‘satisfactory’ endings for their gender-bending protagonists, or else remain in a world of discontent and tragedy points to the fact that these texts do little to liberate the realities of a positive post-structural gender position. They instead reinforce old gender binaries in their implicit assertions that stability can only be found in the heteronormative and hypermasculine model; else one must suffer ridicule, fragmentation, endless desires for the normative code, violence or even death as a consequence. Marred by their own tragedy, though appearing to be post-structural and liberating tales of gender mobility on the surface, they still are conservative texts once we go beneath this façade.

If the masks of gender in this fin de millenium cinema may be less rooted in cultural practice, an expression of hope more than social fact, or a clever deception built and re-built to guide us away from the pathway to equality instead of toward it, the cinema seems perceptively to note a conservative, atavistic political abreaction beneath the surface of the apparently renovated society of sensitised, ‘trans’ and gay men and ‘empowered’ women that the cinema represents. “Liberation is everywhere, but only as a garb, and under it is the same old disenfranchisement, the same old inequality, perhaps even more brutal now than ever because painted as something else” asserts film scholar Murray Pomerance (2001: 7) editor of Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls: Gender in Film at the End of the Twentieth Century, on the new practices of seemingly post-structural cinema, hinting at what Barry Keith Grant (2001) openly suggests, that “new” filmic treatments are not as new as they purport to be. John Sakaris (2001) also sees the dispersion of homosexual portraiture with suspicion
because at the core, the films continue to place gays and the gendered Other in narrative compromise. “As much as they claim to be inventing new kinds of stories about new kinds of men and women, Grant and Sakeris both suggest, filmmakers continue the old hegemony, the old domination, the old formula, the old “truths” ” (Pomerance 2001: 7).

Even in Schumacher’s Flawless, for example, a film that perhaps most closely offers a working co-habitual relationship between the two dichotomies in the entire repertoire of the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, has its two male protagonists go back to the positions they were in before they made their peace with each other by the end of the film. With the system back intact, and with the protagonists fitting neatly into their “proper” categories once again, the film valorises regulated gender laws keeping us in our proper gendered place. Rusty must be no real threat to the established order in Flawless. The qualities he possesses must, and do throughout the film, even in closure, continue to mark him as “other,” significantly different from more the powerful hetero men (represented here by Koontz) in the broader scheme of things. Though he has accepted his true self by the final reel, Rusty must remain strangely impotent at the film’s conclusion. Alone and without any sense of real redemption, he also requires the help of Koontz for his survival in the film’s climax. Whilst Rusty is passively pinned to the floor with the gun of the film’s villain in his mouth, he can only muster a small insertion in the antagonist’s leg with a nail file, which allows the film’s real hero Koontz, to take him down with the single bullet of his large handgun whilst he is distracted from the pain. The scene seems too suggestively Freudian for contemplation. In this way, the apparent gender-mobile message of Flawless is critically sanitised, and the gendered division remains as it had before. Koontz regains his potency as alpha male and his additional netting of a female in the film’s closure in which he regains his sexual prowess marks his ascent to masculine glory once again even further. The phallus once again marks the libidinal divisions in which authentic masculinity is not only the preferred, the most desired, but also the most stable.
The Conclusion

This thesis has investigated what was initially proposed as a body of Hollywood cinema that surrounded the cultural notion of masculinity in crisis at the turn of the millennium. The examination set out to determine not only how these films coalesced to form a body of movies, each replicating similar themes, tropes and reiterations of the masculine malaise, but also to investigate how this cinema motioned towards the cultural debates that were surrounding the ‘crisis’ issue at this particular time and where this cinema positioned itself in relation to these debates. Further to this, the thesis also set out to examine the possible implications of this cinema’s ‘intervention’, and set out to determine what, if anything can be learned from the cinema. The final aim, and one that will largely be handled here in this final chapter, was to look beyond how this cinema intervened, and to perhaps understand why the intervention took place, and on such a scale that the twenty-three films examined here would represent it.

The previous chapters have revealed that each of these movies oscillate around notions of asceticism and blue-collar values (Chapter Two), violence and ‘body irreverence’ (Chapter Three) and sexual domination and phallocentricity (Chapter Four), as ways to ‘re-masculinise’ oneself in a period that the cinema discloses, (alongside the more global elegiac cultural accounts on the crisis), that men have lost their ‘authentic’ sense of masculine identity. The examination has also revealed a series of implicit contradictions and ironies underlying the pursuit of these notions, which at times seemed almost intrinsic to the commercial and aesthetic nature of a commercial Hollywood cinema; a cinema driven by celebrity, the spectacle of the image and most potently perhaps, sales. Here, in the first part of the concluding chapter, the thesis will reiterate some of these issues and in doing so will collate the evidence garnered in the examinations so far to determine more holistically why the cinema sustains such contradictions.
and ironic effects, and more critically, how this may be reflective of a cinema that cannot escape such outcomes.

In the second part of the conclusion, the thesis will reflect more critically upon the nature of the seemingly intrinsic relationship between the cultural elegiac voices and commentaries that appeared so influential to the shape of this masculinity in crisis cinema, whilst examining the result of this influence on the cinema itself. Here the conclusion will assess the trappings of a modality that assumes a very neat and complete definition of ‘authentic’ masculinity and will make final reflections as to how this approach may be causal to not only the ‘incoherence’ of many of the film’s machinations towards this definition, but also how this definition may also be morally and ideologically objectionable.

This concluding chapter will then detail the implications of this research as a whole, before making final reflections on the significance of the findings. Finally, and reflexively, the thesis will identify the limitations of the research undertaken and the methodologies employed here for analysis, before suggesting other possible avenues for future research and investigation that may supplement a further intervention into not only this cinema, but the overall complex cultural notion of ‘masculinity in crisis’ and its representational practices.

For the purpose of my argument and in order to investigate my research questions more comprehensively, I divided the thesis into the thematic units: work and consumption, violence, sex and sexuality. The thesis began by explicating the social, cultural, economic and industrial paths to the supposed crisis of masculinity at the turn of the millennium. Taking the late 1980s as its starting block, the thesis initially made cultural connections to pervasive changes in the way that men worked. Detailing how blue-collar, physical and primary industries were in decline whilst the white-collar service sector burgeoned, the thesis underlined how cultural commentators, such as Halle (1994) took to read the change as a pervasive threat to men’s traditional sense of masculinity. Dubbed the, “the feminisation of labour,” by
commentators such as Yandle (1995), Jensen et al. (1988), the thesis detailed how the slippage from blue- to white-collar also coincided with the emergence of a New Man, offering New, what Faludi would label “ornamental”, modes of masculine identity. I then moved on to my textual analyses and in Chapter Two the thesis began to examine how the cinema represented the cultural changes relating to men and their position with work and consumption. Here I examined how the films, and their ‘pre-enlightened’ protagonists, represented the New white-collar models of work and male consumer practices. During the examinations of the cinema in this chapter and in particular in the examination of irreverence and asceticism, issues of violence also began to overlap the critical discourse. Subsequently in Chapter Three the thesis began to examine how representations of violence were also, and in ways that would complement the representations of asceticism found in the previous chapter, used as a device against the apparent increasing ‘feminisation’ and apparent social emasculation. Here the thesis examined how the *fin de millennium* protagonists invited injury in a way to ‘de-feminise’ themselves and to prove they stood in antithesis to the image centric and pin-up cultures. This proved a particularly important contribution to my examination as a whole and began to expose some of the inherent ironies that the cinema seemed complicit to when attempting, rather implicitly, to undermine its own commercial industrial praxis. The films seemed to be denying that they were intrinsic to the many values they were deriding, no more so than in the ironic pin-up and celebrity cultures that their hero’s were implicitly attached to in both diegetic and non-diegetic spaces. Here performers like Mel Gibson, Brad Pitt, Keanu Reeves and so on, came to complicate the very issue of celebrity and pin-up cultures that the elegiac accounts of crisis were deriding as fundamental parts of the problem.

In akin to violence, issues surrounding male sex and sexuality were also represented in these films as a mechanism for re-claiming masculinity. Where the cultural investigation revealed that men had become increasingly subjected to their sexualisation on the popular cultural landscape, it also
revealed how women were conversely becoming more empowered in popular and political discourses. The thesis disclosed that the essentialist dichotomies of men as active and women as passive became increasingly compromised by the New ‘politics of looking’. Popular cultural products like *Sex and the City* (1998-2004; 2008; 2010) clearly demonstrated this emerging phenomenon and proposed a new discourse. However, the protagonists in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema came again to challenge this emerging dynamic. Specifically ‘the phallus’, and a phallocentric concern with dominance, became a form of campaigning against the model in which the ‘traditional’, or rather essentialist, dichotomy was perceived lost, or at least damaged. Taking a hyper-presence on the screen, the phallus became a symbol of male virility, heroism and power, in which the protagonists ushered in a forceful and dominating screen presence and aesthetic, motioning (hetero) men back on the phallogocentric throne and once again dominant in gender relations, an effect that marked the end of the critical examinations in Chapter Four.

Perhaps one of the most transparent limitations of the cinema to deliver ‘unproblematic’ texts, that is to say texts that are cogent in both ideology and without contradiction in textual narrativity, is that they seem to assume the position of operating *outside* the commercial, ornamental and celebrity cultures they deride. These motion pictures by all accounts ignore the fact that Hollywood cinema, even the media in general, is intrinsically a propagator of those very cultures. This does, however, at times spill into the narrativity, where there is an unavoidable but implicit suggestion of the media’s role in maligning ‘authentic’ masculine identity with shadows of betrayal, and in doing so it exposes some of the underlying contradictions and ironies of the cinema. To take Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* as a case in point for example, Harron shows how serial killer and hyper-consumer Patrick Bateman speaks and how Bateman acts, is systemically media conjured. Reviews in *magazine* culture sections, for example tell him where to dine, what to eat, and what kind of media-fuelled language he can use for
description; “a playful but mysterious little dish” asserts Bateman when coaxing his mistress Courtney to have the deliberately absurd “peanut butter soup with smoked duck and mashed squash,” a description repeated verbatim from the *New York Matinee*. Equally, high-end glossy fashion magazines ‘fix’ his approach to clothes and style. Indeed the vacuity of this overt leaning on the media is exposed in a way that acknowledges its emptiness and hollow sustenance. For example, Bateman addresses the areas of political concern he believes are of most important in his modern world:

“Well, we have to end apartheid for one. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger. But we can’t ignore our social needs either. We have to stop people from abusing the welfare system. We have to provide food and shelter for the homeless and oppose racial discrimination and promote civil rights while also promoting equal rights for women but change the abortion laws to protect the right to life yet still somehow maintain women’s freedom of choice.”

At which point Harron’s camera show the ensemble at the table where Bateman is sitting stare at him uncomfortably. He continues,

“We also have to control the influx of illegal immigrants. We have to encourage a return to traditional moral values and curb graphic sex and violence on TV, in movies, in pop music, everywhere. Most importantly we have to promote general social concern and less materialism in young people.”

Upon this deeply oxymoronic suggestion, recognised also by the characters within the diegesis, Price, Bateman’s friend and colleague, chokes on his drink whilst everyone is silent and mystified. Of course, not only is Patrick delivering sophomoric, ‘by the book’, media mantra here, but he is also saying it deadpan. Patrick is incapable of thinking about these issues in a reflexive and personal way. This dissociation between life as lived, and life as media informed, even to the point of absurdity, is a key point of critique

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110 Emphasis mine.
for Harron’s *American Psycho*. Moreover, of course, as Chapter Two has examined, Bateman’s endless, boundary-less, decidedly media-fuelled consumption is also reified to induce violence. In fact in one of the film’s most violent sequences, Bateman’s actions stem directly from a Hollywood movie. While Bateman is shown undertaking one of his daily exercise routines, on the television next to him plays Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). In the very next scene, just after Bateman has drugged two women in his apartment, he imitates the tropes; wide-eyed and frothy mouthed he reveals a chainsaw and begins wielding it at his victim. Even Harron’s shooting style changes to compensate for the transition in Bateman’s psyche in which his actions are now governed by imitation, as the camera, like Hooper’s, turns frenetic, the screen darkens and for the first and last time in the film the camera leaves the subjectivity of its protagonist for the hysterical victim.

The inference is that Patrick Bateman is really a facsimile consumer and serial killer, the seriality of his murders forging from simulacra and imitation rather than an innate desire to kill, an effect eternalised by his recurring mantra “I need to return some videotapes”. In short, Bateman is the violent mirror of consumerism, but it is the *media* that creates this reflection, and most potently here, this includes Hollywood. Movies, like his pulp of fashion magazines are simply excerpts for Bateman to design his life and (masculine) identity upon, even if these are, as they always are in *American Psycho*, destructive.111

Other films in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema are also, at times even inherently, critical of the media manipulative model of consumption and its negative relationship to the masculine essence. Fincher’s *Fight Club* ushers in a similar, perhaps more insidious, message in

111 On the commentary track of the standard edition Lions Gate DVD release of *American Psycho*, Mary Harron, asserts that anti-hero Patrick Bateman must watch movies for instruction in human activity: “Nothing can come from within because there is no within: Everything is modelled from outside.”
the Narrator's motion to Paper Street; a crumbling decrepit house disconnected from the media landscape – “by the end of the first month, I didn't miss TV” – asserts the Narrator in relation to this transition (see below). Perhaps the model is most accentuated by Ethan Powell (Anthony Hopkins) in Jon Turteltaub's *Instinct*, who quite literally flees to the silence of the jungle to 'get away from it all' and re-claim his 'instinctual', primitive, masculine existence in a Bly-like expedition to realise his apparent innate sense of self. Indeed this is one of the underlying messages of the masculinity in crisis cinema, and it is cast from the heart of the surrounding elegiac accounts of the crisis: media articulated material consumption and media articulated identities cannot and will not offer a sustainable masculine, or in fact any other kind of identity, for its consumer to follow. It offers only a representation of an empty, often commercially crafted, potentially destructive other. But instinctively, we stumble upon an inherently big problem here. How can a movie, with a narrative, or at least an underlying ideology, that sets up its own medium for the large part as enemy – that is inauthentic, castrating, destructive and manipulative – actively critique itself, at least without achieving near-perfect irony? For Stacey Thompson (2004: 61), the answer is rather straightforward, it simply cannot, and for Thompson it may be a compromise in the cinema's ideological commitments that vitally stand as a limit case for popular Hollywood film in general. “[T]he film refuses to critique itself” asserts Thompson on *Fight Club*:

“After moving into a house without a steady supply of electricity, the narrator admits that “by the end of the first month, I didn’t miss TV,” but this is as close to an examination of visual media as the film comes. *Fight Club* never proposes that Hollywood film, or *Fight Club* the movie itself, cannot resolve or fulfil the desires it sets in motion. The film's corporate means of production prohibit it from making a series of statements such as “don’t watch this movie, don’t buy this movie, don’t pay for this movie, don’t go to movies,” or even “don’t go to Hollywood movies,” and this prohibition serves as one of the limits to the film's anticommercial bent.”
We can also add Thompson’s comments to the other masculinity in crisis cinema of the moment. How can these productions essentially bite the hand that feeds them? Taking this kind of logical rationalising to the cinema as a whole, other instinctual contradictions may also become apparent. To continue with *Fight Club*, how, for example, can a multi-million dollar actor like Brad Pitt, who was paid $17.5 million for his role as material-and woman-hater Tyler Durden, who at the time was very publicly married to equally famous multi-million dollar actress Jennifer Aniston, in a film that cost $63 million to make, a film that was being ‘sold’ globally by multi-billion dollar media tycoon Rupert Murdoch’s 20th Century Fox, convince an audience to relinquish the material (to repeat Thompson above, what about the cost of a ticket?) and reject the media (the platform on which they are viewing the actual film). Tyler’s “It’s only after you’ve lost everything that you’re free to do anything” may be a direct stab at commodity culture but when voiced by multi-million dollar actor/pin-up Brad Pitt, it loses its forcefulness in the irony.

Further, the ironies continue if one examines the sales strategies of the film, an effect which when put into context, is already deeply and intrinsically oxymoronic. For example, 20th Century Fox financed a $20 million large-scale campaign to provide a press junket, posters, billboards, and trailers for television for their ‘anti-consumer’ film *Fight Club*. And this is only at the direct marketing level. Like every other film in this cinema, there was, and still is, a plethora of official and unofficial merchandise available, some of which for *Fight Club* is even advertised as a link on the Extras section of the Special Edition DVD, where replica Tyler Durden jackets, sunglasses and retro t’s are also available. Further to this, and in continuation, the irony of *Empire* magazine voting Tyler the number one best dressed character in film of all time, for his “pure, rebel style” adding “But if you can carry it off, you too will be the imaginary embodiment of alpha-male anarchy, junk-shop chic and utter cool”, is only all too obscenely paradoxical to *Fight Club’s*
ideological code and is clearly an indictment of the cultural elegy. Further, for *American Psycho* the irony of ironies is that if one is so inclined, you can purchase a moving action figure of the serial killer himself; an action figure of a character who defined that the ethics of consumerism’s natural excesses will lead to lifelessness, and will make you succumb to manipulation in movement and gesture. The advertising blurb reads, “it is loaded with ***accessories***: Knives, an Axe, Briefcase, Nailgun, Videotape, Walkman, Apartment Floor Base, with Articulation in: Ball Jointed Neck, Cut Shoulders, Forearms, and Wrists” – a description that curiously more than whispers to the language of Ellis’s transgressive fiction itself.

With the release of the updated figure complete with motion censored dialogue from the film, the repetitious nature of consumption and media vocabulary is ironically forged once again by the marketing moguls of a movie that critiques an extended use of it.

However, it is not just the films textual elements that have become reproducible in the films marketing, merchandising and paraphernalia. One must also take into account the encouraged multiple viewings, namely the DVD format and its multiple reincarnations and special edition releases and re-releases, not to mention the *Fight Club*, and *The Matrix* video games where one can materially ‘become’ Tyler or Neo. Rather than moving consumers to become producers (and away from consumers), the film’s material effect seems to be not just consumption but repeated consumption of the same Hollywood commodity (Thompson 2004: 61-62). Essentially, by connecting themselves so closely to unshakeable modes of, apparently ‘anti-feminine’, consumption in their respective maxims, the films intrinsically prohibited themselves from entering the same spaces to connect, promote, sell and re-sell their ‘product’ to the world, at least without realising near-perfect irony. It is not that it is impossible to ‘promote’ or market what is essentially transgressive anarchy (i.e., that which goes against the system), but when one seems to be deriding the entire *ethic* of consumption, and

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112 See [http://www.empireonline.com/features/top10/bestdressed/1.asp](http://www.empireonline.com/features/top10/bestdressed/1.asp)
113 Emphasis mine.
which such vehemence, it is difficult not to read the films with the same level of critique they discharge throughout. Consequently, as critical texts they fail to complete a coherent representation of the malaise in this respect. Instead, they seem to rather perpetuate the very practice of consumption, even though textually, and on the surface, it is this very practice that they deride.

Aside from the implicit ironies that surround the films ascetic ideologies, one may also interrogate the place, or rather effect, of celebrity in this cinema. Intrinsic to the elegiac position of masculinity in crisis at this moment, and as such, as has been examined, one that is shared by this cinema, is a complete vilification of celebrity cultures. “Publicity mills” and “celebrity industries” are “disembodied barrens, a dismal substitute for the real thing” asserts Susan Faludi (1999: 34-35), contending that postwar men have been betrayed by the growth of celebrity culture, a culture which promotes and celebrates excessive consumerism, monolithic capitalism, and physical beauty. But of course there is more than a subtle irony when actual celebrities are heading the fin de millennium cinema’s campaign against the celebrity culture. Fight Club’s Tyler Durden himself exclaims, “We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we’ll be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars, but we won’t”, but there is clearly something objectionable about these kinds of assertions which resonate in this cinema. Indeed, many critics of the film have found it near obscene that multi-millionaire, pin-up, Hollywood idol, Brad Pitt can sincerely recite those kinds of lines. Henry Giroux (2001: 67) has called it “a contradiction that cannot be overstated,” whilst Salon’s Andrew O’Hehir (1999) has asserted “there’s something more than a little ludicrous about sitting in a theater while Brad Pitt preaches at you about the emptiness of materialism.” These kinds of cultural and ideological objections quite simply do not work in these movies. The whole culture of celebrity drives Hollywood’s commercial cinema, and this cinema is no exception.

It is an effect perhaps American Psycho director Mary Harron can comment on more than most. When production company Lions Gate Entertainment
issued a press release stating that Leonardo DiCaprio would star as the obtusely reprehensible Patrick Bateman in the film, Harron resigned from the venture in protest, preferring to walk from the project than to compromise its integrity with a star who could not possibly capture the vicious emptiness of Bateman (Murphet, J. 2002: 73). With an inflated offer of $20 million to play the role, the hope of course was that DiCaprio would add ‘material’ and ‘celebrity’ value to the production, a value that the then relatively unknown Christian Bale, who Harron wanted for the role, could not forseeably achieve.114 Fresh from his Titanic (1997) success in which he garnered a colossal fan base, no more so than from a hetero-female contingent, Lions Gate wanted to capitalise on his catapulting stardom, even if that meant compromising the ideological fabric of a text where one is supposed to recognise a vicious and monstrous hyper every-consumer. It was only after DiCaprio eventually dropped out of contention – due largely to the fact, as Frank DiGiaco (1998) speculates, that “his portrayal of a yuppie monster who likes to torture and kill women would frighten off the massive fan base of teenage girls whose repeated viewing of Titanic has kept the movie alive at the box office” – that Harron and Bale were back on the project.115 In essence, Lions Gate Entertainment, proved Hollywood’s industrial money-making commitments, and not only that, that much of this commitment is driven by celebrity.116 Ideology could be sacrificed for celebrity if it was deemed more ‘profitable’, an effect Harron came to realise almost to her end in this particular production, commenting, “[I learned] when money’s at stake, everything else goes out the window” on her dodged bullet.117 Indeed, this near-miss exposed the fin de millennium cinema’s relationship to the culture of the celebrity, in which much of the plaintive approaches to the elegy of emasculating celebrity and ornamental cultures, that is those that are image and material obsessed, are critically, but almost

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114 In fact Christian Bale, despite having a relatively healthy pan-Atlantic acting CV covering two decades, had only really last grabbed headlines back in 1987, when at only 13-years-old, he was cast as the lead in Steven Spielberg’s epic, Empire of the Sun.
116 Further here, Lions Gate Entertainment also represent a relatively ‘indie’ contingent.
intrinsically, strained and undermined in both its textual format and ideological underpinning.

Further to this, although Harron managed to stave off the imposition of Leonardo DiCaprio as protagonist on her project, albeit by his own doing than hers, that is also not to say that *American Psycho* was not in part driven by other "star vehicles". When it was eventually settled that Christian Bale would play the role of Bateman, it was only on the proviso that Harron cast at least two other “big name” actors in supporting roles. It was to this end that Harron hired Willem Dafoe to play the acerbic Detective Kimball and Reese Witherspoon to play Evelyn, Patrick's fiancé in the film. Of course the culture of celebrity can be echoed around the body of the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema in which some of the biggest male stars of the era – Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise (taking lead in both *Magnolia* and *Eyes Wide Shut*), Robert De Niro (taking lead in both *Flawless* and *Analyze This*) Brad Pitt, Kevin Spacey, Keanu Reeves, Jim Carey, Anthony Hopkins, Ben Stiller and so on – play the dominant roles.

Moreover, the culture of celebrity also seems to run into the fabric of the diegesis in the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. Though the films impress codes of asceticism, irreverence and values of masochism towards the ‘material’ self and the self-aesthetic (Chapter Two and Three respectively), these are also positioned by charismatic, handsome, (often shirtless) heroes who, in contradistinction to their ideological imperatives, also implicitly strive to achieve their ‘freedom’ through large amounts of capital (or rather its extortion, see Chapter Two). But more than this, by failing to make a real challenge to the structural underpinnings of political and cultural change, preferring to machinate along surface tensions of aesthetic and utopian idealisations, the cinema also enlists a code of celebrity to their heroes, who in doing so merely *showcase* masculinity rather than confront it.

Tyler, for instance, represents the magnetism of the isolated, dauntless anti-hero whose public appeal is based on the attractions of the cult-personality
rather than on the strengths of an articulated notion of political reform (Giroux 2001: 12). His representation on the screen, aesthetically pleasing exteriority and somewhat ‘soundbite’ dialogue reinforces this. Reduced at times to emitting only sophomoric and clichéd expositions such as, “I say let’s evolve, let the chips fall where they may” or “It’s only after we’ve lost everything that we’re free to do anything”, his cult-celebrated personality is also why he must succeed in the movie’s closure where Tyler Durden’s newly realised filmic success, that is against the backdrop of the original novel, may not only be to ensure the film satisfies the fans of the film’s anarchic strand, but may also be symbolic of an audience’s yearning for Durden’s private success than for public gain. It is an effect that is also evidenced by the fact that Fincher cuts to credits before we see the political outcome of Durden’s successes, an effect that exposes the film’s overt commitment to its hero over his politics therein.

Indeed, apart from some textual and character streamlining, Fincher’s Fight Club, stayed relatively faithful to blank fiction author Chuck Palahniuk’s original imagining in 1996, but that is only until the film’s final sequences where it seems that the endorsement of a celebrity-stylised hero even changed the shape of the narrativity. Indeed, the ending got a thorough overhaul. In Palahniuk’s original text, as the novel closes, Tyler Durden sets a bomb to destroy a sea of credit card companies, the film’s proposed hub of the American economic system, but vitally it fails to detonate. In addition, as the Narrator successfully vanquishes Tyler, the novel’s final moments detail how the protagonist is left alone to dwell in a mental asylum. However, in Fincher’s Fight Club Tyler's bombs joyously detonate and the image of the financial buildings collapsing climaxes the film’s closing sequence, whilst in the foreground, the Narrator joins hands with Marla Singer in union. But further to this, although Tyler Durden is, like in the original novel, vanquished by the Narrator’s subconscious, (where in fact he was conceived), Fincher places a subliminal image of a half-erect penis just before we cut to credits, an image the film previously shows Tyler splice into a kids movie in a theatre where he moonlights as a projectionist. The reason
for the incision of the image, asserts Fincher, was to “show that the spirit of Tyler was still out there”.

Indeed, when asked by *Empire* magazine why he deemed fit to change the ending of Palahniuk’s original novel, *Fight Club* director David Fincher replied,

“Jim Uhls [screenwriter] and I got to this point – actually, I think Jim was the first one to identify this – where we were sitting saying ‘OK, why don’t the bombs explode at the end?’ ‘Well because they would destroy all these great public buildings.’ I was like, ‘And why don’t we wanna do this? They’re credit card companies, right? So why don’t we do it?’ Originally we were going to have Ed [the Narrator] and Helena [Marla Singer] in this van with the Space Monkeys (*Tyler’s secret army*), driving away while all the buildings collapse, but it was a little long. But I never thought the mental institution with Tyler really worked. I always felt – and I said this to Chuck – that the book, to me, seemed like the film: totally in love with Tyler Durden. It couldn’t stand to let him go. I wanted people to love Tyler, but I also wanted them to be OK with his vanquishing”.

Nullified by the stilted effects of a hero left wanting, effectively the movie has its cake – Tyler, our ego ideal, is rendered as hero and is immortalised in the subliminal aesthetic of a phallus directly before the credit roll – and eats it too; the Narrator, our ego, is positioned somewhat romantically with a woman, marking both the classic heteronormative Hollywood narrative and aesthetic, as they hold hands in unison before we cut to credits.

It is yet another effect that seems to be acting out of compulsion to the Hollywood film markets where satisfying the utopian desires of audiences, and within that the executives and financiers upstairs, seems more important than sustaining ideological continuity in the thematic content. Fincher seems to quite literally *sell-out* on the “no exit” ideologies the


original text advances. He manages to complete in fact, much like many postmodern industries of consumption, “the deftest of marketing tricks: to be both anti-establishment and mass market...”¹²⁰ Further, while he retains the anarchic pulse, the apology, when the Narrator takes Marla's hand and says, “I'm sorry... you met me at a very strange time in my life,” removes the event occurring before them and recasts it merely as a transitional stage in the narrator's life. “Thus in turn he also rejects all of the more radical ideological oppositions it has unleashed and keeps the film apolitical [and we may want to add commercial] enough to cover the backs of the production” (Thompson 2004: 58). It allows the film to ‘flirt’ with anarchy, keep the board happy upstairs, become a commercial success and win the satisfaction of the widest of audiences. Not only that, and to take this modality into the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema as a whole, the strategy of setting up the ascetic promise of re-masculinisation, and then to renege on this promise, pull back on it, or at least dilute it (as evidenced in Payback, American Beauty, Fight Club, and so on) also meant that they could avoid completing those anti-media and anti-consumption messages so that audiences would feel less anxious buying ‘into’ the films and their reproducible formats. In complete contradistinction to the machinations that they seem to be relaying throughout, the sale of ironically placed merchandising, paraphernalia and repeated sales of “Special Edition” DVD's, video games and other extra textual ‘entry points' that surrounded so much of this cinema could be advanced. As Windrum (2002) has asserted, it may simply be naïve to think Hollywood, a commercial industry, could do otherwise.

In this way, the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema could also be read as a cinema that capitalised on the cultural elegy, in a way not just to profit in the reiteration of the elegy, in pursuing tales of men mourning the death of the ‘traditional’ masculine man then celebrating his resurrection

¹²⁰ This reference in fact is originally attributed to sport giant Nike’s ‘Just Do It’ advertising campaign, a campaign running at the time of the film’s release. Soloman, J., 1998. When Nike Goes Cold. Newsweek, March 30.
forever on celluloid, but rather in a way to ‘sell it’. In a whisper they said
don’t watch TV, don’t go to the movies, don’t buy this “shit” you don’t need,
(in fact the Narrator’s comment, “after a few weeks I didn’t miss TV” is as
close to a direct notion towards turning off from the media that any of the
films get to), but in a shout they ‘sold’ the aesthetic imaginary, the
spectacular bodies in spectacular action. Staying only on the surface, they
forcefully advertised ‘traditional’ notions of masculinity and put them up for
sale. Packaged into a film, and then from a film to a lobby card, a DVD, a
videogame, a poster, a t-shirt, a mug, a NOKIA phone121 and a utopian
ideology; in the cultural storm of consumption in which the films operated,
the audience were encouraged to follow the maxim in the only way that they
could – they ‘bought’ into it. Fight Club and much of the other fin de
millennium masculinity in crisis cinema still enjoys a huge cult fascination
that still subsequently sells all the mugs, t-shirts and merchandise that the
film is still peddling. One of the most commercially ‘rebellious’ cinemas in
Hollywood history has also been one of the most commercially profitable. A
total of eleven of the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis movies – movies
that have called for asceticism, for an obliteration of commodity cultures
and capitalistic predispositions – have all grossed more than $100 million,
reaching the typical benchmark for blockbuster status.122

However, as has been revealed in the textual examinations of this cinema
throughout, the fall-out of this commodification of masculinity in crisis is
stark. Behind this appropriation and need for audience satisfaction, is an
ideological content that gets lost in the blizzard of the sale and the joy of the
image. Consequently what we are left with is a confused and ideologically

121 As arguably one of the biggest films of 1999, NOKIA made sure main protagonist Neo
was using its 8110 phone when receiving mission instructions inside the Matrix. Largely by
inference of this product placement and implicit promotion, the 8110 headed the market by
the end of the decade. To keep with the film’s futuristic feel NOKIA custom fitted the now
infamous spring loaded key pad.

122 The Matrix, Tarzan, The World is not Enough, American Beauty and Austin Powers: The
Spy Who Shagged Me have taken five of the top ten high grossers of the year. In fact, as of
December 2008, in addition to the afore mentioned films, American Pie, Analyze This, Eyes
Wide Shut, Payback, The Talented Mr. Ripley, and Fight Club, a total of eleven of the
masculinity in crisis movies, have all grossed more than $100 million. See:
<http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view2=worldwide&yr=1999&p=htm>
incoherent cinema; films that grieve for the loss of ‘traditional’ man because of burgeoning cultures of commercialisation and ornamental desires at one instant, but then appear to celebrate these very cultures (lest accentuate them) in the next. However, as the thesis has also revealed, the cultural elegy that informs the fin de millenium masculinity in crisis cinema is also complicit to much of the same failings. The next section will confront this issue in more critical depth.

From film to culture

As each chapter of the thesis has examined, and as much of this last section has intimated, it seems that only temporary, idealistic, pre- or anti-feminist methods of masculine renewal are offered by the masculinity in crisis cinema. In every modality that the fin de millenium cinema offers, there is a distinct neglect of the political and structural positions that they are operating in.

As Chapter Two has revealed, taking motions to drop out, as it were, of the white-collar system with no alternative network for raising finances other than a series of illegal ventures, seems to more than critically overlook the pragmatic consequences of this schemata. Indeed, ironically, to seemingly bridge this gap, a series of fin de millenium cinema protagonist’s loot the very white-collar world they deride. Fight Club’s the Narrator bribes his white-collar boss; American Beauty’s Lester Burnham extorts his boss; Office Space’s Peter Gibbon’s attempts to embezzle his white-collar company; Payback’s Porter steals from white-collar businessmen to begin his journey towards retribution; whilst the other films in this cinema, such as The Matrix and Instinct, simply fail to account for the practical issue of money in their fictional worlds of asceticism. Of course this is not only problematic in its practical application, but moreover the ascetic tactic of re-masculinisation also neglects, and in some way shows contempt, for those Other’s who face the reality of more stark and severe concerns to money and employment.
Chapter Three offered a similar perspective. When the films take a decidedly masochistic pursuit of violence as a means of masculine renewal, not only are these ventures temporary, and inherently dangerous, they also ignore the real structural problems of violence for those who suffer and have suffered without consent. Chapter Four’s examination of sex and sexuality revealed more of the same; surface ‘phallic’ promises to the threat of feminisation. Literally, at times, the films filled their screens with images of the phallus, whilst at the same time made the composite screen females decidedly absent and/or a threat to which they would make passive by aesthetic play and submissive positioning whilst they pursued a distinctly heteronormative agenda, an agenda which continued even in the seemingly ‘post-structural’ texts of Flawless, Being John Malkovich, The Talented Mr. Ripley and Kimberley Peirce’s Boys Don’t Cry.

However, not confronting masculinity in its critical and literal sense is not an effect unique to this cinema. The pervasive cultural accounts of crisis are also complicit to the same standards exuded in these movies. In fact as the thesis has continually underlined and demonstrated, they largely informed the narrativity of this cinema, at least in its ideological footing. Accounts like Faludi’s (1999), and to extend this to the earlier elegies of Robert Bly and his seminal Iron John (1991), echo and reverberate across the cinema and though perhaps not direct blueprints, of course Faludi’s article, for instance, was released alongside the fin de millennium cinema, the elegiac tones resonate in the diegesis where ‘old’, ‘traditional’ masculinity is at once mourned and celebrated. It is an effect that can be most explicitly seen perhaps by the number of articles in which Faludi herself has directly praised the cinema, no more so than Fincher’s Fight Club.123 As Clark (2002: 65) has insisted, “Both Susan Faludi’s Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man (text) and the film Fight Club (image) insist that men have been emasculated by consumerism; that the post-war legacy of the so-called good

life has shifted men from active, heroic, confrontational roles into the passive, ornamental roles usually assigned to women; and that, without a Great Depression, or Great War, or any other dragon to slay, emasculated men have become imprisoned in their job cubicles and possessed by their possessions, often with not only negative, but even violent repercussions”.

But not only is this rationalisation of ‘crisis’ built on a logic heavily weighed with nostalgia, it is also inherently mythical, perhaps even illogical, and it is possible a bigger point is being missed here. There is no definitive definition of masculinity. In fact the very act of conjuring a firm and definitive definition of masculinity, a definition that includes some positions while excluding others, is to prompt nothing more than fissure, fragmentation, irony, parody, incoherence, and contradiction, in fact the very problematic fall-out of the fin de siècle cinema itself. How can one ever hope to stand against an imaginary, idealistic, out of reach utopian standard?

The crisis itself, in both the elegiac accounts and those shared in the cinema, was built on a faulty logic that said men and their sense of masculinity should be like this and not like that – but this is a chimera. Men have never shared the same concept of masculinity. As anthropology and socio-biology have demonstrated, men are not born with a certain kind of masculine disposition in their genetic make-up. Masculinity is culturally appropriated. Increasingly gender theorists and post-structural thinkers alike have become increasingly vocal in pursuing that masculinity is a cultural construction. Hence, masculinity has increasingly become referred to in its plural sense, “masculinities”, by leading gender scholars and commentators (Connell, 1995).

However, in order to successfully pursue that masculinity is in some way in crisis, there has to be an underlying assumption that a definition of masculinity, moreover ‘authentic’ masculinity, exists and furthermore is tangible, and subsequently of course, this is very position the elegiac readers of the crisis take. It is implicitly enveloped in the plaintive critical dialogues surrounding the fin de siècle crisis of masculinity, which simply ‘close off’ all
other positions in favour of a singular, seemingly nostalgic, ‘traditional’, and inherently ungraspable other. In exasperating this hagiography, asserting that men, used only in the generic sense, have become abandoned, or “stiffed”, by cultural change, the plaintive rationalisation ignores all other, or rather Other positions, and consequently appears evocatively hegemonic and patriarchal. Though some may have seen the rumblings of an increasingly growing community of men, ready to take a personal meditation towards change, the elegiac readers took to the cultural change with absolute derision, insisting that this change leads only to a fractured sense of masculine identity.

More than this, as the Introductory Chapter revealed, the elegiac readers of the crisis appear as defenders and exponents for the very pathology other commentators, such as Roger Horrocks (1994) or William Pollack (1998), were denigrating, wrapped in an, often violent, and pre-feminist ideology in which everybody but white, middle-class, heterosexual men were to blame for the situation white, middle-class, heterosexual men were currently facing. As psychiatrist Anthony Clare (2000: 4) has insisted, if one sums up the stark and statistical reality of the situation, “The colonists are still in command.” Yet because the elegiac modality neglects to confront the structure, preferring instead to only nostalgise a pathway to redemption by pursuing only hedonistic and ‘spectacular’ goals, which as the thesis has examined, becomes expelled in a concentration on the surface and only temporary ‘fixes’ for the so-called masculine malaise, the method also allowed the elegiac readers, and here their composite cinema, to hijack and take hostage the position of oppression, whilst leaving out those Others from both its malaise and redemption. It is an effect that has left commentators like cultural critic Henry Giroux (2001) to conclude that this type of Hollywood cinema is involved in the emergence of a new kind of racism, reactionary politics and cynicism, and most poignant perhaps, an erasure of important social realities. In fact what Giroux acknowledges here is the un-truth of this utopian hagiography and pursuit of a masculine
idealism; leaving us only to ask, whose idealistic utopia is it that the cinema is pursuing?

In fact it may be worth taking a look at another, earlier, body of cinema that sought to interrogate the role of violence, work, consumption and to a lesser degree sex, in those Other communities left absent from both this crisis and its cinematic projection and representation. Set distinctly outside of white suburban districts and into African-American communities and urban ghettos, “‘hood films”, as they came to be retrospectively labelled, attracted national media coverage in the early ‘90s. Embodied in movies such as Boys N the Hood (1991), Juice (1992), Menace II Society (1993), Sugar Hill (1994), and Fresh (1994), not only did ’hood films simply represent contemporary urban black realities but they also reinforced the popular perception that everyday black urban life, poor employment opportunities and violent crime mutually define each other (Giroux 1995: 333).

These ‘hood films, “also espouse the view that crime is not caused by aberrant individuals but is the result of systemic problems of mainstream society – which they define as white, patriarchal, and capitalist – and thus requires collective solutions” (Grant 2001: 193). In short, the ’hood film sought to explain the somewhat ‘black masculine malaise’ as a socio-cultural inflection of white, patriarchal privilege, in which the mechanisms of modern capitalism, in addition to the result of years of racial exploitation, assist in the moral and social breakdown of black urban societies.

With young black males protesting that they are living in a world in which ‘others’ perpetually offer condemnation and resistance, the “don’t know, don’t show, or don’t care” dialogues of Boyz N the Hood’s Doughboy for example, also creates a virtual assimilation between these films and those of the fin de millennium crisis cinema. Both seem to be at a grievance with a society that does not seem to see their worthiness, or even see them at all; a society that leaves them to find themselves in a violent world which marks their ‘difference’ as unwanted, as surplus and regressive to ‘progress’. What makes it interesting however, is of course the obvious difference in contexts:
the ‘others’ the black men are complaining about are those patriarchal, somewhat middle-class, white men, who here are making complaints of their own cultural ostracism in the fin de millennium crisis cinema less than ten years later. More than this, the black men in this ’hood cinema are also protesting about a jobless totality, where white-collar visions equate out-of-reach utopias, where the realities of violence are systemic to cultural grievance and conducive only to wreaking havoc on families and sapping potential growth, whilst in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, the rules are quite simply inverted: white-collar jobs are pitched as too feminine, too clean and too easy, whilst violence is proactively used to assert ones supposed increasingly passive identity.

It becomes difficult not to conclude that at least some of the fin de millennium cinema are more examples of a tendency – identified by Carol Clover (1993) in relation to Falling Down (1993) – of angry white men ‘carving an interest group’ of their own by claiming that they are the victims of a culture which is not only unable to accommodate their supremacist gender identity but, more complexly, fails to recognise their potential or valuative presence at all. As Watson (2002) has asserted on the more holistic notion of the white angry male in film, and specifically to the movies of Paul Thomas Anderson’s Magnolia (1999) and David Fincher’s Fight Club (the only two they seem to recognise from the year however), “variously referred to as ‘everyman movies’, ‘angry white male films’, ‘mid-life crisis films’, middle-age male trauma movies’ and ‘male hormone movies’, in their own way, [these movies] can be plotted as two interesting instances of a growing body of cultural representations, emerging in a range of formal and generic contexts, in which the universalising codes of omnipotent American WASP masculinity appear irreconcilable” (Watson in Davies and Wells 2002: 16).

But it is precisely because of the context of the codified patriarchal WASP asserting a kind of socio-cultural grievance that so many critics saw the films as pointless meanderings wrapped in the spectacle of the male fascination of violence and sophomoric philosophising. From this position,
many asked why there was a need for any kind of analytical introspection at all. This, together with a heady cocktail of guilt and relief, is perhaps what led a number of prominent critics to dismiss *Fight Club*, for example, as at best either “a laborious and foolish waste of time”, “an insult to intelligent men”, “a witless mishmash of whiny, infantile philosophizing”, or at worst, a “frankly and cheerfully fascist” movie.¹²⁴

As the reception to *Fight Club* here proves, there does have to a kind of caution to this kind of ideological philosophising in which white, middle-class men elegise their seemingly elevated cultural position. Further, what these reviews also revealed perhaps was that the film, and we can extend this to the other *fin de millennium* cinema, is borne from a crisis that is not only inherently middle-class and white-centric, but also one that claims that the resolution of this crisis can be found in rather uncritical, even sophomoric, surface tensions. In fact, perhaps more precisely, and in a way that Susan Faludi, for example, would never admit, the abreaction to the apparent masculine crisis leans towards that social category that also mourns ‘authentic’ masculinity but does not confront it, the New Lad.

Chapter One intimated how alongside the cultural manifestation of the New Man with his seemingly progressive but somewhat ambiguous relationship with the pro-feminist, post-structural camp, and his more recent embodiment, the metrosexual, also ascended a different New Man that marked somewhat of a reversal in gender politics. Indeed, it was in light of the apparent increasing sublimation of the stoic masculine code in favour of an increasingly feminised and seemingly effeminate other, that a cultural need for men to re-grasp their sense of manhood (Levant, 1997; Coward, 1999), away from those seeming to attack men’s stance of victimisation (Robinson, 2000), that a further would-be backlash became evident. The New Lad was borne from such a moment. Like the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis protagonist’s he too was pre-/anti-feministic and

pervasively white-centric. Borne out of a predominantly heterosexual counter-culture and distinctly anti-aspirational, anti-obsessional, individualistic, hedonistic and sexually predatory, it is also to the cultural categorisation of the New Lad where we may perhaps find much of the cogent pitch for the *fin de millennium* masculinity in crisis cinema. Indeed, his emergence, pitched as a new/old kind of masculine ideal, was garnered from the same political and cultural inheritances that saw masculinity as increasingly defeated, with only the hope of men willing to ‘re-gird their loins’ in displays of masculine virulence and phallocentric control to salve the apparent impending cultural apocalypse.

To take Fincher’s *Fight Club* as just one example, even in the textual and aesthetic, the playful confidence of Tyler Durden’s wanton practice with nunchucks, his oversized frame parading on the child’s bike in the basement of his crumbling dwelling in Paper Street, the degradation of “sport fuck” as a phrase to describe his coital relations with Marla Singer, even Tyler’s child-like fighting style and Pitt’s/Durden’s frenetic performance (especially when held against the physical stillness of Norton/the Narrator), all suggest a prototypical New Lad dynamism to the film’s portrayal of the masculine ideal. Further, when the Narrator asserts, “We used to read Playboy, now we read the Horchow collection…” near the beginning of *Fight Club*, it does little than impress, or rather initiate the pre-/anti-feminist undertones of the film from the outset. In the same way, the dialogic of “MILF” (Mom I’d Like to Fuck), first uttered in *American Pie* (1999) became a signature expression of the New Lad, just as Bateman’s disdain for women equally earned him a figurative place in the cult of Laddism.\(^{125}\) Even the ‘new’ construction of

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\(^{125}\) His characterisation has featured several times in New Lad publications but perhaps with no more convincingly to the New Lad essence than in MAXIM’s entertainment article, “Ho Ho Hos: 10 Onscreen Holiday Hookers” in which Bateman’s sexual relations with prostitute Christie (Cara Seymour) is near-celebrated and given the following description: “The yuletide is a natural time for axes and massive blood spatter. Or at least that’s what Patrick Bateman would have us believe. Nothing brings out the Christmas cheer in Bateman quite like dissecting – in the most literal sense – women, so when one enterprising prostitute makes a break for it, much like dropping down a chimney, he drops a chainsaw down the stairs”. Available at <http://www.maxim.com/movies/ho-ho-hos-10-onscreen-holiday-hookers>
American Beauty’s Lester Burnham is based around New Lad mythologies of lust, hedonism and muscle.

The New Lad’s strength of independence and communal solidarity amongst his fraternal brothers, platforms a system of empowerment amongst this emerging culture at the turn of the millennium, and within that logic, he dislocates much of the progressive movements of women and the feminist movement by a simple refusal to take on or accustom himself to their ideologies, in so doing, re-engaging with old codes of oppression.

As Chapter One revealed, MTV’s Jackass (2000-2002), is perhaps is the apotheosis of the New Lad. The nihilism of “partying hard” for a sense of self-affirmation, where political framework gives way to hedonistic, sexist, thrill-seeking ideologies that relieve little than temporary adrenaline fuelled indulgences, seems to assimilate perfectly with the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema. The problem of course with the New Lad culture, as Jackass so viscerally exposes, much to the echo of the nihilism of Fight Club and so on, is that it only affirms masculinity but does not confront it, and within that ‘lack’ often spills a nostalgic idealism, and moreover, irony and contradiction, an effect made explicit in the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema. The effect can be perhaps most cogently read in the New Lad cultural bibles, its magazine publications. No more so than in the ‘Muscle Up By March: And Beat People Up By April’ strapline from a January 1999 MAXIM cover story which seems to near-perfectly relate to the mix of aesthetic and ‘surface’ with function.

126 The ‘playful nihilism’ can be seen in potent cover stories from the lad mag, MAXIM. Referring to the apocalyptic social imaginary of Y2K disaster, MAXIM faces the phenomenon with: ‘Last Call: 50 signs the world is ending. Drinks are on us!’ [January 1999]. Other cover stories include: ‘Any Woman Any Time: 8 pick-up tricks that never fail (we bar-tested ’em)’ and ‘Cause Serious Trouble: 65 things to do when you’re bored stiff’ [February 1999]; ‘Tongue Twist Her: How to kiss her where it counts’ and ‘Gotcha! 16 evil tricks for April Fools’ [March 1999]; ‘More for Less: Plunder the world by doing... nothing!’ [June 1999]; ‘The 20 Beer Workout: Get drunk! Look great!’ [September 1999]; “Can I Have My Life Back Now?”: ‘Torpedo her hidden agenda’ [October 1999]; ‘All-Sex Workout: Never go to the gym again!’ [November 1999]; ‘Annual Lingerie Spectacular: Panty like it’s 1999’ [December 1999].
Equally, the New Lad culture is also susceptible to both seemingly anarchic and commercial imperatives; in fact he is caught in the imbrication. Moreover, New Lad culture and the cinema itself is an imbrication of the masculine and feminine as defined by the elegiac accounts of crisis. They perpetuate the masculine by a ‘utilisation’ of the feminine, that is they perpetuate the so-called masculine desires of violence, asceticism, hedonism, sex and so on by the so-called feminine form; the sale of these desires in literature, films, clothes, gadgets, spectacular aesthetics and so on. Indeed, Laddism and their complicit Lad mags are pregnant with the spread of commercial. Behind the empty bravado of the ‘Muscle Up By March: And Beat People Up By April’ headline is still a strong desire to sell us commodities. As much as the culture is driven to a masculinising imperative, much of this is realised through an assimilation of the, supposedly feminine, commercial strand, evidenced no more so perhaps than by the very strapline on top of every MAXIM magazine which reads Sex-Sports-Beer-Gadgets-Clothes-Fitness, conflicting so-called New Lad manliness with a commercial imperative.127 ‘The 20 Beer Workout: Get drunk! Look great!’ tagline from MAXIM’s September 1999 cover most aptly marks the paradoxical and contrary nature of the New Lad idealism; the collision of consumption and asceticism, unbridled hedonism and narcissism, where most potently, image collides, and then suppresses ideology.

Further, New Lad culture, their ancillary magazines and the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema also have a strong economic need for sales. Both are subservient to economic imperatives necessary for their perpetuation and ultimate survival. What was cultural commentary was also

127 MAXIM’s 1999 covers also offered the promise of, ‘Cool phones’ [January 1999]; ‘Killer toys’ [July 1999]; ‘Must-haves: this year’s coolest clothes’ [September 1999] to allure their prospective readers, but also in a language that echoes much of the fin de millennium cinema. They may well be describing The Matrix (1999) (and its NOKIA endorsement); American Psycho (2000) (and its high end ‘murderous’ gadgetry); and in relation to the Empire article mentioned above in which Tyler Durden is labeled “the imaginary embodiment of alpha-male anarchy, junk-shop chic and utter cool”, David Fincher's Fight Club (1999).
enterprise. The films, like New Lad culture in general may have participated in the game of asceticism, anarchy and violence and so on, but in the end it was only that. For one of the most ‘rebellious' years in Hollywood history also came the most commercially profitable of industrial outpourings, as has been stated, a total of eleven of the *fin de millenium* masculinity in crisis movies have all grossed more than $100 million.

In essence, they resist one apparently commercially empty form, but this may only be in favour of another. In the 2004 *Jackass* movie, the film begins, as did the films trailer, with the band of would-be-revellers huddled in a huge *shopping cart* descending on a nameless town in suburbia. Held in a series of stills and close-ups, in which two Jackass ‘members’, Steve-O and Chris Pontius are semi-naked, the gaggle in turn punch each other in the head and chest as rocks are blasted from canons that line the sidewalk. The scene is cut to the multiple crescendos of Carl Orff's *O'Fortuna*, marking the postmodern bricolage and interplay with ‘classic’ culture. Wide-eyed, ‘pumped’ and viscerally aggressive and hedonistic, the aesthetic of the *Jackass* group crowded in the shopping cart offers a perfect analogy of the matrix: they are shown to be wild, but neatly packaged and ready for consumption.

**Final reflections**

To reiterate the aims of this work, this thesis has investigated what was initially proposed as a body of Hollywood cinema that surrounded the cultural notion of masculinity in crisis at the turn of the millennium. The examination set out to determine not only how these films coalesced to form a body of critical cinema, but also to determine how the cinema reiterated or replicated a cultural voice that was asserting that the apocalypse of masculinity was underway.

In particular, the purpose of this study was to explore how masculinity was (re)presented in Hollywood cinema at the end of the millennium, and to that
end, position and examine these (re)presentations in relation to the cultural theories, criticisms and commentaries that were also claiming that masculinity was in crisis in this seemingly epochal era of cultural history. In this endeavour, the thesis sought to investigate the cultural voices of the moment, concluding that not only were the elegiac the loudest, that is those that were contending that masculinity was indeed in crisis and further that this critical situation was beyond the ‘fault’ of men, but also that these voices resonated most prominently amongst the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema.

It was subsequently Susan Faludi (1991; 1999), perhaps the central voice of the elegiac accounts of masculinity in crisis, who became the principal commentator of which to hold both the plaintive standard and against that standard, the cultural and ideological framework of the cinema itself. To this end, Faludi, and her plaintive contemporaries, provided a useful framework to examine research questions surrounding the cultural crisis and also became a useful point of reference for where any representations of masculinity, as well as any explicit ideas of masculinity in the films of fin de siècle moment, may have derived or resonated from the cultural sphere.

Indeed, in order to meet the scope of this study, I also looked for traits, fissures and patterns across my proposed masculinity in crisis cinema in my bid to ascertain the emergence of these films and their shape. Further, I also enlisted key film and leading cultural theorists, whose readings of millennial masculinities, millennial cinema, and male representation in cinema, for example, I extended with either scope (Davies and Wells; Watson; Giroux) or contextual precision (Peberdy; Studlar) concerning cultural categorisation and “bipolar” masculinities respectively.

An ancillary investigation in the British Film Institute archival library also offered supplementary material in support of my argument, where I was able to add a much more diverse breadth of textual readings to the cinema I was examining, as well as articulate the inherent contradictory nature of
surrounding film paraphernalia and extra-textual material with the detailed precision required for the thesis.

In terms of contextual methodology and argument construction, I initially examined the films' textual elements and moved to investigate links with specific surrounding cultural events and effects when appropriate. Emphasis was also obviously placed in the examination of the cinema's male characters – their construction and representation – and how they related to the cultural moment.

I found throughout the investigation that in each of the film's reiteration and representation of the elegiac take to crisis, the cinema presented the changing gender landscape, in which men and their masculinity were apparently losing their authentic masculine essence, as a dichotomous battle of masculinity versus femininity, or to rephrase this in the language of those who have preceded this investigation ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ masculinity or the Wild Man and the Wimp (Perberdy, 2002). Through this modality they presented narratives that seemingly encouraged the more masculine characterisation, which vitally they defined as uncompromisingly ascetic, violent, somewhat hedonistic and with a pre- or anti-feminist vision of sex and sexuality; whilst the other ‘feminine’ characterisation they represented as weak, consumerist, ornamental and image centred, and often with a kind of fragmentary or fractured disposition. Within this logic the films impressed that the ‘hard’, ‘traditional’ and somewhat pre-feminist ‘version’ of masculine identity was not only the ‘preferred’, but was in some way the most stable and ‘authentic’. Further to this, through approaching the malaise with this separation or ‘spilt’, they also offered the promise of achieving this so-called authenticity by marking it as both real and attainable. In doing so they leaned not only towards an elegiac understanding of the crisis, but one as we have seen, seemingly also marked in New Lad ideologies, where sexual dominance, hedonism, and an implicit encouragement of violent and anti-feminine values meets a de-politicised resistance to cultural change.
It is my contention that this failure to really interrogate the cultural and political structure of the so-called masculine malaise caused the biggest rupture in the ideological and textual coherence of the films and the way they have ideologically connected to their audiences. Sacrificing ideological comprehension, narrative and thematic consistency, and a real connection with the cultural climate for what seems a prioritisation of profit, spectacular imagery and representations of idealistic, somewhat mythical masculinities, it seemed that this Hollywood cinema at this moment was more concerned about creating a visual aesthetic and narrativity that would sell than any other kind of imperative. Indeed, the connections that the films made were all apportioned to the surface. Structural, and long term changes, or ways in which men could adjust to the changes in the cultural climate were instead replaced by a distinctly patriarchal idealism, a cinematic spectacle and spectacularised exploitations of the apparent cultural pain.

However, it also seems that this effect was not distinct only to a somewhat ubiquitously commercial Hollywood cinema. As the last section of this chapter has concluded and as the thesis has intimated throughout, the cinema was also following a pattern of a patriarchal idealism drawn in the elegiac social and cultural imaginary of the period. In fact the crisis itself seems built on an logic of men being unable to reach an overtly romanticised and distinctly nostalgic standard, a standard moreover purported by the elegiac readers of the crisis who saw the ‘traditional’ man idealised in a hagiographic vision where he was not only defined but also deified, revered and venerated.

Faludi and the elegiac accounts may have been astute to the cultural transitions, and even how these transitions can make men feel insecure about their identity, but this research has shown, and it is here that much the importance of this research can be found, that it may have been more a white, patriarchal crisis than one of masculinity. The fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema may have inadvertently exposed this in the way that their heroes fail to connect to everybody and everything for their own sense of both screen and ideological superiority. Indeed, the final effect, and
perhaps the most important finding of this thesis, is indeed when all the evidence is collated together, it seems that this may not be a crisis of masculinity at all. It is rather a crisis of an idealisation, a crisis of a mythical standard, an imagined and nostalgic footing that deems (white, middle-class) men irrevocably superior. The crisis was really that this image was crumbling. It is why this image – so romantic, so tangible, so saleable in ideology and aesthetic – is re-iterated, re-presented and ‘sold’ in this cinema. It is an image that still echoes in the social imaginary long after it was further punctured in the wake of cultural change at this epochal moment.

The fin de millennium moment was indeed a time when the burgeoning spread of image and commercial industries meant that possessions and material commodities seemed increasingly more important than manliness. It was a period when the female and female metrosexuality seemed more pertinent to the challenge of the patriarchal throne than ever before. When cultural products like Sex and the City and Diet Coke ads proliferated in the media hyperspace and into the public consciousness; a time when men were not only beginning to lose the sex war, but were also being objectified. With the emergence of the New Man with his caring, sharing attitudes towards women and supposed ‘feminine’ culture coalescing the change, the situation seemed all the more impossible and objectionable for many of its elegiac readers, as it seemed apparent for many that men were beginning to accept this New modality, this apparent ‘cultural feminisation’. This thesis concludes that the crisis itself was a backlash to change. Further, caught in the postmodern bricolage of resistance and preservation, the crisis cinema was at once a representation of this backlash but also a perpetuation of its very causal underpinning. But a denial of change, a vision of a mythical out of reach, perhaps never in reach, standard, in which masculinity is only ever really ‘imagined’, and further to this a commercial and aesthetic underbelly, will do that. It will, as it did in this cinema, create ironies, contradictions and fissures. Indeed, masculinity is only ever confronted in these its imagined terms. But as the thesis has made clear, this imaginary is inherently
patriarchal, white and almost definitely middle-class. Indeed this may not be a crisis of masculinity at all. It seems more precise to assert that this is a crisis of power, a crisis of dominance, not just against women, or against femininity, or effeminacy, but rather a crisis of privilege and dominion.

**Limitations of the study**

Before I move on to discuss the future implications of this research, a number of important limitations to this current examination need to be considered. The first limitation concerns how the case study films were handled. Due primarily to obvious practical constraints I could only provide an in depth analysis of a limited number of the 23 films I propose as being the crisis cinema. For the purpose of my argument it became evident that it was more beneficial to look at a handful of films in depth in which primarily *Fight Club, American Psycho, American Beauty, Payback, Magnolia* and *The Matrix* provided a useful framework for relating my research questions to specific examples. If this work is extended to a larger volume, it may be useful to examine more of the films in this cinema with the same level of critical depth.

A further limitation of this research may be that the focus stayed specific to masculinities *per se*. This meant that I was unable to relate other surrounding concepts, such as race and comparisons of the masculinity in crisis motion pictures to other surrounding cinemas of the moment, at least in any real detail. Likewise a comparison between female centred films of the same period could be a potentially interesting theme for further investigation. Further to this, another limitation that may have widened the scope of research and provide new insights into the whole discursive notion of masculinity in crisis and its representation on screen could have been a wider, more international examination of cinema. For example, many of the cultural dialogues on masculinity in crisis at the *fin de siècle* moment were also echoed in the UK. Therefore a further study could assess whether the
masculinity in crisis was intercepted in the same way by other national cinemas and then examine the implications of these findings.128

A final limitation that needs to be acknowledged is related to the methodological approach this examination followed to the overall study. Taking a cultural approach to the examination of the fin de millennium masculinity in crisis cinema, in favour of an auteurial investigation for example, meant that the textual readings of the films were wholly based on independent analyses and secondary studies of critical material that surrounded the cinema, not the ‘makers’ of these movie themselves. However, where this may seem to have limited my critical scope, this enabled the thesis to approach the cinema in ways that would vitally allow it to assess how it engaged and interacted with culture, where of course the crisis was embedded, and not within artistic dimensions. As Beynon (2002: 2) has insisted “masculinities can never float free of culture...” which is an understanding that became a very important framework for this research and required an absence of the auteurial perspective somewhat. Considering the fact that some of the films were adopted from previous novels, it also became readily apparent that the culture in which they were adapted was more important that the director/auteur who adapted them. However, perhaps further examination could be undertaken here to establish whether the direct primary auteurial approach, that is interview based research with the auteur themselves, supplement or contradict my cultural findings and textual readings. Further to this, that is not to say that the thesis refrained from any kind of auteurial examination. The thesis did consider where appropriate director’s viewpoints on the critical and popular texts that surrounded their cinema, but often used those in a way to critique rather than affirm the thematic shape and disjuncture of the films.

In addition my cultural approach to the investigation was not specifically designed to evaluate factors related to audience perception. Due to the fact that the subject of the research took place over a decade ago, conducting any

kind of real audience research could have proven extremely problematic. Nevertheless a further study to examine how a contemporary audience relates and reacts to the films within our current cultural position would be an interesting point of investigation in which one could also further determine whether the films evoke the same resonances in today's cultural perceptions and imaginaries.

In short, considerably more work would need to be undertaken to determine whether a focus on race, gender, auteurial readings and any kind of formal audience research would increase the understanding of how Hollywood intercepted the masculinity in crisis issue at the fin de siècle moment. Therefore it is recommended that a further detailed investigation is needed to explore how these other ‘externalities’ could have supplemented my research. If the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of both the issue of masculinity in crisis and its synthetic representation needs to be developed.

However, it is my original contribution to the ever-growing field of men’s studies and studies of masculine representation in cinema that this thesis really finds its critical importance. I have not committed here to a reading and examination of the fin de millennium period in cultural terms, or an examination of masculinity and masculine representation in the cinema, but through my approach of reading multiple forces, tendencies, pressures, events, effects, and tensions in and throughout the cinema I investigate, I examine the conjuncture at which these effects collide. In doing so I offer a unique examination of this cinema and its cultural interplay; an examination that reaches far beyond my predecessors, not only by the fact that I have analysed this cinema and its relationship to the cultural moment in a critical depth not previously undertaken, in so doing widening the scope of both the analytical breadth and volume of cinema relating to this moment, but that I have also taken time to examine its nuances, its contradictions, its historical emergence and its interplay with a shifting dominant culture.
Stuart Hall argues that what is stable in cultural studies is a Gramscian understanding of “conjunctural knowledge” – “knowledge situated in, and applicable to, specific and immediate political or historical circumstances; as well as an awareness that the structure of representations which form culture’s alphabet and grammar are instruments of social power, requiring critical and activist examination” (During 1999: 97). Indeed, conjunctures mark specific configurations of space and time in which multiple effects and possibilities are combined. Taking this conjunctural approach to my examination, rather than an exclusive focus on reading dominant forces and pressures alone and in isolation, my thesis has understood the cultural moment and its cinema in a way that has not been previously achieved. In this way, my findings here, especially once made explicit to the cinema I examine, are rather exclusive to my study.

The thesis takes off from where previous authors have only made vague or limited cultural readings of the fin de millennium period in culture and its cinema such as Paul Watson (2002) or Christine Holmlund (2008). It also connects the dots between those who have only read the cinema (such as Donna Peberdy, 2010; Gaylyn Studlar, 2001 and to some extent Henry Giroux, 2001) and those who have only read the culture (John Beynon, 2002; Susan Bordo, 1999; Ros Coward, 1999; James Heartfield, 2002 and so on) in any kind of real critical depth. This thesis thus bridges the gap between those before it who sought to analyse only one aspect of its nuances, and adds a new dimensionality of conjunctural knowledge to both the moment and the cinema.

To conclude, this research has been an examination of fin de millennium masculinity in crisis in its reel and cultural manifestations. It examined the cultural structure and logic of the ‘crisis’ and examined the role Hollywood played a role in its dialogue. The importance of the thesis is to be found not only within the examination of the fin de millennium texts, but also in the global spaces that surround and seemingly interact with them; where the relationship and fissures between cinema, gender and identity politics in this particular moment of Hollywood cinema has been explored.
Furthermore, although specific in its context here, the thesis may now act as a forum in which we can exchange other ideas, contexts and interplays on the role the Hollywood film industry plays with identity politics in general and the limitations inherent with its industrial praxis.

In addition, what this thesis has exposed is that Hollywood, at least here, as a cinema fascinated with spectacle and a cinema intrinsically embedded in commercial praxis, may have been provocative enough to stir emotions about the crisis in masculinity at the end of the millennium moment, but really failed to hit home any workable alternatives or ‘solutions’ for the crisis. Perhaps it serves as a limit case for all representations of anti-commercial, anti-ornamental, anti-celebrity, indeed anti-Hollywood practices in the movies. And so, if we are even to take from this thesis that the *fin de millennium* crisis of masculinity was as painful as the elegiac readers and commentators were making out, to borrow from Bret Easton Ellis and Mary Harron’s *American Psycho*, if one is looking for a way out of the so-called crisis, THIS, at least, is “NOT AN EXIT”.
ABBREVIATIONS


FILMOGRAPHY


*Analyze This*. 1999. Dir. Harold Ramis. 103 mins. Warner Bros. [DVD].


Gone With the Wind. 1939. Dir. Victor Fleming. 224 mins. Warner Bros. [DVD].


Me, Myself and Irene. 2000. Dir. Peter Farrelley and Bobby Farrelley. 116 mins. 20th Century Fox. [DVD].


Mrs. Doubtfire. 1993. Dir. Chris Columbus. 125 mins. 20th Century Fox. [DVD].


Office Space. 1999. Dir. Mike Judge. 89 mins. 20th Century Fox. [DVD].


Play it to the Bone. 1999. Dir. Ron Shelton. 124 mins. Touchstone Pictures. [DVD].

Point Blank. 1967. Dir. John Boorman. 92 mins. MGM. [DVD].


Stagecoach. 1939. Dir. John Ford. 96 mins. United Artists. [DVD].


Stigmata. 1999. Dir. Tom Lazarus. 103 mins. MGM. [DVD].

Sugar Hill. 1994. Dir. Leon Ichaso. 123 mins. 20th Century Fox. [DVD].


