Special issue
CRITICAL MASCULINITIES

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Critical Masculinities

The five articles of this special issue, which originated in a conference on "Performing the Invisible: Masculinities in the English-Speaking World" (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, September 25-26, 2010), all address matters critical to the field of men's studies across different disciplines: the significance of the category of masculinity in the field of men's studies; the ubiquitous "crisis of masculinity," which has pervaded political and scientific discourses on masculinity; finally, the complex relationships between hegemonic and marginal masculinities.

Keywords: Masculinity, Crisis of Masculinity, Men's Studies, Hegemonic Masculinity, Marginal Masculinity

The Criticality of Men's Studies

Referring to the large number of scholarly works on men and masculinity in the past few decades, Bryce Traister has argued that "[m]asculinity, one might say

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without irony, is everywhere" (2000, p. 274). In the same vein, Robyn Wiegman goes as far as claiming that "it is not an overstatement to suggest that one of the most prolific areas of feminist inquiry in the 1990s has been the study of men and masculinity" (2001, p. 358). From its very emergence, the field of men's studies has been inextricably linked to and influenced by that of women's studies and its questioning of dominant models in the way we produce knowledge. Intrinsically then, men's studies has also been characterized by criticality, that is constant interrogations, conversations, and controversies on its status and legitimacy, as well as its methods.

One particular bone of contention has been the issue of the institutionalization of men's studies in academia and its relation to women's studies, as epitomized by the discussion about the choice of symmetrical nomenclature (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005, pp. 2-3). On this topic, Harry Brod—a pioneer in the field of men's studies in the United States—gave an opinion, the ambivalence of which illustrates the very tension at work in the relationships between men's studies and women's studies: "… I argue that decisions about autonomy or integration as women's, men's and/or gender studies must be made according to particular circumstances in particular institutions. I do stress the intellectual autonomy of men's studies, but this does not necessarily translate to institutional separation," (1987, p. 156) he claimed in a piece provocatively called "Does Manning Men's Studies Emasculate Women's Studies?"

Far from deterring scholars interested in the field from constantly questioning their methods and goals, the popularity of men's studies makes it even more necessary to answer the question Gail Bederman asks in the opening paper of this special issue: "What does it *actually* mean to study masculinity—particularly when we consider it as "invisible" or "performative?"" (p. 1; emphasis added). Bederman's questioning of recent scholarship on masculinity lies, according to her, in its failure to see it as "primarily a heuristic category, a conceptual placeholder which allows us to ask certain kinds of questions." For her then, "[t]he term is useful only when the scholars who employ it define precisely what they want to know and what they mean when they use the term "masculinity" (p. 5).

Coming from a pioneer in the study of American men and masculinity—through her seminal book published in 1995, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, in which she investigated the relationships between American masculinity and the imperialistic discourse at the turn of the twentieth century—such assertions might appear to some somewhat odd, even gratuitous and uselessly confrontational. They, however, echo recurrent questions raised by other scholars, such as Donald E. Hall, who has maintained that "'masculinity studies' itself is a problem in that what it actually comprises is quite murky" (2000, p. 229).

It is in fact our contention that, after four decades or so of men's studies scholarship, we need to examine it retrospectively and critically in order to assess its exact contribution and renew the field by opening new perspectives in the study of men and masculinity. Bederman's paper should thus be read, as she sees it, as "an invitation to the scholars of the present to think about why they are studying masculinity" (*this issue*, p. 13). Through the description of her own journey as a scholar studying masculinity in the late 1980s, at a time when "it was not entirely clear to

feminist scholars what 'men's studies' might be, nor how 'masculinity' should be studied" (p. 17), we are encouraged to think about the construction of the field as a dialogue, albeit an uneasy one, between "men's studies" and "poststructuralist gender analysis," two approaches Bederman argues "need not be intrinsically incompatible" (p. 14).

Quoting from Natalie Zemon Davis, who, as early as 1976, called for the joint study of women and men—a call reminiscent of Gerda Lerner's, made in 1975 in favor of "a history of the dialectic, the tensions between the two cultures, male and female" (1975, p. 159)—Bederman contends that the desire to study men and masculinity originated in women's studies scholars and that the study of masculinity predated the emergence of men's studies as an organized and autonomous field. What Bederman reminds us of is that men's studies was also born out of male scholars' desire to target "an audience of men" (p. 22), a point which Harry Brod very explicitly advocated: "While I want to be clear that in principle either gender can legitimately and fruitfully study the other, on the whole I think there are good reasons for men to tend their own gardens rather than others'" (1987, p. 156). Taking up on that claim, some scholars, like Traister, have made a case that "[a]lthough informed—sincerely I believe—by the political and critical principles of feminism and left-liberalism, the new masculine American studies effectively crowds out the women and texts responsible for the rise of feminism within academic literary studies and returns the man to a humanity whose historicized particularity nonetheless shifts Americanist cultural criticism, once again, into the dominant study of malekind" (2000, p. 276).

The link between the overwhelming presence of men among men's studies scholars and what Bederman describes as a lack of interest "in analyzing these dualistic opposites as seeming-binaries, nor in how these and other binaries worked to construct masculinity in relation to its 'others'" (p. 21) needs to be assessed and addressed more systematically, as it might also account for some of its biases, as commented on by Bederman and others. For Traister again, men's studies has been intertwined with the ubiquitous notion of "crisis:" "The history of American men as men now not only proceeds as a historiography of masculine crisis but collectively writes itself as an actual history of American masculinity *as* crisis" (2000, p. 287). All this makes it all the more necessary to define what we mean when we study masculinity, especially since one of the main critical issues attached to the concept of masculinity is the crisis of masculinity, another "thing" that is often not defined and needs to be reassessed.

THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY INTO QUESTION

The question whether there is a crisis of masculinity is first and foremost an epistemological issue which is still being debated inside and outside academic circles. But it is also a political issue which has often been used for conservative ideological purposes, an example of which is to be found in men's scapegoating practices studied by Angus McLaren (1999). McLaren shows how a dominant model of masculinity was constructed by default, as a counterpoint to what were perceived as different forms of deviances. Is the crisis thus a mere ideological construction serving political means? This explains why some scholars have chosen to stay away from the phrase itself, as Pascale Molinier, who would rather refer to "une mise à

mal du socle de l'identité masculine," which she describes as the discrepancy between the unchanging representations of masculinity and the *praxis* of masculinity (2004, p. 25).

As Tim Edwards points out, the meaning of what a crisis of masculinity actually is still remains uncertain because of the hackneyed use of the concept of crisis (2006, p. 7). A lot of different understandings of the 'crisis of masculinity' have in fact emerged, raising important questions: How do we know or establish that there is a crisis of masculinity? Does it exist at all? Is the crisis of masculinity ontological or is it contingent? Could the notion of crisis be part of a suitable definition of masculinity itself?

Many discussions around the idea of a crisis of masculinity—debating whether or not it exists—focus explicitly or implicitly on the notions of power and identity, in the articulation between historical context or/and subjective experience, between theoretical discourse and *praxis*. This distinction is made by Tom Harman as he differentiates between the crisis of masculinity (a conceptual notion) and the "crisis of men," which can be felt or observed first-hand (*this issue*). Sociologists and psychologists speak of a crisis of masculinity that is manifest through empirical analysis through numerous and multiform, encompassing notions of identity, self-worth, health, education… (Kahn, 2009, pp. 209-231). Following Tim Edwards, Harman does recognize these issues as being problematic, yet he does not consider them as evidence of a crisis (p. 29), and points to the gap between the strong theoretical framework on the topic of a crisis of masculinity and the limited evidence on the crisis of men (p. 30). As Harman signals, a crisis of masculinity is made palpable subjectively (a subject is affected by a crisis) and is a consequence of social change, since it is "a local manifestation of, and personal reaction to, changes in social, economic and gender relations" (p. 30). Sophie Chapuis examines the White corporeity in Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* in this very same perspective: her analysis of the wounded White male bodies lacking sexual power, strength or voice are symptomatic of a "deep and genuine uneasiness born from cultural transformations" (p. *this issue*, p. 44), caused by the Cold War (p. 43), and by the 1960s liberation movements (p. 46). All this echoes the role played in the United States by the context of the Cold War and the 1960s counterculture in the development of the crisis of masculinity both as a popular topic and an academic theme (Cuordileone, 2000).

Yet the crisis of masculinity has been a recurrent feature—although with different names—of political and scholarly discourses for decades, even centuries, mostly in times of social and political changes. But does this discourse reflect reality? In other words, has the hegemony of masculinity, or a certain hegemonic construction of masculinity, ever been in danger? The answer given by Gail Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization* is quite clear: she rejects the claim that American masculinity was in crisis at the turn of the 20th century, because she sees "no evidence that most turn-of-the-century men ever lost confidence in the belief that people with male bodies naturally possessed both a man's identity and a man's right to wield power" (1995, p. 11). The emergence of a popular discourse claiming the existence of a crisis of masculinity can be seen as a response to transformations of gender, class or ethnic relations (for example women's emancipation). Talking about American masculinity since the end of the 1960s, Sally Robinson stresses how changes have been "clothed in the language of crisis, and the texts produced out of that crisis use

a vocabulary of pain and urgency to dwell on, manage, and/or heal the threats to a normativity continuously under siege" (2000, p. 5). Chapuis thus analyzes the contamination of the language of crisis in Rick Moody's novel *The Ice Storm*, showing how the "rhetoric of the Cold War creeps […] into physical descriptions, suggesting that the White body may be the locus of deeper anxieties" (p. 43). More recently, in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man*, Susan Faludi has rejected the common view according to which "the male crisis in America was caused by something men were *doing* unrelated to something being done to them, and that its cure was surely to be found in figuring out how to get men to *stop* whatever it was," an opinion she calls "circular reasoning" (2000, p. 7, emphasis in original).

To certain critics, however, the crisis of masculinity corresponds to a given moment of negotiation leading to the reassertion of a dominant model: "however much male subjectivity may currently be 'in crisis', as certain optimistic feminists are now declaring," writes Modleski, "we need to consider the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men ultimately deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it" (1991, p. 7). In this perspective, the crisis would thus be temporary, and the discourse about a crisis of masculinity a way to discuss masculinity.

But as suggested by Chapuis, the crisis of masculinity "may simply be a critical episode of a longer disease men have chronically been suffering from" (p. 46). Subscribing to Forth's argument (Forth, forthcoming), Chapuis shows that the contemporary novelist explores the crisis of masculinity as pathology "mostly made visible thanks to a series of physical symptoms that transform the White body into a metonymic receptacle of wider social anxieties" (p. 44). For Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, American masculinity has always been in crisis, because it has constantly been redefined (1999, p. 9). In the same way, for R.W. Connell, it is the three structures inherent to the gender that make it tend toward crisis: power relations, production relations, and relations of cathexis (1987, pp. 84-85).[1] Thus a history of masculinity is a history of crisis, of masculinity as crisis (Nye, 2005, p. 1938). Bryce Traister sums up well how this vision has influenced current scholarship on men and masculinity:

> the current trend, while promising as a movement within gender studies, has come to operate within a two-pronged "crisis theory" of American masculinity; one is rooted in a new historiography of American masculinity that locates instability at the base of all masculine identities constructed within American cultural matrices; the second is derived from Judith Butler's influential theoretical account of gender as always performative and contingent. (2000, p. 276)

Harman's contribution should thus be read within this context, as it addresses the major questions of definition and manifestation of a crisis of masculinity and tries to provide a new turn in the debate by resorting to Gilles Deleuze's notion of

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[1] R.W. Connell was inspired by Jürgen Habermas' description of "crisis tendencies," i.e. inherent, structural tensions and inequalities in social systems that lead to social crisis.

event. By doing so, he looks into the scope of the notion of a crisis of masculinity in itself: It is affirmed or denied, yet does it correspond to the sum of problems encountered by men?

This ability to adapt and to constantly reinvent itself links masculinity to capitalism, according to Abigail Solomon-Godeau: "Masculinity, however defined is, like capitalism, *always* in crisis. And the real question is how both manage to restructure, refurbish, and resurrect themselves for the next historical turn" (1995, p. 70). Grounding *The Ice Storm* in the buoyant, critical context of the 1960s, Moody is able to probe the interconnectedness of race, gender and class even if, paradoxically, it focuses on the single entity of the White, heterosexual, middle-class male. By shedding light on the perpetually imminent fall of this hegemonic figure, symptomatic, as Chapuis argues, of the many socio-economic crises, Moody reverses the traditional visibility/invisibility paradigm.

The novelist's (perhaps) anti-hegemonic characters raise the question of what hegemonic masculinity is. Though White middle-aged men should embody an invisible norm which assures them a position of power, Moody's protagonists seem to be threatened by their lack of visibility and somehow emasculated by the patriarchal society that should have empowered them. Could these characters represent a subordinated masculinity of sorts?

From Hegemonic to Marginal Masculinities: Critical Resistance

The two-decade-old concept of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987) is still highly significant today. At first, it referred to "the pattern of practice […] that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 5) and was therefore inextricably linked to patriarchy and gender relations. To further expand on these gender relations, Demetriou has distinguished between two subcategories of hegemony: "external hegemony," accounting for the dominance of the hegemonic group over women, and "internal hegemony," where the dominance of the hegemonic group is over other males (Demetriou, 2001, pp. 337-361). Demetriou's refining of "hegemonic masculinity" reinforces Connell and Messerschmidt's idea, as that of many feminists', that gender is a process ("Growing old is a process of reinvention;" Holdefer, *this issue*, p. 62), and necessarily, a relational concept. However, following post-structuralist thought as deployed by Butler, such a division seems to further reinforce the compulsory binary structure of society (what Irigaray has dubbed "the old dream of symmetry"), which rests on the existence or presupposition of an "Other," be that a "woman" or a "man" (Butler, 2006, pp. xiv, 31). But as the existence of a normative hegemonic masculinity—which is different from dominant or the most represented, since hegemonic masculinity could be an ideal that men try to live up to—presupposed the existence of subordinated masculinities, the critical attention has moved to what the concept could teach on relations among men themselves. As a matter of fact, Joshua Ferris' novel, *The Unnamed* (2010), forays into the male dominated work environment of the law firm, where competition for the alpha male position is a deeply ingrained practice. The main character, as Peter Ferry has it, indeed is "the archetypal hegemonic male. He is White, middle class, and, as a city lawyer, has a job that gives him a high degree of power and influence"

(*this issue*, p. 55). He initially is an embodiment of the "Law" and the backbone of his masculinity is his "careerism," a term Collinson and Hearn use to define the "competition between men in organizations […] often expressed in the widespread preoccupation with hierarchical advance" (2001, p. 160). They purport that this concern may be a crucial element through which middle-class men attempt to establish masculine identities in the workplace, "[y]et careerism is also likely to intensify the threat to such identities […]" (2001, p. 161). Ironically, Ferris' character is under the threat of his body's uncontrollable impulse to wander. This physical impulsivity, traditionally associated with women, forces him to reconsider his masculinity and uncover the workings of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace.

Though it has met many criticisms, which Connell and Messerschmidt address in their article entitled "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," the concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a well-established and complex analytical tool to think of critical masculinities, that is masculinities that could be viewed as marginal and, as such, as able to adopt a criticizing stance on hegemonic masculinity (the curmudgeon as courtly Fool for Holdefer; p. 70). The marginal man is, as sociologist Robert E. Park originally theorized, "[the] one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures…. His mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and, either wholly or in part, fuse" (1937, p. xv). It is their dual position that enables the marginalized masculinities analyzed in this issue to cast a critical glance both on their 'mainstream' counterpart, as it were, and on themselves. Both Ferry and Holdefer take as objects of study the 'marginal man,' whose masculinity can be understood as "a defence against the perceived threat of humiliation and emasculation in the eyes of other men" (Kimmel, 1994, p. 135). As they face transitory phases, both figures are confronted with the embodiment of the social norm, an area of hegemonic masculinity studies that needs to be further researched according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 24). This specific aspect is addressed in both papers but in different ways. We could thus consider Tim's uncontrollable urge to walk in Ferris' *The Unnamed* as a bodily rejection of a previously embodied norm, while the ageing man studied by Holdefer grapples with the impossibility of embodying norms which may result in setting him apart.

Is that to say that marginal masculinities should be considered as subordinated or as counter-hegemonic figures that help question and redefine the established hierarchy? We reach here an ambiguous aspect of Connell's concept. While this is what Ferry purports in his paper ("The flâneur, in making visible the discourses of power that shape masculinity, becomes a counter-hegemonic figure, a self-reflexive analytical agent of subjectivity and masculinity," p. 49), Holdefer views the figure of the curmudgeon as more complex since he removes himself from all power structures.

Connell and Messerschmidt remind us that they have always thought of hegemonic masculinity as a still-evolving practice of masculinity which is therefore open to challenge. But what is the role of counter-hegemonic figures? Do they have the power to redefine masculinity? Or as Mosse (1996) argues, do counter-types only serve dominant types by negatively reinforcing the norm? Finally, if marginal masculinities are indeed capable of producing or authorizing alternative discourses, how do they manage to do so?

It is their very exclusion from the invisible norm that endows the flâneur and the curmudgeon with the scopic propensity that turns both into sociological observers, producers of narratives and self-reflexive, counter-hegemonic agents, thereby regaining some agency and power as subjects, both ontologically and linguistically. These transformations buttress the claim that identity is a contingency, a doing, and make it possible for the subject to rewrite the scripts. By lodging their arguments in postmodern theories' focus on agency and rewriting, Ferry and Holdefer contribute to celebrating difference and "interrogating the cultural scripts" of hegemonic masculinity (Gutterman, 2001, pp. 60-61). The visible margin is no longer ancillary to its hegemonic center, but rather plays a crucial role in bringing its mechanisms to the fore and pulling the rug from underneath it as hegemonic masculinity is as much the subject of critical focus as marginal masculinities. The flâneur's peripatetic reflections and the curmudgeon's skits examine their own disruptive masculinities pitted against the workings of hegemonic masculinity. By approaching the study of men and masculinity from the parapet of critical margins, Ferry and Holdefer help create a space where self-reflexivity is a paradigm to explore both marginal and hegemonic masculinities.

Answering many scholars' call to historians to "[extend] beyond their disciplinary literacies and [embrace] comparative and cross-cultural analysis" (Allen, 2002, p. 203), the stances adopted by Ferry and Holdefer highlight that—a generation of men's studies later—the critic's viewpoint has shifted towards the margin in order to make salient the invisible center and to interrogate the interactions between marginal and normative masculinities, notably through the function of literature and cultural representations' raw material, language. In the words of Holdefer, "literature, stand-up comedy, biography and popular culture [...] can all be viewed as performative utterances," where a gendered persona can coalesce (in keeping with Butler's idea of *doing* gender (2006, p. 34). If Ferry's flâneur inhabits first and foremost a geographical margin, Holdefer's curmudgeon explores the theatrical margins of the "masculine prerogative" (Holdefer, p. 68) from which reality is questioned and gender construction deconstructed.

Ferry and Holdefer's papers succeed in revitalizing the study of marginal masculinities as they accrue the fairly recent research that values literary and cultural representations of masculinity (from Knights, 1999, to Armengol, 2010). The originality of their strategies is two-fold. First, the critical view they adhere to is that the category of "men," following Judith Butler's denominational discussion of "women"—one of the starting points of her theoretical argument, is not universalizing and should not be "normative and exclusionary" (Butler, 2006, p. 19). Secondly, and as a corollary to this first epistemological standpoint, Ferry and Holdefer deploy a germane methodology. They choose to focus on "'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings" who put into question the hegemonic, invisible, and unmarked model as they destabilize it (Butler, p. 23). The disruptive masculinities analyzed in this issue constitute more than a taxonomy of non-hegemonic masculinities; it instead purports to complexify the theme of "crisis of masculinity" by taking marginal masculinities *as critical tools* of hegemonic masculinity. Such figures as the flâneur and the curmudgeon embody masculinity's potential for rejuvenation after tribulations, especially physical (the unnamed ailment of Ferris' novel, ageing and post-virility in Holdefer's two case studies) in different spaces

(the modern city; the theatrical and metaphorical spaces of performance). These critical masculinities, like the feminine in the economy of hegemony, "as the repudiated/excluded within that system [constitute] the possibility of a critique and disruption" (Butler, p. 38).

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GAIL BEDERMAN*

WHY STUDY "MASCULINITY," ANYWAY? PERSPECTIVES FROM THE OLD DAYS

This paper, written by a self-styled "old-timer," invites current scholars to consider what it means to study masculinity. It argues that "masculinity," as scholars use the term, is a heuristic category, and is most useful when recognized as such. To provide perspective, it revisits the 1980s and 1990s and contrasts the two very different, but equally valuable movements then pioneering the study of masculinity: "men's (or masculinity) studies" and "poststructuralist gender analysis."

KEYWORDS: MASCULINITY, GENDER, MEN'S STUDIES, POSTSTRUCTURALIST GENDER ANALYSIS

As one of the "first generation" of gender historians to study masculinity in the United States, I welcome the opportunity to revisit this subject. Things have certainly changed, since the "old days," when the notion of "men's history" or "men's studies" elicited only puzzlement.

On the other hand, as someone who has not worked on masculinity since 1995, I feel a bit like Rip Van Winkle, awakening from his twenty-year nap. Much is familiar; much has changed. Certain assumptions about why we studied masculinity—so obvious they barely needed to be spoken in 1990—have fallen away. Conversely, as a member of that older generation I am not always clear about what members of this generation of masculinity scholars really want to know, or why.

My paper will, in fact, remain mostly in the past, as an invitation to the scholars of the present to think about why they are studying masculinity. What does it actually mean to study masculinity—particularly when we consider it as "invisible" or "performative?" Consider this, as well, a report about how difficult it was to imagine how to study masculinity twenty-five years ago, when I was

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a graduate student. As a historian, I find use in understanding how new generations of scholars adopt, adapt, and forget the assumptions and resources of previous scholars, as time passes. I hope that those who study masculinity in the present may find some use in seeing how we "old-timers" tried to cobble together a "history of masculinity" in the 1990s.

I will begin with a brief argument that masculinity (as scholars use the term) is a heuristic category, and should be recognized as such. Second, I will deal with what kinds of resources were available to historians of masculinity when I began working on my dissertation, in 1986 (Bederman, 1995). Third, I would like to distinguish between the two very different scholarly movements working on "masculinity" in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] One, "men's (or masculinity) studies," was led by Michael Kimmel, R.W. Connell, Joseph Pleck, and Harry Brod, among others. The other, "poststructuralist gender analysis," is exemplified by Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam. I will use, as examples, the scholarship written by Kimmel (1993), Connell (1995), Butler (1990), and Halberstam (1998). I hope to show that at the time, "men's studies" and "poststructuralist gender analysis" had entirely different goals, and therefore entirely different understandings of "masculinity," as well as "invisibility" and "performance."

Putting these two traditions into conversation (or argument) with one another, as I hope to do here, illuminates the kind of problems that can be caused by citing masculinity as a self evident "thing" rather than using it as a heuristic category. "Men's studies" and "gender analysis" scholarship need not be intrinsically incompatible. Yet these approaches are most usefully combined when we understand their quite disparate goals and assumptions—that is, when we understand precisely what each one means when they invoke "masculinity."

This paper will be valuable only if it helps us to define what we think masculinity scholarship ought to do, today. What do *we* mean when using the heuristic term "masculinity?" And how does our definition of that term help us understand what we, as twenty-first century scholars, want to know?

"Masculinity" Is Not a "Thing:" It Is a Heuristic Category

In any type of academic research, the answers we find depend on the questions we ask. This is true even about subjects that are concrete and intuitively self-evident, like "What caused the fall of the Bastille?" or "How do we map the

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[1] I place scare quotes around the term "masculinity" in order to emphasize that as I use the term, "masculinity" is a heuristic device, rather than a self-evident thing (See below). The scare quotes are intended to remind the reader that I am *not* using the term "masculinity" colloquially, and that I do *not* see it as an unproblematic category. I am attempting to foreground the insight that "masculinity" is not in itself an idea at all. Rather, as scholars use (or should use) the term, "masculinity" is an analytical tool, and needs careful and precise explanation, so that readers may understand precisely what is being analyzed, and why.

human genome?" This is all the more true about subjects that are neither concrete nor intuitively self-evident. "Masculinity" is not a natural thing, like a tree or a table. Like "class" and "ethnicity"—like "gender" and "capitalism"— "masculinity" is a heuristic category. "Masculinity" has not existed throughout time. We do not find Plato discussing "masculinity." In the English language, the word "masculinity" did not even exist before about 1850; and did not come into regular usage until almost the turn of the twentieth century (Bederman, 1995, pp. 17-19).

Whether self-conscious about this or not, scholars who study "masculinity" use that term as a heuristic device, in order to allow them to ask particular questions—whether about human beings who are "men," or about human beings who are *not* "men," but whose gender performances destabilize commonsense assumptions equating male bodies with "masculinity."[2] "Masculinity" helps some study men's behavior, or men's psychological makeup. "Masculinity" helps others analyze the kinds of power and authority that men have—or do not have. Some scholars invoke masculinity to ask—following Joan Scott (1986)—how "gender" signifies power, and what "masculinity" can tell us about imperialism, state histories, or political theory in different times or places. Still other scholars—influenced by Judith Halberstam—analyze "female masculinity," which may, among other things "name a deliberately counterfeit masculinity that undermines the currency of maleness" or make "an embodied assault upon compulsory heterosexuality" (Halberstam, 2002, p. 345). During the 1990s, many historians were inquiring about how certain groups of people became "men" in the first place. In other words, "masculinity" is a placeholder. It exists and is useful to scholars, only as it allows us to ask particular types of questions about gender. Without "masculinity," we cannot ask questions about "maleness" in a time, place, psyche, or text.

When scholars do assume that masculinity is a thing—as recognizable in other contexts as a tree, building, or bone—their analysis often reifies their own unstated assumptions about what "masculinity" is. Those who associate "masculinity" with "anxiety" discover men who are anxious. Those who presume "masculinity" entails "patriarchy" or a "will to power over racial others" find men who dominate women or engage in racial violence. Scholars who believe masculinity entails vulnerability and fellow feeling will find vulnerable men in social groups. Scholars who assume that all men, by definition, are "masculine," can write about almost any male, in almost any context, and—*mirabile dictu*—analyze "masculinity!"

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[2] Judith Halberstam's brilliant *Female Masculinity* (1998) makes the essential point that one must never assume scholarship on "masculinity" must focus solely on the study of "men"—precisely because the relationship between male bodies and masculinity must never be taken for granted. Indeed, as Halberstam demonstrates so forcefully, analyzing "*female* masculinity" effectively demystifies the power of both males and heterosexuals. Moreover, the first chapter of *Female Masculinity* defines precisely what Halberstam means by "masculinity," and how she plans to use it as a heuristic category. It may be taken as a model of precisely the type of definitional and methodological specificity I am asking for, when discussing "masculinity."

Writing about masculinity in terms of anxiety, power, vulnerability or males is not, in and of itself, a problem—as long as the writer explains and theorizes the approach taken. Problems occur only when scholars fail to explain—or even consider—why conceptualizing "masculinity" as they do facilitates their analysis, rather than simply re-inscribing common-sense assumptions or rehashing over-worked, perhaps ossified scholarly trends. For example, numerous U.S. history articles now suggest that "nineteenth-century masculinity" caused insecure white men on the frontier to battle Indians in order to assuage their gender anxieties. Is "masculinity" truly enough to explain the complex phenomena of Indian wars? What do these articles tell us about the histories of racial violence, politics, or even "masculinity" that we did not already know? Often, not much.

In short, there is nothing self-evident about what it means to study "masculinity." "Masculinity" (as used by scholars) is primarily a heuristic category, a conceptual placeholder which allows us to ask certain kinds of questions. The term is useful only when the scholars who employ it define precisely what they want to know and what they mean when they use the term "masculinity."

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U.S. MEN'S HISTORY BEFORE 1986:
ANALOGIES TO WOMEN'S STUDIES/WOMEN'S HISTORY

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The rest of this paper situates the scholarship on masculinity as I came to understand it when I was writing *Manliness and Civilization* between 1986 and 1995. I would like to differentiate between the three major types of academic approaches to the study of masculinity I encountered in those early days. It seems to me, as a recently awakened "Rip Van Winkle," that the differences between those approaches were more obvious at the time; and while all three remain extremely useful to the study of masculinity, some of their premises were, and remain, incompatible. Consider this, then, a kind of sympathetic "excavation" of the most basic assumptions of all three fields at that time, undertaken by someone whose roots were always primarily in "women's studies" and "poststructuralist gender analysis" (as practiced in the USA) rather than in "men's" or "masculinity studies."

Like many scholars, perhaps, I stumbled on the study of "masculinity" in graduate school, when I was trying to find something new to say about my chosen field, "women's history," a sub-field of "women's studies." Although I did not at first try to define what I meant by "masculinity," I had an intuitive sense of what I wanted to know. My questions were shaped by my own field's existing questions and scholarship. Here, too, I think I was a typical graduate student. But it was not easy for me to figure out how to answer my questions about masculinity within a 1980s women's studies paradigm.

By women's studies, I mean the interdisciplinary study of women and the relations between the sexes, as practiced in and institutionalized by colleges and universities, particularly in the United States, since about 1970. Women's studies was founded during the late 1960s, by young feminist graduate students and professors, mostly in the humanities and social sciences. Inspired by second wave feminism, they began to research hitherto-unexplored topics

about women's hitherto-ignored voices and experiences. They were particularly eager to analyze the unequal power relations between men and women. Yet despite the vibrancy of this intellectual movement, given the culturally conservative and overwhelmingly male character of the American academy at the time, women's studies' longevity might have been doubtful, were it not for the concurrent passage of new legislation and policies directed against sex discrimination. Faced with affirmative action mandates, universities across the United States devoted new academic lines to historians, anthropologists, and others who studied "women" (or "blacks") knowing that these lines were among the best ways to recruit talented female (or minority) scholars. By about 1980, these young feminist scholars had become numerous enough to organize their own interdisciplinary programs in colleges and universities across the United States. Women's studies (like "Black Studies") had become a recognized force in the American academy. And so was women's history.

At the time, however, it was not entirely clear to feminist scholars what "men's studies" might be, nor how "masculinity" should be studied. This was particularly true in my field, history. Women's historians were not opposed to studying men. We knew we ought to do so. In 1976, in a much-quoted passage, historian Natalie Zemon Davis had insisted that historians needed to study both sexes: "But it seems to me that we should be interested in both women and men, that we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than an historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the *sexes*, of gender groups in the historical past" (1976, p. 90; emphasis in original).[3]

Nor was it true that no U.S. historians had written about men or masculinity. Elliot Gorn's brilliant *The Manly Art: Bare Knuckle Prizefighting in the USA* (1986), E. Anthony Rotundo's much-cited, "Manhood in America: The Northern Middle Class, 1770-1920" (Ph.D. Diss, 1986), and Peter Filene's path-breaking *Him/Her Self* (1975) were among the best. Perhaps the most influential, although unheralded, early men's historian was Joe L. Dubbert, whose 1974 article "Progressivism and the Masculinity Crisis" pioneered the useful and much-imi-

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[3] After being quoted in the introduction to Pleck and Pleck's foundational collection *The American Man* (Pleck & Pleck, 1980), Davis's two sentences were frequently reprinted by early men's studies scholars (e.g., Brod, 1987; Kimmel, 1993), who rightly saw them as one of the earliest and most eloquent calls for studying masculinity in history. In this light, however, it is worth quoting the two sentences immediately following this passage, which clarify that Davis envisioned a history of men and women *together*, rather than histories of men as a discrete sex. Indeed, she presciently describes the field of gender studies, as it came to be practiced after about 1990: "Our goal is to discover the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods, to find out what meaning they had and how they functioned to maintain the social order or promote its change. Our goal is to explain why sex roles were sometimes tightly prescribed and sometimes fluid, sometimes markedly asymmetrical and sometimes more even" (Davis, 1976, p. 90). In short, the "history of women and men" Davis described was a history of sexism and of gender as a system, rather than as a discrete type of "men's history."

tated trope of "masculinity crisis."[4] Yet, especially for those just entering the field in the 1980s, it was not at all clear what questions historians should ask about men or masculinity in history.

By 1980, existing women's history frameworks were useful to learn about women, but of little help in understanding men, except as "oppressors." Our primary question at the time was "how, when and why in history did women, as a group, manage to acquire social power and influence?" Two types of feminist theory had shaped women's history: socialist feminism (which tended to see women as a class) and radical/cultural feminism (which tended to analyze women's special cultural resources). These frameworks allowed women's historians to discover entirely new information about women's lives in the past and to learn how women's daily experiences, as shaped by the cultures in which they lived, allowed them to take action, as a group, on their own behalf, to accomplish the goals which seemed important to them. This was a revelation to that generation of historians, and drove decades of women's history scholarship (Downs, 2010).

Yet that approach tended to *assume* men's power, rather than to *explain* it. It seemed of scant use to historical analysis of men and masculinity. There was no point in doing research to discover *that* many men in the past had political and social power over women. We knew that already. Simply studying men in public did not get us very far. As Kimmel himself noted at the time, existing histories of politics, war, and almost everything else were chock-full of men, but illuminated nothing at all about the sex-gender system.

Nor did historians get very far by simply establishing that men in the past, like women, had private lives. Some scholars took great pains to establish that nineteenth-century men, like nineteenth-century women, lived in the private sphere, enjoyed their homes, had both loved and dominated their wives and children. Yet nobody had doubted that, to begin with. And then, as now, there is no point doing research to prove something that one already knows.

In 1986, I sensed my most useful framework for analyzing male power was related to the turn to hermeneutics occurring in disciplines ranging from literature to anthropology. Inspired by theorists like Clifford Geertz, Louis Althusser, E.P. Thompson, and Antonio Gramsci, historians of all types—not just women's historians—were trying to decipher the cultural meanings embedded in texts, daily practices, political and social movements. Some historians were already writing good books and articles deciphering these "meanings for manhood," as embedded in Masonic movements, fatherhood, spectator sports, and so on (e.g., Carnes & Griffen, 1990). But these often failed to explain what I wanted to understand about the resilience of male power, which constituted

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[4] It was reprinted in Pleck and Pleck (Eds., 1980, pp. 303-320). See also Dubbert's *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (1979), probably the first published survey of U.S. men's history. Dubbert cites and appears to have adopted the term "masculinity crisis" from Myron Brenton's 1966 book, *The American Male: A Penetrating Look at the Masculinity Crisis*. Sadly, Dubbert died prematurely in 1983 (an obituary appeared in "Notes and Queries," *Ohio History, 93*(1986), 88).

my own, as yet inchoate, definition of "masculinity." This was how I understood my field, as I began trying to conceptualize my dissertation.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST GENDER ANALYSIS AND MEN'S STUDIES ANALYZE "MASCULINITY," "INVISIBILITY" AND "PERFORMANCE," 1986-1995

Meanwhile two important but relatively dissimilar English-language scholarly movements were developing more explicit ways to study masculinities. One, gender analysis, used poststructuralist theory to analyze the cultural construction of gender. Influential practitioners include Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Joan W. Scott, Denise Riley, Teresa de Lauretis, and Gayatri Spivak. The other—somewhat less influential in the U.S. academy, but equally innovative—was the movement that turned into "masculinity studies," represented by Michael S. Kimmel, R.W. Connell, Harry Brod, Joseph H. Pleck, and others. Both academic movements analyzed "masculinity." Both spoke of gender in terms of "invisibility," "power," and "performance." Indeed, at the time, both spoke of cultural construction. However these two approaches' interest in and questions about masculinity were entirely different—at times incompatible. Even their definitions of "masculinity" differed profoundly.

Here again, some definitions and institutional histories may be useful. To begin with "men's studies" (also known as "masculinity studies"): This academic movement was originally formed by feminist men, who appreciated the growing discipline of women's studies but wished to extend its approaches to the experience of men. The movement arose later than women's studies, and at least in the USA, has never been as influential. Unlike U.S. women's studies, men's studies benefitted neither from affirmative action policies (as men were already dominant in the U.S. professoriate) nor a widespread "men's" movement inspiring a generation of male academics. Nonetheless, an informal network of mostly male scholars and activists began holding annual conferences on "Men and Masculinities" as early as 1975. The first formal "Men's Studies Task Group" in the U.S. was formed about 1980. By 1991, the men's studies movement group had split into two rival bodies, over (among other differences) the question of whether or not to support scholarship about men and masculinity that was not explicitly feminist. Although women were welcomed by both camps, most men's studies scholars were male. Even more significant, most were social scientists.

"Poststructuralist gender analysis," on the other hand, drew on postmodern literary and philosophical theory to try to understand how gender works, in culture, history and language, to construct what (falsely) appear to be transhistorical truths about men, women and sexuality. To quote Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, "'[P]oststructuralism' indicates a field of critical practices that … interrogate the formative and exclusionary power of discourse in the construction of sexual difference. This interrogation does not take for granted the meanings of any terms or analytical categories, including its own. Rather, it asks how specific deployments of discourse for specific political purposes determine the very notions used." Ideas, institutions and practices (i.e., discourses), enacted in history, and through language and culture, effect the very

categories through which people understand their own experiences and identities. Poststructuralist gender theory allowed scholars to analyze the coercive and embodied power of gender in new and productive ways (Butler & Scott, 1992).

Which approach was more valuable? That is the wrong question. Both did important work, with lasting value. The point I want to make is that twenty-first century scholars, with their own reasons for studying "masculinity," will be able to use both traditions most productively if they understand the profound differences between them, at least, at the beginning.

Moreover, these two movements exemplify my original point: for scholars, masculinity is best understood as a heuristic category, and not a thing. We can see this, I think by considering how during the 1980s and 1990s, these two academic movements worked out productive—but entirely different—ways to study masculinity. In the rest of this paper, then, I would like to contrast the very distinct ways "poststructuralist gender analysis" and "masculinity studies" approached "masculinity" during these years.

I want to introduce this by analyzing Kimmel's famous story about masculine invisibility, taken from his 1993 article, "Invisible Masculinity." Kimmel tells us that in the late 1970s, in a post-grad seminar on feminism, he listened to a black woman and a white woman argue about sisterhood: "The white woman asserted that all women were 'sisters' because they had the essentially same experiences, and because all women faced oppression by men." The black woman disagreed, and asked the former,

> 'When you wake up in the morning, what do you see?'…
> 'I see a woman,' replied the white woman.
> 'That's precisely the problem,' responded the black woman. 'I see a black woman. Race is invisible to you, because it's how you are privileged.' (p. 29)

This, in turn, made Kimmel groan. The others—all women—asked him what was the matter. "Well," he said, "When I look in the mirror, I see a human being. I'm universally generalizable. As a middle class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person!"

Kimmel's point is that this was the first time he had realized that even though he was a privileged white man, he, too, had both race and gender, even if he did not notice them when he saw himself in the mirror. As he put it, he realized part of the benefits he enjoyed, based on his sex and race, was what he called the "privilege of invisibility. The very processes that confer privilege to one group and not to another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred." What was visible to the black woman and to the white woman—his own masculinity—was invisible to him (Kimmel, 1993).

It is a powerful story: it made a profound impression on me, when I heard him recount it at two conferences during the 1980s. His 1993 article makes it clear that this experience had a transformative influence on him, making him the admirable scholar and activist he has been for at least two decades.

But—does this mean that men really are, in Kimmel's words, "the invisible gender?" Does his story demonstrate that his "masculinity" was, in fact, invis-

ible? Obviously not. As Kimmel himself points out, masculinity is invisible *only to men*. Kimmel's masculinity was perfectly visible to everybody in that 1970s seminar room except him.

Now, let us unpack that a bit. There are two points here that seem to me worth highlighting. First, as I have already suggested—and as Kimmel himself argued—the "invisibility" of masculinity is an illusion, experienced only by men. For this reason, I think, men's inability to see masculinity—in contrast to their ability to notice femininity—truly was an important insight for the men's studies movement.

Conversely, most of those doing gender analysis had never found "masculinity" any more "invisible" than was "femininity." For them, the important invisibility was the supposed *naturalness*, but actual constructedness, of gender itself—the fact that gender differences were not inborn, but culturally created. For those doing gender analysis the "invisibility" of masculinity was part of a more profoundly invisible sex/gender system. Above all, that masculinity did not need unmasking. It needed *explaining*. How did contingent, historically variable, assumptions about sex, gender, and male dominance become so unquestionable that they appeared "natural," whether constructed in terms of "men versus women," "masculine versus feminine," "gay versus straight," or "normal versus abnormal?"

The second—related—difference between those doing poststructuralist "gender analysis" and those doing "men's studies" pertains to their interest in analyzing those types of naturalized dualisms. Kimmel's own story dramatizes the fact that his own "invisible" attributes became visible to him only in the context of their dualistic opposites. That is, he could see his masculinity only *in contrast* to women; and he could see his whiteness only *in contrast* to African-Americans. Kimmel of course realizes this and says so. But he leaves it there. Neither he nor men's studies as a discipline was particularly interested in analyzing these dualistic opposites as seeming-binaries, nor in how these and other binaries worked to construct masculinity in relation to its "others."

In fact, as I recall, as the years passed, men's studies was increasingly interested in analyzing men themselves—as individuals or in relation to other men—rather than in relation to women. This is certainly true of Connell's *Masculinities.* And as we will see, this made sense in terms of one of early men's studies' primary goals: enabling men to understand and oppose sexism without disavowing their own masculinity.

For Butler and the "cultural constructionists," on the other hand, deconstructing binaries—that is showing how binary categories worked, and what they left out—was an essential element of analyzing gender. "The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire" (Butler, 1990, p. 31). According to Butler and poststructuralist gender analysis, these oppositional categories—individually and in relation to one another—were precisely what rendered gender,

heterosexuality, [and race] compulsory, natural, and therefore invisible. So we needed to study how these coercive binaries were constructed. Conversely, it made no sense to analyze "men" or "masculinity" in isolation from its "others" (whether "man's" opposites were understood to be women, savages, queers, etc.).[5]

So far, then: men's studies wanted to *unmask the invisibility* of masculinity—particularly for an audience of men. Conversely "gender analysis" wanted to use poststructuralist scholarship to *explain the coerciveness and naturalness* of both gender and heterosexuality.

This gets us into the question of epistemologies. Precisely because one goal of poststructuralist gender scholars was to understand how historically contingent gender arrangements became seen as "normal," "natural" "unchanging" and "common sense," they were drawn to postmodern—and frequently French—theorists like Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Levi-Strauss. Like such theorists, they wanted to unmask the coercive power behind "common-sense assumptions" and "every-day practices." To do this they needed to go beyond the easier "materialist" or "commonsense" explanations of culture and power. Not surprisingly, "gender studies" scholars tended to be in the humanities or in anthropology—disciplines where the late-twentieth-century turn to hermeneutic analysis had been most powerful.

Conversely "men's studies" scholars had (and have) far less interest in complicating commonsense understandings of either gender or politics. Their ultimate goal—at least the goal of Kimmel's and the NOMAS (National Association of Men Against Sexism) side of the movement—was to empower men to oppose their own unfair privileges and to reject sexism, without rejecting themselves or their own masculinity. They were and remain eager to build a non-sexist men's movement in which sympathetic men could avoid both abjection and self-loathing, merely for being men. To do this, they needed neither "French feminism" nor the "linguistic turn." (Connell, unlike Kimmel, was particularly scathing about that type of theory, which he clearly did not understand. He considered it merely the study of "metaphors," divorced from the "reality" of "bodies.").

Connell's fallacy in seeing Butler's *Gender Trouble* as merely invoking bodiless metaphors, however, can be suggested by taking up her concept of "performance," which necessarily involved actual, not metaphorical, bodies. Judith Butler's idea of "performance" or "performativity," which she introduced in her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, has been both one of the most powerful, and most misunderstood, concepts of modern gender theory. From the very beginning, readers—even, and perhaps especially those whose first language was English—have misunderstood the way Butler was using the term "performance." Butler spent about ten years and several books trying to clear up the

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[5] Indeed, at the time, it was very difficult for me to appreciate how useful its practitioners found this project of "unmasking" or "making visible" masculinity. My misunderstanding of this point made me far more critical of some of this work than I ought to have been.

confusions raised by this word, as used in *Gender Trouble,* until she finally moved on to other projects. Those who (like myself) have not read all that subsequent work may still find her term confusing, precisely because the English word "performance" has so many different meanings—many of which Butler did not intend.

So let us disaggregate some of those meanings. Let me begin with some French vocabulary, in order to disaggregate the possible meanings of "performance." In French, "jouer un rôle" is NOT what Butler means by performance. When an actor "plays a role," he is doing something voluntary. Upon ceasing the performance, he can return to his real self. This is NOT what Butler means.

"Performances," as Butler understands them, are coercive and not voluntary. One cannot simply "step out of one's role" or "refuse the performance of masculinity," in Butler's terms. This is because, as Butler saw it (at the time), there is no "authentic self" prior to, or outside, gender or its performance. (*Pace* Connell, this does not mean that there is no *body* outside discourse; but rather that it is nonsense to imagine that any "body" can escape discourse, unless entirely outside all human contact).

So what did Butler mean by "performance?" To understand this concept, French speakers should translate "perform"—not into "jouer un rôle"—but into the verbs "exécuter" or "effectuer." Conversely, English speakers should think of "performance" as used in the phrase "high-performance engine." It is the "performance" of an engine that *makes* it an engine. An engine can *perform* efficiently or inefficiently. But if it *ceases to perform, it ceases to be an engine*. It is a mass of useless metal—unrecognizable and incoherent, in the world of operating machinery. In the same way, refusing "performance" (which probably is not possible) would render a person's embodiment entirely incoherent and illegible. Such a situation is difficult to imagine; but perhaps closest to the ambiguously sexed *Saturday Night Live* character "Pat," and/or to the "difficulties of "masculine women" attempting to use the ladies room, both described by Halberstam (1998).

In short—for Butler, as for Halberstam, Scott, and many other gender studies scholars—gender (of any kind) was neither inauthentic nor a role. The project of poststructuralist gender analysis was to denaturalize masculinity and femininity in order to show how gender worked—that is, how it was performed—in ways that were coercive, violent, yet naturalized, and made invisible; in ways that had material effects and that instantiated important power relations upon embodied human beings of various genders and sexualities.

I hope, then, it is becoming clear what I mean by saying that during the last two decades of the twentieth century, the term "masculinity" meant entirely different things to the practitioners of men's studies than it did to the practitioners of poststructuralist gender analysis. One group, composed primarily of male social scientists, wanted to help ordinary, non-scholarly men join the fight against sexism without abjuring their own masculinity. They were particularly interested in understanding how men of different classes and races—different masculinities—related to one another. The other group, composed primarily of female humanities scholars, wanted to unmask the coercive, but misleading "naturalness" of the sex gender system. They wanted to explain

how gender coerced performance, thus marginalizing women and sexual minorities, repeatedly, yet quite differently in various times and places.

It should not be surprising, then, that by the 1990s, men's studies and postmodern-influenced gender studies scholars found relatively little useful in one another's scholarship. This is *not* to say that twenty-first-century scholars cannot utilize both Kimmel *and* Butler, both Connell *and* Halberstam. As a newly awakened Rip van Winkle, I hope that they *will* use all this old scholarship, creatively and thoughtfully, in order to answer their own questions.

I would suggest, however, that the very best way to use these scholars simultaneously is to be very conscious that *"masculinity" is not a thing to be studied—it is a heuristic category, which allows scholars to ask different types of analytical questions*. In retrospect, I think that we (and especially I, myself) could have had more productive conversations across disciplines if we had been more conscious of doing just that during the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

So where does that leave us in the twenty-first century? I no longer study masculinities, but others do. What do they mean by "masculinity?" If "masculinity" is not a self-evident "thing," like a "tree" or a "table," then what is it? What do they all want to know about it?

The sex-gender system has changed remarkably since the 1980s—it is almost unrecognizable, in my opinion, at least in the United States. Oppression (gender oppression of both men and women) is both the same, and different today, twenty-five years later. Can we figure out why it has changed? And how?

Are there any reasons to still study "masculinity"—*whatever* that is? If so, what are those reasons? What, if anything, does the study of "masculinity" contribute, which is unavailable without using that term? In short, what are the stakes in studying masculinity, in our various disciplines, other than getting a few more publications under one's belt, in order to keep one's job?

I cannot answer these questions, myself. I do not do this work any more. But I am fascinated by the question, and hope the present generation of scholars will answer that for me.

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Tom Harman*

The Crisis of Masculinity as Deleuzian Event

The author finds the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze to provide a means to account for the effects of the crisis of masculinity without recourse to moralism but rather to an affective and immanent ethics. By looking at a number of texts that discuss the crisis of masculinity, he suggests that they reach an impasse with the inevitability of proposing a moral discourse. He then goes on to show how Deleuze's work can suggest a way of going beyond this impasse to revitalise the question of masculinity and its crisis as a starting point for research and ethical engagement through his theory of the event.

Keywords: Crisis of Masculinity, Gilles Deleuze, Poststructuralism, Deleuzian Event

Is there a crisis of masculinity? Commentators such as Rosalind Gill, Stephen Whitehead and John Beynon continually disregard such a notion as vague, untenable, or as media spin. Why do these commentators feel the need to respond in the negative to such a proposal? What are the methodological and moral reasons for this and is there another way to approach the question of a crisis of masculinity? I will be asking, how does the question of a crisis of masculinity retain its power to demand an answer and yet in spite of these responses remain unanswered with regard to the contemporary problem (or problems) of men? It is this ambiguous power of an unverifiable event that I wish to look at in this paper.

The reason for addressing the question of 'the crisis of masculinity' is to ask what a crisis of masculinity *actually is.* This is to show how, by revealing its ontology, that it has real effects that constitute a wider field of study into the way men are perceived and perceive themselves without descending into empiricist particularism or psychological universalism. It is also to go beyond a method-

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ological impasse that revolves around the question of such a crisis which, when addressing the question of the "truth" or "reality" of such a crisis, masculinities studies displays an underlying transcendence and moralism which inevitably leads to the application of a preconceived ideal of "the good" onto questions of how men should act.

In both of these cases I have found the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze to provide a means to account for the effects of the crisis of masculinity without recourse to moralism but rather to an affective and immanent ethics. By looking at a number of texts that discuss the crisis of masculinity I suggest why they reach such an impasse with the inevitability of proposing a moral discourse. I then go on to show how Deleuze's work can suggest a way of going beyond this impasse to revitalise the question of masculinity and its crisis as a starting point for research and ethical engagement through his theory of the event.

Is There a Crisis of Masculinity?

Commentators such as Rosalind Gill (2001), Stephen Whitehead (2002) and John Beynon (2002) have dismissed such a notion as vague, untenable, or as media spin. As Rosalind Gill states,

> I would not say that masculinity is in crisis. It is just a sloppy, lazy label for a whole range of different trends, which get bundled together and treated as if there is a major problem. Obviously it makes a news story to say that men are in crisis. But what we often see is figures for divorce, unemployment, how boys are doing at school, figures about the decline of manufacturing—all of these are just pushed together to create a sense of crisis, where I would argue that they need to be looked at in their own right, and there may not be any relationship between them. If we want to take these things seriously, we better look at them individually rather than just wringing our hands and going 'Oh no. Men are in crisis.' (2001, section 5, p. 4)

Why, then, in spite of these responses, has the question of a crisis of masculinity remained prevalent in cultural discourse and how has it had the power to bind together these different trends that Gill points out, remaining a pressing question in contemporary culture?[1] Subsequently, why do certain commentators feel the need to respond in the negative about the existence of such a crisis? My interest in the question of a crisis of masculinity is therefore in how the term has retained its power to demand an answer and yet in spite of numerous responses remain unanswered with regard to the contemporary problem (or problems) of men. It is this ambiguous power of a crisis of masculinity as an unverifiable event that I wish to consider in my paper.

My reason for addressing the question of the crisis of masculinity is to answer the question of what a crisis of masculinity *actually is*, its ontological sta-

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[1] A quick internet browse brings up a large list of articles and books still dealing with the question of a crisis of masculinity.

tus, in order to show how it has had real effects while remaining empirically unverifiable. This research is informed by post-structural philosophy aligning the notion of crisis with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the event. Undertaking this analysis has brought into question how certain sociological and psychotherapeutic methodologies approach the question of a crisis of masculinity and has highlighted problems with how these approaches deal with the question of crisis and subsequently their ability to account for change. This analysis has also brought to light problems with how both discourses have presented recommendations for future action. When addressing the question of the "truth" or "reality" of such a crisis, these approaches have displayed an underlying transcendentalism and moralism, which inevitably leads to the application of a preconceived ideal of "the good" onto questions of how men should act. My broad aim then is to suggest an approach that goes beyond the methodological impasse that haunts the question of a crisis of masculinity, whether it exists or not, its "reality" or "truth," and suggest a way that it can be accepted as real and having effects that call for ethical deliberation rather than the application of rules to men's conduct or moralising. In both the case of the reality of such a crisis and a critique of moralism I have found recourse to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his conception of the event to provide a means to account for the effects of the crisis of masculinity and to approach it instead through an affective ethics.[2]

I will firstly discuss some of the texts that deal with the question of a crisis of masculinity and go on to suggest why they reach an impasse with the inevitability of proposing a politico-moral discourse; I will then go on to show how Deleuze's work can suggest a way of going beyond this impasse to revitalise the question of masculinity and its crisis as a starting point for research and ethical engagement.

The Crisis of Masculinity

The question of what a crisis of masculinity might be has a history that goes back almost forty years from its foundations in men's consciousness-raising groups through its diverse political and therapeutic invocations to its arrival in the academy. Yet it is a question that has, I believe, not been adequately answered and remains a figure that haunts the field of masculinities studies. There have been numerous books dealing with the effects of this proposed crisis of masculinity that variously suggest in more or less authoritative and schol-

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[2] Daniel W. Smith explains "Deleuze…uses the term "morality" to define, in very general terms, any set of "constraining" rules, such as a moral code, that consists in judging actions and intentions by relating them to transcendent or universal values […] What he calls "ethics" is on the contrary, a set of "facilitative" [*facultative*] rules that evaluates what we do, say, and think according to the immanent mode of existence that it implies. One says or does this, thinks of feels that: what mode of existence does it imply?" (2007, pp. 6-7). Throughout the text I will be maintaining this distinction between morality and ethics.

arly terms that men in the late twentieth century have suffered a transformation of their position, and that this is due to their role as men. Yet this crisis is usually projected onto something other than masculinity as such, such as a crisis of redundancy (Clare, 2000) or a crisis of legitimation (MacInnes, 1998, 2001) or a socio-historical crisis (Kimmel, 1987).[3] Few, though, have addressed what a crisis of masculinity is *in itself* or provided a theoretically convincing account of what it could be.

   Tim Edwards' *Cultures of Masculinity* (2006) is one of the best and most recent books that address the question of whether there is a crisis of masculinity. The book compiles and critiques work done across a wide range of methodological approaches providing an astute appraisal of the conflicting opinions in the field. Edwards' innovative way of presenting the question of whether there is or is not a crisis is to split his discussion between what he calls a "crisis from without" and a "crisis from within." The "crisis from without" refers to the empirically documented changing position of men over the last fifty years within different social contexts; work which has seen an exponential rise over that time. These contexts cover certain arenas such as work, education, crime, family, sexuality and health where men's position has been seen to have become problematic and has been considered symptomatic of a crisis of masculinity. The "crisis from without," according to Edwards, as a cause in itself of an overall crisis of masculinity, seems to be an untenable proposition as the men that are directly affected by the changes presented in such empirical literature are always geographically, demographically, and temporally distinct leaving many men unscathed by these transformations. Moreover, what is highlighted by these studies is not evidence of a new "crisis" but issues of domestic violence, health concerns, and emotional difficulties which do not appear to be new at all but are perennial problems affecting men at work and in the home. The "crisis of masculinity" in this sense would then not constitute an overall or universal crisis of masculinity but a tendency toward crisis for some men.

   It is Edwards' contention, though, that a crisis of masculinity can only be upheld if we consider these relations along with a "crisis from within." The "crisis from within" traces the shift in men's experience of themselves, and how they relate to their own masculinity, which Edwards notes "often refers to a sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness or uncertainty" (2006, p. 17). Yet this is also equally difficult to substantiate in anything other than in a personal and specific form through accounts of "subjective experience" leaving the crisis of

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[3] Clare states, "Phallic man, authoritative, dominant, assertive—man in control not merely of himself but of women—is starting to die, and now the question is whether a new man will emerge phoenix-like in his place or whether man himself will become largely redundant" (2000, p. 9). For MacInnes, the crisis is due to the breakdown of the legitimacy of an ideology. He states, "Since [the] invention of masculinity was essentially a holding operation…it has been in crisis ever since" (2001, p. 311). For Kimmel "these crises occur at specific historical junctures, when structural changes transform the institutions of personal life such as marriage and the family, which are sources of gender identity" (1987, p. 123).

masculinity once again as a local manifestation of, and personal reaction to, changes in social, economic and gender relations.

Where does this leave the possibility of an overall crisis of masculinity? Edwards formalises the proposition of an overall crisis of masculinity made by contemporary commentators down to three main contentions: firstly, following McInnes (1998), he suggests masculinity has, as a set of values, positions, and practices become devalued and undermined in the current social context, presented as negative rather than positive. Secondly, following Simpson (1994), the undermining of gender role distinctions and the feminisation of some forms of masculinity in such areas as consumption, fashion, and sexuality make it unclear whether there is a singular masculinity. And finally, masculinity, in itself, could be considered as crisis inducing state. In this reading the crisis of masculinity comes from the transformation of values, a variegation of practices and a problematisation of a specific identity. This would appear to be a rich vein of research, but Edwards undermines these proposals by suggesting that the three concerns of values, practices, and problems are merely ones connected to a theoretical and conceptual domain that has little effect on men's experience of themselves in contemporary culture. He states "in sum, what we are left with here is limited evidence for the perceived crisis of *men* and far more –yet entirely theoretical and purely conceptual—support for the notion of a crisis of *masculinity"* (2006, p.24). Edwards, therefore, dismisses the crisis as a limited and empirically unverifiable contention that, though it may exist conceptually or emotionally, has little effect on a more general understanding of masculinity as lived experience or the actual experience of living for men.

Edwards' approach, though proving a useful way of distinguishing approaches to the study of masculinities, by relying upon a distinction between a "crisis from without" and a "crisis from within," repeats the same methodological caesura that forces the discourses he discusses to take up diametrically opposed positions regarding the "reality" of a crisis of masculinity. This division can be seen most vividly in the differences between men's studies in sociology and those hailing from psychotherapy. As Edwards' discussion shows, sociology, in its emphasis on empirical enquiry, dismisses the crisis as a personal and limited experience that cannot be sufficiently generalised or universalised. Accordingly, sociological texts present the use of a crisis of masculinity discourse within masculinities studies as a rhetorical device and as evidence of a political "backlash" against the advances of feminism (Connell, 2005; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Beynon, 2002; Whitehead, 2002). Commentators from the field of psychotherapy, on the other hand, witnessing the personal and subjective experience of men unsure of their role as men, see in this evidence of a crisis that can be generalised within a universal Oedipal discourse (Clare, 2000; Horrocks, 1994). These two approaches both distinguish two realms, the empirical and the psychic, exterior and interior, other and self, that whilst validating each other as necessary for the others existence are given, alternately, the power to claim the "truth" of a situation or a state of affairs: the sociological on the empirical side, which denies such a crisis as emotionally relative, and psychotherapy on the psychological side, which invests in subjective claims.

I will firstly take as a specific example of the sociological approach the work of Stephen Whitehead (2002). His approach represents the crisis of masculinity as existing within discourse but in so doing relegates it to a position of rhetoric based on emotional, subjective or erroneous assumptions and makes of its use a rhetorical or hysterical device. He states:

> At the level of factual 'truth' the crisis of masculinity does not exist; it is speculation underpinned by mythology. Nevertheless, what is factual is that such a discourse exists in the public domain. (2002, p. 62)

And therefore,

> This does not make crisis real in any absolute sense—though for some individual men anxieties concerning their sense of (masculine) identity may well be quite vivid. (2002, pp. 58-59)

This position seems rather paradoxical in Whitehead's work in that he insists upon a discursive understanding of masculinity but when confronted with the crisis discourse resorts to particularising such an event to certain men, denying the effects of such a discourse on a broader level. Would it not be precisely the discourse of crisis that has motivated his own writing and, were his "Foucauldian" reading to be followed through, is it not what constructs the subjectivities of men? "Men" in Whitehead's account are reified in relation to an abstract masculinity that is vilified as being a by-word for dominance. By dismissing the crisis and not following through with his "discursive analysis" Whitehead dismisses an analysis of how discourse creates "individual men" and their "sense of (masculine) identity." What is presented then is not a theoretical invalidation of a crisis of masculinity but the desire not to engage with what a crisis of masculinity represents.

The reasons Whitehead gives for his dismissal of the crisis break down into four contentions (2002, pp. 55-56):

1. Men are not a homogenous group; there can be no singular crisis of masculinity.
2. The crisis of masculinity informs a backlash politics rather than embracing feminist inspired change.
3. Men have different pressures other than their masculinity, such as race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, culture etc. that are more pressing problems in their everyday lives.
4. Men have overwhelming control over resources and power so it is hard to imagine this group in any such crisis.

We can see from this list that these four reasons, apart from the first, do not deny such a crisis but are reasons for dismissing it as a valid subject of study. The first reason, that men are not a homogenous group, once again reifies men in relation to masculinity. Whitehead, here, repeats the problems highlighted regarding his analysis of discourse and the distinction between the two realms of the empirical and discursive. From this argument we are still left with no

clearer idea about what the crisis of masculinity actually is other than that its representation has a powerful political and moral currency in sociological discourse.

There are similar problems in psychotherapeutic discourse. In the psychotherapeutic discourse presented by Roger Horrocks (1994) masculinity is an exterior force that affects and limits a "fully human" interior essence. For Horrocks:

> Masculinity in Western society is in deep crisis. The masculine gender has all kinds of benefits, but it also acts as a mask, a disguise, and what in psychotherapy is called a 'false self'. […] I shall suggest that masculinity *is a crisis* for men today—that the masculine gender is a precarious and dangerous achievement and is highly damaging to men. (1994, p. 1)

Horrocks suggests that masculinity, as a construct, is "false" in relation to the private truth of the individual and that the assumption of the masculine "disguise" is problematic and misguiding. The cure to this crisis is to achieve a healthy balance between the public face of masculinity and the private realm of the family in which this true self can be developed by taking up the role of the loving father. Whilst being myopic about the actual nature of masculinity, presenting a singular view of "man" as the middle class, white, urban, heterosexual male, this view once again devolves into moral dictates that have no connection to an actual appraisal of what a crisis of masculinity might be or the social conditions that constitute it. It suggests that the "cure" to masculinity is, however ironically, to become a good father.

To argue that the discourse of crisis is both untrue but powerful, false but seductive, is to take up a moral viewpoint: masculinity is presented as a malevolent "other" that is the cause of men's woes. For Whitehead the anxieties of certain men are delegitimated as being particularities that cannot be generalised into a concept. The crisis of masculinity is then portrayed as a hysterical grasping at power by men who believe that their position is in danger. The discourse of a crisis of masculinity, in this sense, is seen as divisive power that is called upon and justified by a hysterical, power hungry "interiority." The idea of a "true self" upheld by Horrocks relates the public sphere to that of a false imposition on the self turning a vague notion of the social into a malevolent other. In this case, a singular malevolent masculinity comes from an "outside" and is placed over the being of men that needs to be replaced by the correct therapeutic model. Whether agreeing with the contention of crisis or not, both positions present the need to overcome the imposition of a transcendental image of an "evil" masculinity: one from "inside" and the other from "outside." This malevolent other is then to be overcome by what is considered "the good" within each discourse.[4] For sociology this is social justice (Connell, 2005,

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[4] My use of 'good' and 'evil' rather than good and bad draws on Deleuze's appraisal of Nietzsche's thesis of going beyond good and evil. Deleuze explains, ""You are evil, therefore I am good." In this formula it is the slave who speaks…They begin by positing the other as evil…. The evil one is the one who acts, who does not hold himself back

p. 44), which would be an imposition of a just law designating the correct relations for men to live by. In the case of profeminist authors such as Connell and Whitehead this would be following feminist principles; though the question of which feminist's principles remains unclear (a point highlighted by Edwards, 2006, pp. 30-31). For psychotherapy this would be coming to terms with an Oedipal drama through the process of therapy and submitting to the law of the father, but, of course, a good and just father. We therefore have a methodological problematic that forces these approaches to present a transcendental and prior definition of an "evil" masculinity necessitating notions of "the good" applied to the discourse of masculinities studies. In both cases "the good" is prescribed as a submission to "the law," either a juridical model or a psychoanalytic one, that is presupposed through their methodological approach in which masculinity marks the line between guilt and innocence. The crisis of masculinity is, therefore, for both discourses, the moment when masculinity, as a figure of discourse, rears up and marks this line between "inside" and "outside," between "guilt" and "innocence," and between "evil" and "the good."

THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY RECONSIDERED

How is it possible to account for masculinity becoming the site on which sociological and psychotherapeutic discourses mark the line of "good" and "evil" without falling into the same methodological impasse; repeating the same moralising formula and applying "the law" to an open social field of actions and reactions; being the harbingers of guilt and the bearers of moral violence? Is this an impassable problem or can the problem be reconsidered? The confusion about what a crisis of masculinity actually is derives from a methodological demand for verification from empirical or subjective tenets that relies upon an alternate vilification of interior or exterior motivation. This demand comes from a theoretical inability to reconcile the effect that the realms of the empirical, subjective and discursive have on each other and the inability to propose an alternative model. As in Edwards' and Whitehead's sociological discourse the crisis of masculinity is a ruse of power that came from a hysterical and power hungry "interiority" that had been institutionalised in patriarchy, and is reacting to the advances of feminism and changes in the economy. The crisis is, therefore, dismissed as an interior affect that has little empirical foundation. Discourse in this sense is relegated to that which discusses and argues over "facts," which are the only true bearers of truth. For Horrocks' psy-

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from acting, who does not therefore consider action from the point of view of the consequences that it will have for third parties. And the one who is good is now the one who holds himself back from acting: he is good just because he refers all actions to the standpoint of the one who does not act, to the standpoint of the one who experiences the consequences, or better still to the standpoint of a divine third party who scrutinises the *intentions* of the one who acts" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 121). See also (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 22-25).

chotherapeutic discourse, the crisis of masculinity is the imposition of a malevolent "exteriority" onto an innocent interior that needs guidance in the form of a "good father." The discourse of the troubled patient is then taken as symptomatic of a misalignment between the self and the truth of the universal Oedipal subject. Discourse is once again relegated to merely being a signifier of the "truth" of the Oedipal drama.

I have suggested that both discourses bear the mark of crisis even though sociology denies its existence. Crisis, in my reading is, therefore, a moment when masculinity becomes problematic and a site of contestation over the location and effects of masculinity; a place where "good" and "evil" are to be designated.[5] Masculinity, therefore, becomes problematic in the sense that it cannot be decided, but also in the sense that it expresses itself as urgently in need of an answer, something to be solved. The line of demarcation between right/wrong, good/evil has yet to be drawn for this designation and is therefore a point of contestation. Crisis, therefore, marks the breakdown of one particular state of designations and the contest to draw out new ones upon an open social field.

How would it be possible, then, given the moral problem of the distinction between the empirical, the psychotherapeutic and the discursive, to approach the question of a crisis of masculinity as having a certain form of reality and having certain effects that would not be immediately dismissed by demands for truth in the form of fact or immediately reduced to the Oedipal drama? This argument against the empirical claims of the social sciences and the universalist reductions of psychoanalysis has been prefigured in the uptake of poststructuralism in gender discourse since the nineties (particularly Butler, 1990, 1993) but this approach has yet to be applied to the question of a crisis of masculinity. Through my own research I have found a productive and ontologically rigorous approach to this problem can be drawn from the work of Gilles Deleuze, specifically his explication of the event in his 1969 *Logic of Sense*. What makes Deleuze's work so appealing for such a project is his insistence on a philosophy of immanence and his consistent contestation of negation, negativity and lack and all philosophies of resentment and bad-conscience, drawing from a Nietzschean critique of morality towards an ethics and ontology of affirmation. *The Logic of Sense* is Deleuze's most extended engagement with the theme of language and ethics and it is these two themes that I will engage with regarding the question of a crisis of masculinity.

As I have been demonstrating, the question that the methodological hiatus in masculinities studies between sociology and psychotherapy poses is; "is there

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[5] The term "crisis" derives from the Greek κρίσις discrimination, decision, and κρίνειν to decide. It is also possible to draw parallels here with Derrida's discussion in *Plato's Pharmacy* of how translations have rendered the Greek *pharmakon* into either "remedy" or "poison" even though the term can equally mean both, covering over the double meaning and ambiguity of the term. The *pharmakon* marks the point where "the good" and "the bad" are to be decided, but the decision covers over the contingency of the choice.

a way to explain the crisis of masculinity that is neither empirical nor merely subjective but that has effects upon both these realms, and, subsequently, how does this explanation transform our notions of moral and political action?" The Deleuzian answer would be the event and the task of willing the event.

The event, for Deleuze, has a fundamental relation to language. What Deleuze divines from language is an elusive dimension of the proposition, which he calls sense. Usually, within language, its relation to reality or a state of affairs is defined through three dimensions of the proposition: denotation, signification and manifestation. Denotation is the relation of the proposition to external objects, signification is the relation of the proposition to universal concepts, or meaning, and manifestation is the proposition's relation to the speaking subject. Deleuze presents an argument stating that these dimensions succumb to a circular logic where none of them are able to ground the other; hence these three dimensions are not enough to explain their genesis, their connection to actual states of affairs. From this Deleuze deduces the presence of a fourth dimension that cannot be said to exist outside the proposition but differs from it, and exists as a metaphysical surface between language and states of affairs; this dimension Deleuze calls sense. As Deleuze states:

> *Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs.* It turns one side towards things and one side towards propositions. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes. It is exactly the boundary between propositions and things…It is in this sense that it is an 'event': *on the condition that the event is not confused with its spatio-temporal realization in a state of affairs.* (1990, p. 22)

The connection, disjunction and conjunction, between a state of affairs and the proposition is integral to Deleuze's project. What he is suggesting is that, what happens in a state of affairs is the ground for making propositions but these propositions are never reducible to it: that representation in terms of the proposition is necessary but is never the final word because what is expressed can never be truly represented. The representation though still remains the product, the outcome, of an actual state of affairs. This means that state of affairs can never be represented only intuited through sense, which is the expressed in the proposition. The expressed is not, then, a subjective moment created by an independent mind, or a quality of objects, but a neutral surface, a prehension that could not be said to exist but to insist or subsist before the subject as impersonal and pre-individual.

The expressed within the proposition is not of the order of things that constantly change in the mixtures of state of affairs that are held together by the subject; by a "good sense" that goes from past, to present, to future selecting a unique and "correct" path, that selects and fulfils its function to "foresee" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 75). Nor is it a "common sense" that distinguishes objects and persons and brings together a unity capable of saying "I." The expressed is of the order of infinitives, verbs: that exist outside of the present in an al-

ready happened and a not happened yet. The event which occurs in sense, then, rather than defining persons and their actions constitute infinitives, verbs, that rather than having a specific and local identity held together by the arrow of time and the discernability of objects defines an infinite and pure identity. Green is a quality of something of its mixtures in a state of affairs but "to green" is an attribute which is said of a thing (1990, p. 19). This attribute does not exist outside of the proposition that expresses it but exists between the two realms as the attribute of a state of affairs and the expressed in the proposition.

Deleuze gives the example of the battle as epitomizing the event. If we ask "where does the battle exist?" it does not exist in its various actualisations of men killing one another, as this is just men killing each other, mixtures of bodies in a state of affairs. It does not exist either in the minds of those men who surge forth or retreat in the battle as it does not depend on these minds but rather subsists apart from them as a result of this state of affairs: it *hovers above* the battle as an already past or already to come in an infinitive "to battle."[6] The actual battle, though, transforms the infinitive "to battle" through the relationship between the constitutive state of affairs and the proposition. The event is not something that can be said to happen to something physically but is rather an incorporeal transformation of the conditions of knowing: a leaping in place. Therefore the event can be one that has far reaching effects that transform the whole realm of sense effecting infinitives that come into connection with the event; not in relation to a straight-forward law of cause and effect where identities remain constant but a complete transformation of their sense.[7]

The crisis of masculinity is the event of the transformation of sense of what masculinity is. Though not having a definitive or singular cause (though the causes of the rise of feminism and the transformation of capitalism are generally agreed upon) has not stopped the event having the effect of causing a rupture in men's self-perception and the perception of men: the sense of who and what they are. As in Rosalind Gill's quote at the beginning of the paper, as with the example of the battle, the crisis has many incongruous causes but from this comes a singular idea or ideal event that has a sense that is expressed through the proposition of a crisis of masculinity. The crisis of masculinity is therefore not empirically verifiable within a state of affairs, though it is its attribute, or the product of a subjective interiority, though it is expressed in the proposition, but has the position of marking a relation between the two as a sense event. To "be a man" has become problematic, a sensitive topic, and the crisis of masculinity marks this event. As Deleuze explains:

> The mode of the event is the problematic. One must not say that there are problematic events, but that events bear exclusively upon problems and define their conditions…. The event by itself is problematic and problematizing. A problem is determined only by the singular points which

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[6] Ronald Bogue gives an erudite explanation of the relation of the event to the battle in his *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics* (2007).

[7] See James Williams (2008) for a recent appraisal of Deleuze's concept of the event.

express its conditions. We do not say that the problem is thereby resolved; on the contrary, it is determined as a problem…. We must then break with the long habit of thought which forces us to consider the problematic as a subjective category of our knowledge or as an empirical moment which would indicate only the imperfection of our method and the unhappy necessity for us not to know ahead of time—a necessity which would disappear as we acquire knowledge. Even if the problem is concealed by its solution, it subsists nonetheless in the Idea which relates it to its conditions and organizes the genesis of the solutions. (1990, p. 54)

The crisis of masculinity is a problem that subsists in its acclamation and denial, that answers or solutions do not dissipate but mark the position of the problematic. It marks the genesis of these solutions remaining real yet incorporeal, making us aware of this border between propositions and states of affairs that marks the event.

Men's studies basing itself upon sociological or psychotherapeutic methodologies has been unable to account for the crisis of masculinity's transformation of sense. For profeminist sociology the proposition of a crisis of masculinity appears as a recidivist moment against the progress of feminism without accounting for why masculinity has become problematic or the focus of its discourse. This has the consequence of sociology representing this transformation as a moment of enlightenment and the progress of reason over the dominance of power, rather than the expression of a new dominating form of power grasping hold of new objects. This approach can then demand that defined bodies reproduce and repeat what is prescribed as "reasonable," true or good in accordance with a hegemonic idea of what is right laid out by this discourse and enforced by law, thus denying a questioning of the transformation of sense demanded by the event. Within psychotherapy the crisis of masculinity appears as an aberration of a universal and transcendent Oedipal law. By not submitting to the correct image of the father men have fallen foul of social ills either through "the error" of society leading men astray, or women and feminism disrupting men's position of superiority, or an "incorrect" uptake or identification with the "wrong image" of the father. The event is therefore covered over once again by a transcendent constant denying any real transformation. Deleuze, through the singularity of the sense-event, proposes a philosophy that does not impose a transcendent law but an immanent articulation, where the state of affairs transforms the infinitive through the singular event, marking the possibility of the new. When seen from the position of the event the crisis of masculinity marks a transformation of sense where men's relation to how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves is changed. This does not, however, tell us what transformation has taken place but marks the place of a problem and an ethical demand of how to not resent this event but to will it: to counter-actualise that which happens to us as though it were willed. The crisis of masculinity marks a new functioning of masculinity at the end of the twentieth century and shows how masculinity is perceived as visible and problematic.

Conclusion

The dominant reason for the crisis's contestation is firstly its lack of validation as an empirically verifiable occurrence because, as in Whitehead's case, of its supposed particularity as a subjective mental event or (merely) existing in discourse. The second reason is a political and moral one in that those considered as profeminist see in the work of writers working with a conception of crisis a "backlash" politics that comes from a hysterical over-reaction to a perceived loss of power. Though this may be the case, this political parlaying is not as innocent as it seems when it presents the profeminist viewpoint as the natural bearer of "the good" whilst also stating politico-moral programs for the behaviour of men. Horrocks and Clare, though suggesting such a crisis of masculinity, see in it only an "excess" of a malevolent masculinity, and are unable to respond to it other than suggesting a return to "the good father" as the bearer of moral justice. A Deleuzian reading, on the contrary, undermines the power to roll out doxa on how men *should* live, on how male bodies *should* relate to others, in accordance with a preconceived model of "the good." Instead, it opens up the question of masculinity as an effect of a particular state of affairs and asks the question of how is such a crisis lived. We see, then, in the discourse of masculinities studies, as its inevitable effect, though it may be proclaimed or denied, the event of the crisis of masculinity.

Deleuze's approach, rather than asking the moral question, "is the crisis of masculinity real or true?" asks how we can affirm the event of a crisis of masculinity, masculinity's transformation in sense. Deleuze's approach therefore asks not how an "evil" masculinity is to be controlled by a preconceived and transcendental law but how masculinity is to be lived in relation to the problem, that is, the event of a crisis of masculinity. I believe this is important for the study of masculinities so that it does not get trapped in resentment and guilt about men or masculinity, or end up denying that a transformation has taken place in the position of men in the late twentieth century, but instead, can affirm this transformation and what it shows us about the possibilities of change. As Deleuze states:

> Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us. To grasp whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted (it is always someone else's fault) is, on the contrary, what renders our sores repugnant—veritable *ressentiment*, resentment of the event. (p. 149)

In this light, I argue that we should neither resent nor deny the crisis of masculinity but affirm it as an incorporeal event that leads us to a deeper understanding and ethical engagement with the question of masculinity.

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White Masculinity on the Verge in Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (1994)

This article explores the anxieties of White masculinity in Rick Moody's second novel *The Ice Storm* (1994). Set in a period of national and international unrest, the year 1973, the novel bears witness to the growing vulnerability of White males who live in northeastern White suburbs that appear as precarious bastions of conservatism. Our ambition is to suggest that the crises metaphorically affecting the national body of the United States are about to affect in turn the body of White suburban males. Indeed, it seems that men are constantly on the verge of falling, whether physically or socially. Potential breakdown looms large in this era of social agitation and cultural transformations.

KEYWORDS: White Masculinity, Suburbs, Body in Crisis, Rick Moody

In her epilogue entitled "Same as it ever was (more or less)," Catherine Jurca suggests that representations of the suburbs are still deeply rooted in a literary tradition that goes back to John Updike and John Cheever. The title of her epilogue laments the fact that nothing new has emerged since the 1960s, for suburbanites have long been plagued by the same torments, i.e. "alienation, anguish, and self-pity" (2001, p. 161). The critic includes Rick Moody in the list of writers who have specialized in the subgenre of suburban writing although Moody has always had some trouble accepting this literary inheritance, especially because of its realistic trend.[1] However, it is an undeniable fact that his early novels[2] mainly deal with the anxieties of White middle class families who live in suburban towns of northeastern America.

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[1] For more on Rick Moody's ambiguous relationship to John Cheever's legacy, see Moody (1997).

[2] We call early novels those published in a ten-year interval starting with *Garden State* (1992), *The Ice Storm* (1994), and *Purple America* (1997). We could also include Rick

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The Ice Storm, Rick Moody's second novel, was published in 1994 but the action is set in 1973, at a time of domestic and international crises. The novel opens with the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the looming Watergate and the oil crisis as a backdrop—a period immediately described as "dark ages" (p. 4). Although the novel is set in the well-named suburb of New Canaan, Connecticut, we are easily led to understand that the apparent domestic felicity is precarious and may soon be shattered. Our goal is not to focus on White suburban families as a whole but isolate its most disabled member, the White male adult and father—in our case, Benjamin Hood, a security analyst approaching his fortieth birthday, whose physical insecurity may be symptomatic of a period of uncertainties. Indeed, throughout the novel, it seems that two crises run parallel: one affecting the political body of the United States, the other affecting the White man's intimate body.

As we will try to articulate these two crises, we here use as a starting point the hypothesis developed by social critic Barbara Ehreinreich who identifies the anguish of the White middle class as a genuine fear of falling, "a fear of inner weakness, of growing soft, of failing to strive, of losing discipline and will. (…) Whether the middle class looks down toward the realm of less, there is the fear, always, of falling" (Ehrenreich, 1989, p. 15).

We argue that the fear of falling not only causes distress to a whole social class but affects most specifically the category of White men. Drawing on Ehreinreich's analysis, Catherine Jurca suggests in her epilogue that a similar anguish is to be found in suburban writing: "The fear of falling, and actual falling, looms large in this literature" (2001, p. 164). Indeed, in *The Ice Storm,* Moody portrays White men who are on the verge of falling but pretend they are still standing upright while the world around them is collapsing.

When historian Arthur M. Schlesinger published "The Crisis of American Masculinity" in the late 1950s, he asked the following question: "What has happened to the American male?" Schlesinger identifies a growing concern with men's sense of virility that has become mainly observable in American fiction at the turn of the 20th century. According to him, early male characters—he quotes the frontiersmen of James Fenimore Cooper—were not preoccupied with their maleness because they were not aware of acting like males. However, as we move further in the 20th century, it seems that ignoring this fact is no longer possible: "Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem" (2008, p. 292). In the 1960s, being a man was problematic since the "American male" had become an umbrella phrase that encompassed heterogeneous forms of masculinity. Indeed, the cultural and social revolutions of the sixties challenged the tacit correspondence between the "American male" and White heterosexual masculinity, i.e. "hegemonic masculinity."[3] The dominant model of the White man was on the verge of a crisis

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Moody's memoir *The Black Veil* (2002) since part of the book describes the author's youth in the suburbs of New Jersey and Connecticut.

[3] The Australian critic R.W. Connell first developed the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" in an essay published in 1987. "Hegemonic masculinity" does not necessarily

that had already been seeping through American fiction for a couple of decades.[4]

The Ice Storm actually bears witness to the growing insecurity of White masculinity through the portraying of husbands and fathers who choose to ignore social changes and live according to past models of masculinity: "Hood believed in the stolid riders of the New Haven line, those grailing knights, legendary heads of household, whose leadership was marked chiefly, though not entirely, by intimidation" (p. 10). Benjamin Hood firmly believes in a patriarchal system in which a spouse and children are obedient subordinates. The irony here lies in the fact that Benjamin's view on masculinity and domesticity are immediately disputed by the narrative voice in the opening pages. It seems that the incipit lies on a constant back and forth movement as the narrator exposes Benjamin's conservative views on masculinity while suggesting concurrently that those are about to be shattered soon.

Set in 1973, the novel opens on a chronicle of social transformations, worldwide conflicts and economic hardships that seem to have no impact at all on the close-knit community of New Canaan.[5] The suburban town appears as one of the last bastions of conservatism which remains undisturbed and uncontaminated by national evolutions:

> None of this, though—not the Watergate Hotel and its palette of hypocrisy, coercion and surveillance, not Jonathan Livingston Seagull, whose movie had just opened, not transactional analysis or Gestalt therapy troubled Benjamin Hood's sanguine and rational mind. Hood waited happily for his mistress. In her guest room. In those dark ages. (p. 4)

As a consequence, the opening pages are built on a contrasting structure: Benjamin's feeling of serenity is continually described against a backdrop of latent crises. However it seems that the narrative voice suggests that the crises metaphorically affecting the national body of the United States are bound to affect in turn the masculine body. The word "crisis" is first used to describe the

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equate with White masculinity but any form of dominant masculinity in a given environment. "Hegemonic masculinity" is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities" (p. 186). In our perspective, we understand "hegemonic masculinity" as being White heterosexual masculinity since it has long been the dominant model in the United States. However, in the 1960s, it became gradually challenged by alternative models such as homosexuality or ethnic masculinity.

[4] Schlesinger quotes for example Hemingway, Dreiser or Fitzgerald and detects "a new theme emerging in some of these authors, especially in Hemingway: the theme of the male hero increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility to himself" (p. 292).

[5] The narrator amusingly comments on the systematic delayed repercussions of social transformations in the White suburbs of Connecticut: "The Summer of Love had migrated, in its drug-resistant strain, to the Connecticut suburbs about five years after its initial introduction" (p. 55).

1973 oil crisis[6] but it already seems to hint at Benjamin Hood's physical dysfunction: "His erection was subsiding. Right now. His bejeweled weapon of persuasion was subsiding where it used to beckon, at his boxer shorts" (p. 6). The rhetoric of the Cold War creeps here into physical descriptions, suggesting that the White body may be the locus of deeper anxieties. Benjamin's sex subsiding metaphorically points at an image of falling that corroborates Catherine Jurca's analysis. The opening pages portray a White male who physically is on the verge of falling as we witness the early beginnings of the crisis.

As a matter of fact, the incipit is built on a systematic delaying of the masculinity crisis. Just like Benjamin waiting for Janey Williams, his never-to-come mistress, the reader is forced to remain in a position of expectancy and watch out for signs of potential moral or physical breakdowns. It seems that the methodical delaying of the protagonist's lover functions as a narrative strategy that allows for some pauses in the chronicle of international crises. It creates a disjunction between the hectic rhythm of the outside world and the comforting fixity of suburban temporality: "Well, the delay had its pleasures. It conjured dirty and agreeable fantasies" (p. 5). Besides, the delaying of Janey's arrival is an opportunity for the narrative to create a sharp contrast between the protagonist's daydreaming and the reality of the pending crisis of masculinity:

> In the mirror over the dresser he looked good for forty. Almost forty—next March. Wait a second. His skin was stretched over his paunch (…) He was mottled and patchy. He needed a new coat of semigloss. His hair was going. He had worn it short all his life—he had never seen it, really—and now it was gone. His glasses were perched on his tiny, crooked nose like a large, barren tree on a granite outcropping. His minuscule eyes were the color of antifreeze. Okay, he was forbidding to behold. He resembled a funeral director or a salesman of bogus waterfront propriety. (p. 6)

Ironically enough, the first manifestations of the crisis are introduced by the verb "wait," as if the narrator was about to unveil a secret the protagonist had chosen to ignore. As readers, we are first asked to be patient before being invited in the intimacy of a guest room that looks more like a consulting room where the narrator calls on us to witness the character's decaying body and make a severe diagnosis. Ghost-like Benjamin seems to have departed the world of the living and become the shadow of his former self. The epiphany is made possible thanks to a mirror and a clever play on focalization. Indeed, the gaze constantly shifts from what we observe through Benjamin's eyes and what we are led to see thanks to the narrator's comments. As a consequence, the images of decay and potential falling increase the precariousness of Benjamin's masculinity.

It is remarkable to note the discrepancy between the masculine and "conventional posture" (p. 7) Benjamin wants to enact in opposition to his repressed feminine side, as revealed by the narrator. Indeed the protagonist fancies him-

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[6] "The energy crisis was getting under way" (p. 3).

self as a warrior or superhero:[7] "He was here, he opined, because his touch could be cruel. He was masculine and magical and mystical. He was a swords- man" (p. 7). At the same time, it seems that the process of feminization is well under way. Benjamin is plagued with all sorts of ailments that have tradition- ally befallen women. Ulcer, eczema, canker sores and chronic anxiety trans- form Benjamin's toughness into feminine weakness.[8] Besides, we can note that his proneness to crying is described with another image of falling: "The small failures of life brought him, inexplicably, to the verge of tears, though he always managed to step back from that precipice" (p. 7).

In these opening pages, the protagonist always seems to be on the verge of falling. The crisis of the masculinity is mostly made visible thanks to a series of physical symptoms that transform the White body into a metonymic recepta- cle of wider social anxieties. Although these physical wounds can be read on a symbolical level, the critic Sally Robinson insists on their reality:

> By calling these wounds, and the crises they herald, metaphorical or fan-
> tasized or manufactured, I do not mean to suggest that they are unreal; on
> the contrary, the persistent representation of white male wounds and of a
> white masculinity under siege offers ample evidence of what is felt to be
> the *real* condition of white masculinity in post-liberationist culture. (p. 6)

According to her analysis, the metaphorical wounds to be found in literature, for example, are symptomatic of a deep and genuine uneasiness born from cul- tural transformations that affect White corporeality. While Robinson argues that the crisis of White masculinity is real, in a recent article, Christopher E. Forth clearly identifies three reasons that can account for White men's grow- ing anxieties during the Nixon era: the rise of feminist movements, the fight for homosexuality and the demands of people of color.[9] Among these causes, one seems particularly relevant to Moody's fiction: the dread of ethnic masculinity and its subsequent fear of everything that is non-White.

In her essay, Sally Robinson argues that the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 coincided with the emergence of the concept of whiteness. Indeed, in the Pres- ident's "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,"[10] an enigmatic cate-

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[7] The parallel between the Hood family and the comic book *The Fantastic Four* is re- current in *The Ice Storm*. Benjamin's son, Paul, finds shelter in the world of comics as a way to escape the reality of his condition. He sees himself as "a loser from a family of losers" (p. 196).

[8] Later in the novel, another male character, Stephan Earle, is also described as "wom- anly and weak" (p. 167).

[9] In the conclusion of his article, Forth explains: "All of these scholarly developments emerged against a backdrop of growing anxieties about masculinity in the West, no- tably in the United States, where demands for the rights of women, homosexuals, and people of color seemed to exacerbate the blow to national self-esteem dealt by the Viet- nam War" (in press).

[10] The "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam" was delivered on November 3, 1969, by President Richard Nixon in the wake of growing demonstrations against the

gory of people emerged, "The Silent Majority," that critics Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Waterberg quickly identify as being "unyoung, unpoor, unblack."[11] In the wake of Nixon's address, the White middle class thus became a distinct group that, as opposed to ethnic minorities, homosexuals, or women, had not taken part in cultural revolutions so far. Sally Robinson focuses mainly on a gendered perspective and explains that the emergence of whiteness also coincides with a crisis of White masculinity. Although it was tacitly accepted that White males still embodied the American norm at the turn of the 1960s, nascent liberationist movements threatened the hegemony of White males, whose main concern was to survive and delay their future marginalization.

In *The Ice Storm*, it seems that male figures all share the same fear of extinction, for being a White man means being an endangered species. White men's vulnerability grows because White culture "becomes increasingly less vital and vibrant than other American cultures" (Robinson, 2000, p. 36). The consequence is a withdrawal of the White community into itself, which Moody ironically translates in his fiction into a fear of what is non-White.

In New Canaan, ethnic minorities are invisible because most of the African-American community is circumscribed to Port Chester, NY, a seaside town in which the train carrying Paul, Benjamin's son, to his White suburb is forced to pull in at the peak of the ice storm. The scene is set in "ominous darkness" (p. 194), as if the blackness of the night was symbolically there to recall that of the inhabitants' skin color. Paul is convinced that he could be attacked at any minute and he watches out for potential rapists or murderers. When the engine fails, it allows the narrative to take a long break as we are given Paul's considerations on African-Americans. The narrative digresses into Paul's memories of Black children at school and we understand that the teenager was taught a series of clichés about Black male children:

> The guys, on the other hand, the two black guys were unavoidable. Brian Harris rules Saxe Junior High. He wore his hair long, in a Black Panther Afro, and this spooked everybody. And he was a superior athlete, but maybe only because every white kid in New Canaan had been brought up to believe that Afro-Americans were superior athletes. This was something Paul's dad had actually told him. (p. 196)

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war in Vietnam. In his speech, Nixon remained adamant and refused to withdraw the American troops clinging to the hope of negotiating an honorable peace for the United States. The president addressed here an enigmatic category of people, the "silent majority," those who had been forgotten by the media and that critics had rapidly identified as being white conservative suburban families who had not taken part in the national agitation. See Lassiter (2005).

[11] "Unyoung, Unpoor, Unblack" is the subtitle of chapter 4 of Scammon and Waterberg's essay, which Sally Robinson uses in turn as a title to an article published in 1998 called "'Unyoung, Unpoor, Unblack': John Updike and the Construction of Middle American Masculinity."

From the teenager's memories, we can easily surmise the stereotyped and racist discourse transmitted by his parents to him: Black people are physically stronger, and because of their different hairstyle, they are scary. Paul's recollection implicitly conveys the father's anxieties towards any alternative form of masculinity. It appears that the White boy has mainly had second-hand experience of African-Americans, either through family stereotypes or television. A telling example is given when Paul's memories travel back to the night when the African-American activist Angela Davis was acquitted, an event that caused his father to lose control: "From the Naugahyde reclining chair that was his dad's chief consolation, Benjamin called out listlessly, drunkenly, at the screen: *Fucking communist dyke cunt*–" (p. 197). It is interesting to note here that the person of Angela Davis encapsulates the three main sources of anxiety that assail White men: women, homosexuality and ethnic minorities. The insult is all the more forceful as it is pronounced by a drunkard who, in his comfortable armchair, firmly wants to recapture the days of a gone-by era, the days when males' White heterosexuality was the norm. The insult crystallizes what are, according to sociologist Michael Kimmel, "the constituent elements of "hegemonic" masculinity," that is to say "sexism, racism and homophobia" (2005, p. 7).

Eventually, we can observe that Benjamin's chronic anxiety of what is non-familiar and non-White may be ironically reflected in his nutritional restrictions since he mainly eats "foods that were *white* (rice, oatmeal, Cream of Wheat hot cereal, white bread, potatoes, the occasional glass of milk or slice of American cheese)…" (p. 8). Benjamin's eating habits consist in a restrictive diet whose effects, however, seem highly inconclusive. Indeed, the more he eats white food, the more his mouth aches as if Benjamin was symbolically the agent of his own pain and contributed to his own silence.

As liberationist movements become more and more vocal, Moody forces his protagonist to remain silent for clinical reasons: "Citrus, ketchup, spices—these were all contraindicated. As was the act of speech" (p. 8). However, it clearly appears that Benjamin's mouth ailments are symptomatic of the more general extinction of White men's voice.

In *The Ice Storm*, the crisis of masculinity is made visible through a series of physical symptoms that affect White corporeality. However, along with Christopher E. Forth, we could eventually question the use of the word "crisis" to describe this deep insecurity:

> The notion of "crisis" implies a deviation from a previous state of health and stability as well as a desire for therapeutic measures to restore that earlier condition. Yet a major problem with thinking about a "crisis of masculinity" historically is that there seems to be no stable period prior to the disarray being described at any given moment. (Forth, in press)

According to Forth, the crisis of White masculinity, as it appeared in the 1950s, may simply be a critical episode of a longer disease men have chronically been suffering from. In such a perspective, we could also transform Catherine Jurca's "fear of falling" into a fear of relapsing—assuming thus that an anterior fall already existed. However, it cannot be denied that liberationist movements

caused a major blow to White masculinity in the 1960s leaving the following question unanswered: will White men ever recover?

In Rick Moody's work, White male characters are often vulnerable men who are on the verge of falling. In his memoir, *The Black Veil* (2002),[12] the author writes about his own experience of anguish in the following terms: "I was no threat, I was white America in the gentlest, most unimposing form, I was the oppressor history of America confined to the mental hospital, you could have blown hard on me and I would have toppled" (p. 209). The passage unveils some repressed feelings of guilt that can appear as profound causes of White men's long disease. We could argue that liberationist movements are exterior factors that implicitly point at an inner darkness carried by White American males, whom Moody depicts as beings who are constantly tormented by the evil deeds committed by their ancestors. Among those deeds are suggested the enslavement of Africans, the genocide of Indians—evil deeds that all empha-size the blackness of the White male. We could eventually suggest that the in-visible blackness of the White soul may be the profound cause of his anxiety—black being heralded by Moody in *The Black Veil* as the quintessential color of the United States: "*The real American color is black,* primordial, eternal, heartless, infinite, full of sorrow" (p. 303).

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PETER FERRY*

READING MANHATTAN, READING AMERICAN MASCULINITY
REINTRODUCING THE FLÂNEUR WITH E.B. WHITE'S *HERE IS NEW YORK* AND JOSHUA FERRIS' *THE UNNAMED*

This article reintroduces the flâneur, traditionally a figure associated with 19th century Paris, as a methodological tool for investigating literary representations of 21st century American masculinity. Contemporary research on the flâneur has either propagated the disintegrative effect of the modern metropolis on his masculine identity or dismissed the flâneur as a postmodern trope bereft of any specific signified. Conversely, this article will argue, with close readings of E.B. White's *Here is New York* and Joshua Ferris' *The Unnamed*, that the flâneur returns as the definitive figure of the postmodern age. The flâneur, in making visible the discourses of power that shape masculinity, becomes a counter-hegemonic figure, a self-reflexive analytical agent of subjectivity and masculinity.

KEYWORDS: MASCULINITY, FLÂNEUR, AMERICAN FICTION, E.B. WHITE, JOSHUA FERRIS, NEW YORK

Masculinity Studies has enjoyed steady progress for the last three decades within the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and cultural studies (Lea & Schoene, 2002, p. 319). In response to the entrenched belief of a universal masculine essence, scholarship within the field has demonstrated that masculinity is a historically contingent construction (Foucault 1981; Connell 1987, 1995; Butler 1990; Kimmel 1996, 2000). Despite these advances within the fields of sociology and psychology, it is only in the last ten years that the field of Masculinity Studies has begun to recognise the wider cultural and social value of literary representations of men and masculinities. Studies such as Ben Knights' *Writ-*

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ing Masculinities (1999), Berthold Schoene-Harwood's *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man* (2000), Alice Ferrebe's *Masculinity in Male-Authored Fiction 1950-2000* (2005), and Josep M. Armengol's *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities* (2010) have underlined the ability of the novel to elucidate, illustrate, and critique the social condition of masculinity.

In this article I wish to propose that there is one literary figure that provides a viable metaphoric and methodological tool for negotiating the role of American fiction in portraying and shaping American masculinity: the flâneur. Flânerie, originating in 19th century Paris,[1] began as the pastime of a seemingly passive languid ambler. The flâneur has evolved, however, during the course of modernity to enjoy various reinterpretations. Beginning with Flaubert's "disinterested idler,"[2] to Balzac's "flâneur-artiste"[3] and Baudelaire's "lyrical poet," "anonymous artist," and "philosopher,"[4] the flâneur has evolved into Walter Benjamin's "detached reporter"[5] and Edgar Allan Poe's "urban detective" (Barger, 2008, pp. 351-372; Werner, 2004). Contemporary readings of the figure have emphasised the role of the flâneur as "sociologist," in the view of David Frisby (1994), or "analytic form" according to Chris Jenks (1995). As a sociological type engaged in the analysis of urban discourse, the flâneur, as Deborah Parsons elaborates, continues to exist "in theoretical and historiographical means, as a model for [our] own methodology and the cultural climate we are studying" (2000, p. 228).

Investigation into the issue of masculinity and the flâneur can be traced to the research of feminist critics of the 1980s led by Griselda Pollock, Janet Wolff and Elizabeth Wilson.[6] It is Wilson who declares, "the very idea of the flâneur reveals it to be a gendered concept" (1992, p. 98). Despite this apparent position of power of the male figure in the city of modernity, Wilson suggests that it is the city itself, traditionally regarded as feminine, which forms and deconstructs

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[1] R.D.E. Burton sums up critical opinion on the origins of the flâneur by stating that "no figure belongs more thoroughly to Paris, and the nineteenth century, than the flâneur" (2009, p. 1).

[2] For Flaubert's flâneur, see the Penguin Classic edition of *Sentimental Education* (2004). As Priscilla-Parkhurst Ferguson notes, "Productivity of any sort is not even a remote possibility in Flaubert's world because the artist-flâneur at mid-century stands for anomie and alienation" (1997, p. 95).

[3] As Balzac's flâneur exclaims in *La Comédie humaine*, "To stroll is to vegetate; to flâner is to live" (1980, p. 930).

[4] For Baudelaire the drive behind this need was the flâneur's desire to illustrate "that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity' … by 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (1964, p. 13).

[5] Benjamin has written extensively on Charles Baudelaire and the flâneur. See, in particular, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1982).

[6] See Elizabeth Wilson (1991; 1992, pp. 99-110), Janet Wolff (1985, pp. 37-46), and Griselda Pollock (1998). The work of Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (1994, pp. 22-42; 1997) can also be added to this group.

the flâneur's masculinity.[7] Echoing Georg Simmel's influential essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), Wilson argues that the urban labyrinth leads to the "disintegrative effect" on masculinity. In her view:

> the flâneur himself never really existed, being but an embodiment of the special blend of excitement, tedium and horror aroused by many in the new metropolis, and the disintegrative effect of this on the masculine identity. The *flâneur* does indeed turn out to be like Poe's Man of the Crowd—a figure of solitude, he is never alone; and, when singled out, he vanishes. He is a figure to be deconstructed, a shifting projection of angst rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power.... He floats with no material base, living on his wits, and, lacking the patriarchal discourse that assured him of meaning, is compelled to invent a new one. (1992, p. 109)

Wilson's stance on the invisibility of the male flâneur shares notable parallels with the major debates within Masculinity Studies itself. With the majority of research in the field focusing upon historically marginal masculine groups, I would go as far to suggest that this trend has led to an over-tipping of the balance toward the invisibility of the hegemonic category of masculinity—a development mirrored by the invisibility of the flâneur.[8] With a refocus on flâneurial figures in fictionalised Manhattan, it is my contention that a fresh critical insight can be achieved in the research on representations and constructions of hegemonic American masculinity.

To fully gauge the value of the flâneur in literary representations of masculinity, I would like to begin with what many would argue to be the classic piece of flâneurial writing on Manhattan: E.B. White's *Here is New York* (1949). A work of "non-fiction," *Here Is New York* is the product of White's voyage through the waves of wandering New Yorkers who lived the reality of Manhattan during this period. Although written in the first person, *Here Is New York* is much more than dry journalistic reportage—it is White's love poem to the city, a piece of urban poetry that affirms Manhattan as the ideal arena for the twentieth century flâneur.

In contrast to the view of the disintegrative effect of the modern metropolis propagated by Wilson and her cohorts, at various points in *Here is New York* White emphasises the protective nature of this urban arena. White sees New York City as succeeding in "insulating the individual (if he wants it, and almost everybody wants or needs it) against all enormous and violent and wonderful events that are taking place every minute" (p. 22). To those suffering "a deficiency of spirit" it can offer "sources of excitement for spiritual sustenance and maintenance of morale" (p. 25). Ultimately White believes that the city's inhabitants "find in New York a protection" (p. 25). The point White is making is that

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[7] For discussion on the gendered nature of the city within the context of flânerie see chapter one, 'Into the Labyrinth,' of Wilson (1991).

[8] See also Kimmel (1993) for further rumination on the invisibility of gender to the American male.

> New York is peculiarly constructed to absorb almost anything that comes
> along … without inflicting the event upon its inhabitants; so that every
> event is, in a sense, optional, and the inhabitant is in the happy position of
> being able to choose his spectacle and conserve his soul. In most metrop-
> olises, small and large, the choice is often not with the individual at all.
> (pp. 23-24)

Admittedly, as the capital of the twentieth century, New York City has expe-
rienced unprecedented growth and expansion. White does not hide the ten-
sions and strains of this urban concentration. As White reports, "New York has
changed in tempo and temper during the years I have known it. There is
greater tension, increased irritability. You encounter it in many places, in many
faces" (pp. 51-52). Furthermore, "the normal frustrations of modern life are
here multiplied and amplified…. There is greater tension and there is greater
speed" (p. 52). White is writing about Manhattan in the late 1940s, but his acute
awareness of societal conditions of the time foretells the state of this dense
urban arena to come, whilst evoking the concept of "time-space compression"
coined by David Harvey (1989). Manhattan, put simply, "has never been so
uncomfortable, so crowded, so tense" (p. 52).

Despite this seemingly inevitable urban malaise, White does not reach the
conclusion suggested by Wilson. White celebrates the special relationship be-
tween the subject and his urban environment. As White denotes, "Mass hyste-
ria is a terrible force, yet New Yorkers seem always to escape it by some tiny
margin…. The city makes up for its hazards and deficiencies by supplying its
citizens with massive doses of a supplementary vitamin—the sense of belong-
ing to something unique, cosmopolitan, mighty and unparalleled" (pp. 32-33).
The American male, therefore, need not automatically suffer dissolution of his
masculine subjectivity due to the stresses and strains of everyday urban life.
Conversely, it is the very urban environment itself that can offer a sense of
(re)generation of selfhood.

As White begins *Here Is New York* commenting on the link between the city
and its people, he also ends *Here Is New York* with his final proclamation of
New York as "the City of Man" (p. 56).[9] Certainly on one level this would seem
a pun on *Man*hattan, but it also refers to the changing social and political land-
scape of New York City. In 1947 it was decided that the permanent headquar-
ters of the United Nations would be situated in the Turtle Bay area of
Manhattan. It is in Manhattan that diplomacy, democracy, and international re-
lations between members of the human race ("man") would be situated. This,
I would argue, is further evidence for the choice of Manhattan as the urban
arena to study the development of the American urban male of the twentieth

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[9] Throughout *Here is New York* White writes about the various male figures that exist
within this urban arena. As he states, "New York is the concentrate of art and commerce
and sport and religion and entertainment and finance, bringing to a single compact
arena the gladiator, the evangelist, the promoter, the actor, the trader and the merchant"
(p. 19).

century. Manhattan turned out to be the city of modernity in which male subjectivity, particularly American male subjectivity, would be debated and defined. This unique urban labyrinth therefore became the product and producer of diverse and often competing masculinities. Manhattan, in housing the United Nations headquarters, can be considered both factually and figuratively as the location of what White terms as "the Parliament of Man" (p. 55).

Contemporary research on the flâneur, particularly the American flâneur, has read this literary figure as a casualty of postmodernity. A cluster of critics brought together by the nihilistic and negating strand of postmodern theory, namely Zygmunt Bauman, Jean Baudrillard, and Graeme Gilloch, have led the call for the death of the flâneur. This view is crystallized in Gilloch's article, "The Return of the 'Flâneur': The Afterlife of an Allegory" (1999).[10] Gilloch states his intention to explore "how and why such an eccentric and arcane allegorical figure has become a key trope in contemporary social and urban analysis" (1999, p. 101). Gilloch goes as far as to suggest that our contemporary era calls for a resurrection of the flâneur. However whether this is a heroic reinvention or merely a simulated by-product of the period is less clear. Rejecting any suggestion of the power of the flâneur to offer acute critical insight, Gilloch states:

> The return of the figure is symptomatic of the postmodern. The *flâneur* no longer perambulates as a pedestrian, but circulates as a sign. As the *flâneur* comes to adopt more and more guises, proliferating as a trope, an allegory for more and more tenuous figures and experiences, it becomes a pure sign, a signifier freed from, bereft of, any specific signified. (p. 108)

Using the lexis of the post-structural school of thought, Gilloch argues that the flâneur in this contemporary postmodern era, which Gilloch sees epitomised by Baudrillard's America (see Baudrillard, 1989), is not a propagator of progress. The flâneur has regressed once more into the languid stroller, walking aimlessly amidst the attractions of flashing neon lights promising instant satisfaction and excitement.

From this reading Gilloch states that "the flâneur returns as a definitive postmodern figure" (p. 108). I would reformulate that statement to say that the flâneur returns as the definitive figure of what some might call our postmodern age. The flâneur is not negated by postmodern society, but has a particular postmodern sensibility, that is, he is conscious of the various discourses at play within contemporary society. Although not necessarily in control of them, he does not exist outside of them. He is an observer, he is a consumer, but most importantly he is a self-reflexive figure who studies, and who should be studied, in literary representations of contemporary American masculinity.

Stefan Morawski, in his essay "The Hopeless Game of Flânerie," proclaims the figure of the flâneur as "the last intellectual" (1994, p. 187). Morawski's

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[10] Interestingly Gilloch's article appears in the same year as the anniversary edition of *Here Is New York.*

flâneur is the individual who would not surrender to the total lure of modern day Manhattan. In lieu of the typically postmodern drives of instant gratification and mindless stimulation, Morawski adds definitively: "The *flâneur* as the artist's (the intellectual's) probe and shield is today super-heroic in his challenge to the drills of our civilization, the narcotizing market supply of idiocies, the lifestyle-tied shibboleths" (p. 187). In a period when fatalistic prophecies are fashionable, it is reassuring that there still remains a voice willing to speak in support of the flâneur. Yet I would distance my position from Morawski's view that the flâneur occupies an elevated position of intellectualism—it is my contention that the flâneur is not "the last intellectual" but the everyman.

It is evident that what drives the flâneur is not simply the desire to observe his urban surroundings and produce aesthetically pleasing literary reflections of this environment. The issue of masculinity—its formation and deconstruction—is fundamentally linked to the figure of the flâneur. This raises the key question that I hope to answer with this article: How does the flâneur lead us into new avenues of studying contemporary American masculinity represented in novels based in Manhattan?

The sustained significance of the concept of the flâneur in examining the social construction of American masculinity is best illustrated in Joshua Ferris'[11] *The Unnamed*.[12] The protagonist of *The Unnamed* is Tim Farnsworth, an extremely successful partner in a law firm in the heart of Manhattan. He has the perfect family, the perfect house, and the perfect job. However, Tim begins to develop a condition that disturbs this ideal existence: without warning, regardless of where he is or what he is doing, and unable to control it, he gets up and walks. At first this may appear as a gimmick used by Ferris to drive the narrative. Further consideration, however, reveals Ferris' protagonist as the ideal figure to be analysed in the context of literary representations of American masculinity.

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[11] Ferris's first novel, *Then We Came to the End* (2007), is a comedy of contemporary American manners set in a recession-hit ad agency in Chicago. Its dry dark humour satirises the absurdities of office culture and the interactions between people forced into the constrictive stressful environment of the office. Yet beyond its appearance as a comedy of manners, the novel also deals with the intricacies of the social relationships between differing categories of men within this microcosm of the office. The sharp cultural insights that define *Then We Came to the End* are further developed in Ferris' *The Dinner Party* (2008), a short story published in *The New Yorker*. Although appearing to share the comedic sensibility of *Then We Came to the End*, there is a sharp shift in the tone of the piece toward a darker rumination on the underlying tensions in social relationships. *The Dinner Party* can therefore be identified as the transitional piece in the published work of Ferris. The satirical social commentary of *Then We Came to the End* is transposed and transformed, through *The Dinner Party*, into a more profoundly existential questioning of the effects of contemporary existence within an all together different social arena in *The Unnamed*: the streets of Manhattan.

[12] Versions of the literary figure of the flâneur have reappeared in a number of recent American novels, namely Paul Auster's *Invisible* (2009) with the aptly named protagonist Adam Walker, Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010), and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011).

The Unnamed engages with one particular strand within the field of Masculinity Studies that has been investigated by David L. Collinson, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell: masculinity in the workplace.[13] The law firm is a gendered institution. Its structure, practices, values, and language reflect these socially established notions of masculinity. Furthermore it is also a gendering institution in that it creates masculine identities that are shaped by the various discourses at play. Tim is the archetypal hegemonic male. He is White, middle class, and, as a city lawyer, has a job that gives him a high degree of power and influence. As such, it is his job that is central to his masculinity. His increasingly erratic impulse to walk, however, raises various problems that force him to re-evaluate his masculinity and the meaning of being an American male in 21st century Manhattan.

Tim lives to work. Even in his darkest moments, exhausted and broken after another endless bout of walking, and having been found by his wife curled up by the side of the road, he repeats his mantra, "I have to go in" (Ferris, 2010, p. 14). Tim is the embodiment of the American Dream. Having worked his way up the firm from a junior position to partner, it is clear that he believes that it is work that defines him:

> The trial, that was the point. The clients. The casework. The war room. He took on a few pro bono causes. And he worked in midtown amid the electricity and the movement. And his view of Central Park was breathtaking. And he liked the people. And the money was great. And the success was addictive. And the pursuit was all-consuming. And the rightness of place was never in doubt. (p. 37)

Despite the fact that "there were no official hierarchies among partners at Troyer, Barr" (p. 56), it is evident that the patriarchal system is ingrained into the psychology of the male employees. Tim's self-positioning within this hierarchical masculine framework is played out in his interactions with the law firm's managing partner Mike Kronish. Tim's egotistical nature is shaped and driven by his obsession with achieving a more dominant hierarchical position, what Collinson and Hearn term as "careerism".[14] Kronish occupies the top position, and masculine power struggles are evident in their every exchange. When coming face to face with his corporate adversary, it is Kronish's physicality that is prominent, especially when compared to Tim's physical state after spending other night walking Manhattan: "[Kronish] seemed to hover. Proximity to him felt like sudden contact with a grizzly bear risen up on its hind legs" (p. 56). It is not only his physical stature but also his ability and willingness to push himself to the limits of physical endurance that Tim begrudgingly admires. Tim is extremely envious of the fact that Kronish once worked a

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[13] For comprehensive overviews of studies of masculinity in the workplace see David Collinson and Jeff Hearn (2000, pp. 144-169; 2005, pp. 289-312).

[14] See David Collinson and Jeff Hearn on "careerism" (2000, pp. 144-169). As they state, "competition for career progress comes to be synonymous with conventional masculinity. Upward mobility can therefore become a key objective in the search to secure a stable masculine identity" (2000, p. 161).

twenty-seven hour day, which "made Tim want to leap across the desk and eat his lucky, healthy heart" (p. 57).[15]

The destructive force of this masculine hierarchy is best illustrated in the trial of R.H. Hobbs. Hobbs, whose private equity firm provides a lot of business for Troyer, Barr, is accused of stabbing his wife to death. The general consensus within the company is that he is innocent. The evidence against him is entirely circumstantial, and the district attorney only manages to bring charges against him by the skin of his teeth. Tim believes that he is the lawyer to ensure that Hobbs will be acquitted and yet, as the court date approaches, the worsening of his condition means that Tim pays little attention to the case. Despite Hobbs arriving into the law firm and breaking down in Tim's office, with Tim unable to show any compassion, "He didn't know what to say" (p. 74), he remains adamant in his repeated refusals to allow any other lawyer to take on the case. Furthermore, later in the novel, Tim is approached by a man claiming to know details about the murder. Not only does the man suggest that he is involved, he also has a knife which he hints at being the murder weapon. Tim, however, is unable to find out for certain if this nameless man in the street is a suspect in the case, as Tim's uncontrollable urge to walk returns. Eventually Kronish has to take overall control, but by that point it is too late. Hobbs is convicted and ultimately takes his own life in prison. Hobbs is a victim of the power discourses that shape the masculine hegemonic framework.

Michael Kimmel argues that men view masculinity as "a defence against the perceived threat of humiliation and emasculation in the eyes of other men" (1994, p. 135). It is this fundamental component of the male's subconscious that makes Tim continue to go to greater lengths to hide his condition from his colleagues. After finally admitting his condition, and hoping for some sense of compassion, Tim loses his position as partner and finds he has been replaced by a new up-and-coming lawyer, "that kid," Masserly: "Peter's favourite...with that air of entitlement that some junior associates acquire when they sense they are favoured by one or another partner" (Ferris, 2010, p. 123). The irony is, of course, that Tim is describing himself years before when he got his break by "impressing the right people" (p. 37). Yet the work that Tim took so much pride in, which defined him, has now been rejected and, to his complete disbelief, repeatedly "guffawed" at (p. 177).

Tim's dismissal is due to the development of his condition—the "unnamed" to which the title of the novel refers. Experts within a range of medical disciplines offer Tim a variety of possible causes: dietary deficiencies (p. 38); psychiatric problems (p. 38); naturopathic issues (p. 38); a possible reaction to his environment (p. 39); and the suggestion of a genetic cause (p. 40). The failure

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[15] For an insightful study on the role of physical characteristics in the shaping of hegemonic masculinity within the workplace see Frank J. Barrett's case study on the US Navy (2000, pp. 77-100). Barrett finds that "throughout all communities in the Navy, the image of masculinity that is perpetuated involves physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain" (p. 81). This finding can be easily transposed onto other organizational structures, particularly that of a Manhattan law firm.

of science to explain what is happening to Tim is summed up with one physician's definitive diagnosis: "There is no laboratory examination to confirm the presence or absence of the condition ... so there is no reason to believe the disease has a defined physical cause or, I suppose, even exists at all" (p. 41). It is finally given a name: "benign idiopathic perambulation" (p. 41), that is to say, a need to walk but arising spontaneously from an unknown cause.

Future readings of the novel will most probably focus on the physical and psychological deterioration of Tim as the narrative develops. Reading his condition as a strict medical illness is, in my view, somewhat of a reductive approach to this complex flâneurial character. In contrast with this reading, I would argue that the cause of Tim's condition is more in line with the diagnosis of the bodhisattva who offers a sociological insight into Tim's malaise:

> The bodhisattva has encouraged him to look deeply into his reliance upon technology. Email and PDA, cell phone and voice mail were extensions of the ruinous consuming self. They made thoughts of the self instantaneously and irrepressibly accessible. Who's calling me, who's texting me, who wants me, me, me. The ego went along on every walk and ride, replacing the vistas and skylines, scrambling the delicate meditative code. The self was cut off from the hope that the world might reassert itself over the digitized clamour and the ego turn again into the sky, the bird, the tree. (p. 49)

The origin of Tim's condition may be uncertain, but it does affect every area of his life. He loses his position in his law firm, his marriage breaks down, and his daughter sees him as a freak. A possible answer to the riddle may be that it is a manifestation of the subconscious desire that Leslie A. Fiedler (1960) underlines as the key theme of American fiction: the male's escape from the responsibilities of society. Following the example of our hegemonic male literary figure Huck Finn, Tim also makes his way through the wilderness. Yet, in contrast to the natural wilds of the forest and the river, Tim's wilderness is the street: "for everywhere was a wilderness to him who had known only the interiors of homes and offices and school buildings and restaurants and court houses and hotels" (p. 247). The metropolis is Tim's wilderness but one that he repeatedly calls his "home."

With the various tenets of what shape conventional understandings of masculinity disintegrating around him, it is his reinvention as the urban spectator that provides Tim with a renewed sense of self. The city becomes his sanctuary but also his subject of study. Outside of the closed capsule of the office environment, he begins to recognise the dynamics of his hegemonic masculinity. This can be broken down into two separate but interrelated categories: "external hegemony," i.e., the dominance of the hegemonic group over women, and "internal hegemony," i.e., the dominance of the hegemonic group over other males.[16] This realisation is played out in a number of scenes. Firstly, Tim listens

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[16] These dynamics of hegemonic masculinity are explored by Demetrakis Z. Demetriou (2001, pp. 337-361).

to the conversations between two Latina girls. Listening to their everyday problems he recognises that these girls are victims of the patriarchal discourses that define society. These girls, in Tim's view, are "the subculture of women who did not get the respect they deserved from men" (p. 151). Secondly, later that day, he also overhears two men talking. Although they are speaking English, he struggles to hear exactly what they are saying: "He got only the tone of complaint. He understood that the speaker had been wronged in some way, and that the injustice was more than just a minor slight" (p. 153). This is a striking metaphor for the awakening of Tim. A lawyer, gifted in the use of language, able to listen to clients, and to understand, interpret, and shape their case into a convincing narrative, is unable to make out what the average man in the street is saying:

> He strained to recall a single exchange—on the street, from the next table in a restaurant—overheard in all the years he had lived in the city, within the inescapable nexus of babble he had sat in most of his life, and not one came to mind. Not one. Had he never unplugged his ears of the self-involvement that consumed him about work, when he wasn't sick, or about sickness, when he couldn't work? Had he never listened? (p. 151)

Evolving into the Manhattan flâneur, Tim begins to recognise the power of observation, the self-educating power of watching, and perhaps more importantly, the self-nourishing potential of urban narratives for him and his ill wife:

> For the first time he began to pay attention to the things he saw on the walks so that when he returned to her, he had observations of the outside world to share. They were fleeting, they were middles without beginnings or ends, but they were diverting—for him to witness, for her to hear. (pp. 287-288)

This urban wilderness is Tim's refuge. He returns to the city with Jane after she recovers from cancer. Leaving their eight-bedroom mansion in the suburbs, they move into a one-bedroom apartment in the heart of the city, "a tenth of the size of their house in the suburbs" (p. 184). Leaving behind all "their stuff," letting go of his masculine pride in wanting to assert himself as the dominant member of the law firm, and realising he does not need to feel any greater sense of social status, Tim begins to delight in the small details of urban living. The smells and sights of the inner city streets, in particular, their "physical touch," gives Tim "a greater containment of the world" (p. 188).

When Tim started roaming the streets of Manhattan he had been an aimless wanderer lead by his own self-interest and caring little about those around him. After opening his eyes to the city the change is telling:

> He realized he might have been doing it wrong for years. He might have seen interesting things had he been able to let go of his frustration and despair. He wondered what kind of life we might have had if he had paid attention from the beginning. (p. 288)

From these passages there is the clear indication that becoming a 21st century incarnation of the flâneur gives Tim a greater sense of selfhood, a belief in the significance of his own existence within the increasingly chaotic and disorientating urban environment. Crucially, it also demonstrates to Tim the various dynamics of the social construction of his hegemonic masculinity.

Throughout the narrative Tim embodies various flâneurial personas; in the complex internal monologues he is Baudelaire's philosopher; in search of the murder suspect in the Hobb's case he is Poe's urban detective; trying desperately get a look at the face of this man walking through the densely populated metropolis he re-enacts the narrator of Poe's "Man of the Crowd". Ultimately, Tim is employed by Ferris as a counter-hegemonic figure, a commentator on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity in the urban wilderness of Manhattan as we move into the second decade of the twenty-first century.

One of the recurring charges put to this literary figure in the contemporary era is the invisibility of the flâneur, particularly that of the straight White male. I have aimed to demonstrate that the flâneur symbolizes a creative attitude of urban investigation and inquiry, "a procession from scepticism to sight" (1995, p. 149) in the words of Chris Jenks, a shaking off of a typically postmodern blasé attitude and a movement towards a critical appreciation of literary representations of American masculinity shaped within Manhattan. As Jenks states:

> The flâneur, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context. It is an image of movement through the social space of modernity…. The flâneur is a multilayered palimpsest that enables us to move from real products of modernity, like commodification and leisured patriarchy, through the practical organisation of space and its negotiation by the inhabitants of a city, to a critical appreciation of the state of modernity and its erosion into the post-, and onwards to a reflexive understanding of the function. (1995, p. 148)

This study of the flâneur has been based upon the close reading of two literary cases studies: E.B. White's *Here Is New York* and Joshua Ferris' *The Unnamed*. Although examples of flâneurial writing, they may appear to be profoundly divergent texts. Employing White's classic piece of urban reportage to contextualise the contemporary imagining of the flâneur has demonstrated that the Manhattan flâneur has existed, and continues to exist, as a counter-hegemonic methodological tool through which the discourses of power that shape American masculinity are dramatized and, crucially, made visible. Not only is the flâneur a documenter of his environment, a producer of literary reflections on the modern city, these texts underline the fact that the flâneur is a self-reflexive figure, an analytical agent of masculinity shaped by the various discourses at play within the urban arena. E.B. White's modern enactment of the flâneur walking the streets of "the City of Man" in 1949 and Joshua Ferris' postmodern reincarnation of the flâneur in the guise of the counter-hegemonic Tim Farnsworth sixty years later exhibit, as literary representations, the sociological and cultural paradigm of flânerie.

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CHARLES HOLDEFER*

PERFORMING THE CURMUDGEON: THE TOOTHLESS LION

Growing old is a process of reinvention. Performing the curmudgeon is one way to redefine dignity in a time of waning powers. The curmudgeon trades in earlier roles of authority and virility and, by repositioning himself above the fray, creates a new space where he can perform. This paper draws on J.L. Austin's notion of performative utterances and explores how they can coalesce to form a persona which becomes a functioning gender parody (J. Butler) and participate in a broader dynamic of masculinities (R.W. Connell and J.W. Messerschmidt). After defining the curmudgeon, this paper considers two "case studies:" the comedian George Carlin and the poet Philip Larkin, in light of issues of chronology, space, sexuality and the creation of a "post-virile" status. Lastly, it addresses the political coding of the curmudgeon and its future as a masculine parody.

KEYWORDS: AGING, MASCULINITY, CURMUDGEON, PERFORMANCE, PARODY

The curmudgeon is not an obscure or esoteric figure, but his importance for male role-playing, particularly for aging males, is underestimated and has not been sufficiently explored. Judith Kegan Gardiner has observed that age remains an undertheorized category in comparison to gender and, in addition to being biologically and socially constructed, it is also performative (2002, pp. 93, 96). The curmudgeon is a case in point. Performing the curmudgeon is a sort of survival strategy, a way to redefine dignity in a time of waning powers. The curmudgeon trades in earlier male roles centered on virility and competi-

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tion[1] and, by an act of repositioning himself above the fray, creates a new space where he can perform.

I view the curmudgeon in this manner by drawing on an appreciation of how performative utterances (Austin, 1982) can coalesce around a persona which, if sufficiently stylized and recognizable through repetition, can become a functioning gender parody (Butler, 1990) and participate in a broader dynamic of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).[2] These performative utterances need not be seen as conveying metalinguistic truths (Terada, 1995). The point is the *effect.*

The curmudgeon is often valued for his straight talk and frankness, but he is not playing a "parrhesiastic game" as described by Michel Foucault, for whom power is the focus (2001). He is no Socratic interrogator, and he would probably harrumph at the mention of Michel Foucault. He does not put himself in danger, nor does he constitute a threat. The curmudgeon is, in effect, a toothless lion.

This fact does not, however, condemn him to irrelevance. In a world full of cant and hypocrisy, the curmudgeon offers the appearance of alternatives. His performance distances itself from younger versions of masculinity and, at times, can involve its audience in a sort of Brechtian estrangement. He also shares some of the traditional features of The Fool.

Who, exactly, is a curmudgeon? In order to underline the pervasiveness of the figure, this discussion will draw on examples from a wide range of sources: literature, stand-up comedy, biography and popular culture, which can all be viewed as performative utterances,[3] and which constitute, by their repetition in so many contexts, a readily recognizable masculine parody. I will begin with a tentative definition of the curmudgeon, emphasizing its dependence on a social contract, and then I shall consider two "case studies:" the comedian George Carlin and the poet Philip Larkin. I have chosen Carlin and Larkin because each was widely recognized by major media and cultural commentators as curmudgeons,[4] and because studying them will open the discussion to both Amer-

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[1] For instance, the jock, lover, leader, dad, etc.

[2] Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize a plurality of masculinities which are evolving "configurations of practice," which can be "hegemonic" or "nonhegemonic." The curmudgeon would belong to the latter category.

[3] Austin focuses on performative utterances as "conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect" (p. 14), while considering theater or poetry as "hollow" language, which is "parasitic upon its normal use" (p. 22). Butler underlines the "critically queer" potential of the latter category, referred to as "illocutionary performatives" (1993, p. 214n). My discussion will include the entire range of performatives, whether "ordinary" or "illocutionary," treating them as functionally constitutive elements of the curmudgeon.

[4] Carlin was "the comedy circuit's most splenetic curmudgeon" according to his *New York Times* obituary (Watkins & Weber, 2008), while J.D. McClatchy's extended review of Larkin's *Collected Poems* was entitled "Songs of a Curmudgeon" (1989). These are typical descriptions of the men.

ican and British contexts, which is desirable at this stage of description. Although this article cannot pretend to be exhaustive, Carlin and Larkin are in many ways representative and complement each other in regard to key performative contours.[5] Carlin's career illustrates issues of chronology and space, while close readings of several Larkin poems provide insights about the curmudgeon's sexuality or "post-virile" status. Lastly, this article will address the problematic political coding of the curmudgeon, and consider its future as a masculine parody in the 21st century.

<div align="center">DEFINING A CURMUDGEON</div>

The etymology of "curmudgeon" is unknown and a matter of speculation. Samuel Johnson gave the derivation as "*coeur méchant*" from an unknown correspondent (1755). Some speculate that it has Scottish origins from a word meaning to mumble or grumble (Winokur, 2007, p. 20), and today it is a common translation of the Irish and Scottish Gaelic "bodach," which is a kind of hobgoblin. Dictionaries variously define the curmudgeon as a bad-tempered, cantankerous person, or as a miser, grouch or sourpuss.

Of course, a curmudgeon does not have to be a straight white male, though that is indeed the most common received image, or performance of the role, in the English-speaking world. It is easy to think of other configurations: in contrast with *straight*, there is the example of a person like Quentin Crisp, or a long tradition of drag queens appreciated for their waspish comments, some of which could be characterized as curmudgeonly. In contrast with *white,* there is the African-American cultural critic Stanley Crouch, sometimes referred to as "Crouch the grouch" (Alexander, 1999), or the comedian Redd Foxx. In contrast with *male,* there have been mass market anthologies such as *The Curmudgeon Woman,* which featured Margaret Thatcher, Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Diller on its cover—an unlikely trio in other contexts—united, supposedly, by their shared curmudgeonliness (Henley & Goodchilds, 2000).

That said, homosexual curmudgeons and queer alternatives have been given less space in the cultural conversation, while racial groupings have historically been rooted in other received images and stereotypes. For the elderly black man, there is the figure of "uncle;" elderly Asians have been often cast in the mould of wise man or guru, and Native Americans as the tragic vanishing Indian or cryptic shaman. And for cranky old women, instead of "curmudgeon," the words more commonly used have been *shrew, crone, hag, harridan, harpy*— all of them gender-specific and negative, though there have been recent efforts of feminists to re-examine them (Henley & Goodchilds, 2000, p. vii).

For contemporary usage (and marketing) of the curmudgeon, one can turn to Jon Winokur. Winokur is the editor of popular anthologies like *The Portable*

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[5] That said, I am not in pursuit of a transnational or "essential" curmudgeon. Geography, history and the individual psyche play crucial, particularizing roles in the ongoing dynamic of masculinities. This essay is intended as a general introduction.

Curmudgeon, The Traveling Curmudgeon and *The Big Curmudgeon.* He is arguably the dean of the current curmudgeon industry in mainstream American publishing. Like the anthology of curmudgeon woman, these works are not scholarly sources but they are symptomatic of the culture. Winokur sums up the range of definitions neatly. A curmudgeon is "*A crusty, ill-tempered, churlish old man; 2. Anyone who hates hypocrisy and pretense and has the temerity to say so; or 3. anyone who points out unpleasant facts in an engaging and humorous manner*" (Winokur, 2007, p. 7).

Historically, the first two definitions have dominated. The rise of the last definition reflects recent reassessments of gender roles, and is perhaps also a reaction to earlier rhetorical excesses about positive thinking. Curmudgeons, in fact, occupy a now-fashionable niche. *Grumpy Old Men*, a BBC Two program which began in 2003, quickly led in 2004 to *Grumpy Old Women*, which ran for several seasons, was repackaged as a book and stage show, and is still used as a theme for holiday television specials. A cursory Internet search reveals blogs not only with names like "The Crusty Curmudgeon," which fits the traditional mould, but also "The Young Curmudgeon," "The Precocious Curmudgeon" and "The Knitting Curmudgeon," to name a few. It has been commercialized to the point that a company sells curmudgeon greeting cards.[6]

I will speculate later about the future of the curmudgeon in light of such departures from the traditional gender parody; my principal interest here is to explore the workings of the aging masculinist model, which involves a particular kind of social contract, or trade-off. Tellingly, the curmudgeon has no enforceable authority. One does not have to *submit* to this bad-tempered or surly old person. Rather, his performance can be enjoyed (or ignored) by his listeners as a construct in itself. In some respects, the curmudgeon's position is analogous to the traditional idea of putting a woman on a pedestal. It is an appreciation which is premised on powerlessness. But, in his case, it is less a matter of gaze than of *listening,* to the toothless lion's roar.

The typical appeal of this performance is that the curmudgeon seemingly knows how to do away with equivocation, excuses, and wishy-washy attitudes. Consider this example from the cowboy poet Wallace McRae, in the appropriately titled "The Cowboy Curmudgeon":

> You lookin' for candor? Well, canned you done got.
> I'll wash all the wishys 'n hang 'em up high.
> You're yearnin' for truth? Well like it or not,
> I'll render your gizzard and show it the sky. (1992, p. 136)

The tone is unapologetically aggressive. The image is revealing, too: "render *your* gizzard" (emphasis added). In other circumstances, a listener probably would not tolerate this kind of speech. As a rule, we are very attached to our gizzards, and we do not like someone probing them or putting them on display. But, for the curmudgeon, we will make an exception, because age has obliged him to trade in his power and we know that he is physically innocu-

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[6] See http://www.curmudgeoncards.com/company.html.

ous and cannot *really* hurt us. If he could, we (or a younger, stronger, more powerful person) would probably shun him for his unpleasantness, ignore him, or fight back and supplant him. Rather, as the gizzard image suggests, with a large degree of literalism, the appeal of the curmudgeon is visceral.

Of course, no sane person would want to live with W.C. Fields, or at least with the persona he projected, but the idea of a crank who hates dogs and small children has a certain charm. (This charm, of course, is highly contextual, and need not be appreciated at all times by everyone.) When H.L. Mencken says, "Every normal man must be tempted, at times, to spit upon his hands, hoist the black flag, and begin slitting throats" (1919), or, when Mark Twain says, "[God] takes no interest in man, nor in the other animals, further than to torture them" (1996, p. 327), they touch a nerve that we might like having touched. Scrooge, most readers would agree, is more entertaining than Tiny Tim.

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GEORGE CARLIN:
FROM COOL TO CRANKY, OR A CURMUDGEON'S PROGRESS

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George Carlin (1937-2008) offers an interesting case study because his highly public life illustrates the aging process and trajectory toward a curmudgeonly performance space.[7] A highly popular stand-up comedian and occasional actor and author, Carlin was a familiar face on American stage and television for five decades. A common thread through all the phases of his career was a love of words and the playful possibilities of language and, beyond his role as an entertainer, he left his mark on American jurisprudence about censorship when a suit related to his famous 1972 stand-up routine, "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" got him arrested, and the 1973 radio broadcast of a related routine resulted in a lawsuit that eventually went to the United States Supreme Court, and a ruling on the F.C.C.'s authority to regulate such broadcasts (*Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation*, 438 U.S. 726 (1978)).

Carlin began as a fairly conventional stand-up comedian, but by the 60s and 70s, he had evolved into a high profile countercultural figure. He sported a beard and long hair and cultivated a laid-back hippie image, creating characters like Al Sleet, a perpetually stoned television weatherman, and Scott Lame, a dippy disc jockey for the radio station "wonderful WINO." Although his routines contained political references typical of the Vietnam era, and his "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" was a rallying point for free speech advocates, Carlin was not, at this stage, conspicuously ideological or committed, and he certainly did not sound angry; his prevailing attitudes were "hipper than thou" or anarchically goofy. The famous "Seven Words" were released on his album *Class Clown* (1972) which, as the title suggests, is hardly a manifesto. The routine features Carlin reciting the seven words very quickly

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[7] Born in Manhattan, Carlin was a high school dropout who served in the U.S. Air Force and worked as a disc jockey before pursuing a career in comedy. He was awarded The Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in 2008.

in the manner of a tongue-twister, a stunt that was imitated by schoolchildren across America, not just for the predictable pleasure of violating a taboo, but also because tongue-twisting was *fun*, a competitive diversion for kids.[8] In this period of rock ascendancy and youth culture, the perception of being *old* was itself a taboo.[9]

Thus it was by no means obvious that in later years Carlin would become a ranter and fulminator, perhaps the most high profile curmudgeon entertainer of the last decade. There is not space here to discuss particular routines in detail, but a cursory review of his album and DVD titles tells the story: in the playful 1970s, these included *FM & AM* (1972), *Class Clown* (1972), *Occupation Foole* (1973), and *Toledo Window Box* (1974). In the final dour decade of his life, he released *You Are All Diseased* (1999), *Complaints and Grievances* (2001), *Life is Worth Losing* (2006) and *It's Bad For Ya* (2008). Monologue subjects in the last one include "Traffic Accidents," "The All-Suicide TV Channel," "Coast-to-Coast Emergency," and, quoted below, "You Have No Rights."

> Boy, everyone in this country is always running around yammering about their fucking rights. 'I have a right. You have no right. We have a right. They don't have a right.' Folks, I hate to spoil your fun, but you have no rights, OK? They're imaginary. We made them up. Like the Boogie Man. The Three Little Pigs. Pinocchio. Mother Goose. Shit like that. Rights are an idea, they're just imaginary. Cute idea, cute, but that's all: cute and fictional. ... I feel, for instance, that I have the right to do anything I please. But, if I do something you don't like, I think you have the right to kill me. So where are you going to find a fairer fucking deal than that?

Carlin's evolution from joker to misanthrope underlines that there is no necessary or inevitable link between the curmudgeon and younger nay-sayers, such as the "Angry Young Man." It would be temptingly logical to assert a chronology according to which Angry Young Men grow up to be curmudgeons, but there are too many counter-examples. For every Kingsley Amis, who would seem to follow a trajectory from Angry Young Man to curmudgeon, there is someone like Henry Miller, who, after being hardboiled, in his later years became a New Age Softie. Probably more useful than chronology in this regard is the idea of a curmudgeonly *space*. Although discussions of "masculine" space have often focused on consumption (Mort, 1996), shared geographies (Hörschelmann & Van Hoven, 2004) and male bonding (Twitchell & Ross, 2006), here I am addressing examples that are more self-consciously individualistic. The Angry Young Man is usually some sort of rebel, loner, or outsider. But there is a difference between positioning oneself outside, or (as in the case

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[8] In one breath, without pause: *"shitpissfuckcuntcocksuckermotherfuckerandtits."*

[9] Rock typically addresses the curmudgeon with a pirouette: rather than foregrounding the performer's advanced years and self-identification as a curmudgeon, a song is more likely to be *about* a curmudgeon (e..g., the Beatles' "Mean Mr. Mustard" or a travesty of the role (e.g., Nirvana's "Curmudgeon").

of the curmudgeon) *above*. The outsider is often on a quest for alternatives; the curmudgeon has less time, and is probably settling for the satisfactions of shaking his fist at the world.

To what effect? When Carlin holds forth about powerlessness and the arbitrary nature of "rights," he both talks tough and at the same time makes it manifestly clear that he is not the man in charge. He becomes, in a manner, a weakened parody of masculine prerogative, even as he uses its ostensible weaponry, expressing himself in extravagant outbursts of anger. In another context, the anthropologist Rosalind Morris (1995) has described the idea of "performing gender twice over" and has pointed to a number of possible effects. These effects include liminality, anti-structure, play, and even (though she suggests that this is more rare) a Brechtian estrangement, toward "a transcendence of the bastard mimesis with a 'truer,' more 'adequate,' or more 'liberating' mimesis" (p. 586). I would argue that the last example is the case here. While Carlin lets off steam about rights being made-up stories like Pinocchio, he also alerts his listeners to the theatricality of his pose. He becomes a subject objectified. And when this estrangement happens, a more critical appreciation of his role and of alternatives beyond it becomes possible.

Lastly, although such parodies and subterranean critiques of masculine power are not without pathos, the curmudgeon is not tragic, either. Carlin's musings on "Things We Say When People Die" and "Parents in Hell" are performed at a safe remove, for bitter laughs, and cannot be compared to the laments of Shakespeare's King Lear who, whether on the throne, on the heath or in prison, remains *vulnerable,* in the fray, often in the most elemental sense. Lear pays a high price for this vulnerability and comes to admit that his rages were the product of "a very foolish fond old man" (1608, 4.7.60). The curmudgeon, in contrast, is an irascible smart old man, who has managed to find shelter, paradoxically, on a proscenium.

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Philip Larkin:
The Post-Virile Condition, or Life After Sex

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A generation after his death, the English poet Philip Larkin (1922-1985), my second case study, is still popularly remembered as a curmudgeon.[10] In this era of compulsive rankings and lists, Larkin's *Collected Poems* was recently nominated by *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the "five best curmudgeonly books" for the writer's qualities as a "misogynist, child-hater and stone atheist" (Derbyshire, para. 5). This description is superficially accurate, as far as it goes, though critics have pointed out the performative, even campy aspect of Larkin's personae (Holdefer, 2006; Swarbrick, 1997) and his penchant for masking (Rácz, 1995). In this discussion I would like to narrow the focus to several

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[10] Born in Coventry, Larkin was educated at Oxford and worked most of his adult life as a librarian at the University of Hull. Larkin published fiction and criticism but he is mainly remembered for his four volumes of poetry (*The North Ship* [1945]; *The Less Deceived* [1955]; *The Whitsun Weddings* [1964]; and *High Windows* [1974]). He was offered the position of Britain's Poet Laureate, but he declined.

poems where the aging process is foregrounded (since, of course, misogyny, child-hatred and atheism can appeal to any age). I will emphasize particularly the "post virile status" and the performance of life after sex alluded to in the poems "Annus Mirabilis," "Posterity," and "This Be the Verse."

"Annus Mirabilis" (1968), whose title ironically echoes John Dryden's 1667 poem of the same name about military battles and the Great Fire of London, is emblematic of the curmudgeon's sexual predicament. In the famous first stanza, the speaker outlines his post-virile status in light of a larger cultural context:

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (which was rather late for me) -
> Between the end of the Chatterley ban
> And the Beatles' first LP. (p. 146)

Usually the poem is read as a comment on the so-called sexual revolution of the sixties, which was marked by changes in attitudes toward censorship with the open publication of works like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and the explosion of youth and popular culture, closely identified with the Beatles. The change, it seems, was inestimable. The second stanza describes the dreary, quarrelsome state of affairs before this era, before summing up a new existence where

> every life became
> A brilliant breaking of the bank,
> A quite unlosable game.
>
> So life was never better than
> in nineteen sixty-three
> (Though just too late for me)—
> Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban
> And the Beatles' first LP. (p. 146)

The speaker is clearly poking fun at the hype often attached to the swinging sixties and the rhetoric of liberation but, in the parenthetical comments, he also reveals something of *himself*. If we read these observations as representative of a curmudgeon's sex life, two facets emerge: first, the curmudgeon was untouched by the sexual revolution; and second, he is not troubled by this fact. There is little reason to take his claim about the "better" life in 1963 at face value. His is not an old-bachelor prudishness (which is itself a highly sexualized pose) but a matter-of-fact observation that he is no longer in the running. And implicitly, instead of regretting a post-sexual existence, he actually finds it a sort of relief. He avoids dissonance between biological age and self-perception, or between biological sex and self-defined gender (Gardiner, 2002, p. 95). The curmudgeon does not have to go along with the sexual revolution, which in any case will not deliver on such extravagant promises or fantasies. There *is* life after sex.

On the other hand, there are limits to this defensive posture, and Larkin's poem "Posterity" (1968) underlines how the curmudgeon's post-virile status disempowers him with others. Here, the speaker's supposed biographer, a pushy American professor named Jake Balokowsky, takes over the poem after the first five lines and elbows himself into the spotlight for the remaining thirteen lines. Balokowsky describes the poet in purely exploitive terms, as just another step along the path of academic careerism. He disparagingly refers to him as an "old fart," a "bastard" and "one of those old-type *natural* fouled-up guys" (Larkin, p. 139). The italicization of "natural" calls attention to its own constructedness. According to Balokowsky, an "old-type *natural* fouled-up guy" lives a life devoid of interest. "He's not out for kicks or something happening." And this fact seems central to Balokowsky's lack of respect.[11] It is the price the curmudgeon pays for taking himself out of the running. Another kind of male will be in charge.

Larkin offers, however, a post-virile riposte of sorts in "This Be The Verse" (1971) by raising the stakes and questioning the very idea of procreation. The performance here is very much a matter of form. Larkin's work is generally marked by an attention to traditional meter and rhyme, sometimes deployed very subtly. But the purposely clunky title of this poem signals another kind of game, and the first stanza flirts with doggerel.

> They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
> They may not mean to, but they do.
> They fill you with the faults they had
> And add some extra, just for you. (p. 142)

There is a difference, however, between playing the fool in the pedestrian sense and performing the courtly fool's role in the traditional sense, and I would argue that here Larkin is attempting something akin to the latter. The courtly fool not only entertains but also challenges norms or habits of thought. His role affords him a freedom of speech not enjoyed by other subjects of the king. Lear's fool, for instance, openly questions all appearances of natural and moral order. His only certainty is that "the rain it raineth every day" (1608, 3.2.77). Larkin adopts a similar tone in the last stanza of "This Be The Verse:"

> Man hands on misery to man.
> It deepens like a coastal shelf.
> Get out as early as you can,
> And don't have any kids yourself. (p. 142)

In real life Larkin was reluctant to make public statements or perform readings of his work ("I don't want to go around pretending to be me," Larkin,

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[11] The possible anti-semitic element in Larkin's characterization of Balokowsky further illustrates the problem of performed persona and authorial intention. See Motion (1993, p. 436).

1983, p. 51) but what is striking in "This Be The Verse" is that Larkin concludes a poem with the kind of pronunciamiento that he professed to loathe. As in "Annus Mirabilis," the speaker goes beyond the immediate and local, and inserts himself into the history of humanity, with reference, even, to geologic time—whereupon he offers portentous advice. ("Get out as early as you can/And don't have any kids yourself.") The solution to human misery is to eliminate its source: humans. Here, the post-virile curmudgeon has the liberty to philosophize like a fool.

<div align="center">

CONCLUSION:
THE POLITICAL CODING AND FUTURE OF THE CURMUDGEON

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Given the often forceful expression of the curmudgeon's role, one could wonder about its political uses. Gardiner has noted how the shift from gender to age categories can "complicate, depolarize and contextualize" (2005, p. 167). Indeed, the curmudgeon's relationship to ideology is not simple.

It is a truism that the elderly are more likely to be conservative, and this has often been the case of curmudgeons. Within their respective contexts, figures like Evelyn Waugh and Philip Larkin (who were both fairly "old" even when they were "young"), or H.L. Mencken, probably fit that description. Kingsley Amis, earlier alluded to as someone who went from being a so-called Angry Young Man to being a curmudgeon, followed a trajectory of spending his early years as a member of the Communist Party, and his senior years as a supporter of Margaret Thatcher. The very notion of progress or the utopian impulse which underpins much of leftist thinking provides a number of tempting targets for the conservative curmudgeon. A forward-looking curmudgeon sounds like a contradiction in terms. What does a curmudgeon have to look forward to?

On the other hand, there is certainly no conservative monopoly. A respect for traditions and institutions, which underpins much of conservative thinking, provides tempting targets for the left-leaning curmudgeon. Brechtian estrangement, alluded to earlier, certainly had a leftish agenda, and individual curmudgeons like Edmund Wilson or George Bernard Shaw come to mind. George Carlin is probably best described as a libertarian, and writers like Edward Abbey or Edward Hoagland might be considered green curmudgeons. Ultimately, this right/left, conservative/liberal divide is too sweeping and simplistic, and the curmudgeon, as a gender parody, resists a specific political coding.

In the end, individuality trumps ideology, or, more precisely, an ideology of individualism prevails. Those of a partisan disposition can always find examples to make their case, but the Fool serves many kings. At times he can startle and estrange, and lead his listeners to question the established order but, most of the time, the role of the curmudgeon is as much about entertainment as wisdom. His words are valued for their asperity, not their profundity.

Such individualism is apparent in the recent rise of self-described curmudgeons who do not correspond to the traditional gender parody, whether young, female or some other male variant, such Larry David in the current HBO com-

edy series *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, whose performance as "Larry David" shows an aging, semi-retired male whose narcissism is still a source of sexual tension and who, in spite of himself, cannot remain above the fray. David and other less traditional curmudgeons, in addition to testifying to the breadth of the curmudgeon's appeal, also demonstrate Connell and Messerschmidt's fundamental contention that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time" (2005, p. 852). The extent to which the role of the curmudgeon has become unmoored from its traditional masculinist usage remains uncertain, but perhaps we are entering an era where the kind of performance associated with him will cease to be a gender parody at all. In a more general context, Butler has referred to the process of "*dis*identification" (1993, pp. xiii, xiv), which might describe what is happening to the curmudgeon now.

At present, however, the traditional gender parody remains recognizable, and exists also as a spectral presence for other kinds of performers who have embraced the term. For the traditional curmudgeon, faced with aging, his defensive repositioning is also liberating. Since he no longer has to assume the responsibilities and images associated with masculine authority and virility, he can still find a role which provides gratification, though of a more limited, astringent sort. This trade-off comes at the price of power, and of being taken totally seriously, but it is a lively last stand before the final letting go, and death.

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