

HAMLET, FIGHT CLUB, AND CREMASTER 3: THE ORDER
FIGHTING THE DIE HARD MASCULINITY NARRATIVE

by

Andrew Chapin Sobey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Science and Natural History Filmmaking

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

November 2009

© COPYRIGHT

by

Andrew Chapin Sobey

2009

All Rights Reserved

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Andrew Chapin Sobey

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citation, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the Division of Graduate Education.

Cindy Stillwell - Chair

Approved for the Department – School of Film and Photography

Robert Arnold

Approved for the Division of Graduate Education

Dr. Carl A. Fox

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Copying is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this thesis in whole or in parts may be granted only by the copyright holder.

Andrew Chapin Sobey

November 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Masculinity Narratives Defined.....	1
Methods for Analysis of Masculinity Narratives.....	3
2. ANALYSIS OF MASCULINITY IN MAINSTREAM FICTIONAL NARRATIVES.....	6
Introducing the Protagonist.....	6
The Love Interest.....	9
Subversion and Internal Conflict.....	12
A Closer Look at <u>Fight Club</u>	13
3. ANALYSIS OF A NEW MASCULINITY AVANT-GARDE FILM.....	20
4. CONCLUSION.....	28
REFERENCES CITED.....	29

ABSTRACT

Socially constructed ideas of gender are crucial in Western culture. For males, the achievement of the status of “manhood” is essential to be considered truly male. Because of the cultural importance of this achievement, many cultural artifacts reflect and revolve around it. The exploration and celebration of manhood thus often forms the basis for works of art. In the case of film, an art form practiced much more commonly by men, examples abound. However, not all filmic narratives about masculinity take the same approach to the issue. While many portray the achievement of manhood in a simple, celebratory way, some in fact challenge cultural ideas of masculinity. The purpose of this essay is to discuss and identify these subversive masculinity narratives, with the goal of establishing a dimorphic categorization system. This system delineates masculinity narratives between a traditional, celebratory type, and a new, self-aware/self-reflexive type. For the purposes of this discussion I analyze several examples of mainstream masculinity narratives: the films Fight Club and Die Hard, and Shakespeare’s Hamlet. I intend to show how the different portrayals of masculinity in these works either reinforce or subvert traditional cultural ideas of masculinity, and seek to establish a model for the new masculinity genre. To study these issues from another angle, I also look at an avant-garde work, Matthew Barney’s Cremaster 3: The Order. This second analysis shows how mainstream masculinity narratives, both the traditional and new varieties, can be packaged and discussed in an experimental work. Ultimately, this essay establishes a new/traditional masculinity binary, as both a lens for analyzing current works, and a mold for creating new ones.

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity Narratives Defined

“Be a damn fire eater now. He’d seen it in the war work the same way. More of a change than any loss of virginity. Fear gone like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man. Women knew it too. No bloody fear.”

-Ernest Hemingway

Dominant Western culture, like nearly all cultures, defines manhood as a necessary achievement for males before they reach adulthood (Gilmore, 11)¹. This achievement typically involves conquering pain, violence, sex, or death (or some combination thereof); failing to do so demonstrates a male’s inability to truly become a man, suggesting gender’s primacy over sex. David Gilmore argues that these rites of manhood constitute a form of male procreation, allowing men to beget other men, circumventing the womb. In patriarchal societies such as ours, this achievement permeates all aspects of the culture, especially its art. Hence, Western cinema, both mainstream and experimental, provides countless narrative examples of this masculine achievement.

However, all masculinity narratives are not created equal. Although the whole of masculine cinema constitutes a spectrum, rather than a distinctly dimorphic body of texts, it can generally be divided into two camps: the celebratory and the self-aware/self-reflexive. Both types of masculine narratives often involve the phallic dichotomy of

¹ One should note that while Gilmore illustrates the ubiquity of these definitions, he by no means concedes their inevitability.

characters as described by Peter Lehman (26). These two types of masculine characters are the “powerful, awesome spectacle of phallic masculinity,” exemplified by the male protagonists of action and pornographic films, and the “vulnerable, pitiful, often comic collapse,” of phallic masculinity, e.g. Woody Allen and Dudley Moore characters. For an example of the celebratory masculine narrative, and the two types of phallic masculinity, one need look no further than the above Hemingway quote, taken from *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. This quote describes the transition of the main character from the flaccid masculine type to the awesome spectacle type, as witnessed by another character who has already achieved manhood. The latter describes American men (presumably those who have not gone to war) as “the great American boy-men,” (38) perfectly illustrating the primacy of gender over sex in Western culture. These celebratory narratives glorify the path to and achievement of manhood without calling either the process or product into question, thereby reinforcing patriarchal hegemony.

While it may, on the surface, seem that the vulnerable, pitiful collapse of masculinity presents an alternative to this hegemony, a Gramscian reading suggests that this narrative merely represents a form of compromise equilibrium. In other words, the Woody Allen-type masculine character functions as a comic device, calling attention to itself in specific opposition to the awesome spectacle that masculinity is *supposed* to be. This relationship in fact exploits and reinforces traditional definitions of masculinity, rather than challenging and de-centering cultural mores. In the interest of de-centering traditional masculinity, the self-aware/self-reflexive masculine narrative provides another, perhaps more subtly effective iconoclastic method.

These new masculinity narratives, far more rare than the celebratory variety, hold the path to maleness up for examination. One can find examples of new masculinity narratives in both experimental films, and, somewhat surprisingly, mainstream Hollywood films. However, while the term “new masculinity” implies that a general trend of questioning traditional narratives is strictly a modern phenomenon, the push towards a new masculinity is by no means a recent invention. Shakespeare’s Hamlet represents a much older attack on traditional masculinity, and provides a framework for interpreting modern filmic masculinity narratives.

Modern film is a bastion of male hegemony. The film industry is dominated by men at every level, and, not surprisingly, the narratives it produces often reinforce patriarchy. Thus, it seems unlikely that modern films would produce a new masculine narrative, as it would be an attack not only on masculinity, but on the film industry status quo as well. To wit, feminism found a home in independent avant-garde productions early in the history of film. However, these feminist avant-garde films, while often constructing effective and insightful arguments against traditional masculinity and male hegemony, certainly cannot represent a push towards a new type of masculinity narrative, as they are not masculinity narratives in the first place. New masculinity narratives in film must not only attack, but subvert, traditional gender roles.

Methods for Analysis of Masculinity Narratives

To analyze some examples of this subversion, we must also have a control. This control will both calibrate the traditional masculinity narrative in film and serve as a

reference point for analyzing new masculinity narratives. As Lehman points out, action film protagonists typically represent the “powerful, awesome spectacle of phallic masculinity”. Therefore action films would seem the logical place to begin looking for both a control and a counter-point, i.e., both traditional and new masculinity. In the canon of modern action films, few surpass Die Hard in financial success or influence within the genre. In the same way that we can use Hamlet as a framework for analyzing self-aware/self-reflexive masculinity narratives, we can use Die Hard as a framework for analyzing modern mainstream masculinity narratives. However, not all modern action films contain similar masculinity narratives. Fight Club, another financially successful action film, paints a very different picture of masculinity. In combining Hamlet, Die Hard, and Fight Club, we can establish a spectrum, or an axis, along which other mainstream narratives can be aligned.

Finally, in contrast to these three works, which bring masculinity narratives into popular genres, Matthew Barney’s Cremaster 3: The Order seems to take a very different approach. The film is a cut down of Cremaster 3, part of Barney’s Cremaster Cycle, and was excerpted from the larger piece for public viewing in the Guggenheim Museum in New York. For the purposes of this essay, however, Cremaster 3: The Order will be discussed as a stand-alone film, not in reference to the larger body of work from which it came. This experimental piece is another example of a masculinity narrative, but has a different purpose and takes a very different approach to its subject than the other texts. Rather than bringing the discussion of masculinity into the mainstream, as other new masculinity narratives attempt, Cremaster 3: The Order brings elements of the celebratory

masculine blockbuster narrative into the realm of the critical, namely, the experimental film. This not only renders the blockbuster narrative strange in a Russian formalist sociological sense, it also provides a new mode of experimental film; as Keller and Ward phrased it, Barney created a “neo-avant-garde blockbuster”. While Barney may have only been using this technique to comment on the gender roles of the traditional Hollywood blockbuster, he may also have intended to put forth the possibility of a new mode of critique in experimental film.

Through an intertextual analysis of several examples of masculinity narratives, across multiple genres, looking for specific points of contact among them, I hope to establish a model self-aware masculinity narrative, to be used as both a lens for reading other works, and a formula for building a new genre of storytelling.

ANALYSIS OF MASCULINITY IN MAINSTREAM FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

Introducing the Protagonist

Each of these four works opens with a crisis of masculinity. The audience meets the protagonist of each story at a point of conflict. This conflict involves a rift between domestic and violent masculinity, gender confusion, or both. Fight Club, for example, begins with its protagonist, who remains nameless throughout the film but is generally referred to as “Jack” in discussions of the film, in an acute crisis of gender. Jack is a depressed insomniac who contemplates suicide. This gender crisis causes him to begin formulating his hyper-masculine alter ego, expressed as single frame flashes of Brad Pitt’s character, Tyler Durden. Jack, who narrates the film, explains that his insomnia caused everything in his life to become distant, “a copy of a copy of a copy”. One could interpret this Benjamin-esque loss of aura as pertaining not only to Jack’s way of experiencing his own life, but also the loss of aura for traditional masculinity. This loss of masculinity is made explicit in the film’s opening sequence through Jack’s nesting behavior. In his search for some kind of satisfaction in life, he replaces human interaction with consumerism, seeking to build the perfect collection of material goods, and believing that his possessions actually constitute his personality. To further stress Jack’s gender crisis, he also begins frequenting several self-help groups, the most important of which being a gathering called, “Remaining Men Together”, for men who have lost their testicles to cancer. Here Jack meets Bob, who represents a truly unique mix of gender roles in the film. Bob was a body builder who used steroids to attain

hyper-masculinity. However, as a consequence of this, he eventually had to have his testicles removed and developed breasts (referred to in the film as, “bitch tits”). This reversal of masculinity suggests that gender problems arise as a result of the pendulum swinging too far in one direction, so to speak. While Bob’s problems came from his hyper-masculinity, Jack is suffering from the same gender confusion, but coming from the opposite direction. Bob becomes a simultaneous mother and father figure for Jack, allowing him to cry while assuring him that they are both still men. This gender crisis and unsteady resolution establishes the protagonist’s struggle, as well as the underlying conflict of the film.

The opening scene of Die Hard similarly hints that it might develop into a more complex tale of masculinity than one might expect. The film introduces its protagonist, John McClane, with a close-up on his wedding ring, and a hand tightly clenched on an airplane armrest. This very first shot conveys the character’s discomfort with domestic masculinity, which the gentleman sitting next to him interprets as a fear of flying. Trying to help, this flaccid masculine character sitting next to McClane offers advice on domesticity, namely surviving air travel. However, when the unnamed domestic man sees the protagonist’s handgun under his jacket – in a slightly-too-obvious phallic reference – he is intimidated and embarrassed. Surprisingly, in a moment of complex masculinity, McClane then pulls a large stuffed bear down from the overhead luggage bin and walks off. While this seems to imply a more vulnerable side to the main character, the rest of the film, beginning with an exchange of lascivious glances with a female flight attendant as he leaves the plane only seconds later, suggests otherwise.

While the protagonists of Fight Club and Die Hard represent the opposite forms of Lehman's phallic masculinity, the points of contact between the two films are intriguing. The most glaring point of contact lies between John McClane and Tyler Durden, each representing the awesome spectacle type of masculinity. In a near perfect recreation of the opening scene from Die Hard, Jack (and the audience) meets his alter ego, Tyler, on a plane. Jack, representing the same flaccid masculinity of the man seated next to John McClane in Die Hard, seems to mildly entertain the awesome spectacle of masculinity that is Tyler Durden. Tyler immediately challenges Jack's domesticity, suggesting that Jack's cute and clever nature is causing problems in his life. Their interaction ends with Tyler grabbing his suitcase, getting up, announcing that he will walk by Jack "giving him the ass", rather than the crotch, then conversely passing a female flight attendant, "giving her the crotch", to use Tyler's terms. The condescending look at air travel as a staple of domestic masculinity, as well as the objectification of the female flight attendant serve the same purpose as those elements in the opening of Die Hard; these elements establish the hyper-masculine character in opposition to, and in fact superior to, society at large.

Fight Club's introduction of Tyler Durden suggests that he might be a ghost or figment of the protagonist's imagination through single frame flashes of the hyper-masculine character, initially in a first person shot from Jack's point of view. This hints to the audience that the awesome spectacle of masculinity embodied in Tyler might actually represent Jack's perception of what a man is "supposed" to be, rather than any real person. Similarly, Hamlet opens with its protagonist, Prince Hamlet, dealing with

the ghost of his father. The ghost informs his son that his recent death was a murder, and charges Prince Hamlet with avenging it. Again, the story begins with a crisis of masculinity, as this violent quest conflicts with (Prince) Hamlet's own desires, namely academia and love. As Hamlet's sanity comes into question later we are lead to wonder whether this quest actually came from his father, or if Hamlet projected his own ideas about manhood onto the ghost. Hamlet's struggle for the rest of the play, apart from that of killing his father's assassin, lies in his inability to reconcile his desire for domestic masculinity with his quest to avenge his father and claim his manhood. Unlike this relationship in Hamlet, where the protagonist feels driven by his socially constructed image of masculinity represented by the ghost of his father, Fight Club gives that construction its own tangible character. Rather than encouraging the protagonist to behave in hyper-masculine ways, Tyler does things on his own, while Jack sits back in awe of this powerful spectacle. Fight Club allows the ghost of King Hamlet to run free, taking hyper-masculinity to its logical extreme.

The Love Interest

The relationship of the protagonist to his love interest forms another interesting point of discussion between these narratives. To compress the plot of Die Hard only slightly, John McClane is on a quest to patch up his domestic relationships, but gets sidetracked by German terrorists. Only through the extremely thorough victory of violent masculinity does domestic masculinity become attainable. The film ends with McClane, covered in sweat and pouring blood, finally embracing his wife. The film then

immediately cuts to the phallic “Nakatomi Tower”, the setting for the film, complete with several filmic orgasm euphemisms: explosions at the top of the tower, fireworks sounds, violin music, confetti streaming down to Earth, and a tilt downward highlighting the awesome spectacle of the tower. While the narrative suggests what women are “really” looking for in a man, the overtly sexual ending also shows what men are “really” looking for in a woman, undercutting the last vestiges of domestic masculinity that might have survived through the film. By the end of the film, only the celebration of the hyper-masculine protagonist, reflecting the violent masculinity of King Hamlet’s ghost, remains.

In the case of Hamlet, the protagonist’s internal struggle with masculinity causes him to spurn his love interest, Ophelia, and contemplate suicide. Hamlet himself seems to prefer the vulnerable masculinity of domestic love with Ophelia, but feels pressured to become the “powerful, awesome spectacle” of dominant patriarchy. Eventually, his efforts to fulfill his father’s (supposed) wishes indirectly causes Ophelia’s death, and later his own. This contrasts sharply with Die Hard, in that the violent masculinity that John McClane employs to win back his wife, a reward that we’re not entirely convinced the hero wants, actually prevents Prince Hamlet from achieving the domestic masculinity that he desired from the start.

Fight Club, not surprisingly, offers a stranger and more complicated relationship between the protagonist and his love interest. Although Bob seems to resolve Jack’s gender crisis temporarily, the introduction of a love interest throws a wrench in this tentative tranquility. However, much like Hamlet’s reaction to Ophelia, Jack expresses

contempt for the mere presence of this love interest, Marla Singer. Intriguingly, Marla is played by Helena Bonham Carter, who also played Ophelia in the 1991 film version of Hamlet, further reinforcing parallels between the two. Marla's appearance at Jack's self-help groups prevents him from identifying with Bob the mother/father figure, thereby relaunching his gender crisis. Although Jack finds Marla attractive, he does not admit this even to himself, and seems to be constantly intimidated by her presence. Later in the film, Marla begins sleeping with Tyler, rather than Jack. As in Die Hard, the hyper-masculine, violent male is attractive to women, and can engage in domestic masculinity only as far as "sport fucking", as Tyler phrases it. Tyler's use of the phrase makes explicit the sexual references that the ending of Die Hard implicitly suggested.

Jack's placement of romantic/sexual interests solely in his violently masculine alter ego, while feigning disgust for Marla, is a clearly misogynistic gesture. Although Jack becomes jealous, he spurns her advances towards him. His rejections of Marla are similar in their phrasing and motivation to Prince Hamlet's rejections of Ophelia and his own mother, regarding women as inferior and frail because of their perceived need for the love of a Tyler Durden-type masculine character. This perceived need, which Jack and Hamlet both find disgusting, is interrogated deeply in both of these narratives, as the sanity of each protagonist is called into question. In Die Hard, however, women's need of the powerful phallic masculine male, and the frailty and inferiority inherent in this need, is a basic underlying assumption of the narrative itself. In this way, misogyny forms the very foundation of the celebratory masculine narrative in Die Hard, an element that cannot be removed without the narrative itself collapsing; Fight Club and Hamlet, on

the other hand, encourage a more explicit reading and questioning of the misogyny of their protagonists, and both present misogyny as an obstacle to narrative satisfaction, rather than a prerequisite for it.

Subversion and Internal Conflict

Fight Club, in contrast to Die Hard, takes the complex, new masculinity narrative approach of Hamlet and renders it blockbuster. In doing so, the film subverts its own genre, and packages that subversion in an aesthetic palatable for the traditional action film audience. Also, in contrast to the feminist avant-garde, Fight Club attacks the system from within. The obvious risk of this Trojan horse approach, however, is that the film camouflages itself too well. If the satire is too subtle, a new masculine narrative could end up merely reinforcing the very ideas it intends to subvert. While these narratives contain some of the same trappings of the celebratory masculine narrative, the critical viewpoint is apparent throughout a new masculinity narrative. So the question we must pose about Fight Club and Hamlet, for the purposes of this essay, is, does each function *more* as a celebration, or questioning of cultural ideas about manhood?

The most significant indication that each of these narratives questions, rather than celebrates masculinity, lies in their central conflict. In both Hamlet and Fight Club the conflict occurs not between protagonist and antagonist, but rather as an internal struggle within the protagonist himself. The two sides of this internal struggle are split along the lines of Lehman's two phallic masculine characters. However, unlike both celebratory, "awesome spectacle" masculinity narratives, and those involving the flaccid, comic

collapse of traditional masculinity, these two specific examples refuse to locate the two masculinities in separate characters. Rather than posing the former type of masculinity as success, and the latter as failure, Hamlet and Fight Club suggest that the struggle between the two is the key to achieving true manhood. This vastly different approach to masculinity and manhood radically de-centers gender, and its primacy over sex, by establishing cultural gender roles as the protagonist's main obstacles.

Although the central conflict of Fight Club strongly suggests that the film's aim is to question, rather than celebrate, traditional masculinity, the film provides a good deal more evidence to support this claim, as well. Since one of my main goals in this essay is to show that new masculinity narratives can subvert their own genres, a more in-depth analysis of Fight Club as a new masculinity action film seems expedient.

A Closer Look at Fight Club

The key to the new masculinity of Fight Club lies in the relationship between Jack and Tyler. Freud described his melancholic sadomasochist as a split between the ego and the superego. The superego, obsessed with social constructions of self, punishes the ego for failing to live up to social expectations, while the ego comes to enjoy the punishment (Ta, 266). Fight Club gives viewers several clues that this is precisely the relationship between Jack and Tyler. First, and most obviously, the film comes out and says that Tyler is Jack's social construction of an ideal male. This character, based on social expectations, is the protagonist's superego. He chastises Jack several times for being soft and effeminate, punishing the ego for failing to live up to cultural manhood. In a more

literal sadomasochistic sense, every time Tyler fights in the film (with only one exception), he wins; every time Jack fights (with only one exception), he loses. It seems that when the protagonist allows his superego take over, sadism rules, while the ego takes a more masochistic form. In the end, stable masculinity can only be achieved through the literal death of the figurative character Tyler, and the figurative death of the literal character Jack, causing the birth of a new masculine character in the closing shot of the film.

The resolution in Fight Club comes only after Jack actually learns that Tyler is his own masculine self-image. In a strangely self-reflexive scene, Tyler tells Jack that, “[a]ll the things you wish you could be, that’s me”. The struggle between the two masculinities of Jack/Tyler thus becomes very literal in the final act of the film, with Jack attempting to seize control of himself from his hyper-masculine imagined self. However, as the Tyler side of the protagonist evidently anticipated this, he told the members of “Project Mayhem” to castrate Jack if he ever tried to call off the anarchistic actions of the group. This, aside from adding to the bizarrely self-reflexive conflict between the two male leads, stresses Tyler’s castration anxiety, another staple of Freud’s essentialist gender analysis, as well as his belief that Jack is not truly a man, again highlighting his perception of gender’s primacy over sex.

To return briefly to Hamlet, while spurning his real love interest, Prince Hamlet engages in an Oedipal quest, aiming to kill his mother’s new husband (King Hamlet’s brother), and deriding his mother’s need for another man’s love. Roughly 300 years after Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, Freud would describe the resolution of the Oedipus complex

as being essential for the development of normal gender roles. When examined through the lens of Oedipal desire, the relationship between Jack, Tyler, and Marla in Fight Club provides greater insight into the protagonist's conflict of masculinity. The film repeatedly suggests that Tyler serves as a father figure to Jack. First, Tyler comes to replace Bob as Jack's salvation from identity crisis. In fact, not only does Tyler replace Bob, the combined mother/father figure, Bob himself comes to look up to Tyler later in the film. Jack's also has a brief discussion with Tyler about his own father, in which his discussion of abandonment mirrors Tyler's existentialist ideas about God. This setup of Tyler as Jack's adopted father, and the omnipotence of father figures in general, sheds more light on the true conflict of the film, Jack's struggle with his own ideas of gender. As Jack's subconscious desire to replace Tyler as the object of Marla's affection plays out, we are left wondering how she fits into this strange Oedipal narrative. Freud held that the resolution of the Oedipus complex happened when a boy learned to identify more strongly with his father than his mother, abandoning his desire to replace his father. The narrative of Fight Club, however, turns this resolution on its head. In opposition to Freudian gender development, Jack remains troubled and confused as long as he identifies more strongly with Tyler; the resolution to Jack's conflict comes only when he finally abandons Tyler, and identifies with Marla for the first time. Turning Freudian gender theory on its head is a fairly stereotypical feminist gesture (with good reason, of course), and serves to question patriarchal dominance in Fight Club. Although I would certainly not go as far as calling Fight Club a feminist film, I would argue that employing

a feminist gesture as a central plot point in a story about achieving manhood strongly suggests that something beyond a mere celebration of cultural mores is taking place.

The societal role of the hyper-masculine character in Fight Club is also worth interrogating. Tyler's main function in the film lies in his relationship with society at large. His actions and words are direct attacks on modern civilization, and as he represents Jack's ideas about manhood, establish a conflict between masculinity and modern society. Tyler has several jobs. As a projectionist in a mainstream cinema, he splices single frames of a penis into family films. As a banquet waiter, he urinates and ejaculates into the food he serves to wealthy patrons. He also sells soap made from fat that he steals from liposuction clinics, or, as Jack puts it, he "[sells] rich women their own fat asses back to them". These all function as attacks on society. More specifically, the first two are phallic attacks on society, suggesting that the phallus has been backed into a corner, so to speak.

"The dominant ideological drive to retain the awe and mystique surrounding the penis is crumbling before the journalistic and artistic drive to break down the final taboo," (Lehman, 39).

Peter Lehman argues that the extreme dramatic importance of the appearance of a penis in film is a symptom of phallic hegemony. He criticizes films like The Crying Game and Boogie Nights, which, despite ostensibly attempting new takes on Hollywood narratives, both include the on-screen penis as their dramatic climax. This dramatic importance in film seems reminiscent of Freudian ideas about penis envy and castration anxiety, suggesting that society revolves around the penis, thereby justifying patriarchal hegemony. Given Lehman's critical take on the importance of the phallus, Tyler

Durden's attacks on society seem relevant to his larger role as Jack's projection of hyper-masculine societal expectations. By urinating and ejaculating into the food of society's upper echelon Tyler is attacking his perceived threats with his very being; as a representation of all that is phallic for Jack, it seems appropriate that most of Tyler's actions should revolve around threats to and attacks using this phallus. Tyler's editing of the films he projects is much more fascinating. By splicing a single frame of a penis into family films as an attack, Tyler is maintaining the very phallic hegemony that Lehman criticizes. However, this act maintains the importance of the appearance of the penis not only for the audience of Tyler's theater, but for the audience of Fight Club, at that point in the film, as well, although this dramatic importance is later subverted. Tyler also argues for the importance of having a penis, by pointing out to Jack after his apartment explodes that his situation could be worse: "[i]t could be worse, a woman could cut off your penis while you sleep and throw it from the window of a moving car". This reiteration of castration anxiety, further reinforcing the aforementioned Freudian justification of patriarchal hegemony, also references the John/Lorena Bobbit incident of 1993, stressing the threat society poses to the phallus.

The dramatic importance of the phallus undergoes its own arc in Fight Club, helping to establish the relationship between the dichotomous phallic masculinities of the film. The two appearances of a dildo in the film reinforce this relationship. Early in the film the mere suggestion of a dildo serves as a great embarrassment for Jack; later, in Marla's apartment, an on-screen dildo doesn't concern Tyler, making Marla's reassurance that, "it's not a threat to you", seem totally unnecessary. As mentioned

above, Tyler maintains the importance of the image of the penis for both his audience in the theater where he is employed, and the audience of Fight Club as well. However, Tyler, the walking phallus, loses in the end of the film. To hark back to his introduction in single frame flashes, the last few seconds of the film before the credits include a flash cut of the same penis that Tyler spliced into the films he projected. However, at this point in the movie, the image has been robbed of its dramatic importance. This time, the appearance of a penis does not seem to carry the same gravity, and in fact is a self-reflexive filmic joke. Robbing the phallus of its extreme dramatic importance serves to de-center the phallic hegemony that Lehman criticizes. This flash cut in the final seconds states the film's purpose, reminding the audience of the phallus worship of the first two acts, and stressing the loss of phallic hegemony inherent in the protagonist's victory.

While Tyler's extreme phallic masculinity obviously appeals to Jack, as that is the reason for Tyler's existence, it quickly becomes obvious that other men find the concept attractive as well. The fight club itself starts when Tyler and Jack are fighting – that is, Jack is brutally beating himself in a parking lot – and some male bystanders ask to join in. Although it is hard to imagine this situation in reality, in the context of the film it seems to make perfect sense. The snowballing of “Fight Club” (the club in the film, not the film itself) shows the audience that Jack's gender crisis was perhaps not as unique as he might have thought. That the club evolves into “Project Mayhem”, an anarchist terrorist group, only seems appropriate, as Tyler is Jack's response to what he sees as an emasculating society. While “Fight Club” was an effort to escape from a feminizing society, “Project Mayhem” was an effort to destroy that society and remake the world as

Tyler saw fit. This suggestion of a broad problem headed towards a radical and violent end highlights the need for a new discussion of masculinity, and a new solution to the conflict between the two classic forms of phallic masculinity.

Although the conclusion of Fight Club could easily be read as Jack's victory over Tyler, there are several elements of the final scene to suggest otherwise. Tyler dies when Jack finally accepts that Tyler is part of him and shoots himself. However, immediately following this, "Project Mayhem" succeeds in destroying the buildings of every bank and credit card company in the city, thereby destroying the materialistic consumer protagonist that defines Jack at the start of the film. Furthermore, he finally accepts his attraction to Marla, and the film closes with the two of them holding hands, looking out upon the city as the financial institutions collapse. This character is clearly not the same Jack that we have known throughout the film. Both Tyler and the anonymous protagonist are destroyed, and a new man is born, indicating the resolution of Prince Hamlet's internal masculinity conflict as well as the purpose of the film.

ANALYSIS OF A NEW MASCULINITY AVANT-GARDE FILM

Masculinity narratives are not confined to the action genre. While we could probably find examples of these types of stories in nearly every genre of film, avant-garde film seems the most promising for offering a different approach to the subject matter. However, finding an avant-garde film that can easily be placed along our Die Hard - Fight Club - Hamlet axis for analysis might seem more difficult. Matthew Barney's film Cremaster 3: The Order offers just such an opportunity, conveniently enough, as it revolves not only around a masculinity narrative, but also a series of references to popular action film. In discussing this film, I hope to provide an alternative framework for the new masculinity narrative. In other words, I would argue that Cremaster 3: The Order shares the same narrative and social goals as Fight Club and Hamlet, but comes at them from a very different angle.

The aesthetic and narrative of Cremaster 3: The Order are centered around Freemasonry terminology and imagery. The main character, a gender confused autobiographical Matthew Barney, is known as the "Entered Apprentice", a term for the lowest level of Freemasons. Each level in the film is referred to as a "degree", another Freemason term, indicating the rank of a Freemason, implying advancement and achievement with each successive level. After the opening credits, which establish the characters and the Freemason terminology, the body of the film opens with a group of women emerging from a bubble-bath, their nipples covered only with the square and compass symbol of Freemasonry. The invocation of this fraternal organization not only reminds the viewer of that of Fight Club, it also allegorizes patriarchal society.

The emergence of the women from the bubble-bath is followed by Barney's emergence from the same pool, serving as a birth metaphor for the protagonist. Barney, as the Entered Apprentice, appears to be a celebratory masculine character similar to Bruce Willis in Die Hard, a muscular figure, bloodied from some unknown combat, wearing the traditional masculine garb of Barney's Celtic ancestry. However, this masculine garb is not colored green, blue, or brown, as one might expect, but pink, suggesting gender confusion in the protagonist. In much the same way that the protagonists of the three previously discussed films begin with a crisis of masculinity, the Entered Apprentice seems stuck in limbo between Lehman's two phallic masculinities. Immediately after his filmic birth, the Entered Apprentice begins ascending the Guggenheim on his quest to reach the highest degree.

Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim Museum to be a stark contrast to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Keller and Ward, 8). Rather than elevating art in a temple-like building, he wanted to make contemporary art accessible to all people. To achieve this, he designed the gallery as a long inclined plane, without separate levels, and with the artworks at the same height as the patrons. It would seem, therefore, that the obvious way for one to climb the Guggenheim would be to ascend this incline as the architect intended. In fact, in the opening to another blockbuster action film, Men in Black, Will Smith does exactly this. His ability to sprint up the long spiral demonstrates his strength and stamina in establishing his character. Barney, however, takes a very different approach to the action hero's ascent of the museum. In demonstrating his strength, and displaying the awesome spectacle of phallic masculinity, the gender

confused autobiographical Barney character goes up the hard way. The filmmaker set up a series of climbing walls going straight up the interior of the Guggenheim's ramp. Reminiscent of so many action heroes who take the illogically difficult path to demonstrate their strength for the audience, Barney climbs straight up the climbing walls rather than using the gradual incline of the gallery. However, unlike similar behavior in action films, this immediately strikes the viewer as an odd choice, making strange one element of the traditional masculine narrative.

The first level, or "degree", is called, "The Order of the Rainbow for Girls". Filled with dancing women in lamb costumes, this level represents adolescent sexual attraction, the beginning of gender differentiation, and heightened sexual dimorphism. The lamb costumes invoke a sense of the childlike innocence of the women, while the gender confused Entered Apprentice observes, but takes no action. After briefly watching the dance of the "Rainbow for Girls", Barney climbs straight up to the second degree. "Agnostic Front vs. Murphy's Law", a battle between two moderately well known New York City punk bands, serves as the backdrop for the second degree. This level, in which Barney attempts to acquire tools and build a small sculpture in the middle of a mosh pit, symbolizes the protagonist's journey through adolescent aggression. However, as was the case with the first degree, the Entered Apprentice ultimately fails to accomplish anything tangible in this second degree, and advances up the wall to the third degree, "Aimee Mullins".

Aimee Mullins is a Paralympic athlete and a model, and Barney chose to use her real name for the degree in which she appears. We first see Mullins in a white dress, of

sorts, with unwieldy glass prosthetics below the knees. The white costume is vaguely bridal, and in stark contrast with the bright pink of Barney's Entered Apprentice. The two approach one another slowly, ending in an embrace where they meet. The embrace is the Masonic "five points of fellowship", a sort of identifying embrace for Freemasons. Once in the arms of Mullins, Barney's costume switches from the pink kilt to the same white dress of Mullins. This suggests that the domestic masculinity of marriage actually emasculates a man, turning him into a second bride. The film further elucidates the masculinity message of this degree by using a fraternal ritual for the matrimonial embrace, implying a blasphemy of masculinity. Once locked in the embrace, however, the bride (Mullins), transforms into a human-sized domestic cat and begins attacking the Entered Apprentice and attempting to block his escape. The metaphor of this transition, from beautiful bride to bestial domestic cat, blocking his escape, is central to the masculinity narrative of the film. The protagonist, apparently seeing the error of his domestic masculine ways, is once again dressed in the pink Celtic clothing. The ensuing fight between Barney and Mullins draws solely from action films, even including a wire-fighting maneuver across the open space of the middle of the Guggenheim.

Escaping and moving on to the fourth degree, the Entered Apprentice must now construct a statue using a very Barney-esque method. The incomplete statue of a ram, which we saw in completed form during the introduction to the film², can only be completed through a caber-toss. Barney must throw pillars end-over-end in the exact right alignment in order to build the statue. Although the pillars could easily be placed in

² In its completed form during the introduction, the missing parts of the sculpture rise up as it rotates, along with a pillar between the ram's hind legs. This adds a phallic note to the erection of the statue in the fourth degree.

the proper position, the protagonist again takes the more difficult path. Interestingly, however, this time illogically difficult path alludes not only to celebratory masculinity, but also to Barney's own career as a sculptor, in which many of his works have been constructed using similar methods. Again, as he did in the previous three degree, the Entered Apprentice leaves the task incomplete and moves on.

Throughout the film up to this point we have seen glimpses of the fifth degree. Richard Serra, both the title and star of the fifth degree, first appeared early in the film, setting up small walls at the top of the Guggenheim. He then proceeded to heat up some sort of white goo into liquid form and throw it against these walls. The goo then began running down the ramp of the Guggenheim, seeming to represent the passage of time, reminiscent of a sand timer. This apogee of the protagonist's levels of achievement calls to mind the early art of Richard Serra himself, as well as fellow minimalist Vito Acconci's piece, Seedbed. That this minimalist performative sculpture forms the highest achievement for the Entered Apprentice makes clear the self-reflexive nature of the protagonist. Barney contemplatively observes Serra in action, then, evidently deciding that this semen-hurling sculpture is, in fact, an achievement to aspire to, moves back down to complete the unfinished degrees. Much like King Hamlet and Tyler Durden, Serra sends the protagonist on a hyper-masculine quest.

After finishing the statue on the fourth level, the Entered Apprentice returns to the Order of the Rainbow for Girls, where he must pass through the legs of the dancers. Once this is complete, he is rewarded with the lambskin symbolic of both freemasonry (fraternal achievement) and the conquering of adolescent sexual desires. The protagonist

is then reborn, returning to the base floor of the Guggenheim to begin his climb again. At the punk rock/adolescent aggression level he acquires the tools that he failed to attain in his first attempt, then quickly moves on to confront the domestic cat once again. This time, when confronted with the trappings of domestic masculinity, the Entered Apprentice uses his newly acquired tools to destroy the bride/cat-beast, brutally beating her with a spike and hammer.

Up to this point, the only self-aware/self-reflexive gestures the film has made have been rendering the celebratory masculine quest ridiculous, and the highly autobiographical role of Barney's character. Working in the surrealist/trance film mode of experimental film, the trials of this autobiographical protagonist seems to represent the filmmaker's inner struggle of gender. However, whatever need there is for interpretation of the new masculinity narrative on behalf of the viewer is totally eliminated with the final two shots of Cremaster 3: The Order.

After beating the female-cat-beast into submission, the Entered Apprentice moves on, but the camera stays with Mullins. No longer seen through the subjective gaze of the protagonist, we see her again in her bridal, human form. Now bloody, beaten, and blindfolded, the audience sees the effects of Barney's celebratory masculine quest. Rather than identifying with the protagonist, we instead are asked to relate to the vanquished foe in the final moments of the film. Reminding us of the dancers of the Order of the Rainbow for Girls, Mullins is seen with several lambs, making vanquished foe seem more like innocent victim. Furthermore, that the audience never sees the conclusion of the protagonist's quest stresses the importance of Mullins as the ultimate

consequence of his actions, rather than any traditional victory. The final shot of the film is a view of the Cremaster Cycle symbol atop the glass window of the Guggenheim, shot from within the museum. The symbol, a giant pair of blue spheres, is a striking contrast to the phallic tower with which Die Hard closes. These blue balls represent an unsatisfied phallic symbol, rather than the victorious, orgasmic phallus of the Nakatomi Tower.

Cremaster 3: The Order is a strikingly different of a self-aware/self-reflexive masculinity narrative from that of Fight Club and Hamlet. Unlike the enormous success of the latter examples, it seems Matthew Barney deliberately made a box-office flop: while the larger piece, Cremaster 3 was rumored to have cost nearly \$8 million; it grossed just \$515,000 (Keller and Ward, 9). This unsatisfying ending for the film reflects the unsatisfying ending of Cremaster 3: The Order for Barney's autobiographical protagonist. Rather than ending with self-realization, as was the case in both Fight Club and traditional trance films, another genre from which Barney draws heavily, or self-destruction, as was the case in Hamlet, Cremaster 3: The Order ends with phallic dissatisfaction, and forces the audience to confront the consequences of the protagonist's quest, rather than his rewards.

In the nexus of experimental and mainstream filmmaking, Cremaster 3: The Order finds its own unique niche. The film seems to exist outside of the mainstream, in that it shares more with surrealist and trance films, but still outside experimental cinema as well, in its enormous production value and presentation of traditional mainstream elements, especially violence and the objectified female body. However, as Barney's

critical viewpoint is available for reading throughout the film, the reader is afforded ample opportunities for identifying the new masculinity of the narrative.

CONCLUSION

Hamlet, Fight Club, and Cremaster 3: The Order represent a progressive type of masculinity in film, focusing on cultural ideas about manhood rather than celebrating the ideal product of those ideas. All three have less than desirable endings, with Jack from Fight Club probably faring the best, suffering a gunshot wound and witnessing the massive destruction caused by his hyper-masculine quest³. These unsatisfying endings seem a necessary element of the self-aware/self-reflexive masculine narrative, demonstrating the problematic results of contemporary gender roles. Die Hard, our control, by comparison, does not allow room for the audience to question the validity and value of the protagonist's masculinity, but only allows for celebration of the presence and victory of the "real man", whose arrival Hemingway celebrated in the quote with which I opened this essay. That quote, as Hemingway was wont to do, linked the progression into manhood with war, reinforcing a link that has been repeatedly used throughout history to justify not only male hegemony and violence on the micro level, but, in some instances, war itself. Given that the end results of these masculine conquests more often resemble the conclusion of Cremaster 3: The Order than that of Die Hard, it is time we start questioning the validity and value of the masculinity of our heroes, both real and filmic.

³ We, the audience, are told that no one is being hurt in the destruction of the financial buildings at the end of Fight Club, allowing for a relatively happy ending to the film.

REFERENCES CITED

- Barney, Matthew. Cremaster 3: The Order. Glacier Field LLC, 2002.
- Cohan, Steven and Ina Rae Hark, ed. Screening the Male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema. Routledge, 1993.
- Fincher, David, dir. Fight Club. Twentieth-century Fox, 1999.
- Gilmore, David. Manhood in the Making. Yale University, 1990.
- Hemingway, Ernest. The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber. From The Short Stories, Ernest Hemingway. Scribner Classics, 1997.
- Keller, Alexandra and Frazer Ward. Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avant-Garde Blockbuster. *Cinema Journal*, 45:2, 3-16. 2006.
- Lee, Terry. Virtual Violence in Fight Club: This Is What Transformation of Masculine Ego Feels Like. *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, 25:3-4, 418-423.
- Lehman, Peter. Crying Over the Melodramatic Penis: Melodrama and Male Nudity in Films of the 90s. From Masculinity, Peter Lehman, ed. Routledge, 2001.
- McTiernan, John. Die Hard. Twentieth-century Fox, 1988.
- Ta, Lynn M. Hurt So Good: Fight Club, Masculine Violence, and the Crisis of Capitalism. *Journal of American Culture*, 29:3, 265-277.