

Also in this series:

DISCUSSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE
Edited by Hal Foster

VISION AND VISUALITY
Edited by Hal Foster

THE WORK OF ANDY WARHOL
Edited by Gery Garrels

REMAKING HISTORY
Edited by Barbara Kruger and Philomena Mariani

DEMOCRACY
A PROJECT BY GROUP MATERIAL
Edited by Brian Wallis

IF YOU LIVED HERE
THE CITY IN ART, THEORY, AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM
A Project by Martha Rosler
Edited by Brian Wallis

CRITICAL FICTIONS
THE POLITICS OF IMAGINATIVE WRITING
Edited by Philomena Mariani

BLACK POPULAR CULTURE
A Project by Michele Wallace
Edited by Gina Dent

CULTURE ON THE BRINK
IDEOLOGIES OF TECHNOLOGY
Edited by Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey

VISUAL DISPLAY
CULTURE BEYOND APPEARANCES
Edited by Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY

EDITED BY
MAURICE BERGER
BRIAN WALLIS
SIMON WATSON

PICTURE ESSAY BY
CARRIE MAE WEEMS

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK
LONDON

PAUL SMITH

EASTWOOD BOUND

There is a quite well-known photo portrait of Clint Eastwood, made by Annie Leibovitz, which figures the star in what have become his trademark street clothes—green T-shirt, brown corded trousers, and running shoes. He is standing erect against the backdrop of what looks like the film set of a Western. The rebellious, maverick, sometimes Promethean hero that Eastwood is so frequently and fully taken to represent is here heavily tied by ropes around his body and legs. His hands, also heavily bound, are held out in front of the body at about waist height. His expression is perhaps not his most familiar one, but it certainly can be glimpsed occasionally in his movies: it is a

look of vague bewilderment, with a slight crooking of the mouth into a mixture of amusement and annoyance as he looks back at the camera. His eyes are narrowed at the same time as his brows are arched slightly upwards. His straightened body seems to emerge from a billow of dust behind him.

This image was recently used as the cover to a Pluto Press collection of essays called *The Sexuality of Men*. I do not know how it came to be selected for that cover, but it does seem an interesting and apt choice in certain ways. The several male, British authors in the book are concerned with how, as the editors put it, "popular versions of what it is to be a 'real man' have become so outlandish as to prompt the idea that all is not as it should be for the male sex." Consequently, these writers undertake the task of breaking the silence that seems to surround this "hidden subject, resistant to . . . first investigations," male sexuality.¹ On the face of it, Eastwood's public and cinematic personae, among the most visible icons of masculinity in North American culture, can be readily taken not only as the epitome of the silence and the barriers to investigation that the authors are trying to break, but also as an obvious and symptomatic marker of the notion that "all is not as it should be" in regard to masculinity. The silence that many of his film performances appropriate as the sign par excellence of empowered masculinity, the erectness of his body, and the ubiquity of what the book's editors call his "oversized gun," the careless ordinariness of his J.C. Penney clothing, the limited but stark range of his facial and bodily gestures; all these contribute to Eastwood's presence within this culture as one of the more legitimated bearers of its masculinity, "real" or otherwise. At the same time, and many of the movies in which he stars and/or which he directs are somewhat troubled presentations or investigations of the kind of (or, of the image of) masculinity that they popularly stand for.

The trouble is perhaps hinted at in Leibovitz's picture, where this iconic male body emerges from the waves of dust around it to stand tall as the very type of a unique masculine beauty, but where it is simultaneously marked and immobilized by these ropes—signs of a certain helplessness or, at least, of difficulty. And yet the ropes in the photo (especially the five layers that encircle Eastwood's biceps, chest, and back and that are the focal point of the image) might also be indicative of a certain pleasure. That is, a pleasure in powerlessness—a pleasure that could certainly be grasped as an indication that "all is not as it should be" with this man, and that we might expect to be normally hidden from view in this culture and called "perverse"—is adumbrated across the ambivalent gestures of his face, and is, I would also claim, sketched across

his films. Further on, I shall want to regard this pleasure in relation to the idea of masochism, and for now it can certainly be taken to provide an emblematic starting point for discussing male sexuality, in that it presents an ambivalent moment whereby this male body, objectified and aestheticized by Leibovitz's portrait, comes to represent something a little "outlandish."

It has been possible for a long time now for discourses addressing North American notions of masculinity to actually rhapsodize on exactly the outlandish character of that special kind of man—the hero, often the Westerner, who acts as the serviceman for the culture. There is little point in trying to demonstrate here, once again, the long history of that man, from James Fenimore Cooper's pioneering heroes, through "classic" Western protagonists such as Shane, to a plethora of action heroes in the 1980s, such as Eastwood in *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986) or Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon* (1987). But it is interesting to see how this brand of male protagonist in all such cultural productions is always in some way marked (and is made enjoyable or at any rate consumable for audiences) by precisely his inability to act as the ultimate solution to the narrative and social contradictions in which he is involved. Natty Bumppo's self-righteousness as he goes around killing and destroying as much or more of "the natural" as he claims to be conserving,² the desperate but ecstatic hypostasis of the cowboy faced with an ineluctable tide of westward expansion and modernization at the end of *Shane* (1953), the ineptitude of Mel Gibson's character in *Lethal Weapon* in dealing with the family life that renders his own heroism possible; each of these in some way fails to transcend fully the contradictions of the narratives in which they figure.

Now, an orthodox critique of the male heroes in these kinds of popular cultural narratives would be to say that they actually present easy and transcendent solutions to contradictions; my claim is that, to the contrary, the resolutions and solutions are never fully realized. Still less are they embodied in this long line of male heroes of which Eastwood is, of course, an especially important member. Eastwood's interest, it seems to me, resides largely in the tendency of his work to remain, much longer than most other popular cultural narratives, in the rather special or peculiar state of gratification that comes of recognizing the factitious nature of the ultimate solution, and in doing so to exhibit the symptoms of what lies behind that gratification.

This, at first, might seem a peculiar opinion to be holding, and admittedly it is one that flies in the face of the overt narrative frames of popular movies such as Eastwood makes and stars in. However, I have something very particular in mind, in that I want to propose that action and Western movies like Eastwood's

might actually exceed the familiar processes of narrative contradiction and closure and leave what I will call "hysterical residues." Such hysterical residues take to be the point of interference between the processes of narrative and the construction of diegetical worlds in film. My point is that action movies in particular (although I would like to say all Hollywood movies) throw up this kind of contradictory space, these elements that cannot be ultimately resolved and that remain as a kind of special emblem of the film's relation to the cultural world to which it attends.

In this regard, Eastwood's movies quite routinely open out onto difficult and multivalent questions about the popular cultural representation of masculinity, beyond their always rather formulaic narrative frames; indeed, the narrative disposition of particular tropes of masculinity does not ultimately control or delimit them, and leaves unmanaged and resistant representations of a male hysteria. Of course, I am far from discounting here the significance of narrative closure as a kind of punctual return to noncontradictory positions that satisfy both cultural and generic codes of verisimilitude. But I want to take the stress temporarily away from formulaic endings, and ask to what extent they are but a lure beneath which particular kinds of representational and sexual-political questions can be left unresolved.

In Leibovitz's photo, Eastwood appears to emerge, almost risibly classical, from his own peculiar waves to become an objectified spectacle. At the same time, this spectacle is marked and bound. It is with the tension between (or rather, the pairing of) these two elements—the objectification and eroticization of the male body, and the registration on this body of a masochistic mark—that I want to begin. I am interested in looking at the ways in which contemporary popular movies might effectively stand against some of the notions that writers in film studies deploy when talking about the interfaces of gender considerations and representation, but also I want to sketch out an argument for looking to see what happens when the purportedly "outlandish" nature of representations of masculinity in popular culture are apprehended, not as immediately and irredeemably contemptible, but as something by and through which some of the realities of male-sexed subjectivity are registered.

Paul Willemen, in a very short article about Anthony Mann's Westerns, talks about the way in which the male heroes there are diegetically cast in two distinct ways, the one consequent on the other. First, they are offered simply as spectacle: "The viewer's experience is predicated," Willemen says, "on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes, or more abstractly history."³ This pleasure can readily

be turned to an eroticization of the male presence and the masculine body, and it is always followed up—in Mann's movies just as in most such Hollywood genre movies—by the destruction of that body. That is, the heroic man is always physically beaten, injured, and brought to breaking point. One needs to add to Willemen's formulation the obvious third stage, in which the hero is permitted to emerge triumphant within the movie's narrative line; this stage conventionally cannot occur before the first two. This third stage obviously provides the security and comfort of closure, and is a crucial element in the production of spectatorial pleasure, but Willemen proposes that both of the first stages of representation are also in their way pleasurable for the spectator. The first "pleasure"—that of voyeuristic admiration of the hero's body and presence—is followed diegetically and graphically by the "unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated . . . and restored through violent brutality."⁴

This intertwining in most action scenarios of what we might call on the one hand the solidity of masculine presence, and the demonstration of masculine destructibility and recuperability on the other, is readily apparent in most Eastwood movies, whether they be the Westerns or the cop movies, or even the comedies in which his costar is an ape (*Every Which Way but Loose*, 1978, and *Any Which Way You Can*, 1981). A first impulse would be to consider this as little more than the exigency of Hollywood habits and formulae, but of course it has its ideological ramifications, too. I would claim that this passage—from eroticization, through destruction, to reemergence and regeneration—is such a staple of action movies and Westerns in general that it can readily be called the orthodox structuring code for those movies. There are, I think, several interesting characteristics to it that will bear commentary, insofar as what is at stake here is a certain erotics of the male body that demands or entails peculiar diegetical and graphical representational strategies and processes of viewer identification.

Willemen implicitly proposes that the pleasure of the first two stages needs to be understood in terms of sadistic and masochistic frameworks, where objectification is pleasure yielded to the sadistic gaze, and where the destructibility of the male body is to be grasped as a masochistic trope. Since much film theory regularly deploys the frameworks of sadism and masochism as essential heuristic notions (the notion of sadism—especially in its relation to the gaze—almost chronically, and that of masochism more recently), it might be as well to briefly consider them here.

The cinematic erotics of the male body depend first of all upon that body's objectification. It is common, of course, to regard such objectification as the

standard treatment for *female* bodies in the cinema; equally familiar are the many critiques, deriving so often from Laura Mulvey's seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), that tie this objectification to the sadistic male gaze, to the structure of filmic diegesis, and to the supposedly irredeemably phallogocentric nature of the cinematic apparatus itself. Male bodies, too, are subjected to cinematic objectification, but an objectification that is effected by specific cinematic means geared to the male body and perhaps to the female spectator's assumed gaze. The specific nature of male objectification has not been very fully dealt with by critics and theorists, but does receive some treatment from Steve Neale in his article, "Masculinity as Spectacle" (1983). Taking his cue from Mulvey's analysis of the way women's bodies are objectified and made the object of the gaze, Neale also tends to take for granted the sadistic/masochistic doublet. His thesis is that, because of the power of the ritualized structures and relays of the (a priori) sadistic gaze in cinema, a male body must effectively be "feminized" by the apparatus and spectator if it is to become objectified. Dealing with the masochistic stage, he suggests that what occurs there is a "testing" of the male hero, analogous to the investigation of female protagonists in standard dominant Hollywood cinema: "Where women are investigated, men are tested" (16).

Neale's contention, that in order for the male body to be thus objectified it has to be "feminized," is open to question, not least because it relies upon a sweeping generalization (increasingly often doubted in Film Studies) about the conventions and the apparatus of cinema—namely, upon the argument that they are oriented primarily and perhaps exclusively to the male spectator and his processes of identification. Neale's argument is in a sense self-fulfilling, or at least circular. If it is first assumed that the apparatus is male, geared to a male heterosexual gaze, then any instance of objectification will have to involve the "feminization" of the object. However, instances of the erotic display of the male body are rife in contemporary film and media production, and can be shown to be geared to either male or female spectators (or both) in different contexts, in ways that do not conform to the conventional treatment of the female body. There exists a whole cultural production around the exhibition of the male body in the media—not just in film, but in television, sports, advertising, and so on—and this objectification has even been present throughout the history of Hollywood itself, while evidently having been intensified in recent years. Scarcely any of this plethora of images depend upon the feminization of the male; rather, the media and film deploy rather specific representational strategies to eroticize the male body.

In film, Eastwood's primary directorial mentor, Don Siegel, is perhaps one of the first Hollywood directors to have systematically foregrounded the display and the eroticization of the male body and to have turned that display into part of the meaning of his films. Siegel's films in this regard have developed a strong repertoire for dealing with the male body without deploying the particular formal strategies by which female bodies are offered to the male gaze in most Hollywood productions. That is, his work is often concerned with the activity and dynamics of all-male groups, and this concern has allowed the development of something like a cinematic obsession with the male body. Siegel's repertoire of shots and conventions, often duplicated in films that Eastwood directs, can be mined to produce a little semiotics of the heroized male body. Among his most frequently used devices are the following: what I call "under-the-chin shots," where the heroized male figure, shot most often from the waist up, seems to loom above the spectator's eyeline; heavily backlit shots, in which either the details of hero's whole body or his face are more or less obscured while the general shape is given in silhouette; a preponderance of facial close-ups, in which the actor's gaze is directed from right to left at a roughly forty-five-degree angle, used especially often to deliver Eastwood's characteristic snarl and slight facial movements; and traveling shots and pans that follow the male body's movement in a relatively unsmooth motion, and usually avoid centering the body in the frame.

This is obviously a quite rough and schematic cataloging of the kinds of objectifying shots favored by Siegel, Eastwood, and later by other action-movie directors. But the point here is that these kinds of representational strategies (developed, I think, into something like an industry standard in the last two or three decades) differ from those chronically used to objectify the female body. There is, in other words, a specific and even ritualized form of male objectification and eroticization in Hollywood cinema.

Another of Neale's assumptions—that looking at the male body is something of a taboo in our cultures—is also contradicted by the kinds of strategies that action/Western movies typically make available to themselves. It might still be true, however, that eroticizing the male body ultimately produces a mixed pleasure. According to Willemen, "The look at the male produces [in the male spectator] just as much anxiety as the look at the female" (16). Certainly it is the case that such movies appear to take precautions against the possibility of such anxiety in particular ways. First and most important, the two-stage exhibitionist/masochistic process *must* always be followed by a narrative revindication of the phallic law and by the hero's accession to the paternal and



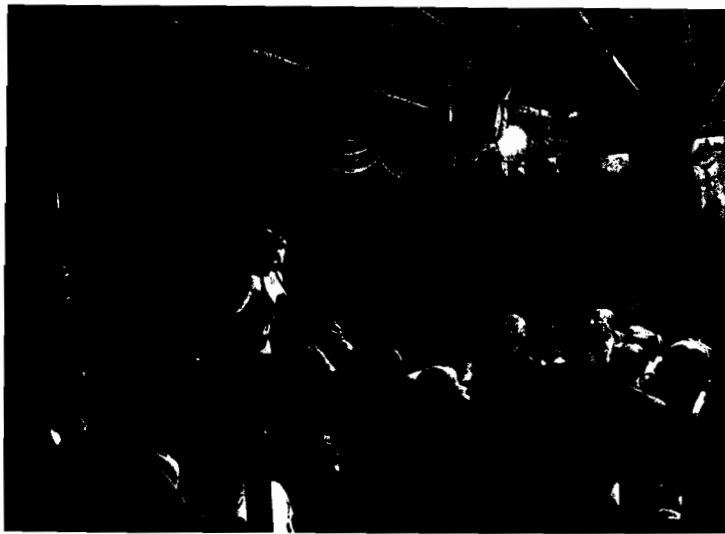
patronizing function of the third stage of the orthodox action-movie codes. Second (that is, less obligatory than the diegetic resolution), many of these movies accompany the pleasure/"unquiet pleasure" that they establish with a quite marked antihomosexual sentiment—which is to suggest that the masochistic moment is often crucially antihomosexual in its significance.

An example of this latter strategy can be found in the second Dirty Harry movie, *Magnum Force* (1973), in which the antagonists are a band of extremely right-wing young policemen, part of whose "evil" in the movie's terms is their implied homosexuality, their rather butch and leathery appearances, and their close homo-bonding. In movies where homosexuality is not actually imputed to the antagonists (that is, to those characters who are to inflict physical damage on the hero's eroticized body), their sexuality is usually offered as perverse in some other fashion: this is the case, for example, with Scorpio, the main antagonist in the original *Dirty Harry* (1971), who is marked as effeminate and perverse in different ways. In *Sudden Impact* (1983), there is an interesting melding of the two strategies: the leaders of the gang of rapists are, first, Mick, who in the motel scene is shown to be unable to conduct "normal" heterosexual relations, and second, Ray, the movie's "dyke," who procures Jennifer and her sister for the gang to rape and who also seems to have some heterosexual desires (for Mick), which the movie clearly presents as perverse.

Thus, even while these kinds of specifically masculinized representational strategies at the corporeal level are not a feminization of the male body, at the same time they do always carry with them a defense against possible disturbance in the field of sexuality. If it is actually allowed to show itself, this disturbance will always be ultimately annealed, covered over, sometimes literally blown away in and by the narrative frame. In what is perhaps the least well made of the Dirty Harry movies, *The Enforcer* (1976), the first mention of homosexuality comes signally in the final scene as Callahan blows away Bobby Maxwell with the Law's rocket and then mutters, "You fuckin' fruit." Clearly the function of such defenses is not confined to establishing the perversity and evil of the antagonist, but also designed to defend the picture from its having eroticized the male body in such consistent ways.

One particularly interesting text for the way it exhibits some of the strategies I am describing is the Siegel-Eastwood collaboration *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979). The first sequence of this movie, where Eastwood's character is brought as a prisoner into Alcatraz, is especially indicative of Siegel's concerns and his ways of working with the male body. In preparation for his incarceration at Alcatraz, Eastwood's character, Frank Morris, is first stripped and searched in the prison's reception area. The camera then follows his naked body through a kind of gauntlet of objectifying looks from the prison guards as he goes toward his cell. Those looks are intercut by Siegel's typical low-angle, under-the-chin shots of Morris's striding body. These shots are remarkable in that they do not correspond at all to the direction of any of the guards' looks; and similarly, the guards' looks are not used to construct the geography of the prison's space (this is done instead by means of a series of medium-length shots with Morris's body moving across the screen, but never exactly centered in it). Thus there is a disjuncture set up between the direction and function of the camera's look, and the direction and function of the guards' looks. In a more classical Hollywood mode, and in the objectifying passages where it is a question of a woman's body, these looks would normally reinforce each other. Here, the purpose of the lack of coincidence is to deny or defuse the homoerotic charge of this sequence while still producing a voyeuristic look at Morris/Eastwood: to both look and not look at this male body, then, is to engage in a quintessential fetishistic process.

This sequence is mostly classic Siegel—framing the male body as an eroticized but simultaneously disavowed object in a sequence where the central concern is the movement through a space, but a space that does not need to be extremely logically defined. The sequence finishes with a slightly more



unusual shot, as Morris is deposited naked into his dark, barred cell. There, shooting from the guards' side of the cell, the camera picks out Morris's sidelit torso and lingers on it. A storm in the background lights up Morris's stern face for a millisecond, but otherwise all we see is the chest and its musculature. Morris is depicted thus as a kind of threatening Gothic beast, as his shining body glistens in the darkness of its cage. The camera lingers over this final shot, both erotically regarding Morris's body and also clearly pointing out that body's larger-than-life potentialities, all the while prefiguring its inevitable "testing" later in the film.

This objectifying passage is quickly followed by the standard routine of destruction. Morris is variously assaulted by both inmates and authorities in the closed space of the prison. The moment of his worst torment comes at the hands of isolation block guards, and this acts as the catalyst to the acceleration of the movie's narrative line toward Morris's subsequent escape—and his escape will be from the masochistic moment as much as from the prison itself. The movie's final sequence has the prison governor wondering whether Morris and his fellow escapees could have survived the icy waters of San Francisco, while one of his officers muses that the men had vanished into air—the ultimate hypostasis of the heroic body.

As well as following the orthodox codes of the action narrative—objectification and eroticization, followed by near destruction and final hypostasization

of the male body—*Escape from Alcatraz* defends against the apparent perversity and unquiet pleasure of the early stages by accompanying them with the standard antihomosexual component. After the opening sequence has suggestively turned the guards' policing looks into the dithering carriers of homoerotic objectification, the movie soon introduces a rather unpleasant homosexual inmate whose advances Morris rebuffs, setting himself up for a series of attacks and fights with this man who, predictably, ends up with a knife in his body before Morris escapes.

Further confirmation of the strength of these rather simple conventions is perhaps best given by way of the counterexample of Siegel's earlier picture, *The Beguiled* (1971), in which Eastwood/McBurney is recuperating from serious battle wounds in a Southern girls' school. The Eastwood character's lechery toward some of the school's inmates leads to their punishing him by rather hastily (and probably unnecessarily) cutting off his wounded leg—an amputation that is explicitly referred to as a castration. This corporeal removal is the culmination of Siegel's transgression of the standard rules for this kind of movie: the path of objectification, destruction, then transcendence is not followed here. At least, things are not in their proper order. The damage to McBurney's body has already been sustained before the start of the movie, thus depriving the camera of any opportunity to run the usual objectification routines. Furthermore, there is no triumphant transcendence in the end: after the rushed amputation, McBurney's anger and accusations provoke the women and girls to murder him with poison.

Audiences for *The Beguiled* have never been large, and it remains one of the least successful movies with which Eastwood has been associated, despite his and Siegel's satisfaction with it. Siegel explains the failure by suggesting, "Maybe a lot of people just don't want to see Clint Eastwood's leg cut off."⁶ Whether that is the case or not, the lack of success of *The Beguiled* underlines in a negative way the fact that Hollywood dramas have induced certain expectations about the masculine corporeal, and cannot readily break them: the exhibitionist/masochistic stages must serve the end of the hero's triumph, and they are inextricably part of the diegetic necessity. Another way of saying this might be to suggest that the masochistic stage of such narratives cannot be presented as a complete castration, and that the possibility of transcendence must always be kept available. The masochistic trope in this sense must be no more than a *temporary* test of the male body.

One familiar effect, of course, of the hero's more usual triumph over the deliquescence of his once-objectified body is the promotion of various

metonymically associated notions of regeneration, growth, rebirth, sacrifice, reward, and so on. In that sense one could talk of these various tropes as mythical; we have a tradition of such narrative ideologies to which to appeal, including the traditional story of Christ's ascent after the crucifixion. Indeed, in much occidental cultural production the Christ-figure could be said to have operated chronically as a privileged figure of the pleasurable tension between the objectification and what I call the masochizing of the male body, and it is certainly no accident that so many of the films of the Western or action hero take advantage of references to that figure. Eastwood's movies—and especially his collaborations with Siegel—are rife with such references. Eastwood has starred in or directed several movies that make it an easily identifiable point of reference: *Pale Rider* (1985), for instance, in which he plays a priest; *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974), in which he is a pretended priest, and several shots allude to the crucifixion; or even *The Beguiled* itself, in which his role is explicitly linked to that of a long-suffering Christ, but in which there is no triumphant transcendence, only the death of his character.

Recent film scholarship has begun to investigate how the concept of masochism and its concomitant "unquiet pleasure" can be deployed in looking at the question of subjectivity (and especially male subjectivity) in filmic relations. One thinks immediately of the work of Kaja Silverman (notably *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*), Gaylyn Studlar (*In the Realm of Pleasure*), and Leo Bersani (*The Freudian Body*, which, while not concerned specifically with film, does address the cultural production of "art" in general).⁸ Part of the point in each case is to attempt to complicate, and even undo to some degree, the rather monolithic view of male subjectivity that film scholarship tends to propose.

In their different ways, and with certain disagreements, each of these three writers proposes the masochistic trope, the masochistic moment, as in some sense subversive of conventional or "normal" formations of subjectivity. Bersani, for instance, sees masochism as a formation that disturbs the fixities of literary and visual language to produce a designifying moment, or a denarrativizing moment; more specifically, he reckons that it produces what he calls an "interstitial sensuality," responding to a reader's pleasurable "interpretive suspension between narrative and nonnarrative readings."⁷ In a similar fashion, Silverman proposes masochism as a formation of suspension, though her preferred notion is that of "deferral"—masochism as a deferral of male submission beneath the Law of the Father and of the normative pressure of male sexuality. For her, this is indeed a large part of the definition of perverse sexuality, that it be set against the aim-directed "normality" of the male subject. The fully

consummated pleasure of the normal subject is associated with guilt, but the suspended, showy pleasure of the masochistic fantasy is disavowal of the paternal function, a sort of escape from it, and a way of punishing its imposition: "What is beaten in masochism is not so much the male subject as the father, or the father in the male subject."⁸ Thus, in Silverman's account, the masochist "remakes the symbolic order, and 'ruins' his own paternal legacy."⁹

In these treatments of masochism as what I am calling a trope, there are considerable difficulties to be negotiated concerning the relation of theoretical schemas to textual matter, and equally to relations of reception. The assumption in what I have to say is that the filmic representations of masculinity act as a kind of demonstration of how masculinity is supposed to work (or, to put it another way, they profer particular meanings around the subject of masculinity and to the male subject). I want to stress here the process of narrativization in which a masochistic moment is but a part, a single element caught up in the machinery of the profering of significance. I want to avoid the temptation of implying that this demonstration forms male subjectivity in and of itself, or that it produces some unavoidable male spectatorial position. Film does have its interpellative effect, of course, but that does not mean to say that it inevitably or indefeasibly determines forms of subjectivity. Cinema is not, that is, simply the symptom of the spectator elaborated, as it were, elsewhere. In other words, I see some kind of disjuncture between representation and subject positions that many film theorists still do not. While allowing for direct spectatorial identification, and thus for the cinema's profering of subject positions, I dare say that investigation of the representational strategies of film is finally capable of discovering more about the availability of cultural ideologies than about forms of subjectivity.¹⁰

With such provisions in mind, it becomes difficult to accept entirely the claims of Bersani and Silverman. Each of them exploits the notion of masochism as a perversion in order to suggest that it subverts, undermines, defers, or invalidates the phallic law and the fixities in both subjectivities and meanings that depend upon phallic law. Silverman perhaps summarizes this position best in her claim that the male masochist:

acts out in an insistent and exaggerated way the basic conditions of cultural subjectivity. . . . [H]e loudly proclaims that his meaning comes to him from the Other, prostrates himself before the gaze even as he solicits it, exhibits his castration for all to see, and reveals in the sacrificial basis of the social contract. The male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing to be sutured or recompensed. In short, he radiates a negativity inimical to the social order.¹¹

Silverman theorizes, then, that male masochism is in itself an oppositional formation. But if, to paraphrase Judith Mayne, we submit the theory to the test of narrative,¹² or investigate the function of the masochistic moment in representational practice, it might be seen that the "inimical" nature of masochism and the pleasurable of its self-proclamation can be sustained only provisionally: that, in other words, popular cultural narratives in effect enclose and contain male masochism.

This proposition is not, I think, contradicted by Freud's discussion of masochism. In his paper "The Economic Problem in Masochism" (1924), in which he ostensibly deals with the economic system of masochism, Freud is led to quite firmly narrativize the phenomenon.¹³ Its etiology is in what he calls erotogenic masochism, "found at bottom in the other forms": *feminine* masochism and *moral* masochism. Erotogenic masochism, the lust for pain, is for Freud the homeostatic result of a negotiation between the libido and the death drive, which he describes at length in *The Ego and the Id* (1923).¹⁴ The relative stability of the outcome of this negotiation provokes exactly the narrative dramas of the feminine and moral forms of masochism. Strict distinctions between these two latter forms are not especially important for my purposes here. But what is common to Freud's explanation of both is the claim that they are exhibitionist and in a sense histrionic, the exhibitionism and the drama being designed to provoke punishment. The punishment most readily comes (particularly in moral masochism) in the shape of "sadistic conscience" or in an intensification of superego activity. Masochism for Freud, then, is characterized by the need of the subject to "do something inexpedient" in order to bring down upon itself the gratifying punishment of the superego. The point I mean to stress here is that masochism's "negativity" is largely a functional catalyst in a formulaic narrative of erotic gratification.

This narrativized context for masochism might need to be considered alongside Silverman's claim for the negativity of male masochism, and for the subversive potential of "bringing the male subject face to face with his desire for the father" through the masochistic moment.¹⁵ One would certainly not want to reject Silverman's particular project as a viable way of articulating radical moments of male subjectivity; but alongside it, one might also have to take account of how, in popular cultural texts, the place of the exhibitionist/masochistic is already accounted for, and already pulled by narrativization into a plot precisely designed to eventually explode the negativity of masochism.

Indeed, it might even be worthwhile to make the rather more wide claim that in fact (that is, in a narrativized frame) the male masochist importantly obeys

and serves the phallic law. Masochism (to paraphrase Lacan) is primarily a neurosis of self-punishment, partly because of the way it has of entailing or invoking the superego's revenge, the return of "sadistic conscience." The masochistic moment certainly promotes deferral and suspense, but a suspense that can work only if it is in the end undone. Male masochism is at first a way of not having to submit to the law, but, equally important, it turns out to be a way of not breaking (with) the law, either. Masochism might well bespeak a desire to be both sexes at once, but it depends upon the definitional parameters of masculinity and femininity that undergird our current cultural contexts.

Male masochism might, finally, be seen as another way for the male subject to temporarily challenge his desire for the father and to subvert the phallic law, and as ultimately another step in the way (might one even say the puerile way?) of guaranteeing the male subject to be the origin of the production of meanings.¹⁶ Indeed, it might be said that male masochism is a kind of laboratory for experimenting with those meanings to which ultimately we accede. The rules of masochism are, then, primarily metaphorical, and the game is a game played out unquestioningly in the thrall of the symbolic; crucially, the lessons of masochism do not last, they come and are gone, forgotten as part of the subject's history of struggle in learning how to triumphantly reach symbolic empowerment. Masochism, grasped in this way, would be a closed space where masculinity sets the terms and expounds the conditions of a kind of struggle with itself—not a struggle necessarily for closure, but a struggle to maintain in a pleasurable tension the stages of a symbolic relation to the father—a struggle in which, ironically, the body becomes forgotten.

The pleasure proffered in action movies can be regarded, then, not so much as the perverse pleasure of transgressing given norms, but as at bottom the pleasure of reinforcing them.¹⁷ This is where the narratives of such movies can be justifiably dubbed conservative: they marshal a certain identificatory pleasure into the service of a triumphalist masculinity by employing a process girded around and endlessly reproduced by the narrative conventions of Hollywood and its country's cultural heritage. But even in the most conservative and rigid kind of cultural production, there is an underside, a double edge or a residue. In this instance, something is continually being fended off in this procession. What is common to many of the action movies and Westerns of the sort Eastwood makes is the way in which the exhibition-masochism trope and its pleasure/unquiet pleasure, along with their resolution into a triumphalist view of male activity, reside alongside a residual, barely avowed male hysteria.

That hysteria is often expressed narratively as the sensation of the dangers inherent in identification with women or with homosexuals (of both genders), or else it is a hysterical formation that can be glimpsed in moments of incoherence or powerlessness in the male body and the male presence. Sometimes it is only barely visible in the joins of the text as it produces its apparently seamless cloth. The hysterical moment I am stressing marks the return of the male body out from under the narrative process that has produced what appears to be its transcendence, but that in fact is its elision and its forgetting. In other words, although there is in these movies a conservatively pleasurable narrative path which finishes by suppressing the masculine body and its imaginary, the body nonetheless returns from beneath the weight of the symbolic. What I mean to point to as this hysterical residue, then, is an unresolved or uncontained representation of the body of the male as it exceeds the narrative processes.

The meanings generally proffered by these movies concern the male body as that which has to be repressed. This of course sounds paradoxical to say, given the way these movies produce also an apotheosis of masculinity in the serviceman hero. But a simple instance of what I mean can be glimpsed at the climactic moments of any of these action movies, where the male protagonist's control of the narrative situation is never matched by control of his own body. The body here is always represented as de-eroticized, turned into a mass of mere reflexes. The male access to control is clearly marked as a symbolic or metaphorical matter, a process of forgetting the body, forgetting the previous stages of eroticizing and masochizing the body. And yet the body is still there, still in the field of representation, but no longer subject to the somatic meditation that the narrative has thus far constituted.

In warding off this hysterical residue, suffocating its somatic presence with the safe and deferrable pleasure of the symbolic, the male heroic text itself becomes hysterical. In the case of *Sudden Impact*, *Tightrope* (1984), or *The Gauntlet* (1977), there is an explicit alliance on the part of the male protagonist with what is presented as the strength of femininity and women's voices and presence. Such alliances are always finally negated in the narrative, in the sense that the women involved finally have to be pulled beneath the law (even when the law is the male hero's own version of justice) and have their independence replaced by a traditional, disempowered status in relation-ship with the male protagonist. And yet they leave their marks on the experience of the movie.

Some of these marks can readily be seen in one of Eastwood's later movies, *Pink Cadillac* (1988), directed by Buddy Van Horn. The female protagonist,

Lou Ann (played by Bernadette Peters), is the target not only of the Eastwood character, Tommy, a bail bondsman, but also of the neofascist "Birthright" gang, whose money she has inadvertently stolen. Before meeting her, Tommy has been a somewhat happy-go-lucky character, known for his histrionic modes of trapping his quarry. For instance, the film opens with him trapping one man by calling on the telephone and pretending to be a deejay for a country station giving away a date with Dolly Parton. Later he arrives in a limousine and livery to complete the act and capture the man. Or else, as the surprise ending to a rodeo scene, Tommy turns up as the rodeo clown to handcuff the winning rider. In terms of the narrative line, these early manifestations of Tommy's motile and protean body act as the scattered instances of his personal and somatic irresponsibility.

It is precisely his changeable body that will be pulled into a different consistency by the end of the movie: he will have made his alliance with Lou Ann, rescued her baby, held hostage by the Birthright, and driven off with her to make plans for a business alliance that will consolidate their personal one. Along the way, his protean abilities are displayed in at least a couple of other set pieces: one where he dresses up in a gold-lamé jacket, puts on a mustache, and effects a Wayne Newton voice, getting into a chase scene where his aging body is made to look ridiculous; and another where he acts as a potential red-neck conscript for the Birthright, gaining the confidence of the gang members by putting on a rictus grin and chewing and spitting tobacco, ending the scene with a comic forced swallowing of a rather-too-large wad of tobacco.

These hysterical manifestations of the Eastwood body here are, of course, the comic counterpart to the violent testing of the body that occurs in the action movies. Importantly, however, they are placed similarly into a direct relation with the man's alliance with the transgressive woman. At a crucial moment in the formation of this alliance, the Tommy role provides Eastwood with the opportunity to give one of his most egregious performances: for a number of lines he effects a woman's voice and flutters his eyelids in mimicry of some notion of femininity. Immediately after this, their alliance is sealed at the point where Lou Ann says that she's going to take "no more shit from men," and he responds—in the context, gratuitously and even mysteriously—"That's one thing we have in common. I'm not gonna take no more shit from men."

The alliance leads to his straightening up, as it were, on the way toward becoming the serviceman, the future father for her child, and future partner. Lou Ann's effect, then, in the movie is to provide the place where the body that is out of control can finally find repose. In the meantime, the memory of the

Eastwood body remains untouched: the old panting body that runs around in a gold jacket with its mustache hanging off, the contorted face of the redneck as he almost chokes on his tobacco, the wildly fluttering eyelids of the man impersonating a woman.

It is perhaps to overread to suggest that all these moments are symptoms of the loss of control of the male body. They are, after all, at one level clearly just scripted opportunities for Eastwood to show off the supposed range of his acting abilities. At the same time, they are significant for the way in which the male body appears there as excessive—or, another way of reading it, as defective in relation to the image to which it aspires at the narrative's end. Equally, they are significant for their relation to the woman whose transgressive character is finally reined in along with the male body.

As I have suggested, these symptomatic moments are a comic analogue to the action movie's masochistic moment, but they themselves remain masochistic in their histrionic and exhibitionistic qualities, which foreground the contortion, indignity, and even the aging of the Eastwood body. If the masochistic trope colludes with and finally reverts to narrative closure, such hysterical registrations remain as part of the history of the male body, and are left floating, uncontained, and untranscended by the narrative. What the hysterical, in this sense, bespeaks or figures is something that in my article "Vas" I have called (paradoxically enough) "the unsymbolizable of male sexed experience."¹⁶ That article is an attempt to point out and begin to explore the male imaginary and its registration of both the body and the lived experience of male sexuality. It is generally understood in psychoanalytical theory that repression in the male subject seems to prohibit the speaking of the male body, to block its symbolization. The hypothesis entertained in "Vas" is that, in reality, repression is never complete, and that some part of male somatic experience remains to be registered: this is the strictly unsymbolizable body, a body reduced to figuration outside the schemas of the phallic organization of the symbolic. This body is then left to be figured in ways that I call hysterical.

My most general claim here, then, is that, in the cultural production of this phallogocentric society, masculinity is represented first of all as a particular nexus of pleasure. That pleasure is produced in these films through a specific mode of objectifying and eroticizing the male body, and is fortified by a series of operations on that male body that, while they have the trappings of a resistance to the phallic law, are in fact designed to lead the male subject through a proving ground toward the empowered position that is represented in the Name of the Father. Masochism is, in a sense, a metonym for another frequently deployed

masculinist trope—the fun of the chase, where the hunter momentarily puts aside his innate advantages in order to intensify and elongate the pleasure of the exercise.

Within such a representational framework, something escapes or is left unmanaged. The hysterical is what always exceeds the phallic stakes, what jumps off. The hysterical is marked by its lack of containment, by its bespeaking either the travails or the pratfalls of a body, and by its task of carrying what is strictly the unsayable of male experience. That is, what escapes the terrible simplicity of male heterosexual experience and the crude simplicity of homocentric narratives is always something that cannot or should not be represented or spoken. In that sense it is rather apt that Eastwood has become popularly known primarily for the silence of his acting performances and for the sheer presence of his body. And it is remarkable, too, that many of his films explicitly produce and locate that image of himself in a close alliance with femininity.

Eastwood's films tend to arrest themselves, as I suggested before, in the specific gratifications of that place for longer than most other movies would dare. The generous reading of this would be to say that, while they are in that sense predictably unsubtle popular responses (albeit rather belated ones) to the impact of feminism in this culture, they do concern themselves with the difficult task of representing masculinity at the hysterical moment of its potential deprivileging, and even at the moment of the deliquescence of masculinity's body (Eastwood was nearly sixty years old when he made *Pink Cadillac*). These movies certainly do not represent an escape from the kind of masculinity that infuses the older ones, like the first Dirty Harry movies, but they can at least be said to attempt to play out that masculinity in relation to femininity. These are not, ultimately, movies that will encourage any radically new male subjectivities, but written across them, in the shape of Eastwood's hysterical body, are the silent signs of what might best be described as a coming out.

Those signs have the function, too, of pointing up the lure of the orthodox codes, where the pleasure of masculine representations is given as essentially and intrinsically bound up with the three-stage shift from objectification to masochism to empowerment. The central masochistic moment is thus a kind of necessity in the conservation of norms of male sexuality within the discourses of popular culture; it represents a way of structuring into the full subjectivity of the egoistic hero a resistance, a way of beating the father to within an inch of his life before replacing him or allowing him to be resurrected, and finally doing things just as well as he can. In this sense the masochistic moment, girded by its moments of pleasurable perverse display and exhibition, serves

on of the masculine confrontation with the father. But this masochistic moment is *temporary*, a kind of trial, a rite of know we have to go through but that will not take all our about it (to me, at any rate) is the way it so often seems question of how we might negotiate our sexuality in lived a question of how symbolic dramas are channeled and ore on the edge, more outlandish, than this masochistic of being unable to be in control, the sheer excess of the sterical symptoms we have written on our bodies—symp- masochistic regard for ourselves can completely erase.

umphries, eds., *The Sexuality of Men* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 1.

is on Natty Bumppo in her book *The Feminization of American Culture* (New 6.

t the Male," *Framework*, no. 15–17 (1981): 16.

urt Kaminsky, *Don Siegel* (New York: Curtis, 1974), p. 251.

jectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992); Gaylyn Studlar, *In the rnsberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois rnsanl, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia

y, p. 78.

ity at the Margins, p. 211.

he Realm of Pleasure, also investigates "the masochist's disavowal of phal- of some of the Von Sternberg/Dietrich collaborations, such as *Blonde Venus*. ; she is concerned to use masochism as a way of intellectually displacing i so much film theory assumes. Although one has considerable sympathy r's is insufficient insofar as she is led to posit masochism as a kind of ur- difference is ultimately elided. The masochistic turn, in her version, does rrativization, as in Bersani, but actually *dosexualizes* insofar as the priv- ism becomes the androgyne. This leaves Studlar with the unfulfilled task / sexual difference emerges. Indeed, her way of taking masochism back em to assume the Oedipal: thus masochism serves the function of coun- rights it should make impossible, that is, the phallic schemas of sexual s brief argument against Studlar seems right: she writes that Studlar's "is rading of masochism, which comes close to grounding that perversion in *subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 417n.

lic rendering of a longer and probably contentious set of arguments about nd subject position. Some more formal version of these positions can be

found in my *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). The word *pro- fer* is a conflation of—or perhaps a pun on—the English words *offer* and *prefer* and the French word *proférer* (to utter). The conflation suggests, then, that the text offers the reader preferred meanings.

11. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 206.

12. To be precise, Judith Mayne ends her article, "Walking the 'Tightrope' of Feminism and Male Desire," in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1988), with the following claim, from which I have extrapolated here: "But there is a fit between theory and narrative, and the intersection of feminism and male desire needs to be thought, and rethought, by submitting theory to the test of narrative" (p. 70).

13. Freud, "The Economic Problem in Masochism" (1924), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), vol. 19, pp. 157–72.

14. Freud, "The Ego and the Id" (1923), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, pp. 3–66.

15. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 204.

16. My point here is somewhat akin to that of Parveen Adams in her brilliant essay "Of Female Bondage," in T. Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1990): "Think of the masochist in particular; though he may appear as victim he is in fact in charge. He is the stage manager in charge of the scenery, the costumes and the roles" (p. 253).

17. A similar kind of critique of the use of the trope of masochism comes in Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), especially the chapter entitled "A Father Is Being Beaten." Modleski seems to me correct in her sense that the fashionable deployment of male masochism encourages the secret reimportation of the father, rather more than it produces a feminist masculinity. She suggests that the masochistic project will be "doomed to failure, from a feminist point of view, unless the father is frankly confronted and the entire project of abjection and the law worked through; otherwise . . . the father will always remain in force as the major, if hidden, point of reference—and he may in fact be expected at any time to emerge from hiding with a vengeance" (p. 70).

18. Paul Smith, "Vas," *Camera Obscura*, no. 17 (1988): 31–66.