WHITE MASCULINITY IN THE AMERICAN ACTION FILM  PRE AND POST 9/11

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts  of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Gordon V. Briggs

June 2007
This thesis titled
WHITE MASCULINITY IN THE AMERICAN ACTION FILM PRE AND POST 9/11

by
GORDON V. BRIGGS

has been approved for
the School of Film
and the College of Fine Arts by

Alessandra Raengo
Visiting Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts

Charles McWeeny
Dean, College of Fine Arts
Abstract

BRIGGS, GORDON, M.A., June 2007, Film

WHITE MASCULINITY IN THE ACTION FILM PRE AND POST 9/11 (88 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Alessandra Raengo

The subject of my research is how certain white masculinities are experienced in the action films of the late 1990’s to the present. It is my contention that the period saw the action film as a battleground where white masculinity came to terms with its own cinematic image. The experiencing of masculinity was not played out across national spaces and exaggerated bodies as it had been before, but through a complex relationship between such white masculinity and the cinematic simulacrum of its own image. In addition, I explore how these masculinities were experienced in the wake of the September 11th attacks and the War on Terror which followed. The films selected for this thesis not only speak to the continual deconstruction of gender identities by postmodernism, but illustrate a dialogue between the masculine imagination and the experiencing of masculinity itself.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Alessandra Raengo

Visiting Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts
Table of Contents

Page

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... 3
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 5
CHAPTER 1: CREATING THE MILLENIAL MAN ......................................................... 8
CHAPTER 2: POST 9/11 AUTHENTICITY ................................................................. 37
CHAPTER 3: HOLLYWOOD GOES TO WAR ............................................................ 61
CONCLUSION .............................................................................................................. 80
BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................................................................................... 84
Introduction

As America moves into the 21st Century, men have weathered enormous social and cultural changes that have molded the experiencing of white masculinity. I wish to study the relationship film plays in the forming and reflecting of contemporary masculine images. While I have always been interested in cinema's relationship with gender, my interest in this particular subject began on the morning of 9/11. I became intrigued with the repeated references to movies in order to describe the attacks. As the post 9/11 drumbeat to war got underway, the rhetoric of America's leaders began to sound increasingly like that of certain action films I was watching. With this idea in mind, I felt the relationship white masculinity shared with its cinematic fantasies was in need of further examination. I suggest that the films I discuss in this thesis present a series of masculine crises and reaction to crises. These crises range from the onset of mass market androgyny in the late 90's to the 9/11 attacks. In both cases the cure to such perceived masculine crises is the evocation of an 'authentic masculinity'. By achieving this authentic masculinity those who seek it hope to remasculate themselves. The search for and designation of certain white masculinities as 'authentic' is one of the focuses of my work.

The first chapter of my thesis will explore the idea of millennial masculinity as it is illustrated in the film Fight Club. In examining the narrative of David Fincher's 1999 movie, I will explore how the film deals with issues concerning white male fears of extinction through consumerism. Fincher's film touches on a variety of issues concerning
the fear that hegemonic constructions of manhood will become obsolete in the new millennium. I suggest it is this fear which results in the inaction of the masculinist theater known as Fight Club. The film’s ritualistic and sadomasochistic acts of violence show white collar middle age men gleefully destroying each other's bodies in order to discover their “true manhood”; a manhood in opposition to the commodified images of masculinity which currently prevail our culture. *Fight Club*’s acts of destruction illustrate a pathological inaction of masculinity, one which may bespeak to a desire to offer a stabilized, non-commoditized image of masculinity before the end of the century. Through *Fight Club* we see the normally simplified stable images of gender in action films portrayed as a schizophrenic fever dream.

The second chapter of my thesis focuses on 9/11 and America's initial reaction to it. In addition to examining the 'authentic' masculinity of the New York Firefighter, I examine the public image of George Bush, whose Presidency seems to be a series of symbolic gestures meant to evoke a cowboy mystique. As President Bush proudly stated that Osama Bin Laden is “Wanted, dead or alive”, his evocation of dialogue out of a western movie further demonstrated the use of cinematic imaginings of white masculinity to deal with the tragedy of 9/11.

The third chapter of my thesis will focus on Hollywood’s preliminary response to the 9/11 attacks in the form of the new military adventure film. I have termed these films the Go Get’em! Movies! I contend that the movies both satiated the American desire for revenge against the terrorist attacks and prepared the country for the inevitable military responses to come. I argue that the films counteract the growing sense of
American vulnerability and uncertainty by providing both more traditional images of masculinity and gendered racial unity. Through an analysis of the film *Black Hawk Down*, I examine how Hollywood has constructed a new military masculinity based on technological superiority as well as old imperialist models from the previous century.

In the post 9/11 world in which we live, the films I examine are pregnant with sociological significance. As issues of terrorism, imperialism, and patriotism fill our daily headlines, I hope to prove that a genre usually associated with mindless escapism has become a means by which society navigates the uncertainty of a world at war.
Chapter 1: Creating the Millennial Man

As the countdown to the millennium started, the world began to take account of all the events, ideas, and individuals which helped shape the 20th century. Detailed lists of historical and technological events were created and debated. Names like Einstein and King took their place alongside events like the Apollo moon landings and the Kennedy assassination as symbols of the century that was. This vast “cultural accounting” eventually extended beyond the realms of history and science and proceeded to spawn new observations about race, sexuality, and gender. As one century ended and another began, some understandably began to think about not just where we had been, but where we were going. A byproduct of the millennium’s cultural accounting were several theories on the “current state of things”. Any examination of what the current state of things is predicated on a historical narrative which must first explain what the state of things was. With the end of the century increasingly on the collective consciousness of the world, the millennium itself became an ideal setting for the examination of the current states of various facets of society, including gender. At the end of the 20th century various millennial discourses regarding gender focused on the current state of masculinity, white masculinity in particular. In the wake of feminism, the rise of consumer culture, and the end of the Cold War, the experiencing of more liminal white masculinity and the characteristics of that masculinity seemed ripe for exploration. The genesis and characteristics of this millennial white male and his masculinity is the central question of this thesis. While my primary focus in this
chapter is on the area of white masculinity in the film *Fight Club*, I first wish to unpack the various issues surrounding the millennial man and his masculinity, in order to better contextualize my reading of the film.

What makes up the millennial man? Is he just as a much a product of individual perception, as a product of gender study? While there is no a specific definition of what millennial masculinity is, in analyzing the discourses surrounding the millennial man certain patterns do begin to emerge. In regards to gender, the rise of fashion and health magazines targeted at young men can be seen as symptomatic of a change in cultural attitudes. In England, magazines such as *Loaded* targeted the so-called “New Lad” and his fondness for designer fashions and young women. Writer Sean Nixon noted in his discussion on magazines such as *Loaded* that “its audience had no new heterosexual gender script forged since the 1980’s, which left a space for the return of a particular repressed” (Quoted in Gibson 180). Across the Atlantic, America saw the rise of its own form of print media targeted at New Lads. Publications such as *FHM*, *Men’s Health*, and *ZM* all focused on helping young men achieve the muscular body that many yearned for. In his study of millennial discourses in British magazines, writer John Beynon identified four discursive themes that were quite prevalent during the period of 1999-2000. They were as followed:

Theme 1: Men Running Wild
Theme 2: Emasculated Men
Theme 3: Men as Victims or aggressors
Theme 4: Old Men vs. New Men

As the 21st century began, Beynon's study painted a bleak outlook for white masculinity, because it has been conceived as something dangerous. However,
Beynon feels that masculinity has been painted to be something dangerous.\(^1\)

Beynon sees millennial masculinity as a gendered conflict between the past and present, the old and the new, or simply the yearning for the past breaking against the uncertainty of the future. Each of these conflicts will be manifested in *Fight Club’s* protagonists. Whilst Beynon's research is more expansive in its contextualizing of millennial masculinity, other writers see the millennial man as a product of visual culture.

In the article *Millennial Male,* author Catherine Fitzpatrick writes about the visual signification of the millennial man. She states that “the biological make up essence of male and female remains as solid and unmovable as ever. What has changed, according to Anthony Shugaar, an author specializing in popular culture issues, 'is the willingness to experiment with the outward signs of sexual identity' ” (1). These external indicators sampled traditionally feminine behaviors such as hair care, skin care, and awareness of current fashion trends. Fitzpatrick credits this new “gender tourism” with several factors; which include the feminized image of man stemming from high fashion, the rise of gay culture, and the most importantly the economics of the Post-Fordist world.

“Well into the 20th century, the essential image of a man was that of a person who worked hard, provided for and protected his family, defended his country. The 90’s brought deep changes, among them a rising tide of prosperity. Today the masculine identity is more closely tied to consumption than work” (2). Fitzpatrick’s visual

\(^1\) “What jumps out is all the negativity: a Martian arriving on the planet Earth and not knowing what masculinity was would quickly form the opinion that it was highly damaged or damaging condition with very few if any redeeming traits. In the hands of these writers it is something to be contained, attacked, denigrated or ridiculed, little else” (p.143).
assessment of the millennial man evokes the classic star images of John Wayne and new Hollywood leading men like Leonardo DiCaprio, but simultaneously seems to illustrate Beynon’s theme of the old man vs. the new man. Beynon and Fitzpatrick posit that the millennial masculinity seems to be characterized by a tension between traditional hegemonic forms of white masculinity and the newer more androgynous forms of masculinity which seems to exist in relation to consumer culture.

Even though visual culture seems to have embraced the millennial man, one must not exaggerate his ubiquity. The whole perception of the onslaught of effeminate millennial men could be a product of a sort-of “masculine panic,” similar to the one which gripped white males during the rise of Second Wave Feminism. In another essay titled Millennial Man writer Paul Smith explores how millennial masculinity and the discourses around it are in truth the latest chapter in the idea of masculinity in crisis. “Most writers seemed convinced that there is currently a kind of siege on traditional notions of masculinity, a crisis of hegemonic definition that then dialectically evokes a crisis of visibility for the manifold forms of other masculinity that exists but are not yet culturally accommodated” (735). The notion that masculinity is in some form of crisis is as old as gender studies itself. However, this perceived crisis centers around the millennium. Smith argues that as the millennium approached, it seemed that masculinity was quickly becoming obsolete. In the wake of the increasing economic prosperity of the late 1990’s, which was brought on by a low employment and the dot com boom, it seemed that men were made to curb their more aggressive, more primal tendencies to
better function in a more technologically based society. The millennial fears that men were, as Smith puts it, becoming the “millennium’s second sex,” were largely based on the perception that men, mostly white men, were being displaced in a new seemingly gender-neutral workforce. Emerging to take their place were liberated, intelligent women. *The Economist* warned: It is possible that “the gains the west has made through enhancing the economic position of women will be tarnished if the male laborer is pushed to the margins” (Quoted in Smith, 732).

Perhaps men had nobody to blame but themselves for the new integrated workforce. As author John Gram writes in his faux obituary of white males titled *R.I.P White Men*, “in many ways women are different than men of the past. Women seem to harbor the strange notion that hard work, knowledge, competence and persistence are the proper ingredients for success. On the other hand, the traditional great white male scoffs at such nonsense.” It must be stated that most, if not all, of these millennial discourses are purely opinionative and have little to no foundation in the everyday white patriarchal reality that is American Culture. This form of “masculine mourning” obviously does not take into account the fact that most Fortune 500 jobs are still held by white men and that on average women still make less than men in most positions. The fear of white male extinction is by no means a new one. Rather it has profound historical roots “From revolutionary days when the paranoid struggle to establish the republic was accompanied by a paranoid struggle to define the correct the kind of manhood to promote and ensure the integrity” (Smith 1). As Smith points out, there has always been a certain element of masculinist rhetoric that has posited that men are societal victims on the verge
of extinction. These apocalyptic male prophecies are oddly functional for those who wish to aggressively exercise and assert white male power. After all, if white masculinity is truly under attack, the act of expressing it can be political, artistic, and even healthy. However, the act of exercising gender may be in vain. As Gram’s obituary states, “[w]hether he is destined for final resting place in the museums of the land remains to be seen. There will be pitiful efforts to restore his feathers, to prop up his prowess and power. Nevertheless, the great white male’s day has past, along with his unlimited power and influence.” Both Gram’s obituary and the other discourses of the millennial man present the supposedly endangered white male with a unique dilemma: How does one exercise his masculinity if one does not know exactly what masculinity is?

I have chronicled the themes and discourses around millennial masculinity and surmise that they chronicle a perceived onslaught of mass market androgyny, but simultaneously these discourses help create an stable image of what a “real man” is and was. The discourses surrounding the millennial man are part of an ongoing cultural process of gendering certain behaviors as masculine or feminine. “In our own 'real world' masculinity is the ever-emerging effect of remediation, a generalization induced during the consumption and comparison of mediated images for the purpose of producing an immediate identity, and hence, it is always in a state of articulation, of coming into being” (Tripp 186). Writers such as Smith and Fitzpatrick help facilitate this state of articulation through their research. It stands to reason that one cannot document the blurring of gender lines until such lines are established, even hypothetically. In short, the
discourses around millennial masculinity serve to document such masculinities as well as create them. It is within this millennial melting pot of genders, paranoia and apocalyptic predictions that Hollywood enters.

As a producer of cultural artifacts, Hollywood is in a unique position to reflect these turns of the zeitgeist screw, as well as navigate the culture through the perceived blurring of gender lines. As Smith states “the era of Post-Fordism and its changing world of work, cultural definitions of masculinity are continually being drawn into new contradictions, and it falls to various cultural agencies (such as Hollywood) to resolve them imaginarily” (732). Is it possible that Hollywood sensed these cultural anxieties and provided audiences with a series of films which articulated these fears? Fight Club’s 1999 release coincided with a series of brutally satirical millennial films released by Hollywood. Movies such as The Matrix, Dark City, The Truman Show, Pleasantville, American Beauty, and others, gave audiences stories about white middle class suburban males “waking up” from the artificiality of the supposedly real world reality of the American Dream.²

The story of Fight Club is narrated by a lonely, unfulfilled young man (Edward Norton) who finds his only comfort in feigning terminal illness and attending disease support groups. He soon meets an intriguing character in the form of Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). They become fast friends, bonding over a mutual disgust for corporate consumer-culture hypocrisy. Eventually, the two start Fight Club, which convenes in a bar basement

² “Through ostensibly concerned with such desperate themes as aliens, artificial intelligence, the nightmare of the desk job, and the scandals of commodity culture, these films are nevertheless all linked by a common acknowledgment of and consequential response to masculinities perceived to be in jeopardy” (Tripp 181).
where angry men seemingly unable to properly express their masculinity engage in brutal, bare-knuckle bouts.

In addition to *Fight Club* being a rich illustration of millennial masculinity and white male paranoia, the film’s employing of action movie conventions such as brutalized male bodies, juvenile acts of destruction, and latent homoeroticism illustrates a new view of white masculinities.

Although much has been written about *Fight Club*, most academic writing seems to concern itself with the film’s premise rather than the execution of that premise. I intend to prove that *Fight Club* is a film that is just as schizophrenic as its narrator. In doing so I hope to construct how millennial masculinity is experienced in Hollywood action films. I first wish to examine the construction of Edward Norton’s character of Jack. In the first act, Jack is presented as a visual articulation of white males fears of emasculation though consumerism. I wish to prove that *Fight Club* does not endorse the idea of a crisis in masculinity, so much as it satirizes it. Similar to Tripp’s argument that masculinity is in a constant state of articulation, I intend to argue that the experiencing of white masculinity in *Fight Club* is characterized by states becoming, as well as expressing, and defending masculinity. I would further argue that these states are composed of distinct four aspects. 1) Becoming aware of one's own masculinity or becoming aware that there are actions, feelings, and behavioral traits that are inherently male. 2) A man becoming aware that these traits are different from those of women. 3) Finding some way to express such newfound masculinity. 4) Defending this masculinity, as it is in some form of crisis or under some form of threat, be it from femininity or
consumerism. In short, in *Fight Club* to experience masculinity, one must be thrown into a state of crisis.

**Emasculated Landscape**

"When you're have insomnia you can't sleep, but you're never really awake either." –Jack

In *Fight Club*, the dead have arisen to walk the streets of an emasculated metropolis. The dead in this case is the American Male, who has long since abandoned his masculine identity for the anonymity of the American buying public. Amongst these anonymous consumers is our protagonists, whose nightmarish quest for masculine identity will embody the film’s schizophrenic narrative. In the film’s first act, Jack is a man whose lack of identity is only matched by his lack of sleep. Norton’s character (who I refer to for the remainder of this chapter as Jack) finds he is unable to sleep. He is an insomniac trapped in a perpetual state of sameness. Locked in the capitalist cycle of buy and spend, the only means of expressing his individuality is through consumerism. The film is populated with shots that communicate the sense of identity assertion through consumerism. One sequence shows an establishing shot of Jack’s empty apartment. As the camera slowly pans right, furnishings begins to suddenly appear on-screen accompanied by price tags. With this sequence we see Jack’s apartment beginning to resemble the pages of an IKEA catalog rather than a genuine home. Jack’s furnishings and creature comforts serve to indicate his status as an upper middle class male, but more telling is Jack’s detached attitude while purchasing them. It seems that Jack’s material possessions are all symbols of both class status and consumption itself.
These clear acts of conspicuous consumption tell us that Jack is trapped in a metaphorical narcolepsy, a narcolepsy of consumerism. Jack substitutes desire for consumer objects particularly IKEA home furnishings for sexual desire and for emotional connection to human beings. “Like Jack, men (and women) want things because the free enterprise, consumer-materialist culture they live in benefits from their desiring things. In *Fight Club* Jack unconsciously substitutes the near-perfect IKEA sofa for a human relationship” (Lee 1). Jack’s lack of identity is perfectly in keeping with Beynon’s theme that millennial men are somewhat emasculated. Beynon quotes writer Susan Faludi who states;

“The internal qualities once said to embody manhood—surefootedness, inner strength, confidence of purpose— are merchandised back to men to enhance their manliness. The more productive aspects of manhood such as building and cultivating or contributing to society could not establish a foothold on the shiny flat surface of a commercial culture, a looking glass before which men could only act out a crude semblance of masculinity.”

(Quoted in Beynon 137)

Jack’s tourism of support groups offers us no relief from the images of emasculated males. Jack’s first stop is a support group for men with testicular cancer. One character named Bob (played by Meat Loaf Aday) is a former bodybuilder whose steroid use caused him to grow “man boobs”. Ironically, Bob's pursuit for the ultimate visual signification of masculinity has made him into a pseudo-woman. The scene proceeds as all the men join together and hug one another. In a comical display of emotional catharsis, Bob cradles Jack in his arms and sob “It’s all right, we are still men.” The support group therapy is enough to temporally provide Jack with the “release” he needs in order to sleep, but his infiltration of the support groups is based on
lies, and his slavery to the marketplace still continues. Jack’s enslavement to consumerist ideology could be seen as an example of what Susan Faludi called *ornamental culture*. Fauldi argues that men have fallen victim to this particular type of consumerism, one based on feminized consumption and not ‘manly’ production (quoted in Beynon 94) ³. Within the ornamental culture of display, men like Jack increasingly find themselves at risk for objectification, or worse, must compete against commodified images of masculinity produced by the same ornamental culture which they oppose.

The androgynous millennial man seems to be the ultimate realization of masculine fears of ornamental culture. The search and experiencing of an “authentic masculinity” will take up a large portion of *Fight Club’s* narrative. However, the character’s construction of an “authentic” masculinity will be imagined in opposition to images of men that are disseminated through consumer culture. In one telling exchange, Jack and his alter ego Tyler Durden stare at the image of an almost naked and youthful, muscular male body of an advertisement that looks similar to those of Calvin Klein. “Is that what a real man looks like?” Jack asks rhetorically. Durden playfully responds that “self improvement is masturbation” and that “self destruction is the real answer.” The exchange highlights *Fight Club’s* assertion that ornamental culture has put forth a series of false bodies which men must compete with. With his open legs, long hair, and vacant eyes, the image of the exposed body of the advertisement pacifies as well as

³ For Fauludi “old style masculinity was rooted in the politics and community of social system which has now been replaced by an ornamental culture predicated upon electronic town squares, cyber communities and cafes and image-obsessed, celebrity industries and their visual spectacle” (Beynon 136).
objectifies the potentially active white male body. Such objectification likens the body to an image of sexual gratification as seen on the covers of magazines such as *Playboy* and its many imitators. These effeminate male bodies seem to trivialize white masculinity by making it a passive object for visual consumption. In his essay on employment of the male body in fashion, writer David Buchbinder states:

> Places of worship are public places, magazines, billboards, the television and so on—in which icons of the divinized male body are exhibited to people for visual consumption, like a sort of communication that by admiration of as well as desire and envy for that body. For men in the culture, there is a powerful pressure to emulate that body in one’s own, in sort of a profane *imitatio Christi* (228).

In *Fight Club* the false bodies of the consumer culture are a symptom of the same process by which 'real men' are emasculated. If the defining aspect of *Fight Club*'s emasculated landscape is a lack of control over the image of the body, then part of the narrative’s subsequent searching and experiencing of masculinity will be the reclamation of the white male body through violence.

**Experiencing Masculinity in *Fight Club***

I have suggested four distinct phases in the experiencing of millennial masculinity. The first phase characterized is a matter of awareness. In order to experience his masculinity, Jack must first become aware of his masculinity. The film’s first act shows our protagonist as an anonymous consumer devoid of a particularly masculine identity. However, this dilemma will soon be solved with the introduction of two characters, Marla Singer and Tyler Durden, who both act as dark reflections of Jack’s troubled psyche.
Although Jack’s relationship with his alter ego takes up a large portion of the film’s narrative, for the moment I wish to focus on Jack’s relationship with Marla. Although she may appear to be a superfluous character, the presence of Marla Singer foregrounds the film’s preoccupation with reclamation of gender identity. Dressed all in black, and resembling a drug addict, the bohemian, chain-smoking Marla does not seem to fit into any traditional convention of desirable femininity. In not being a sexual object for Jack’s pleasure or his gaze, Marla becomes an oddly liberated woman. A woman whose narcissistic addictive persona is an odd refraction of Jack’s own emasculated and feminized personality. As Marla continually mimics Jack’s “tourism” and exploitation of the support groups, he begins to see his own masculine shortcomings. Jack even goes on to say, “Marla the big tourist. Her lie reflected my lie.” Jack’s solution to his masculine crisis is disrupted by a transgressive female figure. “Once again, repressed white masculinity is thrown into a crisis by the eruption of an ultraconservative version of post-1960’s femininity that signifies both the antithesis of domestic security, comfort and sexual passivity offering neurosis and blame in their place” (Giroux 264). For Marla support groups are purely theater, or as she puts it “they are cheaper than a movie and there’s free coffee.” For Jack, support groups are both an opportunity to express genuine emotion about his plight as an anonymous consumer, and a means of validating his victim status as a white male at the hands of an indifferent ornamental culture. Jack soon tries to persuade Marla to attend support group on separate days than him. This leads to a darkly satirical exchange in which the two engage in an argument over
possession over the diseased bodies of the support groups.

Marla: I want the blood parasites, and brain cancer.
Jack: You can’t have the whole brain.
Marla: You can take emphysema my smoking doesn’t go over well at all there.
Jack: Testicular cancer shouldn’t be an issue.
Marla: Technically I have more right to be there than you do, you still have your balls.
Jack: You’re kidding right?
Marla: I don’t know, am I?

Jack and Marla’s bizarre conversation highlights the movie’s preoccupation with the body as a site for contention. Secondly, Marla’s questioning of whether or not Jack has “balls” is meant to emasculate Jack and question whether he is “manly” enough.

The character of Marla may secretly be the key figure of the film. Her female presence consistently disrupts the homosocial space that will be established by Jack and Tyler Durden. In addition, as a spectator unaware that Tyler and Jack are the same person, Marla witnesses Jack’s schizophrenia first hand. This leads to the Marla character becoming surprisingly sympathetic to the audience upon second viewing of the film. In being both the impetus for Jack's masculine awakening, and a bystander in Jack’s one man war with himself, the film positions the woman as the only psychological stable force in the schizophrenic emasculated landscape. If Marla facilitates Jack's awareness of his gender then Tyler Durden helps him become aware that it is in crisis.

**Liberation through destruction**

“The things you own, end up owning you.”-Tyler

The lines spoken by the enigmatic Tyler Durden are both a subtle critique of 90’s consumer culture and an articulation of an invisible enslavement of men. Applying the previous ideas of the millennial man, this enslavement has captured the male body, and
its representations. In order for Jack to be able to experience his masculinity, he must first become aware of this enslavement, and thus use Tyler’s agency as a means of liberation. Despite his anti-consumerist philosophy, Tyler himself works within the capitalist system, but unlike Jack he is not a slave to it. Tyler manufactures and sells soap. In keeping with the film’s satirical tone, the soap Tyler sells is rendered from human fat that Tyler and Jack steal from plastic surgery clinics. Quoting Norton’s character, “We stole women’s fat asses and sold it back to them at twice the price, it was beautiful.” Because Tyler is not enslaved by the market, he is free to manipulate it. However, Jack’s escape from consumerist enslavement begins the moment he suddenly loses all of his material possessions. Upon returning from another business trip to his apartment Jack finds that it has been destroyed in a freak gas explosion, which is later revealed to be caused by Tyler himself.

Once he is liberated from the ornamental elements of he attained during his narcoleptic consumerist enslavement, Jack is free to see just how dependent on those objects he was. The incineration of Jack’s apartment illustrates Durdens’ philosophy of liberation through destruction. Tyler’s destruction of Jack’s “material self” leads to gaining Jack’s friendship as well as an awakening to his masculine crisis. However, Tyler’s destructive impulses will not stop with the simple destruction of one apartment. Now that the two men are aware that their own masculinity may be in crisis they must exercise it. This perceived exercising of masculinity will illustrate the final phase in the experiencing of millennial masculinity. Seeing that ornamental culture has enslaved men and their images, Jack and his alter ego must rally their destructive
impulses and reclaim the one site that has been a symbol for the false ornamental culture, the body.

The body and possession over its powers and mysteries is a recurring theme of *Fight Club*. The opening shot of the film takes place in digitally created fear cells of the human brain. As the credits flash across the screen, the camera rapidly glides along the pulsating circuits of Jack’s brain like a strange rollercoaster ride. Perhaps these images visually imply Jack’s accelerated sense of paranoia and his rapid loss of mental control. As previously stated, bodily contention is demonstrated in the sequence when Jack argues with Marla over who will posses the human brains and diseased bodies of the support group, demonstrating that both seek to employ an outside body to bring mental comfort to themselves. Yet another interesting motif of the film is the strange referencing to body parts in the third person. One sequence even shows Jack reading a poem which is written from the point of view of an organ. At this point in the story we are unaware that it is Jack who is writing the poems.

*Jack*: *I am Jack’s medulla oblongata. I am Jack’s colon.*  
*Tyler*: *I get cancer I kill Jack.*

These body journals cue the audience to the fact that “Jack” is not in control of his own body; his body may be in fact controlling him.

The destruction and subsequent reconstruction of the white male body is one of *Fight Club*’s key visual strategies. When Tyler and Jack first hit one another each feels a sudden rush of energy and adrenaline. The touch and feel of another person coupled with the unbridled release of anger and violence seems to be both emotionally and
possibly sexually satisfying for both men. In this sense, the brutal bodies of *Fight Club*
are not simply exercise in sadomasochistic pleasure, but offer these characters that are
emotional fulfilling surges of authenticity. In a landscape that seems populated
with false commodified bodies, the bruised bodies and broken bones of the underground
bouts offers an stinging dose of “reality” for its men.

**Strategic Masochism and the Destruction of the White Male Body**

The destruction of the eroticized white male body is by no means a new theme in
action films. From the muscular machine-like body of Sylvester Stallone in *Rambo*, to
the tortured and bloody body of Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*, to destroy and subsequently
reconstruct the white male body has been a consistent subtext of action movie narratives.
While the exposed white male body must be visible, if not near naked, in order to
communicate its “natural” power and superiority, the body must paradoxically resist
objectification. For a nude body is a vulnerable body, vulnerable to injury, and more
importantly vulnerable to sexual objectification from the varied gazes of the audience.
This paradox of expression and repression tends to produce what theorist Paul Smith
termed as “hysterical bodies”, “The films frame the male body in a narrative that moves
from objectification /eroticization, through a temporary destruction that 'masochizes'
the male body, and ends up in the regeneration of that body and the reemergence of the
phallic masculinity that was damaged by the second and even first stages of the
narrative”.(Quoted in Robinson 141) Smith believes that this strategic masochism
ultimately is a temporary violation of phallic norms within a narrative which aims to
“rephallicize” masculinity by erasing or forgetting the vulnerable male body. Therefore the image of the tortured white male body could facilitate the character’s overcoming of his corporeal limitations. However, the tortures Smith speaks of usually takes place at the hands of the villain (usually a foreigner). *Fight Club*’s lack of a traditional movie villain complicates this paradigm. The torture/masochism of *Fight Club* is self-imposed and somewhat affectionate.

The characters in *Fight Club* seem to wear their bruises like badges. What is so gratifying to these characters about the sight of a bruise on their skin? In regards to this question, I would suggest that it is not the bruise which holds the answer, but the skin on which it appears. In his study of the visual representation of the wounded neo-classical male body, writer Stephen Dudink suggests that the impermeable neo-classical male body was often linked to the political ideologies of Revolutionary America. Furthermore, portrayals of the wounded, open, mutilated, and bruised could illustrate political and ideological instability. Dudink writes, “[t]he dynamics between impermeable and opened male bodies might constitute a meaningful site of instability in the construction of the male body in modern political culture” (158). The vision of the mutilated male bodies represented the “political” trauma of the Post Revolutionary American transition from monarchy to democracy. Although Dudink's ideas are in relation to American colonial history, the fusing of both gender studies and film studies has taken to examining bodily trauma as a means of reading masculine crisis. Theorist Sally Robinson, writing about 1970’s men’s liberation movements states, “like men’s liberationists movements, somatization of the social and political symptoms of a decentered white masculinity, the hysterical male body registers, in bodily terms, the
The ideas of both Robinson and Dudink relate to the visual strategies of *Fight Club* whose bodies are equally as strong and wounded. These strong impermeable bodies that Dudink explores in his writing are similar to the strong white bodies which have been integrated into ornamental culture and subsequently objectified through advertising. These are the same white male bodies that were scoffed at by Tyler and Jack earlier in the film. If the commodified false body is indeed impermeable then by the characters destroying their white male bodies, as with the mutilated neo-classical bodies, they illustrate the trauma of millennial transitions and transformation. As one looks closely at wounded bodies of *Fight Club* the more the bruised bodies become far more complex in their meanings.

I looked closely at the blood stained shirts, the demented smile of Jack with a mouth full of blood and broken teeth. I studied the image of a shirtless Brad Pitt with a open gash above his left eye, which was soon to be accompanied by a bruise on his right, as well as the sight of black and purple bruises on white skin. As I looked deeply at the bruised bodies of Jack and Tyler and the rest of their fellow Fight Clubbers, I realized that this “epidermal ornamentation” seems be layered with three meanings. First, as far as the film’s plot is concerned, the bruises function as a short hand form of communication. Jack and Tyler can always recognize a member of their sadomasochistic fraternity from the bruises on his face. Second, the bruising and battering of the male characters literally “colors” the body, thus robbing the once impermeable white body of its inherent beauty.

---

4 Dudink feels there is more than opposition between the (neo) classical body- no orifices. Their relation is structured, like so many other ideological oppositions openings and the grotesque body—all openings and orifices. Their relation is structured, like so many other ideological oppositions, by a dynamics of repugnance and fascination.
and stability. While I do not wish to argue that the bruising of white bodies makes them “black”, I would suggest that this punishment of the flesh is just as much a backlash against white skin privilege and all its economic and therefore consumerist benefits, as it is a supposed cure to white masculine crisis. Finally, I feel that within the bruises and open wounds of Fight Club’s bodies there is something more, something that even avoids the words of my writing. The only description one could offer is that there seems to be a deliberate embrace of physical monstrosity. In deliberately breaking their noses, swelling their faces, punching out one another’s teeth, the men of Fight Club seem to care little about the long term physical and mental effects of this constant battery. The men care even less about their outward physical appearance and possible physical recovery. Physical beauty is not a concern for the men of Fight Club. Beauty itself is a characteristic of the false men produced by ornamental culture. It seems that a wounded beauty, a mutilated physical imperfection are what is valued in Fight Club’s masculinist tribe. In one sequence, fueled by jealousy, and latent homosexual feelings, at Tyler’s seeming abandonment of him for a young, blond, handsome member of Fight Club, who is aptly named Angel Face, Jack decides to obliterate Angel’s good looks in a subsequent match. Jack practically beats the young man unconscious. As a result Angel Face’s face appears swollen and bruised for the rest of the film. When Tyler asks why he has so brutally beaten the boy, Jack coldly responds “I just felt like destroying something beautiful.” The shunning of conventional beauty and the embracing of physical monstrosity and sadomasochism already points the way towards Fight Club’s
hyperbolic third act. As Fight Club’s narrative continues, Tyler’s plan to “step Fight Club up a notch” will result in the organization shifting from self indulgent acts of brutality to outright acts of terrorism.

**The Crisis in Masculine Crisis**

As Fight Club morphs into Project Mayhem, the destructive impulses of the organization have morphed from destruction of the white male body to the destruction of society as a whole. As Tyler leaves Jack to set up franchises of Fight Club all over the country, he gives his disciples so-called homework assignments. These assignments are actually acts of vandalism which include destroying expensive cars, setting fire to computer stores, and even attempting to demolish a franchise coffee shop by using a runaway piece of corporate art. At the start, all of these acts are depicted as comedic and harmless. The audience is even invited to revel in these acts of mayhem, as they probably wish they could engage in such acts themselves. However, as Project Mayhem’s acts become more violent, Jack begins to question both the direction and foundation of Fight Club. Under the reign of Tyler, the once liberating sadomasochistic fraternity has turned into something resembling a fascist organization. If a self-destructive fraternal organization is necessary to awaken the masculinity that was deadened by ornamental culture, the film then asks: what has white masculinity awakened to? The members of Project Mayhem seem to be so enamored with their own pseudo military ability and masculine sense of entitlement that they become entranced by it. This idea is demonstrated in one key scene of the film.

After attempting to carry out another destructive homework assignment for
Project Mayhem, the character of Bob is shot and killed while trying to escape from the police. When the Fight Clubbers (now called Space Monkeys) want to hide evidence of the crime, Jack strongly protests.

**Angel Face:** He was killed serving project Mayhem sir.

**Jack:** This is Bob. He was a friend of mine and we’re not gonna bury him in the fucking garden!

**Steph:** But in Project Mayhem, we have no names.

**Jack:** No, listen to me. This is a man and he has a name, and it’s Robert Paulson, ok? He is dead now, because of us, alright? You understand that?

**Mechanic:** I understand. In death, a member of Project Mayhem has a name. His name is Robert Paulson.

**Steph:** His name is Robert Paulson.

**Jack:** Stop it! Shut up!

**Members of Fight Club:** [Chanting] His name is Robert Paulsen.

**All Space Monkeys:** His name is Robert Paulsen! *(louder)* His name is Robert Paulsen! His name is Robert Paulsen!

The men begin to robotically recite their new mantra. Even as Jack begs them to stop, the morbid chant of Robert Paulson continues to echo through the whole house.

Having had enough of both Fight Club and Project Mayhem, Jack finally decides that the organization has gone too far.

The importance of this scene must be emphasized. The Fight Clubbers have gone from a collection of bruised and battered working class men to something resembling a paramilitary unit. The men are now all dressed in black and are wearing combat boots. They have all shaved their heads and burned their finger tips with lye, as to erase any external indicators of individuality. More importantly, they are all speaking and thinking exactly alike. Even as the men recite the name of a dead individual, they do so out of a robotic sense of conformity rather than individualistic expression. Jack and Tyler’s Fight Club was premised on the idea that consumer culture has turned men into emasculated zombies. They believed that
corporations and franchises have robbed men of both their identity and their masculinity. In order to reclaim and experience their masculinity they must destroy themselves. Ironically, under the guidance of Tyler Durden, the men have become physical and mental zombies, zombies enslaved to a new franchise; that franchise is Fight Club. With the Robert Paulson scene *Fight Club* seems to debunk the organization's own premise. The scene illustrates that masculine crisis itself is an illusion, a juvenile, narcissistic, robotic cry from a patriarchal order trying to reclaim a bygone era. Rather than being a mode of individual expression, the male need to seek out and experience its own perceived authentic masculinity has become pathological. This opinion is also shared by both director David Fincher and actor Edward Norton, who state that the Robert Paulson scene is the linchpin of the film. On the DVD commentary track to the film Norton states, “Fight Club is a bunch of frat guys who take themselves too seriously. They are complete such morons.”

**Buying Tyler Durden**

Ultimately, through scenes such the Robert Paulson sequence, the filmmakers instruct us not mistake the Space Monkeys juvenile acts of destruction for genuine political protest. We see that neither Fight Club nor Project Mayhem embody the white masculine ideal so much as they embody the endless pursuit of it. *Fight Club's* third act could be seen as the replacement of ideology with identity. Under Durden's leadership Fight Club becomes less an expression of masculine rage, and more like a training ground for an army of pseudo-Tylers. The Fight Clubbers are not Tyler’s followers as much as they are his clones. The men of *Fight Club* have bought into both
Tyler’s ideology and his identity, just like they bought into the consumerist identities provided to them by an indifferent marketplace. The act of “buying into” Tyler’s identity is right in line with a certain consumerist ethos in which commodified identities can be purchased by those who have the resources. If the men of *Fight Club* are truly consuming Tyler's identity by adopting it, the film could be read as an example of a “gender marketplace”. This marketplace’s participants are able to buy into a certain type of masculinity, specifically the masculinity of Tyler Durden. The currency of exchange in this system seems to be violence itself. The value of violence in this hypothetical marketplace might be exceedingly high. While the idea may seem bizarre, violence as a pseudo currency is demonstrated in the now famous sequence in which a newly homeless Jack asks if he can stay with Tyler. Tyler says yes only after Jack agrees to hit him as hard as he can. In what some could describe as a bizarre wedding contract, Tyler gives Jack's bread and board, while, in exchange Jack will provide Tyler the sadomasochistic pleasure of bodily injury, the importance of which has already been stated. However, we must not forget that illusion or not, Jack uses Tyler's agency to escape his perceived crisis in masculinity. It appears that in addition to giving each other a sadomasochistic release through violence, the two men use one another to discover and experience their own masculine identities.

In *Fight Club* masculine identity is fluid. For a certain amount of violence, *Fight Club* will let you destroy your body and your current self; in exchange a working class man can become another Tyler Durden. Durden’s identity has
become another commodity to be bought and sold in the franchise of Fight Club and Project Mayhem. The result of this marketplace is an endless simulacrum of Tyler. Each one's journey for an authentic masculinity leads to the instilling of a commodified one. The perceived white masculine crisis facilitated by consumerism leads to a different kind of consumerism, the consumption of a perceived masculine ideal. The masculine ideal in this case takes the form of Tyler Durden or more specifically Brad Pitt. Does Fight Club feel that a crisis in masculinity brought on by millennial anxiety even exists? I would suggest the answer lies in the schizophrenic mind of the film's protagonist.

In order to examine Fight Club as a schizophrenic dual narrative, I wish to first establish how Fight Club creates an extra-diegetic space outside the diegetic space of the film. From the start of the film the audience is invited to engage with the story on a variety of levels. In addition to Jack's combination of voice-over narration and Jack's direct address to the camera, when we first meet Tyler he literally appears to us in the flash of an eye. Tyler's image flashes on screen for the duration of 3-4 frames, which Brad Pitt referred to as subliminal Tyler's. It is also worth noting that Tyler has a night job as a projectionist. He uses this job as a chance to splice single frames of pornography into family films. Is it possible that Tyler could have spliced his own image into the film? It is little wonder why a pornographic frame (a large erect penis) is spliced into the final frame of the film. In another sequence, when the character of Jack faints from exhaustion, his voice over narration describes the moment in technical terms. Jack's narration states “It's called a changeover, the screen turns black the story keeps on going.” With these examples in mind, it is possible to conceive that Fincher is
attempting to create his own type of Alienation Effect, one that breaks the fourth wall so cherished to most action movies, and invites the audience to view *Fight Club* as a cinematic construction. If this is indeed the case, the result could allow the audience to negotiate the film as a savage satire of consumerism, as well as a satire of perceived masculine crisis. The fluidity of audience perception is crucial to understanding the film, especially when considering that perception is a crucial theme of the story.

As previously stated, the millennial crisis in white masculinity (as with many notions of crises) may be purely perceptual. Through the character of Jack, *Fight Club* repeatedly calls into question the validity of such perceptions of crisis. When the film is first viewed, one is unaware of the fact that Jack and Tyler are one in the same. Seeing how the movie takes place entirely from Jack’s point of view, the revelation of Jack’s schizophrenia simultaneously negates and reinscribes his previous interactions with Tyler, turning them from supposedly genuine acts of masculine expression into clear acts of dementia. However, Tyler is also the one who awakens Jack to his masculine crisis and frees him from consumerist enslavement. If Tyler is a product of Jack’s perception then so could be the crisis he awakens himself from. If in fact the phantom Tyler is just a figment of Jack's tortured psyche, then the validity of his contentions of male crisis becomes unstable at best.

“I look like you want to look, I fight like you want to a fight, I fuck like you want to fuck. I am smart a capable in all the ways you are not”- Tyler.

Why does Jack’s self-projected alter ego take the form of a young handsome muscular man? As Tyler explains how he is so much smarter, more capable and
more handsome than Jack, he could have added: I have the body that you want to have. Tyler/Pitt is shown throughout the film bare-chested, firmly-muscled and bronzed in deliberate contrast to the pallid unremarkable body of Jack. One cannot overlook the contradiction inherent in casting superstar Brad Pitt. Paradoxically the same “authentic” body that Jack yearns for and the same male body that the Fight Club bouts aimed to destroy is the quintessential example of the commodified male body. This paradox puts certain scenes in a different light. We continually see Pitt’s own perfectly muscled torso; his body is framed by the other men in the film in such a way that our gaze is inexorably towards him. “Pitt's body is fetishized, offered up and commodified. Norton’s slim and unremarkable body and the muscular heroic physique of Brad Pitt, who not only persistently exposes his body to our view but in his habitual wearing of extremely low-strung trousers, barley covering his crotch, often creates a gap between trousers and the shirt that it turn invites us to imagine what lies beneath.” (Buchbinder 229) Again, the movie's satiric reflexivity presents itself, as we have the ultimate commodified male body propagating the destruction of such bodies. Ultimately Jack must destroy Tyler who has become his own false body, or a simple commodity in the gendered identity marketplace of Fight Club. However, the only way Tyler can be stopped is for Jack to kill himself. The ensuing battle between Tyler and Jack, in all its heightened absurdity, encapsulates all the film's ideas.

*I ran. I ran until my muscles burned and my veins pumped battery acid.* -Jack

The character of Jack is saying these words because he is running for his life, his
body, and his mind. He is running from members of Project Mayhem who have just attempted to castrate him. He is running to try and stop Tyler’s plans of destroying the headquarters of America's financial institutions. It is in this scene that we are given a striking image of white male paranoia. We see a terrified Edward Norton sprinting down the empty city streets wearing a bathrobe, t-shirt, and boxer shorts, he is carrying a gun in one hand and blueprints to the financial institutions in the other. Jack has been reduced to an irrational, terrified, partially domesticated, partially armed, and completely frightened man. He is armed in order to protect himself from an omnipresent enemy that wishes to emasculate him. With this shot we see white masculine paranoia for what it really is, paranoid. In order to regain control of his mind Jack must fight his own mind. The subsequent battle between Jack and his mental projection of Tyler all occurs in Jack’s mind. However this internal battle illustrates the conflicts which characterize the millennial man: The conflict between the feminized domesticated Jack and the liberated Tyler, the conflict between Jack’s more technologically and consumption driven future and Tyler’s more anarchist yearnings for the past, the conflict between the hard man and the soft man. Most important, Jack is in a fight between male reality and his masculine ideal. Within the tortured mind of Jack we see that the journey to experience masculinity is literally schizophrenic. The journey itself is a demented fever dream that one must awaken from as Jack was awakened from his consumerist narcolepsy. Be it through the consumption of commodified bodies, or through mental projections, by pointing out the irrationality of pursuing authentic masculinity, Fight Club could speak to a larger question of how the individual can truly assert their identity in the late capitalist world.
The problem may lie in the fact that gender identity must constantly be an external manifestation. As Richard Dyer has described, masculinity is impossible to live up to and the result is a sense of failure by men. Dyer observes that there is likely to be disjuncture between the masculinity signified and the signifier, the actual man itself (Quoted in Benyon, 66). The disjuncture between signifier and signified seems to be at the heart of Fight Club’s twisted narrative. By the film's end, Jack regains control of his body through one last act of sadomasochistic violence. Jack shoots himself in the face and thus kills the false projection of Tyler. Jack finds peace by deciding to settle into a seemingly heteronormative relationship with Marla. By deciding to end his pursuit for the experiencing of an authentic masculinity Jack ultimately gains control of his own mind and body. As the film ends Jack and Marla embrace and look out over the city as several large skyscrapers explode and collapse due to Project Mayhem. The film’s 1999 audience is clearly invited to laugh at this mindless destruction, which was also a clear act of terrorism. Little did they know that a real terrorist threat loomed in the not so distant future, and that cinema’s representations of destruction and white masculinity would be forever altered.
Chapter 2: POST 9/11 AUTHENTICITY

Watching September 11th the Movie

"I couldn't believe it. It was like something out of a Bruce Willis Movie” -9/11 witness

When we say September 11th what do we mean? Do we mean a horrific event, an act of war, or an event that was, as Noam Chomsky described it, “a crime that had perhaps the most devastating instant human toll on record, outside of war” (66)? The words themselves conjure up images of burning skyscrapers, falling bodies, firemen, ambulances, and downtown New York becoming a haunting ghost town covered in a cloud of ash and debris. The numbers 9/11 could simply be a numerical benchmark for when American society crossed over from an era of isolation, invulnerability, and security to an era of vulnerability, uncertainty, and hyper-patriotism. The issues, emotions, and ideas spawned by the 9/11 attacks are thus encased and signified by these two numbers. Ironically, the numbers make one of the most devastating crimes in modern human history into a blatant understatement. Perhaps, this is because the events of that particular day are so unspeakable inexplicable that no words can give them “linguistic justice.” One of the characteristics of the post 9/11 world is the desire to explain and to understand what, how, and why the attacks occurred. As 9/11 studies continues to develop within academia, the vast range of issues that the 9/11 attacks cover can be better examined and understood. My aim is simply to contextualize 9/11 in regards to cinematic representations of gender and race. While examining white masculinity in regards to the terrorist attacks may seem like a tangential and even trivial
method of getting to the so-called heart of the matter, I would suggest that a media
focused exploration, which works in tandem with gender studies, affords us the
opportunity to not only understand the events and the aftermath of 9/11, but more
importantly, it allows us to understand how we as a society have begun to understand
the events themselves.

In order to better explore the role gender plays in 9/11, we must first examine the
event itself. For those New Yorkers who witnessed 9/11 firsthand, the words used
repeatedly to describe their emotions were shock and disbelief. Witnesses simply
could not believe that the atrocity they were seeing was real. The image was one of the
most famous American landmarks being consumed by flames after a plane flew
directly into it. As horrific as such an image is, many would not witness the attack on
Tower One. The same could not be said for the attack on Tower Two: “Filmed from
every conceivable angle, the image of the second passenger aircraft imploding within the
second Twin Tower at that 'live via satellite moment' and the collapse of the entire World
Trade Center, [gave us] the realization the dual crashes were no coincidence”
(Scantron 1). Perhaps in addition to the scale and ferocity of the attack, the feelings of
shock felt by those who witnessed it came from the familiar location of the
destruction. “The crimes of September 11th are indeed a historic turning point, but not
because of its scale, rather because of the choice of target” (Chomsky 68). This was not
some distant unfamiliar foreign city under attack. This was America; this was our home.
In the days following the attacks the initial feelings of shock would soon be replaced with
feelings of grief as images were beamed out across the world which depicted Lower Manhattan as the aftermath of a war zone.

Most Americans did not experience 9/11 as those New Yorkers did. Most would experience the attacks through the medium of television. It is here that television's role as a structuring apparatus becomes simultaneously utilized and destabilized by 9/11. In her essay *Homeland Security: The Roots of Displacement* writer Marusya Bociurkiw explores how the 9/11 attacks disrupted the traditional role of television, which is to provide structure, routine and understanding to the viewer. In our media driven society it is not at all uncommon to suggest that many construct their daily habits around their television viewing schedule. In fact, the viewing of a certain show, on a certain channel, at a certain time provides not only routine but structure as well: “When prime time broadcasting scheduling collapsed during and just after 9/11, one felt a sense of disorientation and a kind of relief-- the relief one gets while being temporarily away from home” (Bociurkiw 3). In researching historical television events (such as state funerals and inaugurations) writers Daniel Dayan and Eliha Katz uses the term “festive viewing” to characterize the viewing of events like 9/11. Dayan and Katz state:

In fact they are interruptions of routine; they intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives. Like the holidays that halt everyday routines, television events propose exceptional things to think about, to witness, and to do. Regular broadcasting is suspended and we are guided by a special announcements and preludes that transform daily life back into something special, and, upon conclusion of the event, are guided back again (Quoted in Bociurkiw, 2).

With Dayan's and Katz’s idea in mind, 9/11 illustrates a unique kind of festive
viewing. Our normal daily routine was halted in order to witness the exceptional event. However, unlike other festive events that occurred in the previous millennium, 9/11 had no clear precedent or conclusion, which makes television's function of guiding viewers back to their routines even more problematic. Television's ability to provide the images of 9/11, yet its failure to provide understanding to accompany those images illustrates how 9/11 functions as an event totally outside the real life references of modern American existence: “The disaster had no frame of reference in the world of popular culture adequate for its expression, one able to grasp its meanings. Television struggled to find ways to express a sense of reverence for those lost” (Bell-Metereau 199). The only possible comparisons one can make to 9/11 are ones to American cinema, action cinema in particular. Indeed, cinematic metaphors were constantly evoked by television hosts at a loss for words. The phrase, “it's like a movie”, was repeated many times. Incidentally, the duration of the attack was a little over two hours, which is the approximate length of a Hollywood action film. As cameras caught images of people flooding the streets while running from fire and debris, the images were strikingly similar to the visual effects in movies like Armageddon and Independence Day. Writer Kevin Mahar went on to state that “the aesthetic memory of 9/11 is perversely and irreversibly rooted in blockbuster movies” (Quoted in Bell-Metereau, 198).

These references to cinema do not trivialize the 9/11 attacks as much as they illustrate a reaching into the realm of fantasy in order to provide an understanding which the real world could not provide. This need to understand 9/11 by evoking fiction may speak to the larger horror that the attacks unleashed. As Mikita Brotman writes in her
study of 9/11 visuals, “in Western Culture we've come to associate the horrifying with the visual representations of violence. For something to be horrifying it must be seen” (164). In the weeks that followed the 9/11 attacks, networks voluntarily chose to censor their more graphic footage, such as footage of people jumping from the towers as well as close ups of the dead. “Such images of people being blown apart at their workplace on an ordinary weekday morning is rather different from images of wars being fought on foreign lands” (Brottman 187) Those who witnessed the attack, be it in person or through the medium of television, experienced a raw and virtually unfiltered collision of reality and fantasy, a collision of the foreign and the domestic, but most importantly, a collision of the mundane and the horrific. “Like footage of Nazi concentration camps, this kind of imagery cuts through all the media and allows us to come to a straightforward, unadulterated understanding of exactly what happened on the morning of 9/11” (Brottman 176).

9/11: An Attack on American Masculinity

How exactly can understanding masculinity help us understand 9/11? I would suggest that 9/11 and its subsequent social effects could be understood as two competing forms of masculinity: that of the Middle Eastern suicide bomber, and that of the urban blue collar white male. While the familiarity of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are a key aspect in understanding the shock that their destruction facilitated, equally relevant are their symbolic importance. The “assassination” of the World Trade Center, which is the heart of America's economic strength and superiority, coupled with
the destruction of the Pentagon, symbolic of America’s supposed military superiority, made for an attack on America’s economic, military, and social infrastructure, as well as an attack against the centers of male dominance, the temples of monetarism and war (Gronfors 201). Without indulging in Freudian psychoanalysis too much, it must be stated that the buildings are phallic, “not just in the crude sense of being towering monoliths that penetrated the sky, because they, along with Pentagon, represented attitudes associated with political, economic, and cultural hegemony” (Ducat 225). Such a symbolic emasculation of American phallic power could be meant to illustrate feelings of emasculation some Middle Eastern people, particularly men, feel at the hands of Western economic and military policy.

In turning to the American side of 9/11, the attacks did succeed in wounding America’s national, as well as masculine, consciousness. The new sense of national and masculine vulnerability was illustrated in various images of weeping men which permeated the television coverage following the attacks. Men who were once icons of white male stoicism were openly sharing their pain and anguish with the world at large. Men from “news anchor Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, and Peter Jennings; Police Commissioner Bernard B, Kerik; Fire Commissioner Thomas Van Essen and Mayor Rudy Giuliani, long seen by many as more callous than compassionate, shed tears for lost colleagues and friends” (Wax). Such open displays of male vulnerability demonstrate 9/11 as a radical paradigm shift in the traditional modes of masculine expressions of vulnerability. In the past such a public and unabashed display of emotions could ruin a man permanently. In 1972 Senator Edmond Muskie’s Democratic
Presidential Campaign was permanently crippled when he openly cried at a press conference. The consequences of crying were understood by all men. A weeping man was traditionally a sign of weakness and “sissyness.” Glen Hendler, author of *Sentimental Men: The Politics of Affect in American Culture*, states “The meaning of a man's display of emotions depends a great deal on how he has performed masculinity in the past. If Giuliani hadn't seemed so unsentimental previously, would we have been affected by his display of emotion?” (Quoted in Wax). However, in viewing the 9/11 attacks in all their horrific glory, certain antiquated attitudes regarding male emotion (such as “real men don't cry”) could become obstacles in bringing about a period of national mourning and unification. In short, 9/11 made it more acceptable than ever for men to cry.

**The Heroes of Ground Zero**

Such displays of sadness on the faces of American males illustrates 9/11 as a symbolic wounding of American masculinity. I would argue that the healing of the nation's masculinity, and thus the healing of the nation as a whole, was played out across the image of the heroic New York firefighter. As writer Brenton Malin notes in his study of late 90's representations of masculinity in crisis, “if the masculine hero of the '90's offered a conflicted blend of hypermasculine toughness and new age sensitivity, the September 11th hero is still more profoundly conflicted, eminently heroic and eminently vulnerable.” Be it the image of the firefighter covered in a coat of debris, or the image of the police officer wandering through the clouds of smoke surrounding
Ground Zero, post 9/11 discourse continually deployed the image of heroic first responder. These images were presented as an emotional focus around which the courage and spirit of the country could unite.

The broken defeated bodies of the firemen and police officers stand as proof of our vulnerability, fallen icons that demonstrate the profound tragedy that has befallen the country. At the same time, the repeated discussions of these same fireman and police officers constant vigilance in rescuing people from the World Trade highlights a national masculinity that is still strong and intact (Malin 147).

It is in these almost apocalyptic images of death, destruction, and emasculation that a post 9/11 hero culture will begin to emerge.

It must be said at the start that there were heroes on September 11th. As groups of firefighters rushed into the burning Twin Towers with the single purpose of saving lives, their selfless actions cannot be described as anything but heroic. A closer examination of certain aspects of post 9/11 rhetoric reveals a reinscribing of the New York firefighter from white “working class Joe” into hypermasculine warrior, or as one writer called them “knights in shining fire helmets”. Although the police officer enjoys a powerful status in any major city, the NYPD was consistently the target of public derision. Scandals such as the sodomizing of Adner Loumia, and the shooting of Amadou Bailo Diallo, plagued the NYPD’s public image. “All of that would change in the post 9/11 world. “In the old paradigm, police were marginal blue blurs from the outer boroughs, and fire fighters simply the hired help. In the new paradigm, they are heroes who rushed into the burning building when everyone else was running out” (Morrow).
For some the 9/11 firefighter would come to symbolize all the virtues of traditional masculinity. In his essay “Firemen of 9/11: The Meaning of Masculinity” conservative columnist Dr. Phillip Mango constructs the 9/11 firefighter in relation to mythological Christian Warriors. “The 9/11 firefighters were kings who guided people to safety and created order. They were warriors who went back in the days after the towers had fallen, day after day just to find body parts of their brothers.”\(^5\)

Mango positions the 9/11 firefighter as models of a neo-conservative rendition of Muscular Christianity. Words like *heroes, knights,* and *warriors* seem to permeate the discourses of heroism in the Post 9/11 world. Such discourses simultaneously characterize the New York fireman as both ordinary and extraordinary “Right now, the difference between Peter Parker putting on a costume to become Spider-Man and a man off the street putting on a uniform is really wafer-thin. Fantasy is matching up with reality” (Herel). The idea of the 9/11 firefighter as a sort of mythological hero came full circle as both DC and Marvel comics released a series of comic books and graphic novels which depicted the NYPD and the NYFD as greater than any superhero that the comic book universe had ever produced. One famous comic book cover had Superman marveling at the mural depicting of New York firefighters and simply saying “WOW!” It seems that in the Post 9/11 world the rules of representation themselves may have become irrecoverably confused, as fantasy tipped its hat to the reality that spawned it. Matthew J. Friedman, executive director of the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder said Americans are reaching out to firefighters because of what they

\(^5\) Mango uses the studies of writer Carl Jung who studied myths from different cultures throughout history.
represent and because of the comforting presence they provide as America prepares for future attacks. In the creation of a 9/11 heroic masculinity based around the firefighter, we see a particularly gender based coping mechanism to the horror of 9/11. The events of 9/11 are so spectacular and so extraordinary than so must be the men who rise from their ashes.

**Out of the Ashes: The Return of Authenticity**

In the days and weeks which followed the 9/11 attacks, the firefighter quickly became the a new American hero. “The attacks facilitated a revivification of heroic manhood by turning altruistic New York firemen, policemen and assorted males into iconic rescue-worker hunks” (Ducat 227). The post 9/11 heroes most distinguishing characteristics are their everyday ordinary nature. Due to his working class blue collar status, the 9/11 hero carried with him not only a sense of traditional masculinity, but a valuable sense of authenticity. Such authentic masculinity seemed to be predicated on the individual's class status. Ideally the blue collar man is real, and is far distant from the commodified inauthentic masculinities that are associated with both Madison Avenue and pre 9/11 New York. The blue collar male body was not perfectly sculpted, and was in no way effeminate. He did not wear a suit, he wore a uniform. All that he is and was stemmed from economic and social necessity, rather than from consumerist narcissism. In this respect the 9/11 hero is forced to act out a bizarre paradox. “One the one hand, economic trends diminish blue-collar work. Yet on the other hand, even as the blues fade away, the culture lionizes them and their qualities” (Pinkertone). In other words the
working class status of the New York Firefighter gives him the specter of masculine authenticity, the same masculine authenticity the men of *Fight Club* yearned to experience. From such authenticity, post 9/11 society can mythologize these heroes and subsequently remasculate the country as a whole. The desire to remasculate America in the wake of the 9/11 attacks seems rooted in the idea that the attacks themselves were the byproducts of an emasculated society. In the days that followed the attacks Rev. Jerry Falwell stated “The pagans, and abortionists, and feminists, and gays and lesbians...and the ACLU...helped make this happen.” While Falwell's comments were widely criticized by people on both sides of the political spectrum, the desire to “toughen up”, or as some might say, “man up” the nation was one of the key characteristics of post 9/11 discourse. Part of this toughening up of society took the form of declaring the return of the “Real Man.” In the article titled *Heavy Lifting Required: The Return of the Real Man*, author Patricia Liegh Brown writes that “to cultural defenders of manliness who have deplored the last decade's gender-neutral sex roles, nirvana has arrived”.

Brown's comments strangely echo that of *Fight Club's* Tyler Durden as she notes the passing of millennial men such as Leonardo DiCaprio. As stated before, the New York firefighter's masculinity seems authentic when contrasted with the supposedly feminine men of the 1990's. “There is a great desire to feel protected, to feel daddy is going to take care of us. The image of firefighters and rescuers is very healing to us” (Brown). It may indeed be human nature to hero worship especially in times of crises. However human nature would soon give way to the nature of the marketplace. In the months following the attacks remasculated New York became a brand onto itself. The same television
channels that belched smoke and screams for days after the attacks now ring the bells of game shows featuring firefighters vying for cash and Cadillacs (Herel). Toy companies cashed in on the cultural zeitgeist as well, action figures of 9/11 fireman were being sold for as much as ten dollars each. One action figure of an African American firefighter can be purchased for $39.95. Though the adoption of the post 9/11 firefighter's seemingly authentic masculinity, America and the world celebrated, visualized, and economically consumed their own newfound feelings of remasculization. The post 9/11 desire for recovery through remasculization is as problematic as it is potent. As before, the shadow of Tyler Durden presents itself in the post 9/11 paradigm. The seemingly “authentic” masculinity of the 9/11 hero could be seen as a projection from a society which aims to give meaning to the traumatic events of 9/11. The desire for the authentic post 9/11 male all but fetishizes the New York firefighter and the policeman, turning them into symbols who must carry the burden of the initial trauma of the attacks, as well as our country's desire for recovery from the attacks. Post 9/11 hero discourses come dangerously close to creating a masculinity so pure, so traditional, and so “authentic” that the genuine acts of heroism of 9/11 become part of some strange post 9/11 fantasy. The complexities of post 9/11 hero worship can be summed up by firefighter Capt. Harold Schapelhouman who, while he appreciates the respect and believes it's deserved, he said there's something unnerving about it all. “It's an honor, and at the same time it's uncomfortable, because, the only reason we're there is because of a tragedy”(Herel).
President George W. Bush the Authentic President

In the wake of 9/11 cultural commentators across the political spectrum hailed the return of the real man. This “real man” was the blue collar everyman, whose heroism was an example for the whole world. I return to the headline in the *New York Times* ’The Return of the Real Man’. I find that the most interesting words here are not “real men”, but the word “returns”. In fact, if traditional white masculinities were returning, such an idea pre-supposes their absence. Such a declaration that real men had been resurrected may in fact be a symptom of a larger desire. The desire in this case is to consciously or unconsciously return to the past.

After the horror of 9/11 America would find itself gripped with uncertainty. Many Americans wondered if there would be another attack, and if we were prepared. These developments developed perfectly with a pre 9/11 mass culture trend of World War II nostalgia. “According to the avalanche of books and films idealizing the “good war” and the men who fought it this period was supposedly a time of unambivalent and secure masculinity in which gender and other aspects of cultural life were not plagued with uncertainty and conflict” (Ducat 228). Such excursions to the past frequently took the form of evoking World War II. “Commentators, former officials and news anchors such as Tom Brokaw, steeped in his Greatest Generation mythologies, were eager to liken the terrorist attacks to Pearl Harbor, an event with very little in common with 9/11” (Anderson 201). Such evocations of the “good war” are understandable. To evoke World War II simultaneously evokes the supposed simplicity of the time in which it was fought.
The return to the more traditional forms of white masculinity offered a sense of both comfort, familiarity, and stability to a nation facing a future that looked increasingly more uncertain. In short, it appeared that the country wanted to view the uncertainties of the future through an evocation of the past. It is within this context of national vulnerability and cultural nostalgia that President George W. Bush would emerge and promise to bring “the 9/11 killers to justice.”

President Bush is a figure whose actions and political positions rouse great passion on all sides of the political spectrum. While the President's policies and attitudes seem to have very little to do with representations of gender and race in film, I would argue that President Bush's image is closely linked with cinematic representations of white masculine heroes, specifically the Hollywood cowboy. President Bush would benefit hugely from the supposed return of the "authentic" real man. The cornerstone George Bush's 2000 Presidential campaign was the restoration of honor and integrity to the Presidency of the United States. Upon beginning his administration “he restored the older dress codes at the White House that had been abandoned by Clinton…Yet at home at his ranch he would appear in jeans held up by a Texas-size belt buckle and sporting a western work shirt” (Gregg 92). It would soon become clear that Bush was not in Washington D.C. “The morning paper and evening news regularly featured images of the president standing under a great big Texas sky. The message was clear: This president is not a politician. He's a Texan” (Quenqua 13). In creating a public persona based on his supposed Texas roots (not accounting for the fact that
President Bush was born in Connecticut and educated at Harvard) while at the same time attempting to effectively govern from Washington D.C., Bush seemingly tried to balance two historically iconic images of white male power, the cowboy and the American Presidency. However, part of the President's appeal among his conservative base would be his comfort with his Southern heritage.

In promising to restore honor and integrity to the White House (a not so subtle jab at President Bill Clinton), President Bush aimed to bring what one author called a “Dignified Authenticity” to the Presidency. “The Bush Presidency would not have the routine grandeur of formal Eastroom” (Gregg 92). Similar to the authenticity bestowed upon the 9/11 firefighter, the image of the President playing cowboy on his Texas ranch gave him a certain average working-class credibility. The same credibility that most politicians desire but cannot achieve, the desire to be an ordinary man, but at the same time the most powerful man in the world. Part of Bush’s Post 9/11 popularity is his ability to hold in tension the symbolic aspects of the presidency as well as the iconic image of the cowboy.

President Bush's supposed authenticity seems to be rooted in the evocation of the mythos of the American Cowboy. To evoke the image of the cowboy is not only to evoke a symbol of white masculine power, independence, and authority, but the grandeur of American history. “Americans believe in and love the cowboy. They see the cowboy as central to the identity of Americans and to themselves. We have only to think of the popularity of country music and western movies, and the cowboy in general” (Dodwel 10). Presidential candidates frequently evoke the image in
order to sway red state and blue state voters alike. "What the cowboy myth means, however, is complicated because the cowboy represents both desire for violence and recklessness, but also the pursuit of heroism and integrity” (Dodwel 4). Writer Victor Hanson in his analysis of Bush's cowboy image states “John Wayne deep in the saddle still has a far stronger emotional pull on Americans than contemporary yuppism.” Writer Richard Slotkin explains that the cowboy myth idealizes the “white male adventurer as a hero of national history” and that America needs a new myth that reflects the country’s current demographics and “does not reduce the parties of the American cultural conversation to simple sets of paired antagonists” (Quoted in Dodwel 4).

In the midst of Post 9/11 masculine nostalgia, Bush's already established cowboy persona allowed the President to effectively govern with little to no interference from Congress or from the international community. With the entire government supporting him and a populace increasingly calling for action backing him, the President proceeded to reform and remasculate American foreign policy. "After 9/11, the Bush team outlined a muscular, idealistic and unilateralist vision of American power and how to use it. President Bush aimed to lay the foundation for a grand strategy to fight Islamic terrorists and rogue states by spreading democracy around the world and preempting gathering threats before they materialize”(Allen). The President promised that the United States would make no distinction between terrorists themselves and the countries that harbor them. “Aiding and abetting 'terrorism' would provide
legitimacy for military action... there would be no third way, no neutral territories (Scraton 5)”. This remasculation of American Foreign policy would be termed by some as “Cowboy Diplomacy.”

“There's a sign out there in the old west, wanted dead or alive.”-President Bush

Both the President’s critics and defenders have seized upon this statement. To the Bush critics this statement may appear to be typical of his Presidency's reductionary and somewhat adolescent view of the complexities of foreign policy. However, to the Bush supporter it may appear to be a bold statement, free of both ambiguity and political correctness in a way so many other sound bites are not. The President's blatant evocation of “the old west” in his rhetoric indicates his awareness of his cowboy public image, as well as his willingness to reciprocate that image for PR purposes. In addition, Bush's evocation of the “old west” acts as a form of rhetorical shorthand to a public, who ideally has a ready-made image of a cowboy and the west in their minds. Thus the hunt for Osama Bin Laden not only becomes military action, but a familiar storyline from a western as well. As the build up to the War on Terror increased, Bush's evocations of the cowboy would become more direct. At the National Cattleman's Beef Association meeting in February 2002, Bush told the crowd “Either you are with us or against us.” Later that year in November at the NATO summit in Prague Castle, where Bush was generating international support for a war with Iraq, he stated “Contrary to my image as a Texan with two guns at my side, I'm more conformable with a posse” (Quoted in Dodwell 7). If indeed the post 9/11 world was being imagined as the Wild West, then the President was given the
opportunity to play sheriff, thus further suiting his hypermasculine public image.

One cannot overlook the racial connotations to this new “cowboyesque” foreign policy. The cinematic cowboy has traditionally been a white male figure, one whose power and superiority is usually exercised on a race depicted as primitive, uncivilized, and inferior. If Bush was going to play cowboy, which country would have to play Indian? The subsequent wars in the Middle East did provide the American public with countless images of masses of Middle Easterners dancing and cheering, supposedly at the deaths of Americans. In addition, news outlets frequently displayed the grainy images of the hidden faces of alleged terrorists training in some undisclosed desert location. If President Bush was truly become the sheriff to the post 9/11 world, the Middle East was quickly being shaped to be Wild West that was in need of civilizing.

Part of the association of Bush and the cowboy comes from political journalism and a clash between European and American perceptions of the cowboy. On March 19 2002 Reuters ran a story titled “High Noon for Cowboy Era” in which the lead sentence declared that “for Arabs, Bush's ultimatums to Iraq were a throwback to the wild west.” (Quoted in Dodwell 1) Furthermore columnist William F. Buckley when writing about the President's meeting with skeptical European leaders over the Iraq War called the trip *High Noon in Europe*. The disjuncture between American and European perceptions of the cowboy may explain why Bush is often derisively referred to as one in the European press. “Cowboys swagger through foreign landscapes, causing trouble. They carry guns and shoot people” (Smith). Historically the cowboy, with all his rugged
individualism, has enjoyed a favored status in the American imagination. “Many Americans relish the idea that they are different from Europeans because the experience of the American frontier and the cowboy rode in it, many Americans promote Fredrick Jackson Turner's version of frontier as a means of defining differences between U.S. and Europe” (Dodwell 9). Probably the best explanation of the cowboy and the attitudes towards him comes from Vanity Fair writer Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens states, “Boiled down the use of the word cowboy expresses a fixed attitude on the part of non Texans about people from Texans” (Dodwell 4).

When Bush evokes the cowboy what kind of cowboy is he referring to? Throughout American history there have been several cowboys, the cattle driver, the sheriff, and the frontiersman. The evoking of the cowboy image by an American President is not by any means a new occurrence. Ronald Reagan was fond of wearing ten gallon hats and saying things like, “Go ahead. Make my day!” (Schneider) Reagan's reference to Dirty Harry is understandable in the respect that Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry was a then modern day cowboy. Dirty Harry cleaned up the city and protected it from petty liberal bureaucrats and thieves. Both Bush and Regan evoked a certain masculine image of the cowboy, an image that is unquestionably a product of cinema. In describing Bush as a cowboy, cultural commentators frequently made allusions to cinema. Peirs Morgan, editor of London's Daily Mirror stated “I think people look at him and think John Wayne. We in Europe like him in cowboy films. We don't like him running the world” (Quoted in Dodwel 7).
I return to Bush’s infamous “dead or alive” statement. The most interesting part of Bush’s statement were not the words “Dead or Alive”, but the words “there's a sign out in the old West” What old west is the President referring to exactly? Is Bush speaking of a photograph that he has pasts upon during his historical research of the old West? Is Bush referring to the old west or, as is the more likely, is he referring to the western? Put simply, Bush is not evoking the history as much as he is evoking the cinematic.

If Bush is evoking a cinematic representation of the Cowboy, then the question becomes: is Bush playing the traditional Western sheriff, or is he playing John Wayne’s interpretation of such a character? Once again the ghost of Tyler Durden appears in the post 9/11 world as the adoption of a seemingly authentic masculinity reveals itself to be simply an illusion. The illusion in this case is the supposed “authenticity” of the cowboy and the President’s evocation of such an authenticity. The paradox in the adoption of the “reel cowboy” is one that has troubled the cowboy image sense the days of John Wayne; The cowboy is the ultimate symbol of traditional, white American masculinity, but as played on screen by actors such as Marion Morrison (aka John Wayne) and Gary Cooper, it is also a manufactured creation, since their struggles are constructed and their masculinities are performed. Presidents and men of power continually wish to evoke the cowboy image; however our most accessible reference points to those images is Hollywood film. The cinematic cowboy seems to occupy a liminal space in the contemporary white masculine experience. The cowboy is authentic masculine icon,
but at the same time our visual references to the cowboy myth are inauthentic constructions of Hollywood.

In a world where the reality of 9/11 is so potent why do we surround ourselves with cinematic cowboys, and mythological superheroes? In a world which claims to value the authentic, why did 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror quickly become so inauthentic? It seems that the reconstruction and experiencing of white masculinity in the post 9/11 world can be characterized as a search for the authentic masculinity, be it the “real men” of the New York Fire Department or the “dignified authenticity” of President Bush. Such authenticity is then either commodified or utilized as political rhetoric for the protection and unification of a traumatized country. Furthermore, such supposedly “authentic” masculinities serve as catalyst around which a certain “national recovery narrative” can be told. This national recovery narrative turned firefighters into mythological superheroes, presidents into cowboys, and the world as a whole into the Wild West. In short, the authentic white masculinity becomes the canvas on which a paradoxically inauthentic narrative of recovery can be told. Therefore the working class white male must be authentic in order that their masculinities can soon be mythologized for such authenticity, and use that mythology to heal the wounded nation.

The Post 9/11 Brotherhood

“I can hear you. I can hear you the rest of the world can hear you and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear from all of us soon.” -President Bush

The image is one of the most enduring of the post 9/11 era. President Bush stands near the center of Ground Zero with his arm wrapped around a firefighter. He is
surrounded by the rubble of the World Trade Center, as well as by an army of
firemen, policemen, and rescue workers. President Bush's words sought to reassure
an anxious public that the country would endure, and that retribution was coming to those
responsible. The moment would be one of the most pivotal of the Bush administration:
“The moment that began completely unscripted and with a malfunctioning blow horn that
the President happened to find at the site ended with chants of USA! USA!USA!
Newsweek's Johnathan Altler instantly identified it as a turning point in history. “That is
the day Bush became president” (Gregg 97). The Ground Zero moment merged the
President's public image with that of the soon to be mythologized New York firefighter.
In addition, many mark this as the moment when the feeling of vulnerability would
become feelings of vengeance. While the President's words that the "terrorists will hear
from all of us soon" directly promised military action, the image of the President standing
on top of the ruble surrounded by rescue workers covered in debris promised
something else, unification. The phallic towers which once represented the power of
American capitalism and superiority were gone, all that was left in their place were
these men. Their collective male bodies and their spirit now must symbolize the
American superiority and power the Trade Center towers once did. Now we are left with
a different image; the image is of a small, but determined collection of working class
authentic males, lead by their dignified, authentic President. By the end of the
President's speech they have reclaimed this ghostly space for America. I would posit that
with this image we see the start of a post 9/11 brotherhood. Forged in the fires of 9/11,
this brotherhood, these new authentic males can adopt and represent different white masculine identities, such as the Christian warrior, the soldier, or the cowboy.

**Unification through Masculinity**

The role of women on 9/11 seems to be absent from the public memory of the event. It must be stated that both the N.Y.P.D. and N.Y.F.D. are historically male institutions, but the heroism of victims such as Captain Kathy Mazza and Police Officer Moira A. Smith was largely overlooked by the media. For the most part, the media concentrated on women who were distraught widows and mothers, thus making the recovery from 9/11 a male affair. If the attack was intended to be a symbolic emasculation of American phallic power then the obvious response would be to project stable familiar masculine images, such as that of the New York Firefighter or the cowboy president. In this respect, the desire to project stable masculine images stems from necessity to create a national consensus in the wake of 9/11.

Writer Daniel Tripp described masculinity as a “consensual hallucination,” and what we call masculinity is an aggregate of a complex web of characteristics, behaviors and traits that we have agreed to read as masculine (186). Such an agreement, however hallucinatory, is a form of consensus, and such consensus is a form of unification. In this respect, what we recognize as masculine is also recognized as both familiar and understandable. In short, the evocation of something society has agreed to read as masculine forms a latent consensus amongst the recipients of the masculine act or image. Therefore, masculinity, in whatever a form it takes, becomes a means of
facilitating stability. In the post 9/11 context, the evoking of a cinematic masculinity becomes a means of visualizing tradition, history, and consensus within a society where each was threatened by the 9/11 attacks.
Chapter 3: Hollywood Goes to War

In the wake of an Independence Day style attack, which caused the superhero firemen led by the John Wayne style president to facilitate his "cowboy diplomacy," it seemed that fiction, specifically action film fictions, were becoming the means by which the world would come to understand 9/11 as well as our responses to it. If Hollywood had shaped the initial reaction to 9/11, the masculine image Hollywood puts forth subsequent to the attack carried even greater importance. In framing its response, Hollywood would turn our collective vulnerabilities into collective victories and turn real life tragedies into hyper-real spectacles.

Hollywood's initial reaction to the attacks was one of denial and censorship. “Immediately after September 11th, several Hollywood films were pulled, edited, or otherwise changed to make them more appropriate for American audiences” (Malin 164). Shots of the Twin Towers were removed from many films as not to remind audiences of the tragedy. Studios were convinced that sensitivity was more appropriate than violent spectacles. Perhaps the 9/11 attacks exposed the Hollywood blockbuster's predilection for violence to be somewhat obscene. This opinion was shared by filmmaker Robert Altman, who went as far as to blame movies for inspiring the attacks. Altman states:

The movies set the pattern, and these people have copied the movies....Nobody would have thought to commit an atrocity like that unless they'd seen it in a movie.... How dare we continue to show this kind of mass destruction on movies? I just believe we created this atmosphere and taught them how to do it. (Quoted. in Bel-Metereau 148)

Whether Hollywood was in anyway responsible or not, the violence of 9/11 could not be
dismissed by the industry “Hollywood was not wrong in thinking we didn't want to see a lot of buildings blowing up (unless it was mythical) or watch cartoon depictions of Arab terrorists. But that didn't mean the audience's appetite for violence and warfare was depleted, as the seers first predicted” (Ansen).

On November 11, 2001 several of Hollywood's most powerful producers met with President Bush's top adviser and strategist, Karl Rove. The group aimed to explore how the entertainment industry can assist the Administration's new War on Terrorism. “Rove informed the Hollywood executives of his goal message that the White House would like to stress that instead of propaganda, the war effort needs a narrative that should be told, said a straight-faced Rove, with accuracy and honesty” (Cooper). Mark Mckinnon, a Bush Strategist, attended the meeting and stressed the importance of content geared toward September 11th and terrorism and of the need to communicate “American values” internationally (Portman).

Just by chance, Hollywood had a fresh crop of war films in the pipeline. This new cycle war films included *Behind Enemy Lines, Windtalkers, Black Hawk Down, Hart's War, We Were Soldiers, Collateral Damage, Sum of all Fears*, and *Tears of the Sun*. Writer Tom Doherty described these films best when stating, that they all “embraced a set of suddenly *au courant* values- a respect for public servants in uniform, a sympathy for military codes of conduct, and a celebration of the virtues forged on the crucible of combat” (4). The first film to test these new post 9/11 cinematic waters was the action film *Behind Enemy Lines*. *Lines* proved to be the
quintessential example of the post 9/11 military Hollywood alliance. Inspired by the real life case of Scott O'Grady whose plane was shot down in Bosnia in 1995, the story of Lines follows a young fighter pilot's attempt to evade capture after a similar attack. The pilots fellow soldiers defy European and NATO leaders to bring “their boy home, and reunite the great military family.” With its unapologetically jingoistic tone, Lines reflected the patriotic fervor of the post 9/11 viewing public. While Lines was conceived with little to no political ambitions, audience reaction to the film could bespeak the initial effects of 9/11 on the depiction of violence in cinema. “When Behind Enemy Lines was test screened on September 6, the response was mediocre recalls John Moore, its young Irish director. When the movie was shown in the wake of the World Trade Center attacks, “the difference was undeliverable. In one month the cards went from 'really enjoyed it' to 'we need films like this one' The response was stunningly different, and we hadn't changed a thing” (Ansen).

The morphing of Lines from a standard Hollywood action film to a patriotic necessity bespeaks a larger paradigm shift. A shift that would turn fighter pilots into international cowboys, and turn soldiers in Somalia into machine-gun-carrying saints. What I suggest is so present in these films is exactly what the studios initially tried so hard to eliminate from their movies. It is something absent from the diagesis of the post 9/11 film, but present in the collective memory of the audience who is watching them. I speak of course of 9/11 and all the issues regarding terrorism, masculinity, nation and vulnerability that surrounded the event. I would suggest that the shadow of 9/11 and the images and discourses surrounding it are present in this new cycle of war films.
Post 9/11 Context

It must be stated that all of these movies were filmed before 9/11 and conceived well before the event. However, production is only one part of the Hollywood machine. All of these films were shot before 9/11, but they were edited afterward, marketed with an eye to the effects of 9/11” (Bell-Metereau 145). Separately, each is simply another entry into the established action film genre. Put into the post 9/11 context, these films become something more; their imagery becomes a reflection of the real world rather than glimpsing into a Hollywood dreamland. Scenes that show the demolition of a skyscraper are no longer empty spectacles, but haunting reminders of actual events. The images of an American soldier under fire in a foreign land seemed less like a historical retrospection and more like a prediction of things to come. “American blockbuster movies laid the groundwork for the public's response to the event as the beginning of a war rather than a terrorist attack” (Bell-Metereau 144). As America increasingly turned to cinema to understand 9/11, I contend in addition to preparing the country for the inevitable War on Terror to come, that these films and their masculinities serve as a diagram for the reunification, reassurance, and remasculation of America post 9/11. “Decades from today, undergraduates hazy about historical dateline will likely read these films not as emanations from the penumbra of y2k, but burst of patriotism ignited by 9/11, expressions of renascent nation ready to kick ass” (Doherty 1). Because these films indeed played into the post 9/11 desire to “kick ass,” I have affectionately named these films “Go Get'em Films.” Within the narrative of the Go
Get'em Film we see a return to the idea of “the good war” and the honorable American soldiers that fight it.

The Hollywood soldier and his indestructible noble masculinity has been a staple of Hollywood for many years. Spawned by the American defeat in the Vietnam war, Hollywood realized a series of films aiming to re-win Vietnam and thus re-masculate the country as a whole. Films such as *Rambo, Commando*, and *Missing in Action* all starred actors who used their hyperbolic hard bodies to visually communicate a sense of white masculine superiority. First coined by writer Susan Jeffords, the 'hard body' hero represented a backlash against the seeming feminization of society, but he also represented a re visioning of the impact of Vietnam on America masculinity from failure to triumph” (Quoted in Gates 301).

The only Go Get'em film to star a hardbody was Andrew Davis's *Collateral Damage* which stared Arnold Schwarzenegger as a firefighter who goes in search of terrorists who killed his family in an attack on American soil. Even though *Damage's* story of a heroic firefighter who takes on Columbian terrorist is in keeping with the current public adoration of New York firefighters, and even though Schwarzenegger has accumulated an impressive action movie resume, the movie failed to perform well at the box office. It seems the post 9/11 desire for the “authentic” male works against the star personas of hyper-macho action figures like Schwarzenegger.

One of the most popular Go Get'em Films is Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down*. A film whose release was moved up in order to capitalize on the emerging patriotic fervor permeating the country. Scott's hyper-violent action war film depicts a near-
disastrous Battle of Mogadishu, in which a unit of Army Rangers must fight off an entire city of Somali gunmen in order to rescue the crews of two downed Black Hawk helicopters. Within *Black Hawk Down* we find what could be the ultimate cinematic meditation on post 9/11 masculinity. Scott's hyper-violent war film bespeaks to issues of nation, unification, and the perpetuation of the post 9/11 brotherhood.

**Saints with Machine Guns**

“We can do something or sit back and watch the country tear itself apart on CNN.”

- Eversmann

Sergeant Eversmann's call to action speaks to *Black Hawk Down*'s function as an imperialist post 9/11 text. Eversmann was not going to sit back and watch this tragedy on television. He was not going to look, but to act. It is within this theme looking and acting, nation and imagination, and between 'us' and 'them', that the role of white masculinity in *Hawk* presents itself. In entering the world of *Black Hawk Down*, we see a land that is wrapped in death. “Dusty, sun-baked and crisp, the cinematography renders Africa as an ungodly, blighted landscape, not so much third world, as Ninth Circle of Hell” (Doherty 6). The opening shot of the film is of the emaciated body of a Somali being prepared for burial. As Black Hawk helicopters roar overhead, our gaze quickly becomes linked to that of an American soldier. From his helicopter he watches as tens of thousands of Somalis fight for bags of rice. The soldier's first response is “My god ...look at them all.” Be it through the medium of television or through first hand experience, we experience Somalia through the sight and voice of the white American male, the voice that would provide moral concern and
whose eyes would provide images that would give him the moral authority to take action. Such constructing of moral authority would come to characterize both the Go Get'em Film as well the War on Terror. Before one shot is fired, and before one American life is lost, the moral dimension of the mission is established. “While the war film of the 1980's offered a right wing revisionism, the new Hollywood war film displaces a deliberation on politics to one on morals” (Gates 302). The concept of the moral righteousness of warfare was shared by director Ridley Scott as well, “the movie talks about things that are really positive. People will take out of it what they want. If this was pre-September 11 maybe they would've taken out 'War is Hell we should never go to war.' But we've learned that we have to be involved. If it's not us, who else is it?” (Quoted in Mathews) In the aftermath of an event like 9/11, audiences were not likely to look up at screens and see a film that critiqued U.S. Military policy. “Hollywood Cinema as Marl Lacy argues, has become 'a space where commonsense ideas about global politics and history are (re) produced and stories about what is acceptable behavior from states and individuals are naturalized and legitimated” (Pepper and McCrisken 188). The moral dimension to Go Get'em films such as Black Hawk Down helped frame any subsequent wars in response to 9/11 as moral ones. Similar to the soldiers in Hawk, America was attacked without provocation and any retaliation to that would be morally justified. The moral imperative of these films humanizes the soldiers and their missions. The soldiers of Black Hawk Down are depicted as saints with machine guns rather than aggressive army rangers. “These films focus on the fact that whether the conflict itself is
right or wrong, the men fighting it are doing so for the right reasons. These are not political wars being presented on the screen, but moral ones” (Gates 301). While the soldiers of Hawk are portrayed in a far more “realistic way,” they still cannot escape the specter of feminization.

The young idealistic Sergent Eversmann, played by Josh Harnett, is seen as slightly feminized. He is high on ideas but low on muscles and experience. “The new Hollywood war film sees a shift away from the revilement of feminized masculinity and offers the idealistic youth as a successful integration of the feminized into masculinity and, as such, represents the ideal hero for the new millennium” (Gates 302). Eversmann and the other men of Black Hawk Down are not the invincible warriors of action film past; they are injured in battle, they are scared by their surroundings, and they openly cry at the loss of a colleague. The excepting of slightly feminine qualities into the hyper-masculine male group of the military further demonstrates the integration of 90's sensitivity into the new post 9/11 man. Like the city leaders and firefighters on 9/11 these men in uniform are in touch with their emotions and are openly allowed to cry.

While Eversmann's sensitive idealism may be seen as feminine, by the film's end, he has come face to face with the realities of warfare. He is successfully integrated into the fraternity of Army rangers. However, Eversmann only truly gains acceptance from his fellow soldiers after killing several Somalians and witnessing the death of his fellow rangers. For Eversmann, the Battle of Mogadishu becomes a violent rite of passage, one that will facilitate his entrance into true manhood.
Africa Incognita

If, in fact, the urban warfare of Somalia offers a chance for the young men to enter real manhood, then in *Black Hawk Down*, Somalia plays the role of a *terra incognita*. In the imperialist context, a *terra incognita* is as an unmapped area, a land that has been uncharted by Western eyes. This mysterious land which plays off the audience's geographical fantasies has been a characteristic of popular imperialism for many years. In this imagined space boys can run wild without ever becoming savage and build the muscles and spirit necessary to serve the empire. In addition to geography, a *terra incognita* can be racially constructed as well. Writer Michael Donaldson in his examination of these geographical fantasies states that “Valorous white Christian masculinity is defined in relation to the threat of the savage privative 'otherness' of non-white savages that surround them. In these adventures stories masculinity and race are mutually constitutive” (Quoted in Breyon 35). Within the context of film, the dominant cinema has always worked as a means of propagating what writers Ella Shohat and Robert Stam termed the Imperialist Imaginary. “Adventure films, and the 'adventure' of going to the cinema, provided a vicarious experience of passionate fraternity, a playing field for self-realization of European masculinity. Just as colonized space was available to the empire, colonialist landscapes were available to imperial cinema” (Shohat and Stam 367).

Africa has stood as the *terra ingognita* for the British imperialist imagination for centuries. “Africa is a very old site for European myths and fantasies for which the north seemed not to have the uncharted space” (Cameron 11). The term *terra incognita*
implies that the land is somehow mysterious and unknown, but the only people to whom
the land is unknown to are the foreigners who comes to occupy it. What makes the land
of Black Hawk Down so menacing is not the violence of the land as much as the
overwhelming sense of otherness. With its urban wasteland setting and raging hordes of
black men, Somalia is imagined as something out of a white American nightmare, rather
than factual reality.

Equally as troubling is Black Hawk Down's racial coding. I now point to one of
the film's most graphic sequences. The scene seems to be modeled after a zombie horror
flick. In the midst of one of Black Hawk's hyper-real shootouts, another Black Hawk
helicopter is shot down and is quickly surrounded by a group of angry Somalis. The
pilot then takes out his machine gun and opens fire on the crowd surrounding him.
Once he is out of bullets, he takes out a photo of his family and holds it in his
hands, as the mob quickly enters and begins to tear the pilot apart. This sequence in
which the dark hands of the Somalis rip apart a white body is one of the
film's most regressive and further demonstrates the primitive “otherness” of the Somalis.
As Elvis Mitchell concluded in the New York Times: “the lack of characterization
converts the Somalis into a pack of snarling dark-skinned beasts, gleefully pulling the
Americans from a downed aircraft and stripping them. Intended or not, it reeks of glumly
staged racism” (quoted in Pepper and McCrisken 197). As the downed helicopter pilot
fires away at the dark bodies surrounding him, one cannot help but be reminded of films
like Night of the Living Dead, Aliens, and other siege movies in which one man must
fend off a horde of monsters. “The Somalis are portrayed as a marauding mass of ill-disciplined, bloodthirsty madmen, reviving stereotypical 'Africans' as savages to be either controlled or exterminated” (Pepper and McCrisken 196).

If, in fact, the rangers are there to protect the lives of the Somalis, then why does the film repeatedly show sequences (like the aforementioned helicopter scene) in which they are exterminated in mass? I would contend that in Black Hawk Down Africa does not exist. Africa is imagined as what post 9/11 America needs it to be in order to remasculate itself. The landscape is imagined as a place of violence and disorder, thus giving the post 9/11 man the moral justification needed to exercise his 'Noble Imperialism'; an imperialism necessary to facilitate their entrance into true manhood. As Shohat and Stam have noted, “[p]rogrammatically negative portrayals helped rationalize the human costs of the imperial enterprise” (393). In short, in the imperialist paradigm of Hawk, Somalia exists as a space by which America can exercise physical and moral superiority over its indigenous people. Whether it is the Bosnian wilderness of Behind Enemy Lines or the jungles of the Congo in another Go Get'em Film, Antoine Fuqua's Tears of the Sun, white American heroes often reshape the “third world” to be a training ground for remasculcation. These foreign spaces become a playground of sorts in which all the deficits of the male body and spirit are corrected. Ideally, what will emerge is a body fit to serve the post 9/11 “American Empire.” If, in fact, Somalia does not exist and is simply just a projection of the West, then what function do its native people serve?

Abstracted Africa

Despite the overwhelmingly high body count in the film, I would posit that the
purpose of the Somali in *Hawk* is not simply to die, but to provide the Rangers with the moral authority to carry out their mission. The image I now refer to is one of the film's most enduring. After escaping the violence of the first Black Hawk crash site, Eversmann and the last remaining rangers begin a slow motion sprint down a deserted Somali street at dusk. A small group of waving Somali children soon accompanies the men. As the Rangers emerge from the smoke filled horizon, they are surrounded by a different horde of Somalis; this one is filled with smiling faces and cheers. The men are welcomed back by a mass of native people who seem to be grateful for their hard won fight, the image also informs the audience that the Rangers have finally left the hostile terrain of the city and have arrived on a terrain of safety. Despite the loss of life in the previous battle, the image of the children's faces indicates to the audience that for the Rangers the battle was worth fighting, simply for the sake of those children. However, this image is still a troubling one. As the Rangers begin their slow motion sprint to safety, the audience’s perspective is not that of the Somali children looking at the heavily armed foreigners, but that of the rangers looking at the Somali children, who eagerly guide the audience and the soldiers to the safety of the American occupied territory. As with the opening of the film, the American gaze is also a moral one. The image of the friendly mass of Somali children serves to validate the morality of the American soldiers, even if their battle was ultimately a defeat. *Hawk*'s continual depiction the Somali people in massive crowds robs them of any sense of individuality. The scene in which the soldiers have moved from one Somali mass shooting bullets, to
another Somali mass shouting cheers, indicates that the Somali people have no true identity, autonomy, or stake in this story. It seems that the purpose of the African in this story is to appear and not to act. They are not individuals, but abstracted symbols. In this respect, the Somalis are just as much an abstract creation of the imperial imagination as the terra incognita they occupy, because, the imperialist imaginary visualizes them only at the price of abstraction. Although the Somali people are visible in virtually every sequence of the film, and therefore exist within the image, they are frequently pushed to its periphery. The Somalis can appear in the story, but they cannot drive it. While there are several visuals of the anonymous Somali horde, *Hawk* contains little to no Somali voices. It seems that the same white imagination that can show African faces fails to give them a voice. The few Somalis that speak do so in the form of ominous warnings directed at the American Military. In one sequence, a Somali soldier informs a captured ranger of the futility of America's mission:

“You have the power to kill, but not to negotiate. In Somalia killing is negotiation. You think even if you capture the general, we will just put down our weapons and accept your American democracy….there will always be killing. This is how things are in our world.”

The Somali’s assertion that killing is a natural part of African life simply enforces the same imperialist perceptions of Africa being a dangerous continent in need of civilizing. However, while there might be some truth to the Somali’s words, the representational deck has already been stacked against him. The films has spent two hours establishing the moral justification of the American's mission, and the primitive barbarity of the Somali's actions. Therefore, the soldier's warning sounds like the words
of a madman justifying murder, rather than a soldier defending his country. It becomes almost incidental whether or not the Somalis have any individuality or humanity.

Ultimately the rangers of *Hawk* are not there for Somalian humanity, but to validate their own. Their narrative function is to be the recipient of Americas soldiers' charity or hostility. Without them, the American soldiers have nothing to exercise their power against.

**Cyborg Warriors in Somalia**

In addition to being viewed as a faceless horde, the integration of advanced military technology allows us to eliminate the humanity from the enemy altogether.

“Viewed from on high via real time video transmission, the African hordes circling around the American and lurking around every corner evoke nothing so much as a swarming aliens in the series originated by Scott”(Doherty 6). In one nighttime sequence an army helicopter is able to triumphantly obliterate an entire rooftop full of machine gun carrying Somalis purely through the use of night vision technology. Scott's camera even gives us a shot from the night vision's point of view which identifies the Somalis by their heat signature. This technological gaze of the helicopter further abstracts the Somalis, turning them into tactical entities resembling insects rather than people, this gaze further distances the audience from the Somali natives and turns their destruction into something out of a hi-tech video game.

The most conspicuous difference between the post 9/11 soldier and his cinematic forefathers is the merging of state of the art technology with the very body of the soldier. White male action heroes have traditionally been opposed to the use of sophisticated
technology. John Wayne could have taken the train, but he rode a horse instead. Rambo could have used a tank, but in the end he chose a bow and arrow. In other words, it has been a long held convention of the action genre that in order to win "the savage war" the male hero must recede to an almost primitive state, a state in which all the comforts of technology are cast off, and body itself becomes the most dangerous weapon of all. A real man is supposed to be able to fight with his bare hands, and he is supposed to be able to do it alone. Because instruments of technology are designed to alleviate human stress and augment human efficiency, the use of technology might imply some intellectual or physical deficit on the part of the man who uses it. No such anxiety exists with the post 9/11 cinematic soldier. The heroes of Hawk and most other Go Get'em films integrate everything from night vision goggles, cellular technology, and satellite technology, to body armor on to their person. One could view the technological superior cyborg body as the ultimate manifestation of Hawk's imperialist masculinity. The use of GPS technology allows one's very perceptions of space and location to be reshaped to fit the tactical needs of the army rangers. The film's night vision technology and the helicopter are most essential. Their combined use allows the soldier to be literally both above their enemy and see through the enemy as well. In addition to state of the art technology, the superior body armor of the rangers gives them a significant advantage over their foes. The Kevlar covered bodies of the rangers allows the men to take multiple hits from the inferior weaponry of the natives without sustaining serious injury. Paradoxically, the adoption of this technology communicates a sense of American power and
superiority, but at the same time informs us that the white male body is not inherently superior, but human and vulnerable. Gone now are the hardbodies of action film past, replaced instead with a the new post 9/11 “authentic masculinity,” one which is physically vulnerable, but morally and technologically superior. In the end, we get a civilian militia dependent on a tom-tom network of cell phones, outfitted in shirtsleeves and armed with RPG's fighting tenaciously against the hi-tech, well protected Rangers and Delta boys, encased in body armor, night vision goggles and headsets (Doherty 6). In Hawk the Americans may sustain some losses but ultimately the Somalis never had a chance.

The Go Get'em Film gives us a cyborg warrior, one who can embrace both the post 9/11 male sensitivity and as 21 century technology. One's bodily imperfections are embraced in order to be corrected. However, the integration of technology further creates a sense of uniformity amongst the soldiers. As writer Tom Doherty muses “no wonder the cyborg-like American warrior seems only more individualized than the native cannon fodder”(Dohery 6).

Brotherhood of Blood

“They won't understand that it's about the men next to you, and that's it. That's all it is. In battle it's all about the man next to you.”-Hoot,

I have already suggested that the remasculation of America Post 9/11 would be facilitated through the actions of an army of “authentic” white males. Rangers and Commandos who dive out of Black Hawk helicopters, as so many film reviewers
noticed, are not stand alone Rambo types of a previous generation. As writer David Elliott noted, “They tend to seem more collective” (Quoted Anderson 217). This puts Hoot's words in a rather ironic light. If service to the brotherhood is truly not service to yourself or even to your country, but really about the man next to you, then the men of Hawk are themselves just another horde; a horde of wounded cyborg imperialists. However, their abstraction is one of choice, it is a voluntary surrendering of individuality for the sake of the "greater good.” Their individualism is secondary to the necessity for unification and remasculcation post 9/11. “Black Hawk Rangers and Delta Force Commandos work as a team to do 'what a man's gotta do'. In this war narrative, the myth of the masculine is fulfilled through acts of collective bravery and teamwork, not acts of individual heroism” (Anderson 217). Each member of the brotherhood knows he could die in battle, but dying for a higher cause is in keeping with the post 9/11 fixation on moral superiority. It is within such a context of death that the post 9/11 brotherhood can show emotion: “The emotions and characteristics associated with the feminine are displaced into masculine characters. They express their love and tenderness, but only within the context of death” (Bell Metereau 152). The loyalty and preoccupation the soldiers of Hawk have towards their dead resembles something out of an ancient war ritual. “The Army Rangers protect the tomb that is the first Black Hawk crash as sacred ground....To protect from violation and retrieve the corpse of a fallen comrade at the risk of life is noble, not foolish 'Leave no man behind' is the above-the-title-tag line for Black Hawk Down”(Doherty 8). Black Hawk Down is less about the success of our military might than the courage and loyalty of G.I.'s under pressure. “Eighteen men died
in the Battle of Mogadishu, most of them while trying to protect the bodies of the fallen comrades. It's a kind of fraternal allegiance we got to know intimately from the examples of the firefighters and police at ground zero” (Mathews). The one commonality between the 9/11 firefighters and their cinematic counterparts is the one thing that binds both brotherhoods together: death. Their lives are unified because of the loss of life. However, while these men may appear shaken and worn from their long battle, one must not mistake this as a cinematic outcry against war. It is actually quite the contrary. “The pagan oaths and blood rituals in [these] films preach the gospel of the oldest war story, ...far nobler than the candy-ass home front, a celestial arena for true glory and mystical brotherhood” (Doherty 8).

Ultimately, the Go Get'em film continues Hollywood's battle with America's often inconvenient history. From a crushing defeat, the Battle of Mogadishu is turned into a video game in which America emerges victorious. As Sue Willaims says, Hawk becomes “an astonishing glorification of slaughter that makes tragedy look like a majestic triumph for the brotherhood of man” (Quoted in Gates 306). Black Hawk Down ends, with an image found in many of the Go Get'em films. It is an image found at the end of Behind Enemy Lines, We Were Soldiers, and Tears of the Sun. It is the image of the survivors; a group of uniformed soldiers emerging from the smoky aftermath of some great battle, they are tired and wounded, but still they stand. Around them is smoke, chaos and debris, but their bodies stand tall and uniformed. In these images, we see the echo of President Bush's Ground Zero moment and the days that first spawned the
post 9/11 man. These are not hardbodies, but wounded ones; they are not individuals as much as part of a collective whole. Most importantly, their mission was a moral one, and not political. The boys who entered have emerged triumphant and white masculinity has emerged triumphant.

After all the bullets have been fired and all the blood had dried, after both reality and fiction have been blurred, an unanswered question remains. Is the post 9/11 man the first truly "authentic man" or like Tyler Durden is he just another product of the endless pursuit of it?
Conclusion: The Last Laugh

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to explore the relationship certain action films have had in the construction, reflection, and subversion of cultural attitudes regarding 'the masculine'. While the relationships between men, their masculinities, and their cinematic incarnations must be more extensively investigated, I feel the films I have chosen reflect a unique turning point in the way we view cinema and masculinity in this country. My hope is that this research will add to the preexisting knowledge of how masculinity is being experienced in the new century. Though ostensibly concerned with masculinity, I have come to realize that this thesis is about fantasy. For most of the time, the line between the real and the fantastic is a distinct one. However, throughout my research fantasy is repeatedly evoked as a means of establishing superiority, unity, and identity.

I have used David Fincher's *Fight Club* as the foundation for my thesis, as I feel its narrative speaks to contemporary issues regarding masculinity, but also illustrates the blurring of reality and fantasy. I have posited that the film is indeed a schizophrenic text. A text that at first illustrates white masculine fears, and then, through the eyes of its mentally disturbed protagonist, proceeds to ridicule the legitimacy of those fears. *Fight Club* sees white masculine crisis as a self imposed exercise in mental destruction. Within my discussion of *Fight Club* I have attempted to ground the various issues surrounding authenticity. I have suggested that experiencing of one's own masculinity is characterized by the search for its most authentic incarnation. Through an examination of
Fight Club's monstrous bodies. I have suggested that what is designated as authentic operates in a dialectical relationship with that which is perceived to be inauthentic, thus making the two mutuality dependent on each other. In further unraveling Fight Club's twisted narrative I have suggested the creation of a gender marketplace where men can exchange certain authentic masculinities. In many ways Fight Club's narrative acts as both a precursor and rebuttal to post 9/11 masculinity. The masculine crisis presented in Fight Club in ripe to be filled by post 9/11 masculinity.

In the wake of 9/11, the 'great war' that the men of Fight Club yearned for had finally arrived. Club's Project Mayhem carried out acts of terrorism all over the country. In keeping with Club's theme of masochism, this terrorism was self imposed and finally self destructive. The film's characters destroyed their bodies, businesses, and ultimately their identities in order to experience their own authentic masculinities. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, violence itself had to be qualified. After the destruction of the Twin Towers, action films had to have a purpose for showing their destructive spectacles. Post 9/11 violence would be exported outward, instead of directed inward. The object of our violence would not be our own bodies, but the people of the terra incognita which emasculated us. In the case of the fictional Fight Club and the reaction to the very real 9/11, the acquiring and projecting of an “authentic” masculinity seemed to be the a solution to the threat of emasculation.

In the wake of 9/11, white masculinity turned to its own “representational ancestry” for guidance and understanding. However, the results of this 'gendered nostalgia' were in themselves problematic. As I have examined in this thesis, the evoking
of cinema simply complicates the very identities it is supposed to clarify. Much like the protagonists of *Fight Club*, the turning firemen into superheroes and presidents into cowboys, we continue our own schizophrenic fever dream; one that calls John Wayne a real man, one that turns the American defeat in Mogadishu into a triumphant victory, and turns the greatest terrorist attack in human history into another movie.

I have posited that masculinity is experienced by the search for and defense of such a masculinity, the search for the authentic self that exists outside a commodified marketplace. However, as I have suggested throughout my thesis, that very authenticity is that same marketplace's most valuable commodity. Be it the underground franchising of Tyler's identity in *Fight Club* or the marketing of the authentic masculinity of the New York Firefighter post 9/11, white masculinities that are designated as authentic quickly become assimilated into the same market that their very existence was supposed to work against. The desire to search out authenticity may in fact be a desire to finally escape the fantasy of masculinity. Within authenticity there seems to be some truth, an inner peace that does not exist in the paranoid, conflicted, self destructive performance of the masculine.

The last laugh may be had by Tyler Durden and his fellow space monkeys. The hypothetical gender marketplace that *Fight Club* satirized became real, as the supposedly authentic masculinities of the New York Firefighter became commodified toys, fashion trends, and comic books. The bloody masochistic fraternity of *Fight Club* became the post 9/11 brotherhood that would re-masculinate the country through their authenticity.
Finally, *Fight Club’s* satiric search for authentic masculinity became manifested in a cowboy president, whose 'dignified authenticity' was just as hallucinatory as Tyler Durden’s. When America no longer insists on putting forth narrow and hegemonic definitions of the masculine, when we stop crying out for the authentic and continue the embrace of its commodified opposite, when we cease to confuse American history with American mythology, is when we will finally wake up from our own schizophrenic fever dream.
Bibliography


Bociurkiw, Marosya. "Homeland (In) Security: Roots And Displacement, from New York, to Toronto, to Salt Lake City."

http://reconstruction.eserver.org/033/bociurkiw.htm


<http://www.nationalreview.com/buckley/buckley012403.asp>


  http://www.godspy.com/reviews/TheFiremenandtheMeaningofMasculinity.cfm


McCrisken, Trevor, and Andrew Pepper. American History and Contemporary


  27 Nov. 2001.


QuenQua, Douglas. “Public Image- W's Ranch Spurs Homely Fell to President's Image.”

Robinson, Sally. "Emotional Constipation and the Power of Dammed Masculinity:
  Deliverence and the Paradoxes of Male Liberation." Masculinity: Bodies,


Scott, Cord. "White in Red, White, and Blue: A Comparison of Comic Book Propaganda
  from World War II and September 11th." The Journal of Popular Culture 40.2

