


THE GENDER AND MEDIA READER

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to reality television, Andrijevic argues that aura has now been displaced onto the apparatus itself.

3. Economically, this shift in programming has certainly favoured the industry. Reality television is partially the result of the dual trends of corporate media consolidation since the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and increasing globalization of media markets. With these trends there is a consequent reluctance on the part of networks and media conglomerates to make large investments in media content. Reality television's reduced need for acting, writing, directing and producing talent fits the bill. As Mark Andrijevic (2003) has pointed out, everyday people are willing to do the work of being watched and developers of television content have been only too happy to exploit this willingness. With a compelling concept, ratings hits can be cobbled together requiring a minimum of overhead costs, resulting in a maximization of profits for media corporations.
4. All examples and text from *The Sworn and Extreme Makeover* are from episodes airing on Fox and ABC, respectively, in the fall of 2004.

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35.

FISTS OF FURY

Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Martial Arts Cinema

Yvonne Tasker

It was undeniably the figure of Bruce Lee who popularized martial arts movies with Western audiences of the 1970s, even before his untimely death made him the stuff of legend. As well as being the first Chinese actor to become a major star in the West, Lee played a significant role in the redefinition of both the Hong Kong and the American action cinema. The martial arts cinema, itself part of the broader action traditions of a popular cinema that is defined by physicality and spectacle, encompasses a vast range of forms and subgenres: Chinese and American martial arts films, from both the 1970s and the present day, offer a fertile ground for an investigation of the play of sexualized racial discourses within the popular cinema.¹ In the pages that follow the operation of these discourses are discussed primarily in relation to the dominating figure of Bruce Lee, but also with reference to the work of recent Western martial arts stars, and the kung fu comedy associated with Jackie Chan. If these traditions have received little sustained critical attention, perhaps this is because critics tend to dismiss the products of the popular cinema as mindless, objecting to the visceral pleasures of physicality that are on offer. This lack of attention, however, will come as no surprise when we consider the marginal audiences with which the films are popular in the West, as well as the relative invisibility of Asian film culture.²

The typical action narrative operates around an axis of power and powerlessness, which is complexly articulated through the discourses of race, class and sexuality that constitute the body of the hero. Themes of activity and passivity are central to all these dis-

courses, as well as to the construction of the action hero. While the hero is, by definition, an active figure, he is also frequently rendered passive, subject to a range of restraints and oppressive forces. The hero is also defined in part by his suffering, which both lends him a certain tragic status, and demonstrates his remarkable ability to endure. The trajectory of tragic suffering is at its most extreme when enacted through the figure of the white male hero of recent Western action movies. While the black protagonists of these films, who usually act as partners to the white hero, are often damaged in some way, this seems to render them symbolically safe. By way of contrast, these same Western movies seem to need obsessively to cut up and punish the body of the white male hero, a body that they not coincidentally, also offer up as sexual spectacle. In *Cyborg* (1989) the hero, played by Jean-Claude Van Damme, is described as a "walking wound." This phrase comes close to encapsulating the role of the white male hero in the contemporary action movie. He is both massively damaged and yet still functioning. It also indicates the potential purchase of a psychoanalytic discourse in understanding the complex ways in which figures of power and powerlessness are written over the body of a hero who is represented as both invincible and castrated.

"Race," Masculinity, and the Action Tradition

In the action cinemas of both Hong Kong and America, the body of the hero or heroine is their ultimate, and often their only, weapon. A point of distinction

between the two traditions lies in the way the Chinese hero often fights for and as part of a community, while within the American tradition the hero has become an increasingly isolated figure.³ Both, however, tend to find themselves confronting a political system that is almost entirely corrupt, a villain who is the complete personification of evil. In Hong Kong films the use of the colonial past as a setting provides a specific populist point of reference. While some films are set in an unspecified or mythological past, the invocation of Japanese, Russian or British forces allows for a more historically and culturally located narrative threat.⁴ While Western films often tend toward the articulation of narratives centered on class conflict within a context of supposed racial harmony—the interracial male buddies—Hong Kong films are more likely to enact conflict in terms of the figures of colonial oppression, in which the enemy represents a threat from outside. The context of the anticolonial narrative is crucial for thinking about the racial discourses of masculine identity that are worked through in the Hong Kong martial arts cinema. As is evidenced most clearly in Bruce Lee's internationally successful films, the martial arts film of the 1970s deployed a discourse of macho Chinese nationalism that proved popular with a range of audiences. While the assertion of a powerful Chinese hero has an obvious appeal for Asian audiences, both in Asia and America, martial arts films were also hugely popular with black and white working-class audiences in the United States and in Europe during the 1970s. Such popularity can obviously be understood in terms of the production of fantasies of physical empowerment. These fantasies respond to the *constitution of the body through limits*.⁵

The redefinition of the swordplay film into the martial arts format familiar from the 1970s involved the increasing centrality of the fight, and hence the body, as a set piece. The action shifted to settings such as the martial arts school or the tournament, providing a showcase for the skills of the various performers.⁶

A typical scenario consists of the fighting schools, in which the hero or heroine, who may be single or plural, fights to defend the honor of their school and the particular style of fighting associated with it against the incursion of a corrupt school, often associated with the Japanese.⁷ In *The Chinese Boxer* a rogue Chinese who has been thrown out of the town some

years before returns, bringing with him three Japanese karate experts who defeat the good school and take over the town. Only Wang Yu's character survives to take on and defeat these corrupt forces. In the film's final sequence, Wang Yu triumphs over the karate experts despite the machinations of their treacherous Chinese go-between, who has hidden himself under the snow. Within the anticolonial narrative of revenge, the collaborator is an ambiguous enemy. The figure of the traitorous intermediary, who in *The Chinese Boxer* is also a rapist, is interestingly written through sexual imagery in Bruce Lee's *Way of the Dragon* (U.S.: *Return of the Dragon*). A gender dysfunction of some kind comes to define the threat represented by this figure.

Way of the Dragon is set in contemporary Rome, a re-location that does not significantly alter the basic formulation of a Chinese community, here the owners and workers of a restaurant, under threat from an archetypal white capitalist with an army of hired thugs. The European location does allow for an explicit address to issues of Westernization, largely expressed through discourses of sexuality. The treacherous Chinese go-between is styled as a camp gay man who, dressed in outrageously bright Western clothes, minces about the restaurant cooing over Bruce Lee's muscles. Interestingly, he is one of the first characters in the film to realize what Bruce Lee's body is for, commenting on its hardness. As in his other movies, Lee's character holds back from fighting for some time and the film teases the audience as to when Lee will "reveal" himself, a double moment in which he both reveals his body, removing his jacket, and his "hidden" strength. The go-between functions not only as a passive figure against which the tough masculinity of Lee's character can be defined, but is also figured here in terms of a specifically (homo)sexual threat associated with Europe. The sexual naïveté of Lee's character, Tang Lung, is indicated through his encounter with a European prostitute who takes him back to her apartment. He happily works out in front of a mirror but is horrified when she appears before him naked, running away in panic. Lee's absorption in his own image here is played off against those characters who have sexual designs on his body.

Set in Shanghai's international settlement, *Fist of Fury* (U.S.: *The Chinese Connection*) portrays the struggles of a Chinese school who are powerless against

the political power of the Japanese school. A famous image from the film has Bruce Lee as Chen desecrating a park sign saying "No Dogs and Chinese." This moment specifically enacts a fantasy that involves the refusal of physical limits. The film militantly champions a muscular Chinese national identity, despite the strictures of the law and against the insults of the Japanese. The go-between in this film acts as a translator for the Japanese—mediating between both language and culture. Disrupting a memorial service for their teacher, the go-between brings the Chinese to a challenge, contemptuously referring to them as the "Sick Man of Asia." A close-up shows Chen's fist tightening, with the accompanying soundtrack amplifying and intensifying this physical expression of anger. Finally eschewing his promised restraint, Chen goes to the Japanese, defeating them all and declaring "we are not sick men." This assertion of nationalism is very clearly inscribed through the revelation of Lee's body—as he ritualistically removes his jacket—so that discourses of masculinity and nationhood are completely bound up together in his star image. It is Lee's body that marks the assertion of a masculine national identity.

The American action cinema is more visibly concerned than other Hollywood forms with discourses of racial difference and masculinity. In a genre defined so much by physically black and Asian performers have had more opportunities to take on major roles. The spaces offered by such roles inevitably reinscribe stereotypical definitions of the physical, often further positioning black and Asian characters within a fantasized marginal space of criminality or deviance. Yet the martial arts film is also a genre in which racially overdetermined bodies, spaces for the projection of a range of fantasies, come into intimate physical contact. To this extent, racial difference functions partly within the films as a term that can deflect anxieties around their implicit homoeroticism. A violent physical confrontation, usually between men, forms the climax of the martial arts movie, which can be seen in terms of the staging or the performance of competing masculinities. In the memorable final fight from *Way of the Dragon*, Bruce Lee takes on karate champion Chuck Norris against the setting of Rome's Coliseum, a location that indicates the grandeur or at least the proportions of the occasion. The film offers compet-

ing masculinities and male bodies as a way of speaking about colonial conflict. Ritual images of limbering up, or extended training sequences, as well as the fights themselves, offer the male body as a sexualized spectacle, a spectacle that is inevitably overlaid with the complex meanings of the racially defined body.

The language and images through which the figure of the hero is articulated pose questions of gendered identity in terms of visual and verbal metaphors of hardness and softness. The hero's masculine identity is constructed as hardness. Using a range of methods to fight their opponents, the hero must avoid letting any stray kick or punch through his/her defense, so that the body functions as a sort of armor.⁸ In *The Chinese Boxer* Wang Yu must make his hands *like iron*. The film's training sequences detail his disciplined struggle to become invincible, with images of him hardening his hands by placing them in a vat of heated iron filings, running and jumping with iron rods attached to his legs. These images provide a clear since amplified instance of the process by which a gendered identity is constituted through the necessary act of imagining, as well as resisting, bodily boundaries. We identify with a masculine identity that is constituted before our eyes, enacted through these narrative images of physical hardening. Judith Butler takes up this point when she suggests that "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated." Butler sees the body as "a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality," but the purchase of her analysis can also be extended in order to think about the racial constitution of the body (*Gender Trouble* 130). The symbolic centrality of a rhetoric of hardness in the martial arts films finds its parallel in those visual metaphors that express a fear of penetration, or of the softness that would allow it. As we'll see in the case of Bruce Lee, these fears are in part routed through the history of representation in which Chinese men and women have been constructed by the West as "soft."

A metaphorical language of gender that is intimately entwined with issues of place and status, is in operation in the fight film generally. For Western movies of recent years, a fear of softness is more directly connected to the deployment of a sexual, usually homoerotic, imagery of bodily penetration. The terrain of the action

cinema is haunted by questions of masculine identity that are in turn bound up with complex configurations of power and authority. As I've already implied, these ideological figures must be considered not only as they operate textually, but in terms of the audiences' relationship of identification to the figure of the hero. At the most obvious level, the figure of the graceful and ultimately triumphant martial arts hero offers a more perfect figure of identification for both male and female audiences, and in this sense our relationship to the image is one of primary narcissism.⁹ The hero performs astounding physical feats with which we can identify—a process in which identity is *constituted through an identification* with the performance of the body. The notorious soundtrack of grunts that accompanies martial arts films forms part of the sensuous assertion of a physicality that transgresses limits. Our relationship as an audience to the adventures portrayed is also mediated through an identification with the Oedipal figure of the hero who struggles, who rebels against, but is subject to, the structures of the social world.

Martial arts films combine sets of images that define the body in terms of aggression and sensuousness. It is no accident that, given a particular understanding of masculinity, Western censors have read the films as primarily having to do with aggression. The sensuousness of movement is effaced, leaving only the violence of the body a violence that is then projected onto a pathologized marginal audience. Yet if we reinstate the eroticized aspects of the graceful movement played out in these films, it also becomes apparent that the martial arts film has evolved as a cinematic form that allows men to look at men. In this the films legitimate a taboo look. More than this, they allow an identification with a male figure who other men will look at and who will enjoy being the object of that admiring gaze. In understanding this, the juxtaposition of martial arts and dance is a useful one. In Western culture, dance is constructed in opposition to fighting. It is also linked to the feminine, and often explicitly to images of male homosexuality. It is important to note though that this does not mean the feminization of the male dancer, a formulation that operates within a simple gender binary. Rather, dance offers the possibility of occupying a feminine position that involves, as with the martial arts film, an explicit location of the male body on display.

While Freud's theorized relationship between primary narcissism and homosexual desire (love of the self and the same) has proved problematic, I want to invoke this relationship here as one possible way of talking about the "regressive" pleasures of the fight films. To some extent psychoanalysis functions to provide a framework within which terms such as "regressive" and "childish" do not carry the pejorative connotations that they do in everyday speech. Clearly regressive or childish pleasures are in operation through our identification with the hero as a more complete figure who triumphs over adversity. This fantasy of empowerment emerges from and speaks to those who, like children, find themselves in a position of powerlessness. In particular, an identification with the physical aspects of the hero's triumph is crucial—offering a very different set of pleasures to an intellectual identification. The regression to stake in the films can be seen as a resistance to (becoming) the father; a resistance that is radically different but nonetheless present in both the Chinese comedy films and the more earnest, or anxious, products associated with Bruce Lee and with more recent white stars. This resistance relates to the hero's location within a fantasy of omnipotence that is to some extent "outside" the institutions that repress power.

In the revenge narratives around which many martial arts films are structured, the fight has an immense importance. The "shift of the narrative discourse to violence," suggests Chiao Hsiung-Ping, "allows such a particularly intense and coherent statement of conflicts that the fight scenes become the real force carrying the narrative flow" ("Bruce Lee" 35). This understanding is echoed by Stuart Kaminsky who finds a Western point of reference for the films in the Hollywood musical, which has dance as its physical center expressed in the set-piece musical number (see Kaminsky). Chiao Hsiung-Ping also links the figure of dance to images of physicality and the success of the martial arts films rather more effectively through an image from another hit film of the 1970s, *Saturday Night Fever*. We see the near-naked hero, Tony Manero (John Travolta) alone in his bedroom. On the wall are images of Sylvester Stallone (as Rocky) and Bruce Lee. All three men are figures who have achieved or seek to achieve success through their physicality—dance, boxing, kung fu—escaping the marginal

spaces in which they find themselves through their achievements. The bodies of these working-class, marginalized men, which are their only resource, are turned through these forms into a spectacular site of pleasure rather than labor. Such images offer a physical constitution of identity that attempts to escape the policing to which the body is subject. The emphasis on physicality then, allows the audience to identify with the construction of an oppositional identity sited on the body. This is pleasurable partly because the body is constituted through oppressive physical limitations.

Whilst Chiao's analysis was written retrospectively, critics at the time were not slow to posit links between the Western success of the martial arts films and a "ghetto myth" through which dispossessed groups might identify with the hero's struggle to overcome. B. P. Flanagan's speculation on the success of the films is representative, asserting how it is "obvious" that "people who represent the most oppressed segment of a society would obtain great satisfaction, indeed enjoyment, in watching an antagonist be literally destroyed by the kung fu hero" (10). These equations—between audience and hero—are often rather schematic. The reference to the success of martial arts films with a black urban audience in the United States seems to represent an end point. The lack of further critical work suggests perhaps that the *process of accounting* is all a process not unlike those regulatory processes of classification familiar from other spheres. An "obvious" explanation can ultimately operate to confirm the marginalized audience in their marginal place, since explaining the appeal of the films somehow exhausts them. Is this because the films, like their audiences, are assumed to be "simple"? By contrast, Chiao's analysis begins to unravel the complex articulation of race, class, and sexuality that is elaborated in the differing Chinese and American reception of these films, as well as within the revenge narratives of the films themselves.

While I am wary of generalization in relation to an area so often characterized precisely as "simple," I wish to risk one at this stage. This is to suggest that while both Hong Kong and American martial arts films are staging fantasies, the primary focus in each tradition is different. Within the Hong Kong cinema the films can be seen as primarily working through fantasies of empowerment that emphasize social relations.

By contrast, the Americanized version of the martial arts format has increasingly become used as a space within which to stage homoerotic fantasies, primarily working through issues and anxieties around white male sexuality. Now it is nonetheless the case that both traditions employ a gendered rhetoric through which they articulate their narratives of revenge and struggle.¹⁰

Bruce Lee and the Remasculinization of the Chinese Body

"Remasculinization" may be a problematic notion within discourses about race and sexuality, potentially implying a return to a mythical gender stability, yet it nonetheless provides a way of situating a discussion of the central figure of Bruce Lee.¹¹ The significance of Lee's Western success lies partly in his articulation of a tough masculinity within nationalistic films that can be read against a history of "feminizing" Western representations of Chinese men. The significance of this shift becomes even more apparent when we consider the one Western vehicle in which Lee starred, *Enter the Dragon*, a film that gives him an asexual persona and that seeks to rewrite his image into that of a representative of colonial authority. Before moving on to a discussion of Lee's films in this context, I want to make a brief digression into literature. In her novel of Chinese-American womanhood, *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston writes fantasies of omnipotence precisely in terms of shifting gendered identities. Thus her narrator tells us "[W]hen we Chinese girls listened to the adults talking-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen." She speculates on whether women "were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound" (*Woman Warrior* 25). The polarized terms, of bondage and of the swordswoman's raging freedom, are initially assigned a sex and a gender—female/feminine and male/masculine—from which the text seeks to break free. Kingston uses another opposition—that between China and America—in order to partly deconstruct this gendered binary. Her various narrators are, for much of the text, caught between the two. Kingston's writing invokes a variety of cross-cultural perspectives within an American context, in which China is

read, through Orientalist discourses, as a mystical/feminine space.

Kingston's second book, *China Men*, opens with a short fragment, "On, discovery," which describes Tang Ao's journey to America, the "land of women." He is captured by women who remove his armor and slowly painfully "feminize" him. He is made up, his ears are pierced and his feet bound until, when he is serving food at court, we are told that his "hips swayed and his shoulders swiveled because of his shaped feet." He has become a beautiful and painful spectacle: "She's pretty, don't you agree?" the diners said, smacking their lips at his dainty feet as he bent to put dishes before them" (*China Men* 10). In this fragment and in the different narratives that follow, King-Kok Cheung sees both the book and its hostile critical reception from Asian critics as revealing "not only the similarities between Chinese men's and Chinese women's suffering but also the correlation between these men's umbrage at racism and their misogynist behaviour" (240). In this she points to the impossibility of tackling questions of gender "in the Chinese American cultural terrain without delving into the historically enforced 'feminization' of Chinese American men, without confronting the dialectics of racial stereotypes and nationalist reactions or above all, without wrestling with die-hard notions of masculinity and femininity in both Asian and Western cultures" (234). This perception is crucial in enabling King-Kok Cheung to both critique and contextualize the attempts by male literary editors to reproduce and update a heroic masculine tradition of Asian literature. In a footnote Cheung also refers to Bruce Lee, pointing to his significance in representations of Chinese masculinity but also to his rather inhuman characterization in *Enter the Dragon*, the American film that is taken up below.

When Bruce Lee died in 1973 he was given two funerals. Chiao Hsiung-Ping writes of the thirty thousand people who attended his Hong Kong funeral, suggesting though that the event "was *only symbolic*" since the real thing "was held in Seattle, and Steve McQueen and James Coburn were among the pallbearers" ("Bruce Lee" 31; emphasis added). What was this double ceremony symbolic of? Perhaps it indicates something of the way in which Lee was positioned, and positioned himself, as a star in both Asia and America. Bruce Lee was, and remains, the only

Chinese star to achieve an international visibility that included the West. He was also a very *visible* star in that his films tended to emphasize his physicality in a way that some have characterized as narcissistic. Given that the role of the movie actor is defined by display, the designation "narcissistic" tends to be invoked only when critics feel such display is inappropriate or unsettling. In this sense it is significant that Lee's assertion of a strong, muscular Chinese hero should be so often dubbed unsettling by contemporary Western critics. Within his films Lee's thin musculature is played off in spectacular film battles against huge, muscular opponents: Chuck Norris in *Way of the Dragon*, Robert Baker in *Fist of Fury*. I've already noted the way in which Lee's films build up to the moment when he will fight, keeping him clothed up to that point as a form of disguise. Assuming a variety of disguises in *Fist of Fury*, Lee/Chien uses his *invisibility* as a Chinese man and revelation is also a play, once more, on an accumulated history of images of softness and hardness, passivity and masculinity.

The hardness of Lee's body and of his star image emerges from a history of softness, a history of images in which both Chinese men and women had been represented as passive and compliant. In an early film appearance as a heavy in *Martlowe* (1966), James Garner suggests that Lee's character is gay, thus leading him to lose his temper and leap to his death. Garner's jibe picks up on the extent to which the display of Lee's body and physical grace was to be emphasized in his persona. The display of the male body in action is felt to be unsettling here, making too explicit as it does the homoeroticism implicit in these man-to-man showdowns. Later on in his career, Lee was turned down in favor of David Carradine for the lead role in the television series *Kung Fu, Of Carradine*. Chuck Norris is reported to have said, with rather disarming honesty, that he "is about as good a martial artist as I am an actor." Lee himself pondered whether perhaps "they weren't ready for a Hopalong Wong" (qtd. in Claessner 91). The earnestness of the Lee persona, along with the comedic sections of his films, can be situated against this cinematic context. Lee's struggle within America, which can be contrasted sharply with his success in Hong Kong, has emerged as a key element in the star image that has developed since his

death. Chuck Norris conveys something of this in the following description of Lee, which is taken from Norris's indicatively entitled autobiography, *The Secret of Inner Strength*: "Bruce lived and breathed the martial arts. I still recall the night I dropped in on him at home and found him in the den watching television. He was lying on his back in front of the TV set with his young son, Brandon, sitting on his stomach. Bruce had leg weights wrapped around his ankles. He had barbells in his hands. While bouncing Brandon on his stomach, he was inhaling and exhaling, thus tightening the muscles of his abdomen. At the same time, he was doing leg-ups and arm exercises" (67). Such testimonies form part of the mythology surrounding Bruce Lee, a mythos that is constructed through images of an obsessive commitment to training and the struggle to succeed, to become a star.

Lee's image speaks of a struggle to become hard, to negate an imputed softness. Another aspect of this is Lee's reputed refusal to follow any one school of fighting, instead appropriating and adapting a range of styles. Lee is complexly positioned as a star in both, and "in-between," Asia and America. Chiao Hsiung-Ping explores this positioning "in-between" in terms of what she calls Lee's "cross-cultural savvy." Having worked in both industries, she points out, Lee was in a good position to judge what would appeal across the two. He was responsible for moves toward the use of martial artists rather than actors in Hong Kong films, as well as the reduction of rapid editing camera tricks; the use of trampolines; and so on. Lee "knew the generic importance of the fighting scene, but . . . strove for a 'believable' kung fu. . . . Oriental fantasies were reduced and western realism was emphasized" ("Bruce Lee" 33). In cinematic terms the meaning of this opposition between fantasy and realism is clear, avoiding trick camera work and so on. At an ideological level this opposition echoes a history of racialist stereotypes, a history that seeks to represent the kinds of fantasies at work in the Western imaginary as somehow "real."²

If a strong masculinity is central to Bruce Lee's image, then this is accompanied by anxieties that prefigure the uncertainties that surround the personae of many white male stars today. That this image of the Chinese man was perceived as problematic within Hollywood is evident in *Enter the Dragon*. The film

centers on three men, heroes who are constructed through the use of racial stereotypes. Bruce Lee plays Lee, who is the center of a film that is to a large extent a showcase for his skills. Along with Lee are a white American character called Roper, played by John Saxon (a B movie actor who received equal billing with Lee), and an African American, Williams, played by Jim Kelly, who went on to play the part of "Black Belt Jones." *Enter the Dragon* does not, however, go in for the extensive interracial male bonding that typifies many action pictures of recent years. While the three heroes talk to each other at various points, they do not act together and their stories are kept discrete. There is one key moment of recognizable male bonding in the film, between Williams and Roper when they first meet. Significantly, this moment centers on their shared experiences in Vietnam. Indeed, within the narratives of many American martial arts movies, Vietnam functions as the space/time when the hero acquired his fighting skills. Perhaps because of the very centrality of a "Vietnam" constructed against an Oriental Other in American films, *Enter the Dragon* is clearly uncomfortable with its racial mix, a mix that represents Warner Bros.' very tentative attempts to promote a Chinese star. Anecdotally, while the film is often seen by Western audiences as Lee's greatest achievement—and it is the film for which he is best known in the West, Asian audiences were suspicious of the film (Chiao, "Bruce Lee" 37; see also Claessner 93–96).

We are introduced to Lee in the Shaolin Temple, where an English official, Brathwaite, enlists his help against the evil Han (Shen Kiu) who is involved in both drugs and sexual slavery. Han holds a martial arts tournament every three years on his fortress island as a way for him to recruit talent to his organization. The struggles against colonial opponents found in *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon* are replaced by Han who, with his white cat, is very clearly derived from a James Bondian lineage. Such a tradition does not offer a particularly fruitful space for the articulation of a Chinese identity, so that Lee seems to be placed once more in the role of Karo, the sidekick he had played years before in the American television series *The Green Hornet*. After Lee has agreed to act on behalf of the British, he is given a further motivation in a flashback that tells of the death of his sister (Angela Mao Ying). Roper is a

compulsive gambler whose debts have led him to fight in the upcoming tournament. Williams's motivation for attending is less clear since we see him saying his good-byes wordlessly in an all-black martial arts school. As he is traveling to the airport, Williams is harassed by two white policemen. Williams knocks the men out and steals their police car signaling an underdeveloped narrative of racial conflict within America—a narrative that is displaced through images of the Orient.

In the complex relationship between the articulation of a Chinese and a masculine identity in Lee's image, the following comments from Robert Clouse, director of *Enter the Dragon*, are indicative:

He [Lee] had this strut . . . they showed me his first three films at Warner Bros. and . . . I said the first thing we have to do is kick the strut out of Bruce Lee. We're going to Westernize him to some degree. They wanted an international star. I said we would put him in carefully tailored suits instead of just his Chinese suits. We'll show him both ways. He should look as though he'd be comfortable in New York or London. . . . [In *Enter the Dragon*] he comes strutting down the field toward the end of the big battle. . . . And I said . . . "You're beyond that now. A Western audience doesn't like the obvious strut. Let's play it straight there."

("Interview with Robert Clouse" 43)

Caught up in fantasies of racial and sexual identity, Clouse speaks through oppositions of savagery and civilization, Western suits versus Chinese suits. Gail Ching-Liang Low heads her discussion of cultural cross-dressing with a pertinent statement from Frantz Fanon that the "colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (qtd. in Low 83). Such a logic structures Clouse's desire to put Lee in Western clothes in order that he be "comfortable" in the West, which is really to say that the West would be comfortable with him. Clouse's reference to "playing it straight" in this context unwittingly indicates the homophobic imaginary that underpins the cinematic performance of Lee's body—a performance in which the body is offered as sexual spectacle, as a site of pleasure rather than subjection.

This same logic is also expressed through Clouse's (failed) intention to *kick the strut* out of Lee. This phrase signals something of the fear and mistrust that develops around Bruce Lee's star status in the West, fears bound up with the tough nationalistic male identity that is championed in his Hong Kong films. I don't want to suggest that Lee was completely controlled by this discourse, since the parts of *Enter the Dragon* that he directed, and his own performance in particular do emerge (complete with strut) as to some extent separate from the messy compromise that is the film's attempt to cater to a range of audiences. The confusion of the film is expressly clear in its mobilization of sexualized discourses of race. The three fighters are, in appropriately Bondian-decadent style, offered the choice of a harem of women. Roper selects the white woman who seems to be in charge, while Williams selects four Asian women. Predictably enough, Lee's character absents himself, selecting a woman he knows to be a spy who has been placed on the island.

It is Kelly as Williams who must bear the burden of the film's discourse about race. It is no surprise then that the stereotype of the black stud is invoked or that Williams does not survive to the end of the movie. It is he who also voices the film's social commentary, pointing regretfully to the ghettos of the city. Amidst the general success of Hong Kong action pictures in the America of the 1970s, producers were not slow to notice the appeal of these films to an urban black audience. Black martial arts films, which built on the success of films like *Shaof* (1971), invoked a hypersexualized image of the black man. By contrast, one of the most enduring Western stereotypes of the East is as a site of a mystical, asexual knowledge. Richard Fung captures this, setting out a representational dichotomy in which Asian men are either an "egghead/wimp" or "the kung fu master/ninja/samurai." He is "sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism." Fung uses Fanon, who describes how "the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis," to draw a contrast with Western representations of the Asian man who "is defined by a striking absence down there" (148). In *Enter the Dragon* Chinese sexuality is erased while blackness, in the figure of Jim Kelly, becomes the overdetermined space through which the film signifies both sexuality and racial difference.

Western Stars and the Martial Arts Cinema

A commentary on the workings of the Western action cinema is useful here in contextualizing the kinds of operation at work in a film like *Enter the Dragon* or more recent Orientalist fictions, such as *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, which I discuss below. The American martial arts film, which is a subsidiary of the big-budget action picture, has very little cultural prestige attached to it. Indeed, Western martial arts stars frequently express the desire to move on from the so-called "chop-socky" action film into more conventional action movies. Jean-Claude Van Damme is no exception, and his films have gradually moved away from showcasing martial arts into more traditional heroics. In any case, the overdeveloped muscular frames of the white Western stars are geared much more toward the sort of static posed display involved in bodybuilding than the quick-fire action seen in the Hong Kong films. Given this tendency toward static display, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the films are centrally concerned with the sexual commodification of the (usually white) male body. The body is portrayed as sexual spectacle within a narrative that offers a critique of such commodification. Though there is not space here to develop the point fully, the different status of martial arts and other American action pictures can be understood partly through the sense that the martial arts form already carries the kinds of feminized associations that the Western imaginary has long ascribed to the East. The insistent eroticism of films featuring stars such as Van Damme, only makes it more important to distance him from such implicit feminization. Thus, it is black characters who once again take up the burden of a pathologized (homo)sexuality in the Western films.

A.W.O.L. (1990) casts Van Damme as Lyon, a soldier who has deserted the legion to visit his dying brother in America. He works his passage stoking the boilers of a ship, a typical plot device in that it both stresses the body as a site of manual labor and allows Van Damme to remove his clothes. Such moments of display are combined with set-piece fights. On his arrival Lyon meets Joshua, a crippled but street-smart black man, who initially seeks to exploit Lyon's fighting skill, though the two soon become buddies. The theme of the commodification of the working-class male body, typical of American fight movies, is also

explicitly bound into the sexual implications of that commodification here, as Lyon finds himself working for "The Lady," who runs a high-class bare-knuckle fighting operation. The controlling figure of Cynthia, "The Lady," is a deeply fearful image of the powerful woman who at first seeks to control Lyon and then, when he spurns her sexually, matches him against a vicious white fighter known as Atila, who literally tears his opponents in two. The anxiety attendant on the commodification of the white male body is mediated here through the figure of the powerful (masculine) woman. The version of black masculinity articulated in these films is also crucial to securing the symbolic position of the hero. The recurrent figure of the "damaged" black man is central, with the crippled Joshua fulfilling this role in *A.W.O.L.*, and Hawkins (who has a "dead" eye) befriending Van Damme in *Death Warrant* (1991). The physical flaws of these initially hostile but ultimately dependable men make them symbolically safe in an anxious representational world. Blackness also functions then as a space within which to deal with fears around homosexual desire.

In *Death Warrant* Van Damme plays Burke, a cop who goes undercover in a maximum-security jail. The prison narrative is a favorite of the American action cinema, allowing as it does for the free play of homoerotic images and for the repressive mobilization of stock characters, such as the sadistic white warden and guards, dependable black old-timers, and hysterical, knife-wielding Latinos. Here the hero is explicitly threatened with rape, an assault that the film's editing implies, though it cannot seem to explicitly state. While Western martial arts and other action movies thrive on interracial same-sex friendships, homosexuality or any notion of gay desire remains almost exclusively expressed in terms of threat and violence. The fight then provides the perfect space for male physical intimacy—since that intimacy is accompanied by a compensatory brutal violence. Serving to highlight the sexual significance of the "castrated" black man in these fictions is another level of blackness conjured up by *Death Warrant* in the figure of Priest. He inhabits a mysterious realm beneath the prison. "The lower you go the funkier it gets in this place," Burke's cell mate tells him cheerfully, adding that he should "cover his ass" and "I mean that literally—it's not a figure of speech." We are told that even the guards

won't come here—it is a space then that is both sexual and totally other. Here we find Priest surrounded by his "badies," male/female inmates who function as profoundly unstable and hauntingly present figures in the film—images of the subterranean depths that lie beneath the sexual relations as relations of power that structure the prison world. The film both acknowledges and plays to the existence of gay desire, in its images and its narrative, while finally projecting this desire onto a space of pathologized black masculinity in which sexuality is part of a more general excess.

An earlier Van Damme movie, *Kickboxer* (1989), not only teams the hero with a "damaged" black man—Taylor, a cynical veteran scarred by his experiences in Vietnam—but also employs stereotypical images of the East Thai kickboxing champion Tong Po embodies the Orient as sexual threat alongside the figures of the mythic sage and the virginal maiden. The structure of this film is a familiar one in the West. A young white man persuades an ancient "Oriental" man to teach him the skills of a secret martial art. At the same time, he typically meets an "innocent" girl and falls in love. Although he seems to face impossible odds, he ultimately wins out in the final moments of the film. Now this is to some extent a familiar narrative of the Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s. The hero is initially beaten, learns a secret technique that makes him invincible, and, after extended torturous training, is ultimately triumphant—this is roughly the plot of *The Chinese Boxer*. But the version of this narrative that places the white hero at the center represents a significant rewriting.

To think about this further I'll refer briefly to an American cop movie, *Showdown in Little Tokyo* (1991). Starring Dolph Lundgren and Brandon Lee, this is a rare film in its casting of a Chinese actor in a major heroic role. The film seeks to capitalize on an action-comedy tradition by casting Lee as a thoroughly Westernized Japanese-American, who to some extent undercuts the strong-silent performance of costar Dolph Lundgren.¹³ In a perverse colonial logic, Aryan beefcake Lundgren plays a cop brought up in Japan who styles himself as a samurai warrior. His knowledge of Japanese tradition, language, and culture is played off against Lee's Westernized persona. The film's fantasy of cultural cross-dressing operates both to negate the homoeroticism implicit in the buddy rela-

tionship and to produce a complex fantasy of white mastery through the appropriation and penetration of the other's culture. Speaking of fantasies of cultural cross-dressing in nineteenth-century imperialist literature, Gail Ching-Liang Low points out that since "the Orient becomes through western imagination, a site of excess sexuality and deviant behaviour that must be penetrated and controlled," then the "violation of a subject-culture may also be read as a sexualised text" (95).¹⁴ In *Showdown in Little Tokyo* this fantasy might be directly interpreted in terms of the racist articulation of American fears around Japanization. That these fears are bound up with masculine identity is perhaps most apparent in the "comic" moment when Lee's character compliments Lundgren's on the size of his penis. Recalling Richard Fung's comments on Western myths of Asian sexuality as asexuality, it is clear that Lundgren's superwhite, muscular body functions as a fetish within the film. The body is clearly constituted by "race," and yet it also refuses the limits of that constitution. The freedom to shift, transgress, and adopt racial identities in this way is, of course, as Ching-Liang Low points out, available to different groups differently (98).¹⁵

Jackie Chan: Masculinity and Kung Fu Comedy

Jackie Chan's combination of action with slapstick comedy is quite distinct from the earnest and anxious suffering of the white stars, and from the dominating figure of Bruce Lee. His films are much more at ease with the hectic heroics of their male protagonists, heroics that are at once offered as spectacle and comically undercut. Comic interludes and punch lines punctuate even relatively tense narratives such as the *Police Story* films. I'd like to make some brief comments on Jackie Chan's films here as a way of talking about a very different kind of Hong Kong filmmaking to that associated with Bruce Lee. The films use a variety of physical set pieces—both comic and violent—drawing on a theatrical tradition that is common to static bodily display at work in many American films. This is most apparent in the orchestration of group fights of amazing complexity, as in the bar room brawl and the final showdown of *Project A*. The more restrained playground battle in *Police Story 2* pitches

Fists of Fury

Chan against a group of thugs, but even here, when the hero fights alone, the camera work is carefully choreographed around the scene, rather than the individual hero, as spectacle.

Of course many of the films I've already discussed include comic moments, though I've not focused on this aspect of the action tradition. What distinguishes the quick-fire timing and slapstick comedy for which Chan has become famous is the infiltration of comedy into the fight scenes themselves, fights that as we've seen, form the center of the martial arts movie. In Chan's films, fights are played both seriously and for laughs; as when opponents come to blows and then back off shaking their fists or rubbing their heads in pain. Such moments admit both the possibility of pain and the vulnerability of the body. There is an indelicate moment in *Wheels on Meals* when costars Chan and Yuen Biao are involved in a street fight. They look at each other, agree that their opponents are too rough and simply run away. Chan, while at times a very graceful fighter, also plays on the way in which both the body and technology lets its owner down. Thus he often seems to win his fights more by good luck and determination than skill. In the middle of a tense fight at the end of *Wheels on Meals*, Chan frees himself from a hold by kicking his opponent. Similarly, most of the people in a Jackie Chan film are at some point a fighter—characters are not written as professional fighters and they are not necessarily students or teachers in a martial arts school. Pauline Yeung, the romantic lead in *Dragons Forever*, who spends most of her time being rescued or wooed, suddenly and quite inexplicably, produces a short set-piece display of fighting skill, knocking out a bad guy in the films' final showdown.

In Chan's movies it is more often the case that women are either explicitly cast as, or ultimately revealed to be, glib. They increasingly seem to represent a troublesome presence, both an annoying and a fascinating distraction from adventures and from the concerns of male friendship. Heterosexual romance is an important term for the definition of an adult masculine identity in the films, but is also the cause of myriad problems, as in the two *Police Story* films. The chorus of three women who keep getting in Chan's way in *Operation Condor: Armour of God 2* (1991) represents an extreme articulation of women-as-femininity-as-chaos.

An inordinate amount of screen time is given over to the comic demonstration of female incompetence by contrast to Western movies that are much more likely to exclude women altogether. The original *Armour of God* was reviewed and marketed in the West as Chan's attempt to cash in on the success of the *Indiana Jones* films. While these successful films do provide a reference point, there is more than a little naïveté in the assumption that Hong Kong always follows in the wake of Hollywood, especially given Hong Kong's long tradition of producing epic adventure films. So while some critics suggested the film was Westernized, they didn't in turn acknowledge the ways in which *The Armour of God* redefines and undercuts those Hollywood traditions that it does draw on. Indeed, Chan emerges from a changed industrial context in Hong Kong, and the figure of the adventurer is rewritten within its existing traditions. Chan plays Jackie, the "Asian Hawk," an expop star turned adventurer who tracks down ancient artifacts for sale to the highest bidder. The film allows Chan to explore a Europe that is constructed as an alien and exotic territory. The hero is pitted against a fabulously bizarre sect of evil monks who are ensconced in a mountain retreat. A rather camp waiter tells them that the monks come down once a month to fetch supplies and women, establishing both the opponents and the terrain as sexually decadent. The terms of Orientalist fantasies are turned around on themselves, as Europe becomes the site of an exotic adventure for the Chinese heroes and heroine.

The film turns on the relationship between Jackie and his best friend Alan. Though Alan is to some extent a clownish character, this is set up differently to the physical comedy constructed around Chan. Though we see him early on performing in a spectacular stage show before a huge Hong Kong crowd, he lacks masculine competence within the film's terms. He is something of a fashion plate, modeling a series of stylish clothes throughout the film. Given this characterization it is not surprising that Alan is useless in a fight, pointing out hysterically that he doesn't believe in violence while holding onto Jackie for protection, getting them into trouble and needing to be rescued. If the fight bears the narrative discourse of the martial arts film, then a hero who cannot fight is an oddity. Within the film's discourse about masculinity Alan is clearly situated within a feminine position that

is played for laughs. The comedy format allows for an articulation of masculinity that is to some extent fluid, not expressed exclusively in terms of a muscular hardness. Ultimately, though, *The Armour of God* falls back on blackness as a space of sexualized defiance. In one of the film's final sequences, when Jackie is attempting to steal the armor, four black furies are turned on him. These fighting women are killed out in black corsets and slippers. Both comic and fetishistic, these women represent the displacement of an exaggerated sexuality onto blackness. This image echoes the opening of the film, located in a fantasized Africa, in which Jackie fools a black tribe by talking gibberish. He escapes, stealing the sword that is part of the "armor of god," using a variety of gadgets and stunts. The structures at work here are replicated in the recent sequel, *Operation Condor* (1991), which again begins with Jackie fooling a black African tribe. This time he only narrowly escapes from the threat of marriage. The "Asian Hawk" achieves his heroic identity at the expense of an Africa constructed as primitive and easily fooled.

Unlike Bruce Lee, the struggle for American success is not foregrounded in Jackie Chan's star image, though he also made a rather disastrous American movie with Robert Clouse at one point in his career.¹⁶ "Bruce had that hard tight look whenever he wanted it," observes Clouse, the man who we recall wanted to "kick the strut" out of Lee. Clouse goes on to remark that he "thought Jackie Chan had it but he was soft" ("Interview with Robert Clouse" 9). Chan's "softness" does not consist in a lack of muscularity or an inability to fight, but more in a refusal either to take the male body too seriously or to play the part of Oriental other. Chan's persona is built on the cheerful admission of vulnerability at work in his films—most obviously in the inclusion at the end of the movies of outtakes featuring stunts gone wrong. And while he frequently gets beaten up in his films, he is nonetheless in control. As Chan put it, "In Hong Kong, I can control everything. In Hollywood I'm just a Chinese actor who speaks bad English" (Rayns 84).

Discourses of race and masculinity are elaborated in vastly different ways in the various martial arts films discussed in this essay. I have sought to comment on some of the many contrasting traditions and

subgenres, and to argue that the construction of racial and gendered identities in the genre is not as simple or as easily characterized as it may seem. Though many films work to reinscribe sexual and racial stereotypes, our readings also need to be situated within a historical and a cinematic context. The discussion of the very distinct star images and films of Bruce Lee, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Jackie Chan emphasizes the radically different ways that the ideas, images, and themes associated with the martial arts genre can be inflected. Indeed, though I have used the term "genre" here, it is probably evident from the range of films discussed that there is no clearly definable set of rules that can encapsulate the martial arts film across either the output of decades or the different industries of Hollywood and Hong Kong.

I have sought to argue, though, that there are certain themes recurring across different films—power and powerlessness, physical limitations and their transgression, narratives of revenge, and so on—that have a clear resonance for the discussion of the construction of masculine identities in the cinema. A central focus for this discussion has been the role of the body in the genre, with the suggestion that we can see the constitution of gendered identities in the cinema as operating through the act of imagining and resisting bodily boundaries. The discussion of various films and stunts offered here can only further emphasize the extent to which ideas and images of masculine power—defined through such figures as the "hard" male body, the ability to bear suffering, and ultimately to triumph—are intertwined with discourses of race, class, sexuality, and nationality.

Notes

Thanks to Val Hill, Leon Hunt, and Gwion Jones for their ideas and comments.

1. While the primary focus of this essay is male martial arts stars, Hong Kong cinema has a long tradition of female fighters. Western martial artist Cynthia Rothrock went to Hong Kong to make films such as *Above the Law* (with Yuen Biao), while in Hollywood producers seem more likely to cast her as a "girlfriend."
2. Popular Asian cinema has an extensive circulation in the West through forms such as video. The point I'm making here is that these forms are marginal in comparison to the more widely available and more widely discussed Hollywood material. There are complex links between

the popular cinemas of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Bombay. These traditions are often ignored by Western criticism, though attention has been paid to more prestigious Asian films. For an excellent industrial survey see Lent.

3. This tendency is most evident in the frequent use of the figure of the Vietnam veteran, portrayed as a slightly unbalanced man who has lost his comrades in battle and been betrayed by his government.
4. I do not know of any Hong Kong action films that deal explicitly with the colonial present, though British figures are very visible, if marginal, in films—for example, *The Police Story* and *Project A* films. Chiao Hsiung-Ping describes *Project A-11* (1987) as "given over to addressing the contradictory situation whereby Hong Kong now fears the 1997 return to the mainland and would rather remain colonised" ("Distinct Taiwanese" 160).
5. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon writes that "The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native hears is to stay in his place and not go beyond certain limits" (40). Fanon also emphasizes that the experience of the world through such oppressive limits generates fantasies of physical empowerment. See also Robins and Cohen, especially *Kanukie Sandwich: Growing Up in the Working-Class City* 94–103, in which they discuss the appeal of the martial arts; and see Walkerdine, for a discussion of class in relation to narratives of fighting. A key reference point for my argument here is Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Butler uses Foucault to discuss the constitution of the body through signs.
6. See Gleasner 54.
7. Gleasner outlines the function of the antagonistic school in these films as "a straightforward stand-in for the insidious involved in Japanese imperialism or for their less overt infiltration into Chinese life" (36).
8. The most useful reference point for a consideration of this play of qualities is in the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, such as *Normal Symbols and Pathology and Danger*. Theweleit takes up the image of the body as armor in relation to militarist culture in *Male Fantasies*. Theweleit, however, tends toward a pathologization of the ways in which identity is constructed through the establishment of bodily limits.
9. I'm referring here to Freud's essay "On Narcissism" (1914), in which narcissism is situated as part of human development rather than a property of a perverse few.
10. Male buddy relationships are crucial to the Hong Kong action film and have become more explicitly eroticized in some recent films such as *The Killer* (1989). See Chiao, "The Distinct Taiwanese" 163, for what she describes as a "macho/gay feel" to some recent Hong Kong films.

The distinction I'm seeking to draw here, though, is around the extent to which recent Western films quite obsessively center on relationships between men.

11. Jeffords interestingly uses the term "renascubination" in the context of recent representations around Vietnam. See her *The Renascubination of America*.
12. Though he doesn't discuss China in an extensive way, Said's *Orientalism* is a crucial point of reference here. Bhabha's writings on colonial discourse develop these points within a psychoanalytic framework. See his "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" and "Sly Civility."
13. Jackie Chan was also called on to play a Japanese character in the *Commando* film series, part of an early attempt to break into Western markets. Brandon Lee seems aware that his father's name has given him an access to the American industry denied to other Chinese actors. The publicity machine seems determined to push this line, dubbing him "Son of the Dragon." See for example, "Interview with Brandon Lee." Since this essay was originally written, Brandon Lee died in unusual circumstances and we have seen the much hyped release of his last film, finished with the help of computer technology. The turn to be taken by media mythology around his death remains to be seen.
14. Bhabha's writings (see note 12) are relevant here in terms of the processes of failed identification at work in the complex fantasies of mastery that structure colonial discourse.
15. Mercer offers an interesting discussion of Michael Jackson's changing images in this context in his "The Boy Who Fell to Earth" 34–35.
16. The film was *The Big Brawl* (1980), which Clouse directed. This is not to suggest that Chan is somehow a more "subversive" figure than Lee. Rather that the two emerged from very different historical moments.

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36.

LETTING THE BOYS BE BOYS

Talk Radio, Male Hysteria, and Political Discourse in the 1980s

Susan J. Douglas

"Listening to [Howard] Stern," wrote *Boston Globe* columnist Mike Barnicle in 1994, "is the electronic equivalent of loitering in the men's room of a bus terminal."¹ Apparently, despite such slurs, this was a place a lot of listeners wanted to go. Why was this, for some, such an appealing destination in the 1980s and '90s? Howard Stern, Don Imus, and Rush Limbaugh, as well as other local talk jocks, revitalized radio beginning in the mid-1980s, soaring to the top of the ratings during morning drive time or with Limbaugh, taking a time slot thought hopeless and turning it into a gold mine. Most of the commentary about talk radio, whether journalistic or scholarly, has focused on two things: its rudeness (the threat it posed to civility) and its unrepresentative amplification of right-wing politics (the threat it posed to democracy).

But what is obvious, and yet much less frequently discussed, is talk radio's central role in efforts to restore masculine prerogatives to where they were before the women's movement. After all, over 80% of the hosts, and a majority of the listeners, particularly to political talk radio, are male.² Talk radio is as much—maybe even more—about gender politics at the end of the century than it is about party politics. There were different masculinities enacted on radio, from Howard Stern to Rush Limbaugh, but they were all about challenging and overthrowing, if possible, that most revolutionary of social movements, feminism. They were also about challenging buttoned-down, upper-middle-class, corporate versions of masculinity that excluded many men from access to power. The "men's movement" of the 1980s found its outlet—and that was talk radio. In

this essay I'd like to provide a brief overview of the rise of talk radio and consider how the recuperation of certain types of masculinities played a central role in the genre's success and in the ongoing American debate about what is and is not our "national identity." And I'd like to suggest that a new gender hybrid, the male hysteric, emerged on talk radio as a deft if sometimes desperate fusion of the desire to thwart feminism with the reality of having to live with and accommodate to it.

Talk radio began to make national headlines in the mid-1980s, when Howard Stern gained increasing notoriety and earned the moniker "shock jock" and Alan Berg, an especially combative talk show host in Denver, was murdered—presumably, it was thought, by one of his infuriated listeners. More headlines came in 1989, when a coalition of approximately thirty talk show hosts coordinated a major attack on a proposed 51% congressional pay increase that then Speaker of the House Jim Wright planned to push through without a floor vote.³

The number of radio stations with all talk or a combined news and talk format quadrupled in ten years, from approximately 200 in the early 1980s to more than 850 in 1994.⁴ As music programmers and listeners evacuated the AM dial in favor of FM in the 1970s, previously thriving profitable stations were faced with a crisis. Some tried the all-news format while others clung to music, but by 1980 the talk format—whether the host was a sexologist dispensing advice or a political consultant fielding calls—was proving to be a solution to AM's abandonment. Talk radio didn't