Peter Lehman (ed.). *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture.* New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

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1 Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture is among the most recent contributions to the burgeoning field of masculinity studies. The point of departure for this collection edited by Peter Lehman, a pioneer in this area, is a sceptical view of this "masculine turn": although not entirely unexpected in our era of identity politics, the academic debate around masculinity has so far failed to sufficiently conceptualise, let alone "explain" it.

2 If Lehman's scepticism regarding the theorisation of masculinity sets the book's tone, anxiety and crisis are its main themes. A popular movie that has become a by-word for the angst apparently overshadowing male experience in the late twentieth century is John Boorman's Deliverance (1972; based on the novel by James Dickey), which shows men torn between the desire to express and the demand to repress their natural urges. Sally Robinson contextualises the tension underpinning the film by reading it against the male liberationist discourses that developed in the 1970s as a response to feminism. Men, in the terminology of these discourses are "blocked" and their natural urges repressed; they can only be released with the aid of archaic notions of manliness. By contrast, Robinson argues, Boorman's film expressly undermines idealisations of a violent, primal masculinity and accepts a state of anxiety as the norm.

3 This notion is endorsed by many of the 17 essays in this collection. By far the greatest fear overshadowing masculine identity and male relationships is the threat of homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, the theoretical point of reference of many essays is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal thesis that patriarchal power is constituted through male bonding based on homosocial desire. Its downside: the homosocial may always dangerously slide into the tabooed homosexual. One way of overcoming the threat of homosexuality is to face it head on, as the contributions by Robert Eberwein, Susan White and Joe Wlodarz illustrate. Eberwein argues that even those scenes in World War II combat films and photography that appear to depict instances of homosexual male bonding are ways of asserting heterosexual masculinity. In a similar way, Anthony Mann's T-Men (1947), discussed by White, exploits the "homosexual panic" (111) of the post-war era by tampering with the safe borderline between the homosocial and the homosexual in order to endorse normative heterosexuality; a strategy also typical for recent male rape movies, which, as Wlodarz points out, exploit the kick of transgressing straight masculinity at the cost of making gay men the scapegoats for

this thrill. However, in some cases these strategies of containment seem to fail. Justin Wyatt argues that in Barry Levinson's Swingers homosexual patterns inflect heterosexual male bonding in a positive way. Similarly, Amy Aronson and Michael Kimmel's tour de force précis of contemporary cinema illuminates how the dangerous slippage into homosexuality inevitably haunts mainstream cinema's attempts to mine gay markets. Even the stock feature of the healthy homo buddy, which Aronson and Kimmel read as a contemporary version of the classical Hollywood trope of feminine innocence delivering a morally weak man from evil, potentially undermines the normative ideals it serves.

4 No less anxiety-inducing than homosexuality is the category of race. Amy Louise Wood provides a differentiated analysis of the construction of white masculinity through the participation in and photographic documentation of lynchings. Her essay thereby provides an important historical backdrop to Krin Gabbard's discussion of the Mel Gibson blockbuster Ransom (1996), where the (white) protagonist's increasingly irrational vendetta against his son's kidnapper is informed not so much by his wish to free his child but by the overriding need to defend his precarious masculinity against the destructive influences of his wife and a domineering "antagonist": a gratingly reasonable black FBI-agent. Gibson's violent pursuit of whiteness is validated in the end, as he manages to liberate his child and destroy his enemy in a spectacular showdown. For Italian-American men, by contrast, ethnic and gender identity is far more problematic, as Aaron Baker and Juliann Vitullo point out. While films like The Godfather and Rocky establish the idea that Italian machismo is an authentic alternative to bloodless WASP masculinity, more recent movies such as Analyze This and TV series like The Sopranos defy the traditional narrative of Italian manhood and the myths that sustain it, exposing the way this ideal enables and perpetuates violence.

5 But although Baker and Vitullo foreground the psychological tensions experienced by Italian-American men trying to position themselves within American culture without recourse to ethnic and gender clichés, their essay entails the promise that normative notions of masculinity can be subverted after all. This possibility is further explored in the essays by Chris Straayer on Patricia Highsmith's The Talented Mr. Ripley and Toby Miller on "James Bond's Penis." For Straayer, Highsmith's strained relationsip to homosexuality results in the creation of an almost poststructuralist ideal of genderless identity in Ripley - a potential left unexplored by Purple Noon (1960), the first film version of the novel. Even James Bond movies, despite the overt machismo of their protagonist, break down the demands of masculinity, creating a camp hero defying the prescribed limits of his identity. In Miller's words, Bond "is a drifter in a tux whose body bears the signs of social stratification, but who

never stays in one place long enough to adopt the mantle of patriarchy through its trappings of soil, blood, and home" (250). By contrast, Warren Beatty embodies the limitations of that ideal, subversive potential: as Lucia Bozzola argues, the gradual deflation of Beatty's public persona is a direct result of this insatiable stud's attempt to concurrently establish a romantic and familial self-image.

6 The essays in this collection are at their best when they manage to locate the representation of masculinity in its cultural context, often developing complex and insightful conceptualisations of masculinity at a given historical moment. Thus Dennis Bingham's analysis of Oliver Stone's *Nixon* biopic emphasises that Stone's portrayal of Nixon "as a product of failed American assumptions about political success and the wielding of power" (273) - while at times unfaithful to historical reality - manages to capture the uncertainties that characterise American culture on the eve of the twenty-first century. The cultural coding of masculinity is illustrated convincingly by Lee Parpart, whose impressive survey of male nudity in Canadian cinema is in part a response to and extension of the category of "the melodramatic penis" - the carefully choreographed and staged exposure of male genitals - discussed by Peter Lehman in his contribution to this collection. Agreeing with Lehman that this convention above all confirms men's powerlessness, Parpart nevertheless explains it as a predominantly American phenomenon.

7 Yet although the collection yields such fruitful insights, one cannot fail to notice its pervasive undertone of complaint, which echoes the tenor of the "images of femininity" debates of an early stage of feminist criticism. Were it not for Robert Lang and Maher Ben Moussa's discussion of *Rih Essed* (1986), the acclaimed and moving debut of Tunisian director Nouri Bouzid, on the one hand, and performance artist Tim Miller's piece about his workshop-experience, on the other, *Masculinity* would suggest that there is no material praxis beyond the theorisation of subversion. While Lehman's collection ably illuminates the scope of the current debate on masculinity, it also confirms his initial scepticism that much groundwork remains to be done.