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Masculinity as Moments of Becoming: an interdisciplinary account

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The experiences of men in late modernity and the extend of the revision of masculinity as *the* privileged form of being, have led some film theorists to recommend that masculinity should not be studied as the dominant and unchallenged embodiment of patriarchy but as 'moments of becoming' (Powrie et al 2004: 14) with emphasis on fragmentation and vulnerability which challenge the traditional association of masculinity with activity and power, and femininity with passivity and lack of power.

Researchers in Men's Studies and Film Studies agree that the traditional conception of masculinity as another name of privileged patriarchy is too simplistic a way of approaching the complex phenomenon of contemporary identity. They often propose the enlargement of masculinity with elements of femininity, yet differences in definition, scope and methodology entail that the meaning of the proposed revision varies considerably in the two disciplines[1].

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[1] Some researchers, especially in Men's Studies, see the benefit in demolishing the masculine/ feminine dichotomy and propose that masculinity should be understood as a continuum encompassing both masculine and feminine characteristics (Savran quoted in Brown 2002:133). Others propose that any analysis of masculinity must retain an understanding of the relationship of actual men and women (Hearn 1996: 203) or pragmatically point out that even though men collectively have greater access to power and authority, individual men often feel powerless and passed over by impersonal institutional authority (MacKinnon 2003:15). A recent article in 'Men & Masculinities' which surveys the latest trends in the field of Men's Studies, draws attention to the similarities between the sexes, inviting researchers to focus on these similarities rather than dwelling on the heterosexual dualism 'which implies a static and normative definition of gender' (Petersen 2003: 59). In Film Studies the language of gender remains inextricably linked with the psychoanalytic polarities: traditional masculinity is associated with activity, sadism and voyeurism, and traditional femininity with passivity, masochism and coming under the gaze. Individual identities, subversive or not, are regularly discussed in those terms. So dominant is this trend, notes Brown, that 'it is impossible to discuss the idiosyncrasies of masculinity without resorting to the language of feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics' (Brown 2002: 128). However, no one can deny the wider impact of seminal articles such as Mulvey's (2000) and Neal's (2000) who have permanently and correctly associated masculinity with the privileged position of seeing and exercising authority with controlling 'the gaze', thus establishing the visual code of its proliferation.

At the same time, sociologists of late modernity emphasise the ways in which identities are now produced via 'the reflexive ordering of self-narratives' (Giddens 1999: 244), as ongoing do-it-yourself auto-biographies (Beck 2005: 24) with an increased level of self-consciousness which takes into consideration, among other things, the fluidity of gender positions and the fragility of human relations. The principle of reflexivity and the reflexive production of auto-biographical narratives have been embraced in earnest by Sociology and Narrative Analysis alike, but despite the fact that an auto-biographical narrative is said to have any visual or written form, the silent consensus is that the preferred object of Sociology and Narrative Analysis is linear non-literary, non-artistic accounts of experience. The parting of ways between the social sciences and the humanities is sometimes further aggravated by the way in which disciplines use the same terminology. In Sociology, for instance, the term 'reflexivity' applies to thinking, while in Film Studies it has primarily been referring to the practice of drawing attention to cinema's technical devices, reminding the spectator that one watches a staged spectacle[2].

In this context, it is perhaps unavoidable to ask how interdisciplinarity should proceed in the case of Gender. How are researchers who do not wish to be held back by the pseudo-dilemma 'art or real life' supposed to straddle the divide. The present paper attempts to further the interdisciplinary dialogue on Gender by focusing on the reflexive production of masculinity in Greek and Italian cinema. Socio-cultural rather aesthetic theories alone are used in this discussion. The focus is on how men reflect upon and narrate their becoming in cinema. Both activities pass through the feminine. It is often noted that today men appear a lot more at ease about embracing certain feminine characteristics. Yet, experiences of vulnerability and loss, traditionally associated with the feminine position of 'passivity', are still perceived as threats to masculinity. The present paper examines three cases of masculine becoming which have the theme of 'the descend to the Underworld' in common. In the first two, passivity and the loss of a woman underline the innability of some modern men to keep up with the traditional definitions of their gender. In the third case, the gradual loss of power illustrates how feminisation affects masculine becoming beyond the realm of object relations. More importantly, in all three instances, the narrated experiences comprise a difficult and at times painful encounter with one's naive assumptions and ignorance. And yet, argues this paper, this almost tragic insight into masculinity, is the most appropriate form of gender and identity consciousness in late modernity. The present discussion brings together two theorists, Slavoj Zizek and Ulrich Beck, whose works on 'fantasy' and 'reflexivity' respectively are

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[2] For a discussion of reflexivity in Cinema and Literature see Stam 1992

not only comparable but can be seen as complementing one another. The methodological challenges and implications of their convergence are discussed below.

Hollywood and European cinema have produced numerous instances in which a crisis of masculinity is but a detour back to the fold of patriarchy. The return to patriarchy or 'remasculinisation' usually awakens man to his responsibilities. A typical example is 'War of the Worlds' (dir Spielberg 2005), where the negligent father turns into a hero-protector of his children. Very often a crisis is accompanied by the visual elaboration of feminisation, suffering and pain, which eventually lead to the glorification of the male, especially when entwined with other themes such as romanticised nationalism. A typical example is 'Braveheart' (dir Gibson 1995)[3]. In all cases, the male hero emerges stronger or wiser, having successfully undergone a test, having fulfilled a mandate supported by prescribed gender roles and having reaffirmed his standing as a man. The opposite, masculinity under permanent crisis, is also well documented. An extreme but typical example is 'Deliverance' (dir Boorman 1972) in which a weekend on the mountains turns into a nightmare for a group of male friends and the rape of one of them by a 'hillbilly' renders the return to masculinity and civilisation highly problematic.[4] In 'Les Amants du Pont Neuf' (dir Carax 1991) love turns into a relationship of morbid dependence. The catalogue of the effects of crisis could go on for ever.

In the Greek and Italian films we will examine below gender crisis manifests itself in long journey, the archetypical form of which is Orpheus' descend to the Underworld (Hades). Orpheus' journey is one of loss – he loses Eurydice – and gain – he gains knowledge and artistic inspiration. The Greek adaptations, however, offer no artistic consolation and figure common men: in 'Hades' [The Underworld] (dir Haralambopoulos 1996) a successful Athenian lawyer in his late forties tries to locate a woman, Evanthia, who, at the height of the Cold War, entered Albania in order to smuggle out her husband's parents. What the lawyer finds hard to understand is why Evanthia risked everything, including her marriage and a very promising career in the legal profession for such an apparently doomed plan. The lawyer retraces Evanthia's steps in the villages of north-west Greece and eventually enters Albania in an attempt to bring her back. In 'No Sympathy for the Devil' (dir Athanitis 1997) the myth is set in a dystopic futuristic City and pivots around love at first sight: Orpheus, a supermarket cashier and amateur boxer sees

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[3] For a discussion the display of the vulnerable male body in Hollywood films see Brown 2002.
[4] For a discussion of masculinity in 'Deliverance' see Robinson 2001

Evridiki (Eurydice) on a train platform, follows her, meets her and spends a few blissful days with her before she is abducted. He will descend to the Underworld, the disreputable Old City, to find her working as a striptease performer at a nightclub.

The kind of knowledge and a 'reflexivity' produced by the contemporary descend to Hades is not merely a process of 'reflection'[5] or narcissistic self-assertion as in the films we discussed above, but one that takes into account 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' (Beck 1999: 126), the two by-products of the knowledge-driven late modernity which confront one with the limits of one's knowledge and the meaning of one's acts. Beck's definition of reflexivity applies mostly to the public sphere and the operation of knowledge in modern risk-taking societies. However, 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' can be meaningfully supplanted to the inquiry of gender as a much needed qualification of the term 'reflexive' which tends to be liberally applied to any process of introspection. This transposition comprises the methodological question: how are 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' produced in cinematic narratives as part of the masculine becoming? How are they shown to have an impact on the masculine narrative par excellence, the controlled narrative of initiatives and calculated risks? And further, what kind of new, reflexive and modern gendered consciousness do they produce or envisage?

A model of analysis capable of containing, explaining and illustrating the production of 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' is Zizek's 'Fantasy'. Zizek's work is interdisciplinary and brings together Psychoanalysis, Cultural Theory and Philosophy. It therefore comprises the ideal framework for the assimilation of Beck's ideas into the wider interdisciplinary dialogue on Gender. In Zizek the term 'fantasy' applies to an organised narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end which tells a story in retrospect, aiming to provide a credible version of events. With this orderly narrative, notes Zizek, the narrator and/or protagonist produces his own objectivity (Zizek: 1997: 11), allowing himself to tell the story as an independent observer rather than as a participant who was implicated in and influenced by the narrated events. Moreover, the fantasy produces something equally important: the illusion that an object is being lost during its time, while in reality it had already been lost or was never there in the first place (Zizek 1997: 13) – Eurydice in the case of the Greek films. To the extend that the fantasy

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[5] Beck notes that 'the meaning of the word *Reflexivitat* in German also includes *reflex* in the sense of the effect or preventive effect of non-knowing' (Beck 1999: 109).

procures organised excuses, it has a pacifying effect because it veils an original deadlock (Zizek 1997: 11), in our case the anxiety produced by failure and loss of control. However, it contains the seed of its own subversion, those moments or unexpected turns of event which rent the fabric of the narration, revealing the fallacy of objectivity and illuminating the narrator/protagonist's real involvement. These are, as we shall see below, the moments at which 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' are narratively produced out of the opposite, the effort to veil and keep them at bay. In terms of masculinity, these are the moments in which Orpheus, the aspiring hero, encounters the implications of being both 'noble' and 'male' in a world of deceit and corruption.

Both Greek films are reflexive in the sense that they retell a familiar story in which the protagonist occupies the recognisable position of Orpheus. Both stories are also reflexive because they announce a familiar ending, Orpheus' failure to bring Eurydice back from the dead[6]. Both films are products of late modernity and, at the same time, nostalgic of the past as they negotiate the difficult passage from idealised old-fashioned love and foolhardy heroism to calculated risk-taking and the infinite variety of forms of contemporary intimacy[7]. Both films are reflexive in that they illuminate the crisis which permeates modern masculinity while showing that the individual is unaware of it: the lawyer in his late forties is at odds with the world around him and feels vaguely guilty for not having helped a dying friend. The cashier/boxer is totally isolated, without friends and family, a virtual nobody with no attachments and any form of sociality. In both cases, Eurydice's disappearance provides Orpheus with a goal and a purpose. Thus, he conceives the plan to rescue the woman from the talons of death and exploitation with unclear personal motives, a surplus of guilt and feelings of rejection.

However, the lack of self knowledge and of clear sense of purpose often define masculinity at its purest. A gratuitous act or simply 'going for it' is the epitome of male freedom (Vincendeau 2001: 148, Panayi 1993). In the present case, masculinity as 'not having to justify one's acts' is grafted onto personal crisis from the very beginning and

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[6] According to the myth, Orpheus was instructed by the king of the Underworld to walk ahead of Eurydice and never look at her while still in the realm of the dead. By turning his head Orpheus caused the woman's permanent retreat to Hades.
[7] According to Giddens (1991), one of the main exponents of the theory of reflexive modernization along with Beck, late modernity is characterised by the replacement of traditional forms of kinship and contractual relations (e.g. in marraige) with more negotiable forms of intimacy based in mutual trust and a greater sense of freedom, especially for women. This entails a greater variety and plasticity of intimate relations.

produces the necessary 'unawareness' which will underline the calculated actions of the entire journey. In its space the modern Orpheus invents and answers a distress call – Eurydice never appeals to him for help – and invests it with the traditional values of the noble mission and love at first sight. The automatic social and emotional validation of heterosexual heroic masculinity means that no further justification is required[8]. Lack of knowledge and purpose turn into a form of gendered interpellation: a man has to do what a man has to do, starting with the obligation to accept the heroic call of which he is both the sender and the recipient. In this manner, the shift of attention from ignorance (lack of knowledge of one's motives) to a missing object (woman) engenders a beginning, a cause, a purpose and an orderly narrative.

From its initial stages the descend to the Underworld highlights Orpheus' purity and superiority. The hero does not participate in the exploitation of women or any other degrading practice and stands apart, a mere observer of acts and behaviours. Long and vantage-point shots establish his detachment: the lawyer by the roadside dominating the frame; the lawyer in village coffee houses standing up in a circle of seated peasants asking questions; the cahier/boxer observing the corrupt Old City from afar. This visual lack of involvement highlights a false objectivity or, as Zizek calls it, an 'impossible gaze' (Zizek 1997: 18) which determines the narrator's early perspective. Modern Orpheus stands alone in a strange world: an outsider in the realm of Hades.

This initial detachment is challenged when Orpheus himself comes under the public eye, beginning to feel vulnerable and exposed: in the deserted villages of Northwest Greece, the few remaining inhabitants treat the lawyer with suspicion and refuse to talk about Evanthia. His isolation is visually represented by his solitary wandering in empty streets while being observed from behind latticed windows. In 'No Sympathy', after Evridiki's abduction, the cashier/boxer is snatched by the same gang, beaten and abandoned in a multi-storey car-park form where he cannot find the exit. Close-ups create a sense of claustrophobia. A disorientating effect is created by sweeping 360 degree shots. When he arrives at the Old City he stands out as a new customer and is beaten up repeatedly. His claim to being a boxer is completely discredited. The gendered nature of vulnerability is further illustrated in the narrative sequences in which Orpheus passes through the same loci as Eurydice before him, literally following in her steps and

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[8] Edley & Wetherell discuss the cultural construction of the masculine self via different strategies such as the internalisation of patterns and histories, the equation of masculinity with rationality, the immunity from emotions as well as certain tautological way of explaining and rationalising decisions (Edley& Wetherel: 1995: 157)

becoming the passive, feminised object of the public gaze. As was noted in the introduction, similar moments of passivity have received considerable attention in Film Studies. In the case of the Greek films, feminisation gives Orpheus the 'man apart tag' (Nicholls 1999: 43) which normally allows for the association of suffering with the nobility of a cause and anticipates the 'remasculinisation' of the hero via the imminent achievement of his goal.

This is where the Greek films take a different turn and produce a reflexive awareness very different from the aloofness of the 'man apart'. In order to advance his quest and find Eurydice, Orpheus must lose his identity while assuming the insignia of masculinity: upon entering Albania the lawyer exchanges his clothes for a poor man's, thus symbolically losing his identity. Next, however, he buys Evanthia back with his money, thus identifying with the institutional and monetary power that supports exploitation. In 'No Sympathy' the cashier/boxer has to wear a mask in order to conceal his identity and pose as a customer of the sex trade in the bars of the Underworld. In both films masculinity is foisted upon Orpheus. It emerges as an unwelcome identification, an 'I am not just that' or, in terms of the fantasy, another impossibility which illustrates the contradiction between the purity and difference of the particular male and his ability to benefit from using the means of (masculine) authority and power.

The forced assumption of masculinity foregrounds an issue central to the precise definition of reflexivity: the common belief that there is a difference between the roles or masks one is forced to assume and another, 'real' one, on the basis of which one designates oneself as unique and different. This belief goes unchallenged till the moment the hero turns into what he hates most: the voracious consumer of sex or, metonymically, the narcissistic male who is after the gratuitous satisfaction of his own desire. It is easy to see that this reversal chimes with Orpheus' lack of knowledge about his motives which fuelled the gratuitous adventure in the first place. It can also be compared to the psychoanalytic 'return of the repressed', the eruption of knowledge one wishes to keep veiled by eagerly embracing a certain mode of being or acting. Thus, far from remaining unknown, 'unawareness' emerges in the realm of the narrative as the tragic irony of becoming the detestable Other. In that sense, reflexivity as 'unawareness' first makes its presence felt when masculinity appears in its true colours: contradictory and impossible, with equal access to femininity qua innocence or vulnerability and masculinity qua exploitative power.

The two films do not stop there. The advent of 'unawareness' as tragic irony is completed by the 'unintended consequences' of one's acts. In the original myth, moved by Orpheus' daring journey, the king of the Underworld consents to handing Eurydice back to him. In the modern adaptations Eurydice refuses to be saved. In 'Hades' Evanthia follows the lawyer obediently but subsequently refuses to comply to his wishes to be reunited with her husband and live happily ever after. The lawyer returns to Athens empty-handed. In 'No sympathy' Evridiki is too intoxicated to recognises Orpheus or appreciate his attempt to save her. All that she sees is just another male customer.

In both cases, female indifference upsets the man's plan, exposing the 'unintended effects' of his efforts, the radical upending of the fantasy of controlled acts which fails to take into account the other's reactions. If the controlled narrative and its cultural manifestations, the quest and the adventure, is the masculine modus operanti par excellence, the two directors contemplate its transformation into aimless wanderings, a reversal no modern knowledge-based social system is eager to contemplate as its main form of operation. At the same time, the fact that Eurydice sees just another male rather than the noble saviour brings the issue of being and appearances into a premature conclusion. Zizek notes that there is no truth behind the mask other than the mask itself, the succession of symbolic roles and position one assumes in real life (Zizek 1992:34). The two directors seem to concur, turning the docile female of the ancient myth into the voice of the new (reflexive) era. Therefore, with Eurydice's resistance, the two films propose a 'moment of becoming' which involves the narrative's own failure. Not the failure to bring the woman back from the dead – the oldest form of boosting the masculine self by allowing for the sublimation of her death into art – but the failure to reach the comfort of her absence[9]. A moment of becoming therefore, a truly reflexive one, marks the reversal of the fantasy of uniqueness and heroism and illustrates that one is 'common', 'ordinary' and 'nobody', part of the order one hates and despises and more male than one ever cared to admit. From a slightly different perspective, a reflexive moment of becoming includes the understanding that an object, Eurydice, was always already lost before the beginning of the adventure and even annuls the pacifying effect pain, vulnerability and 'feminisation' secure for masculinity.

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[9] Eurydice's death (loss) is traditionally sublimated, i.e. turns into artistic inspiration. At the same time Eurydice is just an apparition or a spectre. The present versions of the myth vary considerably in this respect: the woman is a concrete presence, not a spectre or a dead body. Thus turning her into 'inspiration' becomes almost impossible.

A journey comparable to Orpheus's but without the involvement of a woman is narrated in Gianni Amelio's 'Lamerica' (1994) in which another young man descends to the underworld of modern day Albania. Gino arrives in Albania as part of an Italian firm intending to set up an imaginary shoe factory and defraud the Italian state of considerable investment funds. For bureaucratic reasons the company appoints an Albanian president, a political prisoner from the communist era who goes by the name of Spiro Tozac. Spiro disappears and Gino is sent after him, experiencing the abject poverty, lawlessness and inhumanity of everyday life in Albania. Soon Spiro turns out to be an Italian left behind by Mussolini's troops and thrown into prison by the Albanian state. Having lost the sense of time after decades of incarceration, he lives in the past and thinks he is on his way to Sicily to be reunited with his young family. Together with Spiro, Gino will try to reach Tirana and then the seaport from where they can return to Italy. He will travel on foot and then at the back of a truck, at first standing out as the representative of the desirable capitalist Italy but gradually becoming less recognisable and more disempowered, especially when fired by his company and left to face charges of fraud by the Albanian government.

In his effort to reach Italy Gino is sustained by his conviction that he is different, the 'man apart' in a crowd of would-be refugees who attempt to reach the modern day 'America' on unsafe boats. Yet his appearance and methods of operation begin to resemble theirs and his disempowerment is visually portrayed by the gradual loss of the attributes of power: the air of superiority, the car, the clothes and the mobile; his feminisation by coming under the public gaze and by being touched and curiously examined by the fellow passengers on the truck; his acculturation by blending in the crowd and going unnoticed. 'Lamerica' is reflexive in the sense that it visualises the loss of western privileges as well as the relative value of life, law and power most westerners normally take for granted. It de-masculinises and de-humanises the hero at the same time. It is also reflexive as it tells the present story in the light of Italy's imperialist past, opening with archive footage of Mussolini's annexation of Albania. The impossible gaze or 'unawareness' in Gino's case is his inability to appreciate the personal adventure on the background of the collective, or to see how his predicament, his own loss, had already being under way long before his birth.

It is no coincidence that all three films end with their protagonist stranded in the Underworld. In 'Hades' the penultimate scene repeats the first, which shows the lawyer in a small boat with a few others passengers in the middle of a placid lake. By the end of the film the spectator knows that this boat trip is the return to Greece, which is nevertheless undermined by the lack of visual markers or borders between the two countries and the failure of the lawyer's mission. In 'No Sympathy' the cashier tries to escape from the Underworld with an unconscious Eurydice in his arms, only to progress as far as a small yard surrounded by tall buildings. The last shot of 'Lamerica' recalls the familiar media footage of boatloads of Albanians on their way to Italy, for whom reaching their destination was never guaranteed. Along with the Albanians, the protagonist is made the residue of history, with his personal experience standing as the metonymic equivalent of the repressed, neglected residue of any official account of historical events. In that sense, both the collective and the personal fantasy of a plausible interpretation of history is shown to be haunted by the return of a surplus, the 'unintended consequences' of one man's or one nation's acts. At the same time, reflexivity demands that man takes cognizance of his position at the tragic ironic moment at which he sees his plans reach vacuity, not 'failing' but being satisfied only too literally and therefore annulled through their very satisfaction: gaining access to a Eurydice which refuses to be saved or securing a place on a boat that might perish or forever be stranded in the Adriatic.

We started the present inquiry with the methodological convergence of reflexivity and fantasy on the masculine narrative, asking how men narrate their becoming while reflecting upon the meaning of masculinity as well as experiences of vulnerability and passivity. If myth is a bridge between times and cultures and still remains an expression of masculinity in late modernity, the myth of contemporary Orpheus entails a becoming in failure and failure in becoming. This involves not only the realisation that the contemporary male cannot be the 'hero' of old times but the recognition of the trompe l'oeil through which the fantasy achieves its aim 'presupposing what it purports to reproduce' (Zizek 1997: 11), the purity and difference which set a few men apart from the mob. In that sense, the modern masculinity negotiates an impossible space, is finding and not finding oneself to be Orphus at the end of one's journey. All three films converge on an essentially tragic position, that no one is innocent. In terms of gender, the avoidance of taking into account one's responsibility and partaking of patriarchy partly materialises in 'unawareness' and partly in modern man's eager assumption of vulnerable femininity instead of encountering the practical consequences of being male. True reflexivity therefore entails ceasing to sit on the fence of gender, or, as Connell puts it,

being a complacent male who does not actively promote patriarchy but draws the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2001: 80). To the extend that men are either reluctant or unable to reach that end it is the woman who becomes reflexive, a mirror or a reflexive surface which sends back to its receiver the call for help and forces upon the male the revision of the meaning of time-honoured noble adventure.

The second question we asked was how 'unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' are produced in narratives of masculine becoming and how they are shown to have an impact on the masculine narrative par excellence, the controlled narrative of initiatives and calculated risks. 'Unawareness' and 'unintended consequences' need not be post-factum effects of thought. They literally inhabit the narrative as moments of tension between conscious assumptions and repressed knowledge. If unawareness is the return of the repressed that is not immediately heeded, then the emergence of the unintended consequences is the obvious, unmissable final result of what was already happening and of what the narrative attempted to keep out, explain away or veil.

Moreover, reflexivity entails the opposite of the symbolic loss of the feminine object which marks the advent of the new knowledge, the revisions of the assumptions of an entire civilisation based on making sense of loss and building masculinity in its wake. Thus the practical consequences of having entered a new era are those of entering the worst nightmare for the traditional male and, at the same time, the first step towards a radical freedom according to which none of the old values hold, especially the options of greatness and sublimation. This, one might add, is one of the ways of experiencing 'precarious freedom' (Beck 2005:6), the characteristic par excellence of life in late modernity. Masculine becoming in the above sense, not only 'is' but 'must' be reflexive, working it way towards certain 'moments' of radical reversibility in which the veils of the fantasy are ripped and the weaknesses of its narrative logic are exposed. All three films converge on the subversion of those collective and personal narrative excuses which exonerate a man or a nation of their guilt and responsibility. 'Becoming' therefore does not include moments of awareness in which one constructs a plausible version of events but one which encounters the repeated cracks in the orderly narrative and one's failure to acknowledge complicity to the return of (personal or collective) history and, most important, the personal benefit and the true motive behind every act of altruism.

The final question this paper raised, concerned the new gendered consciousness the three films envisaged. If masculinity resides in the moments of failure to sublimate failure, is there only a bleak feature ahead? Eurydice's action suggests an alternative way. Her indifference to the world, be that the world of riches or the utopic universe free of exploitation and male desire, challenge Orpheus to not simply accept his tragic loss but to 'traverse the fantasy' thus sacrificing the sacrifice or heroism which keeps one attached to the mentality of the myth. The three directors show that masculinity in late modernity has just arrived there: old myths are obsolete and men find themselves at the brink of a new era, one which subverts the mythic-tragic attitude which envisages masculinity as 'staging rites of sacrifice in which the silent hero, ethically superior to gods and men attains transcendence' (Nicholls 1999: 51). Putting reflexivity, unintended consequences and unawareness into effect announces the first steps to the radical renunciation of traditional male values.

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