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The Phallus: Power and Vulnerability

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Introduction

This chapter focuses upon the cultural significance and meanings of the image of the erect penis, aka the Phallus. The authors contrast two views – from ancient history and from contemporary cinema – that show its range of meanings and significations to be both complex and revealing. In ancient history, the Phallus appears in painted, bas-relief and sculptural form, both attached to male figures and on its own, amongst the material culture of peoples all over the world – going back some 30,000 years before the present – in contexts that clearly depict it as a sacred image. Its journey as a cultural signifier through the past two thousand years, however, has been very different. It has been progressively shunned and ultimately regarded as the representation of all that is impure and even evil. Male same-sex activity, uncontroversial in antiquity, has been suppressed along with the image of the Phallus, as the focus upon the use of the erect penis only for procreative activity – and not for worship, pleasure, or anything else – has gripped those practicing the 'religions of the book'. Then in the second half of the nineteenth century, the new scholarly pursuit of anthropology – with racial and gendered biases - set the men of the 'white' 'races' of Europe above the more 'primitive' 'races' of colonial possessions around the world. To these European thinkers the Phallus became the signifier of primitive or savage masculinity, paired in deity dualities with local goddesses representing a primitive and passive femininity. This last dual image persisted until very recent times, notably as the 'straw man' so vilified by second wave feminism. At the same time this new scientific view created medical classifications for non-procreative activities with the erect penis, designating same-sex activity as an illness. Such a chequered history for an image has bequeathed – for contemporary cinema – a rich and complex field to mine for culturally significant stories, as the authors show in the example of the turn-of-the-century film *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999, US), with its "respect the cock, tame the cunt" routine, providing food for thought both in its depiction of male power(lessness), and as a vivid media documentation of the issues around the notion of the Phallus in contemporary thought.

Without claiming that post-modern eyes can see the ancient Phallus through the pre-modern eyes of those peoples in the various contexts where it appears, the authors wonder whether decoupling the image of the Phallus from the colonial depiction of savage masculinity might prove liberating in a contemporary post-gendered world. Such a decoupling might help reveal the likelihood that the image of the Phallus meant a good many different things, in the various contexts where it is found: an image not so much of primitive masculinity as of an abstract first principle, a pure, unadulterated and sacred pillar (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Or, made in clay or metals and worn around the neck or wrist, or as a key-ring fob, a simpler representative of divinity kept about the person to bring good fortune (Figure 3). Formed on the god's day from fresh dough by the village baker, it can be a symbol, even, of joy and laughter on a very light-hearted religious festival, (Figure 4). The authors wonder especially perhaps that there is an inherent vulnerability and ephemerality to the Phallus, both individually and collectively conceived, which such a decoupling might help expose.

The chapter is organised as follows: a historical guide to the appearance of the image, in ancient times, is followed by an exploration of the reasons for its disappearance. The authors

then question whether the Phallus as signifier of primitive power and savage domination is not perhaps both simplistic, and more revealing of 19th century European culture than those it tried to understand. Lastly, in the final section, armed with these new insights, the authors examine a particular case study, the film, *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999, US), in depth, arguing that our historical view of the image of the Phallus enables a far richer interpretation.

Figure 1 Kanayama Shrine Phallus Photo taken by David Kreps at Kanayama Shrine, Kawasaki, Tokyo, Japan, Nov 2016.

Figure 2 A Greek Herm. Photo taken by David Kreps at Agora Museum, Athens, Greece, March 2006

Figure 3 A Roman 'fascinus' talisman. Photo taken by David Kreps at Birdoswald Roman Fort, Hadrian's Wall, UK, Sept 2013.

Figure 4 A baker's contribution to a festival. Photo taken by David Kreps at Tyrnavos Phallophoria, Larissa, Greece, February 2016

The Sacred Phallus

How is it, we moderns might ask, that the image of the erect penis was so prevalent, so openly displayed, and so often regarded as sacred - or at least superstitiously favoured - in ancient times? Until the advent of modern science – spermatozoa were not discovered until the late 17th century – it is likely that little was understood concerning ovulation, and indeed the immensely influential Greek writer Galen, whose medical texts were 'gospel' until the Enlightenment, believed that human beings emerged from the 'seed' within semen, and that the womb was merely the place where it grew before emerging as a baby (1916, Book 1 Chp 6 p19). There are some assertions that the drinking of semen in religious rites is very ancient and was even still being practiced in early Christian mystery sects (Eliade 1976; Roscoe, 1997). That such anatomical ignorance helped to impart some of the significance that semen, (and its source the Phallus,) had for people in Greek and Roman civilisation, should not, now, in more enlightened times, lead us to dismiss that significance altogether. The seed remains the bearer of half the genetic material, and the spark that sets things going in the egg that it finds. The importance – and antiquity - of the image of the Phallus, and what it produces, for ancient peoples, is clear (Figure 5).

In ancient Greece the God Hermes, a son of Zeus, was frequently represented as an erect penis, or 'ithyphallic' as it is politely described. Far from being a symbol of savage masculinity, among other associations Hermes was thought of as the one who leads souls to the other world and can restore them to Earth, feeding them with the power they need. He was the God of boundaries and their transgression, the protector of tombs, and the patron of magicians (Allen 2018). At road junctions and at street corners one would often find a 'Herm' – an ithyphallic statue of the God, Phallus proudly erect – to mark the transition from place to place. In Thessaly, his cult had particular importance, uniquely so in Greece: on grave markers a Herm is represented accompanied with an invocation to Hermes Chthonios (the God of funerary transition). In this manner, the deceased is identified with the God – arguably at his most vulnerable - and coexists with him in the actual monument (Larissa Museum interpretation plaque 2016). The grave marker was sometimes simply a large stone Phallus (Figure 6). Many figures in Greek mythology were represented in statuary as ithyphallic (Figure 7), and as Roman civilisation rose and absorbed the Greek, so too their own mythologies included Gods and mythic characters with large, erect penises (Figure 8.)

Figure 5 Neolithic Phallus from the 7thmillennium BCE Photo taken by David Kreps at Larissa Museum, Greece, March 2016

Figure 6 Funerary Herms. Photo taken by David Kreps at Larissa Museum, Greece, March 2016

Figure 7 Ithyphallic Silen. Photo taken by David Kreps at Acropolis Museum, Athens, Greece March 2006

Figure 8 Stone Priapus. Photo taken by David Kreps at Vindolanda Roman Fort, England

Nor was it merely the Greeks – renowned in fact for the smallness of the flaccid penises on most of their statues – for whom the Phallus was sacred. Long before the rise of Classical civilisation, Neolithic peoples, aside from the goddess figurines many of us will be more familiar with, also left behind many Phalli in the archaeological record – for example amidst the enigmatic temples of Malta (Figure 9) and the megalithic monuments on Corsica (Figure 10).

Figure 9 Triple Phallus, c3000BCE. Photo taken by David Kreps at Tarxien, Malta

Figure 10 Bronze Age Phallic Statue-Menhirs, adapted c1000BCE from megalithic standing stones, c3000BCE. Photo taken by David Kreps at Filitosa, Corsica

Herodotus, moreover, whose *Histories* concerning his travels are one of the principal sources for written accounts of the ancient world, believed the Greek Gods derived ultimately from the Egyptian pantheon. There are interesting arguments that it was in fact the phallic rituals

that they have in common that form the principal link between them (Edmonds 2013). But the focus in this chapter is not to suggest such correlations, many of which may have simply been the result of syncretism in ancient times, but upon this common theme of the Sacred Phallus, and its prevalence across the ancient world.

In Egypt there was Pamyles, the ithyphallic God whose Spring Equinox festival, the Pamylia – an ancient Egyptian phallophoria – was a celebration of his fostering of the child Osiris, one of the five all-important intercalated days between each 360day year (Plutarch 1936). Small Horus child statuettes – the Harpocrates of the Greco- and later Romano-Egyptian period - with hugely exaggerated Phalluses, are found in their thousands along the sacred waterways (especially at Naukratis, the Greek colony in Egypt, on the Canopic branch of the Nile river where it opens to the Mediterranean) where this festival (among others) took place. These little statuettes with their huge Phalli were deposited in the waters as votive offerings to the fertility of the Nile inundation (British Museum 2020). The ephemerality of these images of the Phallus – created out of clay for the sole purpose of disposing of them in a ritual offering to the river – seems not just to echo the brevity of the moment when the Phallus produces its *semen virile*, but also to signpost the inherent vulnerability of the Phallus: no sooner risen to the point of its existence, than just as swiftly drooping back to its simpler, humble flaccidity as a waste-disposal organ. This focus upon the Phallus as time-bound, as a process of rising and falling, and how the peak moment at the core of this ephemerality represents the spark of life, is present in the mythologies surrounding Egypt's God Min, whose ithyphallic likeness appears frequently on the walls and pillars of the temples at Luxor. Min presided over the coronation ceremonies of New Kingdom Pharoahs. In an echo of Sumerian God Enki's filling of the Euphrates with his own semen, told in the Epic of Gilgamesh (Friedman 2003 p5) these Egyptian Pharaohs were – according to some sources - expected to ejaculate as part of their coronation ceremony, thus ensuring the annual flooding of the Nile (Temple, 2007) (Figure 11.)

Figure 11 Egyptian God Min. Photo taken by David Kreps at Temple of Luxor, Egypt, March 2007

Further afield, as the work of Asko Parpola asserts, the ancient Indian deity Shiva, whose story he traces back to the Indus Valley civilisation (3300BCE) and whose Phallus forms, in Shivaic doctrine, the central pillar of the world, and whose semen spawned the universe (O'Flaherty 1973; Temple, 2007) can be considered a cultural 'original' for a host of later, regional variations, gradually moving westward through the Middle East, as the Iranian 'Lord of the Animals', into Europe, where his story and role in local pantheons is found under the name of Osiris, Dionysus (and of course his son, Priapus), Bacchus, and Cernunnos (Parpola 2015). Some scholarship suggests that in India the representation of the sacred Phallus was once extremely common (Eliade, 1976; Singh 1997). Though some modern Hindus may insist the Shivalingam (Figure 12) represents a pure sacred spirit, it clearly also does, and always has, represented the Phallus (O'Flaherty 1973; Parpola 2015). As Eliade points out, the semen produced by the Phallus is in many Sanskrit texts equated with solar light: it comes of the noon-tide of the rise and fall of the Phallus, when the Sun is at its brightest, and thus the seed and solar light are one and the same (1976 p93).

Figure 12 Shiva Lingam. Photo taken by David Kreps at Thiruketheeswaram Shiva Temple, Sri Lanka, Sept 2017

Beyond India and the ancient Mediterranean world, there is also plenty of evidence for the sacred Phallus being of significance for other pre-modern peoples. In South America, the Moche people of pre-Columbian Peru in particular represented the Phallus in their ceramics. At Chucuito in Peru, moreover, there is an enigmatic Aymara/Inca temple (Figure 13, Figure 14 and Figure 15) (Taylor 1987; Keen 1990; Clendinnen 1991; Estrada 2003; Peinado et. al. 2007).

Figure 13 A Moche Ceramic. Photo taken by David Kreps at the Lorca Museum in Lima, Peru

Figure 14 A Moche Ceramic. Photo taken by David Kreps at the Lorca Museum in Lima, Peru

Figure 15 An Aymara/Inca fertility temple? Photo taken by David Kreps at the Inka Uyu, Chucuito, Peru

In Japan (Kuly, 2003) there are both Temples to the Phallus and phallophoria festivals celebrating it (Figure 16), although the antiquity of these is unclear.

Figure 16 Kanayama Shrine Phallus. Photo taken by David Kreps at Kanayama Shrine, Kawasaki, Tokyo, Japan, Nov 2016.

In New Zealand, the Maori continue to celebrate the fertility of their warriors in traditions that likely predate colonial times (Figure 17).

Figure 17 Sculpture at Waitangi National Park. Photo taken by David Kreps at Waitangi National Park, New Zealand Sept 2007.

There is also the extraordinary (if contested) work in Papua New Guinea of Gilbert Herdt on the Sambia male initiations – where boys fellate and drink the semen of the older boys and young men of the tribe as part of their education: the semen is what makes them into men (Herdt 1981; 1987).

Sex in the Ancient World

In 'ancient' times, the notion of 'sexuality', as we understand it now, simply did not pertain (Foucault, 1990; Cantarell, 2002; Neill, 2009). People had sexual relations with each other, and such relations did not define who one was. Sex, indeed – with the appearance of the Phallus on a man's body - was often treated as sacred. Beyond the Greek and Roman world, Stephen Murray tell us that Islam replaced pagan religions across the Middle East that included "sacred sexually receptive – often gender-variant – functionaries" (Murray & Roscoe, 1997:24). According to Herodotus, who described it in his *Histories*, "The Babylonians have one most shameful custom. Every woman born in the country must once in her life go and sit down in the precinct of Venus, and there consort with a stranger…The woman goes with the first man who throws her money, and rejects no one" (2013 p88). There is a good deal of debate about this practice - sometimes described as a variant of the *Hieros Gamos* or Sacred Marriage, that is believed to have been a part of religious practice in many ancient temples – usually between a 'sky god' and an 'earth goddess', played out by temple functionaries and devotees (Kramer, 1969; Rickard, 2015). As Stoll points out, "Whether or not temple prostitution actually existed in Mesopotamia has been a widely discussed issue in academic circles. Points of view differ so vastly that some find evidence for it everywhere, and others detect it nowhere" (Stoll 2016 p419). Some scholarship dismisses it (Budin, 2008) asserting the concept of sacred prostitution is merely a myth and arguing that what Herodotus and others were describing was more likely non-remunerated ritual sex, a *Hieros Gamos* such as is found elsewhere, or non-sexual religious rites. Others question that scholarship (Rickard 2015), suggesting that the "silver coin" Herodotus describes becomes sacred the moment it is thrown, and a necessary part of the temple upkeep

– similar to the coins offered at Japanese Shinto Temples and Christian Churches the world over, to this day, in exchange for the spiritual rewards on offer. Moreover, there seems little doubt – regardless of what was going on in the ancient Middle East - that it was common elsewhere. Herodotus assures us "A custom very much like this is found also in certain parts of the island of Cyprus" (2013 p89) and Rickard (2015) describes this particular Cypriot *Hieros Gamos* as a unique blend of Greek and Sumerian influences. Unsurprisingly, the Church fathers decried any such 'sacred sexuality' (Stoll 2016 p419).

Roscoe tells us, too, about same-sex activity in the ancient world. "The category of status-differentiated homosexuality includes not only paederastia, relations between adult men and youths such as flourished at Athens, but all relations between individuals socially defined as male in which one partner is of higher status than the other" (Roscoe 1997 p56). Familiar in English public schools like Eton between sixth formers and their younger 'fags' (Bullough and Bullough 1979) status-differentiated homosexuality is universally based on "a distinction between the inserting (high status) role and the penetrated (low status) role in sexual intercourse" (Roscoe 1997 p56). The concept of the Phallus has become here a definer of relationships: the position of the erect penis constitutes the nature of relations in these status-differentiated homosexualities.

Third-gender roles, too, were common throughout the region, including, "state third-gender roles, in which gender difference was linked to specific positions in state and civic institutions, and folk third-gender roles, exemplified by the devotees of popular goddess cults," such as that of Cybele. That these third-gender roles continued not only into the 19th century but – in some places – to the present day, is evidenced by the discovery, during the war in Afghanistan, by American troops, of institutionalised pederasty in the Pashtun areas of the Af-Pak border region (Wijngaarden & Rani 2011), where the boys attached to older males are frequently dressed in women's clothes.

In North America, moreover, there were amongst the Native American tribes what the European settlers described as "berdache" – a French word derived from the Arabic "bardaj" meaning "kept boy" - who, since 1990, have renamed themselves the "Two-Spirit" people, who assume the dress, social status, and role of the opposite sex, (Spanbauer 1991; Jacobs 1997; Estrada 2011).

Sexual Repression: the hiding of the Phallus

So, where – apart from museums and remote mountain regions - did all this go? Clearly – though it is impossible for any modern eye to see through the eyes of the pre-moderns - pre-modern sexuality had little of the embarrassment or prudery around sex, sexuality and nudity of modern times. Why are things so different today? Since at least the early 4th century CE we have – in the West at least – been subject to, at first the Christian, and then the Islamic, suppression of sex as something to be frowned upon, prohibited, and to be ashamed of. Sex, in short, and the image of the erect penis in particular – the Phallus - became something religious authorities no longer celebrated, but tried to suppress.

The main targets – since early on – have been those sexual acts which are not directly involved in procreation – the use of the erect penis for any means *other* than to create life. The sixteenth canon of the Synod of Ancrya in 314CE focusses on bestiality, prescribing a range of different penances to unmarried youths, married men over 20, and married men over

50, who received the harshest sanctions. As no animal is able to consent to such activity and there are any number of hygiene issues with it this canon seems ostensibly very sensible. But it was later extended to include same-sex activity between males (Newadvent 2020) – the start of a discriminatory attitude equating homosexuality with bestiality that survives to this day among some religious fanatics. The First Council of Nicaea, under the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine, a decade later, in 325 CE, included a prohibition against self-castration for clergy. This practice was associated with the adherents of the Goddess Cybele, who was roundly frowned upon by other pagan religious authorities, but equally feared; her temples were thus allowed all over the Roman Empire, including many altars in Britain, and home to the 'Galli' – an all-male priesthood renowned for orgiastic worship (Conner et. al. 1997 p147). Then in 342 CE, the Christian Roman emperor Constantius II decreed the death penalty for any male who "marries [a man] as a woman... [a situation in which] gender has lost its place" (Halsall 1998). Such early homophobic edicts record the attitudes of the senior clergy in the new Church, struggling to assert the authority of Christianity over the surviving pagan temples in late antiquity. But it seems clear that such activities nonetheless continued, long after the Empire in Rome had fallen over the course of the 5th century. In the 11th century, as the papacy in Rome began to exert new influence across Europe - vying for power with the Holy Roman Emperor - Peter Damian, a reforming Benedictine monk with the ear of Pope Leo IX, strove to stamp out the male same-sex activity that was rife amongst the clergy and in the monasteries at the time, and was the first to limit the notion of 'sodomy' to acts undertaken with a penis (Boswell, 1980; Newheiser, 2015). Until then the story of Sodom, where Lot offered his daughters to be ravished by a mob, seemed focused less on male same-sex activity – let alone anal intercourse - than on anything that was not strictly procreative. Islam, from the 7th-8th centuries onwards, had perhaps inspired this, and certainly seemed in some respects to follow suit, in much the same vein, prohibiting very early on all non-procreative sexual activity, and making much of the story of Lot, or Lut as he is known in the Hadith. One of the Arabic words for the act of anal sex between men is liwat, deriving from Lut.

In Europe, by the Middle Ages, the prohibitions of the early Church Fathers grew to become an obsession with the demonizing of the penis. Satan's penis, as Friedman relates, was in fact the central character in a great number of the Witch trials in mediaeval Europe. "In a culture where the Virgin symbolized all that was pure, the penis stood for all that was evil. What defined Mary's sanctity was her lack of contact with a penis," (Friedman 2003 p4). Small wonder that Phallic imagery all but disappeared from Christendom: the sacred Phallus and non-procreative sex went into hiding.

Yet as a signifier of personal virility, in the form of the codpiece, the image of the Phallus took part, during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, in the creation of a new gender: the modern male. King (2004) argues that societies once based upon alliance – all men, women and boys subordinated to higher ranked males – underwent profound transformation in the 17th-18th centuries: a transformation born of the idea that one's status could be derived merely from the ownership (or lack of it) of a penis, and therefore not, exclusively, from one's allegiance to those of higher status.

By the 19th century European ideas began to medicalise sexual activity, inventing whole categories of 'sexuality.' This constituted ascribing a name to a series of specific sexual acts and then ascribing that set of acts to particular types of personality. The term 'homosexual' was first coined by Hungarian sexologist Kertbeny in 1869. This notion was taken up by Westphal in a famous article in 1870 as, "contrary sexual sensations" – regarded by Foucault

as the "date of birth" of the categorisation, 'homosexual' (Foucault 1990). An 1895 translation of Richard von Kraft-Ebing's sexologists' bible *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) saw the word's first appearance in English (Halperin 1990). Such Victorian values of prudery gradually changed the British Christian laws against sodomy (first introduced by Henry VIII in 1533, and a capital offence until 1861) into laws against a type of person – the homosexual. As early as 1860 in India, laws against sodomy had been exported to the colonies.

So, the image of the Phallus once openly represented a cluster of sacred meanings focussed around notions of purity and light, and a wide variety of relations, both sacred and everyday, between men and women, and between men. These meanings underwent profound change over the last two thousand years. Attitudes to the Phallus changed, progressively, from those of veneration, to those of shame and – in the paranoid Middle Ages – even evil (Friedman 2003). The image was suppressed, along with the open place of sex in society that it also represented.

The Legacy of the 19th Century

Today, despite gradual relaxation of social mores in some Western countries, the legacy of Empire lingers, as "sodomy laws throughout Asia and sub-Saharan Africa have consistently been colonial impositions," (Gupta 2008:10) which do not reflect pre-colonial cultural mores. Such laws suppress the image of the Phallus, and are, as Gupta titles his treatise, an 'Alien Legacy'. "No 'native' ever participated in their making. Colonizers saw indigenous cultures as sexually corrupt. A bent toward homosexuality supposedly formed part of their corruption. Where pre-colonial peoples had been permissive, sodomy laws would cure them—and defend their new, white masters against moral contagion" (Gupta 2008:10).

The meanings associated with the Phallus today, then, are heavily laden with contemporary attitudes to sex, sexuality, and 19th century Victorian colonial attitudes to pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religious belief and practice. These attitudes combined the religious fascination with procreative activity with the new sciences emerging from the Enlightenment. As the 18th century antiquarian Richard Payne Knight asserted, in his *Worship of Priapus* published in 1786, the Phallus, as stone, clay or metal image, is about symbolism, representation of "abstract ideas by objects of sight," rather than through words or numbers (2006 p14). Such an approach he deems quite fitting; after all, "in an age when no prejudices of artificial decency existed, what more just and natural image could they find, by which to express their idea of the beneficent power of the great Creator" (ibid p14). But it is also clear that the morality of the 18th century was heavily influencing his interpretation of such symbols. Indeed, Knight asserts that Phallic amulets were worn by chaste women in ancient times to signify that "the devout wearer devoted herself wholly and solely to procreation, the great end for which she was ordained" (2006 p26). Interpretation, then, is all!

By the middle of the 19th century, a new uniformitarian settlement amongst English Protestants, placing God the Creator as divine clockmaker, gave to the mechanical universe an intentional, teleological whole: the progress of history now had a plan, a finalism - the perfection of nature. A vision of a clockwork universe that scientific advance would inevitably understand in its entirety took hold of European thought, and the medicalisation of sexual behaviour described above was simply a by-product of an overall drive to classify and determine everything with the tools of the new sciences.

Thus, the understanding of the origins of life shifted over the centuries from being a product of the sacred solar Phallus of divine figures, and the fecundity of its semen, in a primordial act of creation, to something wholly abstract. In pre-Judaeo-Christian cosmogeny the Phallus was openly venerated. By the time of the Book of Genesis this act of creation had become much coyer and more sanitised and it would become increasingly abstract as time progressed. By the Middle Ages the Phallus was only spoken of as an evil opposite of the pure virginity of the Mother of God. Male same-sex activity, meanwhile, uncontroversial and frequently institutionalised in antiquity, was increasingly suppressed alongside the image of the Phallus, as the focus upon procreation became progressively more abstract and purer, and notions of masculinity that proscribed any non-procreative activity became increasingly prescribed. With a final abstraction, in the 19th century, in the clockwork universe, the transformation would seem to be complete, and those whose behaviour still erred from the abstract perfection of procreative masculine activity were newly medicalised as 'ill' in some shape or form.

Yet, with the contemporary distance being established in Western democracies from such medicalisation, and the emancipation not just of same-sex activity, but of sexuality in general, there has, in recent years, been a resurgent interest, too, in the image of the Phallus. There is now a Penis Café in Sicily[1], a Phallus Museum in Iceland[2], and a Penis Park in South Korea[3]. In Tyrnavos, a small village near the capital of Thessaly, Larissa, in northern Greece, an echo of ancient Hellenistic practice, moreover, can be found. There is no evidence that the Tyrnavos festival is older than the late 19th century. But its heritage is clear, and the Phallophoria takes place on 'Clean Monday' every Spring. There seems little evidence that this renewed interest treats the Phallus as a sacred source of the universe, of life, light, luck, or transition to the paths of the dead, as in ancient times. Indeed, there seems far more evidence that the image is one of fun, jollity, and perhaps irony – a 'theme-park' revisitation of once ancient rites, both for village enjoyment and as tourist attraction. Complex as ever, the Phallus remains, we argue, very difficult to pin down to one particular interpretation!

Contemporary celebrations of the Phallus

The absurd….

Figure 18 Tyrnavos Phallophoria. Photo taken by David Kreps, Tyrnavos, Larissa, Greece, March 2016

[1] https://www.turrisibar.it/
[2] https://Phallus.is/en/
[3] https://www.facebook.com/MetroUK/videos/1556696897698926/ and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haesindang_Park

Figure 19 Tyrnavos Phallophoria. Photo taken by David Kreps, Tyrnavos, Larissa, Greece, March 2016

Figure 20 Tyrnavos Phallophoria. Photo taken by David Kreps, Tyrnavos, Larissa, Greece, March 2016

Figure 21 Tyrnavos Phallophoria. Photo taken by David Kreps, Tyrnavos, Larissa, Greece, March 2016

The devout....

Figure 22 Kanayama Shrine Phallus. Photo taken by David Kreps at Kanayama Shrine, Kawasaki, Tokyo, Japan, Nov 2016

And the tacky…

Figure 23 Pan. Photo taken by David Kreps at Acropolis tourist shop, Athens, Greece, March 2006

A Contemporary Case Study: The Parodic Phallus in *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999, US)

Disarming the image of the Phallus from its 19th and 20th century associations has proven to be both liberating and revealing, leading perhaps to a celebratory enjoyment that (at least some of) the pre-modern depictions may themselves have represented. But in what ways is the Phallus represented more recently and in visual media? This is too broad a question to be answered in one book chapter, however the authors do wish to include a film case study

which raises some interesting questions about the Phallus, power and parody; it can be argued that this is a film that is symptomatic of the rich and troubled history of the Phallus and what it can represent.

This final part of the chapter, then, focuses on the performance of Tom Cruise as motivational speaker Frank Mackey in the film *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999, US), and his "respect the cock, tame the cunt" routine. The film tells the tale of two separate elderly fathers reaching the end of their lives due to ill health on both their parts, and the differing issues their grown-up children have. In both scenarios the fathers have failed their children in different ways and this has impacted extremely negatively on the lives of their children. Tom Cruise plays one of the father's sons and the character has capitalised on his misogynistic ways by becoming a motivational speaker encouraging men to dominate specifically using the Phallus, or "cock" as he calls it, to embody male or masculine power over women – reminiscent of King's (2004) description of the 17th century male who newly derived his status merely by dint of the possession of a penis. Cruise's performances to rooms of rowdy men are more explicit in terms of language than they are visually and can be read as both parodic backlash to feminism and through homoeroticism. The Phallus in this film is not celebratory as is often the case in the various histories we have explored, but both a sickening display of attempted male power and a destabilising of that very same power. The notion of masculine power is disrupted/interrupted in the film in a number of ways and Frank Mackey (Tom Cruise) becomes symbolic of this as he adopts the Phallus as central to his motivational workshops in an increasingly desperate attempt at asserting male authority; ultimately this adoption of the Phallus as a symbol or rhetoric of power fails as Mackey struggles with the death of his estranged father and ends the film a broken and very vulnerable man.

The Phallus is fundamental to his routines and this is due to two factors: lighting and camera work, and the way that Cruise uses his body to play Frank; performativity is central to how these scenes work to destabilize male power. The scenes are often lit and shot to highlight Tom Cruise's face rather than body, but his penis is tacitly on display continually – a sort of filmic codpiece - or perhaps more accurately he is continually performing the erect penis. For example, the very opening of a key scene, in which viewers are confronted with Mackey's motivational workshop attended entirely by men, introduces Mackey to his delegates (and us the viewer) in shadow and his entire body in silhouette. The effect is that his body is representative of a giant Phallus. As the male crowd applaud and cheer the lighting increases so we begin to see more of Cruise's very determined expression. Richard Strauss's rousing Also Sprach Zarathrustra (which we should perhaps remind ourselves is inspired by Nietzsche's essay of the same name) plays to the crowd, as Mackey moves his arms higher up to symbolize power before finally moving his hands down to frame his penis[4]. Behind him a banner falls open to read "seduce and destroy", the title of his motivational workshop, and shows the image of a giant wolf type creature (representative of men) stalking a small rodent type creature (representative of women). The status-differentiation in the implied relations is clearly based upon the position of the erect penis. As Mackey begins his talk the camera moves into more of a midshot, yet instead of cutting the character off at the waist as would be more usual, the camera sits just below including Mackey's groin in shot. This subtle use of framing implies the importance of the penis to both this character and how the film interprets male power in heterosexual discourses.

[4] It is worth noting the music to this scene begins at the end of the former scene which depicts Frank's dying father and his nurse caring for him; the music provides a subtle link between the themes of fathers and sons, power and vulnerability.

Later the camera moves down Cruise's body as he performs imaginary sex, and lingers over his crotch in the same way traditionally in mainstream film the camera has lingered over female body parts. His performance of imaginary sex here with an imaginary partner is highly dominant suggesting a submissive second party, which we can assume would be female given the "respect the cock, tame the cunt" mantra, but seems more redolent, perhaps, of status-differentiated homoerotic relations. Gesture is also very important in these scenes; he is continually, and overtly, gesturing towards his penis seemingly to demonstrate its supposed power and the fact that it apparently warrants respect – simply for being a penis. For that is indeed what this film, and this character, are all about – failed male power embodied by the image of a Phallus. That such a meaning for the Phallus could come about, in light of our discussion, above, of the many and sacred historical signifiers of this ancient symbol, is revealing, perhaps, of the strange internal inconsistencies of the cultural notion of the 'masculine'.

The explicit and implicit performance of the penis here can be read as both parodic backlash to feminism and through homoeroticism; explicit because of the language and because Tom Cruise's whole body becomes a phallic representation, and implicit because there is also a covering over and disavowal of Cruise's body. He is tightly clothed, but he is clothed in this scene. Although later we do see more of his body as he demonstratively parades around in his underwear, posturing for the benefit of a female interviewer; here Mackey is deliberately trying to intimidate the interviewer and he uses his body performatively to flaunt his penis. When the interview commences Mackey continually interrupts the interviewer, attempting to undercut her authority. He also tells her in an intimidating manner, whilst still in the workshop surrounded by men that it is "not very safe for you here". Any power Mackey thinks he has over this woman is quickly subverted when she reveals that she has proof he has lied publicly about his family history. He is clearly and visibly shaken by this revelation and is shot in a close up on his face which disavows the presence of the body he has so far relied on to embody the Phallus and the power associated with its latter-day meanings.

In terms of his performance it is a performativity in Judith Butler's sense of "gender trouble"; repeated actions enforce and maintain a gendered identity (Butler, 1990), and is perhaps what Cameron would call a "sustained performance of masculinity" (Cameron, cited in Smirnova, 2016: 3). Such a "sustained performance" is what pulls the punters in for Mackey's workshops as it is a convincing performance, but in the end that is all it is. For Cruise as Mackey this performed identity is a deeply parodic version of a "deep masculinity" or "hyper-masculinity". Such exaggerated understandings of masculinity can be thought of as coming out of the context of the 80s and 90s, such as the "men's movement" in the United States, and what we could argue was a backlash to then recent feminist movements (Pfeil, 1995). Such thinking is perhaps best embodied by Robert Bly's book *Iron John: A Book about Men* which Fred Pfeil criticizes as attempting to be both, and problematically so, ahistorical and transcultural as well as being based on an "obscure" fairy tale (Pfeil, 1995: 171). The book's focus is not dissimilar to the motivations of Mackey's workshops, although Bly unsurprisingly is less bombastic and aggressive than Mackey, and tries not to frame his ideas about encouraging a fully developed masculinity in opposition to femininity. That said, "despite Bly's insistence on the fact that women are not to be subjugated and men should not turn away from women, his book does smack of pre-feminist ideology and he continually plays on very traditional views of gender" (Ruddell, 2013: 86).

But the point here is that Mackey's overt performance of a deep masculinity, which is performed in a very "bodily" way, fails. In short "*Magnolia* is symptomatic of a crisis in

masculinity" (Dillman, 2005: 143), and this is not just to do with the representation of the male characters (including Frank), which depicts all sorts of crises, particularly in relation to fathers. Dillman argues that the film disrupts the "'male' textual film system and more traditionally 'masculine' narratives" (Dillman, 2005: 144), which she argues is, in part, due to the film's adoption of particular televisual strategies and forms. Frank is also silenced by women in two key moments of the film, firstly when his interviewer exposes the lies he has told about his past, and secondly when his female manager calls him to tell him that his father is dying. Further male vulnerabilities are in the "quiz kid" wetting himself on camera and Frank's father who embodies a former power that is eroded by ill health.

Cruise's performance of Frank thus produces both an explicit and implicit performance of the penis because he performs constant reference to it visually and in language. This apparently unabashed performance of a version of male power purely demonstrated through the penis is undercut deliberately by two factors: firstly, that we are encouraged as viewers to see this as parody, and secondly, because the character turns out to be deeply vulnerable and in some sort of Oedipal crisis. Gender and sexuality is in trouble here in further implicit ways also, such as in the casting of Tom Cruise to this role; this is significant as a number of his performances can be read as homoerotic. In *Magnolia*, he surrounds himself by men continually and is cheered on performing imaginary sex on stage; is it their respect and intimacy he is trying to gain rather than in any heterosexual coupling? It certainly seems so, particularly in his suggestion that women will always let men down. But Cruise has a number of further performances that can be read in homoerotic terms, such as *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) and *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (Neil Jordan, 1994).

Conclusion

Although just one case study we believe Magnolia is an indicative example of how the Phallus can function in contemporary cinema, which is as symptomatic of the many ambiguities surrounding masculinity and issues of both power and vulnerability. As we have argued, throughout history perceptions and understandings of the Phallus vary depending on context and perspective. Some of these ambiguities, particularly on the negative side, seem to be captured in this film through the representation of Mackey. What the film does not do is celebrate the Phallus in the way that we have seen historically in many cases, and in the way that, for example, the new Penis Café and Museums are beginning to. The difference, we might suggest, is precisely in the distance between notions of masculine power and dominance, typical of the 19th century colonial understanding of the Phallus, from the ephemerality and vulnerability of the Phallus understood as a cultural signifier of life, of fun, and of the pleasures of the flesh. A valuable further project would be to examine representations of the Phallus across a range of film and television genres, and I suspect that what we would find would be a range of interpretations, from the absurd to the parodic to the celebratory, as history has taught us.

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