ALONE TOGETHER:
CINEMATIC (RE)PRESENTATIONS OF
MASCULINITY, FRIENDSHIP, AND GRIEF

By
Costas Thrasyvoulou

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the links between masculinity, friendship, and grief in a combination of creative work and critical analysis. The creative component consists of a thirteen-minute short dramatic film entitled *Brothers* (2014). This film explores the different ways in which three young men react to the death of a close male friend. The film contains no dialogue and emphasises the importance of gestures, actions, and other forms of behaviour.

The thesis is comprised of three main sections. The first situates masculine experiences of grief and friendship in a critical context by drawing on discourses from sociology and psychology. I argue that the feelings of individual men in relation to traumatic events such as bereavement are often hidden or repressed because of the need to present a stoic exterior, even during grieving rituals such as funerals. This kind of behaviour preserves the invulnerability often associated with dominant or idealised versions of masculinity. However, this tendency arguably inhibits male emotional intimacy and friendship, particularly during times of crisis.

The second part of the thesis considers how these interrelated issues are represented cinematically through a close reading of the John Cassavetes film *Husbands* (1970). *Husbands* is concerned with the dissolute behaviour of three male friends in the aftermath of the death of a friend. Although the men are garrulous, they struggle to articulate their feelings. I employ research on performance in cinema, as well as criticism of Cassavetes' work to interpret the slips in their masculine bravado.

The final section engages in an exegesis of *Brothers*. I reflect on the influence of *Husbands* on my project. I also discuss the ways in which *Brothers* can be understood in terms of the critical frameworks established in the previous chapters.

A Note About *Brothers*

The creative component of this project, the film *Brothers*, is included alongside this thesis on a DVD. The film can also be accessed online at <https://vimeo.com/99519967> using the password **masterscut**. A copy of the final shooting script is also included in the thesis as an appendix.

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**Dedicated to
KW. JM. LD.**

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INTRODUCTION

This project examines the links between masculinity, friendship, and grief. It combines a thirteen-minute short dramatic film exploring these themes, entitled *Brothers* (2014), with this thesis. The impetus for the project came from an experience I had at the funeral of a friend. This friend was also a mentor, an older bloke who taught me how to conduct myself as a man. As the eulogy was being read in the packed funeral parlour, I found myself becoming increasingly distraught. I tried desperately to suppress my sorrow but I was overwhelmed, sobbing audibly. With my head down I glanced sideways and saw only men – his friends. They sat still and straight, many with their hands on their knees as though they were posing for a rugby team photo. Not one of them was crying, only me. I wondered why these men were so expressionless. And then, perhaps more troublingly, I wondered why I felt so self-conscious about my own emotional response. It was a paradoxical situation, I found it inconceivable that none of these men seemed to be showing any sadness and at the same time I was trying desperately to *act* more like them.

Stemming from this personal episode the project seeks to investigate and analyse the ways in which men *perform* masculinity in situations where emotional instability is present. It proceeds on the critical assumption that masculinity is constructed socioculturally and relies on a process of external or visible enactment. I will argue that masculine identity is frequently organised around notions of strength. As such, potential signs of vulnerability are hidden or denied in order to protect male privilege and power. This often involves behaviour that is to the detriment of men's ability to forge emotionally intimate relationships, particularly with other men. It also influences their capacity to grieve.

The thesis component of the project draws on three main critical fields: sociological literature on masculinity and male friendship; therapeutic and psychological research on male grief; and film theory on screen performance. In reading the film *Husbands* (1970), I additionally utilise scholarship on the cinema of John Cassavetes.

Following the discourse of the social construction of gender, I define dominant or hegemonic masculinity as an idealised version of masculinity men accept as normative. Hegemonic masculinity involves a series of performative tensions pertaining to how men believe they should act to embody the ideal. As Victor Seidler states, masculinity becomes performative “often as a way of concealing inner turmoil from others” (13). Therefore, men enact “the stoic message”, a doctrine of self-autonomy, self-control, and reticence, in order to appear seemingly invulnerable (I. Harris 145). Since friendship is part of the male performance, the tenets of the stoic message influence how men construct and manifest these relationships as well. Consequently, barriers to intimacy can exist in a fraternal bond.

Similar notions are reiterated in therapeutic and psychological research I review considering male grief in the wake of bereavement. Using this work I attempt to ‘unveil’ male grief, a malaise masked behind the stoic male façade. These studies note how the crisis of loss poses a danger to the male performance as it conjures a raft of internal anguish threatening to subvert the male front. In response, men deploy further protective mechanisms to hide grief from others, thus leading to a fraught and lonely journey. In collating this literature I extract three aspects of male grief: “secret grief” which incorporates silence and self-control; the desire to repress and suppress painful feelings; and the drive toward activity as a method of coping (Staudacher 19).

To examine these issues in cinema the focus is on performance and emotion. In analysing Cassavetes’ *Husbands* – a film following three men in the aftermath of a friend’s death – I take into account George Kouvaros’ suggestion that the unconventional nature of Cassavetes’ films require a different interpretive framework, prioritising “bodily gesture, human relation, and emotion” (qtd. in Islam para. 13). This framework is present in recent film theory by Donna Peberdy who advocates for an investigation of cinematic masculinities at the level of performance. Here, the reader locates performative moments of “angst”, like a nervous gesture or a muddled line of dialogue, that reveals a breakdown in the idealised male front (Peberdy 8). In both *Husbands* and *Brothers* I will uncover such moments and relate them to the wider context of my three themes.

Richard Armstrong’s *Mourning Films: A Critical Study of Loss and Grieving*

in Cinema, which was published during the formative stages of my enquiry, develops some important concepts for the analysis of cinematic grief. Armstrong argues for a new retrospective genre of mourning cinema. He analyses films such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), *Don't Look Now* (1973), and *Three Colours: Blue* (1993). According to Armstrong, a “mourning film” has two main components: a female protagonist; and a tendency to look “beyond the cinema’s myriad spectacles of death at the feelings death engenders in the living” (2). Thus, he tracks a character’s emotional journey in the aftermath of bereavement. This frequently involves the experience of loss and a continuing struggle to come to terms with the character’s grief.

Armstrong argues, “the archetypal mourning film, like its forebear the woman’s picture of the classical era, remains a female preserve” (24). To account for this, he suggests that Western society often looks to women to personify grief, assuming that “women are more sensitive, intuitive and empathetic than men, more disposed to shows of public suffering and pity” (21). The implication is that, these supposedly ‘female’ preserves allow women to become symbols of suffering within the cinema of mourning. Meanwhile, in the examples discussed by Armstrong, men are marginalised. Frequently they are the ones who have died, leaving women to mourn alone. In his conclusion, Armstrong notes that his “gender bias” is necessary in order to pursue a distinct set of films and advocate for a specific female centred genre (194). While strengthening his thesis that mourning cinema constitutes a determinate genre, this omission raises a number of questions about the presentation of male grief. In closing Armstrong agrees, stating that male mourning should be the subject of future considerations (195).

In early iterations of my project I sought to ascertain if a *male* mourning film existed. It soon became clear that this task would expand well beyond the confines of the dissertation. As Armstrong warns, a theme like grief is so vast as to be potentially “unwieldy” and any review of multiple works would necessitate strict organising principles (18). I identified some suitable texts that might be included in a corpus of male mourning films, such as *The Son’s Room* (2001), *The Crossing Guard* (1995), *In The Bedroom* (2001), and even the New Zealand film *After the Waterfall* (2010). However, these films did not manifest the three themes I wanted to explore in

consistently interesting ways, nor did they prompt the creative spark I required to inspire my own film. Crucially, the missing link was the depiction of men grieving together, since the majority of these examples focused on solitary men grieving within disenfranchised family units.

Ultimately, the film I intuitively returned to again and again was *Husbands* because it is a rare example of men grieving in a group. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on reading this single film rather than analysing various titles. Accordingly, another aim of the thesis is to examine *Husbands* as a narrative of male grief and friendship. *Husbands* is widely regarded as Cassavetes' most 'difficult' picture by defenders and detractors alike. As a result, there has been a dearth of writing on *Husbands*, with even eminent Cassavetes scholars Ray Carney and George Kouvaros avoiding sustained discussions of the film in their foremost work on the director.¹ By reconsidering *Husbands* as a rich text dealing with the themes of masculinity, friendship, and grief, I hope to reinvigorate debate around the film.

Husbands is also the chief film that inspired *Brothers* – the latter being the final key contribution this project makes. Sandra Poppe affirms that by confronting death and grief at the cinema the spectator is offered “the possibility to live through existential feelings in the safe setting of fiction” (117). She additionally acknowledges a similar prospect in the act of filmmaking where “the artist also has the opportunity to deal with existential subjects and to ‘test’ several emotions connected with these subjects” (106). As a creative undertaking *Brothers* allows me to merge my personal sentiments and academic conceptualisations, and ‘test’ them within a practical exercise. In chapter three, a critical exegesis that reflects on the devising process, I give a first-hand account of how my film came into being. By shedding light on the intentions of *Brothers* I am able to elucidate my work in detail, thereby providing as full an understanding of the creative text as possible.

While the scope of this study delimits the films I consider, it also restricts the academic fields I investigate. Consequently, my formative conceptualisations of

¹ While Carney devotes a chapter to *Husbands* in his later book *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies* it is absent in his earlier *American Dreaming: The Films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience*. Kouvaros probes several scenes from *Husbands*, albeit in a larger chapter on *Love Streams* (1984), in *Where Does it Happen?: John Cassavetes and Cinema at the Breaking Point*.

masculinity, friendship, and grief are concentrated and only scratch the surface of these immense notions and their multifarious critical fields. Mandates on inclusion and exclusion mean a number of substantial scholarly disciplines are not present here. For instance, examinations of grief are prominent in psychoanalytic theory spanning from Sigmund Freud through to Julia Kristeva. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida have written effectively on loss as well. Furthermore, literary criticism by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick insightfully addresses textual representations of male friendship in English Literature. Although I delved into this work, I drew predominantly on ideas and concepts from sociology because they were the most effective in analysing socially constructed gender roles.

The breadth of research on masculinity also means that generalisations about Western masculinity across historical and cultural contexts were unavoidable. Regarding the film texts, it is important to acknowledge that masculinity in 1970s America during the production of *Husbands* would vary from that of modern provincial New Zealand in many respects. Therefore, different sociocultural backdrops will have shaped our individual presentations of men. Nonetheless, I would argue that the tenets of the stoic message are evident in many societies throughout history.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one provides base conceptualisations of masculinity, friendship, and grief. Using sociological research I suggest that masculinity is socially constructed and performative. In particular, men enact masculinity in a manner that aims to efface external signs of emotional vulnerability. Friendship is an additional aspect of the male performance. As other males constitute the audience that validates an individual's masculinity men can remain reticent and guarded in order to appear invulnerable, even amongst close friends. Finally, by reviewing therapeutic literature on male grief, I consider the ways men might respond to bereavement and how the ideological underpinnings of masculinity contribute to a potentially fraught experience. Since the crisis of loss instigates a raft of distressing internal emotions, it is a significant test for the controlled male performance.

In chapter two I conduct a reading of John Cassavetes' *Husbands*, a film about three men mourning the death of a friend. The emphasis on social performance inside the fraternal group is exemplary for examining in relation to the trio of themes outlined in chapter one. Situating this discussion within the field of Film Studies, I draw on contemporary theory around performance and emotion by Donna Peberdy, in addition to scholarship on Cassavetes. In a critical commentary of the film I will identify instances of performative angst in *Husbands*, as well as dissecting the film's representation of the grieving male group in a state of emotional dislocation.

In the final chapter I undertake another close reading, this time of my short film *Brothers*. The film was influenced by the deaths of three friends in 2009. While it is a deeply personal work, the chapter attempts a critical exegesis. Reprising the conceptualisations of masculinity, friendship, and grief discussed in the first two chapters, I explain how I devised a dramatic scenario that depicted these issues. Revisiting *Husbands* I also expand on the ways my film was inspired by Cassavetes' picture, as well as how it differs in important respects. The last portion of this chapter culminates in a thorough textual analysis of *Brothers* that conveys the ideas, intentions, and idiosyncrasies of the film.

CHAPTER ONE

Masculinity, Friendship, and Grief

While researching this thesis I often asked family, friends, and peers what they thought masculinity entailed. I was largely unsurprised by the standard list of traits and tendencies I would hear. They are well summed up by John MacInnes, who recounts the results of his own impromptu surveys, “terms such as hard, aggressive, strong, dominant, remote, powerful, fearful of intimacy, rational, unemotional, competitive, sexist ... crop up regularly” (14). Upon quizzing a class of secondary school students on male qualities, the first three remarks called out to me were “strong”, “tough”, and “angry”. When pressed for why these answers related to masculinity, most people recited variations of breadwinner dogma connecting femininity to motherhood and masculinity to provision. Some contrasted biological differences in men and women’s bodies in regards to strength, while others mentioned specific cultural touchstones like rugby or the ‘Kiwi bloke’.² More commonly however, I was met with interim puzzlement before hearing “...it’s just how they’re meant to be...it’s how men act”. The prescience of this plain statement, with its intrinsic emphasis on the word *act*, is a logical place to begin a consideration of the key tensions that arise in the performance of masculinity.

This chapter will focus on explicating masculinity, friendship, and grief – the triad of themes that are fundamental to this study and to my film *Brothers*. The peak of this triad is masculinity, which is both socially constructed and enacted. Men, I will suggest, wrestle with tensions between a strong, even invulnerable exterior and a potentially vulnerable interior. This desire to shield one’s weaknesses from others can lead to the incorporation of a “stoic message”, which promotes self-autonomy, self-control, and emotional reticence (I. Harris 45). Male friendship constitutes another aspect of masculine performance. Adherence to the tenets of the stoic message can result in fraternal relationships that lack closeness or emotional intimacy. Concomitantly, there exists a latent bond, often called *brotherhood*, which manifests itself in covert ways. Finally, drawing on therapeutic literature, I will propose that the emotional turmoil of grief can have implications for bereaved men. Grieving men frequently alienate themselves from those around them, preferring to repress and

² The ‘Kiwi bloke’ is a New Zealand cultural archetype renowned for his rugged individualism and no nonsense credo. For a discussion see Jock Phillips’ *A Man’s Country*?

suppress their feelings, once again seeking to efface their vulnerability.

A recurring theme in research on the social construction of masculinity is that it requires, and even constitutes, an act. To adhere to the normative, or, as it is now commonly referred, *hegemonic* ideal, within a particular sociocultural sphere requires a repertoire of what Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe call “manhood acts” (279). Similarly, Judith Butler refers to “performative acts”, while Candace West and Don Zimmerman speak of situational “accomplishments” (521; 125). These acts can be as specific as feigning knowledge about a subject in order to appear erudite, or as general as adopting an air of aggression when one is placed in a confrontational situation. This process of enactment dovetails with Raewyn Connell’s conception of plural interactional masculinities, by implying that men oscillate between guises depending on specific circumstances.³ For example, Roger Horrocks calls the male identity “protean, fluid, [and] adaptable”, noting how a man’s sports field persona may differ drastically from the way he acts in the familial home (5). There can also be a contradiction between the internal experience of masculinity and its external expression. It is the tension between a subject’s internal tenor and external sphere through a mediated performance that are central to this thesis and its consideration of masculinity, friendship, grief, and subsequently the cinema.

At the heart of hegemonic masculinity is ideology and the implication of an ideal enactment of masculinity. However, such an ideal might be a fallacy that operates as a socioculturally constructed and internally moderated measuring stick which men gauge themselves against. David Buchbinder summarises hegemonic masculinity as constituting an “ideal(ised) masculinity. *It is that notion of the masculine to which men subscribe, whether or not they themselves embody it*” (94).⁴ For example, to return to the traits compiled by MacInnes, men may believe they need to be rational and in control under all circumstances, despite such a requirement being implausible (14). As Anthony Easthope suggests, these ideals become pervasive and ultimately mythic, permeating from society, history, and culture before gestating inside the subject’s head (166). The role of the media as a “mechanism of hegemony” which (re)produces these often-unattainable “exemplars of masculinity” in sports stars or cinematic men, contributes to this almost mythic creation (Connell and

³ As put forth in her book *Masculinities*.

⁴ All instances of emphasis within quotations are in the original unless stated otherwise.

Messerschmidt 834; 846).

While cataloguing these myths is beyond the scope of this thesis, I contend that certain endemic, and arguably anachronistic, ideologies underpin hegemonic masculinity. Many of these features, being tough, hard and unemotional for instance, constitute the central strain men encounter in the enactment process. Specifically, I wish to isolate and examine one key tension that arises between the external act and the internal reality – the perception of weakness and vulnerability. Although characteristics like reticence or stoicism are not necessarily inherent traits of masculinity, they can be linked to the notion of a split between exteriority and interiority. The accompanying tension also has repercussions for the way men form relationships, as well as how men behave during the emotional tumult of bereavement. At this point, an analogy might be useful. For example, we might consider that male identity can be separated into a hardened exterior and a potentially soft interior. The male body may have a resilient exterior, but its flesh can be penetrated, weakened, and destroyed. Masculinity can also be conceived of as a set of hardened social performances that can be contrasted with less assured, even fragile, inner psychological states. Horrocks describes the kind of dichotomy I am proposing as a split between outer and inner, “between doing and being, between the mask outside the man, and the heart inside the man” (36). My contention is that in enacting masculinity men often attempt to don impenetrable armour to shield their vulnerability from others, and in particular, from the policing eyes of other men.

I. Conceptualising Masculinity

In order to illustrate the importance of the issues of weakness and vulnerability in the performance of hegemonic masculinity, I will focus on two notions. Firstly, I will propose that an influential sociocultural image of power is an external symbol, the idealised male body, which is validated for its ‘hardness’, invulnerability, and ability to deny or incorporate physical pain. Secondly, a ‘hard’ physical exterior has the potential to damage a ‘soft’ psychological interior. One outcome of this might be a tendency of men to also deny or incorporate emotional pain or trauma by adhering to “the stoic message” (I. Harris 145). These tensions relating to the exterior and the interior can cause discord within the male subject, who struggles with internal conflict during the process of enacting ideals embedded in

hegemonic masculinity. A great deal of embodying hegemonic masculinity, or at least remaining complicit with it, is predicated not only on the assertion and exertion of power, but the retention of it through the denial of weakness. To appear weak or vulnerable is to cede power and thus produce subordinated masculinities.

Power, strength, and ‘hardness’ have often been associated with the male body. An external emblem of vigour and virility, the hard male body appears impenetrable, complete with natural armour of muscularity. Images of these bodies pervade the media and carry their own mythical ideologies. As Tim Carrigan and others suggest, “hegemony means persuasion, and one of its important sites is likely to be the commercial mass media” (594). We encounter hard bodies in violent sports (professional wrestling; mixed martial arts; and in New Zealand, rugby), at the cinema (notably in action and adventure genres, but also pornography), while young men increasingly confront them in new technologies, particularly video games. Since the media operates as a mechanism of hegemony, many of the ideological underpinnings of masculinity can be located in widespread images of the male body that are (re)produced frequently. Such depictions contribute to what Buchbinder calls “cartoon” masculinity, idealised and fantastic examples of manliness (90). These bodies possess two distinct qualities: the power to inflict pain on others; and pivotally, the ability to deny or incorporate their own pain.

Indeed, these dual qualities are central to conceptions of hard male bodies within Film Studies, specifically the case of John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone). In her book *Hard Bodies*, Susan Jeffords examines how Rambo epitomises the propensity of the male body to assert itself through violent action, while also noting moments where it is rendered vulnerable (28-34; 49-52). Throughout *First Blood* (1982), Rambo wounds or kills countless men who pursue him, reducing them to “helpless, screaming men [who] far more effectively portray the consequences of weakened masculinity than silent corpses do” (Jeffords 32-33). This is juxtaposed with instances where Rambo himself is wounded but is able to continue on. Jeffords points to infamous scenes where Rambo performs “painful self-surgery” by stitching up his own wounds, subjecting his body to further pain in order to repair it (51). Richard Dyer, also using the exemplar of Stallone, considers how despite its hardness, his body is still occasionally damaged, and that being beaten, bruised, and scarred is part

of its iconography (155). While the idealised male body is powerful enough to inflict pain through explosive violence, it simultaneously displays incredible restraint and resilience by incorporating its own pain.

This notion of effacing vulnerability advances the discussion beyond exteriority toward interiority. Rambo is able to endure crisis not only because he has a strong external body, but because he has the internal resolve to match. A similar coupling of exterior strength and interior fortitude is esteemed within sports. Michael Messner identifies how the sporting hard body is conceived as a violent “machine” or “weapon” impervious to weakness (“Bodies” 91). However, these bodies rely equally on mental tenacity to defy what Don Sabo calls “the pain principle” (185). New Zealanders frequently recount the fabled example of Wayne “Buck” Shelford, who continued playing when his testicles – a biological symbol of masculinity – were torn from his scrotum during a rugby game. The influential sportscaster ESPN lauded his courage, suggesting that after such a performance of endurance, Shelford’s masculinity was unquestionable (Dimond para. 3). So, while the hard male body is still susceptible to damage, it can forsake pain by internalising it. The wider implication is that although not all men can produce a mythical external hard body, they can conceal their vulnerability by suppressing their own pain, be it physical or emotional.

Emotional pain threatens to breach the surface of the male body from the inside out, manifesting itself in a breakdown of the male social performance. While physical damage marks the male body, a wounded interiority is only visible if men fail to sustain the pretence of composure. Horrocks contends that emotions pose a danger to the male identity and as a result are something men “fear” (30). For this reason, as Schrock and Schwalbe indicate, “emotional display must be regulated, lest it undermine a manhood act” (281). Regulating internal pain is one of the central tenets of what Ian Harris calls the “stoic message”, a doctrine of self-autonomy, self-control, and reticence (145). The precept is simple: “Plug it out; stick to it; don’t admit any weakness; don’t complain; don’t be a burden on others; don’t owe anybody; do it yourself” (I. Harris 145). The stoic message safeguards a man’s inner world, concealing insecurities, fears, and desires. The slightest semblance of instability signifies a loss of control and a failure to incorporate the stoic message.

Therefore, interior regulation, repression, and suppression become protective mechanisms against revealing weaknesses, allowing men to maintain the guise of power and invulnerability.

The deployment of such rigorous self-control creates significant tension around expression. By expressing doubts or anxieties, a man is exposing his vulnerability to the external world and risking subordination. A prevalent anachronism is that men do not reveal their feelings, or even that they are incapable of having them. We also hear that men do not possess the language to articulate their internal grievances or express their fears. Horrocks labels this “male autism”, an affliction besetting men who continually repress and suppress their inner turmoil (107). While these generalisations are contentious, their repetition as cultural myths relate back to power and vulnerability. In an influential early article that espouses this link between men, power, and society, Jack Sattell proposes that if masculinity is relational, then projecting an air of “unemotional rationality” allows one to maintain an upper-hand (120). Sattell suggests that inexpressiveness serves a key function, emerging as an “intentional manipulation of a situation when threats to the male position occur” (122). This argument is important for identifying and emphasising *appearance* and emotional regulation, particularly in certain situations, contexts, and in regards to personal relationships.

II. Performing Friendship

This discussion of the tensions between exteriority and interiority in terms of power, vulnerability, and social performance can be linked to male friendship. Michael Kimmel states that while masculinity is a performance, it is enacted primarily for the scrutiny of other men, who “watch us, rank us, [and] grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood” (“Identity” 275). A great deal of this performance is organised around the emotion of fear. As Kimmel argues, fear permeates almost every facet of the male front and as a consequence “masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves” (“Identity” 277). Similarly, Todd Migilaccio believes “friendship should be conceived of as one component in masculine performances ... How we engage with friends is a reflection of our expected masculine behaviours, essentially displaying that men ‘do

gender' appropriately when they 'do friendship'" (238). The mandate to perform masculinity when one performs friendship creates strain around emotional intimacy in fraternal relationships.

Kimmel and Niobe Way both perceive a historical shift in male relations during 20th Century industrialisation and the rise of competitive capitalist markets ("Identity" 271; 30). The escalation of what Kimmel labels "marketplace masculinity", resulted in a new patriarchal arena where masculinity was "played out in a contested terrain", heavily influenced by power ("Identity" 271). As men were now participating in a hostile market, vulnerability and weakness comprised chinks in the male armour and ammunition for other men to exploit in the battle for hierarchy. Koji Ueno and Rebecca Adams suggest this competitiveness extends to men's friendships, discouraging the revelation of personal information in order to protect and hold power (218). Another key deterrent according to many scholars is homophobia, a serious obstacle to intimacy since homosexual masculinities are deemed subordinate to heterosexual masculinities.⁵ Due to these factors male bonds became fraught, increasingly associated with amity as opposed to intimacy.

Deborah Kerfoot proposes that men "manage" their fraternal relationships to avoid the potential for emotional intimacy (237). A way in which they achieve this is through instrumentality. According to Geoffrey Greif, male friendships are formed via "shoulder-to-shoulder" activities (66). Comparably, Larry May and Robert Strikwerda refer to this idea as "parallel play" (112). Again, sport is the obvious example that Greif uses, but we might additionally point to the work environment, or possibly to something as unusual as male crime gangs (70). Adams and Ueno agree that male relationships are often created and maintained in distinct situational contexts that place an emphasis on activity (217). Within these group dynamics, Kerfoot asserts that the male act relies on a controlled "script" that is informed by the qualities central to the stoic message (237). The desire to live by a controlled script, even among friends, builds a barrier to emotional intimacy because the latter necessitates "letting go of the script that fashions the responses of masculine subjects, and requires that they reveal aspects of themselves as vulnerable" (Kerfoot 237). Therefore, men not only live by a restrictive script, but also seek to organise the stage upon which

⁵ For discussions of homosexuality and male friendship see: Miller 129-142; Kimmel 'Identity' 266-287; Kimmel *Guyland* 50; Messner 'Friendship' 258; Flood 426.

their relationships play out by structuring their interactions around controlled events and activities.

The majority of the issues I have raised so far appear to negate the way men respond to vulnerability. The consequence of this negation is the problematising of male emotional bonds, and the insinuation that they are left wanting or are absent entirely. Although this may be an element of innumerable fraternal relationships, we should not underestimate the strong bonds men forge. Recently, Way has attested that young boys *are* emotionally intimate with one another, and rely profoundly on self-disclosure until late adolescence when a growing pressure to comply with hegemonic ideals intensifies (18). For Way, the analogy of a “straightjacket” that binds feelings is perhaps too severe and reductive, since intimacy and a yearning for close male friends remains crucial to the lives of many men (7-8). Indeed, men frequently champion the nebulous notion of *brotherhood* – a largely tacit bond that escapes clear definition.

Scott Swain’s concept of “covert intimacy” offers a useful way of understanding how such relationships might function (72). Swain defines covert intimacy as “a private, often nonverbal, context specific form of communication ... rooted in the behaviours that men reported as indicative of closeness and intimacy in their friendships with other men” (72). Swain develops a comparable argument to Kerfoot, although he considers instrumentality to be positive rather than problematic. Swain contends that men produce friendships via gender validating group pursuits (77). By undertaking instrumental activities, men generate “closeness in the doing”, bonding over things such as sports, music, or drinking (Swain 77). For Swain this shoulder-to-shoulder practice of enacting togetherness allows for instances of covert intimacy to arise.

Swain draws a compelling example from one of his research interviews. The interviewee, Greg, recounts the immediate moments after winning a sports championship when he traded a meaningful glance with a friend (Swain 79). For Greg, the fact they had looked to each other first and ran towards one another was emotional affirmation of the strength of their friendship despite his insistence that it all occurred inside “a split second” amid the chaos celebrating men (Swain 79). Although the context of sporting success might explain and legitimise a general outpouring of

emotion, the covert quality of this exchange in a public arena reminds us that masculine intimacy is expressed through small gestures like a knowing nod or slap on the back, or through the private vernacular that is often exclusive to a particular male group. If we accept covert intimacy we see that male intimacy also exists beneath the surface, behind what William Pollack calls the “mask of masculinity” (11). As I move toward a discussion of friendship in *Husbands* and *Brothers* in the following chapters, we will discover that covert intimacy is a constructive concept to apply to cinematic masculinity. Since both films explore tensions around male intimacy, it is by identifying covert intimacy that we can locate quiet moments of pathos.

III. Unveiling Male Grief

The most testing predicament for the performance of male identity is during a crisis, and there is perhaps no greater crisis than bereavement. When the casual surveys I discussed earlier turned to loss, I was consistently told that men grieved in particular ways. For instance, they had to be strong and less emotive, or became taciturn and withdrawn. Such a picture of male grief is inherently mysterious – an invisible malaise that once again lurks beneath a regimented exteriority. As a result of these common assumptions, a subfield of therapeutic literature on gender differences in grief and mourning has grown. Using this work I will outline three main tensions surrounding the male experience that best encapsulate a summary of the research. Firstly, in keeping with the principles of the stoic message, men are prone to undertake what Carol Staudacher calls “secret grief”, a response typified by silence and self-control (19). Secondly, men implement repression and suppression as a means of readopting a stable masculine performance. Finally, grief can drive men to respond in an active way as they strive to return a sense of normality to their lives.

In accordance with the arguments I have made concerning inexpression, Staudacher believes that remaining stoic and silent following loss protects against “vulnerability” and any requirement to explain sentiments that relate to a perceived emotional weakness (15). She states: “Death intensifies vulnerability and creates anxiety, fear, increased dependency and insecurity”, all of which pose significant threats to the controlled male front (17). In an interview conducted by Genevieve Creighton and others, a young man who is lamenting the death of a friend regards his masculinity as an external defensive layer that is somehow undermined by grief,

explaining, “that protection kind of comes off and you’re more exposed” (38). The possibility of being overcome by emotions causes men to dread a breach of decidedly “un-masculine expressions of grief such as crying and/or irrational muddled thoughts and speech” (Creighton et al. 38). For these reasons, reticence is considered to be a seemingly pragmatic male strategy that keeps the raft of uncertainties and fears locked away.

It is not surprising then, that withdrawing and practicing solitary or secret grief is a prevalent aspect of male mourning. According to Creighton et al., men wish to “reinstate control” over their grieving and feel the need to hide in order to regain composure and sort “through un-masculine feelings of sadness and despair privately” (38). Though men admit to crying, this physical manifestation of grief is often performed in isolation. In separate studies undertaken by Scott Kenney and Judith Cook, examples abound of men who confessed to crying, but only in private spaces like cars, basements and garages (27; 299). These revelations challenge the misconception that men *feel* less, or are incapable of conveying grief externally. Rather, it implies that they require sequestered sites to express sorrow and assess feelings away from the scrutiny of others. Since privacy is not always attainable, Darcy Harris identifies the additional necessity to obscure signs of vulnerability in public situations, suggesting that men may mask their turmoil, or find what she calls “covert ways” to grieve (247). While men’s grief is literally hidden behind the closed doors of secure male spaces, it is also self-consciously concealed under the surface of a durable social performance.

This inclination to mute and hide grief is further accentuated by outside pressures and responsibilities male grievers report feeling. An archaic, yet hardy patriarchal attitude about being providers and protectors leads men to repress and suppress emotions for the sake of people around them. Here, the language and phrases used by men is emblematic of how they view their social position, and is essentially a variation of the stoic message. Those questioned by Creighton et al. speak of “manning up”, “fighting through it”, and wanting to turn grief “down” or “off” (38). Cook refers to men “shielding” not only themselves but also families and friends by “blocking” or “postponing” their own grief (302-304). Staudacher even claims that some men see loss as “a *test* of masculinity” (14). Consequently, this compulsion to

act in control creates a veneer that simply augments an unresolved response, which continues smouldering underneath. Although repression and suppression assists men in adhering to the stoic message, the denial of outward expression and subsequent lack of support men receive culminates in a long and lonely struggle with a tumultuous inner state.

Despite the impulse to maintain self-control, emotions can rise to the surface and become visible to others. Summarising her interviews, Cook notes: “There was an implicit theme in the men’s reports that emotions were ‘dangerous’ ... the actual *expression* of such powerful feelings was viewed as even more threatening” (304). While this may be the case for an emotion like sadness, which carries the semblance of vulnerability, it is less true for anger. Indeed, many men see anger as an arguably legitimate grief response. Kenneth Doka and Terry Martin suggest that anger is the most common form of affective expression and “may not threaten the masculine griever with as serious a loss of personal control as other feelings” (“Masculine” 150). Kenney connects angry external outbursts to the burden of sustaining control and an excess of internal “pressure” (32). He goes on to state that men he spoke to saw anger as “appropriate” and “seemingly strong” (32). Since anger and aggression are socioculturally validated, often through the violent media texts I mentioned earlier, they comprise a supposedly sanctioned way for men to expel emotional turmoil that lies latently within them.

Grief can be a catalyst for action amongst men who desire an outlet in which to channel emotional energy. Doka and Martin propose that while some activities, like creating a memorial to the bereaved, might allow for the meaningful symbolic expression of mourning “other activities such as a flight into meaningless activity or an increase in alcoholic consumption may simply seek to circumvent the experience” (“Masculine” 152). A commonplace example sees men quickly returning to work or other consuming tasks. Doka and Martin indicate that the reintegration of regular routines enables men “to restore normalcy and a sense of security in the wake of loss” (*Gender* 78). However, immersion in activity also offers a distraction and escape from emotional instability. In a pertinent account that illustrates the split between exteriority and interiority, a man interviewed by Kenney spoke of working relentlessly all day to keep his body and mind occupied, but succumbing to despairing

thoughts as he lay in bed attempting to sleep (29-30). Staudacher links this obsessive behaviour to repression and suppression, contending that constant activity “shuts away emotional experiences” (36). In taking an active stance, male griever confront loss in a way that encompasses the need to either command or evade the crisis, despite both outcomes being impossible.

Considering the solitary nature of male grief outlined in this summary, it is unsurprising that few examples contemplate the role of male friendship and bereavement. In addition, scarcely any investigate the existential upheaval that occurs when a man loses a close friend. Instead, male grief is rendered as a lone journey where men are alienated from those around them, and even from themselves. I have repeatedly drawn on the work of Creighton et al., as it contributes a unique recent enquiry that focuses exclusively on young men, and their experiences of losing a friend. One crucial conclusion they make is that loss can constitute a coming of age for some men, facilitating the transition into manhood, and the adoption of ideals tantamount to the stoic message (42). Meanwhile, regarding friendship, only Staudacher explicitly explores the topic of “male grief and companionship” (201-215). In a statement reminiscent of covert intimacy, she encourages men to share silences with each other as opposed to feeling pressured to express emotions verbally (210). What is striking about these final points is that while young men acting as pallbearers are a universal sight at funerals, there is a dearth of research on how men might actually support or carry each other as they grapple with mutual grief.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have conceptualised masculinity, friendship, and grief, the three central themes I wished to depict in my film *Brothers*. I have argued that masculinity is predicated on a tension between power and vulnerability. In order to gain and hold power, men must avoid and deny vulnerability and weakness. A core aspect of this avoidance requires the adoption of a performance of masculinity that relies on often impossible ideals about what it means to be a man. These mythic ideals can create a significant split between external social performance and internal emotional realities. I have also suggested that these notions play a large part in the creation of fraternal relationships, which while not *overtly* intimate, might be deemed *covertly* intimate. Finally, I examined how the crisis of bereavement can culminate in

a testing situation for men who deploy a number of protective mechanisms in order to keep feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty at bay. While looking for films that explored male grief, I predictably found many about lonely and alienated men. To my surprise it would be a heady film about three middle-aged husbands mourning the loss of a friend that would best realise the tensions I have just examined, and ultimately inspire my own film. In the next chapter I will contend that what is compelling about John Cassavetes' *Husbands* is the way it portrays these men experiencing grief as a unit. *Husbands* presents grieving men *alone together*.

CHAPTER TWO

Alone Together: *Husbands*

“[of *Husbands*] I hope it means something to certain people that have suffered a loss and don’t know how to express it.” John Cassavetes⁶

“At first there were four of us, now there are three of us, and you want to be alone.” Harry (Ben Gazzara) in *Husbands*

During an interview with Ray Carney, John Cassavetes recounts the experience of seeing the George Stevens film *A Place in the Sun* (1951) in his early twenties (*Cassavetes on 258*). Cassavetes thought the film was awful, yet he was compelled to watch it over and over again. After these repeated viewings Cassavetes realised that he had responded to the film in a way he could not explain: “‘it had something *to do* with something’” (qtd. in Carney *Cassavetes on 258*). Carney suggests that for Cassavetes, *A Place in the Sun* was revelatory because “it showed him that the things that reach us most deeply may repel us at first” (*Cassavetes on 257*). This anecdote has affinities with my own experience of watching *Husbands*. While seeking a film that coalesced my sentiments about masculinity, friendship and grief, I too was looking for *something*. However, I was not expecting to find it in a film as onerous as *Husbands*.

In the following analysis I will explore this *something* – a representation of masculinity, friendship, and grief, manifest at the interstices of performance and emotion. I begin by outlining a way of approaching masculinities in Cassavetes’ cinema, emphasising the strain around performance and emotion. Cassavetes’ films are inherently about the acts people employ in order to shroud their internal instability. His male characters in particular are immensely concerned with tensions surrounding power and vulnerability, and interiority versus exteriority. The last portion of the chapter culminates in a critical commentary of *Husbands* in relation to these ideas. The commentary also foregrounds the aspects of *Husbands* that influenced *Brothers*, presaging the discussion I will undertake in the next chapter.

⁶ Qtd. in Carney *Cassavetes on 212*.

I. Screen Masculinities: Crisis, Angst, and Performance

In chapter one I outlined a contrast between male exteriority and interiority, arguing that the performance of a rugged exterior may be a defence mechanism against interior vulnerability. Concomitantly, masculine performance is fluid and susceptible to slippage, especially during critical events – like bereavement – when emotional turbulence and feelings of lost control subvert the stoic message. While I pointed to sociocultural examples of hard bodies that legitimise an indestructible mantra of ‘playing through the pain’, there are also myriad cases where images of masculinity are critiqued, rendered fallible and vulnerable. In cinema this frequently occurs in moments of crisis, often of the existential variety. As I progress to an examination of the turmoil felt by Cassavetes’ husbands, it is important to evaluate the role of crisis and relate it to the performance of masculinity. To do this I will draw on recent film theory by Donna Peberdy, who advocates reading screen performances as sociocultural performances of masculinity.

In *Masculinity and Film Performance*, Peberdy aims to analyse “the relationship *between* the performance of masculinity on screen (playing a character) and the performance of masculinity off screen (social roles, gender discourse, and popular culture)” (10). Peberdy acknowledges a socially constructed notion of masculinity whereby sociocultural life comprises a performance and male social roles require the adoption of “fronts”, like the conception of armour or masks I used earlier (22). She simultaneously identifies the fallacy of a “true” gender, while recognising the ideological underpinnings of “normative” masculinity and their reproduction in the mass media (28). Peberdy argues that media images of idealised masculinity are powerful, even “omnipotent”, and contribute significantly to the social construction of gender (28). Calling upon similar ideas proposed by Judith Butler and David Buchbinder, Peberdy asserts “the ‘dominant masculine’ is reproduced as a reflection of a certain social reality and as a model on which men in the culture may pattern themselves” (29). By this rationale, images like those of Rambo become endemic sociocultural symbols.

However, at the centre of Peberdy’s study are cinematic examples where idealised masculinity is destabilised in some way. The films Peberdy analyses in fact eschew the eventual reassertion of hegemonic masculinity once a crisis is surmounted.

A representative case is *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992), a film that concludes with “the angst-ridden male, salesman, husband and father” Shelley “The Machine” Levene (Jack Lemmon) suspended “in a permanent state of insecurity” as he awaits the fallout of a police investigation (Peberdy 33). Indeed, these films often contain performances that for Peberdy “emphasise the crisis, not the resolution, foregrounding angst over stability” (32). Peberdy uses “angst” as a key critical term referring to “specific manifestations, performances and presentations of masculinity” that call into play the tensions between the male front and the “internal and individual” reality (8). Such instances exhibit both the instability of the male performers and also “the performative nature of ‘normative’ masculinity” in their failure to embody the male ideal (Peberdy 88). While limited to contemporary American films that are self-aware of the critique they present, the triadic focus on masculinity, screen performance, and sociocultural performance that Peberdy prescribes is an useful way of approaching masculinity in *Husbands*.

Husbands is a film that stresses crisis over resolution, and reveals angst in the trio characterised by an escape, and a breakdown, of their social roles. As I will contend, Cassavetes’ films are about fissures in social performance. In *Husbands* he claims his intention was to expose the “‘bustling, bravura ego’” of masculinity as it is offset by the “‘meaninglessness of men’s lives’” (qtd. in Lopate 163). Peberdy considers performance as “a gendered enactment” and perceives masculinity as “that which is put on – a social role that is informed by cultural expectations” (170). *Husbands* comprises a sustained exploration of unstable masculinity as it depicts men thrown into existential crisis, colliding with the demands of their exterior roles – as men, husbands, friends, and fathers – and an internal need for emotional intimacy with one another.

II. Cassavetes: Performance and Emotion

Performance and emotion are synonymous with the cinema of John Cassavetes. They also mark two constructive ways of interpreting his work. Adrian Martin asks the reader of a Cassavetes film to question, “what’s happening in this swirl that constitutes a person, a relationship, an action, a scene?” (para. 24). The heady encounters that have come to epitomise Cassavetes’ output concentrate on “a group situation or dynamic” where mercurial interior states are threatening to breach

the surface and flood a scene with a torrent of unrestrained emotionality (King 109). As Maria Viera notes, Cassavetes is drawn to uncovering events “where conventional roles and models of behaviour are breaking down” (38). This emphasis on emotion, the breakdown of social performance, and its occurrence within a group context are defining features of Cassavetes’ oeuvre, and are particularly important in *Husbands*. In an interview with Needeya Islam, Kouvaros indicates that we require a different interpretative framework when analysing Cassavetes’ films (para. 13). Kouvaros argues that instead of examining “obvious formal manipulations in terms of point of view, editing patterns, spectator positions and relating these to broader ideological structures, our attention has to be on a shifting surface of bodily gesture, human relation and emotion” (qtd. in Islam para. 13). I will attempt to employ this strategy in my reading of *Husbands*.

While Cassavetes’ films are praised for their acting, they are also fundamentally about social performance at the level of character. For example, critics have lauded Gena Rowland’s turn as Mabel Longhetti in *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), yet we should acknowledge that the film’s central precept is Mabel’s inability to perform the role of housewife. Her deviation from a normative rendition of motherhood culminates in her desperate plea to her husband “I’ll be whatever you want me to be”. As Todd Berliner intimates, “I suspect that Cassavetes saw real life as a kind of performance, that in his films he sought to represent people in the act of representing themselves” (9). Berliner goes on to state that in a Cassavetes’ picture, “acting emerges as a condition of life, not simply the activity of performers on stage” (12). *Opening Night* (1977), the director’s most self-conscious rumination on *acting*, climaxes with extended sequences of live theatre where it is virtually impossible to negotiate the boundaries of the act. As in reality, it is difficult to isolate the alternation of fronts that Cassavetes’ characters deploy in order to exercise power, shield vulnerability, and thus remain in role.

This preference for adopting a mask is especially relevant to the representation of masculinity across Cassavetes’ filmography. Kouvaros, whose research attempts to locate the margins of the performative within the director’s work, contends that “the compulsion to put on an act ... marks the behaviour of men”, notably in *Husbands* and *Faces* (1968) (68). A number of scholars share this view. Parker Tyler suggests

Husbands is “deliberately devoted to appearances” and “surface phenomena” (108). Nigel Andrews describes Ben Gazzara’s Harry as having “a carefully groomed invulnerability” (106). While Carney proposes that emotional confusions are buried under “layers of protective colouration”, and that in the “fiercely predatory and power saturated” society of Cassavetes films “every self-expression is socially mediated” (*Insecurity* 109-110). Moreover, many of Cassavetes’ male characters, such as Cosmo Vitelli (Ben Gazzara) in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1975), Nick Longhetti (Peter Falk) in *A Woman Under the Influence*, and Seymour Moskowitz (Seymour Cassel) in *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971), seem to alternate between aggressive volatility and taciturn vulnerability. In Cassavetes’ cinema, men are constantly wrestling with the strain between interiority and exteriority, between reservation and revelation.

Cassavetes himself identified a split between an *outside* and *inside* world while referring to *Husbands*: “‘There’s the outside world and there is the inside world ... the inside world holds you, really contains you, can cause you pain that you don’t show outside, and that is why no one ever talks about it’” (qtd. in Loeb). This point can be linked to the interior/exterior tension of idealised masculinity, a continual conflict that threatens to expose his male protagonists. Furthermore, the semblance of the inside world being withheld verbally is a key aspect of his films. For Charles Leary, “the secret” at work in Cassavetes’ characters is their tendency to “talk about everything except what they want to talk about” (170).⁷ Verbal expression, Leary maintains, “disguises serious communication and exchange”, thereby displacing “a tangible connection among people” (170). Cassavetes’ men are characterised by what I call *excessive inexpression*. That is, they avoid silence or revelation by overwhelming a scene with seemingly mindless verbosity. However, by locating an examination at the level of performance and emotion we can discern allusions to latent grief and veiled vulnerability in their superficial banter.

III. *Husbands*: Critical Commentary

The plot of *Husbands* traces three middle-aged, middle-class men from Long Island, New York – Gus (John Cassavetes), Archie (Peter Falk), and Harry (Ben Gazzara) – in the days after the death of their friend Stuart (David Rowlands).

⁷ Leary is invoking Seymour Moskowitz’s line “I talk about everything except what I want to talk about” from *Minnie and Moskowitz*.

Following the funeral they embark on an extended bender. Instead of explicitly confronting their loss, they play basketball, swim, conduct a farcical singing competition in a dive-bar, and ride the subway conversing on apparently inane topics like their lost dreams of becoming professional athletes. At the end of this night of revelry, the men decide impulsively to fly to London as an escape from their grief and their familial obligations. In London they drink, gamble, and eventually solicit the company of a trio of women. Their crude debauchery continues until Gus and Archie decide to return home, leaving an estranged Harry behind. The film concludes with Gus and Archie venturing back to their respective families, while Harry's fate remains unknown.

To discuss the most pertinent scenes I have separated my commentary into four sections based on the locations the film moves between in chronological order: Home I; New York; London; and Home II. An approach of this manner is useful for tracing the devolution of the men's friendship. Leary states, "as they move from New York to London, and the film progresses, what was once a group of three separates into three individuals" (119). In each section I isolate key scenes and sequences that espouse the themes of masculinity, grief, and friendship. Within these I will scrutinise distinct moments where tensions of masculinity and social performance come to the fore, or when the men's inherent need to connect emotionally with one another arises or is undermined.

Home I: Bodies

Husbands' opening montage concisely sets up the film's relationships. The sequence also devotes significant attention to the male body, and it can be interpreted as an analogy of the performative nature of masculinity. Here, in a succession of photographs taken at an idyllic pool party, the husbands appear shirtless, striking 'muscleman' poses that fluctuate between irony and earnestness (fig. 1). They manipulate staunch postures, while in candid instances their aging physiques appear soft and unguarded. Their 'hard' bodies are an idealised exhibition, a front for the spectatorial stare of the camera. This dichotomy between emphasised act and incidental candidness is a defining feature of the film's portrayal of masculinity, as well as directing the viewer to the importance of performance in Cassavetes' cinema. Peter Bradshaw sees the sequence as "an ironic demonstration of power and strength",

since the men competitively display a waning bravura (para. 1). Meanwhile, Marshall Fine sees their bodies as “vital, unquenchable, and unstoppable”, ill prepared for the existential reality check about to occur when Stuart’s body fails (*Genius* 206). The concluding shot of the three surviving husbands pointing at the barrel-chested Stuart positions him at the centre of the fraternal group, the “linchpin” that will drop out and fracture the foursome (Fine *Husbands*).

Fig. 1. Musclemen. From *Husbands*. Dir. John Cassavetes. Columbia Pictures, 1970. Film.

The sequence is also notable for the economy with which it sets up what Hoday King calls “hyperbolically stereotypical gender roles and patterns of behaviour” (109). The male bond is immediately prioritised and privileged. In contrast, the women, the largely absent *wives*, are passive onlookers restricted to child minding while the men lark around drinking beer and bellowing idiotic songs. Carney suggests that based on these idyllic images, the men of *Husbands* are immediately differentiated from the deeply repressed male characters of *Faces*, who are only ever seen engaging in clandestine competition with each other (*Dreaming* 124). However, the husbands are still “trapped and deadened in certain ways too ... just as they are visually confined in the still photographs, they are psychologically hemmed in by their cocky masculinity, their sureness of themselves and their positions” (Carney *Dreaming* 124). The film soon moves beyond this insular world to chart a “journey that will carry them beyond all the comforts, complacencies, and emotional shelters of these initial snapshots” (Carney *Dreaming* 124). Stuart’s death throws the men into a delayed coming of age, or as Ivone Margulies asserts, a state of “liminality” whereby

they are forced to strip their public personas and confront the truth of suppressed and repressed feelings (291).

New York: Grief

The funeral reintroduces the male group, now reduced to a team of three. Here, the previously liberated male bodies are leaden in dark, heavy clothes of mourning. They unite in a masculine grief uniform, challenged by the same crisis, their visual similarity reproduced in long shot. Fine notices that in early scenes their matching silhouettes make it difficult to tell them apart (*Husbands*). This implicit homogeneity will soon devolve into heterogeneity, separating the male team into individuals. As we observe them moving amongst the mourners, the sharp polarity with the previous sequence is clearly evident. The season has changed, plunging the men into a desolate winter, and the impersonal funeral has removed them from the safety of seemingly perfect suburban lives. As Carney notes, they are suddenly “outside the walls, stripped of defences, and thrown on their own psychic resources” (*American* 126). Despite the catastrophe of their friend’s death, they remain stoic and reticent, adopting a semblance of emotionally stable masculinity even as they embrace Stuart’s tearful widow.

In the coda of the sequence the men leave via taxi, each talking over one another as they criticise the funeral’s hollow sentiment. This brief scene is worth considering in terms of the relationship between language and feelings. Referring to the eulogy Archie laments: “What he said said nothing. If you can’t say the right things when a man dies then what the hell is it all about?” Harry is dismayed at someone discussing insurance with Stuart’s widow, “You don’t talk about insurance, not at a time like that”. Both men seem to carry idealised notions around how Stuart should have been farewelled, and crucially, what might have been said. In particular, Archie, the most inarticulate of the trio, desired a eulogy that evoked sentiments he himself cannot put into words. The way in which the trio drown out each other’s voices also foregrounds an inability to share emotional problems. The performance of each actor, with an emphasis on legitimised anger, presents a grief response typified by suppression and repression.

The next group of sequences: the tipsy subway ride; the juvenile walking race; and the gym diversion, are the first examples of escapism through “doing something else” (Cook 297). Here, the men unconsciously revert to pursuits they would have shared with Stuart, while simultaneously trying to lose themselves in activity and alcohol. The subway scene is quite revealing. When Harry asks sincerely, “What are we gonna do?”⁸ Archie earnestly lists all of the sports he loves, subverting Harry’s wish to route the conversation in a meaningful direction. However, the sports talk prompts Gus to begin a monologue regarding “the terrible sadness” a man feels “when he realises he’s never going to be a professional athlete”. His speech forms a commentary, on loss, fading dreams, and failing male bodies, underscored by his musing about the possibility that other athletes “are going to give out”. The men are deliberately evasive, shrouding existential concerns in allegorical ruminations, within the suitably masculine discourse of sports.

The desire to circumvent painful feelings, to, as Archie says, “sweat it all out,” presents a need to reassert the power and prowess of their male bodies. The failure of Stuart’s body is a danger to their own corporeality and prompts a newfound awareness of caducity. Their reaction is to suppress these feelings by sending their bodies into unrestrained flight through childish play fighting and a visit to the gym. At the same time these scenes tap into the jocularity, the closeness in the doing, that defines their bond. However, the basketball game posits a symbolic enactment of the newly tenuous dynamic. Without Stuart they cannot be evenly split into fair sides and Harry is cut adrift. While Gus and Archie play fluidly, moving in graceful synchronicity, Harry, still wearing his mourning garb, disrupts the flow. Stuart’s absence turns the match, and the fraternal grouping, into an awkward spectacle.

The barroom and bathroom sequences are important examples of the manner in which *Husbands* deals with masculine grief. Here excessive inexpression comes to the fore in excruciating opacity. Before discussing these scenes it is worth detailing their inclusion in the film. Pivotal, as a result of the research of Fine, we know Cassavetes embarked on the singing contest in lieu of a scene explicitly reflecting on Stuart’s loss (*Genius* 214). Originally, Fine notes, the men talked about life, death and other confronting issues, but the conversation failed to present “the crucial sense of

⁸ This is a question that is repeated across the film, underscoring the men’s stasis.

reality they were seeking. After all, these were not supposed to be articulate men” (*Genius* 214). This confirms Cassavetes’ rejection of what Carney calls “the literary quality” of such dialogue, favouring language that obfuscates meaning (*Insecurity* 26). Cassavetes verifies his intention in an interview with Carney, pointing out how he even denied Falk’s requests for clarity, explaining, ““it’s a discovery of what’s inside and what we’re talking about rather than having it explicitly stated”” (qtd. in *Cassavetes on* 224). This evidence illustrates Cassavetes’ determination to avoid issues of subjectivity and interiority, preferring meaning to emerge from the “raw behaviour” of his male characters (Carney “Adventure” 109).

The singing contest at the bar can be read as a surrogate wake where the men attempt to make amends for the vacuity of the funeral. As they coax their cohorts to sing, only to lambast them for lacking “feeling”, Tom Charity suggests that the men are “really beating up on themselves, trying to find a response commensurate with Stuart’s loss” (86). Andrews similarly contrasts this scene with the funeral, proposing that the “naïve sentimentality” of the songs “become a vehicle for real feeling” (106). For Leary it is another form of evasion, in the same way shouting and incessant laughter continually obscure emotional confusion (168). The songs also offer oblique commentary on their thoughts without explicit articulation (Leary 168). For example, a song about a dying cowboy and its blunt narrative of death particularly affects Harry. Later, in their ceaseless demonising of Leola (Leola Harlow), the men demand yet “more feeling”. It is apt that the husbands seldom sing during this sequence, opting instead to offer cruel critiques of the patron’s humble songs. They are castigating themselves, seeking an external source of affect that they cannot generate in their own exchanges.

Following the contest the men retreat to the bathroom to vomit, a somatic and affective manifestation of their drunkenness and latent grief. They vomit because as men they cannot cry, it is their equivalent of the tears Stuart’s widow sheds at the funeral. While Archie does appear lachrymose at one point, he claims that it is “the heat” which is making him tear up. As Harry states, “this thing of vomiting is psychological”. Their grief is, as Archie explains, “a sickness”, and failing to “sweat it all out”, he must purge it. Once emptied, Archie becomes free to express himself in the film’s most explicit moment of excessive inexpression. While Gus “feels like

screaming” – another hysterical venting of emotional confusion – Archie finally demands silence. In the privacy of the tenebrous men’s room confessional, Archie tries to translate the visceral into the cerebral by telling Gus about his inner state: “I want to tell you what’s really bothering me, I’m gonna tell you now what it is. What it must be...” However, emblematic of Cassavetes’ male characters he is too inarticulate. As Kouvaros eloquently puts it, “the words tumble out of his mouth like the broken remains of a thought that has shattered in all directions at once” (181). Archie just stammers: “‘Cause...well like...what are you feeling? I mean what are we supposed to be feeling? ‘Cause what I’m feeling...I don’t know what I’m feeling. You see what I mean? In other words...you see it’s...I gotta find out because I, I know what it is...”

Archie’s non-sensical speech would be comical if it was not loaded with tragic meaning. On the cusp of naming his malaise, Archie falters: “I forget what it is. What is it?” Sylvie Pierre and Jean-Louis Comolli contend in relation to *Faces* that the constant flux of words makes “the *meaning* of the words less important than the way in which they are spoken and the patterns they create, so that what might have been a film about faces and gestures is also in the end about the wanderings of speech” (327). In Archie’s speech, it is not the words that display meaning, it is their stumbling, broken delivery. His rambling stream of thoughts *reveals* his interiority, which is confused and consumed by grief. The speech is piercingly true but ultimately a failure.

Archie’s language breakdown correlates to a failing male ideal. Although Cassavetes’ men are inarticulate, his cinema still presents male language as a performance of power. Consider the utterances of Freddie (Fred Draper) to Jeannie (Gena Rowlands) in the opening of *Faces*, Manny (Ben Gazzara) and Maurice’s (John Cassavetes) verbal attacks directed at Myrtle (Gena Rowlands) in *Opening Night*, or even Archie’s suddenly coherent stripping of Harry delivered moments after his broken soliloquy. As Peberdy argues, men assert their power through the way they speak but also “demonstrate loss of control through how the words are spoken: in broken, incomplete sentences with recurrent pauses and repetitions” (81). Peberdy indicates that occasions when male speech deteriorates exhibit evidence of angst and the “performative nature of masculinity” (88). Throughout Archie’s speech his performance of machismo stutters, revealing his distress. He hides in the *men’s room*,

preventing anyone witnessing his vulnerability. The monologue is the pinnacle of latent grief in *Husbands*, however it is quickly superseded by the guise of boorish bravado again as Gus comically overreacts to Archie's "stink". In an example of trademark vagaries that define Cassavetes' more effective scenes, introspection turns suddenly to extroversion. The duo returns to the backslapping chumminess the character Mary (Jenny Runacre) later identifies as "American bluntness", a performance of friendship that belies a lack of connection.

It is significant to note that Harry, who desperately requires his friends and the potential support they can provide, is isolated during Archie's monologue. Harry is further alienated when Gus mentions he and Archie were "sharing a private moment about Stuart" in the men's room, a barbed statement that points to his exclusion. The possibility of emotional honesty or the sharing of the burden of grief is reduced to a game of one-upmanship. Yet, there is also a glimpse of Gus' mask slipping as he returns Harry's gaze. His face is suddenly solemn and sober (fig. 2). For a second he appears vulnerable, even remorseful for the way his statement may have wounded Harry. In these instances, hidden amongst the cacophony of excessive inexpression, the husbands expose themselves. We catch flashes of interiority as it flickers throughout *Husbands*. By scrutinising their performances and considering their manic utterances, we can unveil the tension between the outer act and the inner reality.

Fig. 2 Gus' mask slips. From *Husbands*. Dir. John Cassavetes. Columbia Pictures, 1970. Film.

London: Friendship

If the bathroom sequence presents the most viable opportunity for sharing “a moment” about Stuart, it ultimately becomes a watershed juncture where the group begins to fracture. Archie cannot express what is bothering him, Gus refuses to listen, preferring to “let the dead lie”, while Harry is symbolically shut out. From here they regress to a puerile performance of male friendship marked by more drinking and petty rivalry. For example, an irate Harry is insulted, this time by Archie. The tirade challenges his masculine image: “You get to work on time, you fawn over your wife, you’re absorbed by yourself, and you have no sense of humour...Harry, you’re a phony”. As I have pointed out, Archie is suddenly coherent, his critique both quick and cutting. Meanwhile, Harry furiously accuses the others of insensitivity while they laugh at his increasing exasperation: “I could never talk to you, you’re insensitive”. The scene descends into an angry scuffle, mediated by Harry’s surrogate friend Red (John Kullers). Red ultimately resolves the situation by forcing Harry and Archie to apologise and shake hands, as though he were reconciling two schoolboys. The exchange epitomises the stunted intimacy of the trio’s relationship.

Margulies notes that London poses an opportunity for the men to enter into a reconfigured “rite of passage”, a process of losing themselves in “anonymous, rankless play” (Margulies 290). They can escape the purgatorial darkness of the men’s room, and their social roles as husbands to reconnect in London, a site far removed from their repressed Long Island lives. However, London poses another space of entrapment with its constantly raining exterior consigning the men to confinement, further exacerbating their inability to bond. Upon arrival they are aptly ushered into another claustrophobic bathroom, although this time Harry insists “there’s gonna be no more talking”. Rather, the men attempt to rouse a lost experience of uninhibited masculinity, re-channelling their energy into gender validating activities like gambling, drinking, and soliciting women. The decision seems primordial, like a return to routines of activity that once formed the basis of their burgeoning mateship. The pointless gameplay is escapist, a brash act they reassume to achieve a semblance of normality, culminating in the ultimate reassertion of their masculine images through a contest to seduce women.

The solicitation starts as a quick-fire competition between the men, another game of one-upmanship. Archie reveals the ruse as a performance for his friends when the first woman he approaches awkwardly reprimands him. His painfully inarticulate pick-up lines are dire and he shuffles like a nervous teenager yet it is not the method but the resulting approval of Harry and Gus that motivates him. Similarly, a later occasion when Gus physically dominates his partner Mary, recalls the scene in *Faces* where Freddie makes himself appear dishevelled so that he can pretend to have bedded Jeannie. Gus yells and screams for the benefit of Archie and Harry in the rooms next door, confirmation for the others that he has succeeded in his seduction. However Mary, as I have suggested earlier, is quick to see through the masks and infantile image of masculinity the men present. Before she is overpowered she provides the cutting insight that these men are “silly, sniggering, schoolboy friends” and that their act of “banging people on backs” and calling each other “pal” is just that – a performance.

Fig. 3. Harry punches tissue. From *Husbands*. Dir. John Cassavetes. Columbia Pictures, 1970. Film.

The film’s penultimate scene is the overwrought dissolution of the trio in front of another audience of women. Prior to this Gus and Archie’s stoicism is ironically questioned when they end up falling for the women they picked up. This failure to inhabit a detached attitude of control drives their return home to the security of their lives where such emotional complexities are repressed. The ultimate collapse of the fraternal group is communicated in a single, fleeting gesture performed by Harry – an exterior manifestation that encapsulates the pent frustrations of his troubled interiority.

When he professes his love for his friends only to be rebuked by Archie's fear of intimacy, he tosses a tissue into the air and endeavours to strike it as it falls down (fig. 3). Like the brief instant where Gus's mask slips during the bathroom sequence, it is an ephemeral moment but a crucial one. This pathetic gesticulation embodies the exasperation, anger, and angst of everything that has preceded it: the death of Stuart; the chasm it has created in their own lives; the futility of their unfulfilled attempts to find solace in one another; and the immediate news that Gus and Archie are leaving him. The team that began as a frozen image of assumed impenetrability has finally de(con)structed.

Home II: Buddies

If Harry's action represents the futility of his isolated anguish, then the final exchange between Gus and Archie metaphorically reduces their relationship to a single glance (fig. 4). The look they silently share as they prepare to return to their respective families surmises their experience. It is both (in)expressive and intimate. Nothing is said and yet it communicates the mutual understanding they share, an explicit example of the covert intimacy and unspoken solidarity that can define male friendship. Words have failed to convey the gravity of what has occurred: the death of their friend; their grief and newfound fragility; and the second 'loss' of Harry. As Carney notes, "when the real events are not external conflicts, but interior muddlements of feelings, scenes and characters reveal truths *between* the actions or the lines of dialogue, *in* the beats, the pauses, the hesitations, the moments of uncertainty" ("Adventure" 109). Kouvaros isolates a similar notion when he proposes that fragments and traces of emotion mean interiority is "only glimpsed through a haze of accumulated actions, minor movements, and expressions" (47). This transient moment, one of several I have isolated in *Husbands*, constitutes an instant where interiority is glimpsed and pathos surfaces.

Fig. 4. Gus and Archie's look. From *Husbands*. Dir. John Cassavetes. Columbia Pictures, 1970. Film.

To conclude my critical commentary it is useful to consider another anecdote from the director's life. After the release of *Husbands*, Cassavetes wrote a novelisation of the film, alternating between each husband's interior musings. Fine suggests it allowed Cassavetes to explore the themes of grief and friendship "in ways that would have been too explicit or explosive for his taste in film" (*Genius* 229). Some of the excerpts are revelatory. Harry complains about his friends, "They have that dry Americanised emotionless way of avoiding anything that might cause them feeling" (Fine *Genius* 230). Archie laments, "What am I – some outsider that doesn't have the same problems and needs that these two guys have?" (Fine *Genius* 230). While Gus, reflecting on their flight of fancy states, "We wanted three of us to be as good as four. And we were sorry that this night had passed so quickly without event, without philosophical exchange, without emotion" (Fine *Genius* 230). These disclosures are absent from the film because they betray Cassavetes' core philosophy about how men act, by hiding their vulnerabilities behind a façade. They also betray his ontological principle of capturing meaning through glimpses of external behaviour that occasionally perforate the shell.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the way *Husbands* coalesces the themes of masculinity, grief, and friendship. I have unpacked the *something* that initially struck me in the film by tracing moments of fraught masculinity, grief-stricken confusion, and excessive inexpression. These emanations occur within social performance, where characters wrestle with the tension between exteriority and interiority. Locating such instances is difficult since Cassavetes' characters, particularly his men, are constantly donning masks and drowning out their emotional vulnerability in a cacophony of meaningless activity and verbal excess. Beyond these exteriors there is, as Archie says in his entropic speech, a "need" for emotional connection, a need that is never quite satisfied for the men, or in my case, the viewer. While *Husbands* concludes with what Christos Tsiolkas calls the "vivisection" of the male group, there are occasions of solidarity and pathos that are manifest during moments of covert intimacy ("USA" para. 5). It is these more sanguine junctures, like the final exchange between Gus and Archie which inspired me to begin the process of producing a script, drawn from my own experiences, that (re)presented the same scenario as *Husbands*.

In the following chapter I shift the discussion from a critical account of someone else's film, to one of my own. I will consider the ways that *Brothers* began initially as a response to what I saw as *Husbands*' failure: the lack of disclosure; the denial of interiority; and the absence of pathos. What I hope will become clear is how *Brothers* emerged with the same concerns at its core: the masks of masculinity; the gravity of grief; the vagaries of male friendship; and the failure of words to adequately communicate loss.

CHAPTER THREE

Grief Work: *Brothers*

This chapter adopts a reflective and reflexive tone congruent with the form of an exegesis. In an exegesis, Jeri Kroll surmises, the artist must become “an expert reader of his own work – a critic and examiner” (6). At the same time, Kroll indicates, the artist is positioned within the discussion “demanding to be heard, to be part of the communication equation, if only to acknowledge the plethora of forces behind any creative production” (6). I will straddle both notions by tracing the evolution of my film, *Brothers*. The first section considers the thematic approach, revisiting the conceptions of chapter one and relating them to the process of devising *Brothers*. The second section tracks the influence of *Husbands*. Although *Brothers* was inspired by Cassavetes’ film, the two differ in significant ways. Finally, as in the previous chapter, I will conduct a critical commentary whereby I assume the role of critic and examiner, and seek to ‘fill the gaps’ by elaborating on the intentions and intricacies of *Brothers*. While the commentary will further expand the film’s themes and the influence of *Husbands*, it will also address more conventional aspects of a cinematic textual analysis.

Since references to the film are made throughout this chapter, it is beneficial to formatively include a synopsis of the film. This will also clarify the names of the characters in *Brothers*. The plot of *Brothers* begins in the summer with four young men – Costas (Costas Thrasyvoulou), Brendan (Brendan Olphert), Theo (Theo Taylor), and Jonathon (Adam Stewart) – enjoying a day at the beach along with Jonathon’s girlfriend May (Jessica Kidd). Jonathon initiates the building of a driftwood dam at a nearby stream, enlisting the help of the other three men. Following the successful building, the film cuts suddenly to Jonathon’s funeral the following winter. During the funeral Costas, Brendan, and Theo recollect the immediate moments before and after they learned of Jonathon’s death and the events are covered in flashback. Costas is the first to find out and subsequently breaks the news to Brendan and Theo respectively. After the funeral the men visit a bar where they drink beer sullenly. Seemingly at a loss for what to do next, the men sit in an idle car until a black dog appears. With the dog in tow the men drive to the beach and begin the

process of rebuilding the dam just as they did in the opening scene.

I. A Thematic Approach

The thematic approach of this thesis shadows the way I approached the conception of *Brothers*. From the outset I identified the central issues I wanted to examine as masculinity, friendship, and grief. Gradually, as both aspects of this project developed they began to inform each other, with *Brothers* gaining clarity through research and the thesis becoming focused as I refined the dramatic scenario. This is in keeping with Kroll's assertion that both creative and critical works develop side by side (8). Here, I will reprise the thematic conceptualisations I outlined in the first chapter and discuss how they connect to salient creative decisions made. Within each theme I isolate a central creative question that served as a reference point throughout the scripting process.

As a male, my idea of masculinity is informed by personal history. The anecdote from the thesis introduction about my friend's funeral is an explicit, and influential, example. The inability to curb my social performance in front of an audience of stoic men presents a concrete manifestation of the interior/exterior tension associated with the grief experience. Seidler refers to the idiom "to lose face", proposing that such a breach of self-control is deemed to be a drastic social failure for many men (13). Hence my succumbing to vulnerable emotions constituted a failure to adhere to idealised notions of hardened masculinity. The stoic message, summarised in another endemic precept to "harden up", an aphorism that relates not only to the body but the mental faculties as well, pointed towards the tension between a hard exteriority and a soft interiority in understanding how masculinity is performed.⁹ The contrasts between soft and hard, interior and exterior became an important conceptual framework that also served to incorporate my individual experience of enacting masculinity.

The driving creative question regarding masculinity was: How can the various aspects of the masculine performance be rendered cinematically? If the point of enactment is to mask weakness by presenting a uniform exteriority, how could this

⁹ "Harden up" is an oft-used colloquialism in New Zealand. In his book *All Blacks Don't Cry* which details his battle with depression, the former All Black John Kirwan, recounts being told to "harden up" by male peers and criticises the dire implications of this motto, especially for young men (52).

process be traced in a visual medium? The solution required conceiving a scenario that observed men grieving in both private and public spaces, with a distinct focus on their performances through gestures, physicality, and particularly facial expressions. Concerning the latter, I recalled Béla Balász's writing on physiognomy, specifically his dictum about the "language" of the face, which "cannot be suppressed or controlled. However disciplined and practisedly hypocritical a face may be ... we see even that it is concealing something, that is looking a lie" (317). Therefore, the way to unveil the male mask was to scrutinise it closely in deliberately organised instances of what Peberdy conceives as performative angst (8). According to Peberdy, angst is manifest onscreen in "a gesture, a series of movements, a sequence of sounds" that reveal cracks in the façade of masculinity (169). This approach was pertinent in the development of scenes, and especially turning points or important moments, within the film. Examples I will discuss in the creative commentary include Costas' single tear in the bunker, Brendan's act of self-harm, and Theo preparing to confront May. By alternating between public and private space, and composure and angst, there posed an opportunity to witness the language of the face, and body, as it betrayed the male performance.

Like masculinity, the theme of friendship incorporates a number of assumptions drawn from my own background. For me, male friendships have often lacked emotional intimacy, particularly in regards to verbal discussions of important personal issues. On the other hand, I also felt that nebulous abstractions like *brotherhood* and solidarity functioned as positive pillars of the fraternal bond. This duality makes male friendship somewhat ambivalent, divided between amity and intimacy. Employing Swain's conception of "closeness in the doing" enabled me to strike a balance, because it indicates how male friendships often evaded the semblance of intimacy, while simultaneously acknowledging a quiescent value men placed on being together (77). Swain's additional isolation of "covert intimacy", recognised in unspoken and ephemeral moments that reveal this tenuous dualism between disconnection and connection, was particularly helpful (71). The example Swain uses of Greg, who recalled his celebration with a friend following a baseball game, resonated with me (79). I could recount similar episodes that ratified the gravity of a friendship in a way I had previously not recognised. Recalling such moments of covert intimacy became critical inspiration for me during the formative

evolution of *Brothers*.

The creative question in relation to friendship was: How can I represent the duality of the male bond within *Brothers*? This also prompted an important accompanying question on whether the film should critique the lack of intimacy or champion the silent solidarity? The answer was to contrive occasions that did both. For example, the post-funeral wake scene where the men sombrely drink beer was initially conceived as a tableau that portrayed the men's disconnection. During script revisions it became evident that it also presented an opportunity to show a quiet moment of togetherness, or what Staudacher refers to as "sharing a silence" (210). The most deliberate dual presentation of closeness in the doing and covert intimacy required the creation of the dam-building activity which bookends the film. As a "shoulder-to-shoulder" task it served to reinforce the emphasis on shared activity that is an intrinsic part of the male bond (Greif 66). When the activity is revisited at the conclusion of the film it envelops the group's grief work, becoming a metaphor for their united front in sharing the burden of loss. These moments of duality embodied the *alone together* paradox, recognising that disconnection and connection are often concurrent within the fraternal bond.

Appropriately, the third theme, grief, was the most difficult to conceptualise and articulate, especially when conceiving of a male experience. As I have mentioned earlier, stoic and taciturn are adjectives that described my own grief responses, as well as those I observed in other men. Delving deeper it became evident that there were a variety of complex tensions at play. The three main sets of tensions that I isolated: "secret grief" which is accompanied by stoicism and silence; repression and suppression; and escape through action and activity, all had a tendency to alternate and arise at different times and within different situations (Staudacher 19). This echoed a more general definition of grief as something that fluctuates, ebbing and flowing in what Erich Lindemann refers to as "waves", or what Colin Murray Parkes calls "pangs" (141; 43). Within my own experiences of loss I manifest aspects from each set of tensions. While they are arguably interrelated they do not always occur in unison. The potential for such a complicated inventory of responses, which could arrive in slow waves or strike in sudden pangs posed difficulty during the creative process. Without the scope of an extended scenario, isolating elements of each tension

would require a deft balance between thorough investigation and austere narrative economy.

The driving creative question in regards to male grief was an issue of pragmatism: How could I portray the myriad facets of the male grief response within a relatively short narrative conceit? The answer came in developing three separate characters who each amplify different aspects of these tensions. By devoting an episode to each character, the film could chronicle three individual responses as opposed to focusing on one central protagonist. For example, Costas presents reaction in his decision to take control of the situation by informing his friends. While Brendan manifests secret grief during the bathroom scene, he more overtly encompasses repression and suppression through his gesture of crushing the glass. He also presents activity in his immediate return to work. Theo on the other hand presents stoicism and silence, most pointedly when he fails to acknowledge May's sorrow in the scene when he drops her home. An episodic narrative, with multiple characters, allowed me to explore these myriad facets, thus encompassing a more complex range of responses within a restrictive timeframe.

Inspiration and Response: *Husbands*

In this section I will move beyond this thematic discussion of *Brothers* narrative inception to explain how *Husbands* served as inspiration, while also inciting a creative response. Despite *Brothers* being influenced by Cassavetes' film, refashioning its basic narrative scenario and thematic concerns, they differ greatly in terms of style, structure, and sensibilities. Indeed, watching the films side by side it is clear that *Brothers* is by no means a remake of *Husbands*. For example, *Husbands* is frequently messy and meandering, while *Brothers* is structured and economical. Where Cassavetes' democratic camera catches spontaneous moments of performance, mine carefully records specific instances of angst. And, perhaps most drastically, *Husbands*' excessive inexpression contrasts with *Brothers*' excessive silence. While these differences are notable, they risk obscuring key similarities between our films that are perhaps less obvious. It is by relaying these similarities, as well as expanding on some of the aforementioned differences: in the emphasis on performance and emotion; the use of omission and ellipsis; and questions of grief and expression that

we can chart the ways *Brothers* responds to aspects of Cassavetes' film.

Both *Husbands* and *Brothers* wrestle with tensions of social performance, eliciting junctures where an afflicted interiority threatens to breach a controlled exteriority. In each case this results from the existential predicament the characters are placed in. As I have suggested, the emotional flux in Cassavetes' films emerges from strained group situations where "conventional roles and models of behaviour are breaking down" (Viera 38). This is evident in *Husbands* where a heightened sense of affective entropy envelops the trio, due to the crisis they are facing. Under such circumstances there is an aura of instability that would not usually be present. This elevated atmosphere exists in *Brothers* with the acute period of grief that disrupts the men's usual behaviour, that is, their performance of masculinity. In refashioning the premise of *Husbands* I elected to focus on the event of the death. In this primary state of shock there posed an opportunity to observe men as they struggled to contain a surge of psychological turmoil. I believe Cassavetes avoided this acute period of grief because it posed another example of something, which as Fine relates, was too explicit for his taste in film (*Genius* 229). Instead, *Husbands* begins with the men already in the process of slowly recomposing themselves, while *Brothers* charts the more visceral moments of sudden loss where the wave of affect is at its most overwhelming.

The central similarity between both films is the way in which the male social performance fluctuates suddenly between composure and collapse. Where Cassavetes relies on alcohol to develop a "modulation of affect" in his scenes, *Brothers* uses this initial phase of trauma to do the same (Kouvaros 180). Kouvaros contends that in *Husbands*, alcohol opens up "layers, sensations, and rhythms", affecting social performance by invoking "a gaze held too long" or "a word caught in the throat" (180). The barroom and bathroom sequences in *Husbands* are examples Kouvaros points to where inebriation instigates failed attempts at self-disclosure (181). In *Brothers* the impact of Jonathon's death imparts a similar dazed affect into the scenes of discovery. In each scene the pang of grief overwhelms the men's ability to curb their interiority. As I have outlined, internal anguish pierces the controlled performance in the form of a lone tear, or in an act of self-harm. Yet, as quickly as these fissures appear they are seemingly subsumed, just like the poignant pause where

Gus's mask slips in *Husbands*. For instance, Costas is seen symbolically raking the bunker, erasing the site of his sorrow and readopting a stoic act.

In *Brothers* these fluctuations serve as deliberately scripted moments of performative angst. These premeditated choices contrast glaringly with the form of Cassavetes' films, where such instants arise spontaneously from within prolonged scenes. As I was constrained by the format of a short film, the turning points and key moments in *Brothers* needed to be more succinct, symbolic, and pronounced than in *Husbands*, where the spectator must work harder to locate them in the "haze of accumulated actions, minor movements, and expressions" (Kouvaros 47). However, I still had to rely on external behaviour, actions, and gestures, especially considering the absence of dialogue in *Brothers* – a feature of the film I will explain shortly. Kouvaros suggests that in Cassavetes' cinema, frenetic behaviour and gestures are abstracted and located "within a precise context of specific relations and pressures" (103). Therefore, minor moments take on heightened meaning. In particular, I drew inspiration from instances in *Husbands* like Harry's motion of punching the tissue, an impulsive act that seemed to condense an entire raft of emotional malaise into a single gesture of pathos. The influence of such moments are manifest in the preordained gesticulations and seconds of stillness in *Brothers* that encapsulate the gravity of the men's plight and convey feelings they cannot utter, or simply dare not to speak.

The fact the men do not speak in *Brothers* culminates in the most significant difference to *Husbands*. I will devote the following paragraphs to explaining this key dramaturgical decision and how it initially emerged from my frustration with inexpression in Cassavetes' film. Firstly, the avoidance of dialogue is a strategic elision that further accentuates the focus on performance and emotional flux. Since in both *Husbands* and *Brothers* the characters do not grant us access to their interiority through verbal revelations, the focus must be on the examples of external behaviour I have outlined earlier. This also connects to the reticent nature of male grief, a quiet malaise that is seldom expressed through language and might only be glimpsed through a subtle performative collapse. As the characters are unable to articulate their emotions, we are left with what Carney calls "raw behaviour" in order to create meaning from the text ("Adventure" 109). Therefore, Cassavetes' insistence – as well as my own – that the audience decipher the "shifting surface of bodily gesture,

human relation and emotion”, poses a challenge to the spectator to engage with the text in an unconventional way (Kouvaros qtd. in Islam para. 13).

Secondly, the use of silence is part of a wider elliptical strategy that asks the spectator to *add* meaning to the text. Pierre and Comolli argue that Cassavetes uses ellipsis in a way that gives the impression entire scenes are missing from his films, forcing the spectator to fill major narrative gaps themselves (324). Their example is the suicide attempt in *Faces*, however we could also point to Stuart’s death in *Husbands* (324). Indeed, Cassavetes’ elision of this event in the latter raised a number of questions, such as: How did the men find out? Who knew first? How might Gus have told Archie? This strategy was an important influence on *Brothers*. While these ellipses can be irritating, they can also leave the spectator thinking about the film long after it has finished, as I experienced in relation to *Husbands*. I attempted to create something similar with *Brothers* by devising scenes that ended on the cusp of revelation. Alternately, in moments like Costas’ phone conversation and his alleyway conversation with Brendan, dialogue is overwhelmed by ambient noise, thus maintaining the film’s ‘vow of silence’. At these points the spectator must answer a range of questions: What is the character thinking? What do you think is being said? And, pivotally, what would you say if your friend died?

Finally, the main reason behind my decision to eschew dialogue grew from failed attempts to script a scene where the men divulged their inner feelings. Early drafts I wrote of the barroom wake scene in *Brothers* were responses to the tedious singing contest in *Husbands*, a scene I found intensely frustrating due to the men’s excessive inexpression. My version of the scene, which was originally designed to be the climax of *Brothers*, contained extended dialogue where the men bonded over losing a “brother” in an increasingly lachrymose confessional. It was essentially the scene Fine suggests Cassavetes removed from *Husbands* where the men considered what Stuart’s death meant to them (*Genius* 214). Yet, like Cassavetes, I felt my dialogue was disingenuous, failing to represent how men would actually interact. Where Cassavetes replaced the scene with the protracted singing contest my solution was the opposite, fundamentally reducing the event to a silent tableau. Paradoxically, the meaning conveyed by each scene is analogous. The husbands fail to connect, preferring to undermine meaningful revelation through excessive inexpression, while

my brothers favour excessive silence, as if they already know talking about their turmoil is useless. Therefore, both scenes, and ultimately both films, are about men failing to confront their grief, failing to break their silence about it, and consequently resigning themselves to being alone together.

It is also worth mentioning the relationship between silence and grief that Armstrong identifies in the mourning film and how this shares connections with *Brothers*. The impossibility of articulating loss is common in grief. Indeed when confronted with a grieving person it is natural to remark, “I don’t know what to say”. This penchant for inexpression is a recurring notion within the therapeutic discussions of grief I have outlined and is alluded to throughout *Mourning Films* as well. Armstrong states that “the film, like the mourner, cannot verbally acknowledge the import of what has been lost and so the retreat into silence becomes its form of expression” (193). Therefore, in a number of mourning films, muteness becomes endemic to the mourning protagonist causing silence to overwhelm the soundtrack. Referring to *Morvern Callar* (2002), a film that charts a bereaved woman’s retreat into isolation, Armstrong proposes that the film uses silence as a stylistic strategy attempting to elevate moments when nothing is said in order to “articulate loss as precisely the void between words, the gap which separates grief from its enunciation” (193). Such a statement is evocative of the way silence operates in *Brothers*, where it is this gap that is emphasised during the occasions when the men’s grief is at its greatest.

III. *Brothers*: Critical Commentary

In this section I will conduct a close reading of my own film, scrutinising moments throughout *Brothers* in the manner I have just suggested the discerning spectator must. The resulting analysis will fill some of the gaps in the narrative, as well as shedding additional light on some creative decisions. Replicating the form of the critical commentary I undertook in chapter two, I will discuss *Brothers* in chronological order with sections devoted to the spaces the film moves between: Beach I; Funeral; Wake; Beach II. Specifically, I will isolate the ways the film (re)presents masculinity, grief, and friendship, as well as expanding on the ways it (re)presents aspects and elements drawn from *Husbands*.

Beach I: Boys

The opening sequence of *Brothers* pays homage to *Husbands* by setting up the film's premise and relationship dynamics in a similar way. Both begin in an idyllic summer setting, portraying liberated male bodies, and immediately privileging the fraternal bond. These sequences also take the form of a distant memory shared amongst the men. Cassavetes' still images add nostalgia to the sequence, reducing it to a series of embalmed instants. While I initially entertained using the same device to juxtapose past and present, I instead opted to record the events as though they were fragments of a forgotten home movie. Like the photographs, this evanescent aesthetic evokes a sense of loss by capturing fleeting images. The bright colour palette adds an air of hyper-reality as though the entire sequence is being viewed through a wistful looking glass. The intention was to presuppose the idea of grief, not just for Jonathon, but also for lost halcyon days. This grief inflicts a coming of age where the group of carefree boys graduate into a stoic manhood.

Fig. 5. Closeness in the doing. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Thematically, the sequence exhibits the quartet's uninhibited masculine bodies as well as the nature of their friendship. They are young, energetic, and determined, yet also childishly playful. While they do not possess typically hard bodies, they are undoubtedly vital. However, the inclusion of the pair of spontaneous falls presages the susceptibility of even the young body. The physical task of building the dam conveys the basis of the fraternal bond in shared activity, an act that reinforces the closeness in the doing (fig. 5). Prior to the building they appear disconnected, while

the activity brings them together. Jonathon leads the exercise, evoking the central position of Stuart in *Husbands*. Meanwhile, May, the lone female character, is cast to the periphery in lieu of the exclusive male group. Upon completion they celebrate in a decidedly masculine way by drinking beer. As they share pats on the back and even swigs from the same bottle there is further presentation of covert intimacy. This is taken to the zenith in the final series of shots where the friends pass a succession of tender looks amongst themselves. These intimate, direct glances imbue the sequence with an overt sentimentality, posing a significant contrast to the end of the film where these shots are reprised in a more dislocated and pensive way.

Fig. 6. Shoulder-to-shoulder. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Funeral: Grief

The contrast between the opening sequence and the funeral is immense. The fluid home-movie aesthetic is replaced with an austere, static visual style, complete with muted colour tones and an accompanying aural silence. The change of seasons prompts an equally drastic change in men's physical appearance. Their bodies are now laden with the heavy black clothes of mourning, similar to those that ensnare Cassavetes' husbands. Their faces are unsmiling and ashen. Though sitting shoulder-to-shoulder they are not united as they were at the end of the dam build (fig. 6). Instead, each is reliving their private story of sorrow, which the film proceeds to recount in episodic form. In the following paragraphs I will analyse these episodes. In each one I will isolate the key instance(s) – often an action, gesture, or expression –

which unveil instants of fractured exteriority, or what Peberdy refers to as moments of angst (9). These are similar to the “beats, the pauses, the hesitations, the moments of uncertainty” that reveal interiority in *Husbands* (Carney *American* 109). I will also elicit how the film’s themes are expounded, with a specific focus on masculinity and grief.

Fig. 7. Costas’ moment. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Costas’ golf course episode contains the most overt emotional manifestation of grief in the film – the shedding of a single tear (fig. 7). This is the key instance in the scene because it is a tangible breach of his exterior performance. Before this, upon receiving the news, he is reduced to sitting in the bunker, not unlike a disconsolate boy in a sandpit. The camera frames his face in close-up in order to capture the hidden “language” of his face (Balász 317). Initially it is tense as though he is actively trying to prevent the tear from emerging, attempting to exert control over his faculties. Once the tear is shed he glances quickly to his left as though he has caught sight of an invisible witness to his vulnerability. Though he is alone, his response is to pull his hat over his face, shielding his emotions from anybody that may have observed the event. The act also arguably denies the spectator, an invisible witness who *has* surveyed the scene, any further access to his emotional insecurity. After symbolically raking over the sand, a secondary act of effacement, he is seen walking purposefully. As he looks up his previously downcast eyes now carry a distinct determination. He has suppressed his sorrow, reincorporating the stoic message in order to break the

news to Brendan.

Before I elaborate on Brendan's key moment, his gesture of crushing the glass, I will discuss the conversation where he learns of Jonathon's death. The single-shot exchange exemplifies the strategy of forcing the spectator to read external behaviour to infer what is being said. As I have suggested, part of the motivation for such elisions is the difficulty of contriving genuine dialogue. Indeed, how does one realistically script such an unreal situation? This is a question addressed to the audience instead. Why are they shaking their heads? What do you think is being said? And crucially, what would you say? Despite this verbal obfuscation, their body language is revealing. Shaking heads convey denial and disbelief, however, there is no embrace between the men, or any overt suggestion that anything is amiss. From a distance nothing undermines their enactment. Brendan scans the street as though the meeting were a nefarious deal he wants no one to see. The insinuation is that there are too many potential witnesses to allow any real feelings to emerge. As he curtly deserts Costas to return to work, Brendan is in denial, turning his back on news he refuses to accept, or cannot comprehend until he is in the private safety of the bathroom.

Fig. 8. Brendan's moment. *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasivoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Brendan's gesture in smashing the glass is also an unconscious external action that implies a loss of control (fig. 8). The act of self-harm, which occurs off-screen but is conveyed through the tensing of his face, encapsulates the suppression of his

grief and the potential damage this poses to his psychological state. Brendan's episode is also the strongest presentation of what I earlier referred to as a 'dazed' affect that engulfs the scene. The noises around him seem overwhelming and occasionally otherworldly. His movements are laboured as though the film has reverted to slow motion. Having partially recomposed himself in the bathroom by vomiting – an example of secret grief, as well as a physical purging that recalls the husbands' somatic response – he returns to work. Brendan is plainly "doing something else" in order to allay the immensity of his acute grief (Cook 297). In the moments leading up to Brendan's act the camera isolates his face in close up. While the muted crack of the glass is an aural manifestation of a shattered internal tenor he scarcely registers the pain. He winces but does not avert his eyes and his face quickly returns to its prior state of inexpression, betraying only a hint of relief. As the film returns to the funeral we see Brendan covering his wounded hand, an action that, like Costas' raking of the bunker, can be understood as effacing the entire episode.

Fig. 9. Theo's moment. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

While Costas and Brendan's narratives are largely solitary stories, Theo's is tied into his relationship with May and the accompanying guilt this creates. Jonathon's death means that they can never atone for their affair, a transgression that is torn asunder in the moment of Theo's angst (fig. 9). As he laboriously enters the bedroom after learning of Jonathon's death, his face bears the weight of tragedy, guilt, and the difficulty of informing May. It is an expression, both irresolute and crestfallen,

that is far removed from the surreptitious look he gives her in the film's opening sequence. The cut to May in the car is a vital continuation of this moment, albeit with a role reversal. Now her face displays her emotional burden, while Theo has reassumed an air of stern control and nonchalance. Her eyes are asking him – and subsequently the film – to break the excessive silence. Ultimately, Theo fails to return her glance, or say anything, epitomising his emotional unavailability. His exhalation when she departs is one of relief, suggesting he can now sort through his feelings alone. Though May's story is left untold, the earlier image of her at the funeral surrounded by statuesque men implies that she will not find solace amongst this taciturn fraternity.

Fig. 10. Sharing a silence. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Wake: Friendship

The barroom scene returns the film to the present and unites the men in a space they feel comfortable together, a pub (fig. 10). It is somewhere they have presumably visited before, a place in which they have publically validated their masculinity and solidified their friendship by drinking beer. However, like the basketball game in *Husbands*, the spectre of their lost friend invades the sites where they previously gathered, drawing attention to the altered dynamic of the group. Indeed, as Armstrong argues, absence can paradoxically encompass presence in films that deal with grief since the characters' – and audience – are so often confronted by reminders of the person who is no longer there (122). Here, the empty chair becomes

an unavoidable sign of Jonathon's absence.

The static reunion is also the epitome of the alone together paradox. Just as the husbands revert to old patterns of behaviour to avoid confronting Stuart's death, they end up being trapped in situations where emotional intimacy proves impossible. The men are drawn together through a semblance of duty, yet they are locked in their own separate states of silence, unable to let go of the "script" that dictates how they behave around one another (Kerfoot 237). As they drink, the friends are framed in a series of single shots that further isolate them from each other. Costas and Brendan are motionless, staring blankly into space, though Theo appears to want to say something, again teasing the possibility of revelation. In the end he drinks out of habit, wishing to add an air of normality to the uncomfortable scene.¹⁰ While he cannot speak, there is hope that the shock of his empty glass hitting the table might startle the group out of their despair and into a higher order of feeling. The men are simply too guarded to give even their closest friends access to their vulnerability.

While the wake exacerbates their inability to connect, it is not the final denouement. Were the film to conclude at this point, the disconnection between the men would not convey the positive aspects of male friendship that *Brothers* seeks to advocate. I did not want to privilege alienation over unification as Cassavetes' does. Instead, as I have mentioned, while I acknowledge an inherent lack of emotional intimacy in the male bond I also recognise its unspoken solidarity. Such a suggestion also betrays a personal sentimentality toward the concept of brotherhood. The men need to acknowledge Jonathon's death by doing something that is meaningful to them. In this regard, the building of the dam is exclusive to the brothers. Its significance as a revisited memory and a fitting memorial to Jonathon carries a private meaning that is known only by them, making the task deeply intimate and unifying. In order to get there they are led by the black dog, a symbolic manifestation of Jonathon. His fixation on Brendan prompts his stoic expression to waver registering the first smile seen in the film beyond the opening sequence, and marking a hopeful turning point.¹¹ The

¹⁰ There is also the implication that he will turn to alcohol in order to drown his pervasive guilt. The imbibing of black beer metaphorically calls to mind black bile, a substance often associated with the depressive humour.

¹¹ However, the dog also appears as a harbinger of depression. Just as black bile is associated with a depressive humour, the image of the black dog has been a more recent conceptual symbol of depression, as in Matthew Johnstone's illustrated book *I Had a Black Dog*. The dog's attachment to

arrival of the dog reforms the fraternal group and allows them to progress towards some pretence of closure.

Beach II: Men

The return to the beach brings the narrative full circle. It is a liminal space, posing an escape from the restrictive and unsatisfying mores of the funeral. While the use of this locale was an intuitive creative decision, present in the earliest drafts of the script, the ocean is used to conclude numerous films that deal with death and loss. As Sean Redmond suggests, beach conclusions often offer non-closure “the ambiguity of something more, possibly. The beach and its shoreline is given incredible power to end and yet not end a film” (723). Similarly, Catherine Russell identifies concluding images of sea and sky as backdrops of catastrophe “in which nothing and everything happens” (209). Even as a site of hope its continuous flow aligns it with the waves of interminable grief. In Armstrong’s examples of mourning cinema the sea is a frequent site of pensive isolation and silence, a final retreat for those who have traversed the hinterland of despair (173). The motif of the dam also carries a number of meanings regarding the irrevocable nature of loss. Metaphysically, the stream flowing toward the sea represents the constant flux of life towards death. Attempting to halt this unrelenting torrent, particularly with porous driftwood, is a futile, Sisyphean task. Their labour also relates strongly to the notion of damming grief, which is emblematic of the suppression and repression facets of the male response.

Ultimately, the purpose of the final sequence is to achieve a bittersweet poignancy through its presentation of patent brotherhood. The trio finally shed their mourning uniform and roll up their sleeves in order to undertake their shared grief work. However, the task is a far cry from the jubilant activity it was in the opening sequence. Their boyish exuberance is gone, replaced with a resignation that emerges in occasional groans of struggle. There is even violence in the way the logs are hurled into the water, hinting at a latent anger emanating from within them. They are no longer carefree, they have grown into their grief, becoming men who have now fully incorporated the stoic message. More explicitly, Brendan is seen denying his physical pain – the wound on his hand – by partaking in the activity. Despite this grave change to their identities they adopt the burden together and gradually begin to help one

Brendan, who is arguably the most repressed of the trio, implies that his grief may remain after the others’ has dissipated.

another. Specific gestures and moments, like Brendan picking up the log Costas is dragging, or the group walking together in unison, present closeness in the doing and covert intimacy. Even the editing of the sequence charts their eventual reunification as they are increasingly framed together as the dam grows in size. Carrying the final log they appear as pallbearers, reinforcing the transcendental meaning this task carries, as opposed to the unfulfilling and impersonal funeral (fig. 11). The final shot of the men astride the completed dam, perhaps the most important image in the entire film, is a striking visual emblem of the brothers being alone and yet together (fig. 12).

Fig. 11. Pallbearers. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Fig. 12. Alone together. From *Brothers*. Dir. Costas Thrasyvoulou. Primer Grey, 2013. Film.

Conclusion

In this final chapter I have sought to tie various strands together in order to recount the history of my film and the ideas, both academic and creative, that shaped it. By adopting a reflective and reflexive tone I have situated myself within the discussion by relating the thematic concepts of chapter one to my own ideas about masculinity, friendship, and grief, as well as relaying my ongoing responses to *Husbands*. Accounting for the “plethora” of elements behind the creative work means there are many idiosyncrasies in *Brothers* that elude explanation (Kroll 6). So, while I have articulated that certain facets in *Brothers* were the result of pragmatic measures that respond to a restrictive narrative scope, others, as in the cinema of Cassavetes, were simply spontaneous moments that occurred before the camera and made their way into the final cut. Where possible, I have tried to explain these elements to contribute as full an understanding of the film as possible. Beyond this are the many personal experiences that informed *Brothers* that I have chosen not to divulge. Much like the men in my film, I have my own private stories that are too difficult to share. Instead, I feel I have put them in a film that speaks for me. To paraphrase Cassavetes – I hope it means something to someone who has suffered a loss and does not know how to express it (qtd. in Carney *Cassavetes on* 212).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how tensions surrounding the performance of masculinity influence men's lives, causing a fissure between the way they *act* externally and what they feel internally. In particular, I argued that the inherent strain between a hardened exterior and a vulnerable interior – between an outside world and an inside world – can affect the formation of fraternal relationships and the experience of grief. This study has also sought to analyse how these interrelated issues have been represented in the John Cassavetes film *Husbands*, and are subsequently (re)presented in my own film, *Brothers*.

I have made three main claims in the thesis. Firstly, I assert that masculinity relies on social enactment. Men exhibit a controlled exterior performance as part of their participation in an idealised hegemonic masculinity that is socioculturally constructed. This tendency involves the acquisition and retention of power. The appearance of invulnerability is a vital aspect of these processes. Secondly, despite the widespread phenomenon of male friendships and the importance of male bonding in the successful performance of masculinity, men often fear the implications of vulnerability and resist self-disclosure. Thirdly, the need to project a secure image of masculinity can extend to the crisis of bereavement. The public behaviour of men during grieving rituals can conflict sharply with their private individual experiences of sadness and loss. Although there is a lack of research in this area, it is my view that such tensions can exacerbate mourning.

In the second half of the thesis I applied these ideas to two cinematic texts. The interplay between masculinity, grief, and friendship is fundamental to the John Cassavetes film *Husbands*. Since Cassavetes' cinema often focuses on group dynamics amidst breakdown or crisis, *Husbands* is a rich text to read critically. Cassavetes' film incorporates what I term the *alone together* paradox, as his protagonists unite over shared grief but fail to provide each other solace. Although they display moments of brotherhood, their camaraderie eventually fractures under the strain of disconnection. I employed the basic premise of *Husbands* when creating my own film *Brothers*. Although *Brothers* reinforces some of the pathological issues around masculinity and inexpression evident in Cassavetes' film, it is ultimately more

hopeful than *Husbands* in its validation of silent solidarity.

To close this discussion I would like to reflect on the title of my film – *Brothers*. This was, in fact, a temporary working title that would eventually be superseded by something more poetic or evocative. I did not appreciate the gravity it carried until it flashed on the screen at the end of an early cut of the film. Indeed, despite its simplicity, the title – *Brothers* – encapsulates almost all of the major ideas I have explored in the film, and the thesis as a whole. The word itself is gendered, implying a distinct focus on men and masculinity. Its plural form also encompasses a group. While primarily referring to male siblings, “brothers” is also a colloquial term used by men to refer to close friends. To call a man a “brother” is an acceptable way of acknowledging a particular depth in the relationship. It also pays homage to *Husbands*. The one thing the title does not convey directly is the notion of grief or loss. However, as Jacques Derrida has suggested, the law of friendship is built on the terrible truth that one friend will die before the other causing the other to mourn (107). “To have a friend, to look at him, to follow him with your eyes, to admire him in friendship, is to know in a more intense way, already injured, always insistent, and more and more unforgettable, that one of the two of you will inevitably see the other die” (Derrida 107). Therefore, to have a ‘brother’ is to embrace the inevitability of potentially losing a friend.

Future Directions

There are various ways in which this project might continue. I concur with Armstrong that a more exhaustive investigation of male grief in cinema can be developed. Such an undertaking exceeded the scope of my work, however during the research process I was able to view a number of films about grieving men. Films I have mentioned earlier like *In the Bedroom*, *The Crossing Guard*, *The Son’s Room*, and *After the Waterfall*, all render solitary male grievers in plaintive ways and might constitute examples of *male* mourning films. Additional titles to consider include *Ordinary People* (1980), *Love Liza* (2002), and *A Single Man* (2009). Within these texts, tropes like the desire for violent retribution and the descent into addiction are more common than in the female mourning film. These trends point to the male need to assert control over loss or escape it entirely. Another recurrent thread is alienation, as these protagonists resign themselves to secret grief. While it might be ambitious to

collate a body of films that culminate in a generic type as Armstrong does, I would encourage scholars, critics, and spectators alike to consider the element of grief and how this affects male protagonists in the variety of films that chart loss.

Beyond this, I believe John Cassavetes' films are overdue for analysis in regards to gender and masculinity. As I have argued, Cassavetes' male characters are enduringly complicated individuals with an expanse of emotional excess bubbling below the surface. The manner in which films like *Minnie and Moskowitz*, *A Woman Under the Influence*, and *Husbands* portray unashamedly boorish men, while simultaneously critiquing their fallibility and insecurity, is fertile ground for future writing. Again, this might centre specifically on performance. One film especially deserving of a close reading is *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. To borrow a term from Thomas Elsaesser, the "pathos of failure" that hangs over Ben Gazzara's turn as Cosmo Vitelli would provide a fascinating character study (286). As Tsiolkas has said of Vitelli, "finally someone had communicated something that I had dared not speak. That being a man means knowing gutlessness better than knowing courage" ("Meet" para. 2). As films like *Love Streams* and *Minnie and Moskowitz* enjoy recent DVD releases, Cassavetes' oeuvre continues to yield opportunities for new lines of enquiry.

Brothers also offers a potential stimulus for other filmmakers who might pursue their own narratives of loss. Leary proposes that Cassavetes' work falls into the paradigm of "personal cinema" as typified by Robert Sklar – a cinema seeking "to put one's dreams and desires into practice before the camera" (qtd. in Leary 40). Cassavetes saw a possibility in cinema to probe things he felt he did not fully "understand" and to put his private fears on screen (qtd. in Carney "Adventure" 105). He also filled his films with his friends and family, drawing their histories into the narratives. Similarly I would refer to *Brothers* as an example of personal cinema. It was made with the insight of friends who had suffered the same losses as me, and poignant moments in the text were drawn from our collective memories. When a film is made with such depth of feeling it cannot help but reveal something about an experience that frequently defies explanation. Therefore, I hope to see forthcoming examples of personal cinema that attempt to recount our stories of sorrow.

APPENDIX A

***Brothers* Shooting Script**

BROTHERS (Working Title)

by
Costas Thrasyvoulou

7th Draft
Costas Thrasyvoulou, July 02

Primer Grey
382a Somme Parade, Whanganui
027 4280523

1

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON

1

Blue sea. Blue sky. A beach ball rolls slowly across black sand. Bright towels dry over driftwood. Beers cool in a small stream.

Five figures at play in the sea, four men and one woman.

JAKE (22), tall and athletic, splashes water at MAY (22), an attractive blonde. She shoots him a sharp glance before splashing water back at him.

THEO (22), boyish and sandy haired, looks on. He laughs. His expression becomes muted as he watches May move closer to Jake. The couple embrace. May shoots a glance back at Theo who quickly looks away.

COSTAS (22), skinny and awkward, empties water from his goggles. He puts them on, dives under the water and resurfaces only to repeat the entire process once more.

BRENDAN (22), handsome and brooding, floats gently by himself appearing lost in his own thought.

2

EXT. STREAM SIDE - LATER

2

The five friends dry off in the sun. They sit quietly each drinking a beer as they absorb the late afternoon light.

May rests her head on Jake's shoulder, her eyes closed. Jake takes a swig and stares thoughtfully at the gentle stream. He stands up, sculls the rest of his beer and tosses the bottle on the sand. He crosses the stream and grabs a large piece of driftwood lying on the bank dragging the pale wood into the water. He begins building a dam.

One by one the others notice Jake. They all watch as he tries to haul a huge log into the water. He struggles, loses his grip and topples over splashing into the stream. He finds his feet, grinning at the others. He tries again.

Without a word the boys rise and join Jake. They work in unison as they collect large stones and logs. May looks on.

Time passes. The dam nears completion. The boys stand back as Jake makes the finishing touches. It is a respectable looking dam. We see each boy's face as they admire their work. Jake stares at the dam with the most pride. He turns his head to look at one of the others. He smiles.

3

INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - MORNING

3

A framed photo of a smiling Jake sits atop his coffin.

We see Costas, Brendan and Theo. They sit together on a wooden pew dressed in dark colours. The light is cold. Each sits locked in their own separate states of silence.

Costas is the most visibly distraught. His face and eyes are red. His gloved hands clasp together. He is tries to prevent tears from falling from his eyes. Just as the tears are poised to fall he looks upward in a hopeless attempt to keep them at bay.

We focus on his eyes. The SOUND OF A STRUCK GOLF BALL.

4

EXT. GOLF COURSE - LATE AFTERNOON

4

Costas' eyes are cast upward. They rise, reach an apex, and descend as he traces the flight of his golf ball. We hear A GOLF BALL HITTING SAND. Costas drops his head. He has found a bunker.

Costas walks slowly down a shell-rock path towards the bunker. He wears a button up polo shirt and tidy trousers. He spits on the face of his golf club, polishes it with a towel, then places it in the golf bag he carries.

He arrives at the bunker, puts his bag down and assesses his lie. The ball is 'poached' in the sand. He draws a wedge from his bag and takes a few practice swings on the grass. He enters the bunker. He stares down the flag stick.

He addresses his ball, twists his feet into the sand and makes a few waggles, squinting as he prepares to make his shot. The instant he begins A CELLPHONE BEGINS VIBRATING in his bag. He stops suddenly, tosses his club against his bag unzips the pocket and removes his phone.

We see Costas from a distance. He paces around the bunker as he talks on his cellphone. We do not hear his conversation, only THE SOUND OF BIRDS AND WIND. Time passes. Costas drops his arm from his ear. He stands frozen. His head drops. He stares at the golf-ball in the sand. His expression blank shock.

Slowly he crouches, in the sand, hesitates a moment then falls backwards. He sits. He stares at his glove and begins tearing the velcro. Slowly he removes his glove. His face turns. To hide his eyes he pulls his cap down. He pushes his bare hand into the soft sand grabbing handfuls of sand gripping them tightly, his knuckles white.

Later. Darker light. Costas sits with his chin pressed to his right shoulder. He raises his head, takes a breath and stares ahead.

Costas walks purposefully across the dimming golf course.

5 INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - MORNING. 5

Costas opens his eyes. He drops his head.

We move from Costas to Brendan. Brendan appears vacant. He picks at the fabric of a bandage on his left hand. He stares down at his hand intently. We hear RUNNING WATER and the RISING VOLUME OF A RESTAURANT KITCHEN

6 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY 6

A busy restaurant kitchen. A sea of white and stainless steel. Brendan stares purposefully at a sink full of murky water. He is the 'dishy', wearing an apron and bright pink gloves he furiously washes plates in the dirty water.

Brendan's CO-WORKER arrives with another tray of dirty plates to add to his intimidating pile.

She exits hurriedly. Brendan hurls a tray into the steriliser and slams the top triggering its noisy process.

7 EXT. BACK OF RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER 7

Brendan takes a puff of an expiring cigarette. He glances down the cluttered alleyway toward the street, noticing Costas' parked car. He stubs out his cigarette and walks towards the street. He glances at Costas who is sitting in his car looking austere. Their eyes meet.

We see Brendan and Costas conversing from a distance. They are silhouettes against the busy street. We hear none of their exchange, just the LOUD NOISES OF THE KITCHEN which overpower everything.

As Costas talks Brendan paces around, finishing another cigarette. When he is done he stamps it out and walks away. Costas hesitates before turning slowly and moving to his car. The alley is empty.

8 INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 8

Brendan stands over the toilet. He has been sick. He flushes the toilet. GLASSES CLATTER through the wall.

9 EXT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER 9

Brendan works without authority, he is slower, more deliberate. He swishes the glasses around the soapy water before putting them on a tray. He takes another glass into his hand and studies it carefully.

He dips it into the liquid and brings it out again. As he holds it in his gloved hand he stares at it intently.

He looks up, staring out the window in front of him. He closes his eyes for an instant. We hear the MUTED CRACK OF A GLASS. Brendan winces, opens his eyes, then looks down. He holds the crushed glass tightly in his hand. Blood begins to drip from his gloves into the soapy water.

10 INT. BEDROOM - LATER 10

Through a slightly ajar door we see Brendan sitting on the edge of his bed. An unlit cigarette hangs in his mouth. He tries to light it but the lighter won't work. After several attempts he stops. His head drops.

11 INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - DAY 11

Brendan raises his head and stares solemnly ahead. We move from Brendan to Theo. Theo looks up at the image of Jake on the casket. He glances to his left. May sits across the aisle. Their eyes meet. May's expression is tired sorrow. After a moment May turns and looks ahead.

Theo's eyes drop down to the funeral booklet he holds. He rubs the paper with his thumb.

12 INT. BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON/NIGHT 12

Theo sits in bed reading. He rubs the paper of his book with his thumb. We hear a murmur. Theo glances to his left and smiles at May sleeping in the bed next to him. He watches her for a moment. She half opens her eyes, cracks a tiny smile, closes her eyes and rolls over.

The sound of a CAR TRAVELLING SLOWLY UP A GRAVEL DRIVEWAY. Theo rises to his feet and walks towards the window. He glances out and sees Costas' car stopping in his driveway. Costas opens his car door, gets out, and glances up at Theo in the window. Costas' expression is austere.

Later. May slowly wakes. She notices Theo's absence and moves toward the window. From the window she sees Theo and Costas in conversation. Theo is crouched down on the ground, his hands toying with stones on the driveway. Costas has his back turned to Theo and is looking down. They are not saying anything to each other. Costas glances up and catches May's eyes.

Later. The car door slams. Theo stands. Costas backs away.

13 INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER 13

Theo grips the hand-rail at the base of the stairs. He seems frozen, unable to move. Slowly he begins to ascend the stairs. We hear QUIET MOVEMENT coming from his room. His steps seem to take an eternity. He grips the handrail tightly as if he fears he might lose his balance.

14 INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 14

The door is ajar. Theo stands on the precipice. He slowly pushes the door open, revealing May sitting by the window. Theo has difficulty holding her gaze. He appears shell-shocked. He strengthens his resolve and looks at her. He opens his mouth as if he will begin speaking.

15 INT. CAR - EVENING 15

Theo and May sit in the car. The engine idles. May turns her shattered gaze toward him. He senses her look and forces himself to turn toward her. They stare at each other for an extended moment. May breaks the gaze, opens the door and exits the car. Theo watches as she walks towards her front door and is met by her parents. He drives away. The sound of the engine slowly dissolves into the sound of RUNNING WATER.

16 INT. BATHROOM - LATER 16

Theo showering through a misty glass door. He sits on the shower floor. The water hits Theo's head as he sits in a sunken posture. He closes his eyes and raises his face up, the full stream hitting his face. The sound of the shower slowly dissolves into the sound of an ORGAN PLAYING.

17 INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - DAY 17

Theo sits with his face upward. The organ continues. He opens his eyes, lowers his head and stares straight ahead.

We see the picture of Jake atop the coffin. Curtains close hiding Jake's coffin and signifying the end of the service. The ORGAN MUSIC fades away.

18 INT. BAR - LATER 18

Black beer is poured from a jug into a small glass. The bubbles swirl around violently. The three boys sit at a table. Each has their own glass of the dark liquid. No one speaks.

Later. An empty jug and glasses at the table.

19 EXT/INT. CAR - LATER 19

The boys enter the car. They sit quietly. Costas occupies the drivers seat. Through the windshield a figure moves around the car. Brendan winds down the window and glances out. A black labrador stares at Brendan. They hold each others gaze. Brendan extends his arm to the dog. It moves closer allowing Brendan to pat it. A smile grows. The sound of a CAR ON A GRAVEL ROAD becomes louder.

20 INT. CAR - LATER 20

A gravel road. Costas drives. Theo occupies the passenger seat. In the back sits Brendan. Brendan glances to his right. There in the back next to him is the dog.

21 EXT. BEACH - LATER 21

The car sits at the windswept beach. Costas cuts the engine. THE SOUND OF THE OCEAN.

The dog leads the boys down a tussock lined path. When they reach the ocean they walk towards the stream. They stare at the flowing water.

Costas is the first to begin removing his shoes. He tears them off and starts rolling up his pants. He wades into the stream and begins to haul logs into the water. Slowly Theo and Brendan join in. Without a word they work in unison. They find logs, stones and driftwood. Anything they can to build their dam.

Later. The boys are gone and we see only a completed dam. It holds most of the water back, but not all of it.

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