MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY:

THE AGING ACTOR'S SEARCH FOR RELEVANCY

THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY

By

IAN MAXWELL RADZINSKI

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

2012

MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY:

THE AGING ACTOR'S SEARCH FOR RELEVANCY

THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY

Thesis  Approved:

Dr. Lynn C. Lewis

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Ron Brooks

Dr. Jeff Menne

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Lynn Lewis for guiding me through this arduous process of researching masculinity in film, while helping me focus on the rhetorical elements that exist within these texts; Jonathan Canon for constantly discussing these films at length and sharing his encyclopedic film knowledge with me; and my parents for helping me amass such a knowledge of these films by allowing me to watch so many of these movies when I was younger.

Name: IAN MAXWELL RADZINSKI

Date of Degree: JULY, 2015

Title of Study: MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY: THE AGING ACTOR'S SEARCH FOR RELEVANCY THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY

Major Field: ENGLISH

Abstract: Throughout recent cinema, the masculine male identity has been showcased on-screen by various film stars both within the action genre and outside it. Specifically, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and numerous others were products of the 1980s masculinity that stressed immense displays of exaggerated violence and hyperbolic musculature on-screen. The 1990s, however, ushered in a new type of masculinity – the emotionally responsive male figure. With this new type of masculinity came a transformation in the male's former masculine character. This newly emerging masculine figure was marked not only by his newfound demonstration of emotion, but also by his social marginalization. *Falling Down* (1993), *First Blood* (1982), and many other films have focused their narratives on society's relegation of the male lead to a reduced status in society.

This study examines how two former popular figures in the cinema – Jean-Claude Van Damme and Michael Keaton in *JCVD* (2008) and *Birdman* (2014), respectively – were both narratively marginalized by a profession whose emphasis has heavily transformed since the 1980s. Each film presents the masculine male figure at a point in his profession where he is attempting to revitalize his career after spending years outside of Hollywood's A-list.

Through a visual rhetorical lens, this study assesses how *JCVD* (2008) and *Birdman* (2014) are prime vehicles for the actors to intertextually comment on their present, diminished positions in cinema. The intertextual commentary within each film draws on the former cinematic identities of these two male stars (Keaton as Batman and Van Damme as the quintessential action hero) and establishes a means through which the audience may understand how each star is commenting upon his former masculine male identity within each film. This essay also discusses how the study of rhetoric and intertextuality should be expanded to include such visual rhetorical realms as film.

Through such scholars as Kenneth Burke and David Blakesley, this essay considers how the visual actions and verbal dialogue displayed on-screen advance a certain rhetorical 'way of seeing' the masculine character or identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever begun watching a film that you enjoyed when you were young and noticed that the dialogue references within the film refer to the actor's earlier career in the cinema? This self-reflexive referencing typically is played for laughs in action films, like in John McTiernan's *The Last Action Hero* (1993). Here the protagonist, Arnold Schwarzenegger as Jack Slater, continuously subverts commonly accepted action genre norms and even his own image within that genre through both verbal and visual commentary within the film, allowing the more knowledgeable audience members the ability to see how the masculine male's identity is re-formulated through the star's dialogue and actions on-screen that openly mock the characteristics of his prior identity as the quintessential, or more specifically, as the *last action hero*. Through the hero's existence in an environment that questions and even threatens these tropes of masculinity, other films like Joel Schumacher's controversial foray into masculinity, *Falling Down* (1993) openly draw on and even revise the white male's ideals of a common or generic masculinity. In other words, McTiernan's *The Last Action Hero* (1993) and many other films like it expose the common genre characteristics that the white male action films of the 1980s and early 1990s built their protagonists' narratives upon.

In this essay that I will analyze two films in particular that contain two important figures of the action cinema – Michael Keaton in *Birdman* (2014) and Jean-Claude Van Damme in *JCVD* (2008) – which not only feature two prominent action stars of the 1980s and 1990s, but, more importantly, are films in which the hero's modern ideal of masculinity is revised through marginalization. Both films feature two famous actors of previous action franchises: Keaton from two *Batman* films and Van Damme from countless action-adventure films in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, with Keaton in *Birdman* (2014) and Van Damme in *JCVD* (2008), each actor's own existence is marginalized or highly downgraded from its previous high status. In *Birdman* (2014), Keaton's character, Riggan Thomson is socially marginalized through his status, or lack thereof in the modern film industry. He is no longer the A-list celebrity that he was when he starred in the *Birdman* superhero franchise years before. Similarly, in *JCVD* (2008) Van Damme is a Hollywood outcast who is commonly relegated to the B-list category of film roles. Both men and both films share in this ideal of masculine marginalization: together their roles as fathers has been severely diminished; each man's celebrity persona is similarly non-existent as both have grown into older age; and both must, as Susan Jeffords relates in her article "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties," make a change from a masculinity that favors hard physical bodies to one that is capable of emotional change. What sets these films apart from the successful changing of masculinity from one of physical prowess to one of emotional change like that from a violent cop to ending up as a school teacher in Schwarzenegger's *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) is one of personal failure and societal marginalization.

Neither film ends well for each character who attempts narrative change:

Thomson seeks a more refined return to acting by directing a stage play of his own interpretation of a Raymond Carver short story and Van Damme seeks a return to a Hollywood acting career, but gets tangled in a post office robbery where he ends up getting sent to prison for extorting money from the Belgian police. Thomson's fate in *Birdman* is left uncertain, although it can be inferred that he may have leapt to his death. Additionally, Van Damme is sent to prison, while the status of his legal battle for custody of his daughter is left unresolved.

Unlike the changes or transitions from a physical masculinity to one of more empathy for such action heroes as Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1990s with films like *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) that detailed a transition for the protagonist from one of a brutal masculine male to one considering the emotions of others, the masculinity of marginalization in *Birdman* (2014) and *JCVD* (2008) works in an intertextual manner. The stars of these two films similarly draw on their own real life attributes and faults within their respective films to comment on their own status in the film industry (in *JCVD*) and the superhero genre in the film industry at large (in *Birdman*). However, through this intertextuality or self-comment within these films both actors create a way for the audience to consider the marginalized masculine male image. This commentary, for the majority of these two films, is done via the first-person narrative device. I discuss later in my essay the persuasive power that the first-persona narrator holds through the ability of direct address and how the audience can identify the masculine male identity through certain visual and verbal characteristics represented on-screen.

Through Keaton's and Van Damme's verbalizations of the inequities imposed

upon themselves and their careers and the visual images that pictorially parallel those marginalizations in their film roles and also their own lives outside their films, a form of persuasion is enacted upon the audience. The audience is provided a visualized and verbalized revision of the prototypical masculine male through each film working to reformulate former indicators of the masculine male identity through creating visual and verbal characteristics of a marginalized male identity (within their films) where both actors' careers are diminishing as they age, their status as fathers are being eroded, and both are being forced into changing their personas in order to become relevant again. This is done in *Birdman* (2014) by the protagonist making the leap to theater and in *JCVD* (2008) with Van Damme seeking Hollywood roles again instead of B-list film projects. Marginalization and relevancy, in the context of this paper, are not entirely indistinguishable terms. Both concepts connect in these films through marginalization relating to the protagonists' exclusion from contemporary, major Hollywood fame by factors acting outside themselves, while relevancy refers to their internal feelings of personal inadequacy in not being able to reacquire their past fame. Both actors are marginalized by social and political factors that have been imposed upon their careers (within and outside film) that relegate the aging masculine male to a less celebrated status in the cinema. Relevancy here comes second in the process. This marginalization creates in these men feelings of cinematic irrelevancy that is fueled by evidence of their lowered status in cinema. To be marginalized is to be conferred as irrelevant in society. And these two men have ultimately sought to re-attain their relevancy through fighting back against this social marginalization.

This creates some pressing questions for scholars studying intertextuality in the

field of visual rhetoric. While scholarship surrounding the notion of intertextuality has generally been confined to that of the written word, more recent scholars like Frank D'Angelo have shed light on the problem of intertextuality being confined to certain sectors of study like literary studies and how other forms of intertextuality work in other mediums, including visual media. Additionally, James E. Porter highlights some of the direct applications of studying intertextuality within visual media by analyzing some common visual images popular within our culture including a popular television commercial.

The focus of my study is to emphasize how the verbal dialogue and visual image(s) within film work together to comment on and reformulate the aging male's masculine identity for contemporary audiences. Identity is not a static concept within the realm of cinema studies. Yvonne Tasker's work regarding the masculine identities of the 1980s and 1990s sheds light on the fact that different eras of cinema exhibit masculinities that mirror the political and social implications of those respective times. What is relevant to the field of visual rhetoric here is the theme of the masculine male identity and its composition – both verbally and visually – in a medium that routinely works intertextually, calling on these former stars' identities to inform and reformulate their aging, current identities. In this essay, I will seek to answer the crucial question of just how the visual image and verbal dialogue in my case studies' films work as intertextual arguments for a revised or remediated form of masculinity for the aging male star.

The study of the visual and verbal qualities of these cinematic texts should contribute to visual rhetorical scholarship by yielding palpable indicators of how the male identity is composed in a visual medium and how these visual/verbal characteristics work

in the formation of this now newly-emerging male identity in a Hollywood that is currently using cinematic intertextuality to develop/comment on this identity.

      This essay will be organized into three separate sections. Chapter 1 "Literature Review: Text, Argumentation, and Aging Masculinity" will discuss the scholarship behind the concept of intertextuality (the borrowing of another text) within the field of visual rhetorical studies and will briefly highlight the concept's origin and prevalence within written mediums. In order to accurately discuss the meaning of intertextuality in cinematic contexts later in the essay, the concept of remediation (repurposing one text for use in another text) will be called upon to highlight the ways in which the written word has been repurposed in a verbal/visual medium (cinema). Also of importance in Chapter 1 "Literature Review" is my discussion of the concept of marginalization. In this chapter I examine how the 1980s and 1990s masculine male identity has been transformed by social marginalization and what this marginalization looks like as it has evolved within the masculine male's identity. Specifically, I explain how social marginalization influences the masculine male into becoming more emotionally receptive to characteristics around him that he might have otherwise ignored. I also consider the role of visual and verbal indicators in the concept of identification with the masculine male identity and the importance that these visual and verbal characteristics impart to the audience.  Lastly, at the end of Chapter 1 "Literature Review" I discuss how the first-person narration device works as a persuasive strategy that visually and verbally allows the audience to identify the characteristics of the masculine male identity. Chapter 2 "Case Studies" will focus exclusively on two aging male actors: Jean-Claude Van Damme and Michael Keaton. Here, I will discuss each lead actor's more recent cinematic

efforts (*JCVD* and *Birdman*, respectively) and the ways in which their aging

masculinities are visually displayed on screen for the audience via intertextual elements

within the narratives that use both the visual image and verbal dialogue to remediate and

then reformulate each actor's former cinematic identity. Lastly, Chapter 3 "Why it All

Matters" will consider the contribution(s) that a study of intertextuality will have in

understanding how identity is remediated not only through the on-screen visual image for

cinema audiences, but additionally how verbal dialogue can contribute, in tandem with

the image, to persuading the viewer how to (re)-consider the masculine identity in the

cinema and in the field of visual rhetorical studies.

The films of many aging male actors today have frequently focused intertextually

on the actors' former personas within the purview of their films' narratives. Former stars

of the 1980s and early 1990s have been part of a niche market of films – films with

seemingly disparate narratives that carefully reference and exploit a previous perception

of the actor's identity. This has been done on-screen by the filmmakers overtly and

covertly referencing an actor's previous persona via a new text's (film's) use of dialogue

and/or the presentation (or image) of the actor on display in his most recent film or films.

Through referencing these actors' former narrative personas, films created years later in

these actors' careers are now able to draw on past perceptions or identities of these stars.

With the career of Jean-Claude Van Damme having reached its apex at the box office in

the mid-1990s and Keaton having gone on to star in many other successful films after his

most famous role as Batman in the early 1990s, each of these individuals has ultimately

been part of an intertextual cinema.

However, scholarship drawing direct comparisons between the two stars'

disparate careers would ultimately be reductive. Neither stars' career nor personal masculinity matches with the other. What these two men share in the films being studied here is a masculine identity that is being marginalized. Neither man is able to hold onto their previous indicators of masculinity, including a sustainable and profitable career in Hollywood or a successful place in the family hierarchy. Through this forced transition from the hard masculinity of the 1980s and early 1990s, Van Damme and Keaton must make the transition to a more emotional masculinity. Yet, unlike the transitions of other stars in the 1990s to a more emotional and understanding masculinity, both Keaton's and Van Damme's transition is one that ultimately leads to failure and their inability to exist in a world that has already changed around them. One should note, however, that while both *Birdman* and *JCVD*, carry some distinct biographical elements, both films focus on each man's filmic identity being marginalized and less on their own real life identity outside the film.

This essay's focus regards each man's filmic identity and how that identity is marginalized within the narrative of the film. It should be observed that while the majority of *JCVD* is based on a fictionalized post office robbery, there is a smaller element within the film that draws attention to Van Damme's real life woes (drugs, divorce, etc.). On the other end of the spectrum is *Birdman*, which concentrates on the fictional story of one man's filmic identity being similarly marginalized. While Keaton and Van Damme possess real life identities outside their own film careers, both men have over the decades created their own respective filmic identities separate from their own in reality. These separate filmic identities composed for the film screen are the ones of which my essay shall concentrate.

In order to both view and perceive these intertextual elements within a filmic text, one must first understand how intertextuality is defined by those scholars who have studied it, and to comprehend what will be considered as intertextual within a filmic text. For my study, my focus will lie with analyzing the word and image in relation to the star's masculine male image. I will concentrate my efforts in revealing and illustrating how the word (dialogue) and image (the stars' image and actions on-screen) work not only as indicators of intertextuality, but, more importantly, how the image relates this to visual rhetorical scholarship. While the word does not explicitly relate to the field of visual rhetoric, it does contribute and, at times, work to complement the visual image. The added emphasis of the word to the visual provides further understanding of what is visually expressed on-screen. My attention will remain on how these two case studies (*JCVD* and *Birdman*) work not only as filmic indicators of intertextuality, but also, how their inclusion of the word and image are important for the field of visual rhetoric's study of a differing medium (film) and how these intertextual indicators or signs may provide a new way of visually comprehending the aging marginalized male's masculinity as a text presented upon a screen.[1]

The concept of remediation holds multiple roles in the context of this essay: first, remediation is considered in its most basic form as the reformulating for use of one text into another (ex. cinema reformulated/repurposed in the online computer game and especially from text-only analysis to visual analysis) (for further elaboration of this concept, see Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation*); secondly, though, remediation refers to the repurposing of visual and verbal characteristics of identity across genres instead of

---

1  For further discussion of film intertextuality/identity read David Blakesley's "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*."

9

solely across mediums. I will discuss how I will be utilizing Bolter and Grusin's term "remediation" in the section of my essay titled "Remediation in the Realm of Visual Rhetoric" and how identity can be similarly remediated across differing genres.

Bolter and Grusin relate that "…the whole entertainment industry's understanding of remediation as repurposing reveals the inseparability of the economic from the social and material," adding that "The entertainment industry defines repurposing as pouring a familiar content into another media form; a comic book series is repurposed as a live-action movie, a televised cartoon, a video game, and a set of action toys," in order to "…spread the content over as many markets as possible" (68). This idea of borrowing certain aspects or characteristics from past films or from actors' past lives and/or their respective franchises, most relates to this idea of intertextuality. This concept of intertextuality will be explained at greater length later in this essay.

What sets these two actors apart from other famous actors from the 1980s and 1990s is that both of these actors have recently starred in films – *JCVD* (2008) and *Birdman* (2014) – that have not only alluded to their prior careers, but most importantly and unlike the later career action hero reincarnations of similar stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone who have also starred in recent films that have capitalized on the publics' memory of their former fame, both Van Damme and Keaton have starred in two films that not only reference each man's former career, but has focused almost exclusively on that topic. Each of these two men's more recent films have been fixated on exposing the suffering and social marginalization associated with not only being a celebrity, but also being an aging celebrity in a career that prides itself on youth and new fads.

While Schwarzenegger and Stallone have recently starred in such intertextual fare as *The Expendables* franchise and the reboot of *The Terminator* series, *Terminator Genisys* (2015), that have allowed them to repurpose their famous and previous personas, Van Damme and Keaton's films – *JCVD* (2008) and *Birdman* (2014) – stand out as films that are not only semi-biographical accounts of these former stars' careers in Hollywood, but also present an alternative masculinity for the audience – an alternative masculinity shaped by their newfound and downgraded place in life. While Keaton's foray into the realm of intertextuality in *Birdman* does draw on some of his past career exploits, the film is inevitably bound by its fictionalization of his career and personal life. *Birdman*, unlike *JCVD*, is not explicitly biographical in nature. My hope in this essay is to not only elucidate this type of masculinity for the audience of this paper, but more so, to clarify the verbal and visual cues that are associated with these stars' newfound place in Hollywood.

*JCVD* is a semi-biographical account of Van Damme's failed Hollywood acting career and his relegation to starring in low-budget direct-to-video films. The movie is centered on Van Damme's desperation in trying to find consistent work in a cinema that has long ago forgotten he exists. The main narrative consists of Van Damme looking for low budget or B-level acting jobs, fighting for custody of his child, and traveling back to his home country, Belgium. These factors create major burdens for Van Damme throughout the film, where he is consistently unable to find movie roles and constantly worrying about making enough money to support himself and his family. The main struggle in the film is set in a Belgian post office where a group of robbers have taken a crowd of civilians hostage, including Van Damme. In this central section of the film Van

Damme's own life and career are intertextually referenced within the film's narrative. Not only does Van Damme confess his cinematic shortcomings to the audience in a key moment of drama within the narrative, but he also exhibits his own personal inadequacies, including his former drug addiction, multiple marriages and divorces, among other things directly to his audience. *JCVD* is a film that uses its leading star's own backstory as a basis to create a completely fictitious bank robbery narrative that while somewhat formulaic when compared to similar films of that genre, ultimately is used to show how truly weak and vulnerable the star is in a 'real life' action situation that mirrors the storyline of one of his films.

Similarly, *Birdman* is a fictionalized account of Michael Keaton's less glorified (but definitely more robust than Van Damme's) career in Hollywood after he declined the main role of Batman for a third film in the franchise. *Birdman*'s narrative is very similar to the one told in *JCVD*. Riggan Thomson (Keaton) is vying for theatrical relevance at a late time in his life after having previously refused to star in another *Birdman* (read *Batman*) sequel, this time as the lead character in his own written adaptation of Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love." Unlike Van Damme's quest for continued *cinematic* relevance, Thomson's (Keaton's) character is on a quest for relevance in a different but equally visual medium – *theater*. This creates several problems for comparing these two case studies. *JCVD*, while similarly fictionalized, still tailors its narrative around a failing movie star (the real life Jean-Claude Van Damme) and his many personal/professional shortcomings like in *Birdman*, but *Birdman*'s narrative essentially is much less intertextual. *Birdman*'s narrative relies on the publics' knowledge of its lead star's previous career as an intertext within the film.

However, unlike the washed-up failure he portrays in the film, Keaton's own Hollywood career has continued steadily since his work as *Batman* ended in the early 1990s. Unlike Van Damme's continued failure to break back into Hollywood filmmaking, Keaton's own life is not quite so dire and is portrayed less on screen than Van Damme's in *JCVD*. Within the context of this paper, though, these differences between each film are immaterial. What makes these two case studies so relevant to this paper are not the explicit similarities inherent within each lead character, but more importantly, the fact that each film calls on each star's prior career (to varying degrees) as an intertext composed of and/or displayed by the visual image and verbal dialogue which reformulates the star's identity in the context of their social marginalization.

However, what is of importance is to consider the differences between each text within the argumentative framework of this paper in order to understand how differing types of masculinity are being separately revised. Specifically, Van Damme's aging masculinity is quite different than Keaton's. Because Van Damme was part of the action cinema of excess in the 1980s, his progression from that form of the action cinema to one of comedic self-mockery and non-action in *JCVD* is quite a departure from his previous persona. While both actors' previous masculine identities differed markedly, their shared sense of marginalized social relevancy is most relevant for discussion in this paper. In other words, both men's prior identities could not be more different. Yet, their newfound position as Hollywood social outcasts most pertains to what will be discussed in this essay.

Similarly, their shared use of both verbal and visual intertextual characteristics within the films' narratives most works here as distinguishing markers of visual rhetoric.

13

Specifically, the use of intertextual verbal and visual features within films forces the audience to re-consider how the marginalized male identity is identified. As will be discussed later, masculinity is a concept that is ever evolving, as noted by Jude Davies and Susan Jeffords, both of whom discuss the evolution of the male identity through the 1980s to the early 1990s in "'I'm the Bad Guy?' "Falling Down" and White Masculinity in 1990s Hollywood" and "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties", respectively.

The darkly comedic film *JCVD* focuses not only on Van Damme's degenerating star quality, but also his fading physical abilities, highlighted in the opening action scene of the film where Van Damme explains to the director that because of his age he finds it difficult to complete such a complicated action scene in one take. What *JCVD* is seeking to revise is the concept or consideration of Van Damme as a real person in a genre that has long ago forgotten about him; by somewhat fictionalizing his struggles on-screen, including his real life exclusion from major Hollywood filmmaking, the filmmakers can revise how the audience perceives his masculine image in real life.

On the other hand, the audience is already aware of the fictional character Riggan Thomson's loss of stardom in *Birdman*, and should additionally be aware of Keaton's continued success in Hollywood, especially with a part in this film directed by critically-acclaimed and internationally recognized director Alejandro G. Iñárritu who has previously directed such films as *21 Grams* (2003), *Babel* (2006), and *Biutiful* (2010). *Birdman* is not parodying or critiquing a career built on bodily excess like *JCVD*, but similar to that film, *Birdman* presents the issue of attempted career rejuvenation as one of its themes. *Birdman* is not critiquing Keaton's presentation of his body in prior films;

instead the film critiques the unrealistic expectations associated with Hollywood stardom – manifested, like *JCVD*, in a parodic form that values youth and formulaic franchises over the now aging and marginalized masculine male individual. While appreciating the origins of each actor's masculine image is important (Van Damme in the action cinema and Keaton with a brief stint in the superhero genre), it is of greater importance to realize that each film references both actors' previous careers as a form of intertext in the narrative that works to establish a way of seeing both stars' aging masculinity through the guise of visual and verbal elements within the respective films.

This is a type of cinema that through the process of internally referencing a former star's cinematic portrayals or previous aurora of stardom has created a revised composition or perception of the main star and has incorporated this into the film's narrative through referencing that star's former career triumphs, miserable failures, and forced distancing from an industry that values younger and more profitable stars. However, what's at stake in this analysis of these mentioned actors' intertextual cinematic careers, is that each of these actors' more recent films (*JCVD* and *Birdman*) not only embody narrative intertextuality, but more so, exist as sites where each actor is set to revise his former film image/identity as an action star (Van Damme) and as Batman (Keaton) at a stage in their careers where older age is more prevalently employed in their films' narratives. Here these references to their former careers act as places for the actors to call their youthful images into question and, more importantly, to revise or transition their masculinity in order to exist in a world where age is more apparent in each of their narratives and effects their perception by the audience both within the film and outside its narrative. Yet, how does all this connect to the field of visual rhetoric? Why does it all

matter?

What this form of identity analysis should afford to the field is another means of comprehending or another perspective of how the masculine identity can be transferred to the viewer through the visual image of the male being marginalized within the narrative of the film and, particularly, how the visual and verbal content are presented on-screen to persuade the viewer in this manner. An expanded explanation of the masculine identity will be discussed in the section "How to Comprehend Visual Rhetoric through Masculinity and its Characteristics." There, the masculine identity will be defined and its placement within the filmic literature will be clarified in greater detail. While notions of cinematic dominance through extensive exhibitions of violence and large musculature marked the masculine identity of the 1980s, the masculine identity of the 1990s was far different. The masculine male of the 1990s no longer retained the same amount of dominance and control over his familial and social surroundings. Instead, this masculinity was marred by a diminishment of the masculine male's power or control over his surroundings. The newly emerging masculine male of the 1990s retained much of his excessive muscular and even displayed a similar amount of violence on-screen for the audience. However, the masculine male began to evolve in the 1990s with fatherhood becoming a major staple of the genre, while social and familial control began to dissolve from the masculine male's grasp, rendering him marginalized by an environment that was once under his almost complete control. The masculine male hero lost some of his relevance through society's marginalization of the masculine male identity.

Such an analysis should emphasize the changing nature of identity featured on-screen in a medium that uses both the verbal and visual to represent this form of aging

masculinity. In Sonja K. Foss' "Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a Transformation of Rhetorical Theory," she provides two definitions of visual rhetoric that broadly define what is included in a collection of works on visuals rhetorics in the edited collection, *Defining Visual Rhetorics*,  explaining "It [visual rhetoric] is used to mean both a visual object or artifact and a perspective on the study of visual data," adding that "In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating," where secondly "…it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication" (304). The visual object of analysis for this study is the cinema, specifically the films *Birdman* and *JCVD*, where the perspective under discussion is that of how aging male masculinity is reformulated and communicated via the verbal dialogue and visual image being used intertextually to then comment on the state of the aging masculine male in today's cinema.

Additionally, these verbal and visual qualities equate to symbols that communicate a type of perspective to the viewer that communicates a certain way to think about the aging masculine male. Through these verbal and visual characteristics the viewer is able to see how each of these processes works intertextually to affect the viewers' way of comprehending how the aging masculine male is composed in the cinema. Hence, this essay should contribute to the field of visual rhetoric another way of seeing the marginalized aging masculinity male through the veil of the visual image and verbal dialogue featured in each film and how these rhetorical characteristics work to communicate and persuade the audience.

As will be mentioned later in this essay, both Van Damme's and Keaton's film

careers and outward personas are largely referenced from their past: Van Damme by starring in films with similar narratives conveying the same repetitive spectacle of his physicality on-screen and Keaton through the image of the media's mass-produced and highly remediated comic book character Batman that established him, however briefly, as a leading actor in Hollywood.

In this essay, I will illustrate the relationship between the image and text as they work on the film screen to reformulate an alternative way of viewing the aging male's masculinity. My objective is to discuss the relationship between the image (visuals on-screen) and the text (as verbalized on-screen), and how each contributes to an understanding of aging masculinity in a visual medium. My intention is to add to previous scholarship, including Sonja K. Foss, who says in "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery" that "The study of visual imagery from a rhetorical perspective may make contributions beyond providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of rhetorical processes," explaining further that "In some cases, such study may contribute to the formulation or reconceptualization of aesthetic notions that unnecessarily restrict definitions of, and approaches to, visual phenomena" (213). One of the goals of this paper is to answer Foss' and Frank D'Angelo's call (see Ch.1 "Literature Review") for a less restrictive view of visual rhetoric, which considers how two rhetorical devices – the visual and the verbal –work together, intertextually, in the re-composition of the male identity in the cinema, a medium which Foss says scholars are now analyzing ("A Rhetorical Schema" 213). I hope that this study may add to the understanding of the processes of evaluating the part that the visual/verbal plays in intertextually reformulating how the masculine male identity is re-composed on-screen in film.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: REMEDIATION, INTERTEXTUALITY, AND MASCULINITY

Scholars have numerous definitions of intertextuality, but, put succinctly, intertextuality is the textual referencing, or borrowing of another's text. While the topic/issue of intertextuality has long been around in literary circles, its connection to rhetoric has not. Frank D'Angelo, who wrote "The Rhetoric of Intertextuality", has stated that the scholarship is limited linking intertextuality and rhetoric, and has instead largely focused on the subject matter of literary studies (33). D'Angelo explains this further by saying that one reason may be because critics have restricted their view of rhetoric, adding that many have "confin[ed] it to deliberative, judicial, and ceremonial occasions in the civil realm, rather than," acknowledging 'rhetoric as ranging over the whole of human affairs' (qtd. in D'Angelo 33). Like D'Angelo, I believe that confining the view of rhetoric's boundaries should be revised.

**How to Think about Visual Rhetoric**

An essay solely analyzing the verbal and visual elements of these two films may add some further scholarship to the screen studies community through a focus on visual aesthetics and verbal textual analysis.

Yet, more importantly, how then does an analysis of the verbal and visual characteristics of *JCVD* and *Birdman* relate to the study of visual rhetoric? How does one differentiate between the two schools? Visual rhetoric, at its core, focuses on the type of persuasion that occurs through the display of the visual. It answers the question – *how does the visual persuade the audience*?

 In the context of this paper, my thesis focuses on the visual and verbal characteristics showcased in both films and how they both contribute to the identification of a different type of masculine male identity: the marginalized masculine male identity. While the marginalized masculine male identity may seem to be a new characteristic identified in many mainstream action films featuring aging male stars, in reality, this identity is not entirely new. In essence, marginalization is a key factor in a majority of action-adventure film narratives. More to the point, marginalization is not new, having figured into numerous prior genres inhabited by the male star, even including the western. Previous directors like John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock have built their filmographies on the marginalized man's inability to conform to societal norms and his draw to social deviation. What my study contends is that while marginalization is not a completely new concept in the realm of identity formation, its part in films featuring the aging masculine male and his own belief that his self-worth has waned in society, has become more prevalent for aging male stars whose filmographies were established in the 1980s and 1990s cinema.

1980s and 1990s stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Douglas, Sylvester

Stallone, Michael Keaton, and Jean-Claude Van Damme, while still popular in their

respective niche markets, have all been a part of this emerging identity that draws on their

supposed marginalization from society and the film industry at large. This is not to say

that with marginalization comes a form of social castration. All these men, including Van

Damme and Keaton, are still powerfully male in their respective former and current

filmic incarnations. What has occurred here is not necessarily a completely new identity,

but more specifically, another transformation of the actors' identity that contains both

their past and present identities. Keaton and Van Damme are still able to evoke a sense of

nostalgia in the audience, reminding them of their former personas, while still

dualistically emerging with a more nuanced identity that has been beset by social

marginalization.

The intertextual ways in which the two case studies comment on this form of

masculine identity will determine the ways in which the masculine identity is displayed

on-screen. In other words, through the narrators and the action on-screen and those

actions posed against the narrators by their environments, persuasion is made. Through

their intertextual self-commentary and the visual accompaniment of their musculature (or

lack thereof) the narrators have developed a way of understanding the marginalization of

the masculine male identity in modern society. These narrators' words work as a

supplement to the already persuasive power of their actions. In particular, how these

narrators/protagonists physically and emotionally react to the social marginalization

incurred by their environment determines the amount of persuasion being made on-

screen.

Part of the persuasion that occurs through visual rhetoric pertains to the notion of terministic screens (a term coined by Kenneth Burke) who said 'Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another' (qtd. in Blakesley "Introduction" 2). Through this idea of using certain terms – here both visual and verbal – to create a way of understanding in the audience, these films work to persuade the audience to understand the text one way and not another.

Both *Birdman* and *JCVD* work with these visual and verbal indicators that draw the audiences' attention to the filmic text in order to persuade them to understand this masculine identity of marginalization. In David Blakesley's *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film* he assigns two terms for the audience to note: film rhetoric and film theory. He defines film rhetoric as "…the visual and verbal signs and strategies that shape film experience – directs our attention in countless ways, but always with the aim of fostering identification and all that that complex phenomenon implies" ("Introduction" 3). Blakesley goes on to define film theory, on the other hand, as "…the interpretive lens through which  and with which we generate perspectives on film as both art and rhetoric – likewise functions as a terministic screen, filtering what does and does not constitute and legitimize interpretation and, thus, meaning" ("Introduction" 3). This essay will focus more on Blakesley's use of film rhetoric and the ways in which the visual and verbal characteristics of film work to persuade the audience to think of the

filmic text and identify with it in a certain way. In Blakesley's book he identifies four ways to analyze film: film as language; film as ideology; film interpretation; and film identification. Film identification seems most pertinent to discuss here.

Blakesley says about film identification that "[t]his approach considers film rhetoric as involving identification and division. Film style directs the attention – or not – for ideological, psychological, or social purposes" ("Introduction" 7). This notion of film style and its purposes within Blakesley's definition largely pertains to the idea of persuasion in this essay. The verbal and visual characteristics in these films work at "ideological," "psychological" and "social" levels. More specifically, these verbal and visual characteristics featured in *JCVD* and *Birdman* work to persuade the audience through these broad conceptual terms. These characteristics affect the audience's ways of thinking. Yet, how does one define these verbal and/or visual characteristics by name? How do they work to persuade the audience?

Burke's concept of identification should help us identify how the word can make an impression upon the audience. In Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, he indicates how identity can be altered by the changing of one's name and/or their environment. Burke notes "Our introduction of the word 'identified' suggests also the importance of the *name* as an important aspect of synecdoche (the name as fetishistic representative of the named, as a very revealing part of the same cluster)," adding "…you will often find a change of identity, signalized by a change of name" (27).

How does this all relate to the identification of the masculine male in regard to

23

their identity? Here what is in a name or label, whether it be "Van Damme," "Birdman," "masculine," "obsolete," and, the most prevalent here, "marginalized", all comes back to the choice of word. The identification of one's self as one of these names creates in that person and the audience's perception of that person a way of understanding the person through his name or his label. *JCVD* acknowledges (and is perhaps common knowledge to Van Damme aficionados) that "Jean-Claude Van Damme" is not his real name. "Van Damme" is but his stage name; "Jean-Claude Van Varenberg" is his birth name. Yet, like the term "Birdman" what a name does is foster identification. Burke references here how the Nazis initially were not named when they were originally formed (27). Through their naming and actions those individuals were able to identify their character. And through a name or a label a type of persuasive power is given to that subject.

Burke goes on to explain identification as "…one's material and mental ways of placing oneself as a person in the groups and movements" adding further that it is "…one's way of seeing one's reflection in the social mirror" (227). Through the verbal and visual characteristics in these films Van Damme and Keaton are able to place themselves in particular masculine identities. The choice of word when referring to one's self and the display, or lack thereof, of one's body on camera works to place the actor in a certain confined way of being seen by the audience. As the audience, we are able to identify these men by their actions on-screen, by way of how they refer to themselves and their actions. These men's past films work as bookmarks of identification: we can use characteristics of past performances when identifying them in their current films. These

24

particular characteristics of masculinity are the ones being commented on here.

Blakesley's *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film* best defines visual rhetoric and how it works to persuade the audience where it "…consider[s] films rhetorically, as acts that dramatize and interrogate the ways people use language and images to tell stories and foster identification" ("Introduction" 8). Through the use of language and images being used in *JCVD* and *Birdman* we are opened a window to understanding the marginalized masculine male identity.

What a study of film contributes to the field of visual rhetoric is creating what Sonja K. Foss and Frank D'Angelo advocate – a less restrictive view of rhetoric. Rhetoric works to persuade the audience through various features of the subject, not least of which are limited to what is spoken. The actual visual characteristics contribute to that process of persuasion. Blakesley's book *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film* treats or views rhetoric "…as invoking a rhetorical situation in which form, content, and technique function as symbolic action or inducement" ("Part One" 18). The verbal and visual characteristics here within these films induce a rhetorical reading of those persuasive features and how they work to persuade the audience to consider notions of identity and masculinity.

## How to Comprehend Visual Rhetoric through Masculinity and its Characteristics

It may seem difficult to comprehend the associations between masculinity and its characteristics with the ideals of visual rhetoric, but in actuality, there are numerous

visual and verbal arguments being made within filmic texts. Each film, at its roots, uses the verbal qualities of its star(s) and/or narrator to convey meaning and persuade the audience to feel a certain way about the film and its message. The same goes for visual elements. Whether you notice the clothing a character is wearing, the environment they act within, or their individual actions on-screen, the visuals work to persuade the audience to think a certain way about the text.

However, some understanding of specific key terms mentioned in this essay and other major texts and how these terms are used in such texts that try to persuade the audience in a certain way is important. Some significant terms that need to be defined here include the masculine identity as it relates to masculinity and identity in the films *Birdman* and *JCVD*, and the terms relevancy, power, and impotence within the frame of these films. I will be discussing these terms from a masculine male context or perspective and not a feminine one due to the fact that the two films of focus in this study contain masculine male protagonists and the movies mentioned by the film scholarship below direct their studies on the effects that social issues and these terms have upon the masculine male character at the heart of the story. This is not to say that scholarship identifying and analyzing a female identity or what part a female identity plays in masculinity are not worthy pursuing, but is far too extensive for the reach of this study.

I will also be referring to two fairly important pieces of film scholarship that have conducted studies on the masculine male image and identity: Jude Davies' "'I'm the Bad Guy?' *Falling Down* and White Masculinity in 1990s Hollywood" and Susan Jeffords'

"The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties." Within these texts words like

power, impotence, and masculine identity can most clearly be framed and elaborated. In

Jefford's piece, she comments on the well-documented transition of the hard-bodied

masculine male from the 1980s into that of the gentle and emotional masculine male that

occurred in films like *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, *City Slickers*, and *Regarding Henry*,

in 1991(Davies 145-46). In 1991 cinema saw a transformation of such hard-bodied

masculine stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger who made the transition from hardened

killer into a father figure in such films as *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) and, most clearly, in

*Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991).

What these and other films containing former hard-bodied action stars of the 1980s

had in common was the fact that the protagonist had ceased relying solely on his

muscular abilities on-screen and had ventured into another role besides that of the

physically powerful hero: that of the caring and feeling father figure. What is

problematic, according to Jeffords, is the "…continued association in these films

[*Terminator 2*, *Regarding Henry*, *City Slickers*, etc.] of gentleness with the family and

domesticity (Davies 145). It seems gentleness and family lives are not coexisting terms

for the masculine male of the 1980s. Jeffords goes on to say "Hollywood versions of

masculinity remain exclusively white, and male suffering is presented as due to accidents

of personal history such as lack of love, rather than economic or historical conditions,"

adding that these men's attainment of gentleness only goes to support their currently

privileged place in society (Davies 146). Here *Birdman* and *JCVD* have much in

common. In both films each protagonist is in the process of making a transition, whether

through their career or coming to terms with old age. Their sufferings were brought on by

poor career choices made when they were younger. Yet, why did each protagonist make

such a transition so late in life? What caused the seemingly stoic Van Damme to change

from a simple-minded action hero within the narratives of his films to one considering the

repercussions of his actions on others in *JCVD*, including how his actions have affected

his child? Similarly, what is one aspect of Riggan Thomson's life in *Birdman* that is

sorely lacking and/or shows the signs of his past failures?

One common thread linking these figures' identities is fatherhood and the

rectification of past failures with those family members close to them. In *JCVD*, Van

Damme's entire reason for extorting money from the Belgian authorities is to pay off his

attorney's fees in order to fight for custody of his child. While Thomson in *Birdman* is

not a character as explicitly linked to sustaining relations with his child as Van Damme is

in *JCVD*, Thomson nonetheless uses his quest for career validation to impress upon his

daughter his own sense of self-worth. Thomson neglected his own daughter, which, it can

be inferred from the text, led to her drug abuse. Part of *Birdman*'s narrative is centered on

Thomson's interaction and relationship with his daughter, where he has the opportunity

to right one of his past failures as a father by employing his potentially unreliable drug-

addict daughter as his own personal assistant. In Jefford's article "The Big Switch:

Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties" she refers to the single concept important enough

to essentially change Schwarzenegger's persona from that of hardened cop to that of a

sympathetic teacher in *Kindergarten Cop* (199). Jeffords explains the idea of family has

the power of change within these films showcasing the masculine identity. In other

words, Jeffords' article notes, "In these films, families provide both the motivation for

and the resolution of changing masculine heroisms" (200). Part of each film's narrative

rests on resolving or at least beginning a process of resolution within the family dynamic.

Jeffords' continues her analysis of *Kindergarten Cop* by explaining "The problem all

these men confront in their narratives is that they did their jobs too well, at the expense of

their relationships with their families" (200). *Birdman* and *JCVD* present the latter

portions of a similar narrative to Jeffords', both containing an absent, selfish father whose

prior career-centric mind negatively affected his relationship with his wife (wives in Van

Damme's case) and his children. Within both *Birdman* and *JCVD* we can witness the

effects of divorce and the "hero's" damaged or strained relationship with his

child/children and, in the case of *Birdman*, his own wife. Through the notion of

fatherhood or family former action stars are being given a new sense of masculinity

within their later films.

More specifically, the common thread combining the protagonists in both films is

the perception of a marginalized masculine identity being made present on-screen in

these films. As Jeffords continues, "…the men of the eighties are being given feelings,

feelings that were, presumably, hidden behind their confrontational violence. While

eighties action-adventure films gloried in spectacular scenes of destruction, nineties films

are telling audiences that these men were actually self-destructive" (200). This is best

exhibited by the visual characteristics of pathos or emotion being featured in both

*Birdman* and *JCVD* by the protagonists who openly confess their feelings to the camera

as their proxy audience. It should be understood that while Van Damme's film career

closely parallel's Jeffords' apt characterization of the selfish masculine hero, Keaton's

career does not. Van Damme's career focused almost exclusively on scenes of both

physical destruction via bloody violence and/or the exaggerated destruction of actual

physical environments. Keaton's career, on the other hand, is one devoid of any

centralizing principle – his career has spanned all genres and cannot be easily

characterized like Van Damme's whose career is almost solely contained within the

action-adventure genre. However, based on *Birdman*'s intertextual focus on

Birdman/Batman as the self-referential text within the film, one can infer similarly

distressing or "self-destructive" characteristics from Keaton's real-life portrayal of the

famous Batman or Dark Knight character.

Although Keaton's action filmography is easily trumped by Van Damme's in

quantity, Keaton's foray into the role of Batman in *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns*

(1992) does provide ample evidence of his dark character and familial inadequacy.

Particularly, Keaton's character Bruce Wayne exhibits these self-destructive tendencies.

Keaton portrays Bruce Wayne, a product of a family torn apart by his parents' murder,

who seeks revenge for their murders, and whose (then) current family consists of brief

interactions with his butler, Alfred. Both *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992) hint

at a romantic life for Wayne/Batman, yet it never materializes or is sustained for very

long. As is, Keaton's character in *Birdman* mirrors the abject qualities of the more literary character Batman, where both men's family lives are centered on their careers, leaving little to no time for romance and/or any other long-term family lives.

The masculine identity is not a static one, as mentioned by Jeffords' article which serves to exhibit the evolving manner in which the masculine identity is composed. Jeffords describes this type of masculinity where the older 1980's brutal and muscular identity of the protagonist has "…has given way to a 'kinder, gentler" U.S. manhood, one that is sensitive, generous, caring, and, perhaps most importantly, capable of change" (197). While providing a simplistic or succinct definition of the masculine identity is quite difficult, it should be understood that the masculine identity is one that is constantly evolving and dynamic.

While the 1980's version of the masculine male identity may have remained static for that decade, and to some extent thereafter with heroes in the 1990s and 2000s still exhibiting hyperbolic musculature and overinflated violent abilities, it did evolve, to a certain degree during and after the 1990s, where the 1980's masculine muscular male still existed, but with the welcome addition of empathy and a newfound understanding of how his selfish actions could have negative repercussions on his own life and that of his family's. This evolution has continued into the new millennium with Keaton and Van Damme finally making that emotional transition. It should be noted that although both actors do make that emotional transition on-screen, Van Damme's action career has been most affected by this change to fatherhood. While fatherhood has played a role in many

of Keaton's films, one should note that fatherhood's place in the transition period of action films differs from fatherhood featured in films of other genres. Two of Van Damme's films stick out as focusing on the pains of fatherhood or being a father figure: *Nowhere to Run* (1993) and *Sudden Death* (1995). However, *Sudden Death* only uses the notion of fatherhood as but one incremental aspect of an otherwise typical Van Damme actioner. *Nowhere to Run*, on the other hand, is more of a nod to George Steven's *Shane* (1953), where the film still focuses on violence, but also on his character existing as a father figure for the female protagonist's son. These films are the exception, not the rule. While fatherhood and family do make up small parts in many of Van Damme's film narratives, they are not substantial enough to warrant the transitionary label most notably exhibited in *JCVD*.

Fatherhood is just one aspect of the masculine identity that both men share. Within this essay one should note how masculinity and identity fit together within the larger argument. Masculinity is part of the ideal male identity in these men's prior films. But, what is masculinity exactly?

As mentioned above, modern masculinity is composed partially by emotional empathy and caring for one's family. While the origins of masculinity are far-reaching past that of the 1980's hard-bodies, the 1980s version of masculinity is the origin of Van Damme's muscular identity, where masculinity would connote large displays of violence and exaggerated musculature. Keaton's masculinity in *Birdman* mirrors that of the transitioning masculinity of the 1990s. Whereas Keaton's *Batman* is a cold character who

often displays his exaggerated musculature and over-the-top physical abilities without any visible family to care for, his character Riggan Thomson in *Birdman* is finally able to make that transition from a previously brutal masculinity in *Batman* to one with a semblance of emotion in *Birdman*.

In Davies' article, "'I'm the Bad Guy?' *Falling Down* and White Masculinity in 1990s Hollywood", he focuses primarily on Joel Schumacher's controversial 1993 film *Falling Down*, starring Michael Douglas as a recently fired and disenfranchised man wandering the streets of Los Angeles who continuously becomes embroiled in brief violent interludes within the city which serves as a filmic comment on (then) pressing social, sexual, and racial issues within the United States. As Douglas' character's interacts with people of different races, classes, and disparate political viewpoints he begins to not only realize how other demographics are subjugated by society, but also his own realization at the film's climax that he is in fact the bad guy because of his militant response to his own perceived societal subjugation and inadequacies. This issue of marginalization within a family and societal context here and, more specifically, impotency and irrelevancy fit into the issue of marginalized masculinity previously discussed in this essay.

The message of this article relates to both *Birdman* and *JCVD* through the visual and verbal indicators of masculine marginalization in society. As discussed above, both fatherhood and family are two ideals indicative of the evolving and more empathetic masculine male. Both concepts are presented on screen for the viewer(s) via their visual

exposition through scenes depicting the protagonists either failing or trying to amend their family situations. In addition, these concepts are presented verbally for the viewer(s) through Van Damme's or Thomson's speeches either to the audience (in Van Damme's case) or directly to the character(s) in question (in the case of *Birdman*). Chapter 2 of this essay will cover in-depth the particular scenes in *Birdman* and *JCVD* which depict the verbal and visual indicators of these men's masculine identities. Although fatherhood and family are two characteristics paramount in the understanding of these males' masculinities, both concepts are just the tip of the iceberg when considering masculinity's role in these men's identities.  These and other characteristics of the masculine male that I described here and later in my essay all work in helping the audience identify the characteristics of the masculine male identity. Blakesley says in *Terministic Screens* "We expect, of course, that film will display rhetorical properties by virtue of its appeal to an audience using a recognizable symbol system," adding that "Some films make this process of appeal, of identification, the primary subject matter of the film narrative itself" (Blakesley, "Part Three" 211). *Birdman* and *JCVD* work through displaying these and other verbal and visual characteristics in order to influence how the audience feels about the subject matter. As Blakesley says, identification is sometimes the main issue being discussed in a narrative. In *Birdman* and *JCVD* we are provided two texts that focus mightily on character identification, from which issues of marginalization, relevancy, fatherhood, family, and the masculine identity in general are all visually and verbally displayed for the audience.

These men's masculine identities are more broadly composed of marginalization. And within that frame issues of power and impotency arise. While Davies' analysis focuses almost exclusively on 1993's *Falling Down*, the article's idea of marginalization does fair well when compared to both *Birdman* and *JCVD* and other films in which the male protagonist's position in society and the family is downgraded. The overall theme of *Falling Down* is very well highlighted in the film's climax where the "protagonist" has the realization that although he has done everything right according to society's standards, he has, in the end not succeeded. Worse, he has lost everything close to him, including his family. Through living by society's standards for the masculine male by holding a job that contributes to America's safety (helping to build missiles) the "protagonist" believed it entitled him to some measure of success and respect. Similarly, within the purview of *Birdman*'s and *JCVD*'s narratives we can see this idea of masculine entitlement by following set societal standards coming to fruition on-screen.

*Birdman* and *JCVD*, like *Falling Down*, work as narratives of men's unsuccessful attempts to reconcile former masculinities with new masculinities. However, the idea of marginalization in *Falling Down* is all the more problematic in that while the "protagonist's" notions of American male masculinity are shattered by his death at the end of the film, the masculine identity of the police officer who shot him (played by Robert Duvall) makes a transition from the empathetic masculine male similar to that mentioned by Jeffords, who ultimately transforms into a violent and misogynistic masculinity closer to that of the 1980s and earlier. What this all means is that while

marginalization is a key element of the masculine male identity in all three films, masculinity is also a dynamic and ultimately volatile characteristic portrayed in these films. The concept is not easily confined to just one tangible characteristic.

While it would be easy to characterize marginalization as inherently part of the masculine identity, it would be only partially true. Specifically, marginalization is not altogether inclusive within the action genre in this way. Social marginalization, to a certain degree, occurs in all films featuring the masculine male. The male star must fight against some form of marginalization in every film. Rambo was ostracized by a small town sheriff in *First Blood* (1982) which provided a cinematic lens highlighting some of America's detestation of returning Vietnam veterans. In the following three sequels, Rambo must fight back against not only his own marginalized masculinity, but those around him. On the other hand, Douglas' character in *Falling Down* (1993) is initially a man that is not marginalized by society, but is forced into that position through losing his job and realizing his newfound place in society, and his overcoming that marginalization inevitably leads to his own death. *Falling Down* is an example of a male's struggle against marginalization: the protagonist's identity and very way of life are endangered and he must therefore fight against such marginalization. In *Falling Down*, the protagonist's masculine identity requires he struggle against marginalization. The larger statement being made by this film is that the masculine male should fight back against those who threaten his identity. This marginalization is not inherent to his masculine character; it was developed through society and must be fought against.

The issue of marginalization is further complicated in *JCVD* and *Birdman*. I believe that with these two films marginalization is not only inherent to both protagonists' character/identity as they have begun to age, but is also something that the masculine male identity struggles against in these circumstances. More specifically, as Thomson and Van Damme have begun to age (in film), marginalization has become inherent to their characters. In both films, each man must labor against being relegated to a lower cinematic status. At this specific point in many aging actors' careers, age and the loss of relevancy are two factors that have regularly arisen in the action cinema. It is now part of the aging male's character – marginalization is part of the aging male's masculine identity. When Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Van Damme, and Keaton, among others, were younger and more muscular, their place in cinema was not questioned. Yet, as their relevancy has waned, marginalization has developed as a driving force in their current cinematic narratives.

In *Birdman* and *JCVD*, similar to *Falling Down*, marginalization is also something that both men seek to fight against. Thomson and Van Damme do not have to leave the cinematic stage quietly. Through *JCVD* and *Birdman*, we can observe both men's struggles against marginalization, while also discerning the ways in which marginalization has become a driving part of the aging male identity in their more contemporary narratives.

Marginalization works differently in all of these films and is not necessarily inherent to all masculine male character identities. With *JCVD* and *Birdman*, however,

marginalization works simultaneously, both as a segment of their cinematic masculine identities and also as something that the masculine male struggles against. The issue of marginalization also heavily draws on the ideas previously mentioned about identification. Whether marginalization is part of the masculine identity or is something that the masculine male must battle against is a topic that should be discussed for each separate film. But, the idea of struggling against marginalization remains at the heart of the masculine male identity. The masculine male may fail in the end, as evidenced by the demise of the "protagonist" in *Falling Down*, but the concept of the struggle against marginalization of any form is what the masculine male must attempt to overcome in order to consider living in society. This is how the audience is able to differentiate the masculine male identity from other identities and therefore identify it on-screen: the masculine male may not always be triumphant against societal restrictions (see *First Blood*), but strives to overcome his marginality regardless of his success. Audience identification lies in perceiving these characteristics through their verbal and visual display on-screen and discerning the context of their use.

This idea of marginalization is one that is also at the heart of Davies' argument. In his article, Davies' considers "…[*Falling Down*'s] employment of some elements of 'political correctness' and multiculturalism in order to formalize and to reinforce patriarchal gender and ethnic hierarchies" as the general theme of the film (146). Similarly, although Thomson's and Van Damme's careers in *Birdman* and *JCVD*, respectively, are in decline, both men on and off screen share a privileged place in

society. Both men, despite their marginalization from Hollywood or A-list society, still hold the status as famous celebrities in their homes. Van Damme is constantly recognized on the streets of Belgium in *JCVD* and Thomson is also stopped on the streets of New York by fans who remember his *Birdman* films, where both men pose for photographs with their cinematic admirers.

More to the point, however, this notion of masculine marginalization is not always one faulting the society the protagonist lives. Often the protagonist has not changed or evolved to meet society's new standards or ways of viewing masculinity. Davies notes one particularly significant example of the 1980's masculine male star at odds with his environment is George P. Cosmatos' *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. While all four Rambo films do concentrate on Rambo's struggles to live and work in environments and societies that are not socially accepting of his character, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* is the most blatant indictment of America's rebuking its Vietnam veterans and, by that same measure, Rambo's own existence as a combat veteran. Davies explains that the focus of this film is "…on a male protagonist at odds with his social environment" (146). The very nature of masculinity, that from the 1980s and 1990s seems to concern the protagonist's conflict with his social environment, whether it is with his superiors or the environment at large. Thomson and Van Damme may not be in violent conflict with their social environments in *JCVD* or *Birdman*, but both men are social outcasts who have extreme difficulty existing in social environments that have evolved far differently than them.

Part of the masculine identity of the 1980's masculine male was one composed of

relevancy and power. Through displays of exaggerated musculature and over-the-top violence, the masculine male was able to showcase his overt power and his relevancy to the film's narrative. The protagonists in *Birdman* and *JCVD*, like that of Douglas' character in *Falling Down* and Rambo in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, are rendered obsolete or irrelevant by their society. Their status as a superhero (in *Batman*), action star (with Van Damme in *JCVD*), protector of the United States (Douglas in *Falling Down*), and as the ultimate war machine (in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*) are reduced to irrelevancy in their respective narratives. In *Falling Down*, Douglas' character confesses in one scene that he is "obsolete", similar to that of Rambo referring to himself as "expendable" in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. As will be discussed further below in Chapter Two of this essay, one theme of *Birdman* is the irrelevancy of the main character, Riggan Thomson, who before attempting suicide at the end of the film utters "I don't exist" to the audience.

This idea of being unwanted produces a sort of emotional impotency in these characters. Their power has been stripped from them: Van Damme can no longer find steady work in a profession that used to prize his abilities, nor has that same fantastic physical ability that he was known for in the 1980s; Thomson faces a similar dilemma in having the utmost trouble producing a theater play that might help him become a star again; Douglas' character loses his job and cannot pull himself out of his devalued new position in life; and Rambo is essentially relegated to mercenary work by individuals who care nothing for him, but only for his abilities. These men are impotent: they no longer

have the same abilities that they had prior and cannot perform in a new evolved society. Although emotional evolution is part of the 1980s masculine male's transition from musculature to more human feelings, it may not always be enough. Sometimes society creates a new niche of masculine character identity that these men cannot and will not be able to fill.

While this marginalization is expressed verbally by these characters explaining society's undesirable views or attitudes towards them or their skills within the films' narratives, marginalization is also visually expressed. Another aspect of this idea of masculine marginalization in the cases of Thomson/Keaton in *Birdman* and Van Damme in *JCVD* is age. Both men are well into old age and show these signs of aging in their abilities and actual physical appearance. In *JCVD*, this is exhibited by Van Damme's inability to physically perform like he did in his twenties. Thomson/Keaton also refers to his aging body while criticizing himself in the mirror.

What this new form of marginalized masculinity entails is not only one of societal discrimination, but also one lacking power and leading to impotency. The masculine male may have evolved since the 1980s into a more emotional and caring father figure in many narratives, but his power is not as dynamic as his masculinity. The control of one's masculinity has now moved away from the masculine male himself and rests in part with society.

What this means is that while the masculine male of the 1980s and 1990s may have once had the utmost control over his image – through sustaining his own

musculature and star status in cinema – he now cannot control the aging of his body and the possible decline of his star image. The notion of identification mentioned previously by Blakesley and Burke note how one may determine or identify another's character or motivations through such visual indicators as the way they dress. While this mode of identification has not changed necessarily, the indicator(s) – the star's visual image – has changed considerably. What these films deal with is a sort of masculine identity crisis and a frustration with either an emotional or professional failure in life which colors how they view their own form of masculinity. So, the concept of identification has remained constant, while the visual characteristics of the masculine male have changed with their age.

## Remediation in the Realm of Visual Rhetoric

The rhetorical applications of intertextuality to visual rhetoric are expressed by Frank D'Angelo in "The Rhetoric of Intertextuality," where he discusses six differing forms of intertextuality – recycling, adaptation, simulation, pastiche, appropriation, and parody – and how each correlates with various mediums to provide elements of intertextuality (33). D'Angelo prefaces his article by establishing the context of his research noting multiple scholars, but contextualizes the concept of intertextuality within the work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva is noted among scholars studying intertextuality because she is believed to have first devised the term "intertextuality" and in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* she defines the term as 'the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another' (qtd. in D'Angelo 33). It's in Kristeva's "Word,

Dialogue, and Novel" that she elaborates on the term, saying that "…any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37). The scholarship that much of intertextual studies are founded relates to written, textual intertextuality. More specifically, the types of intertextuality studied by Julia Kristeva, while having been adapted to visual rhetorical studies by such scholars as James Porter and Frank D'Angelo, is inherently a word-based study of intertextuality.

This creates a problem of translation for visual rhetorical studies scholarship. How does the visual rhetorical scholar translate, rework, or adapt what is fundamentally a linguistically-based form of textual analysis to an examination of the visual image and verbalized dialogue in film?

D'Angelo's analysis of Linda Hutcheon's work *A Theory of Adaptation* hints at this idea of adaptation, where he notes various media's adaptions of famous books to the film medium (34). I will seek to clarify this idea of changing or reformulating an older medium into a newer one in this study. Because the established scholarship in this area of study has focused almost exclusively on textual studies of intertextuality, I will demonstrate how these studies of intertextuality, or the borrowing/using of another text, are applicable to other varied, but ultimately important texts. I must offer one important caveat here: remediation, at its core, refers to the reformulation of one medium into another different medium and does not explicitly refer to the reformulation of one medium into the same medium – albeit wholly revised. What I am examining in my study here is the remediation of intertextuality from one medium (originally the written text)

into another text (film, video games, etc.). However, the concept of remediation (reformulating another medium) does bear effect on the topic of genre. As discussed in the previous section, genres can and do borrow elements and refine or reformulate their characteristics for use in other differing genres. So, remediation, in this instance, consists not of a direct transplant of text between two different mediums, but instead denotes the reformulation of a previous genre's characteristics for use in a different genre. The mediums remain the same while the genres differ. Therefore, while I am not using Bolter and Grusin's term the exact way that they have defined it, I am, however, using the notion of remediation as the reformulating of ideas across genres, instead of mediums. And this is why the term warrants inclusion within my thesis. Remediation, in the most basic sense, refers to the carrying over and adaption of characteristics across mediums. However, my analysis charts the reformulation of identity through differing genres instead of mediums. Identity, in my thesis, is best characterized through the evolution of the visual and verbal displays on-screen between similar filmic mediums. The following discussion of remediation and its uses should highlight for the reader how integral the term is in considering the reformulating of identity across genres in film.

In Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* the authors explain this integral concept of remediation and how it has been reflected in numerous contemporary mediums, including digital art, digital photography, the internet, computer-based graphics, television, and also in film. Bolter and Grusin define this idea of remediation "…to mean the formal logic by which new media

refashion prior media forms" (273). This idea of reformulating an older form of media for use in a newer medium (from print book to book online, for example) is integral to appreciating what is discussed in this study.

While scholarship should attempt to trace the transition or remediation of all texts, this essay cannot cover all means of remediation. I believe that a focus on how text remediates identity from the written word to the screen is germane to this particular analysis because the study of intertextuality is primarily focused within the purview of literature. So, charting how intertextuality and identity are transferred from page to screen should yield the most tangible results of how identity is remediated through intertextual (visual and verbal) texts.

While Bolter and Grusin's study is limited in scope to the remediation of various visual media from before the millennium, the concept of remediation is one that is alternatively applicable to many intertextual texts. In other words, based on the definition provided above, where remediation reformulates previous forms of media, the notion that one type of text (visual media) has modified or transformed a previous form of media text is not unheard of. Bolter and Grusin relate about the varied nature of media that "No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces" (15). Here the idea of remediating texts and the remediation of the masculine male's identity coincide. Each one is inherently effected or reliant upon certain social factors that influence it.

Bolter and Grusin add "What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media" (15). Here visual film media and the traditional textual media analyzed by such previous scholars like Kristeva have something in common. One potential remediation is the visual medium of film that has sought to reformulate or indirectly remediate the former – written textual media like literature. This statement may appear to be too limited of a reformulation because the remediation between mediums contains multiple, varied relationships and is typically not as simple as directly translating one medium to the other. In other words, film does not/has not solely relied on the written text of literature in its remediation of features into the visual realm. Film is indebted to other mediums, as well. Film is composed of a combination of mediums, including music, photography, art, and many others. Hence, a direct 'pouring' of a medium's features into an unlike/different medium is quite rare.

Though the content of the intertextual word-based text that the aforementioned scholars have studied may not be easy to 'pour' directly into another text, more recent studies by James E. Porter and Frank D'Angelo have evaluated visual media texts through their visual relations to popular culture. For this study, though, what will be 'remediated' in this sense is the notion that the aging masculine male identity can be repurposed through the inclusion of verbal dialogue and the visual image on-screen via the actions of the narrator. More specifically, through the remediation of the narrator's identity from text to screen, and evidence of the visual and verbal characteristics of

intextuality a revised view of the masculine male identity can be composed. The former image of masculinity expressed by Van Damme and Keaton in the excessive cinema of the 1980s and the superhero cinema, respectively, is then repurposed for the audience as the stars are marginalized, which requires a necessitated revision of their former masculinities in their new films through intertextual self-comment.

This cinematic repurposing adapts the stars' former images to a new masculine cinema. This is a cinema filled not only with aging action stars of the 1980s and 1990s such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, Steven Seagal, and Sylvester Stallone, who have had to contend with a decrease in their physical abilities and available roles over the years, but also by the general aging male star not necessarily associated with any action franchise or not part of the physical excess of the 1980s and early 1990s, that still contends with his age and its limiting abilities in his roles. As has been discussed earlier in this paper by Davis and Jeffords, the masculine male has had to adapt or evolve his masculinity as times in cinema have changed, much of which has been spurred by social, racial, and political changes in society.

Although this essay seeks to acknowledge the necessity of remediation in the context of this study, it should be noted that the recognition of the difference(s) between the verbalized and visual text, and the written text is something that should recognized, but not accepted as a media hierarchy. Specifically, the focus of this study is to realize the differences between these mediums, not to confer preferences. While the new visual mediums may be comprised of technological characteristics that far surpass the capacities

of those of the more traditional mediums, the technological predecessors were the ones that enabled this technological progression in the first place.

Therefore, while film in particular is composed of the visualized image and verbalized text, the antecedent technology – traditionally-bound, written text conferred it these abilities. In order to concretely highlight how written texts have been remediated in the realm of new and/or visual media, Bolter and Grusin provide the example of electronic reference books that also afford insight into the degrees with which mediums can/are remediated by their successors. In particular, the authors cite Grolier's *Electronic Encyclopedia* and Microsoft's *Encarta*, which "seek to improve on printed encyclopedias by providing not only text and graphics, but also sound and video, and they feature electronic searching and linking capabilities" but nevertheless "because they are presenting discrete, alphabetized articles on technical subjects, they are still recognizably in the tradition of the printed encyclopedia…" (46). Therefore, while remediation indicates a reformulation of a prior medium, it does not necessarily demand complete faithfulness or what the authors term "fidelity" (46). The authors provide numerous examples of mediums that have remediated previous media, like the now dated book available on CD-ROM, which has not necessitated the deletion of that prior medium. Far from it. These new mediums can take or remediate the former mediums without completely eliminating the previous medium's technical footprint.

As Bolter and Grusin relate "…the new medium can remediate by trying to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are

minimized. The very act of remediation, however, ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways" (47). In this way the older medium, in this case, – the written text – is therefore remediated in a different way for film. Unlike comparisons of previous media like cinema and video games in Bolter and Grusin's book, which share very similar visual characteristics and narrative compositions, the film and written text are not necessarily remediated in such an easy or direct way. Whereas, in a video game the cinematic attributes are transferred to the main character as the 'director' and 'actor' in the (cinematic) game world, the reformulation of the written text into the visual media text of film is more complicated. The authorial attributes of the text – the written word – are therefore transferred to the cinema or on film as the visual image and the verbalized word controlled by the film's director and/or production company. In other words, where previous intertextual analysis inscribed intertextual purpose and properties solely to the written text, under the more recent work of James Porter and Frank D'Angelo, scholars have been able to devise intertextual meaning from visual media/visual text based not only adapting the scholarship of previous text-only intertextual scholars like Kristeva, but have also relied on the intertextual qualities of other visual medias for their comparative analysis. Through this remediation and the inclusion of previous (older) written texts, recent scholarship has been able to bridge the gap between mediums.

Bolter and Grusin offer the example of the film theater as a site of remediated

multiplicity. The authors mention, more specifically, that "Whenever we focus on one aspect of a medium (and its relationships of remediation with other media), we must remember to include its other aspects in our discourse," adding that when the viewer visits the theater their experience is not only limited to the actual film that he/she considers within the experience of going to the movies (Bolter and Grusin 67). They mention that during a visit to the film theater, one encounters not only the theater's screen, but also electronic games, film posters, additional types of screens, and other mediums in which these forms of media "…take part in the constitution of the medium of film as we understand it in the United States today" (67). In particular, the authors go on to relate that "We must be able to recognize the hybrid character of film without claiming that any one aspect is more important than the others" (67). This 'hybrid character' of film that is relevant in its remediation of the written word. Film not only builds on the written word, but also (attempts) to reformulate the message of the text into a newer media. Therefore, while the actors rely on the script to deliver their lines and therefore develop the film's narrative (verbally and visually through their actions), the new medium itself – film –works in this 'hybrid character' composed not only of the written word (the script), but also the spoken word and visual image of the actors on-screen.

Bolter and Grusin's study on remediation, while incorporating numerous encompassing discussions of the new millennium's then-burgeoning technological new media, is ultimately finite in its perceptions; the examination of remediation's role in numerous dated technological medias, however, is still relevant, at least conceptually, to

how current new media have remediated themselves from older technologies. Bolter and

Grusin's study, then works as a starting point or point of origin in understanding the

theory behind how the most important characteristics of older media are repurposed by

newer media. Bolter revisits the concept of remediation in his article "Remediation and

the Language of New Media" explaining that his goal was to "…encourage readers to

examine the complex intermedial relationships of digital media forms to such older forms

as film, television, radio and photography" (25).[2] In Bolter and Grusin's prior study they

compared an exclusive array of digital technologies including the ones mentioned above.

What may seem problematic here in my study is the direct remediation or reformulating

of an analog text (written text) into visual and verbal media (film).

Although Bolter and Grusin cite the adaption of the written text (the novel) to the

electronic realm with the inclusion of a book on CD-ROM, that translation of text to a

new medium was far more conventional than from adapting written text to the verbalized

text of the actors and visual image of the actors on-screen in cinema. Here that Bolter

relates a reconsideration of what he wrote with Grusin in *Remediation*, saying "we used a

shorthand when we claimed that one piece remediates another or even that one media

form (computer games) remediates another (narrative film).We [Bolter and Grusin] were

not trying to suggest that media are autonomous agents that act on each other or on other

2 See further discussions of the concept of remediation in Bolter's articles "Formal Analysis and Cultural
Critique in Digital Media Theory", "Remediation and the Desire for Immediacy" and "New Media and the
Permanent Crisis of Aura" by Bolter, Blair MacIntyre, Maribeth Gandy, and Petra Schweitzer. See also
Shaleph O'Neill's *Interactive Media: The Semiotics of Embodied Interaction* which draws on Bolter and
Grusin's previous work.

aspects of our mediated culture" (25-26).

This indirectness between comparing mediums that is most relevant to my study. Bolter continues:

> Remediation is a process that is realized in and through the creative practices of individual producers, designers, and artists. Sometimes this remediation is conscious and intended; sometimes individual designers may not acknowledge their dependence on earlier media even to themselves. But in all cases they are engaging in a dialogue with their audience, for it is the audience who will construct the meaning of the remediation. (Bolter 26)

The above quotation makes apparent the role that the human(s) play in the action of remediation. Remediation is therefore not as cut and dry as comparing like mediums with one another; taking the human element into account will yield more being realized in the process.

Thus, it is not necessarily the written text that the autonomous visual and verbal media (film) is remediating or even acting on, but the action or act of remediation itself. Specifically, through the idea of remediation as a process film might take from the written text.

As mentioned above, remediation is achieved "through the creative practices of individual producers, designers, and artists" (26) and through these individuals in the cinematic system, the act of remediation takes place. The work of David Blakesley is

relevant here, providing four classifications associated with film analysis (film ideology, film interpretation, film language, and film identification) in his study of visual rhetoric's role in film in "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*," where he pays special attention to the film *Vertigo* and audience identification, and from which the broad term 'film interpretation' seems the post pertinent to discuss here. More specifically, 'film interpretation' "…treats film as a rhetorical situation involving the director, the film, and the viewer in the total act of making meaning" (116). In the context of this paper, though, Blakesley's analysis seems applicable to the group process of remediation discussed above. Particularly, through the work of the directors, producers, screenwriters, actors, and others the act of the masculine male identity is realized and then ultimately remediated. The audience, too, plays a part in this process of meaning making, in that the audience – like the production team mentioned above – is also responsible for (re)-formulating the meaning(s) of the text.

In the case of *JCVD* and *Birdman*, the audience may already have an idea of how the stars' masculine identities are/were configured. Hence, by revising the masculine male's identity through exhibiting the intertextual visual image and verbal dialogue on the screen the audience is put in the position of a revised sense of meaning making. They are asked to re-understand the image of the star.

What is also important to our understanding here is what Bolter terms in his more recent study as "homage" and "rivalry." According to Bolter "A remediating form pays homage by borrowing representational practices of an older one. At the same time, the

newer form is trying to surpass the older one in some way, for the simple reason that it must justify its claim on our cultural attention" adding that "In order to constitute a new medium or a significant new form within an existing medium, designers must produce a significant change in representational practice with the tacit or explicit suggestion that this change offers an experience that is more compelling, more 'authentic', even more 'real'" (26). In order to justify its existence, film then must not only pay homage to its predecessor in some way, but must insure an experience that is essentially more 'authentic' or more 'real' for its audience. In this way film must borrow certain standards of representation from the written text. But, how does film borrow from a completely different medium?

As mentioned above, this act of remediation is itself a process, and in this way, film pays homage or is "borrowing representational practices" (26) from the antecedent medium indirectly: through the creation, revision, reading and enacting of a written script to be verbalized and displayed on the screen which is part of this process and is only one part of the system. As discussed above, through the lens of the designers, artists, and producers the medium is itself remediated. Remediation, therefore, is conducted on multifaceted levels then, according to Bolter. Instead of remediation being analyzed directly between two juxtaposed mediums like painting and photography and/or the more directly similar print book and book on CD-ROM discussed in Bolter and Grusin's book *Remediation*, remediation in the cinematic realm is more in line with Bolter's inclusion of the producer, artist, and/or designer.

**Rhetorical Analysis of the Image**

This concept of evaluating visual imagery is not a new one. While Bolter and Grusin's work is mainly delimited to the realm of new media studies, Sonja K. Foss in her article "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery" presents a rhetorical way of assessing visual images. Foss explains that "Rhetorical scholars are responding to changes in rhetorical practice by expanding the data they analyze to include visual symbols," adding that "…they [scholars] have used visual imagery as data for the application, illustration, and explication of various rhetorical constructs" (213). Although the focus of her article is on "…offer[ing] an alternative schema of evaluation to those developed in aesthetics," (214) it does illuminate for the reader the importance that visuals play in rhetorical analysis in general. In her article, Foss describes the many man-made artifacts that can/have been used for rhetorical analysis, including pieces of art, commemorative medals, public places, private spaces, and film (213).

Sonja K. Foss further elaborates on the importance and necessity of studying visual imagery in "Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a Transformation of Rhetorical Theory" where she describes how the study of visual imagery is becoming more pronounced, adding that one reason is the "…pervasiveness of the visual symbol and its impact on contemporary culture," explaining further that "Visual artifacts constitute a major part of the rhetorical environment, and to ignore them to focus only on verbal discourse means we understand only a miniscule portion of the symbols  that affect use daily" (303). Thus, both the verbal and visual play increasingly important roles

in the study of rhetoric and, by that measure, are but some of the characteristics featured on-screen that are worthy of study.

Before I provide an example of the visual imagery being discussed in the current realm of intertextuality (see James Porter below), one should understand what sets visual rhetoric apart from text-based discourse normally associated with rhetorical studies. In her article, Foss expresses that there are two meanings contained within the term 'visual rhetoric.' The first definition is fairly straightforward: "It is used to mean both a visual object or artifact and a perspective on the study of visual data. In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating," adding that "In the second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication" (304). The second definition lends itself more clearly to this current study because comprehending the ways in which the visual communicates its message is imperative to understanding its meaning. Through this communication visual rhetoric may reveal these processes of persuasion that the visual and verbal convey. The extent to which this concept plays a part in this study will be elaborated on in the final section of this essay.

In view of this paper, though, remediation has dual meanings/implications. Remediation is called on here to resituate the arguments being made by previous discourse-only scholarship to the realm of visual and verbalized media – film in this instance. On the other side, remediation is called on in this paper to shine light on the intertextual practices of the film industry as it relates to the resituating and modification

of the aging masculine male's persona. Remediation also describes how identity is

reformulated through the use of the literary device of the book narrator in a film adaption.

Remix, however, is more situated towards the reuse of existing materials and combining

them (via editing) to create a new meaning. While these two terms are somewhat similar

in nature, remix, in the context of this paper would entail a more disjointed way of

combining elements of a narrative and a more radical reshaping of a piece's original

meaning. Remediation here is tailored more towards the transfer of existing conceptual

elements across mediums, whether those mediums are literal like that between written

text and film, or those repurposing the masculine male's persona across his career.[3]

### Reading Intertextuality within More Current Visual Culture

In James E. Porter's article "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," that

he explains the concept of intertextuality by saying that "Not infrequently, and perhaps

ever and always, texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning,"

adding that "All texts are interdependent: We understand a text only insofar as we

understand its precursors" (34). Here that Porter expands on this basic definition of the

term by explaining its significance where "Examining texts 'intertextually' means

looking for 'traces,' the bits and pieces of Text which writers or speakers borrow and sew

---

3 Additionally, I find it important to identify a competing concept often associated with the notion of remediation and that is the term 'remix.' 'Remix' is an expression often associated with the work of Danielle DeVoss, and is clearly defined in an article co-authored by her, Phill Alexander, Karissa Chabot, Matt Cox, Barb Gerber, Staci Perryman-Clark, Julie Platt, Donnie Johnson Sackey, and Mary Wendt called "Teaching with Technology: Remediating the Teaching Philosophy Statement," where the authors discuss how teaching statements are remediated across numerous media. In the article, Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation* is called on for discussing media and the authors make clear the distinction between the two differing terms, explaining that "Remix is an act that calls upon composers to mash, mix, and merge separate pieces, often to create new meaning," whereas remediation "is an act that calls upon composers to reflect, resituate, and reshape a piece while moving it to another medium, and often to enhance or expand upon its existing meaning" (30-32).

together to create new discourse" (34). What Porter means here is that presumably all texts contain pieces of other texts within their own framework. Every text is a compilation or composition of other borrowed texts. In the context of this paper, it should be understood that film will be the sole text focused upon and, therefore, does borrow elements from previous other texts, sometimes filmic or literary, of which will be explained within the case studies.

In Porter's article he relates two types of intertextuality – presupposition and iterability – each of which is useful in clarifying what in the text that is being analyzed. The former "refers to assumptions a text makes about its referent, its reader, and its context – to portions of the text which are read, but which are not explicitly 'there' (35). While this first term seems to scratch the surface of intertextuality's use in cinematic texts, the latter term, however, is more specifically applicable to analyzing the visual and verbal text displayed on-screen; this second type suggests a "'repeatability' of certain textual fragments, to citation in its broadest sense to include not only explicit allusions, references, and quotations within a discourse, but also unannounced sources and influences, clichés, phrases in the air, and traditions" (35). This general idea of allusion(s) referenced by Porter – whether they be subtle or explicit –will be discussed in further detail in relation to Noël Carroll's work "The Future of Allusions: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)" and the role that intertextuality plays in the final section of this paper.

While many former scholars' studies of intertextuality seem primarily applicable

to literary analysis which is the typical medium that intertextuality is read, Porter provides two textual examples of intertextuality in his study (the *Declaration of Independence* and a *New York Times* article), and offers one televisual example (a Pepsi soda commercial). Porter reads the *Declaration of Independence* as an amalgamation of other's text, saying that "To produce his original draft of the Declaration, [Thomas] Jefferson seems to have borrowed, either consciously or unconsciously, from his culture's Text" (36). Porter describes how the Declaration was comprised of many 'borrowed' elements from numerous other sources of political discourse (36). Porter's example of an article about the Kent State massacre focuses on textual presupposition. It features this via the newspaper's message about those killed in the event, particularly through the article focusing on the deaths of two women (38). As Porter states, the inclusion of female casualties being singled out, "[f]rom one perspective…is a simple statement of fact; however it presupposes a certain attitude – that the event, horrible enough as it was, is more significant because two of the persons killed were women" (38). However, what are of note in Porter's mainly text-based study, though, are the cultural presuppositions necessary for the reader to comprehend the visual imagery of the televisual (visual) example of the Pepsi commercial.

Unlike the previous two texts, the intertextual elements in the television commercial require the viewer(s) to be familiar with various filmic and/or cultural images and concepts. Specifically, this more modern example of intertextuality begins with a boy and his dog near a vending machine where before long a spacecraft emerges and begins

sucking only the Pepsi cans out of the machine and then proceeds to take all of the soda

cans (37). The advertisement's message on-screen reads 'Pepsi. The Choice of a New

Generation' (37). As mentioned earlier, the concept of intertextuality necessitates the

inclusion or mention of multiple texts within another text. The reader must have a wide

variety of understanding here to fully grasp all the differing references included from

other texts. As the author mentions, the spaceship is similar to the one featured in

Spielberg's extraterrestrial film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the commercial

includes "several American clichés" like "desolate plains, the general store, the pop

machine, the country boy with a dog" (37). In order to fully grasp what is behind the

message of the commercial, all these external signifiers or components must be

interpreted in the commercial's context. All of these preceding references have been

included in a more contemporary commercial as components or signifiers of a larger

message about what one should drink – Pepsi – the drink combining facets of the old and

new. While intertextuality is certainly present in the written texts (the *Declaration*, Kent

State article, etc.), the concept is in no way limited to those types of texts. Intertextuality

is therefore not limited to the literal text (the written word alone), but can manifest itself

in/through visual images displayed on-screen for the viewer(s). Through the viewers'

cultural knowledge the full meaning or impact of the commercial's message can be felt in

this medium.[4]

    While it may not be difficult to now understand the similarities between mediums

---

4 For further reading on the concept of intertextuality, see Graham Allen's book *Intertextuality*.

and how they share certain characteristics that are ultimately remediated between one another (cinema, video games, etc.), one must realize that the mentioned case studies (*JCVD* and *Birdman*) all work to remediate or reformulate elements of these actor's prior careers in the masculine cinema in order to add intertextual commentary to the films' narratives that focus on personal relevance within cinema, which display these actors' identities on-screen for contemporary audiences. Although extensive knowledge of each actor's filmography and life off-screen may be beneficial to one's ability to connect the intertextual references made in each filmic text, such knowledge is by no means a necessity. Note that these films call on the most basic, limited knowledge of these stars' past careers.

Further, each of these films functions as what Bolter and Grusin term a 'hybrid character' (67) where what is being intertextually reformulated is not only limited to references within the films themselves, but also outside that medium (here read the off stage perception of the stars' persona being displayed on-screen). Within the purview of this essay, the intertextual elements within these films are inherently remediations: these actors' filmic careers are reformulated or thus adapted from 'prior media forms' including their past films and off-screen personas.

In the "Chapter 2: Case Studies," section of my essay, I will include two more recent examples of the aging male's masculinity being reformulated through verbal dialogue and the visual image, with Jean-Claude Van Damme in *JCVD* and Michael Keaton in *Birdman*. In my case study featuring *JCVD*, I will discuss two scenes that

visually and verbally highlight how the masculine identity is reformulated on-screen, including a scene with a visual display of his fading physical capacity and another scene that showcases how verbal language is used to deconstruct or revise his prior masculine male image. In my case study featuring *Birdman*, I will focus on one major scene in the film that highlights the verbal and visual qualities associated with Keaton's former image as Batman and how marginalization plays a part in the reformulation of his image. I will also discuss how remaining relevant is a major theme of both films, where within each film both actors seek relevancy by returning to the spotlight: Van Damme returning to Hollywood stardom instead of direct-to-video films and Keaton returning to stardom through an adapted stage play. Both men seek relevancy in these films because of their dire social situations. Both men are products of a social marginalization. The next section of this paper considers how these men's identities are remediated through their placement as their films' narrators.

## How Identity is Remediated through the Narrator

It should be clear from previous sections how remediation, as I explain it, works to translate components or elements of previous genres into newer genres. Part of the concept of remediation, according to Bolter and Grusin, entails taking parts of one medium and reproducing those parts in another medium in some other fashion.

While it may seem clear how certain elements of one genre may be reformulated from one genre to another, how then is identity remediated or reformulated? The use of the first-person narrator has been around a long time and precedes the narrator in the

cinema. However, cinema has re-appropriated this literary device in order to deliver a similar form of persuasion. One should understand, though, that attempting to remediate the first-person narration device directly from its literary roots to that of cinema is a more complex process than just exploiting the literary device in a newer medium. It is not within the purview of this study to discuss the multifaceted transformation of the first-person narration device between mediums. Nonetheless, the first-person narration device does yield a solid form of audience identification.

This idea of remediating identity begins in literature. In *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, and Authorship* we find multiple articles discussing film adaptions. Within that book, Celestino Deleyto's "Me, Me, Me: Film Narrators and the Crisis of Identity" focuses explicitly on how one medium (literature) remediates or reworks identity through the use of the narrator when adapting a book to screen. Specifically, Deleyto's work centers on the adaptation of two popular British novels – *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *High Fidelity* – and their film adaptions.

The common element connecting these adaptations is that these adapted films continue the books' use of the narrator. Deleyto explains "…the presence of narrators has become a regular feature in films and one with which spectators are increasingly familiar," adding that "…there can be little doubt that these narrators generally bring films closer to novelistic narratives and, moreover…they have constituted, since the 1940s, a common strategy to 'translate' literary texts into film, immediately having become a shorthand way for films to underline their 'literariness', to ostensibly present

themselves as literary adaptations" (244). Deleyto explains further the connection between mediums: "Some film theorists and critics use the term 'film narrator' as a synonym of the camera, which, like the novelistic narrator, 'tells the story'…or as an abstract entity which is in control of all the narrating activities of the film" (qtd. in Deleyto 245). Unlike the static words on a page, the filmic narrator has the option of presenting his/her commentary verbally. The filmic narrator can, like the literary narrator, explain the thoughts, actions, and other characteristics of the narrative and its supporting characters. Unlike the literary narrator, the filmic narrator is not constrained by the words on the page. Deleyto notes that literature and film differ in that films don't tell, but show (245). Yet, in *Birdman* and *JCVD* both films not only show us their narratives, but also present detailed commentary from their lead actors telling us how to consider their masculine identities.

This continued use of the narrator in film is part of this identity remediation. Both *JCVD* and *Birdman* continue this tradition with both leading men as the narrators in each of their films. Both men explain their actions or motives through constant narration in *Birdman* or through commentary via direct address in *JCVD*. And through this direct address of the narrator, the audience is influenced or persuaded to think a certain way about the leading actor. Unlike the more indirect manner in which the narrative is explained with the absence of the narrator, the use of the first-person narrator allows both the actor(s) to directly access their audience. Van Damme is able to tell the audience how exactly his masculine identity should be understood and Thomson can communicate his

feelings of constant inadequacy.

Through this direct address the audience is not only persuaded to think a certain way about the protagonists' masculine identity, but are able to identify the masculine character of the protagonist via their verbal explanations and visual action on-screen. As Burke mentioned regarding identification through labels, 'Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another' (qtd. in Blakesley "Introduction" 2). These protagonists' downgraded versions of themselves are displayed through the first-person narrator device and this device has contributed to the audience not only being persuaded to think a certain way about these men, but through this narrative ability to persuade, the audience can now identify the characteristics of the marginalized masculine male identity on-screen. By being able to see the protagonists verbally expressing themselves and their subsequent visual actions, the audience can identify their masculine identity. Van Damme and Thomson are allowed a direct line to persuading the audience of their intertextual commentary through a device that not only supplements their visual displays, but allows their verbal commentary to be all the more direct and present their opinions about their own masculine identities.

CHAPTER III


CASE STUDIES: *JCVD* (2008) AND *BIRDMAN* (2014)


The cinema of the 1980s and early 1990s represented a kind of bodily excess: men's muscular features were routinely showcased by the display of their exterior muscular characteristics. In addition, the cinema of excess from the 1980s is typically associated with the exhibition of extreme musculature and tremendous displays of action.

Tasker describes the action hero in *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* as:

> Within the action cinema the figure of the star as hero, larger than life in his physical abilities and pin-up good looks, operates as a key aspect of the more general visual excess that this particular form of Hollywood production offers to its audience. Along with the visual pyrotechnics, the military array of weaponry and hardware, the arch-villains and the staggering obstacles the hero must overcome…is the body of the star as hero, characteristically functioning as spectacle. Indeed it is this explosive and excessive cinematic context that provides a setting for, even *allows*, the display of the white male body. (75-76)

However, Tasker provides a more specific description of the 1980s masculine cinema that heavily applies to Van Damme's image as the masculine hero. Tasker notes "In contrast to the images of anarchic violence that have critically accompanied muscular movies, it is, in fact, the values of self-control rather than chaos, and the practices of training and discipline which are extolled as central terms in the definition of bodybuilding and in the image of the muscleman hero of 1980s cinema" ("Spectacular Bodies" 9). These descriptions of the restrained and well-trained muscleman fittingly apply to Van Damme's earlier filmography that was predicated on the fighting competition film. Particularly, with his early films like *Bloodsport* and *Kickboxer*, Van Damme's image was that of the ultimate fighter, perfectly trained, but uninterested in utilizing his physical abilities until absolutely necessary. Van Damme's self-control as the ultimate fighter/killing machine set him apart in that genre.

This issue has once again become relevant with the inevitable aging of the 1980's most famous stars of the action cinema: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Van Damme's film career has focused on the action genre, drawing on the star's early physical performance in the film that made him an international martial arts action star – *Bloodsport* (1988). What this film showcased was Van Damme's highly-developed muscular exterior and uncanny flexibility. The unavoidable aging of these mentioned action stars presents some potential difficulties in the analysis of their now aging masculine features and the role they play in current action or other genres of cinema. These once prominent action stars were, at their prime, most associated with the personification of overt masculinity.

Similarly, with the adaptation of the comic book and the comic book hero to the screen through the big budget send-up of Bob Kane's titular character *Batman*, Michael Keaton starred as the popular character in Tim Burton's 1989 film of the same name and its 1992 sequel. Similar to Van Damme's career of exploiting his physical prowess on-screen for the audience, Keaton's portrayal of Batman functioned in a comparable manner. However, Keaton's display of physicality was done in a vicarious capacity – via the wearing of Batman's muscular rubber suit that supplemented Keaton's own less physically muscular exterior. Keaton, unlike Van Damme was not a part of the action cinema of the 1980s that primarily focused on physical excess and musculature. Keaton's work in the Batman franchise elevated his status in the action/adventure cinema.

Keaton, however, is significant to the conversation here because he too has undergone a similar diminishment in physical capacity (appearance) and career relevance. Like Van Damme, Keaton's Riggan Thomson has undergone social marginalization in *Birdman*.

Although Keaton has worked steadily over the years in Hollywood producing some major hits (unlike Van Damme on both fronts), Keaton's persona, like that of Van Damme's, has been part of an intertextual cinema that has commented on his (here less dramatic) career diminishment, by integrating certain major elements from his prior career into the film's narrative. Both Keaton's *Birdman* and Van Damme's *JCVD* thus work not only as intertextual indicators of each actor's own life in Hollywood, but also serve as regenerative vehicles for the actors to promote their new, aged image for the audience.

Each film not only works intertextually as a real life promotional vehicle for each aging actor, but each film's narrative deals with that exact issue – an actor trying to revive his relevance in the cinematic world. Each film stresses the actors' fight for cinematic relevance in a society that has very little room for the aging comic book hero and/or the irrelevant aging, action star.

The differences between both stars should be obvious to most audiences. Van Damme was part of the cinema of excess in the 1980s and early 1990s, while Keaton only briefly was part of the action-adventure genre from 1989-92 with the *Batman* films. Thus, one should differentiate between each actor's importance/relevance in this essay. The common thread to consider here is that while both actors come from completely different cinematic genres/backgrounds, both of their marginalized identities are expressed on-screen through verbal indictors (dialogue) and visual images (what is on-screen). So, while their backgrounds may differ considerably, the exhibition of their identities and subsequent on-screen goals are vastly similar – to reacquire career relevance after being marginalized.

In the following case studies I hope to illuminate two particular conceptual frames shared within the purview of each of the two mentioned films' specific scenes: the outward (off-screen) persona or perception of the actor and the inward (on-screen) persona of the actor presented on-screen for the viewer. This analysis will be conducted by examining the intertextual elements of each film, including the visual display of the actor on-screen and the dialogue expressed by him during the film. Ideally, this evaluation of both image (visual) and text (dialogue) will not only shine light on how aging masculinity and cinematic relevance are displayed on-screen by two actors, but

may better illustrate the power of combining an analysis of the visual and verbal intertext within the realm of visual rhetorical media.

I will briefly be analyzing certain scenes from each actor's more recent films (*JCVD* and *Birdman*) that highlight the role that intertextuality plays in the process of aging masculinity being portrayed on-screen. I will analyze two scenes from Van Damme's *JCVD* titled "Chapter Nine: Something Like That" and "Chapter Eleven: It Wasn't Me" from the DVD chapter menu and here I term 'the monologue' and 'the kick', respectively (*JCVD*). 'The monologue' is a scene near the end of the film where Van Damme is the only character actually seated in the post office, where he is sitting around a group of scared hostages. In this scene, Van Damme's chair is raised (via an off-screen mechanical lift) above the actual set of the film, allowing the viewer(s) to see where the film set ends and the sound stage begins. In this exposed area of the set Van Damme delivers a lengthy confession directly to the camera, referencing his past martial arts triumphs (i.e. his fame that began because of his role in *Bloodsport*) and personal failures (i.e. drugs and divorce, etc.) within the narrative of the film. This scene not only acts as a dramatic confession within the film's own narrative, but more importantly, as a real life confession to his audience about his troubles.

'The kick' features Van Damme demonstrating his martial arts abilities at the climax of the post office hostage siege. In this scene, Van Damme is taken outside of the post office by the last robber as his hostage and is surrounded by the media, police, and the public. In the first part of this scene Van Damme executes one of his signature roundhouse kicks to the robber's head which causes the crowd to shout in adoration. Unlike a remix, which would re-shape the scene via its existing parts, the scene is

literally stopped after this kick and rewound to right before Van Damme executed the

kick in the prior part, and where this time Van Damme delivers a small, unspectacular

elbow strike to the robber's stomach. While this scene began as an intertextual exhibition

or showcase of one of Van Damme's most famous kicks, which is often used to save the

day in many of his action film's narratives, it ends as a real life revision of Van Damme's

now reduced physical prowess.

Lastly, I will analyze one scene from *Birdman* that works intertextually to

comment on both the outward (off-screen) persona and the inward (on-screen) persona of

Michael Keaton presented on-screen for the viewer. The scene I will analyze (untitled

Scene Twenty-Three from the DVD chapter menu) is the one where Keaton (here

portraying Riggan Thomson) begins to visualize the comic book hero he had previously

played earlier in his career, Birdman, walking directly behind him and talking over his

shoulder, and from which this alter ego delivers a brief monologue detailing the power

and popularity behind his former portrayal of the popular character and also comments on

his off-stage career failures (*Birdman*). All of this occurs as Thomson (Keaton) begins to

observe numerous special effects (explosions, violence, etc.) occurring around him and

subsequently begins to hover above the crowd of onlookers (audience) below him. This

scene holds numerous intertextual elements within its brief narrative, here mainly

existing as a scene that exhibits Keaton's/Thomson's will to be relevant again after being

marginalized in a career where he used to be popular.

### Case Study #1: Jean-Claude Van Damme in JCVD (2008)

This section of the paper will highlight how Jean-Claude Van Damme has

fragmented the early 1980s masculine male embodiment of identity through his work in

2008's *JCVD*, which is a visual showcase of the star's verbal and visual (physical) rhetorical exploits that are revisionist, notably self-satirical, and ultimately intertextual rhetorical responses to the once popularized masculine male identity so prominent in Van Damme's early action career.

This will require a reconstituting of how the visual image and verbalized text act as a structured argument in the film. While Van Damme's image may not constitute the same political messages reminiscent of Stallone's *Rambo* series, Van Damme's aging masculine image seems to be a part of the message of many now aging action stars from that genre like Schwarzenegger, Willis, and Stallone: his body seeks relevance or cinematic recognition through his acknowledgment of aging in contemporary culture. Relevance appears to be a common theme in many of the 1980s and 1990s action-adventure stars' more recent films. Both Schwarzenegger and Stallone have attempted to re-invigorate their fading careers with some successes and some box-office bombs, including Schwarzenegger's *The Last Stand* (2013), *Sabotage* (2014) or Stallone's *Bullet to the Head* (2012), after having been marginalized or considered irrelevant by modern action cinema.

However, within the narratives of the case studies, Van Damme seeks relevance in *JCVD* through his continued pursuit to break back into Hollywood productions, while Keaton seeks a more localized relevance in *Birdman* – that of being accepted as a successful stage actor. I will use the term "relevance" here to signify these stars' continued journeys to cinematic significance or continued fame after being disregarded by major Hollywood cinema and society, in general. In other words, "relevance" will be

used in both case studies to suggest the stars' continued quest for self-importance in film after being marginalized by their surroundings.

## Evolving to Vulnerable and Intertextual Masculinity

While all of these characteristics of the masculine male identity in the mid-1980s and early 1990s were temporarily beneficial to the upward movement of Van Damme's acting career during that time period, his natural transition or segue into older age presents a fascinating rhetorical hurdle in the analysis of the aging action star of a bygone era – especially so in a genre that tends to value the physical abilities of its younger stars. Unlike the previously mentioned action stars, Van Damme's reliance on his body in his action roles has remained static. This brings up a few questions. Even with a certain "preoccupation" with physical perfection, the action star's physical image and/or abilities will inevitably begin to decrease over time. How does the aging star compensate for this inevitable reduction in career capabilities?

According to Tasker, as the action star ages he creates a new "niche" for himself (*Spectacular Bodies* 75). Whether he is before the camera or behind it, the aging action star is readily compelled to redefine himself in the cinema. Tasker notes several actors-turned directors, like Clint Eastwood and Sylvester Stallone; each of these men have redefined their images via taking on other responsibilities within their chosen vocations as they have aged over the years (*Spectacular Bodies* 75). Similarly, while actors of all genres, not just action stars, must find their own "niche" for themselves, the action star is typically the one who must make the biggest leap – from that of involving himself in the actual physical action of the film, into taking a more submissive role behind the camera that doesn't show off his muscles.

What is most pertinent in Philippa Gates' "Acting His Age? The Resurrection of the 80s Action Heroes and their Aging Stars" is the move between genres that the aging action stars take as their age begins to become more apparent in their screen persona. Gates provides examples of the "comedic" roles that major action stars have transitioned to as they have begun to age, including Arnold Schwarzenegger (then age 45) in *The Last Action Hero* (1993) (276-77). What is most notable about this star's transition into the comedic genre is the type of comedy that is prevalent in these types of comedic films: self-satire. Most notably, *The Last Action Hero* (1993) is a self-knowing/blatant satire of the action genre, which finds its protagonist (Schwarzenegger) making the literal transition from screen to real life and facing the harsh realities of being unable to sustain the masculine male façade in the real, outside world.

More to the point, Gates focuses on the aging of one of Hollywood's most prominent actors – Clint Eastwood – while explaining how Eastwood was able to counter the critics of the 1980's masculinity where "By showcasing an aging and failing body, Eastwood was able to temper his hard-bodied past with a new vulnerability – a physical vulnerability that suggested an emotional one" (277). This is similar to Davies' and Jeffords' analysis of the transitioning and emotion masculine hero of the 1990s. The common theme here is this self-acknowledgement of the aging process and in Eastwood's example "…by embracing it" (Gates 278). In keeping with Gates' research, many of the famous 1980s action cinema stars have countered the 1980s image of extreme masculinity by creating a certain vulnerability in their titular characters (278).

This is how the actors are able to remain up to date with the progressing interpretations of masculinity in the action cinema (Gates 278). Keaton's masculinity,

specifically, isn't entirely comparable to Van Damme's here because his own career was not predicated in the action genre, but instead in the comedic genre. However, Keaton's performance in *Birdman* is very much in line with this later form of masculinity mentioned by Gates, where the film frequently makes note of his age and Keaton himself routinely alludes to his age during the film by focusing on his wrinkles and aging body. The entire film, though, is predicated on a certain type of vulnerability – instead of Thomson (Keaton) trying to adhere to his former masculine persona of the superhero Birdman, his new goal is to present himself on stage as a Broadway star. It's through his dramatic presentation of himself on the theater stage as a vulnerable human being that Keaton is simultaneously acknowledging his character's aging image and also his own. This is how Keaton, like Van Damme, carves out a particular vulnerability for himself on-screen/on-stage.

On the other hand, while Van Damme established himself as one of the major action stars of the late 1980s and early 1990s, his more recent film career, with films such as *In Hell* (2003) and *JCVD* (2008) have required a different form of acting or a different form of character from him – one less reliant on his kicking abilities and more dependent on his ability to show his vulnerabilities or human weaknesses on-screen for the audience like those highlighted by Davies and Jeffords. Notwithstanding, while Van Damme's return to the action cinema with a small role as the villain in *The Expendables 2* (2012) was more in line with his action resumé from the 1990s, it was the late film critic Roger Ebert who labelled his standout film role in *JCVD* (2008) as "surprisingly transgressive" which "trashes his career, his personal life, his martial arts skills, his financial stability and his image," adding that "This movie almost endearingly savages him" (JCVD Movie

75

Review & Film Summary (2008)). The common theme between *Birdman* and *JCVD* is that both films showcase their actor's vulnerabilities by blatantly deconstructing the image of the masculine male. Here it criticizes Van Damme's image as an action star of infinite physical ability and Keaton as a former blockbuster superhero. These men are susceptible not only to physical harm and/or societal judgement because their careers are at a point where they must rely on their emotions and become vulnerable in order to survive in today's different masculine world.

What is of importance for this essay, is the referencing again in Ellexis Boyle and Sean Brayton's "Ageing Masculinities and "Muscle Work" in Hollywood Action Film: An Analysis of *The Expendables*" of Tasker's study in the visual cinematic masculinity of action-adventure films, here explaining that intertextuality "…has become a feature of the new Hollywood action adventure films. This is largely due to the development of film stars into celebrities, fully intertextual personalities whose meanings are made up of multiple images of their fictional and 'real' selves across a range of media texts and industries" (477). This is exactly what *The Last Action Hero* (1993) accomplishes in Gates' study – it relies on the off-screen and on-screen personalities of its lead, Schwarzenegger, as material satirizing his own action-oriented career. In that film, Schwarzenegger plays for laughs the masculine identity created in the 1980s of physical and action-oriented excess by not only acknowledging that identity within the confines of the filmic narrative, but by also commenting on it for the film's male audience, Danny Madigan, a boy who grew up expecting those clichéd concepts figured within the masculine narratives of the Jack Slater (Schwarzenegger) cinema action franchise.

However, in *JCVD* (2008) and *Birdman* (2014), I argue that Van Damme and

Keaton are indeed playing themselves, through the veneer of fictionalized versions of

themselves, which act as vicarious bodies for the actors to present their newer

masculinity – a masculinity of emotional transition and vulnerability of the aging action

star that fears irrelevance. Notice that with Gates' analysis of the aging action hero, she

concerns her study with the aging action hero who is part of a franchise: Harrison Ford in

the *Indiana Jones* series, Sylvester Stallone in the *Rambo* series, and Bruce Willis in the

*Die Hard* films. This vulnerability was conveyed through the later installments of these

action stars' films. This is how I believe the aging stars' masculine identity is displayed

on-screen: as intertextual self-reference. In other words, through these and other actors'

continued starring roles a pattern develops both inside/outside the films' narratives. The

audience begins to have certain expectations of a star based on the routine nature of his

past films. Notice that with the most recent installments of the *Die Hard* and *Indiana*

*Jones* series mentioned above, age has become a front and center piece in the films'

narratives, where the protagonist routinely verbally comments about his aging abilities or

lack thereof.

**JCVD (2008): Monologue and Climax as Visual Rhetorical Revision**

As a later film in the increasing filmography of Van Damme, *JCVD* (2008) is a

visually rhetorical argument that relies on the viewer's prior interpretation of Van

Damme's masculine male image – Van Damme is literally a body associated with

visual/muscular male identity – and seeks to diminish it. As previously discussed, Van

Damme's extreme physical abilities both associated with martial arts and the action

cinema most embodied the theme of his works. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger relates

the impact of publicity and analyzes popular images in advertising. His work is relevant

for comparison to Van Damme here because Van Damme's career was/is relegated to

him being an image of publicity for the action genre, having sold his image by appearing

on the covers of numerous magazines and film posters promoting his films throughout

the years. What is most significant here is Berger's explanation of visual presences

associated with the male image:

> A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he
>
> embodies. If the promise is large and credible his presence is striking. If it
>
> is small or incredible, he is found to have little presence. The promised
>
> power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual –
>
> but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests
>
> what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be
>
> fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable of what he is not.
>
> But the pretence is always towards a power which he exercises on others.
>
> (45-46)

This in accordance with Tasker's research exhibits the masculine identity of Van

Damme. Van Damme's "presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he

embodies"; his entire career was built around the potentially "fabricated" physically

exhibited pretense that he is emblematic of the masculine male of the 1980s: exorbitantly

strong with the physical abilities and muscular attributes that render him invulnerable on-

screen (Berger 45-46). These characteristics are part of what Berger describes as his (the

male's) presence. In nearly all of Van Damme's films in the late 1980s and early 1990s,

his presence as the hero was at the forefront of those films. With his large, well-defined

muscles, Van Damme was presented as the hero that was larger than the ordinary human being, easily able to subdue his enemies and exercise his power on them with abilities of a promised power that was primarily physical. In any number of his former films, Van Damme was able to overpower his enemies through the use of his tremendous martial art skills and an ability to dispatch numerous others with almost unbelievable skill with a firearm.

However, as Van Damme has aged, noted most clearly with his relegation to direct-to-video film, he has lost some of that striking physical presence. Many of his later direct-to-video films like *Replicant* (2001), *Wake of Death* (2004), *The Hard Corps* (2006), *Second in Command* (2006), *Until Death* (2007), and *The Shepherd: Border Patrol* (2008), while not completely diminishing his physical fighting abilities or presence with some limited fight scenes included in each film, nonetheless presented them in a diminished, secondary capacity. Van Damme's kicking and fighting abilities where then presented as secondary to his marksmanship abilities in films that increasingly strayed away from showcasing his former physical abilities by only showing him complete just a handful of martial arts feats.  As Van Damme has aged, the emphasis in his later films has been less on how high or with what frequency he can kick and more so with showcasing his skills in dispatching enemies with a firearm instead.

What this intertextuality in more recent Hollywood films requires for its aging stars is vulnerability and these characteristics appear to conflict with the "presences" and "promised power" of the former action star. Before we progress, carefully note that Berger is not talking here about the male action star, but instead about the male in general. Therefore, how does one reconcile Berger's definition of the male in general

79

with that of the male action star? Within the context of the male action star, Berger's

general definition of man is most relevant. Here the male's presence is not something

available in real life, but on the film screen at home or in the theater. Therefore, with a

change of venues, his presence is something that is augmented not only by the film

screen, but the physical excess placed upon it. This is what the male action star sells – his

(excessive) physical presence for the audience. Yet, when the action star loses this

presence, his ability to sell his image is adversely affected. Further, in Berger's *Ways of

Seeing*, he addresses the focus and audience of publicity images adding "We are now so

accustomed to being addressed by these images that we scarcely notice their total

impact," adding how these images pass us where "We are static; they are dynamic – until

the newspaper is thrown away, the television programme continues or the poster is posted

over" (130). Here Van Damme's image as masculine male is not static; we may not

notice it when he lets his guard down on film (or in more recent films) because we are

conditioned to see him as the epitome of the 1980's action star.

Van Damme's performance in *JCVD* (a film named from the initials of his stage

name) seeks to revise this masculine image. The film *JCVD* (2008) presents the star in a

favorable light in his country where all of the people in Belgium (his native land) still

know his name and want their pictures taken with him in the movie. This nostalgic

publicity calls on what made Van Damme famous in the first place: his former physical

abilities and little else. Yet, Berger does say that "[Publicity] has to sell the past to the

future. It cannot itself supply the standards of its own claims. And so all its references to

quality are bound to be retrospective and traditional. It would lack both confidence and

credibility if it used a strictly contemporary language" (139). What is at stake here is a

focus on former publicity. Van Damme must sell his past (and aging) image to future audiences for him to survive in contemporary cinema, which may not work.

In *JCVD*, Van Damme continuously loses parts in low-budget films, most notably losing a part in a B-level picture to his rival Steven Seagal. Van Damme's former image, while still present with him, has not provided him the ability to succeed in film. In real life and in this film, his career has almost entirely been relegated to direct-to-video release films. This loss of image is witnessed in a similar fashion in *Birdman* where the real life actor Michael Keaton must bank on the public's ability to understand the intertextuality associated with him playing a down and out actor who used to play a famous comic book superhero – Birdman (read Batman) – and that public's ability to see the connections between the actual film's narrative and his real life/professional struggles. Nevertheless, Van Damme's masculine public image is something that is focused on in *JCVD* (2008) intertextually and in the traditional sense: individual fans featured in the film focus on Van Damme's past martial arts feats in his older martial arts films by wanting photographs with him, getting his autograph, and/or seeing a demonstration of his kicking abilities, and this is how his masculinity is understood – as the popularized male masculinity of the 1980s. His physical presence is what is called upon, even at an older age. This type of public acknowledgment or nostalgia for a previous image of the star is similarly seen in *Birdman*, where Thomson (Keaton) is constantly interrogated about his former image (as Birdman) and asked for photographs from aging/older fans. The actual (or imagined) image of Birdman appears next to the real life image of Thomson (Keaton) in the film and serves, literally, as a character trying to sell and simultaneously satire the 'old' masculine image of Thomson's/Keaton's comic

81

book character to the audience. While both films act as revisions of previous

masculinities by the inclusion of the actors' issues (personal and professional) in real life,

both still nonetheless provide images of the old masculinities associated with their lead

characters.

## The Monologue: Outward/Off-Screen Persona

Specifically, I will focus my analysis on two particularly telling scenes in *JCVD*

(2008): the first scene ('the monologue') features Van Damme presenting an emotional

monologue directly to his audience; he knowingly breaks the fourth wall separating the

audience from himself to present an action star shaped by the 1980s masculine male

identity exhibiting a completely vulnerable character. The second scene ('the kick')

features Van Damme being led out of the post office by his captor and, from which, Van

Damme displays his famous roundhouse kick. However, what is most noteworthy about

this scene is the subsequent revision of the scene that occurs just after his kick and the

crowd's applause, and which displays the vulnerable or real character behind Van

Damme's muscular facade.

What these two scenes have in common as visual rhetorical arguments is that

these scenes present an intertextual discussion of Van Damme's off-screen and on-screen

personas. While Van Damme's monologue in this film predominantly focuses on his

verbalized confession to the audience, it nonetheless serves to revise his visual identity as

a masculine male character in the action cinema through his deliberately vulnerable

demeanor throughout the scene: Van Damme appeals to the audiences' emotions through

committing to displaying his own 'real life' emotions on-screen. During the scene he is

candid with the audience, staring directly into the camera and openly addressing the

audience and their perceptions of him as a film star. I argue that the verbal and visual both act as one argument in the scene. In this scene, Van Damme draws on his own life as narrative intertext to influence his audience, not on the physically-designated characterization of the masculine male that Tasker has previously described. Here Van Damme's appeal to the audience is much like the argument made in J. Anthony Blair's chapter on visual rhetoric "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" where Blair describes the evocative ways that visual arguments are presented for the audience to process. Lastly, and most importantly, in this scene Van Damme draws on the public's prior knowledge of his life and his own public persona, and addresses these issues directly with the audience and/or his fans.

More specifically, Blair provides a discussion of the benefits of visual arguments over verbal ones, stating that "Visual images can thus be used to convey a narrative in a short time" which is not nearly as applicable to Van Damme's supposed kicking ability shown in the second scene, but is much more germane to Van Damme's brief monologue, a short scene where Van Damme's exhibition of flowing tears and a trembling voice while simultaneously delivering his argument verbally, presents the audience with an explicit, flesh and blood representation of Van Damme as a vulnerable human being, in opposition to or reconsideration of his prior masculine cinematic character ("Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" 51). This weakness demonstrated on-screen corresponds to Blair's second point in his argument which pertains to the "…realism that the visual conveys," (51) where although the audience knows that *JCVD* (2008) is a film – a semi-fictionalized satire of Van Damme at that – it nonetheless presents Van Damme in the middle of a post office robbery where Van Damme is not playing one of his famous on-

screen characters with their indestructible male identities/muscular facades, but instead he portrays himself as vulnerable to emotional distress and physical violence. The monologue begins with Van Damme sitting in a room with the other hostages. Yet, he is the only one sitting in the chair, while the rest of the hostages are literally sitting below him; he is still positioned as the main form of spectacle in the sense that his personal importance is elevated above the other hostages (his audience) because he is sitting at the highest point in the room above the sitting audience. His chair is raised above what appears to be a film set made to represent the post office within the film's narrative.

As this occurs, the camera remains directly in front of Van Damme, positioning him in a tableau composition where all the viewers can see is his face and the tops of his shoulders. Nothing that could render visually his masculinity or muscularity is apparent on-screen. Van Damme begins, while still raised in the air, "This movie is for me. There we are, you and me. Why did you do that? Or why did I do that? You made my dream come true. I asked for it. I promised you something in return and I haven't delivered yet. You win [points to audience], I lose [pointing to himself]. Unless... the path you've set for me is full of hurdles where the answer comes before the question…" adding to this pathos of his life and career, "…So... America, poverty, stealing to eat... stalking producers, actors, 'movie stars', going to clubs hoping to see a star, with my pictures, karate magazines. It's all I had. I didn't speak English. But I did 20 years of karate. 'Cause before I wasn't like that [points to flexed bicep]" ("JCVD (2008) Quotes."). Van Damme is likely channeling his pain and speech towards asking a question of a higher power and progresses to directly acknowledging the audiences' presence in the success of his career by looking at them. Here Van Damme also is confessing about not having 'delivered yet.'

This seems to be a reference to his failed career and his inability to deliver his success or promise thereof to the audience. This seems to follow Berger's discussion of the male's presence, where Van Damme's presence is lessened here because his lack of power or inability to keep his promise to the audience in this situation.

As the scene progresses, it takes effect much the same way that Blair explains "To be effective, the visual properties of a visual argument must resonate with the audience on the occasion and in the circumstances. The visual symbolism must register immediately, whether consciously or not" (*Rhetoric* 52); this appeal to the audiences' pathos resonates with the circumstances of the scene itself: Van Damme is being held hostage and is unable to defend himself or the other hostages in the way that his on-screen personality is known. His open appeal to the audience with tears streaming down his face that show his aging wrinkles, presents the star in a new realistic and human light; the visual of this revered action star crying is definitely symbolic of the vulnerability and real life qualities that this film tries to portray as the real emotions of the actual human being and something that acknowledges Van Damme's real life limitations or genuine qualities. While Van Damme is known primarily for his martial arts abilities as visual force, his tears and human weakness on display are the visual forces of his argument of vulnerability to the audience. In Blair's words "…one can communicate visually with much more force and immediacy than verbal communication allows" (*Rhetoric* 53), which I see as the predominant argument being made in this scene: while Van Damme's words harbor his humanistic confessions and helplessness to the audience, his sporadic emotions during the scene warrant the most focus. From crying, to yelling out his fears and regrets, Van Damme displays a representation of the male identity that is quite the

opposite of the one he is most associated. Van Damme is not only acting on-screen, but is also confessing his real life trials and tribulations for the audience. Here in *JCVD*, Van Damme is calling on another text – reported facts about his life that the viewer may or may not be familiar with.

As the scene continues, Van Damme relates directly to the camera, addressing the audience, "This... this is me today. I used to be small and scrawny. And I took up karate. Hence the Dojo, hence respect…" adding "…Sometimes people in show business say, 'We're gonna' fuck em'. I believed in people, in the Dojo. I was blessed and had a lot of 'wives'. I always believed in love" ("JCVD (2008) Quotes."). Here is it emblematic of the actor to evoke the emotions of his audience, but as Van Damme continues the speech, the audience begins to understand that this is not a commentary for a film, but a "real life" confession towards or commentary for Van Damme's audience where he discusses his past love of Karate and martial arts competition, and his many marriages and divorces.

While his tears act as visual agents of contradictory masculine characteristics, his words are those of an actor or orator conveying his own sense of pathos to an audience. Continuing in a later portion of his monologue, Van Damme says "…If you have 5, 6, 7, or 10 wives in a lifetime, they've all got something special, but no one cares about that in the so-called media. What about drugs? When you got it all, you travel the world. When you've been in all the hotels, you're the prima donna of the penthouse. And in all hotels the world over, traveling, you want something more. And because of a woman... well, because of love, I tried something and I got hooked," then referring directly to himself in front of the camera as "Van-Damme, the beast, the tiger in a cage, the 'Bloodsport' man

got hooked. I was wasted mentally and physically. To the point that I got out of it. I got out of it. But... it's all there. It's all there. It was really tough" ("JCVD (2008) Quotes."). Here we are seeing what Blair terms "Seeing is believing, even if what we are watching is invented, exaggerated, half-truths or lies" ("Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" 56).

However, what we are seeing is the both verbal and physically emotive confession of the "real life" problems of Van Damme; they are not made up. Van Damme assaults his own image as the 'Bloodsport' man, relaying his susceptibility to a drug (cocaine) addiction that hampered his later career in the mid-1990s. He does this not only through his emotionally-laced verbal dialogue, but more importantly like Blair discusses, through his facial emotions. While Van Damme talks using his arms as visual supplements, his face does the most talking in this scene, emoting intensely-delivered pathos to the audience via his literal sweat and tears. While these emotions might be, as Blair says 'half-truths' or exaggerations, they nevertheless draw on the star's real life as a narrative intertext to bridge the masculine divide or wall created before him from starring in such previously one-dimensional, formulaic films in his earlier career.

The image of Van Damme referenced in *Bloodsport* (1988) is emphatically that of the masculine male identity discussed by Tasker: his cinematic identity in that film was one of hyperbolic muscularity, extreme flexibility, and outstanding martial arts talent and is the standard by which he has been judged ever since. By explaining that this seemingly invulnerable image could be shattered, Van Damme is adhering to what Blair says regarding visual argument where a visual "…adds drama and force of a much greater order. Beyond that it can use such devices as references to cultural icons and other kinds of symbolism, dramatization and narrative to make a powerfully compelling case for its

conclusion" where Van Damme is accessing the memory of his cultural iconicity from *Bloodsport* (1988) that helped build his image as a martial arts star ("Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" 59). Calling on a visual image of perfection in a scene of character imperfection, Van Damme simultaneously showcases and revises the masculine identity via his image or visual "…hav[ing] an immediacy, a verisimilitude, and a concreteness that help influence acceptance and that are not available to the verbal" ("Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" 59). However, while Van Damme could have recalled those characteristics associated with that of the 'Bloodsport' man, his invocation of the image via the singular name of the film most associated with his masculine male image, he articulated what could not have been as effectively verbalized in a succinct fashion.

Van Damme continues his monologue explaining his drive to stardom and empathy for those less fortunate than him, saying "I saw people worse off than me. I went from poor to rich and thought, why aren't we all like me, why all the privileges? I'm just a regular guy. It makes me sick to see people... who don't have what I've got. Knowing that they have qualities, too. Much more than I do! It's not my fault if I was cut out to be a star. I asked for it. I asked for it, really believed in it. When you're 13, you believe in your dream. Well it came true for me," adding "But I still ask myself today what I've done on this Earth. Nothing! I've done nothing! And I might just die in this post office, hoping to start all over here in Belgium, in my country, where my roots are. Start all over with my parents and get my health back, pick up again. So I really hope... nobody's gonna' pull a trigger in this post office... It's so stupid to kill people. They're so beautiful! So, today, I pray to God. I truly believe it's not a movie. It's real life. Real life…It's hard for me to judge people and it's hard for them... not to judge me. Easier to blame me. Yeah,

something like that" ("JCVD (2008) Quotes."). When Van Damme says "I truly believe it's not a movie. It's real life" and expresses his disdain for killing while directly breaking the fourth wall by talking to the audience, he is in essence validating the notion that all this chaos is part of his actual human character ("JCVD (2008) Quotes."). By articulating to the audience that what is occurring on-screen is real, Van Damme is effectively implying that his on-screen emotions in *JCVD*, are therefore real as well. This direct imposition of an actor addressing his on-screen/off-screen image through the camera coincides with Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" where he explains ways of interpreting and understanding the actor's image in front of the camera.

This confession to the camera becomes literally transportable to the audience by means of the camera, and by varying degrees, any media or film theater that transports his film/image to the public. This may be how Van Damme is conscious of the audience (who he is talking to) and how "While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market"; this is how Van Damme makes his vulnerability present, and to the extent of this intertextual film, his own personality, which as Benjamin says "The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity" (676). While the film is a deeply emotional and reflexive insight into Van Damme's personal struggles and physical limitations, it nevertheless is a commodity – the key purpose here being for the film to make money from its audience.

Although we as the viewers are persuaded to believe that this is Van Damme's own confession of his past faults by way of his monologue that addresses his problems with infidelity and drug addiction, his revelation near the end of his speech that this confession of vulnerability is part of a real life event which he asks the audience to believe requires us to fall under his "spell of the personality." While the information conveyed in this monologue may be completely true, it still requires us as the audience to see these verbal actions as the new spectacle or showing of power that Berger says would suggest power in an individual; we may not be receiving the "unique aura" of Van Damme in this scene, but instead one that capitalizes or, at the very least, revises his past masculinity for the audience via injecting some of his real life struggles as visual and verbal intertext. While we cannot entirely be sure Van Damme is representing his real self to the audience, we can be sure that this exhibition of vulnerability calls into question his powerful presence/ability as filmic spectacle through his inability to perform against the post office robbers in his presentation of the type of vulnerable masculinity that Gates talked about in her work. While Gates' research focused on a series of aging males that were part of famous franchises, her conclusion where those actors addressed their age in their franchises seems comparable to Van Damme's career in which *JCVD* (2008) started the conversation of his age and career marginalization being present on-screen.

More specifically, as *JCVD* (2008) opens, we find the aging Van Damme failing to adequately meet the expectations of an action scene being filmed for his new film and he explains to the director that because he is forty-seven years old (at the time the film was made in 2008) and finds it difficult to complete such a complicated scene in only one take. So, maybe this vulnerability exuded by Van Damme in his later films is reminiscent

of what Benjamin says: "Experts have long recognized that in the film the greatest effects are almost always obtained by 'acting' as little as possible" (qtd. in Benjamin 675). This seems representative of Van Damme's monologue in the film. While the monologue may not be entirely true, it does appear to address real events that have occurred in Van Damme's own life (drug addiction, multiple failed marriages, and a failed career in Hollywood), which may be the reason that the scene resonates so much with the audience. Because Van Damme is portraying himself in the film, the presentation of emotion(s) on-screen, combined with him saying that this film is not a real film, but real life, provokes for the audience a sense of understanding this film in a reflexive and also intertextual way: this is Van Damme portraying his real emotions and problems on-screen for the audience.

## The Kick: Inward/On-Screen Persona

The second scene that will be examined in this discussion is the climax of the film where one of the film's antagonists is subdued by Van Damme as he is held at gunpoint. What is at stake in the discussion of the visual display of the masculine male identity is the conflicting nature in which the climax of the film is resolved: one of the resolutions finds Van Damme subduing his captor with a fast elbow to his stomach and one of his signature roundhouse kicks (made popular in many of his past films like *Bloodsport*, *Kickboxer*, etc.) to  the antagonist's head, while subsequently reveling in the crowds' adoration, puffing out his chest in triumph, and raising both hands in victory. This violence in action is more suggestive of the 1980's masculine male cinema (as visual intertext) with the hero's display of strength on-screen.

91

The second resolution of the same scene calls into question the accuracy of the prior scene: as the first resolution comes to a climax, the film becomes over-saturated with light, blinding Van Damme, and the film rewinds back to Van Damme and the captor's exit from the post office. This time, Van Damme, visibly weakened, escapes from the captor with a brief (unadorned) elbow to the man's stomach. The film itself is no longer filtered with bright color, but is instead very muted and life-like suggesting that this is the version that really occurred. While the first scene presents Van Damme's kick as visual spectacle for the audience (both the crowd within the film and the audience watching at home/the theater) and as a visual intertext referencing the famous physical abilities that made him famous in his youth, the second part of the scene (the revision) acts as a visual and real life negation of the first scene with the imagined iconic kick. This issue of visual negation corresponds to arguments made in Leo Groarke's article "Logic, Art and Argument" where he discusses arguments made by visuals without words. This scene should be considered as a visually rhetorical counterpart to Van Damme's confession in the monologue that preceded it. In Groarke's work, he mentions that "In other cases, visual negations depend upon the juxtaposition of contradictory symbols, often opposing the verbal and the visual" (111). While this scene contains little audible dialogue besides the crowd's initial chanting of Van Damme's name after the first part of the scene featuring his kick, the scene (both versions of it) nonetheless focuses almost entirely on the image – the former scene reminiscent of his youthful fame and the latter as the genuine display of a real human being's abilities or lack thereof.

According to Groarke, the second part of this scene (the revision without the kick) would act as a visual negation of the first. Van Damme is taken directly into police

custody after the second part of the scene that does not feature the kick. This is due to a minor subplot that features Van Damme in trouble with the Belgian authorities for extorting money from the Belgian police during the robbery in order to pay his lawyer's fees. This scene acts as visual negation because two separate versions of the same scene are juxtaposed against one another: one where Van Damme presents his body (kick) as visual spectacle for a desiring audience and one where he escapes from his captor without the presentation of himself as spectacle.

In this case, the juxtaposition is between opposing visuals. What is verbalized, though, is the audience's acceptance of Van Damme as visual spectacle. In the first version of the scene, after Van Damme subdues his captor, the crowd chants his name "Jean-Claude," while the second version is just limited to the crowd presenting their excitement via inaudible cheers; too whom the cheers are directed towards is questionable. They could be cheering because Van Damme freed himself from the captor with an elbow or the cheering could be one of general excitement. What is at stake in this scene is one of spectacle, or the lack of. This understanding of the scene seems congruent with Groarke's explanation that "Keeping in mind the possibility of visual assertions and negations, the next step toward a theory of visual argument is a recognition that a concatenation of visual statements in a particular image can, like a collection of verbal statements, function as reasons for a conclusion" (111). If this linking of visual statements in an image is a means for making a conclusion, then one might conclude from this visual statement of a film lacking a climax of spectacle that this ending that foregoes the visual climax is one of reflexive or intertextual, real life revision of his

masculine image which coincides with the verbalized revisions made in Van Damme's prior monologue.

There is a potential problem here in understanding Van Damme's image in relation to his previous body of work in the action-adventure genre. The semi-fictionalization of Van Damme's life creates a sense of doubt in the viewer in completely comprehending this change in Van Damme's masculine identity as completely genuine. In J. Anthony Blair's "The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Arguments," he clarifies the definition of visual arguments and explains how visuals are used as persuasion in numerous forms of media. More specifically, Blair says that "The power of the visual granted, visual arguments tend to be one-dimensional: they present the case for one side only, without including the arguments against it…," adding, "The demands of the movie or TV dramatic form include pressures for simplicity and for closure," which places limits on how much we can understand or even believe of Van Damme's masculine revision of his own image in *JCVD* relates to his previous work or even his own life (*Possibility* 38).

### Masculinity as Metaphor

In order to dissect Van Damme's image in relation to film in particular, we must first observe how visual arguments are made and if Van Damme's performance in *JCVD* warrants a revision of the masculine male identity. In Kristie S. Fleckenstein's "Images, Words, and Narrative Epistemology," she writes about metaphors in language and how they contribute to the construction of an individual's identity/identities. In this relation, I argue that Van Damme's actual physical image and martial arts ability in film works here as visual metaphor. However, in the world of the aging 1980s action star, this evaluation

of Van Damme's body as visual metaphor is limiting, similar to what Fleckenstein says "Metaphors based on language as the dominant agent in constituting thought, self, and reality, however, are unnecessarily limiting; they fragment thought, self, and reality without providing a means of unification," which seems indicative to the argument of understanding and reconciling how the aging action star is associated with a rhetoric of the 1980s masculine male identity previously discussed by Tasker (*Images* 915). This requires what Fleckenstein says is our "…need to reexamine the dominance we give to language in our theory of being because of its potential to constrain" (*Images* 915). Fleckenstein explains the answer as "Rather than metaphors foregrounding language, I wish to argue that we need metaphors fusing image and language to undergird our conceptualizations of being," which appears symptomatic of how we might begin to contextualize the masculine male image of the aging action star: instead of the action star's image acting as a static visual metaphor, it should instead be a combination of image and language that contribute to understanding how the action star is perceived as an evolving individual in the cinema – in this case, Van Damme's image and/or personal being in the cinema should be a determination made by the grouping of his image and the language/descriptions surrounding the aging male action star (*Images* 915).

The image of Van Damme as visual metaphor of the 1980's view on male masculinity corresponds to the crux of Fleckenstein's next point that "…for modern humans, imagery continues to function as the initial level of abstraction, symbolically representing our 'spontaneous embodiment of general ideas'" (*Images* 917). In this vein, Van Damme's image as the embodiment of the 1980s action star exists. The image of the masculine male persona is a metaphorical abstraction that is an amalgamation of certain

actions representative of the 1980s action cinema. This was the generalization of the masculine male image that early Van Damme films served to highlight. However, Van Damme's image has physically changed; he has aged.

*JCVD* (2008) presents Van Damme as a withered semi-fictionalization of his former masculine male image of the 1980s. Fleckenstein explains that certain individuals believe, "Language is not the center of being: imagery is. Imagery functions as the heart and foundation of our psychological dimension" (*Images* 918). If this is so, then as Van Damme's age is put on display in numerous ways in *JCVD* (2008), his visual exhibition of masculinity should be considered in a revisionist way, as well. While Van Damme's confessional words in the later part of the film bear symbolic meaning in understanding the humanity of the aging action star, his physical abilities – and in this film – inabilities best serve to highlight Fleckenstein's point.

This is part of what Fleckenstein describes where "Because of this hierarchal organization, semantic representations naturally focus on prototypes, or general representations of a class, instead of on individual possibilities" (*Images* 919). This is the problem with describing the masculine male identity; the language associated with it focuses on the general masculine male archetype. In this way "Imagery, because it provides an alternate way of organizing thought, reality, and self, compensates for the coercive force and structural limitations of language" (*Images* 920). Therefore, the scene comprised of Van Damme's escape from his captor does not contain any comprehensible language; instead it makes us reconsider how to view this film about Van Damme: we see Van Damme subdue the antagonist with a kick, which is immediately revised after the audience experiences it. The scene rewinds and Van Damme and his captor exit the post

office once again; this time Van Damme escapes with a small elbow jab to the man's gut. There is no overt display of male masculinity representative of the 1980s. If this film is understood as a revision of the masculine male identity via Van Damme's inabilities, it does so because "…imagery possesses an obvious relationship to the source of the perception and thus representation. As a result, images are centered within each individual's concrete experiences in the world. They possess the individual's signature" (*Images* 920). This is how the film should be understood: the concept of Van Damme's masculinity in this film should be appreciated as representative of him in the real world.

### Case Study #2: Birdman (2014)

Unlike the previous case study that focused on the publics' (audience's) view of Van Damme as an aging action star representative of the 1980's genre of muscular excess, the actor Michael Keaton exists in a separate plane. He exists as a similar, but distinct example of an aging movie star associated with another popular genre in the cinema – the superhero film. His career was not predicated on action-adventure films (i.e. *Batman*) alone, nor was his masculinity part of the generic muscular excess of the 1980s, but more importantly, was established around the comedic genre. Therefore, his turn as the popular superhero in Tim Burton's *Batman* and *Batman Returns* is evidence of Keaton's career transitioning from one genre into another. However, unlike Van Damme, his persona was not limited to that genre alone, which allowed him to star in other films and in other genres even after the *Batman* series ended for him. Keaton's films have spanned numerous genres over the decades, including early comedies like *Night Shift* (1982), *Mr. Mom* (1983), *Gung Ho* (1986), *Beetlejuice* (1988), and a mixture of comedies, family films, science fiction tales, and thrillers after his success with the

*Batman* franchise, including *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Desperate Measures* (1998), *First Daughter* (2004), *White Noise* (2005), *Toy Story 3* (2010), and the *Robocop* remake (2014), among others. His star, unlike Van Damme's, is still shining bright in Hollywood.

While Van Damme's masculinity emerged from the muscular masculine identity of excess in the 1980s, Keaton's masculine identity developed from his stint as the superhero Batman. The main difference between both masculine identities, however, is that Keaton's masculinity is a less excessive or less physically present one. Specifically, Keaton's masculine male identity was formed over just two films – *Batman* and *Batman Returns* – not with a long-term career built on the subject. The vast majority of his films following his work in that franchise did not even provide a conduit for Keaton to express his former masculinity that he established in the role of Batman.

Van Damme's former career in Hollywood was built on his ability to showcase his overtly masculine exterior and phenomenal fighting abilities, where the film *JCVD* works to showcase how that ability has begun to fail and exhibit the masculine exterior of a real human being under the fading muscular facade. *Birdman* works on a similar note. While Keaton's masculine identity is not built on the physical excesses of the cinema of the 1980s, his is one that has already begun to diminish within the narrative of *Birdman*, where his physical features including the size/shape of his stomach and the lines/wrinkles in his face are brought to light for the audience in order to showcase the extent to which he has aged. Keaton's masculinity is then one that began in the suit of the superhero Batman (here Birdman) and the popularity that role brought him in the late 1980s and early 1990s and is a masculinity that has gradually diminished over the years since his heyday as the popular comic book hero. What the film *Birdman* seeks to do is showcase

the downward spiral of the masculine male's identity in multiple scenes that exhibit the irrelevancy of his aged masculine exterior in today's society and Hollywood at large.

Irrelevancy through marginalization is the common thread that ties these films of the aging masculine male together. Each lead character is on an emotional and transitional journey to re-acquire the relevancy that he had while in his prime masculine condition and before issues of fatherhood and social discrimination arose. One scene in particular highlights Keaton's/Thomson's persona as an aged superhero seeking to be relevant again.

In this scene from *Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* Keaton's outward (off-screen) and inward (on-screen) persona both resonate through the verbal dialogue being espoused for the viewer(s) by both Keaton as the fictional film star Riggan Thomson and as the intertextual superhero that he still embodies – Birdman – while the visual imagery here is presented via the action-oriented special effects included in the scene, and most obviously, through the visual introduction of Keaton's/Thomson's superhero alter ego Birdman (here as an intertextual representation or reference to Keaton's past career as Batman). The scene begins with Thomson walking down the streets of New York City after having fallen asleep drunk on the steps of a building nearby the theater he is appearing. Here the (until now) unseen narrator (Birdman) begins to talk directly to Thomson, trying to soothe him after losing the lead story in the city's newspaper to his co-star Mike Shiner (played by another former superhero Edward Norton who portrayed the Hulk in one Marvel film) and having been driven to drink after an encounter with Tabitha Dickinson (a major critic) in a bar the night before.

Birdman begins: "It's a beautiful day. Forget about the Times... everyone else has. Come on. Stand up! So you're not a great actor. Who cares? You're much more than that," adding, "You tower over these other theater douchebags. You're a movie star, man! You're a global force!" (*"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes."*).

While the initial purpose of this pep talk is to elevate Thomson's spirits after having lost front page publicity to his subordinate co-star and also having confronted a critic bent on ensuring the failure of his play, the scene ultimately takes an extended, abrupt turn, focusing on the visual display of an image – Birdman as the revived embodiment of Thomson's failed career and internal pursuit for relevance. Thomson's internal logic, his internal narrator (Birdman) who guides his own thoughts throughout the entirety of the film finally, materializes visually on-screen, appealing not only to Thomson's own skewed sense of logic or self-importance (ego), but just as important, the character of Birdman works verbally and visually here as the lingering personification of Michael Keaton's former career as the Batman.

I find it relevant here to consult Charles A. Hill's chapter in *Defining Visual Rhetorics* "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images" in order to fully understand the position that the visual image plays when presented for an audience, and more specifically to begin to comprehend the way that identity is remediated through a visual/imagistic and verbal text (film).

In his chapter, Hill relates that less discussed visuals like public memorials and landscapes are now being noticed by visual rhetoricians, noting that their importance in the field "…helps us understand how rhetorical elements work in forms of expression

that are not obviously and explicitly persuasive" (25). Hill's inclusion of items that may

not have initially been considered rhetorical (public memorials and landscapes) echoes

that of Foss and D'Angelo who have argued for a less restrictive imagining of what can

be analyzed rhetorically in the field of rhetoric. Through the inclusion of these seeming

rhetorical outliers into the field of visual rhetoric we can develop additional ways of

viewing these less studied, but still potentially relevant rhetorical objects. Similarly,

while cinema has been the object of visual rhetorical analysis in studies such as David

Blakesley's "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*", which focuses

heavily on viewer identification, less visual rhetorical scholarship has focused on how the

masculine male identity is (re)-composed through such rhetorical elements as the star's

visual image and/or the verbal dialogue expressed within the film's narrative.

For example, on the surface, *Birdman* is a film that portrays the personal and

professional failures of its lead character, who like so many former/aging stars from other

genres is attempting to revitalize his failing career. However, within the frame or context

of career revitalization and, particularly, within the realm of the aging male on-screen, the

film should be conceived as an intertext − or in this case an amalgamation of verbal and

visual cinematic references to its lead's past stardom. The focus of this study is on the

general theme of career renewal or personal relevance after marginalization for aging

male actors through its verbal and visual elements expressed within these case studies:

Van Damme seeking better film parts in the narrative of *JCVD* and Thomson pursuing

Broadway success with his adaption of Raymond Carver's short story "What We Talk

About When We Talk About Love" (which, itself is used as metaphorical intertext within

*Birdman*).

Within Hill's "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images" he asks the ever important question "How, exactly, do images persuade?" (25), here relevant to the text through the first appearance of Birdman on-screen for the viewers. Prior to this point in the film, Birdman acted as Thomson's internal narrator, providing continuous commentary as an unconscious alter ego contributing to Thomson's own internal anxiety over being marginalized as an actor. Hill mentions that "Several verbal forms can be used to increase the presence of an object, idea, or person, but the desired element receives the greatest amount of presence from being directly perceived; an object or person is most present to us when we can see it [him] directly" adding that "The most effective way to increase an object's rhetorical presence is to make it physically present – to actually bring it into the room…" (29), where in this instance, Birdman is placed squarely in front of the viewer on-screen, directly behind Thomson, talking over his shoulder and into his ear. Birdman's arrival in this scene is punctuated by substantial verbal rage expressed in his dialogue as he yells at Thomson about the state of superhero films and how he (Thomson) must reinvent himself to coincide with contemporary cinema. Birdman not only serves as an explicit personification of verbal immediacy to the narrative then (as the narrator), but also as a visual sign of the aging male's anger with being considered irrelevant in contemporary cinema.

What is important is highlighting the function that relevancy plays in visually and verbally demonstrating one's remediated identity on-screen and the role that it plays in the film as an image text. Cinematic relevancy is the overarching theme of the film, visually highlighted on-screen at the opening of the film with this poem "Late Fragment"

102

from Raymond Carver's tombstone, which was originally featured in Carver's *A New Path to the Waterfall*:

> And did you get what
>
> you wanted from this life, even so?
>
> I did.
>
> And what did you want?
>
> To call myself beloved, to feel myself
>
> beloved on the earth. (quoted in *Birdman*)

These words are employed as image text in the film's opening (displayed in large font on-screen), punctuating the movie's overall theme – relevancy – and dualistically working as an interext where it bears an additional meaning juxtaposed next to Thomson's/Keaton's pursuit for personal significance and the film's inclusion of another element of Raymond Carver – one of his short stories – into the narrative center of the film. Here Carver's play "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" serves not only as Thomson's chosen text (that he adapted for the theater) to elevate his personal significance, but also as another intertextual element within the film. The play itself is about a group of individuals discussing the topic of love, but more importantly, features Thomson (Keaton) as the jealous lover of Laura (Naomi Watts) who eventually shuns him for another man (played here by Edward Norton).

Carver's short story plays an intertextual role here by highlighting both Thomson's and, by implication, Keaton's loss of relevancy after being marginalized. In addition, the inclusion of Carver's poem at the beginning of the film also serves an

intertextual function within the narrative because the film makes implicit reference to it through its narrative theme of relevancy after marginalization.

Within the play Ed (played by fictional actor Riggan Thomson) losses his lover – his own relevance – to her boyfriend (played both within and outside the theater by Mike Shiner, another actor who has clearly overshadowed Thomson's significance by garnering front page publicity that reduced Thomson's professional importance to naught). In addition, Thomson's own life is obviously mirrored here as intertext within the film. Specifically, after Ed (Thomson) confronts his cheating wife while she is in bed with her lover, she relates to him that she is no longer in love with him. After she says this to him Thomson looks to the audience and says "I don't exist" prior to shooting himself in the head (*Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*).

The intertextual inclusion of Carver's play is instrumental here as a parallel illustration of a similar loss of relevance, but instead of losing one's relevancy to one's lover, Ed's/Thomson's expression "I don't exist" does not register as a phrase that is solely applicable to Ed's position in the play, but also as a visual, corresponding analogy within the film. Therefore, in the climax of the film, when Thomson premieres the play for the public, he does not use a prop gun during the suicide scene, but instead obtains a real firearm and attempts to kill himself and ends up only shooting off his nose. Like the character in Carver's play, Thomson feels as if he has lost his relevancy in the world; with Tabitha Dickinson's inevitably negative review weighing on his mind, he loses touch with reality and attempts suicide (just like the character in the short story). There are three analogous/interrelating intertexts (at least) within this movie: that of Keaton's journey to re-acquire his relevance throughout this film; Thomson's similar attempt

through releasing his adaption of Carver's short story as a theater play; and Carver's story as well, which works as the main intertext through which Thomson attempts to draw professional relevancy and through which, in kind, Keaton endeavors the same from the film.

The theme of relevancy is increasingly drawn upon throughout the film, particularly when Thomson begins berating his daughter for her lifestyle, from which an argument ensues where Thomson begins (referring to his play) "Listen to me. I'm trying to do something important," where his daughter retorts "This is not important" (*"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes.")*. Nonetheless, Thomson goes on, arguing back that "It's important to me! Alright? Maybe not to you, or your cynical friends whose only ambition is to go viral. But to me... To me... this is - God. This is my career, this is my chance to do some work that actually means something," where his daughter finally replies:

> Means something to who? You had a career before the third comic book movie, before people began to forget who was inside the bird costume. You're doing a play based on a book that was written 60 years ago, for a thousand rich old white people whose only real concern is gonna be where they go to have their cake and coffee when it's over. And let's face it, Dad, it's not for the sake of art. It's because you want to feel relevant again. Well, there's a whole world out there where people fight to be relevant every day. And you act like it doesn't even exist! Things are happening in a place that you willfully ignore, a place that has already forgotten you. I mean, who are you? You hate bloggers. You make fun of Twitter. You

105

don't even have a Facebook page. You're the one who doesn't exist. You're

doing this because you're scared to death, like the rest of us, that you don't

matter. And you know what? You're right. You don't. It's not important.

You're not important. Get used to it (*"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected*

*Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes."*)

Interestingly, this film, and *JCVD* for that matter, both draw on aspects of each

main character's own real life career failures/loss of fame and persona, but both

ultimately fictionalize large pieces of the narrative. Van Damme was never a part of a

post office robbery or extortion scheme in Belgium, nor has Keaton lost his entire

relevancy in Hollywood, where he has continued to work consistently throughout the past

two or three decades. However, a detailed comparison between each actor and the

amount of accurate intertextual elements ported over from their private lives is

unnecessary to the broad ambition of this essay. What is central here is to notice how the

concept of intertextuality (in the form of calling on well-known former masculine

qualities of past actors) works through the verbal and visual characteristics within these

films to display these actors' aging, revised masculinities on-screen for the viewers.

Referring back to the scene where Birdman first appears to Thomson on the

streets of New York City, Birdman begins a litany of suggestions for Thomson to re-

attain his cinematic significance, saying:

Don't you get it? You spent your life building a bank account and a

reputation... and you blew 'em both. Good for you. Fuck it. We'll make a

comeback. They're waiting for something huge. Well, give it to them.

Shave off that pathetic goatee. Get some surgery! Sixty's the new thirty,

motherfucker. You're the original. You paved the way for these other

clowns. Give the people what they want... old-fashioned apocalyptic porn.

Birdman: The Phoenix Rises. Pimple-faced gamers creaming in their

pants. A billion worldwide, guaranteed. You are larger than life, man. You

save people from their boring, miserable lives. You make them jump,

laugh, shit their pants. All you have to do is... (*"Birdman: Or (the*

*Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes."*)

At this point of the film Thomson snaps his fingers and a car explodes from a

missile sent from an unseen enemy, police/military begin storming forward firing

automatic weapons at the unseen entity with the support of two aerial helicopters before

one is shot down. Here the camera turns away from the on-screen action and Birdman

explains "That's what I'm talking about. Bones rattling! Big, loud, fast! Look at these

people, at their eyes... they're sparkling. They love this shit. They love blood. They love

action. Not this talky, depressing, philosophical bullshit" (*"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected*

*Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes."*). The unseen enemy finally reveals itself to be a

large mechanical bird capable of tremendous harm, but is momentarily stunned when

Birdman launches a laser beam from his arm. The scene ends with Birdman relating

"Yes. And the next time you screech... [Thomson shrieks]... it'll explode into millions of

eardrums. You'll glimmer on thousands of screens around the globe. Another

blockbuster. You are a god. [while Thomson begins to hover over the street]

See? There you go, you motherfucker. Gravity doesn't even apply to you. Wait till you

see the faces of those who thought we were finished. Listen to me. Let's go back one

more time and show them what we're capable of. We have to end it on our own terms...

with a grand gesture. Flames. Sacrifice. Icarus. You can do it. You hear me? You are...

Birdman!" ( *"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes."*).

How does this image or series of images work to persuade us as an audience? In
*Birdman*, Keaton's own personal identity is remediated on-screen through a narrative that
not only calls on former literature like Carver's short story "What We Talk About When
We Talk About Love" as an analogy for highlighting its lead character's own struggles,
but also Keaton's own attempt to re-invent himself for the Hollywood audience through
the film *Birdman* itself. Specifically, the allusions to Keaton's former career in the
Hollywood genre are made palpably apparent on-screen in this particular scene where
Birdman first appears to the audience suggesting, not only through intense language, but
also through the film's supplemental imagery (computer special effects), that these
elements work in tandem to influence the perceptions of the audience and also work to
display the identity of the film's lead, Thomson/Keaton, on-screen as an individual
attempting to reinvigorate his Hollywood career. These vivid characteristics (both visual
and verbal) work to complement the intertextual qualities within the film. For example,
during Birdman's speech to Thomson, he not only verbally highlights the state of the
aging male in cinema and the lengths that one must go to be relevant now, but also
visually brings to life the clichéd characteristics most associated with the action cinema
(explosions, violence, death, etc.) for his audience. Less vivid characteristics (words on a
page or more abstract expressions of the scene) would not work as persuasively on the
audience.

Through the amalgamation of vivid features of the verbal and visual on-screen in
this scene and others, *Birdman* works to influence its audiences' perceptions of identity

remediation through intertextual references to its lead's past. This is how Hill answers his

above question – *how do images persuade?* – saying that "The most effective way to

increase an object's rhetorical presence is to make it physically present – to actually bring

it into the room…" (29). Besides making a visual physically present on-screen, can one

not also make the verbal present as well?

     *Birdman* makes the object's rhetorical presence present by its visual inclusion of

the Birdman character and the resulting special effects in the prior scene, but also in the

scene where Thomson attempts suicide, but ends up shooting off his nose instead. The act

of Thomson shooting off his nose, while inadvertent, was meant not only to kill himself,

but to eradicate the revised identity that he had been attempting to create for himself in

the theater, in order to let the identity created by Birdman take full possession, which was

the ultimate goal of his alter-ego Birdman who said "…We have to end it on our own

terms... with a grand gesture. Flames. Sacrifice. Icarus. You can do it. You hear me? You

are... Birdman!" (*"*Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes.").

Hence, when Thomson attempts suicide, it not only parallels the actions of Ed's character

in Carver's play, but is also the graphic manifestation of Birdman's visual language that

calls on such fatalistic/self-sacrificial images as 'Flames,' 'Sacrifice,' and the mythical

Icarus who flew too close to the sun and perished. These pieces of verbal dialogue are

made rhetorically present for the audience by being manifested visually through

Thomson's self-sacrificial actions on stage and in the prior scene where Birdman

describes the type of cinema that people pay money to see.  Hence, the theme of losing

ones' relevance is made visually manifest or present through the film's use of Carver's

play as intertext, where Thomson attempts suicide exactly like the character featured in

the adapted play based on Carver's prior work did. In this case, the object needing presence is a conceptual one – identity remediation. This is a difficult conception of identity to express on-screen, but is done so rhetorically through the film placing the verbal and visual intertextual elements together on-screen for the viewers and allowing the narrator to comment on them.

Overall, *Birdman* is a film that creates a connection between the verbal and visual elements of the narrative far better than *JCVD*. Where *JCVD* utilizes the verbal and visual separately to intertextually comment on and revise the star's identity, *Birdman* exploits both elements simultaneously. In particular, while the visual presence of Birdman is an obvious intertextual manifestation of Keaton's former role as Batman, the other visual elements/images within the film work to manifest the themes of relevancy and irrelevancy from the work of Raymond Carver into the film's narrative. For example, the theme or fear of being irrelevant is not only verbally expressed by Thomson during the film through his worrying about the success of the play/his own professional development, in a discussion between him and his daughter, and to an extent, by Ed's attempted suicide on stage, but also then visually articulated on-screen in these same scenes where Thomson is constantly struggling to make the play a success, and also in the scene featuring Ed's/Thomson's attempted suicide. Both the verbal dialogue and visual image work to supplement one another's rhetorical work on-screen. What this combination of the verbal and visual contributes to the field of rhetoric is a consideration of these two characteristics working together to re-create/re-compose and/or revise a certain type of identity – here the aging and marginalized masculine male identity. In the scene where Birdman is describing a cinema reliant on the basest of moviegoer's desires

– a cinema composed singularly of action movie porn – the viewer is not only provided a descriptive verbal commentary by Birdman himself, but also is provided such stark visuals of violence and action that work in unison with Birdman's observations, that both features (verbal and visual) work to communicate or persuade the audience of a particular message about how the masculine identity should be perceived. Through the ability of the intertextual visual image and verbal dialogue to effect the audiences' perceptions of how aging masculinity is composed, or more specifically, (re)-composed on-screen, visual rhetorical studies may better appreciate some of the less studied rhetorical elements that contribute to the formation of the aging masculine identity.

CHAPTER IV


WHY IT ALL MATTERS: HOW DOES THIS CONTRIBUTE TO VISUAL RHETORICAL

STUDIES?


So, what do these analyses of such broadly different films like *Birdman* and/or

*JCVD* actually contribute to the field of visual rhetorical studies? More specifically, of

what importance to the field is it to examine the visual and/or verbal characteristics

exhibited within these films? While both films may appear quite dissimilar on the

surface, each film works similarly as a visual text that inevitably demonstrates or creates

a re-composition of the aging male's masculine identity through the display of the verbal

(dialogue) and visual (image) on-screen for the viewer. What this type of identity analysis

should provide to the field of visual rhetorical studies is another way of realizing how the

masculine identity can be composed or read by the viewer through the medium of the

screen and, particularly, through the visual and verbal content presented therein.

While the mediums compared here include the visual image of the actor and his

surroundings on-screen, and the verbal dialogue that he and the other actors espouse, and

not directly that of an image and a written text, one must still consider how the

intermixing of the verbal and visual work to (re)-compose meaning-making – here the

identity of the aging masculine male.

Masculinity is not solely revised here through the visual presentation of the star's now aging image, nor is it revised alone through the verbal dialogue that aurally questions that past image, but by the marriage of both the visual and verbal in each film.

Let's not forget that identity formation is composed of both the verbal *and* the visual. An example of this marriage of the verbal and visual is from Yvonne Tasker's "Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema" that cites two of Stallone's films (*Tango and Cash* and *Lock up*) that "…more or less explicitly, [work to] rewrite their hero/star" (234). According to Tasker, the release of Stallone's *Rambo III* (1988) adversely affected his career image for many reasons, including accusations that he was a draft dodger, his divorce from then-wife Brigitte Nielsen, failing to show up to Cannes because of his fear of being targeted by terrorists, and the Russians leaving Afghanistan (which did not sit well against the film's narrative) (Dumb Movies 234).

Hence, in order to shift Stallone's image from the ultimate tough guy to something 'softer' or 'more sophisticated,' Stallone had to not only adjust the types of films he appeared in, but also his rhetoric within those film. While *Tango and Cash* (co-starring Kurt Russell) was still classified as an action film, unlike *Lock Up*, it nevertheless used both the visual on-screen image of its star and his verbal dialogue to re-compose his masculine identity for the audience. Specifically, this film, Tasker says "…sets out to be humorous, taking swipes at Stallone's he-man image within a buddy movie format" and "Giv[es] Stallone a chance to talk and dress up, [while] it is [Kurt] Russell who gets his shirt off within the first few minutes of the film" (Dumb Movies 235). In addition, Tasker says the point of Stallone staring in *Tango and Cash* was to

"…emphasize a more sophisticated Stallone," where "His character, Ray Tango, wears suits and spectacles, deals in stocks and early on sets out the terms of a new image by delivering the joke line 'Rambo is a pussy'" (Dumb Movies 234). Through calling Rambo, the overtly masculine hero that contributed heavily to his stardom and from which people are most familiar, a 'pussy,' while working primarily in the regalia of nicely tailored suits in this film instead of his typically, half-naked exhibitionist style without his shirt, Stallone is verbally refuting his past excessively masculine on-screen image. As Tasker explains, "An attempted redefinition of Stallone's star image in these films is conducted through both the body and the voice" (Dumb Movies 234). We can glean from Tasker's examination of Stallone's attempted redefinition of identity that both the visual image (the body) of the star and his verbal qualities (his voice) play a part in identity construction. It seems also that the narrator's commentary plays a part in the formation and/or revision of identity.

However, this identity construction, or re-construction in the cases of Van Damme, Keaton, and Stallone here, show that the verbal and visual characteristics exhibited on-screen typically call on other cinematic texts to either refute, in Stallone's case as Rambo, or to aid in the redefinition of the star's image. Noël Carroll's "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)," while a somewhat dated text on a practice that seems all too common in contemporary cinema – film allusion (or reference) – is nonetheless a very important look into a tradition within the film industry defined where "…allusion to film history, has become a major expressive device, that is, a means that directors use to make comments on the fictional worlds of their films" adding that the broad definition of the term encompasses "…quotations, the

114

memorialization of past genres, the reworking of past genres, *homages*, and the recreation

of 'classic scenes', shots plot motifs, lines of dialogue, themes, gestures, and so forth

from film history, especially as that history was crystallized and codified in the sixties

and early seventies" (52). Within the texts of *JCVD* and *Birdman* verbal and visual

allusions to the stars' past films were made via the case studies' dialogue, homages to

prior images of the stars, and, in reference to the previous films, calling on similar themes

of masculinity from previous films – only to then revise them on-screen in their more

recent films.

Carroll explains that around that time (the 1970s and on), a myriad of eminent

filmmakers were beginning their work and, from which, routinely referenced previous

films that had influenced them (52). The intention of the new films, as Carroll describes,

was to be "…structured by pertinent strategies and practices in such a way that (1)

informed viewers are meant to recall past films (filmmakers, genres, shots, and so on)

while watching the new films, and that (2) informed viewers are not supposed to take this

as evidence of plagiarism or uninspired derivativeness in the new film – as they might

have in the works of another decade – but as part of the expressive design of the new

films" (52). As mentioned above, Stallone invoked a mocking verbal image of his former

persona, Rambo, on-screen in order to transform into his then-current image as the faster

talking and more sophisticated anti-Rambo. This verbal revocation of his former image

worked so well because it alluded to a former image of himself that the public was very

familiar with. Similarly, with the inclusion of Keaton and Van Damme in my case

studies, both actors invoke, through visual image and verbal dialogue, allusions to their

former selves/identities: Keaton as the superhero Batman (through Thomson as Birdman

within the narrative) and Van Damme as the quintessential action star of the late 1980s and early 1990s as made popular by his constant public attention in the film *JCVD* that references his past career in Hollywood.

The verbal qualities are not only implicitly represented in these films' visual referencing and/or reformulating of the masculine male image on-screen, but also the visual transformation of the actor – Stallone from the nearly naked Rambo into a nicely tailored suit in the film *Tango and Cash*; Keaton's age made more prevalent on-screen, which exacerbates the appearance of his wrinkles and weight gain that differ markedly from those of his former proxied muscular image as Batman; and Van Damme through the visual exhibition of his own physical abilities, or lack thereof at the end of the film where he is unable to perform the same type of overtly masculine fighting ability that is most associated with his masculine character in cinema. These distinctly visual qualities carry representational characteristics that are alternatively described as speech or dialogue within their respective films.

Nevertheless, comprehending the context behind which these case studies work to create identity and/or reformulate it, requires a certain lens or way of seeing. In Kristie S. Fleckenstein's *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*, she relates the role(s) that the image and text (word) play in the construction of literacy, focusing much of her work back to the classroom. In Fleckenstein's chapter "The Shape and the Dynamic of a Poetics of Teaching" that she explains the concept of 'ways of seeing' as it relates to the classroom. In particular, though, Fleckenstein says "Ways of knowing are also ways of seeing, what Martin Jay, borrowing from Christian Metz, calls scopic regimes: the visual rules by which we see one way and not another…," adding "These

rules, however, become so deeply internalized that it is difficult to recognize their existence or to recognize their cultural embeddedness" (*Embodied Literacies* 98). She does go on to add what is "important to scopic regimes is the existence of multiple ways of seeing" where "While one regime tends to dominate in a particular time and place, many less privileged ways of seeing are in contention within a single regime" (*Embodied Literacies* 98). Fleckenstein is referring here mainly to ways of seeing within the field of literacy, mentioning examples here with ways of seeing within the arts and the sciences, where with the arts the viewer is more attached to the studied topic, while the sciences require a viewer more removed from his/her topic of study (*Embodied Literacies* 98).

In the context of this paper, though, the main object of analysis is the genre of masculinity within cinema. What is of contention, however, is how one observes via 'ways of seeing' this reformulation or remediation of identity through the guise of the verbal dialogue and visual image within the text. Film scholars, including Yvonne Tasker, have found that masculinity is not static. This character identity is quite malleable, depending on the circumstances. The excessive masculinity of the 1980s was clearly exhibited in the Rambo series, with the lead representing/commenting on many of the Reagan era policies of the 1980s.[5] Similarly, as Stallone's image began to falter/was criticized after *Rambo III* (1988), his image was then revised or reformulated with his appearance as a more sophisticated action star in *Tango and Cash* (1989), and even in the action-comedy *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* (1992). Also, as was noted in Jeffords' and Davies' works, the masculine identity evolved even further in the 1990s with the introduction of the emotionally present and father figure hero. The multi-faceted 'way of

---

5 For further discussion of Rambo and Reagan era policies, see Susan Jeffords's book *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*.

seeing' that Fleckenstein describes, that considers the existing forms of how the aging

masculine male is composed on-screen, and through other lenses as well, that the field of

visual rhetoric can better understand that the masculine identity is not a static one.

Both *Birdman* and *JCVD* create a unique 'way of seeing' that parallels some of

the research of Ellexis Boyle and Sean Brayton, whose study of intertextuality in

Hollywood, and notions of masculinity in the film *The Expendables* (2010) reveal how

certain features like physical labor, race, and many other aspects of the aging male are

related in that film. While previous scholarship has offered ways of understanding the

aging masculine male identity through the lens of his departure from the excessive

masculinity of the 1980s and early 1990s and through the masculine male's own verbal

commentary on his aging body in such film franchises as *Indiana Jones* and *Die Hard*,

which have worked as a kind of self-acknowledgement of one's own aging body, there is

nonetheless another argument being made in both *JCVD* and *Birdman* in regard to

intertextual commentary about one's self. There appears to be a new way of seeing being

argued in *Birdman* and *JCVD*, where the lead actor (Keaton and Van Damme, in these

cases) not only comments on the state of his fading physical abilities/masculinity, but

from which two specific rhetorical factors are manifested on-screen that contribute to the

composition of the aging masculine male identity: the verbal dialogue and visual image.

While these rhetorical characteristics/factors undoubtedly play a large part in the

formation of the previously mentioned masculine identities, these rhetorical

characteristics appear to work to supplement one another in order to make or form an

intertextual comment on the state of masculinity in *Birdman* and *JCVD*. In other words,

while the visual and verbal inevitably play a role in the composition of the masculinity of

excess from the 1980s and even the self-acknowledged masculinity described by Gates, the intertextual commentary made by both the visual and verbal in *JCVD* and *Birdman* work to supplement each other.

For example, in *JCVD*, the primarily verbal scene where Van Damme confesses to the audience and the dominantly visual scene where he roundhouse kicks his captor at the end of the film, each use their respective characteristics (the verbal and the visual) to supplement the intertextual meaning being made in each scene. Specifically, both of the above scenes are highly intertextual: the confession brings in issues of Van Damme's past into the film's narrative and the scene with the final kick similarly requires the viewer to recall the actor's past filmography. Each of these scenes exhibits these intertextual characteristics in the film's narrative, where, in each respective scene, these rhetorical characteristics serve as rhetorical enhancements– providing a way of seeing what is being visually and verbally represented with an additional rhetorical quality. In the scene from *Birdman* where Thomson is walking down the streets of New York City listening to Birdman speak over his shoulder, the visual and verbal work together as intertextual visual/verbal manifestations of one another. Particularly, the dialogue presented by Birdman is not only verbally expressed, but also made visually present with the special effects of violence that act as a visual mirror to the verbal dialogue. What sets these films apart from some of the other films that feature the aging masculine male is that, similar to *The Expendables* franchise, the leads in *Birdman* and *JCVD* work to intertextually comment on their own fading careers in Hollywood cinema.

The excessively masculine male of the 1980s is still alive today and routinely displayed on-screen with the same actors (Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Willis, and even

Van Damme), still exhibiting their same masculinities. Even with brief revisions of the excessive masculinities of the 1980s with films such as *Tango and Cash*, and even *JCVD*, each star to some extent has reverted back to his signature way of being seen – through the lens of excessive, large masculinity. However, what is important to the field of visual rhetorical studies is the notion of identity remediation and simultaneous revision through distinctly rhetorical qualities – verbal and visual characteristics – that an argument of (re)-composition can be made. Van Damme and Keaton, specifically, are not seen solely through their prior identities as a blockbuster action star and the quintessential superhero, respectively. Instead that identity or way of seeing is shifting. This alternate way of seeing, through the lens of aging masculinity, is where the verbal dialogue and visual presentation of the star's most recent image have the most effect on how identity can be composed.

What is significant to the field of visual rhetoric is recognizing that the aging masculine male identity carries with it several rhetorically informative and, ultimately, persuasive elements – the verbal and the visual – from which visual rhetorical studies may benefit from contemplating the role that each of these elements play when the notion of intertextuality is considered in the composition of the masculine identity. Of additional importance to the field is consideration of the concept of remediation and the role that intertextuality can play in other mediums besides the written word. Attempting to directly traverse the differences between two such unlike mediums as cinema and the written text, from which the study of intertextuality has been heavily established by such scholars as Kristeva, might yield few insightful results. Instead, what is central to this study is to consider what elements each medium remediates or reformulates from the other

medium(s) in order to appreciate the role that that element plays in the current medium

(like that of the narrator). Realizing the role that remediation plays in the aging masculine

male's identity is essential to this study. The reformulating or (re)-composing of the

marginalized male's former masculine identity through the narrator may help the field of

visual rhetoric observe the function(s) that the verbal dialogue and visual image play in

that process and, from which, further studies may serve to highlight the role(s) that these

characteristics play in the composition/(re)-composition of additional on-screen

identities.

REFERENCES

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 665-685. Print.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972. Print.

*Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*. Dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu. Perf. Michael Keaton, Edward Norton, Naomi Watts, and Emma Stone. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014. DVD.

"Birdman: Or (the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) Quotes." IMDB. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2562232/quotes?ref_=tt_ql_3>.

Blair, J. Anthony. "The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Arguments." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33.1 (1996): 23-39. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

---. "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Eds. Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2004. 41-61. Print.

Blakesley, David. "Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock's Vertigo." *Defining*

  *Visual Rhetorics.* Eds. Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah:

  Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2004. 111-133. Print.

Blakesley, David. "Introduction: The Rhetoric of Film and Film Studies." *The Terministic*

  *Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003.

  1-16. Print.

Blakesley, David. "Part One: Perspectives on Film and Film Theory." *The Terministic*

  *Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003.

  17-20. Print.

Blakesley, David. "Part Three: Perspectives on Films about Rhetoric." *The Terministic*

  *Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003.

  211-12. Print.

Bolter, J. David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Mit

  Press, 2000.

---. "Remediation and the Language of New Media." *Northern Lights: Film & Media*

  *Studies Yearbook* 5.1 (2007): 25-37.

Boyle, Ellexis, and Sean Brayton. "Ageing Masculinities and "Muscle Work" in

  Hollywood Action Film: An Analysis of *The Expendables*." *Men and*

  *Masculinities* 15.5 (2012): 468-485.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. 3rd ed. Berkeley: U of California,

  1941. Print.

Carroll, Noël. "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)."

  *October* (1982): 51-81.

D'Angelo, Frank J. "The Rhetoric of Intertextuality." *Rhetoric Review* 29.1 (2009): 31-47.

Davies, Jude. "'I'm the Bad Guy?' "Falling Down" and White Masculinity in 1990s

      Hollywood." Journal of Gender Studies 4.2 (1995): 145.

Deleyto, Celestino. "Me, Me, Me: Film Narrators and the Crisis of Identity." *Books in*

      *Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*. By Mireia Aragay. Amsterdam:

      Rodopi, 2005. 243-63. Print.

Fleckenstein, Kristie. *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching*.

      Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003. Print.

---. "Images, Words, and Narrative Epistemology." *College English* 58.8 (1996): 914-

      933. *JSTOR*. Web.

Foss, Sonja K. "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery."

      *Communication Studies* 45.3-4 (1994): 213-224.

Foss, Sonja K. "Framing the Study of Visual Rhetoric: Toward a Transformation of

      Rhetorical Theory." *Defining Visual Rhetorics.* Eds. Charles A. Hill and

      Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2004.  303-

      313. Print.

Gates. Philippa. "Acting His Age? The Resurrection of the 80s Action Heroes and their

      Aging Stars." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 27.4 (2010): 276-289. *Taylor*

      *& Francis*. Web.

Groarke, Leo. "Logic, Art and Argument." *Informal Logic* 18.2 (1996): 105-129. Web.

Hill, Charles A. "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Eds.

      Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum

      Associates, Inc., 2004. 25-40. Print.

*JCVD*. Dir. Mabrouk El Mechri. Perf. Jean-Claude Van Damme, François Damiens,

Zinedine Soualem, and Karim Belkhadra. Gaumont, 2008. DVD.

"JCVD (2008) Quotes." *IMDB*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <http://www.imdb.com
/title/tt1130988/quotes?ref_=tttrv_sa_3>.

"JCVD Movie Review & Film Summary (2008) | Roger Ebert." *All Content*. N.p., 11
Nov. 2008. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.

Jeffords, Susan. "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties." *Film Theory
Goes to the Movies* (1993): 196-208.

Kristeva, Julia. "Word, Dialogue and Novel." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New
York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Print.

Porter, James E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review* 5.1
(1986): 34-47.

Tasker, Yvonne. "Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice
in Contemporary Action Cinema." *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinites in
Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hard. London: Routledge,
1993. 230-244. Print.

Tasker, Yvonne. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*. New York:
Routledge, 1993. Print.

Works Consulted

Alexander, Phill, et al. "Teaching with Technology: Remediating the Teaching
Philosophy Statement." *Computers and Composition* 29.1 (2012): 23-38.

Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. Routledge, 2011.

Bolter, Jay David, et al. "New media and the permanent crisis of aura." *Convergence:
The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12.1 (2006):
21-39.

Bolter, Jay David. "Formal Analysis and Cultural Critique in Digital Media Theory."

    *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media*

    *Technologies* 8.4 (2002): 77-88.

--- . "Remediation and the Desire for Immediacy." *Convergence: The International*

    *Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 6.1 (2000): 62-71.

Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. Rutgers

    University Press, 1994.

O'Neill, Shaleph. *Interactive Media: The Semiotics of Embodied Interaction*. Springer

    Science & Business Media, 2008.

VITA

Ian Maxwell Radzinski

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY: THE AGING ACTOR'S SEARCH FOR
RELEVANCY THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY

Major Field: Master of Arts - English

Biographical:

Education: Oklahoma State University

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma
State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2015.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Experience:

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK
Graduate Teaching Instructor, Freshmen Composition I and II
August 2013 – May 2015

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK
Writing Center Tutor
August 2012 – May 2015