

SPECIAL SYMPOSIUM

Masculinity

Introduction to the symposium

Hank Earl and Manu Bazzano

Welcome to this edition of *Self & Society*, where the focus of this theme symposium is on masculinity. Why? You may ask. Haven't we heard enough about men and their concerns for the last few millennia? And aren't binary notions of gender plain *passé* nowadays? Perhaps. But as we are writing this introduction, parts of the British nation and its mainstream media appear to be convulsed in a monumental hissy fit or, to put it more psychologically, an *anima* attack, characteristic of the inner feminine being distorted and exploited in the male psyche. England's (male) footballers are the object of screeching contumely, and the leadership of both major political parties is debated with frequently venomous intensity, despite the renewed calls for a kinder politics in the wake of the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP, a woman who had favoured remaining in the European Union, by a highly disturbed man claiming to be putting Britain first. While this toxicity is not exclusive to men in the verbal/media/social media domains, it is very nearly so when it moves to physical enactment.

There are five articles in this issue looking at the male condition. A pioneer of men's work in the UK, **Nick Duffell** writes on the possibility of defensive masculinity being unlearned in a facilitated group setting, where such patterns can be challenged and men can become a force for positive social change in their communities, and improve the quality of their relationships at home and elsewhere through looking at, among other matters, how we as men regulate our aggression and attitudes towards women. Nick has been leading such groups, under the banner of *Searching for my Father I found my Self*, for the past 16 years.

Niklas Serning and **Nina Lyon** offer an excellent, well-researched piece of writing which covers a captivating range of territory, moving from a brief history of feminism, to the notions of the noble and victimhood, as expounded by Nietzsche, and culminating in a comparison between contemporary websites seeming to embody certain facets of femininity and masculinity, and offering a solution to such 'essentialism'. The way they weave exciting contemporary writing, particularly Spivak, with current internet skirmishes is timely (even better – 'untimely', in the Nietzschean sense) and inspiring.

We loved the title of **Nigel Smaller** and **Linda Finlay's** paper 'Becoming a Pilgrim', as it resonated with our sense of masculine questing. Their research appears to be of real and potential value in addressing men's isolation in training. We thought the inclusion of quotations from the participants to be of particular interest and strength, and to have brought great vividness to their work.

Hank Earl has written about the film *It's a Wonderful Life*, its effect on him, and on how its central character is forced to endure a series of crises and disappointments in what is fundamentally a quest for self-acceptance and the love of one's actual life. This

struggle is viewed with the assistance of a fellow seeker, the Grail knight Parsifal, whose story was illuminated by Jungian psychologist Robert A. Johnson. Alternative responses to the crises, including the resource of support and challenge by a men's group, are imagined.

Manu Bazzano's piece is entitled 'Indoor Man', a tale of the domestication of contemporary Western men and their sexuality initiated with Hefner's *Playboy* magazine and expanded through cyber porn. Drawing from clinical practice and idiosyncratic readings of Nietzsche, Foucault and Preciado, his piece calls for the articulation of a feral philosophy able to navigate a middle path for a masculine identity that finds itself stuck between brutality and docility.

As we write the final words to this piece, the shaking up of the political elite in the UK, post-EU referendum, has been intensified by the devastating outcome of the Sir John Chilcot enquiry into the war in Iraq. Both instances confirm how disastrous the consequences can be when politics are dominated by men in whom the existence of an inner life can at best be assumed and at worst, as in the case of the Chilcot enquiry, presenting us not with the banality but with the mediocrity of evil. Mediocrity in this context may well be the outcome of an inability to own uncertainty and vulnerability, to be subject to the dictates of a notion of masculinity that is outdated, pathetic as well as dangerous.

The reflections assembled here will provide readers with food for thought and suggestions/inspiration on how to move forward.