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American Cinema after 9/11

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Abstract

The terrorist attacks in the United States of September 11, 2001, were unprecedented in the modern era, and they heralded a new era in politics as the Bush Administration pursued rigorous security policies at home and staged military operations in Afghanistan, and subsequently Iraq. Witness testimonies, and newspaper articles in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, revealed that many of those watching coverage of the attacks on television temporarily mistook the reporting for a Hollywood block-buster, an indication that there was some kind of relationship between 9/11 and Hollywood film-making. This thesis contends that films produced in 9/11's wake were influenced by the attacks and the response that followed, particularly as they demonstrate either an endorsement or challenge to the Bush Administration, and thus can be interpreted politically.

This thesis makes specific reference to a number of key issues that demonstrate how Hollywood dealt with 9/11. Firstly, the industry found itself unsure what films were suitable for release in the new context of victimhood; it co-operated with government officials to help in the post-9/11 effort, while many individuals responded to the emergency with fund-raising and other activities. The issue of how Hollywood narrativised the emotional and psychological consequences of the attacks is also addressed with particular focus on how film can act as a memorial.

A key feature of both post-9/11 culture and cinema is a fresh apprehension of the real. In this thesis, the issue of 'the real' is studied in two distinct areas: realist aesthetics in fiction film, and how the choice of a particular realism has a

particular ideological significance; and the growth of the documentary feature film.

If Hollywood's attention to realist aesthetics meets a certain need for facts and knowledge in a period of crisis, then the desire to 'understand' is also addressed by genre's treatment of American myth. In the case of post-9/11, focus on the Western demonstrates how the issues of 'strong' masculinity and 'Otherness' of race, are dealt with by Hollywood. One of the prevailing myths surrounding the official 9/11 story is that the latent heroism of the ordinary American citizen was revealed. Here, post-9/11 heroism is analysed with reference to the numerous films based on comic-books, specifically those featuring superheroes that expose particular psychological phenomena peculiar to post-9/11 America.

Finally, the concept of the global nature of 9/11 with reference to how Hollywood deals with American catastrophe in a global context, how an American event is represented by non-American film-makers, and how global events are represented by non-American film-makers but viewed through the paradigm of 9/11 is discussed.

This thesis, then, studies the political and ideological functions and implications of American film after 9/11 through discourses of 'the real' and key issues of self-censorship, co-operation, victimhood, masculinity, race, repression, trauma, and heroism.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Ross Lynchehaun,

23 April, 2012

Introduction

Initial Reaction to 9/11

Disasters in real life - whether man-made or natural – particularly those occurring in an urban environment causing much chaos and destruction, often appear familiar in the modern age. It is arguable that this is partly due to the prevalence of dramatic visual spectacles that regularly appear on cinema screens. When the hijacked planes crashed into the two towers of the World Trade Centre on the morning of September 11, 2001, many people witnessing the ensuing devastation on television experienced a temporary confusion as they were unsure whether the pictures being broadcast from the South of Manhattan were breaking news or scenes from a fiction film.

Only two days after the attacks, Michiko Kakutani's *New York Times* article made significant connections between various aspects of the '9/11' events and the filmic imagery that they resembled. The article testified early to the difficulty many people were having in accepting the actuality of the events themselves, and the role of Hollywood spectacle in mediating their experience:

[M]any witnesses and television commentators on Tuesday turned to film analogies to describe what they had seen. In a culture...besotted with disaster movies, there was an initial sense of *déjà vu* and disbelief on the part of these spectators - the impulse to see what was happening as one of those digital special effects from the big screen...An air travel consultant on MSNBC said that people looking at the disaster thought they were seeing *Die Hard 2* [Renny Harlin, 1990]...A cameraman on CNN said it was 'like covering a very bad horror movie'.¹

¹ Kakutani, Michiko, 'Critic's Notebook; Struggling to Find Words for a Horror Beyond Words,' *New York Times*, 13/09/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/13/arts/critic-s-notebook-struggling-to-find-words-for-a-horror-beyond-words.html?pagewanted=print>>

Neal Gabler also made reference to the comparison with films: ‘Over and over Tuesday, after the planes tore through the World Trade Center towers and then the Pentagon, benumbed spectators said the same words: “It was like a movie.”’² He also acknowledged that the very spectacle and drama of the attacks – from the destroyed buildings to Bush’s promise of action – were uncomfortably familiar because they seemed akin to an excerpt from a Hollywood blockbuster; more specifically, the White House Press Secretary’s information about threats to the President’s aircraft Air Force One reminded Gabler of the film of the same name.³ In a similar vein, Joyce Wadler’s account foregrounded her experience as a journalist covering what was believed to be a small aircraft crashing into the World Trade Centre, only to discover that the unfolding situation was significantly more serious. On realising that America was under attack she thought: ‘It’s unreal, like being in a movie. I’m like everybody else I know. Reference for air attack? A movie.’⁴ These pseudo screen memories would persist. Lance Efron, years later, recalled his initial feeling when he realised the plane crashes were no accidents: ‘news reports were giving more information about the other incidents at the Pentagon and the crash in Pennsylvania. It felt like the end of the world. It felt like a bad disaster movie.’ Michael Powell’s article on New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s leadership in the immediate aftermath of the attacks even likened the ruins of the World Trade Centre to a film location when

² Gabler, Neal, ‘This Time, The Scene Was Real,’ *New York Times*, 16/09/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/weekinreview/this-time-the-scene-was-real.html?pagewanted=print>>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wadler, Joyce, ‘The Thing About These 9/11 Stories...’ *New York Times*, 11/09/07, <<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/09/11/the-thing-about-these-911-stories/>>

he said: ‘Bulldozers and lights were delivered to ground zero, which was lighted up like a movie set.’⁵

On 23 September, 2001, the *New York Times* printed excerpts from essays written by a group of New York and New Jersey-based children in which they put their feelings about 9/11 into words. The feature included the following testimony by Jessica Falco, a grade 6 student, who said: ‘It didn’t hit me just then...that so many people died. It took a couple of days to reali[s]e that it wasn’t just a movie. It was really happening.’⁶ *MSN News* (Canada) conducted a similar exercise in 2011, contacting a number of Canadians who were children in 2001, to talk about their reactions to watching television reports covering the attacks. Adam Gilani, 10 years old in 2001, said: ‘Seeing the images for the first time, it seemed like it was a movie. It just seemed like it was a trailer for some movie coming out.’⁷ Jameela Pereira, 11 years old at the time, who watched the television coverage in school, articulated her experience in much the same way: ‘It just looked like a movie to me almost...I was like, “What is this? What is this?” And then when it hit me: “This is real, this just happened.” That’s when it got kind of strange.’⁸ Elsewhere, Madison Gray reported in *Time* how a teacher based in the Bronx, Ruver Fuentes, reacted on the morning of 9/11:

Watching television on a break between classes, she did not realize she was looking at a live television broadcast of terrorists attacking the U.S. ‘I thought I had seen a movie. I asked “Why

⁵ Efron, Lance, ‘9/11 ‘felt like a bad disaster movie’,’ *News 24*, 09/09/11, <<http://www.news24.com/MyNews24/YourStory/911-felt-like-a-bad-disaster-movie-20110908>>; Powell, Michael, ‘In 9/11 Chaos, Giuliani Forged a Lasting Image,’ *New York Times*, 21/09/07, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/21/us/politics/21giuliani.html?pagewanted=print?>>

⁶ Steinberg, Jacques, ‘Word for Word/Young Voices; In the Shadow of Tragedy: ‘My World Got Shut Down’,’ *New York Times*, 23/09/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/23/weekinreview/word-for-word-young-voices-in-the-shadow-of-tragedy-my-world-got-shut-down.html?ref=sept112001>>

⁷ La Rose, Lauren, ‘Kids at the time: 9-11 ‘seemed like a movie,’ *MSN*, 4/09/11, <<http://news.ca.msn.com/canada/kids-at-the-time-9-11-seemed-like-a-movie>>

⁸ Ibid.

are they showing such a violent film on television,” but they told me it was real,’ said Fuentes, 61.⁹

Similar emphasis is evident in more academic discourse: in his book on 9/11 and its aftermath, *The Rhetoric of Terror*, Marc Redfield devotes a 7-page section to the phenomenon of 9/11 resembling a film, stressing the widely-shared sense that: ‘what was unfolding on television...seemed akin to a particular cinematic genre: the big-budget disaster movie.’¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek’s commentary likewise invoked the blockbuster, although he specified a particular film: ‘[F]or us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots of the collapsing towers could not but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions,’ comparing this to the ‘real reality’ of post-global war and apocalyptic ruin to which Neo awakens in *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), his previous reality being recognised as nothing more than computer-generated virtuality.¹¹

Having seen an attack on a nation considered omnipotent, appreciating the political significance of the event, and given the widespread recourse to Hollywood film in subsequent eyewitness accounts, I felt that there was significant justification for exploring the ways in which American cinema responded to 9/11, and how 9/11 influenced Hollywood production. A deeper interrogation of this hypothesis revealed factors that might explain why American film is an appropriate medium for analysing the effects of the terror attacks. Firstly, workers in Hollywood, whether fulfilling creative or technical roles, are

⁹ Gray, Madison, ‘At Ground Zero, 9/11 Emotions Find a New Home,’ *Time*, 12/09/06, <<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1534087,00.html>>

¹⁰ Redfield, Marc, *The Rhetoric of Terror – Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 27.

¹¹ Žižek, Slavoj, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 15.

also individual citizens, and what happens to the population as a whole also happens to them. As a sector of cultural production, this agglomeration of writers, directors, agents, actors, financiers, camera operators, among others, were in a unique position to absorb evolving themes, its political and cultural aftermath, and articulate a multitude of diverse responses to express what it meant to be a (recovering) victim. Hollywood also has an established history of responding to crises and challenges facing American society: one could point to the many Science-Fiction films and their allegories of the Communist threat during the Cold War as exemplifying this phenomenon. Hollywood films are effective means by which to narrativise crises, probe and explore possible outcomes, and broadly place the event or events, and the debates surrounding them, in comfortable and recognisable frameworks thereby doing their best to turn unprecedented activity into something more easily accessed and coped with. Film is not the only cultural medium to deal with 9/11, but its prominence in the realm of popular cultural entertainment, the proliferation of Hollywood's products (whether in the form of marketing material or the film itself), the spectacular visual scale of the art-form, and its ability to not only recreate the identifiable appearance of real-life, but exceed it, render it an extremely rich and fascinating mode of expression to study.

Further, as the testimonies above show, references to the particular confusion of fictional representation and the actual event are varied, but, across a range of ages and occupations, the same core experience seems evident: the 'actuality' footage is mistaken, albeit briefly, for cinematic effect. Such confusion, no matter how fleeting, indicates that visual culture, and in this case cinema, has a profound effect on the way individuals mentally process information in their day-to-day lives, especially on the rare occasions when attacks occur. Therefore, as

with any extraordinary event, cinema has a small but significant role in the nascent 9/11 story, a relationship that was to develop over the years as Hollywood articulated and examined through fiction the issues whether emotional, psychological, or social that emerged in 9/11's aftermath. Therefore an argument is that representation of an historical event itself is a primary concern in the post-9/11 era: film, or more precisely the scale of filmic images, was the first mental 'port-of-call' for many as they tried to process what they were seeing on television (as it is for many disasters), and in turn film translated the ensuing fears, hopes, as well as security, political, and psychological issues into cultural artefacts that illustrated these phenomena.

More specifically however, my concern in this thesis is that through studying the way film treats issues of co-operation, conflict, emotion and heroism that surround 9/11, and through both analysis of discourses of 'the real' and examinations of genre (in particular two types of genre films), the political and ideological function of American cinema post-9/11 can be construed. In this thesis, cinema's articulations of trauma and victimhood are discussed, along with consideration of mythology, representations of heroism, and the global implications of 9/11 and Hollywood's global presence, in terms of their ideological purpose.

Scholarly Inscription of 9/11

September 11 remains a seminal moment in modern American history, and has been the subject of much reflection and study, and approached from the vantage points of many separate disciplines. What is noticeable from the accounts that

emerged after 9/11 across this range, however, is a basic ideological divide between conservative and liberal perspectives. Jon Wiener's 2005 article in *The Nation* recognised this division early in terms of the role of education:

9/11 is history – but how is it being taught to students in history courses? George Bush and other conservatives maintain that the attacks were acts of evil; liberals, while they condemn the attacks, see them as having a social and political context that we need to understand. These differences are reflected in the debate over the text books written in the past three years.¹²

As Wiener suggests, Bush's defiant tone in the aftermath of the attacks exemplified the conservative attitude towards 9/11. In this view, America was perceived to be at the vanguard of a global struggle against terrorism, a confrontation defined as the fight between good and evil, in which all nations had to pick a side. The President articulated this position robustly in an address to a joint session of Congress nine days after the attacks: "[W]e will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."¹³ In the same speech, Bush explained that the reason the terrorists had targeted the United States was because they hated the American way of life, its freedoms and its democracy. In contrast, commentators such as Judith Butler, from a less belligerent perspective, viewed the post-attack period as an opportunity for America to construct more positive relations with the rest of the world, building on the world-wide goodwill towards America, and the show of unity and

¹² Wiener, Jon, 'Teaching 9/11,' *The Nation*, 08/09/05,
<<http://www.thenation.com/print/article/teaching-911>>

¹³ Bush, George W., 'Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,' 20/09/01,
<<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>>

selflessness that permeated the nation, in the wake of 9/11.¹⁴ Far from being written into history in a homologous way, a clear conflict between a variety of ideological positions emerges, illustrated at an early stage in the way people like Bush or Butler understand and seek to explain 9/11.

A noticeable feature that emerges from study of material written about 9/11 is the wide variety of collections of essays that view 9/11 through the lens of a particular base of expertise, such as foreign policy, or architecture for instance. The perspectives on offer attest to the desire to isolate and secure meaning amidst the devastation, whether the material works to reinforce the Bush Administration's policy direction, or to quickly contest and offer some kind of resistance to the government, or perhaps to simply make sense of the world again and restore a semblance of order. James F. Hoge Jr. and Gideon Rose, for example, editors of *Foreign Affairs* journal, edited *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War*, which features essays that seek to explain the events through political analysis; *After the World Trade Center – Rethinking New York City* contains a number of analyses of 9/11 through architecture, urban planning and design; *Trauma at Home - After 9/11* does much the same, but through the field of psychology and related questions of memory.¹⁵

Many of these essays refer to Hollywood films to support their arguments, an acknowledgement both of cinema's prominence in society, and its ability to recreate exaggerated but identifiable spectacles that illustrate contemporary issues. Film Studies' contribution to 9/11 scholarship is thus vibrant and expanding. An

¹⁴ Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life - The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 40.

¹⁵ Hoge Jr., James F., and Rose, Gideon, *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War* (Oxford: Public Affairs Ltd, 2001); Sorkin, Michael and Zukin, Sharon (eds), *After the World Trade Center – Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Greenberg, *ibid.*

early example is a collection of twelve essays edited by Wheeler Winston Dixon entitled *Film and Television After 9/11* that was published in 2004, though it includes some essays written in 2001.¹⁶ The topics covered in the volume range from examinations of depictions of urban architecture and space in film, to analyses of film from a historical perspective that incorporate attention to the Holocaust, for example, or the Second World War, to discussions of depictions of more recent terrorism in film. The focus of the collection is not restricted to cinema, though, as there is an essay on the television series *24*, and one on *The West Wing*. However, given the date of the collection's publishing, its scope allows analysis of a limited range of films and television, which the present thesis seeks to expand and develop.

My study also sits alongside recent monographs by Douglas Kellner and Stephen Prince, *Cinema Wars* and *Firestorm*, respectively.¹⁷ Kellner focuses on American film during the two Bush terms, and foregrounds the political implications of film, arguing that media culture was a politically contested terrain during that period, with reference to five topics that constitute the basis of his book's chapters: first, Kellner provides an overview of the apocalyptic visions of Bush-era America, conceptualised around the idea of ecological crisis; second, the terrorist attacks are discussed with reference to representations of that day's events in particular, and terrorism in general, and how different films present opposing ideological interpretations thereof; third, Kellner acknowledges the significance of the regeneration of the documentary film by concentrating on the

¹⁶ Dixon, Wheeler Winston (ed), *Film and Television After 9/11* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Kellner, Douglas, *Cinema Wars – Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010); Prince, Stephen, *Firestorm – American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

work of Michael Moore; the author then analyses the way Hollywood fiction engages politically with the Bush Administration; and, finally, raises the issue of military intervention in the Middle East, by identifying conflicting ideological readings of war in documentaries, and also at depictions of war and its aftermath in fiction film.

Firestorm shares Kellner's wide scope, incorporating studies of Hollywood's response to the attacks and looking specifically at Steven Spielberg's post-9/11 output, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006) and Paul Greengrass' *United 93* (2006), before discussing Hollywood's preference for familiar narrative formulas; it also considers independent film, documentaries, war films set in Iraq, and television drama, as well as introducing a section on 'conspiracy' pictures. Prince's study differs most markedly from Kellner's perhaps in its first chapter, where the author constructs a longer back-story for American films that depict terrorist activity (the concept is back-dated to 1935), the purpose of which is to provide a means to understanding how, and from which point, American cinema developed after 9/11.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, this study shares certain perspectives with the aforementioned books by Kellner and Prince. However, certain differences of approach do emerge. Kellner's scope is wide, offering a broad critique of Bush's conservatism through a variety of films, thereby sacrificing depth for breadth. The same could be said in comparison with *Firestorm*, though Prince's book is less politically invective than *Cinema Wars*. My study, in contrast, combines a wide scope with in-depth analysis via the principle of the 'case study;' it provides analyses with a

¹⁸ Prince, *ibid.*, p. 18.

sharper focus on particular film genres, to show how familiar narratives and conventions are altered in light of 9/11.

There are also a number of certain areas that distinguish my study from its antecedents, namely my primary focus on Hollywood cinema, the specific films I consider to be pertinent to an illustration of the 9/11-era, and the historicisation of this temporal phase as an era. The majority of the films studied in this thesis were produced in Hollywood, though significant attention is paid to other types of film that do not necessarily fall into this category, but are distributed through Hollywood channels. I investigate how the industry responded to 9/11: how the effects of the event rippled outwards from the studios, eventually highlighting its global presence. I also consider the ways 9/11 influenced the commodities Hollywood produced to be marketed, sold, and consumed, not just how these products were received, or how 9/11 itself was represented on the big screen (which concerns both Kellner and Prince).

The range of films to which this thesis refers differs from those studied by Kellner and Prince, thus permitting scope for wider analyses and revealing more about the post-9/11 cinema. A number of films ignored by Kellner and Prince are here considered as key filmic texts through which a deeper understanding of 9/11's influence on Hollywood can be reached. Examples include *Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009), *Hulk* (Ang Lee, 2003), and *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009). Additionally, I focus on foreign productions that nevertheless comment on American experiences, events or interests (*Man on Wire* (James Marsh, 2008), *Land of Plenty* (Wim Wenders, 2004), and *11'09''01: September 11* (various, 2002), films that Prince explicitly excludes in order to concentrate on domestic output, which I believe to be a misguided omission) and American films that

indicate their place in a global experience through terrorism. Further, by glossing over the brief resurgence of the Western through the ‘noughties,’ both Prince and Kellner preclude the discussion of the significance of Western mythology as one of the ways that Hollywood, through a re-working of genre, responds to crisis. The comic-book genre, too, represents an important body of films through which to apprehend the psychological gravity of 9/11, but is not studied in this way by either Kellner or Prince, an omission which this thesis works to rectify. Clearly, *World Trade Center* and *United 93* are central to any study of post-9/11 cinema, however here they are viewed in a different light than in *Cinema Wars* and *Firestorm*: the films are used in this thesis both to demonstrate cinema’s specific role in the healing process after 9/11, and to offer models of realism that can be argued to indicate a particular ideological stance. This thesis also argues for the inclusion of a number of previously sidelined films (a decision perhaps due to previous studies’ authors not deeming a film to be worthy of academic assessment, or the film being released after a study’s publishing) as part of a group that ought to be considered major cultural texts in the post-9/11 era. Therefore, this thesis states a case for a significantly different body of films to be centred within a post-9/11 canon.

Re-organisation of the canon is also argued on historical grounds. The studies by Kellner and Prince foreground 9/11 as an event that occurred in a particular period: Kellner posits 9/11 as defining what he calls the ‘Bush-Cheney administration,’ leading him to conclude that film during this period anticipated Barack Obama’s election, so that his temporal parameters are 2000 and 2008.¹⁹ Prince contextualizes 9/11, and the cinematic response to it, within the issue of

¹⁹ Kellner, *ibid.*, pp. 35 – 37.

terrorism, and though he, too, acknowledges that Obama's election represents a cultural progression, he argues that 'we cannot get out of the age of terror,' and, as his final chapter's title suggests, there is 'no end in sight.'²⁰ In contrast, my thesis' periodisation and argument is that a new era began when the terrorists crashed their planes into the World Trade Centre, and was transformed into another one when the extent of the recent financial crises became apparent, one simultaneously defined by the new financial realities.

Thesis Structure

My principal concern lies with responses to 9/11 as represented through film. Aware of a need to concentrate my analysis, I focus exclusively on film after 9/11 rather than screen culture at its broadest, so television programmes are excluded; I also concentrate almost entirely on American film, mostly produced in Hollywood. It is worth underlining that what constitutes 'American film' for this study demarcates a broad field that includes films that are co-produced with other countries, or in which America or its interests are explicitly portrayed. It is also worth mentioning that there is no extensive attention to films set in Iraq, or that deal with conventional warfare; indeed, there are a number of genres, such as historical epics, and horror films that have been excluded for various reasons that include a lack of source material from which to study, and a desire to avoid repetition of existing work. Nor is there any analysis or discussion of events leading up to 9/11, or what exactly happened on that day; rather, it is accepted that

²⁰ Prince, *ibid.*, p. 308.

the event occurred, and what is of primary significance to this thesis is how the event was felt and re-expressed in cinema.

For most of my chapters I construct a conceptual framework, drawing a variety of theorists which inform the interpretations and analyses I make of selected films: these frameworks nominally feature cultural and political theories exemplified by Jean Baudrillard, Judith Butler, Michel de Certeau, Umberto Eco, Susan Faludi and Slavoj Žižek; aesthetic theories (of film, literature, theatre, and comic-books) developed by André Bazin, Colin MacCabe, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, and Scott McCloud; and the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud, amongst others. I consider that for my thesis' purposes, concentrating on one type of theoretical model would lead to narrower readings and understanding of films' significance. Utilising these theories my explorations are performed with reference to the context of American society after 9/11, particularly with respect to the ideological conflict between conservative and liberal positions, described above. Additionally, a wide variety of sources other than the films themselves, including critical and historical publications of many kinds, have been drawn on to support these arguments: *Variety* has proved an indispensable source for industry information and as a repository of film reviews, while I consulted many newspaper and journal articles, *The New York Times*, and *Time* magazine, for example, for political and cultural news during the years following September 11.

In general terms, then, the thesis starts with the event itself, and addresses the context of post-9/11 film production by focusing on the impact of the terrorist attacks on the American movie industry. In the immediate aftermath, the response from actors *et al.* was to offer assistance in whatever way possible, and after the dust had settled, meetings were arranged at executive levels to focus on areas in

which the film industry could assist the government in its new ‘war on terror.’ Contact with government organisations was extended to the military: film makers were employed to devise fictional scenarios to assist soldiers’ emotional training in advance of combat. The emotive power of film was also exemplified by the industry’s decision not to release or to re-schedule films thought to be too traumatic for release in the wake of the attacks.

After this initial chapter there follows an analysis of different ways September 11 is explicitly referenced in a small number of Hollywood films and can be analysed in different ways: by the memorialising function film provides in depicting the events of that day, for instance; by the way in which films’ treatment of post-attack emotional pain experienced by New Yorkers develops over a period of time, hinting at a degree of healing having taken place; and by the way political issues that emerged after 2001 in direct response to 9/11 are engaged, especially looking at the way they seem to suggest either an ideological challenge to the Bush administration or support its positions. Thus, the issues of fictional depictions of emotional, psychological, and political responses to such a catastrophic event are dealt with at this stage.

Claims that 9/11 represented an ‘end of irony’ in American life and culture, coupled with the manner in which post-9/11 issues and the day itself featured prominently in cultural narratives of whatever mode or medium, suggest that this newfound sense of ‘the real’ should be analysed with reference to realist aesthetics. Chapters three and four of this thesis address the issue of ‘the real’ in terms of fiction and documentary respectively. Chapter three identifies three main styles of Realism in the fiction film: photographic realism, political realism, and ‘documentary’ realism in fiction film, and with reference to appropriate

theoretical frameworks, the treatment of narrative subjects by these particular aesthetic strategies are examined as they provide a means to assess which end of the ideological spectrum is in the ascendancy in a particular film, and if a strand of realism can be related to a particular ideology.

The fourth chapter charts the rejuvenation of the documentary feature, seen as another aspect of the new commitment to expressing the real in post-9/11 films. The range of documentaries made in the last decade is ranges from investigations of Bush Administration policies, to discussions of environmental issues. This chapter explains the resurgence of the documentary in relation to several contributory factors. In the wake of 9/11, the most salient include a hunger to make a connection with a solid, reliable basis of information, a need proving as much a source of inspiration for non-fiction film makers as for fiction films' styles. The issue of realist aesthetics, therefore, introduces a concern that chapter three and four both examine with respect to fiction and non-fiction films.

While realist depictions of 9/11 might seem the most noteworthy due to their representation and instant comparability to the events of the day itself, it is also true that the needs of a culture, particularly in the wake of unprecedented destruction, might not be completely met nor satisfied by one type of aesthetic paradigm. In response to this idea an exploration of the conventions of certain genre films reveal much about the psychological state of both film industry and movie-going population, and also political implications on the culture at large of how these films treat the inherent post-9/11 issues. In particular, Westerns traditionally have 'worked out' difficult issues at times of crises in American history and offer divergent mythological and ideological perspectives on those issues. Due to a decline in number of Westerns in production, the fact that there

were any produced at all in the years after 2001, and the way they portray themes that commentators have highlighted as being pertinent to the post-9/11 cultural landscape (namely masculinity, racism, and the demarcation between ‘hero’ and ‘outlaw’ or ‘villain’), requires academic attention.

Conspicuous by their presence, and illustrating the psychology of heroism, films based on comic-books have, like the documentary feature, experienced remarkable ascendancy since 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, superhero characters were depicted in comics as being weak and unable to prevent the destruction, though Hollywood ‘rehabilitated’ them and ultimately, the films that followed provide rich sources for analysing the effects of the attacks. In superhero films, every character experiences an incident of intense personal trauma, which is repressed until a latent power is revealed and can be channeled for the benefit of humanity. Taking this emphasis as a cue, the issue of repression is discussed with particular reference to feelings of helplessness experienced by those who wanted to volunteer at Ground Zero when faced with insurmountable destruction. Superhero films are seen to refer to incidents of repressed trauma before their leads ‘save the day’ through their super powers. From this perspective, the superheroes ‘fulfilled’ the aspirations of post-9/11 America, if only by proxy and fictitiously. Thus the key post-9/11 theme of heroism is addressed, as it returns super-power from the superhero to the citizen.

Lastly, chapter seven describes how the attacks, and the policies that the Bush Administration pursued thereafter, had ramifications for the world outside America. To this end, the chapter explores the issue of 9/11 as a global event through cinema in three ways: first, American perspectives on global politics and conflict are discussed; second, other nations’ perspectives on America and the

post-9/11 climate are analysed, and finally, global connection are studied for the way they can illustrate how 9/11 was experienced by non-Americans, whether inside or outside America, in their own filmmaking. It is argued here that these films facilitate more detached observations which lend themselves to more critical positions whilst using imagery and themes associated with 9/11 as a means to articulate their own history. In this way, this chapter engages with the issue of 9/11 as a global event, and with Hollywood's influential position as global culture industry.

The trajectory of the thesis begins and ends therefore with observations about Hollywood as an industry, albeit from different viewpoints, whilst addressing issues surrounding realism and genre pertinent to 9/11. Thus, this thesis offers a comprehensive account of Hollywood's reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11th; and the films analysed suggest areas of importance to the study of the industry's response.

Chapter 1: 9/11 and Industrial Hollywood

Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, the American entertainment industry, along with the rest of the country, was in mourning.²¹ In keeping with the nationwide desire to ‘help,’ Hollywood endeavoured to assist in any way possible. The depth of this feeling was so profound that, for the time being at least, political differences seemed an irrelevance compared to the perceived need for the nation to pull together, leading Rick Lyman in *The New York Times* to declare a suspension of the ‘culture wars.’²² Lyman stated:

One of the curious and possibly short-lived consequences of the terrorist attacks of Sept[ember] 11 has been an apparent cease-fire in the cultural skirmishing that had previously pitted right against left and Washington against Hollywood in a struggle over one of the country's most lucrative and influential global industries.²³

Despite acknowledging that there remained a degree of suspicion, and that the ‘truce’ was a product of uncertainty in Hollywood as to how to respond to the attacks, Lyman also noted how Reverend Jerry Falwell had been criticised by liberals and conservatives alike for his theory that 9/11 was God’s punishment of

²¹ ‘Entertainment industry mourns,’ *Screen International*, September 14 – 20, 2001, Number 1324, pp. 1 and 24.

²² Lyman, Rick, ‘At Least for the Moment, a Cooling Off in the Culture Wars,’ *The New York Times*, 13/11/01,
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E00E4D61338F930A25752C1A9679C8B63&n=To p/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/R/Rove,%20Karl>>

²³ Ibid.

a morally debauched society.²⁴ Nevertheless, more recently Douglas Kellner's study of Bush-era cinema, *Cinema Wars*, has demonstrated how temporary this 'cease-fire' was; he argues that for the duration of Bush's tenure in the White House Hollywood consistently engaged with, and dramatised, the political issues of the day, and was unafraid to challenge Bush's direction. Hollywood film, Kellner says, was, in fact, a politically contested terrain.²⁵

A seminar chaired in 2005 by the Los Angeles-based Norman Lear Center, in which various commentators were invited to discuss the relationship between cinema and politics – and in particular the outcome of the 2004 presidential election – exemplifies the dynamics of contemporary political conviction in the film industry.²⁶ The panel considered how *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004) and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) impacted on the electorate: Gibson's film they noted, for example, had inspired conservatives to participate in Bush's campaign. In the discussion it was remarked by the Center's director, Martin Kaplan, that there was a fallacy in the media's conclusion, one based on a retrospective (and, thus, prejudiced) analysis: though both films had exceeded expectations at the box-office the media believed that Moore's film had damaged Senator Kerry's campaign simply because he had lost the election and, thus, that celebrity endorsement had been a 'disaster for the Left.' Irrespective of this conclusion, the very subject of this discussion highlights the prominent role the film industry plays in election cycles, especially considering the number of unions and politically-engaged individuals and groups active in Hollywood, and that

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kellner, Douglas, *Cinema Wars – Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), p. 2.

²⁶ The Norman Lear Center, 'Sketches in Celebrity Advocacy: The Passion of the Christ Meets Fahrenheit 9/11,' 11/03/05, <http://www.learcenter.org/images/event_uploads/GoodnightNotes.pdf>, p. 5.

politicians can count on millions of dollars from these groups as well as from an array of rich benefactors and donors.²⁷

The title of the Norman Lear Center's debate mentioned above, 'Sketches in Celebrity Advocacy,' inadvertently echoes the tenor of the immediate post-9/11 climate and the spirit of co-operation that had developed between Hollywood and Washington. Bryce Zabel, writer and CEO of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (ATAS), acknowledged this very climate, emphasising the entertainment industry's desire to perform a high-profile role in communicating America's post-attack position and sentiments. In November 2001, following a meeting held in the Beverly Peninsula Hotel, Los Angeles, between White House officials and Hollywood executives to discuss a mutual commitment to co-operate in the nascent War on Terror, Zabel said: 'What we are excited about is neither propaganda nor censorship...The word I like is advocacy. We are willing to volunteer to become advocates for the American message.'²⁸ After examining Zabel's comments, it is interesting to note, however, that the controversial concepts of 'propaganda,' and 'censorship' are mentioned, casting a shadow over this peculiar union.

Considering the optimistic pronouncement of the cessation of 'cultural wars,' and regardless of how temporary cordial relations between Hollywood and Washington, or Democrat and Republican, actually were, the very fact that these forces synchronised demands further investigation. With this cultural context in mind, this chapter focuses on the points of contact between Hollywood and the

²⁷ Alterman, Eric, 'The Hollywood Campaign,' *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200409/alterman>>

²⁸ Cooper, Marc, 'Lights! Cameras! Attack! Hollywood Enlists,' *The Nation*, 10/12/01, <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011210/cooper>>

government, with particular emphasis on the film industry's initial reaction to 9/11, and subsequent co-operation with Washington and, later, with the military.

9/11's Immediate Impact on Hollywood

On September 11 itself, as news of the attacks and subsequent destruction spread, film production in the United States temporarily ceased, and cinema chains such as AMC Theatres, Loews Cineplex Entertainment, and Regal Cinemas closed for the day as a mark of respect, while, according to *Screen International*, at least one theatre kept its doors open to offer accommodation to stricken New Yorkers:

In Los Angeles, Hollywood ground to a near standstill. Universal, Fox, Sony, Paramount, MGM, DreamWorks and Warner Bros. all shut down on Tuesday...United Artists' Union Square cinema in Manhattan was used as a safe haven in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks.²⁹

Further afield, the Emmy awards show was re-scheduled, and scheduled events at the Toronto International Film Festival, taking place at the time, were cancelled amidst confusion with participants preferring to consult television news bulletins and ensure loved-ones' safety. Both Disney theme parks in Florida and Los Angeles were closed, with an incongruous military presence observed at Walt Disney World.³⁰ FBI warnings about possible terrorist attacks on Hollywood studios resulted in heightened security measures at Sony, Fox, Universal, and

²⁹ 'Entertainment industry mourns,' *Screen International*, September 14 – 20, 2001, Number 1324, p. 24.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.1 and 24; Hill, Jim, 'What Was It Like at Walt Disney World on 9/11,' 07/09/11, *The Huffington Post*, < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-hill/what-was-it-like-at-walt-b_952645.html>

Disney's respective premises that included thorough car and bag checks, while visitor routes within the complexes were restricted.³¹

Hollywood actors also made efforts to get involved with post-9/11 activity, with Kathleen Turner volunteering to assist the wounded, and Maria Bello accompanying her mother, a nurse, to St Vincent's hospital.³² George Clooney helped to organise a telethon to raise money for 9/11 victims, motivated by a Hollywood-wide sense of frustration and helplessness.³³ His efforts extended to making calls to Jeffrey Katzenberg (co-founder of DreamWorks) for instance, to recruit others required to produce the show, and sleeping two nights in the telethon studio as he worked around the clock to help build the set and write cue cards.³⁴ The telethon, entitled 'America: A Tribute to Heroes,' aired on Friday, September 21 on over 27 television channels without commercial breaks and, as of October 5, had raised over \$200m.³⁵ Celebrities performing or manning the telephones included Tom Cruise, Cameron Diaz, Clint Eastwood, Whoopi Goldberg, Tom Hanks, Salma Hayek, Jack Nicholson, Al Pacino, Sarah Jessica Parker, Brad Pitt, Kurt Russell, Meg Ryan, Will Smith, and Sylvester Stallone, with many film stars making multi-million dollar donations such as Jim Carrey and Julia Roberts' respective pledges of \$1m and \$2m.³⁶

³¹ McNary, Dave, 'High Anxiety – H'wood remains in grip of terror trauma,' *Variety*, 25/09/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117853166>>; Variety Staff, 'Shell-shocked showbiz – Fearful of the future, players start rebuilding process,' *Variety*, 16/09/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117852720>>

³² Rich, B. Ruby, 'Out of the Rubble,' *Sight and Sound*, Volume 16, Issue 10, October 2006, p. 18; Ross, Matthew M., 'Showbiz rolls up its sleeves,' 27/09/01, *Variety*, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117853287.html?categoryid=1354&cs=1>>

³³ Brill, Steven, *After – How America Confronted the September 12 Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), pp. 58 – 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Brill, *ibid.*; 'TV networks, radio stations unite to air telethon for victims,' 20/09/01, *CNN*, <http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-20/entertainment/rec.celeb.telethon_1_television-networks-radio-

Elsewhere, Steve Buscemi and Denis Leary's voluntary efforts were motivated by memory of their former occupations: both had been firefighters before pursuing careers in entertainment. After the attacks, Buscemi put on his old uniform and joined his former company, NYFD Company 55, at Ground Zero to help clear the area and search for survivors, while Leary set-up the Leary Firefighters Foundation to provide funds for the bereaved families of lost firemen.³⁷ Daniel Day Lewis, then residing in Manhattan, was reported to have donated blood immediately after the attacks, while Tim Robbins drove across the country from Los Angeles to New York on September 12, and turned up at the Javits Convention Center to help out in its kitchen.³⁸ The importance of providing sustenance to beleaguered New Yorkers is likewise evident in Robert De Niro and Jane Rosenthal's actions. As Matthew M. Ross reported in *Variety*:

The duo, whose offices are a stone's throw from some of [New York]'s top eateries, rented a pair of 500-seat cruise ships (dubbed 'The Spirit of New York I and II') and treated exhausted rescue workers to hot meals from Manhattan's top chefs, including Don Pintabona (TriBeCa Grill), Daniel Boulud (Daniel), Jean-George Vongerichten (Jean-Georges, Vong) and others.³⁹

While these anecdotes exemplify a spirit of selflessness in the face of adversity, another side to victimhood was demonstrated by James Woods' experience. In contrast to Bello and Clooney *et al.*, Woods' measure was security-conscious: on September 12, 2001, Woods alerted the FBI to a group of four men he thought to be of Middle Eastern origin that had travelled in first class alongside him on a

[stations-broadcastthe?_s=PM:SHOWBIZ](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1562007.stm)>; 'All-star telethon raises \$150m,' 25/09/01, *BBC*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1562007.stm>>

³⁷ Ross, *ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

flight from Boston to Los Angeles in the weeks preceding 9/11. Suspicious of their behaviour, he became unsettled by the way they neither ate nor drank anything during the flight; neither did they read or sleep, only sitting erect in their seats, staring directly ahead, and only communicating with themselves and at a low volume.⁴⁰

Although Woods' post-attack recourse to the FBI might be described as the index of a terrified and besieged national mood, or perhaps even personal paranoia, he was nevertheless acting within a context of extreme national sensitivity and fear. *ABC News'* reporting of this incident underlined the seriousness of Woods' experience, its interpretation being that the flight was a practice manoeuvre for the 9/11 terrorists, saying: 'The flight now appears to have been a dry run for the Sept[ember] 11 terrorist attacks.'⁴¹

The debate surrounding the film industry's most appropriate role, and attitude towards audience sensitivity, seems to have emerged almost as soon after the attacks as Woods' contact with the FBI. For example, the September 21 issue of *Screen International* carried two articles which despite their different emphases, nevertheless seem to crystallise the debate surrounding over the mood of the audience, at this early stage. As Mike Goodridge reported, Americans were expressing an aversion to violent films: this ultimately resulted in the release date of *Collateral Damage* (Andrew Davis, 2002) being postponed, along with other films with violent or terrorist-themed content such as Paramount's *The Sum of All Fears* (Phil Alden Robinson, 2002). According to Goodridge, the re-schedulings

⁴⁰ 'Suspicious Behaviour,' *Screen International*, September 28 – October 4, 2001, Number 1326, p. 24; 'James Woods Reported Suspicious Passengers to FBI,' 19/09/01, *ABC News*, <<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/story?id=102411&page=1>>

⁴¹ 'James Woods Reported Suspicious Passengers to FBI,' *ibid*.

could not be accounted for by low attendance at cinemas, since box office takings were 44% more than at the same time in 2000. Indeed, it was non-violent movies like *Hardball* (Brian Robbins, 2001), a film about little-league baseball, that were the most popular films of that period as audiences apparently sought a non-harrowing escape from a bleak reality.⁴²

On the other hand, the position of Goodridge's editor, Colin Brown, was discernibly more robust, if more emotive, arguing that artists' responsibility was to engage with subjects that may seem horrific and to avoid 'cardboard cut-out' characters in order to communicate the experiences of others across the globe, suggesting that:

[T]hose that saw in the very existence of films like *Collateral Damage* yet further proof of humanity's moral depravity could not have been further off the mark: it has always been one of the functions of arts and entertainment...to ponder the worst. Indeed, without Dante's *Inferno* or *Independence Day* [Roland Emmerich, 1996], what frames of reference would so many of us have to express what we witnessed on September 11th?...Just as the horrors of real life can fuel the artistic imagination with even more terrible visions, so art can also provide potent images that can help restore our faith and regard for others.⁴³

Brown anticipated the production of films like *World Trade Center*, *United 93* and *Reign Over Me* (Mike Binder, 2007), as well as the television movies *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis* (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 2003) and *Rudy: The Rudy Giuliani Story* (Robert Dornhelm, 2003) by arguing that part of Hollywood's challenge was to transcend the 'taboo' and depict the various events of 9/11, placing them in

⁴² Goodridge, Mike, 'Real life casts pall over entertainment industry,' *Screen International*, September 21 – 27, 2001, Number 1325, p. 1.

⁴³ Brown, Colin, 'A shared responsibility,' *Screen International*, September 21 – 27, 2001, Number 1325, p. 8.

a meaningful and usable narrative context.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, his implicit suggestion was that Hollywood need not refrain from portraying violent images necessarily, but rather that this should be done in a meaningful and respectful way that ‘touch[es] our collective humanity.’⁴⁵

Elsewhere, the devastation visited upon New York inspired other individuals involved in film to strengthen the connection between cinema and the American community. In direct response to the attacks Robert De Niro, Jane Rosenthal and Craig Hatkoff of the Tribeca Film Centre, made an attempt to assist their local area by forming the Tribeca Film Institute and Tribeca Film Festival in 2002, with a mandate to stimulate the cultural and economic development of New York City and to provide an audience for local filmmakers. Direct links with 9/11 are articulated with the belief that experiences stemming from that day could find resolution in art and narrative:

By upholding a belief in the artistic process as a means to tell the stories of loss and redemption, fear and prosperity, chaos and revolution with the spirit of independent film at the helm, the Tribeca Film Festival has succeeded in re-writing the story of Lower Manhattan. Since the inaugural festival, Lower Manhattan, once covered in rubble and shrouded in loss, has become a thriving cultural and economic center.⁴⁶

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the desire to ‘help,’ be respectful and ‘pay tribute’ permeated the film industry- individuals and organisations alike- whether by using their celebrity or creative talent to raise funds or give freely of their time or premises, many showed the film industry’s willingness to act as a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ From Tribeca Film Festival website, re-posted at
<http://nyclovesnyc.blogspot.co.uk/2007_04_01_archive.html>

positive force by helping construct or foster a spirit of unity. The high profile of Hollywood stars, and the perception of the immediate post-9/11 relief effort being a noble cause no doubt assisted their mission, while focusing much publicity on their activities, perhaps overshadowing the relief efforts of those not associated with the film industry. However, Goodridge and Brown's observations demonstrate that film content was also an issue, both in terms of aversion to violence and the perception of film's effectiveness and ability to promote understanding and humanitarianism, and a concern that was occupying Hollywood at the same time as its 'public face' was responding to the devastation of the attacks by 'helping.'

Film Content and Schedules in the Wake of the Attacks

Approaches towards the marketing of films are fundamentally characterised by careful anticipation of what is likely to appeal enough to prospective audiences to translate into huge box-office receipts. To this end, the industry spends millions of dollars to raise the profile of films, from trailers to merchandise and tie-in deals with other companies, in order to attract as many people as possible to its products. Test screenings provide producers and financiers with an opportunity to analyse how audiences might react to certain edits of films, taking advantage of comments and perceptions to lessen any risk and maximise potential appeal. All these marketing techniques, however, are rendered insignificant if an event occurs, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, that inhibits the ability of a film to attract any customers.

This was the fate of *The Quiet American* (Phillip Noyce, 2002), which was tested by Miramax on September 10, 2001, to moderate, but positive, approval, then shelved days afterwards due to Miramax's nervousness about its suitability in a climate of national tragedy. An adaptation of Graham Greene's novel about an American CIA agent Alden Pyle (Brendan Fraser) pursuing American interests in South-East Asia, *The Quiet American* depicts the agent as trying to create an American 'third force' in the region that will replace both local Communists and the ruling French colonialists. To this end recruits a local corrupt militant group, and arms them; their subsequent terrorist attack, in which many innocent people are killed, is blamed on the Communists to draw America into the region as a major player. Such violent meddling is thus not a sympathetic portrayal of America and Americans. Miramax waited for a number of weeks and retested the film, but some audience members' complaints were overheard suggesting resentment at a film 'taking a swipe at America.'⁴⁷ Miramax head Harvey Weinstein subsequently refused to release the film, saying it would be unpatriotic to show it at a time when few Americans had the 'stomach for a movie about bad Americans anymore.'⁴⁸ It required the combination of strenuous promotional work by Michael Caine, his threat to never work with the Weinsteins again, and the possibility of an Academy Award for his performance to persuade Miramax to release the film.⁴⁹ Even then Miramax allegedly fulfilled contractual obligations on the film's release and no more, neither giving *The Quiet American* much in the way of promotional support, nor extending its theatrical run in spite of the promise of formal recognition by prestigious honours. In December 2002, *The*

⁴⁷ Biskind, Peter, *Down and Dirty Pictures – Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), p. 463.

⁴⁸ Wiener, Jon, 'Quiet in Hollywood,' *The Nation*, 16/12/02, <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20021216/wiener>>

⁴⁹ Biskind, *ibid.*

Quiet American was shown for only two weeks in a select few cinemas, in only two cities: New York and Los Angeles.⁵⁰ This is a clear illustration of the speedy recourse to self-censorship when the film industry becomes apprehensive.

The Quiet American is by no means an isolated case of industry nervousness about content. Indeed, a plethora of films were affected in similar ways, due to their depictions of the World Trade Centre, terrorists or violence. As has been noted above, almost as soon as the attacks took place, a question mark appeared over the viability of a release for *Collateral Damage*. In the film Arnold Schwarzenegger plays a fireman seeking revenge for the death of his wife and child, killed by Colombian terrorists in Los Angeles. The depiction of amoral CIA agents in Colombia, and the implication of American-backed intimidation and violence provoking the South Americans, as well as the depiction of a government building in Washington being targeted by terrorists' bombs, caused the postponing of the film: Warner Bros. decided that the film would not be released on October 5, 2001 as planned.⁵¹

Elsewhere, Sony forced images of the World Trade Centre in *Spider Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002) – visible on posters and in its trailer – to be excised with the computer game of the film made subject to editing for the same reason.⁵²

⁵⁰ Wiener, *ibid.*

⁵¹ Jensen, Jeff and Svetkey, Benjamin, 'Script Check – In the wake of terrorism, execs scramble to rework their film schedules,' *Entertainment Weekly*, 21/09/01, <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,175677,00.html>>

⁵² Jensen, *ibid.*; Grover, Ronald, 'Hooray for Hollywood – at Least for Now,' *Business Week*, 21/09/01, <http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/sep2001/nf20010921_2642.htm?chan=search>

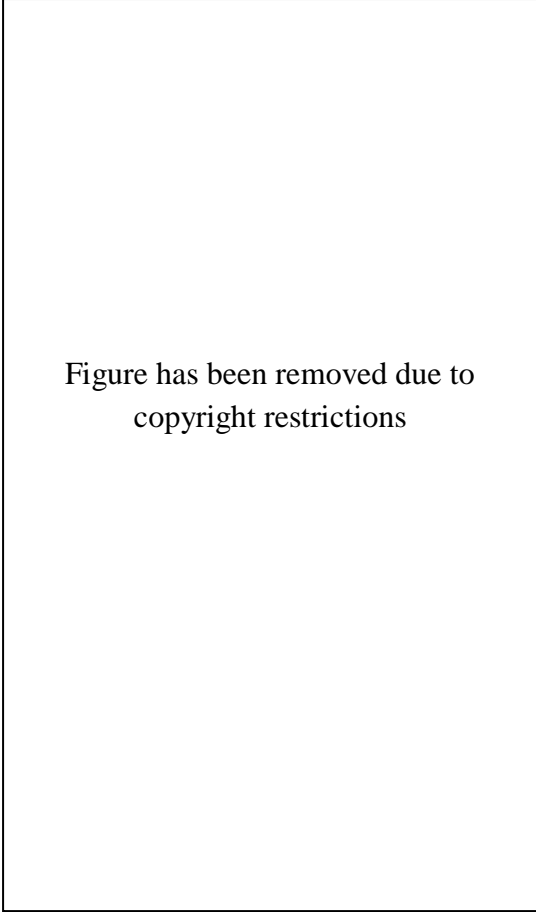


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copyright restrictions

Fig. 1: The original *Spider Man* poster with the Twin Towers reflected in Spider Man's eye panels

Portrayal of the twin towers was the reason for the shelving, re-editing, or re-scripting of such films as *Men in Black 2* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002) whose scriptwriters substituted the Chrysler Building for the World Trade Centre, while Miramax edited the scene in *People I Know* (Daniel Algrant, 2002) in which Al Pacino wakes up on the street and sees the World Trade Centre apparently on its side.⁵³ Mike Goodridge reported in *Screen International* how Lot 47 Films decided to postpone the release of its comedy *Waydowntown* (Gary Burns, 2000) from October 5, 2001, until January 25, 2002, because the film's images, though

⁵³ Jensen, *ibid.*; Hoberman, J., 'All as It Had Been - Hollywood Revises History, Joins the Good Fight,' *The Village Voice*, 11/12/01, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0149.fhoberman.30447.20.html>>

intended to be ‘darkly comical,’ might have caused viewer distress so soon after the attacks.⁵⁴

Buffalo Soldiers (Gregor Jordan, 2001) suffered in much the same way as the films described above. Set in 1989 in Germany, on the cusp of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the film satirises the criminal and incompetent behaviour of drug-dealing American soldiers. Miramax was negotiating the purchase of rights to the film from Film Four and Good Machine International in Toronto as New York was hit and subsequently put the release on hold until 2003, therefore condemning the film to almost the same fate as *The Quiet American*. The scathing criticism of the military at the heart of *Buffalo Soldiers* apparently rendered it as ‘unpatriotic’ as *The Quiet American*, and its release during wars in Afghanistan and Iraq could have been perceived as controversial.⁵⁵

And yet, underlining Kellner’s conceptualisation of Hollywood being a contested terrain, the violent content and war-theme of other films is the very reason why some were released, underlining Hollywood’s ability to sense, and capitalise on, prevailing moods. After the dust had settled in New York, a palpable change in temper occurred, detected by the film industry, as a taste for revenge was registered.⁵⁶ As early as late October, it was reported that war films were being tested discreetly amidst suspicions that delaying the release of films

⁵⁴ Goodridge, *ibid*; Other examples include MGM’s *Nose Bleed* (ultimately unreleased) in which Jackie Chan was due to play a window cleaner on the Trade Centre itself, scuppering a terrorist plot to destroy the building. Paramount cleared the building from the posters of Ed Burns’ *Sidewalks of New York* (2001); DreamWorks’ *The Time Machine* (Simon Wells, 2002) initially had portions of the moon falling on New York; while Disney pushed back the release of the comedy, *Big Trouble* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002), in which a bomb is smuggled aboard a plane.

⁵⁵ Scott, A.O., ‘*Buffalo Soldiers* – Film Review; A Portrait of the Army, But Few Heroes in Sight,’ *The New York Times*, 25/07/03,

<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B00E0DB123FF936A15754C0A9659C8B63>>

⁵⁶ Brereton, Pat, ‘War Movies: Post 9/11,’ *Left Curve*, No. 28, 2004, p. 57.

like *Collateral Damage* had been slightly premature and hasty.⁵⁷ Critics including J. Hoberman, Jeff Jensen, and Benjamin Svetkey went so far as to suggest that *Collateral Damage* was the perfect film for the times, and that it could even be marketed as a ‘flag-waver:’ ‘which some insiders believe could be just the sort of cathartic release moviegoers will soon be craving.’⁵⁸ Elvis Mitchell’s review in *The New York Times* comments on its fortuitous relevancy due to a public service announcement by the Office of National Drug Control Policy broadcast at an interval during Super Bowl 36 only five days before the film’s eventual release. The announcement stated that ‘drug money supports terror...[i]f you buy drugs, you might too,’ and linked cocaine use with financial support of terrorism. Mitchell notes that since *Collateral Damage*’s Colombian terrorists are shown to be in league with a cocaine manufacturer, the commercial might have given the film ‘a new lease on life.’⁵⁹ The pre-release monitoring of reactions to *Behind Enemy Lines* (John Moore, 2001) echoes the sensitivity surrounding *Collateral Damage* but also points to a gradually increasing taste for violence. A war film portraying American soldiers – and in particular one, lone American - fighting for survival against the odds in Yugoslavia, *Behind Enemy Lines* was met with a favourable response by a test audience before September 11, but enjoyed an even more positive reaction in its aftermath.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Grover, Ronald, ‘In Hollywood, War is Hell,’ *Business Week*, 29/10/01, <http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/oct2001/nf20011026_7822.htm?chan=search>

⁵⁸ Hoberman, *ibid.*; Jensen, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Mitchell, Elvis, ‘Fed Up and Going After the Terrorist Himself,’ *The New York Times*, 08/02/02, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9804E3D9173CF93BA35751C0A9649C8B63>>; Piazza, James A., ‘The illicit drug trade, counternarcotics strategies and terrorism,’ *Public Choice*, Volume 149, Numbers 3-4, July 2011, <<http://www.personal.psu.edu/jap45/Piazza%20Illicit%20Drugs%20Counternarcotics%20and%20Terrorism%20PC.pdf>> p. 1.

⁶⁰ Hoberman, *ibid.*; Brereton, *ibid.*, p. 57.

Indeed, Ronald Grover reported on October 29, 2001, for *Business Week*, that studios were engaged in a race to be the first to release their own war film. Audiences responded well to Sony's *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001), and Sony interpreted this as representative of people wanting to watch patriotic war films, and thought about moving forward its originally slated release date of March 2002.⁶¹ A further motivation, Grover reported, was that Paramount had a Mel Gibson Vietnam-set film, *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace, 2002), ready for a summer 2002 release, so Sony felt that if Paramount were influenced by the prevailing mood of patriotism, they too could bring that date forward.⁶²

The Recruit (Roger Donaldson, 2003), a film about the training of a CIA agent, also benefited from the post-9/11 reversal of opinion regarding the American government, which was no longer viewed as 'the bad guy.'⁶³ Indeed, as Todd S. Purdum suggested in *The New York Times*, Hollywood was now rallying round the homeland, and according to Shaun Cassidy (executive producer of television show, *The Agency*), the CIA 'was pretty much viewed as a very dark and nefarious place suddenly became much more gray, post 9/11...Suddenly, the...days of getting the job done and the ends justifying means didn't seem so terrible.'⁶⁴ In addition, due to perceived physical similarities of the Persians to Al Qaeda, and that ancient Persia could be viewed as a substitute for contemporary Iran, *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006), was described by Martin Kaplan of the Norman Lear Center, as practically adhering to a White House-approved agenda in 'its

⁶¹ Grover, Ronald, 'In Hollywood, War is Hell,' *ibid*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ Purdum, Todd S., 'Film; Hollywood Rallies Round the Homeland,' *The New York Times*, 02/02/03, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A06E0D61039F931A35751C0A9659C8B63>>

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

convergence with the axis-of-evil message Washington favors.’⁶⁵ The act of referencing the government, in terms of both dramatisations of its various institutions or its role in sponsoring or helping to formulate particular ‘messages’ is significant, as it is a tangible effect of a period during which partnership between representatives from Hollywood and government officials that were either forged, or intensified, after 9/11. This context can be divided into two distinct categories: contact with White House officials (and other governmental bodies) and contact with the military.

Hollywood and Washington

Given the political and cultural authority that Hollywood and Washington both enjoy, it is no surprise that representatives of both communities should wish to consult each other in the wake of the attacks. As early as 17 October, 2001, as Peter Bart reported in *Variety*, the White House had made discreet contact with members of the film industry in Los Angeles in an attempt to form a working group, which they provisionally termed an ‘arts and humanities task force,’ to harness the energy and enthusiasm of the film community to assist the war effort.⁶⁶ Lionel Chetwynd and Bruce Ramer, an attorney, helped organise the meeting attended by Chris Henick, deputy assistant to President Bush, and Adam Goldman, associate director of Bush’s office of public liaison from the White House; representing Hollywood, were Chris Albrecht, president of HBO Original Programming; Colin Callender, president of HBO Films; Sally Field; Leslie

⁶⁵ Kaplan, Martin, ‘ ‘300’ Reasons to Hate America,’ The Norman Lear Center website, 15/03/07, <http://blog.learcenter.org/2007/03/300_reasons_to_hate_america.html>

⁶⁶ Bart, Peter, ‘H’wood enlists in war - Nets, studios answer call to arms in fight against terrorism,’ *Variety*, 17/10/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117854476.html>>

Moonves, president of CBS Television; Peter Roth, president of Warner Bros. TV; Bryce Zabel, chairman of the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences; and Craig Haffner, CEO of Greystone.⁶⁷ It would appear that nothing tangible was accomplished at this stage beyond scheduling further meetings since it was at this juncture that Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) chair, Jack Valenti and Sherry Lansing, head of Paramount Pictures, issued their own invitations to the White House, at which point the Hollywood executives became involved along with Bush's trusted advisor Karl Rove.⁶⁸

Thus, on Sunday 11 November, Rove, Valenti, and Lansing, along with around 50 others, representing the majority of the premier studios and television networks as well as the Writers Guild of America, Screen Actors Guild, the Directors Guild and the film Academy met in the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills.⁶⁹ Industry chiefs such as Jonathan Dolgen, chairman of the Viacom Entertainment Group were present;⁷⁰ Sumner Redstone of Viacom, News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch, Walt Disney Co.'s Preston Padden, Universal's Matthew Gerson and Fox's Michael Regan were all invited (though, despite being expected to attend, it is unclear if they did).⁷¹

What resulted from this ninety-minute session was a plan of action, a set of themes and the formation of a new committee, 'Hollywood 9/11,' that would

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cooper, Marc, 'Lights! Cameras! Attack! Hollywood Enlists,' *The Nation*, 10/12/01, <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011210/cooper>>

⁶⁹ Hayes, Dade and McClintock, Pamela, 'War Chores for H'w'd – White House, moguls agree to step up showbiz efforts,' *Variety*, 11/11/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117855616.html>>

⁷⁰ Lyman, Rick, 'A Nation Challenged: The Entertainment Industry; Hollywood Discusses Role in War Effort,' *The New York Times*, 12/11/01, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9401E1DC1338F931A25752C1A9679C8B63&n=To p/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/R/Rove.%20Karl>>

⁷¹ McClintock, Pamela, 'White House forges bridge to Hollywood,' *Variety*, 11/11/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117855613.html>>; Hayes, ibid.

operate under the aegis of the MPAA and co-ordinate the film community's effort in tandem with the government's war on terror. Hollywood 9/11's remit included furnishing soldiers overseas with first-runs of movies and DVDs, the production of Public Service Announcements for television or to be shown before films, along with organising celebrity visits and United Service Organisations (USO) tours.⁷² The seven-point theme structure that Hollywood 9/11 was to address involved stressing that: the war on terror was not against Islam; the film industry was in a position to issue a call to service; U.S. military personnel and their families required national support; the terrorist attacks on America were global in nature, an attack on civilisation, and necessitated a global response; children and families needed assurances of security and safety; the war on terrorism was a war on evil; and, finally, that film would not be used as propaganda.⁷³ Both sides remained incommunicative regarding the details of the ideas that were discussed, although if Bryce Zabel's comments are any barometer, the meeting must have involved, and encouraged, some unusual and fantastical ideas: 'Why not ask some of our very best filmmakers to do a three-minute piece on the theme 'My Country 'Tis of Thee,' and then compile them together on video and airdrop them over areas hostile to us?' he suggested.⁷⁴

By 2006, *Variety* reports that Hollywood 9/11 had become 'dormant' amidst criticism that it simply had too many members to achieve any great momentum, not to mention the war on Iraq, which, Valenti believed, 'changed the tenor' of the

⁷² McClintock, *ibid.*; Lyman, Rick, 'A Nation Challenged,' *ibid.*

⁷³ McClintock, Pamela, *ibid.*, and Hayes, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cooper, *ibid.*

climate and Hollywood co-operation.⁷⁵ A more scathing assessment is provided by Nikki Finke of *LA Weekly*, who stated:

[T]hose much-touted conference calls have dwindled from twice a week to once a week to every two to three weeks, and accomplished so little that the supposedly major successes anyone mentions are the timely delivery of first-run movies to soldiers everywhere, some PSA spots spurring volunteerism, and sporadic show-biz visits to warships and military bases.⁷⁶

The writing was on the wall when Valenti stated in March 2003, that there would be no PSAs or trailers produced to promote the war in Iraq, interpreted by Pamela McClintock as a refusal to embroil Hollywood in more controversy, since ‘many in Hollywood are openly opposed to the conflict.’⁷⁷ Indeed, it would appear that this shift from America being on the ‘defensive’ to attacking another country (especially under spurious pretexts) signalled the unravelling of the unity that had been generated after the terrorist attacks.

Initially, Valenti, who saw his role as ‘shepherding’ the group, divided Hollywood 9/11 into sub-committees each one delegated a specific task: organising PSAs or domestic trailers, for instance.⁷⁸ PSAs and ‘greetings to troops’ were shot by the cast of *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Judging Amy* as well as one by comedian, Drew Carey, in support of celebrity USO tours - tours that saw Hollywood personalities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and the cast of

⁷⁵ Johnson, Ted, ‘War is hell for Coalition – Five years, on H’w’d 9/11 org is dormant,’ *Variety*, 10/09/06, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117949777.html>>

⁷⁶ Finke, Nikki, ‘All About Me,’ *LA Weekly*, 26/08/02, re-posted on *Alternet*: <<http://www.alternet.org/story/13930/>>

⁷⁷ McClintock, Pamela, ‘Valenti: MPAA to give videos, not sell war – Org to also supply troops with DVDs,’ *Variety*, 27/03/03, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117883672.html?categoryid=20&cs=1&query=Hollywood+9%2F11+Valenti>>

⁷⁸ McClintock, Pamela, ‘White House forges bridge to Hollywood,’ *ibid.*; McClintock, Pamela, ‘Inside Move: All’s quiet on H’wood front – Showbiz’s help with the war effort,’ *Variety*, 21/07/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117869969.html>>

Ocean's Eleven (Steven Soderbergh, 2001) deliver messages to soldiers at bases in Germany and Turkey.⁷⁹ Short films like *Spirit of America* (Chuck Workman, 2001), for which Chuck Workman edited together a montage of segments from various Hollywood films representing the 'best' of America, were produced to boost morale (although eyebrows were raised that Workman's film included clips of Sally Field carrying a union sign in *Norma Rae* [Martin Ritt, 1979]).⁸⁰

Efforts were also made to produce PSAs for global audiences; for this purpose Hollywood 9/11 enlisted the Moroccan 1984 Olympic hurdling champion, Nawal el Moutawakel-Bennis, to appear in an address which sought to preach international tolerance and respect. The PSA, shot by a production company run by Ridley and Tony Scott, was conceived by Sony executive, Hope Boonshaft, who headed the 'international subcommittee' of Hollywood 9/11.⁸¹ Boonshaft had originally negotiated with Muhammad Ali to do the PSA as he was felt to be a suitable candidate to explain the war on terror to the Middle East, though he ultimately backed out.⁸² Nevertheless, this illustrates the kind of approaches Hollywood 9/11 were taking, which also oversaw the sending of first-run films to troops stationed abroad on video tapes and DVD; for example, Fox arranged the international premiere screening of *Behind Enemy Lines* on board the

⁷⁹ Rutenberg, Jim, 'A Nation Challenged: The Networks; TV Greetings Produced for Armed Forces,' *The New York Times*, 05/12/01, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9806E7D7173CF936A35751C1A9679C8B63>>; Lyman, Rick, '3 Minutes of Patriotism on Film,' *The New York Times*, 20/12/01, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9405EFD133EF933A15751C1A9679C8B63>>; Chambers, David, 'Will Hollywood Go to War?' *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, No.8, Spring/Summer 2002, <<http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring02/chambers.html>>

⁸⁰ Lyman, Rick, *ibid.*

⁸¹ McClintock, Pamela, 'PSA promotes peace – H'wood effort bows as war talk blares,' *Variety*, 05/09/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117872419.html>>

⁸² McClintock, Pamela, *ibid.*; Rutenberg, Jim, 'A Nation Challenged: Public Relations; Hollywood Enlists Ali's Help To Explain War to Muslims,' *The New York Times*, 23/12/01, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F04E0D61631F930A15751C1A9679C8B63&n=To p/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/R/Rove,%20Karl>>

USS Carl Vinson, an aircraft carrier stationed in the Arabian Sea, in time for Thanksgiving, only a few weeks after the initial meetings with Karl Rove.⁸³

Even though the 'Hollywood 9/11' organisation was born in a spirit of unity, it was not without its dissenters, and it was perhaps inevitable that divisions would emerge along lines of party-allegiance. Whilst its first meeting in October 2001 was instigated by Lionel Chetwynd, along with other Republicans, the more productive meetings were initiated by prominent Hollywood Democrats like Valenti and Sherry Lansing. Initial enthusiasm and ideas, which included the production of documentaries similar to the *Why We Fight* (Frank Capra *et al*, 1943 - 45) series, were supplanted by the more bureaucratic attitude and pace of the sub-divided Hollywood 9/11 committee, whose results were hardly radical and whose avoidance of publicity, large membership (rendering conference calls crowded and therefore less than practical) meant that a loss of momentum was soon tangible.⁸⁴ Valenti subsequently shouldered much of the blame for this: some argue that he usurped the initial process of united action, and, moreover, that he assumed control over the group in order to keep the White House at a safe distance, protecting Democratic Party interests by preventing Hollywood donations from flooding into Republican hands during a time of good will.⁸⁵

Valenti, Nikki Finke has argued:

[A] lifetime Democrat, was intent on protecting the interests of his party by keeping...Rove at arm's length from the entertainment business to ensure the 9/11 cause didn't translate into Republican cash. Even hardcore Hollywood Democrats admit

⁸³ Swanson, Tim, '“Lines” shipping off to sea – Pic to premiere on U.S. aircraft carrier,' *Variety*, 20/11/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117856119.html>>

⁸⁴ McClintock, Pamela, 'Inside Move: All's quiet on H'wood front – Showbiz's help with the war effort,' *Variety*, 21/07/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117869969.html>>

⁸⁵ Ibid; Finke, Nikki, 'All About Me,' *LA Weekly*, 26/08/02, posted on Alternet site: <<http://www.alternet.org/story/13930/>>

that, in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks...a lot of rhetoric poured from big Democratic donors in praise of Bush.⁸⁶

Finke also presented another interpretation of Valenti's behaviour, arguing that the only way Hollywood executives could engage in meaningful discussions at a higher-level, was if Jack Valenti was co-ordinating them; the first meeting failed to achieve anything tangible, the suggestion is, because inappropriate people were at the table.⁸⁷ A dismayed Chetwynd was heard to complain: 'Jack's agenda is the industry agenda with a capital *I*. But some of us who work within the industry with the small *i* wanted to be part of something to help America too.'⁸⁸

These intimations of break-down in post-9/11 goodwill are further materialised by conservative productions that highlight the strength of ideological loyalties in Hollywood that undermined the erstwhile all-pervasive spirit of bi-partisan co-operation. Whilst Hollywood 9/11 was overseeing the production of PSAs and, in general, assisting the White House, writer and prominent Hollywood Republican, Lionel Chetwynd, was researching, writing and producing *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis*, an unabashed, hagiographic portrayal of George Bush and his leadership during the period between 9/11 and September 20, when he addressed the nation.⁸⁹ Chetwynd's Bush emerges an omnipotent, decisive and heroic leader, dexterous when required to utter defiant epithets to would-be assailants (such as "if some tinhorn terrorist wants me, tell him to come and get me! I'll be at home, waiting for the bastard!"). Despite access to, and co-operation from, the White House, and claims that his script was factual, *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis* was

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Archerd, Army, 'Sept. 11 focus of upcoming docu, mini-series,' *Variety*, 28/02/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117861643.html>>

excoriated by journalists when broadcast on September 7, 2003.⁹⁰ It was described by Tim Goodman as a promotional film for Bush's re-election campaign in the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and, after witnessing clear examples of incidents being dramatised in Bush's favour, J. Hoberman argued it was 'less a docudramatic account of historical events than a legitimizing allegory.'⁹¹ It elicited this lamentation from Danny Schechter:

DC 9/11 illustrates the direction our propaganda system is taking because it is also the direction that our news system is already headed. More storytelling instead of journalism. More character-oriented drama. More narrative arcs. More blurring of the line between fiction and truth.⁹²

Chetwynd's opus on Bush was preceded, some months before, by another television film, *Rudy: The Rudy Giuliani Story*, that reflected the high esteem in which the erstwhile Mayor of New York was held after September 11. As Jamie Malanowski states in *The New York Times*: 'The third act of his story is full of Great Man moments: his acts of courage, compassion and magnanimity on and after Sept[ember] 11 won him admiration around the world.'⁹³ Supposedly a critical, 'warts-and-all' portrayal of his career, the 9/11 segment illustrates his role after the terrorist attacks, the immediate aftermath of which is depicted in the opening scenes, thereby immediately fixing the ideological and emotional

⁹⁰ In the Writers Guild of America's journal, *The Craft*, for instance: Faye, Denis, 'To Tell the Truth,' *The Craft*, 11/08/06, <<http://www.wga.org/subpage.aspx?id=2165>>

⁹¹ Goodman, Tim, 'Two films on Sept. 11, one silly and one remarkable,' *The San Francisco Chronicle*, p. I-01, 05/09/03, <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/09/05/DD87724.DTL>>; Hoberman, J., Lights, Camera, Exploitation - That's Our Bush! The President's Re-Election Campaign Kicks Off With a Shameless 9-11 Docudrama,' *The Village Voice*, August 27 - September 2, 2003, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0335.hoberman.46558.1.html>>

⁹² Schechter, Danny, '9/11 Propaganda, Hollywood Style,' *MediaChannel.org*, 08/09/03, posted on *Alternet*: <<http://www.alternet.org/story/16735/>>

⁹³ Malanowski, Jamie, 'Giuliani, Meet Your TV Match,' *The New York Times*, 16/03/03, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9506E1D6143EF935A25750C0A9659C8B63>>

parameters of the film. Therefore, while Hollywood was talking ‘on the record’ about commitment to non-partisan co-operation, not only was there ideological disagreement behind the scenes, but this spilled over into actual programming where, in the cases mentioned above, content was directed, not at global, but domestic audiences, resulting in what Schechter compares to embedding ‘a pro-Bush narrative in our brains, leaving us with impressions, images and ideas that influence our political leanings.’⁹⁴

The formation of Hollywood 9/11 is the most significant, tangible entity arising from the contacts between Valenti, Rove *et al.* However, the Peninsula meeting was only one among many other instances of White House-Hollywood interaction. For example, on December 5, 2001, there took place, simultaneously, a Hollywood discussion panel, entitled ‘Hollywood Goes to War? Politics, Showbiz and the War on Terrorism,’ chaired by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, while in Washington, White House officials held a two-hour council with entertainment representatives. The subject of both events was film and television’s role in the war on terror, comprising a review of what had been achieved up to that point and what was planned, expressions of Washington’s gratitude for the industry’s endeavours as well as further stress on Hollywood’s autonomy by government officials. In Los Angeles, ATAS chairman, Bryce Zabel was joined by NBC President, Jeff Zucker, writer Aaron Sorkin, Mark McKinnon, a White House adviser, and Philip Strub, entertainment liaison officer at the Department of Defense. At the White House, presidential deputy assistants Chris Henick and Anna Perez met with Hollywood lobbyists, including representatives

⁹⁴ Schechter, *ibid.*

of the MPAA, and Hilary Rosen, President and CEO of the Recording Industry Association of America, while Karl Rove reportedly made a late appearance.⁹⁵

Furthermore, the head of the newly created Department of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, was in Hollywood on two occasions, making very similar statements, essentially recommending that the film industry draw inspiration from a rich seam of stories emanating from his department. On June 10, 2002, after thanking the television networks for their informative coverage of 9/11, Ridge surmised that “now I think broadcasters have a new challenge: reporting on homeland security.”⁹⁶ Nineteen months later, on January 15, 2004, Ridge addressed the Caucus for Television Producers, Writers and Directors at the Beverly Hills Hotel. After complimenting the industry for their openness, diversity and ability to reflect and inform society, and noting that terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda were intolerant of the creativity found in the members of his audience, Ridge pitched his own idea:

I’m proud to serve with 180,000 people in this department. From your point of view, 180,000 potential stories... We’ve got a lot of heroes and heroines on the frontlines protecting America - many inspiring stories. I encourage you to find these stories, and hopefully, if your creative juices take you in that direction, tell them.⁹⁷

In the same speech he announced a plan to establish a Homeland Security department liaison unit in Hollywood to operate out of the Coast Guard public

⁹⁵ Tiernan, Jill and McClintock, Pamela, ‘White House sez H’w’d true blue – Administration lauds biz’s war effort,’ *Variety*, 06/12/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117856906.html>>; Chambers, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ McClintock, Pamela, ‘Inside Move: Ridge thanks b’casters – TV’s new challenge is ‘to report homeland security’,’ *Variety*, 10/06/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117868307.html>>

⁹⁷ Ridge, Tom, ‘Homeland Security Secretary Ridge Speaks,’ *The Journal of The Caucus For Television Producers, Writers & Directors*, Volume 22, Summer 2004, p. 25.

affairs office.⁹⁸ As *USA Today* reported in 2005, its liaison officer Bobbie Faye Ferguson had provided her guidance for *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004), and a number of television programmes, stating: 'If she approves of a script or idea, the department will offer advice and technical help to the directors, producers and actors about portraying the nation's homeland defenders.'⁹⁹ Thus, by employing a mixture of compliment, threat and persuasion, not to mention the vague, but discernable, intent to underscore this persuasion through constant presence in Hollywood, Ridge helped solidify this bi-coastal, bi-partisan relationship.

The FTC and FCC's Response to Hollywood

Another aspect of the bi-coastal relationship involved two government bodies both of whose remits include overseeing and approving (or preventing) media-company mergers as well as advising on issues of decency and violence: The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). While one should not expect comprehensive transparency from either Hollywood or the White House, their reticence and unwillingness to communicate to the public the details of the discussions which were held between Rove, Valenti *et al.* in November 2001, lead to the kind of speculation in which Pamela McClintock, for example, indulged in advance of the November meetings:

[It t]urns out Hollywood has something Washington badly needs - coming up with just the right wartime message, so that Americans don't look like bumbling cowboys crashing through the gates of

⁹⁸ Bond, Paul, 'Ridge Putting Liaison in H'wood,' *The Hollywood Reporter*, 16/01/04, posted on <<http://www.allbusiness.com/services/motion-pictures/4906018-1.html>>

⁹⁹ Hall, Mimi, 'Homeland Security guides the stars,' *USA Today*, 08/03/05, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-03-07-security-hollywood_x.htm>

world opinion. In turn, Hollywood needs something from the White House - a little sympathy and support in the perennial debate over the moral ills supposedly bred by violent and lewd movies, music and TV. Both parties may soon get their wish.¹⁰⁰

The role of the federal bodies pre-9/11 is well illustrated by the merger of Time Warner and AOL in 2000. Financially worth \$112 billion, the approved merger created the world's largest entertainment company as the two media of cinema and internet joined forces. However, the merger was only approved on certain FTC conditions, that forced the companies involved to concede rights to internet services to their competitors. As *Variety* reported:

Time Warner last month allowed it would give EarthLink, the second largest Internet service provider, first crack at its cable lines before AOL services to customers in a particular market...Time Warner topper Gerald Levin and AOL chairman-CEO Steve Case signed off on additional concessions further opening up cable lines to competitors...Within 90 days of making AOL's Internet and broadband services available, Time Warner will be required to offer access to at least two more Internet service providers, in addition to EarthLink.¹⁰¹

Even taking these concessions into consideration, there is evidence to suggest that the merger was surrounded by controversy as both consumer organisations and Warner Bros.' rivals, the Walt Disney Co., had been making representations to both the FTC and FCC to take rigorous measures against the proposed merger before it was approved. This might be viewed merely as a competitor trying to ensure it is not too disadvantaged; however, controversially, members of the FTC panel, themselves, took a dim view of the deal, describing it as 'illegal,' and

¹⁰⁰ McClintock, Pamela, 'White House forges bridge to Hollywood,' *ibid*.

¹⁰¹ McClintock, Pamela and Goldsmith, Jill, 'FTC blesses AOL-TW nuptials - Deal creates biggest entertainment company on planet,' *Variety*, 15/12/00, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117790616.html>>

stating that the only effective approach was to approve the merger with the conditions rather than take their case to court thereby facing a lengthy legal struggle.¹⁰²

The dynamics of media business would thus nominally appear to pit Hollywood's corporate interests and Washington against each other. This friction can also be illustrated by the fact that, again, in 2000, Washington had confronted Hollywood with the charge that the film industry had deliberately targeted films containing scenes of violence at children.¹⁰³ However, in retrospect, once the White House recognised that Hollywood's wheels were in motion as regards its energetic co-operation after 9/11, and after there were tangible results, the regulatory bodies in Washington seemed to have exercised some restraint. For example, from an initially antagonistic position, both the FTC and FCC appeared to mellow, suggesting that their foe had become an ally. Just over a month after 9/11, FCC chairman, Michael Powell (son of Colin), was praising television networks for their coverage of the attacks and keeping the nation informed, stating that he did not support the proposal that violent content should be only shown at certain times, arguing 'how on Earth do you define violence? We're in a violent society.'¹⁰⁴ This was a dramatic change in tone from a Republican, but one that reflected the post-9/11 climate in which violence was a real phenomenon experienced first-hand by Americans, and no longer simply an issue of film industry gratuitousness.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Chambers, *ibid.*; Grover, Ronald, 'Hooray for Hollywood - at Least for Now,' *ibid.*; Hayes, *ibid.*; McClintock, Pamela, 'White House forges bridge to Hollywood,' *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ McClintock, Pamela, 'Powell lauds H'w'd effort - FCC chair calls TV news channels 'extraordinarily useful' in wake of attacks,' *Variety*, 21/10/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117854568.html>>

The Hollywood-Washington concord appeared to continue with the FTC. Dade Hayes and Pamela McClintock both reported in *Variety* on the steps previously taken by Washington concerning Hollywood productions and marketing that illustrate the shift in approach, highlighting how Washington was prepared to cut its new ally some slack:

The *tête-à-tête* would have been unimaginable at this time last year, when Valenti and the studios were being ripped apart by some in Washington for marketing violent, R-rated pics to kids...Later this month, the Federal Trade Commission will issue a report grading Hollywood on how well the biz [sic] has done in stopping the marketing of R-rated movies to young audiences. Congressional insiders say they don't expect Capitol Hill to jump on the report as a means of criticizing Hollywood, as some key pols did last year when the FTC released its initial report.¹⁰⁵

McClintock provides another example, again, in *Variety*:

Clinton...authorized the Federal Trade Commission to wage an all-out attack on the marketing practices of the movie...biz. The assault left Hollywood badly bruised...The Bush administration quickly made it known that it was leaving the issue alone. It also promised to make itself available to discuss particular problems, such as runaway production.¹⁰⁶

Later, in January 2002, the White House proposed to strip the FTC of its jurisdiction over entertainment media company mergers and hand it to the Department of Justice. After protestations from Democrat Senator Ernest Hollings, who at the time was chair of the committee that oversees the FTC's budget, the restructuring was ultimately abandoned, but the episode illustrates the

¹⁰⁵ Hayes, Dade and McClintock, Pamela, 'War chores for H'w'd – White House, moguls agree to step up showbiz efforts,' *Variety*, 11/11/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117855616.html>>

¹⁰⁶ McClintock, Pamela, 'How does Dubya rub ya? - The Bushies spurn pop culture...', *Variety*, 29/09/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117873493.html>>

Bush administration's willingness to reorganise federal authorities, particularly when advantageous to his own policy needs.¹⁰⁷

This is further exemplified by the controversy surrounding wider plans to deregulate media ownership. In 2006, Democratic FCC commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps explicitly countered FCC chair Michael Powell's decision to relax the rules governing media mergers and ownership since the commissioners believed that media company consolidation had a detrimental effect on diversity and quality journalism, fears that were shared by media commentators and watchdogs as well as the creative community.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, David Chambers argued, in *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, that new regulations might result in large companies consolidating every aspect of entertainment production within their own organisations, thereby impeding competition: 'On the much larger horizon, media giants could now conceivably own their industries vertically from production to home delivery, making complete control over branding and repackaging possible.'¹⁰⁹

The argument is that Hollywood's co-operation with the White House was symbiotic, and advantageous to the business infrastructure underpinning the film industry due to the increasing possibility of de-regulation. This co-operation was, therefore, of benefit to both Hollywood as well as the Bush Administration. As a result of their collaboration, the bodies that regulate the entertainment industry –

¹⁰⁷ Boehm, Erich, 'DOJ, FTC share media merger oversight - Plans to change current operation scrapped,' *Variety*, 21/05/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117867313.html>>

¹⁰⁸ McClintock, Pamela, 'Copps backs hearings - FCC stifling media-rules debate, he sez,' *Variety*, 21/11/02, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117876388.html>>; Kaplan, Martin, 'Testimony of Martin Kaplan,' FCC Media Ownership Hearing, University of Southern California, 31/08/06, posted on <http://www.learcenter.org/images/event_uploads/FCCTestimony06.pdf>; Chambers, David, 'Will Hollywood Go to War?' *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, No.8, Spring/Summer 2002, <<http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring02/chambers.html>>

¹⁰⁹ Chambers, David, *ibid.*

its corporate structures and content – seemed to be curtailed, or at least made to moderate their antagonism towards Hollywood, the long-term effect of which being that many media-company owners now stood to make potentially huge profits in future mergers. A recent report on *CNN* testifies to the money to be made in such deals: cable company Comcast, it stated, was due to pay General Electric \$6.5 billion in a deal, announced in 2009, that saw Comcast's networks merged with General Electric's NBC Universal (whose channels include MSNBC, and Bravo, and which owns Universal Studios).¹¹⁰

Hollywood and the Military

Hollywood's contact with governmental agencies is augmented by its creative collaboration with the Department of Defense and Pentagon-funded institutions. This has taken place at a range of levels: firstly, Hollywood and the military have regularly co-operated in order to accentuate realism in films with themes or settings of armed conflict, and thus post-9/11 contact with the army regarding access to props, army vehicles and bases is a conventional phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is illuminating to witness the frankness of Philip Strub, the Pentagon's Hollywood liaison officer, when commenting on the army's interest in acquiescing with film-makers' requests to utilise its equipment since portrayal of army life in film and television is often responsible for the appeal of military service. During a discussion panel at the 2004 Tribeca Film Festival entitled 'We Hate You (But Keep Sending us More *Austin Powers*)' Strub said:

¹¹⁰ 'Comcast and GE complete NBC deal,' *CNN*, 29/01/11,
<http://money.cnn.com/2011/01/29/news/companies/comcast_ge_nbc/index.htm>

We feel that these requests represent a very important opportunity to tell the American public, primarily, something about the U.S. military, and that perhaps as a by-product, we benefit our recruiting and retention programs at the same time...[O]ur recruiting policy folks have some surveys that show that there are large sectors of the public who derive their primary impressions of the military from entertainment, TV shows, and movies.¹¹¹

Once a production is granted access to military equipment, control over the film's content is exercised by the Pentagon to the extent that it can veto scripts, enforce changes and have first-viewings to ensure the films are acceptable and that the military is depicted as a good career option. As Jeff Fleischer put it in *Mother Jones* magazine:

To keep the Pentagon happy, some Hollywood producers have been known to turn villains into heroes, remove central characters, change politically sensitive settings, or add military rescues to movies that require none. There are no bad guys in the military...The military and the president can't look bad.¹¹²

Windtalkers (John Woo, 2002) exemplifies the influential role the military plays in the production process, a film that was due to be released in November 2001, but which was delayed until June 2002 due to the antipathy towards violent films in the wake of 9/11.¹¹³ Set in Japan during World War Two, *Windtalkers* depicts Marines sent to accompany and protect their Navajo colleagues who were experts in constructing undecipherable codes. According to David Robb, whose book, *Operation Hollywood*, documents numerous examples of where the military

¹¹¹ The Norman Lear Center, 'We Hate You (But Keep Sending us More *Austin Powers*),' 04/05/04, <<http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/TFFGlobal.pdf>>, p. 14.

¹¹² Fleischer, Jeff, 'Operation Hollywood,' *Mother Jones*, 20/09/04, <http://www.motherjones.com/news/qa/2004/09/09_403.html>

¹¹³ Bing, Jonathan, 'MGM Quiets "Windtalkers",' *Variety*, 30/09/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117853355.html>>

enforced script changes, the *Windtalkers* script was read by Strub, and Marine liaison officer Matt Morgan, who both agreed that the scene involving a Marine stealing a dead Japanese soldier's gold teeth should be changed. Despite the script-writers arguing that the scene was based on fact, the Pentagon officials asserted that such an atrocity was not Marine-like and should be deleted from the script.¹¹⁴ Thus, if the Department of Defense does not approve a script, access to military equipment will not be sanctioned, and the film will suffer aesthetically or its budget will rise. Robb contends that the military's rigid stance on 'approved versions' inhibits the usual flexible, organic approach to film production that often requires changes to scripts at the last minute, or after viewing unsatisfactory rushes. As he has argued, the Pentagon's strict approach obstructs this course of action and is, therefore, 'antithetical to the filmmaking process.'¹¹⁵

What makes this aspect of contact significant is that it happened, and continues to happen, in a period of war: not just the conflict in Afghanistan or war with Iraq, but the ill-defined, perhaps interminable, war on terrorism, during which time it was, is, and will be necessary to recruit combatants. Some films have been described by military personnel as 'commercial[s]' for us' and when the Department of Defense asserts such an influence on film, this may result in disproportionately positive depictions of army life with films almost acting, invaluable, in a 'Public Relations' capacity.¹¹⁶

Hollywood's contact with the military is not confined to equipment access or public relations, however. Of particular interest is the Institute for Creative

¹¹⁴ Robb, David, To the Shores of Hollywood - Marine Corps Fights to the Polish Finish in *Windtalkers*, 'The Washington Post', 15/06/02, p. C01, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A54632-2002Jun14?language=printer>>

¹¹⁵ Robb, David, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

Technologies (ICT), based at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Formed in 1999 and funded by the Pentagon, the ICT is a centre in which digital video-game graphics and virtual terrorist scenarios are used in the training of soldiers for combat and to expose them, in safety, to hostile situations. As Marc Graser reported in *Variety*:

[T]he U.S. Army awarded USC a five-year contract to create the ICT with a mandate to enlist the resources and talents of the entertainment industry, videogame makers and computer scientists to advance the state of immersive, or virtual reality, training simulations for soldiers.¹¹⁷

In 2000, John Milius (co-writer of *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)) was one of the first high-profile members of the film industry to assist the ICT (giving him a chance to serve the military, to which he always aspired, despite the asthma that had prevented active service). However, in the wake of 9/11 he was joined by many more of his Hollywood colleagues motivated by a sense of patriotic duty. Within a month of the terrorist attacks, at the request of the Department of Defense, a number of directors and writers had assembled at the ICT and were pitching ideas about possible terrorist threats in America, their targets and how to combat them.¹¹⁸ These creative members of the entertainment industry included writers Steven E. De Souza, who wrote *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), *MacGyver* writer David Engelbach, *Delta Force One* (1999) director, Joseph Zito, *Fight Club* (1999) director David Fincher, screenwriters Paul DeMeo and Danny Bilson, as well as individuals not previously associated with military, or films dealing with armed conflict, such as Spike Jonze, Mary

¹¹⁷ Graser, Mark, 'Ex-bizzar gets creative,' *Variety*, 17/12/03, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117897314.html>>

¹¹⁸ Brodesser, Claude, 'Feds seek H'wood's help – Helmers, scribes probe terrorism at U.S. army's request,' *Variety*, 07/10/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117853841.html>>

Lambert, director of *The In Crowd* (2000), and *Grease* (1978) director, Randal Kleiser.¹¹⁹

Gary Susman documented in *Entertainment Weekly* that as early as October 8, 2001, this group of filmmakers and military personnel had reported twice to the Pentagon even if none of the parties involved were forthcoming on the details of the institute's advice.¹²⁰ By November, 2001, technical innovations and expertise, usually associated with cinematic digital graphics, were being used to provide a kind of virtual reconnaissance for the army; for example, Paul Debevec, the person responsible for *The Matrix*'s 'trailing bullet' effects, could create a simulation of a building for these purposes. For a report in the *New York Times*, he illustrated this technique with a simulation of the Parthenon:

Dr. Debevec essentially downloaded the Parthenon into a computer. After 3-D scanning of the ancient Greek statuary, pillars and walls into a computer program, Dr. Debevec can mimic the scene with an astonishing realism. If the prototype were implemented and a war broke out in Greece, soldiers could scope out the building in advance.¹²¹

By April 2003, marines could benefit from completing missions, making mistakes, killing and being killed in simulated combat in 'Iraq.' As Corporal

¹¹⁹ Susman, Gary, 'Plot Points,' *Entertainment Weekly*, 08/10/01, <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,178524,00.html>>; Hart, Hugh, 'Arts in America: Bringing Hollywood Pizazz to Military Training,' *The New York Times*, 15/11/01, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CE4D61F38F936A25752C1A9679C8B63>>; Brodesser, *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Susman, Gary, *ibid.*

¹²¹ Hart, *ibid.*

Justin J. Taylor told *The New York Times*, ‘It gives you a sense of reality...You get that nervous feeling: do I really want to go around the corner or not?’¹²²

While the use of computer simulations for training marines is by no means a recent phenomenon, the military’s recourse to Hollywood seems peculiar given that Hollywood is an entertainment industry with no real experience in conflict beyond the imaginary.¹²³ It would appear, however, that this sense of ‘imagination’, the ability to provide fresh perspective and content is exactly the property the Pentagon felt was lacking from their own training scenarios. The institute’s creative director, James H. Korris, referred to this phenomenon in *The New York Times*:

My sense was, the Army wanted...to add some Hollywood creativity into their world. The reason they first thought about taking this journey was that when they put people in these simulators, they kept getting bored. Just being able to come up with characters with a rooting interest, having a decent antagonist...those were part of a tool set that represented a different point of view.¹²⁴

Given the emotional trauma suffered by Americans after 9/11, it is perhaps appropriate that military training also incorporates, or at least acknowledges the power of emotion and storytelling, as well as drawing upon Hollywood’s technical know-how in fabricating simulated environments. Indeed, an ICT paper, entitled ‘Emotionally Evocative Environments for Training’ would appear to make this very point. The training scenario, ‘DarkCon,’ set in Bosnia and scripted

¹²² Harmon, Amy, ‘More Than Just a Game, But How Close to Reality?’ *The New York Times*, 03/04/03,
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CE3D81F39F930A35757C0A9659C8B63>>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Hart, Hugh, ‘Arts in America: Bringing Hollywood Pizazz to Military Training,’ *The New York Times*, 15/11/01,
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CE4D61F38F936A25752C1A9679C8B63>>

by Hollywood writer, Larry Tuch, is part of a programme that seeks to engage the trainee emotionally since it is believed that emotional connection will improve information retention (through longer-lasting memories) and will develop skills necessary to deal with the emotional situations of modern warfare.¹²⁵ The training programme takes place in a virtual rendering of a typical East European landscape in a (roughly) one kilometer square 'database' in ICT facilities in Marina del Rey.

What is interesting is that the paper makes explicit reference to Hollywood techniques that the ICT adapted. Firstly, they realised that Disney animators added slight movement to stationary characters since it looks more life-like especially compared to characters that are frozen in a scene:

Disney's cartoons may have taken longer to create, but they had an unrivaled life-like quality. We believe this philosophy holds true for virtual environments. Characters should never stand absolutely still...Anything that moves in the real world should move in the virtual world even if the movement is subtle and slight.¹²⁶

Secondly, Hollywood's influence is felt in terms of the importance of the 'story' at the heart of the training, as trainees are encouraged to 'build a narrative sense of the training scenario.'¹²⁷ Another ICT paper entitled 'Bringing Hollywood Storytelling Techniques to Branching Storylines for Training Applications,' elucidates this development in military training further.¹²⁸ The paper's authors highlight that, through partnership with Paramount Pictures, they were able to

¹²⁵ Morie, J.F., et al., 'Emotionally Evocative Environments for Training,' Institute for Creative Technologies paper, <<http://www.ict.usc.edu/publications/ASC-Morie-2002.pdf>>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Iuppa, Nicholas; Weltman, Gershon and Gordon, Andrew, 'Bringing Hollywood Storytelling Techniques to Branching Storylines for Training Applications,' Institute for Creative Technologies paper, <<http://people.ict.usc.edu/~gordon/publications/NILE04.PDF>>

utilise the dramatic structure of classic narrative storytelling to enhance virtual training. Thus, training missions benefited from having realistic characters (some of whom recurred throughout the exercise), rapidly changing situations and a ‘story arc’ in which the simulation narrative attempted to imitate the way Hollywood films, ‘build from a critical incident, through a series of difficulties, to a moment of high drama and then resolve themselves completely.’¹²⁹ Furthermore, there is explicit mention of how Hollywood writers countenance every possible narrative direction that the protagonist might follow before deciding on the ‘best’ one that will satisfactorily conclude a story. The ICT, basing their training on the necessity for careful selection of a particular course of action that this ‘writer’ paradigm exhibits, incorporated the need for a trainee to choose from two paths into their simulation design since the two paths would result in two different outcomes that would, therefore, demonstrate the strength of a trainee’s decision-making. As the paper states: ‘The strong outcome could only be achieved if the user exhibited strong leadership decision-making in all of the previous chapters [stages of the training programme] combined...But both of the outcomes were dramatically rich, providing a strong pay off in either case.’¹³⁰

Such collaboration, ranging from meetings to utilisation of writing techniques rendered existing connections between the military and Hollywood stronger. While a degree of contact has been maintained historically in order to make both films and the military look as good as possible, the post-9/11 developments reveal a new consistency with the context and conduct of the times. Not only has the military incorporated and adapted Hollywood techniques to create narratives in their training, but the training narratives themselves are

¹²⁹ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Ibid.

designed to expose prospective soldiers to traumatic situations: they have an emotional base, something that is now identified as being an important aspect of training, leading to better information retention.

Conclusion

In his testimony to Congress, days after Rove's Hollywood conference, television writer and producer John Romano, made the following comments in support of the idea that Hollywood, and the wider entertainment industry, had a positive role to play in ensuring that global audiences (in particular those in the Middle East) had access to media which illustrated America and its 'story' in a more favourable light:

What comes through to people abroad watching such shows [as *Baywatch*] is an impression, not of the humanity that we share with them, but only of the plenty and prosperity of our lives...Right now we are entirely dependent on the market system: What they'll see abroad is what sells abroad - which is often the lowest-common-denominator product.¹³¹

Romano hints that efforts should be made to ensure that in this market system, low-common denominator products are balanced, perhaps outnumbered, by better quality products that portray 'shared humanity.' Given the prevailing mood of patriotism and eagerness to do something practical sweeping the industry at that particular time, it is reasonable to assume that the quality product would be aimed at appeasing global audiences. When an advertising executive advises, as John Leslie Jr. did at the same Congressional hearing, that the entertainment business

¹³¹ McClintock, Pamela, 'Content key in war effort – Testimony offers ideas for telling USA's story to foreign auds,' *Variety*, 14/11/01, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117855851.html>>

should sway world opinion, and that no tactic should be dismissed, Rove's high profile denial of influence on issues of film content is called into question.¹³² Indeed, the very headline of Pamela McClintock's *Variety* article that details Romano's testimony and attendant issues, is 'Content Key in War Effort.'¹³³

Therefore, the terrorist attacks of September 11 had a number of direct effects on the conduct of Hollywood beyond the nurturing of a more general sense of national solidarity. In Hollywood the desire to respond in a positive and united manner that included actor, director, writer, union and studio executive alike, demonstrated the enthusiasm with which the industry rallied out of a desire to do something constructive. However, another effect of the terrorist attacks was to compel the entertainment industry to assist Washington in Bush's war on terror, whether that be via involvement with Washington or the Pentagon. If events forced Hollywood and Washington to work together, this was, to some extent, a realisation of an understated mutual admiration. Both improved relations with their counterpart, and the meetings in which both engaged provided a taste of what they both wanted; as Eric Alterman says, 'Hollywood yearns for gravitas, Washington for glamour.'¹³⁴ Indeed, it is a testament to the uncertainties of the post-9/11 atmosphere that the Bush Administration arguably enjoyed more co-operation with Hollywood than its predecessor, and could, for a period at least, count the entertainment industry as one of its allies.

Hollywood, on the other hand, repaired its debauched image for the first time since Reagan was in office, and its top level executives saw federal regulatory and consumer bodies being restrained by the White House for the first

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Alterman, *ibid.*

time in decades. It would be cynical to suggest that each was manipulating the other; genuine desire to do something positive after 9/11 is tangible, but the line between co-operation and opportunity, at some points, became indistinct for both sides. What appears consistent, however, is that, for Hollywood, 9/11 ultimately meant a period of careful negotiation of audience sensitivity in order to limit box-office damage, and thereafter, a period of capitalising on the thirst for revenge, whilst maintaining a posture of both respect and respectability.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the post-9/11 spirit of co-operation, however, is the Institute for Creative Technologies' turn both towards Hollywood and narrative and emotion in its military training simulations. Emotion and narrative are, themselves, fundamental concepts in the nation-wide, post-9/11 climate: the shock, trauma, fear and sadness in the wake of attack and destruction, and the need (echoing Colin Brown's sentiments in *Screen International*, mentioned above) to tell the 9/11 story whether in whole, or in part; and the extent of its impact, whether global or personal. These concepts are, therefore, crucial to Hollywood as a communicator of these stories.

Chapter 2: Emotional and Political Tendencies in Post-9/11 Hollywood

Fiction

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Noam Chomsky spoke about how the attacks were unusual in a modern, global context:

The horrifying atrocities of September 11 are something quite new in world affairs, not in their scale and character, but in the target. For the United States, this is the first time since the War of 1812 that the national territory has been under attack, or even threatened.¹³⁵

Thus, the acts of terror were seen as unprecedented in the modern era, and left the entire nation wondering why America had been targeted, with an initial impulse to seek some kind of explanation by asking ‘why do they hate us?’ In the midst of bewilderment and fear, President Bush was able to provide some answers, most notably that the terrorists hated all that Americans held dear about its civilisation: in particular its freedoms, democracy, and way of life.¹³⁶ Thereafter the Bush Administration came to be defined by 9/11, and indeed its response arrested a decline in Bush’s approval ratings in the first few months of his tenure in the White House.¹³⁷

As well as the effect on American politics, the destruction of the Twin Towers had a huge influence on cinematic culture, whether in the form of renewed war-time co-operation between the White House and the film industry, or

¹³⁵ Chomsky, Noam, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), p. 11.

¹³⁶ Bush, George W., ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,’ 20/09/01, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>>

¹³⁷ <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>>

as individual efforts to assist through volunteer work or fund-raising. Moreover, the connection between the attacks and film, specifically the conventional action film, was consolidated in the very spectacle of the terrorists' acts, since the transmission of the images of the Twin Towers' collapse was widely compared, by those watching on television, to the scheduled broadcast of a disaster movie. From the point of an analysis of the film industry's initial response to September 11, the logical step forward is therefore to examine the cultural artefacts Hollywood produced in the immediate wake of such an event. Bearing in mind the emphasis placed on emotion and narrative, exemplified by the Institute for Creative Industries' request for Hollywood's assistance, and the adoption of screen-writing techniques as regards construction of narrative *dénouements* in military training programmes, it is appropriate to continue here with a deeper investigation into the connection between emotion and narrative in cinema.

Analysis of post-9/11 Hollywood cinema in this chapter is divided into three sections: first, the question is posed relating to what emotional purpose the 9/11 films *United 93* and *World Trade Center* perform, leading to the idea that film can be a memorial to 9/11. Second, attention is given to a group of films, namely *25th Hour* (Spike Lee, 2002), *Reign Over Me*, and *Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009), that use the actual event as a backdrop and context to fictional narratives. Third, post-9/11 films are seen to offer political readings that either support or challenge the conservative response to 9/11 by the Bush administration and the mainstream news media, tendencies that are exemplified by *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004).

Film as Memorial

Given the impact 9/11 had on the political landscape, both domestically and globally, and in spite of both the political content of many of his previous films, it is strange to hear Oliver Stone protesting that *World Trade Center* is not a political film.¹³⁸ In *The New York Times*, Stone is quoted (with reference to his own status as a political, and Hollywood, establishment pariah) thus:

This is not a political film...The mantra is 'This is not a political film.' Why can't I stay on message for once in a while?...It seems to me that the event was mythologized by both political sides, into something that they used for political gain.¹³⁹

In the light of this claim, one should consider this charged context that would appear to have fostered such a sobering effect on Stone, and try to understand what kind of functions the films that depicted 9/11 were intended to perform, if indeed they were not to be 'political.'

A number of issues surround *United 93* and *World Trade Center*, most significantly those concerning their political implications and the context in which they were produced: not only did 9/11 propel Washington and Hollywood towards unprecedented levels of co-operation, the event was soon evoked to rationalise new security measures and even to justify a new concept of war itself. Perhaps most significant of all, however, was the new geo-political milieu of which 9/11 became a part and an expression.

¹³⁸ Jaafar, Ali, 'I'm Not a Political Filmmaker Goddamit! Ali Jaafar Talks to Oliver Stone,' *Sight and Sound* (internet-only article), October 2006, <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49325>>

¹³⁹ Halbfinger, David M., 'Oliver Stone's 'World Trade Center' Seeks Truth in the Rubble,' *The New York Times*, 02/07/06, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/movies/02halb.html>>

The latter has been a troubling notion for many Americans to confront. For many commentators, September 11 demanded re-assessment of America's role in global affairs. Attempts to articulate this, however, were quickly vilified, and those who tried to understand the reasons why such an attack might take place were often accused of aligning themselves with terrorists.¹⁴⁰ Judith Butler explained this phenomenon in her book *Precarious Life*:

[O]ur very capacity to think about the grounds and causes of the current global conflict is considered impermissible. The cry that 'there is no excuse for September 11' has become a means by which to stifle any serious public discussion on how US foreign policy has helped create a world in which such acts of terror are possible.¹⁴¹

Butler argued further that the approach taken by the Bush administration and the media of isolating those who committed the attacks and ignoring the possibility of American acts, themselves, being implicated in other terrorist activities results in there being no need to seek a wider explanation for the events:

There is no relevant prehistory to September 11, since to tell the story a different way, to ask how things came to this, is already to complicate the question of agency which...leads to the fear of moral equivocation.¹⁴²

The post-9/11 climate, for the Right, is more accurately reflected in the words of the President, whose speeches in the aftermath of the attacks were characterised by a defiant tone, quick to stress the evil nature of the enemy, and infused with

¹⁴⁰ Bush, *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life - The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

patriotic imagery and bellicose intent. For instance, he stated, on September 11 itself:

These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong... Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.¹⁴³

In a later speech, Bush stated “Americans are asking, why do they hate us?... They hate our freedoms - our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”¹⁴⁴

Bush, thus clearly defined the Enemy along radical, fundamentalist lines as anti-American. The determination to respond with force, also quickly and unequivocally emerged. Journalists soon adopted Bush’s tone and in turn expressed *their* thoughts on the attacks via similar rhetoric, as exemplified by *Time* magazine’s Nancy Gibbs:

[Bush] was wrong, though, to talk of the steel of our resolve. Steel, we now know, bends and melts; we need to be made of something stronger than that now... Once the dump trucks and bulldozers have cleared away the rubble... what will we do? What else but build new cathedrals, and if they are bombed, build some more. Because the faith is in the act of building, not the building itself, and no amount of terror can keep us from scraping the sky.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Bush, George W., ‘Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation,’ 11/09/01, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>>

¹⁴⁴ Bush, George W., ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,’ 20/09/01, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Gibbs, Nancy, ‘If You Want to Humble an Empire,’ *Time*, 14/09/01, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000761,00.html>>

It is within this emotional and politically charged context, one which consolidated the idea of innocent victimhood over a period of five years, that *United 93* and *World Trade Center* were released. In an interview with *Sight and Sound*, Stone highlighted the pressure involved in making a film about 9/11 at that moment:

Politically, it was a nightmare to make because of all the sensitivities. It could have backfired at any given point. In New York we had many enemies. We had a lot of prejudgement on it. A lot of attacks. It was crucial that it be responsible and accurate to the story...If we'd gotten too sentimental it would have been ridiculed as Disney. At the same time, if it had been too ugly and gritty we wouldn't have been able to achieve the box office we've achieved in the States.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the question must be posed: if the film deliberately avoided politics, carefully considered peoples' sensitivities, and strove to be uncontroversial, then what was the purpose in making a film of this nature in the first place? This very question was posed by Manohla Dargis in her *New York Times* review of *United 93*:

[*United 93*'s] narrow focus, along with...the absence of any historical or political context, raises the question of why, notwithstanding the usual (if shaky) commercial imperative, this particular movie was made. To jolt us out of complacency? Remind us of those who died? Unite us, as even the film's title seems to urge? Entertain us?...I didn't need a studio movie to remind me of the humanity of the thousands who were murdered that day or the thousands who have died in the wars waged in their name.¹⁴⁷

The answer arguably lies in noting that, along with defiance and resolve, a discernable sense of trauma and mourning is apparent in the speeches and

¹⁴⁶ Jaafar, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Dargis, Manohla, 'Defiance Under Fire: Paul Greengrass's Harrowing *United 93*,' *The New York Times*, 26/04/06, <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2006/04/28/movies/28unit.html>>

newspaper columns immediately following 9/11. Bush, himself, proclaimed as early as September 21 however that the time for grieving was over and that in its stead would follow action.¹⁴⁸ Yet, while mourning might have officially lasted ten days, it is within this context of grief that the significance of *World Trade Center* and *United 93*'s function resides: these films addressed the problem of how to help a nation cope with such tragedy, through narrative.

To support a theoretical basis for this proposition, one might consult Fritz Breithaupt's contribution to *Media Representations of September 11* and apply his conclusions to cinema.¹⁴⁹ His chapter, 'Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11,' describes how the news institutions appointed itself as national therapist and pre-empted what it believed the outcome of post-9/11 reflection would be, settling on the concept of 'trauma' as an organising principle of the 9/11 'narrative,' thereby forgoing other possible explanatory ideas (that include anxiety, dialogue, and sobriety).¹⁵⁰ The media selected 'trauma' as preferred characterisation since it implied the victim is innocent, and free to formulate a plan of just retribution, thus representing a much more palatable notion than, say, 'sobriety' which, Breithaupt postulates, would have inevitably required a more detached debate about modern, post-cold war global politics¹⁵¹.

As he says:

Once one manages to position oneself as a 'trauma' victim, one seems absolved from possible involvement...In the case of September 11, it is clear that from the perspective of those who

¹⁴⁸ Butler, *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ Breithaupt, Fritz, 'Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11,' in Chermak, Steven, Bailey, Frankie Y., and Brown, Michelle (eds), *Media Representations of September 11* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68 – 69.

¹⁵¹ Breithaupt defines 'trauma' as a disorder of memory, where past events are perpetually re-experienced in a painful present since the victim cannot integrate the initial experience in normal consciousness; *ibid.*, p. 68.

were killed, the attack was an unprovoked act of hatred. But the same cannot be said on the political level, as past U.S. actions and policies have taken many lives in the Middle East...it is striking to see how little the media discussed the earlier activities and policies of the United States in the larger region.¹⁵²

Breithaupt then explains how healing from 'trauma' works, and argues that the replaying of a painful scenario, even if it revisits and re-opens old wounds, essentially serves to strengthen our layer of protection to the point that eventually we will be able to heal the first wound and protect ourselves from future assault. He suggests that the media, by using and proliferating images of Ground Zero, the American flag, and Osama Bin Laden, therefore (although, perhaps unwittingly) helped Americans to form this protective layer.¹⁵³

Breithaupt's argument, ultimately, is that the manner in which media representations conformed to a formalised pattern of behaviour suggested a therapy as ritualised practice, with emotional healing as its ultimate purpose.¹⁵⁴ Despite the perception that the media, itself, became traumatised in order to be able to produce the 'trauma' and then offered itself as the means of remedy, the efficacy of such a therapeutic practice, he argues, can only be superficial, and unlikely to lead to comprehensive healing since 'this logic of a healing by memory is a shortcut, driven not by therapy...but merely by the expectations raised by the ideology of 'trauma.''¹⁵⁵

The significance of Breithaupt's argument for cinema, here, is to be found in the concepts of 'proper memory' and repetition, and how the media's behaviour

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 75 – 76.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

offers a model of how to engage with the event. Since ‘trauma’ is a disorder of memory, the ‘proper memory,’ once called to mind, will end the pain of the traumatising event and will then lead to healing; that is, the patient will have a normal, healthy relationship with the past once more.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the means of constructing a ‘proper’ memory of 9/11 becomes a hugely important task – and an ideologically contentious one, given the significance of the event, and the political context in which it occurred. Breithaupt initially refers to television news channels and the print media’s responses, but he later mentions the presence of trauma behind film, particularly HBO and CNN television documentaries that marked anniversaries after the event: according to Breithaupt, the proliferation of images in visual media such as film, contributes to the repetition of images, and, therefore, the constant reminder of the tragedy of September 11.

If, as Breithaupt contends, it is possible for the news media to be described as ‘memorials’ in their reaction to 9/11, then the same can be said of films made that dramatised that day. The nature of *World Trade Center* and *United 93*’s subject matter render the films unique in this respect as regards genre: while they display the generic conventions of the disaster film they illustrate an actual event (more specifically, an event that exposed a profound vulnerability), and senses of tragedy from which many are still recovering.¹⁵⁷ *United 93* is the speculative story of one of the four planes hijacked on 9/11 and tells how the passengers heroically attempted to wrestle control of the plane and overpower the terrorists, ultimately failing to save their own lives but preventing it from reaching and destroying its actual target. The film also details the actions and confusion of the officials at the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ For example, the unfolding of a normal day unaware of impending danger, the onset of the disaster, tragic loss of life, emergence of traits of fear, courage, self-sacrifice and heroism.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS) who struggle to both comprehend what is happening, and to deal with the situation. Footage of these three main stories are intercut to maximise emotional impact and tension, though in both films' cases the generic conventions are undermined by audience fore-knowledge, whilst their anticipations as well as memories arguably render the films more painful to watch than other 'fictional' disaster films.

World Trade Center depicts two New York City Port Authority policemen, John McLaughlin and Will Jimeno (played by Nicolas Cage and Michael Peña respectively), as they follow their usual routine and head to Manhattan to work on the morning of September 11. Both men volunteer to assist in the evacuation of the World Trade Centre when news filters through that one of the towers has been hit by a plane. Once inside, the policemen are trapped when the tower collapses. The film cuts between McLaughlin and Jimeno as they struggle to maintain hope, and their respective families who experience the terrorist attack (and its aftermath), helplessly wondering if their loved ones have, firstly, been involved in the events and, then, if they have survived. *World Trade Center* thus focuses tightly on what the policemen and their families experienced. Very few other narrational vantage points are incorporated to the extent that McLaughlin and Jimeno, in their 'sealed-off' state, remain completely unaware of the terrorist nature of the catastrophe. Indeed, the only reference the film makes to the terrorists is as a shadow of the first plane, since that is the only thing the policemen, themselves, saw.

It is these depictions of an actual event which is the crucial point as it provides inspiration for Stone and Greengrass' production and attendant film

style: efforts were made, from consulting with families to utilising Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) data to construct a model of Ground Zero, to employing real people involved to play themselves, to ensure that the films accurately represented what actually happened on 9/11.¹⁵⁸ Both films detail the physical environments in which the action take place and relentlessly focus on the terrifying ordeals their characters experience, thereby foregrounding and replaying the tragedy. They are visceral films to watch and many critics have commented on how hard they found them to view.¹⁵⁹ Neither film, however, makes any reference to the possible causes of the attacks. There is nothing to indicate, beyond the presence of the Middle Eastern terrorists in *United 93*, that America's foreign policy and presence in the Middle East has created antagonism so, according to Breithaupt's formula, American innocence remains fundamental and unquestionable.

The function of these films seems to be to, as Thomas Doherty says of *United 93*, to supply homage to those involved. Both Doherty and Nicolas Cage have made specific reference to the contribution these films make to posterity and future historical study when they say, respectively:

In archival documentaries of the future, *United 93* will likely merge with the 24-7 video footage for a single audiovisual memory of the day, much [like] the way the Hollywood at war montage bleeds into the newsreel footage of WWII.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Duncan, Jody, 'World Trade Center,' *Cinefex*, Number 107, October 2006, pp. 21-22; Halbfinger, *ibid.*, Doherty, Thomas, 'United 93,' *Cineaste*, Volume 31, Number 4, Fall 2006, p. 73 and Smith, Gavin, 'Mission Statement: Paul Greengrass Discusses the Creative Process Behind His Reconstruction of the Worst Day in Modern American History,' *Film Comment*, Volume 42, Number 3, May – June 2006, p. 28.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Ansen, David, 'Oliver Stone's 9/11 is a Tale of Courage,' *Newsweek*, 07/08/06, <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14095532/site/newsweek/>>

¹⁶⁰ Doherty, *ibid.*

And, 'I see it as storytelling which depicts history...This is what happened...' 'Yeah, I remember that.' Generation after generation goes by, they'll have *United 93*, *World Trade Center*, to recall that history.'¹⁶¹ In their portrayal of selfless, heroic, innocent victims, replete with iconic images of the twin towers, Ground Zero, and firefighters, the films act like the protective layer, replayed to harden and heal the nation. One can thus replace 'news media' with '*World Trade Center*' or '*United 93*' in Breithaupt's discussion. The result of which is that they become 9/11 memorials. Indeed, they both exemplify Breithaupt's definition of a memorial: 'finding a proper memorial is not simply a matter of remembering and honoring what will otherwise be forgotten...its mission is healing.'¹⁶²

This function is not without its critics. Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, for example, have argued that the process of mourning and reflection, rather than focusing on the event happening in a political vacuum (which permits almost limitless revenge), this period of mourning should give rise to an America developing a renewed sense of its global humanity. Žižek contended that Americans were faced, in fact, with two options:

Either America will persist in – even strengthen the...attitude of 'Why should this happen to us? Things like this don't happen *here!*', leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside...Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen that separates it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival in the Real world, making the long overdue move from 'A thing like that shouldn't happen *here!*' to 'A thing like that shouldn't happen *anywhere!*'¹⁶³

Whilst Butler put it thus:

¹⁶¹ Halbfinger, *ibid.*

¹⁶² Breithaupt, *ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁶³ Žižek, Slavoj, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 19.

From the subsequent experience of loss and fragility...the possibility of making different kinds of ties emerges. Such mourning might (or could) effect a transformation in our sense of international ties that would crucially rearticulate the possibility of democratic political culture here and elsewhere.¹⁶⁴

When one considers the policies implemented by the Bush Administration on the basis of America's victimhood, particularly the curtailing of civil liberties, the interminable war on terror, the detention of terror suspects in Guantánamo Bay (in contravention of the Geneva Convention on Human Rights), and the abuses of Abu Ghraib prison, the position taken by Stone and Greengrass appears unambitious, tentative, or even blinkered. There is no suggestion in either film that there is the possibility of anticipating and contesting or qualifying these policies – well-recognised by the moment of the films' productions, or, in other words, providing an alternative to the conservative works they produced.

It is arguable, therefore, that these films illustrate the construction of Breithaupt's concept of the 'proper' memory: they create monolithic, uncontroversial texts in order to synchronise senses of the past with attitudes to the present, to provide a single, national narrative. In *Media Representations of September 11*, a chapter is dedicated to the study of how such memorial narratives are created, categorising incidents which are memorialised into 'acute' or 'chronic,' that is, isolated incidents or incidents which are part of a larger, complex but related context.¹⁶⁵ Chronic incidents, by definition, engender numerous perspectives which often conflict and thus there is a good chance that

¹⁶⁴ Butler, *ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Damphousse, Kelly R., Hefley, Kristen S. and Smith, Brent L., 'Creating Memories: Exploring How Narratives Help Define the Memorialization of Tragedy' in Chermak, Steven, Bailey, Frankie Y., and Brown, Michelle (eds), *Media Representations of September 11* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), p. 135.

any memorials will be controversial.¹⁶⁶ Damphousse, *et al.*, argue that September 11, rather than being an isolated attack, is actually more complicated, and possibly chronic. First, the 9/11 attacks, themselves, involved four separate incidents and, second, were the instigating event in a wider climate of terror, including the threat of more attacks and the war on terror. Against the temporality implied by this succession of events, *World Trade Center* and *United 93* create memorials that underline the national disaster rather than drawing attention to divisive issues, thereby allowing the audience as a whole to revisit the event in a consistent, uniform way.

It is understandable, on the one hand, that an American filmmaker would want to avoid controversy over his or her nation's most painful modern experience, and in certain respects it is peculiar that Oliver Stone should be the one director to make a film about the world trade centre given his reputation. Indeed, Michael Peña is reported to have had doubts about the film when he heard Stone was directing it.¹⁶⁷ This gives the impression that attempts were made to focus on unity whether on political or national terms. David Ansen explicitly referred to this process in his review of *World Trade Center*; in *Newsweek*, he stated that the film 'should be embraced as readily by conservatives (whom Paramount is actively courting with advance screenings in Washington) as by liberals. For two hours and nine minutes, at least, it makes the distinction irrelevant.'¹⁶⁸

Paradoxically, considering the political and global climate in the wake of 9/11 and the attempts to unite and memorialise the event, *World Trade Center* and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁶⁷ Halbfinger, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Ansen, *ibid.*

United 93 can thus be interpreted as ultimately making a discernible and coherent, if flawed, political statement. In their concentration on that day's events, in their memorialisation, they grant Bush and his administration license to implement such measures as they consider appropriate. Žižek makes this point in *The Guardian*, contending that it is the films' realism which enables this outlook to emerge:

The realism means that both films are restrained from taking a political stance and depicting the wider context of the events. Neither the passengers on *United 93* nor the policemen in WTC [sic] grasp the full picture. All of a sudden they find themselves in a terrifying situation and have to make the best out of it. This lack of 'cognitive mapping' is crucial...The omnipresent invisible threat of terror legitimises the all-too-visible protective measures of defence.¹⁶⁹

In her *tour d'horizon* of post-9/11 culture, *Portents of the Real*, Susan Willis describes how a statue was commissioned to commemorate the efforts of the fire service in its courageous response to the events in Manhattan, in particular to recreate the image of Iwo Jima by depicting three fire fighters raising the American flag. Though the fire service is mostly white, and though the three firemen involved in that image were all white, the statue was designed to reflect the racial diversity of the 9/11 victims and thus two of the men were replaced by black and Hispanic figures.¹⁷⁰ Like the modified, mediated nature of this statue that does not correspond with the circumstance of the event, *World Trade Center* and *United 93* are cinematic monuments that dramatise an actual event to achieve a particular, unifying effect. Perhaps this avoidance of context is one of the

¹⁶⁹ Žižek, Slavoj, 'On 9/11, New Yorkers faced the fire in the minds of men,' *The Guardian*, 11/09/06, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1869547,00.html>>

¹⁷⁰ Willis, Susan, *Portents of the Real: A Primer for Post-9/11 America* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 13 – 14.

reasons no film has been made about the other plane hijacked on September 11. It is hard to imagine how a film could portray a plane, piloted by Islamic terrorists, being deliberately crashed into the Pentagon and explain it without reference to American involvement in the Middle-East.

9/11 as Context

While *World Trade Center* and *United 93* refuse to permit the portrayal of events leading up to September 11 to inform and contextualise the films' narratives, *25th Hour*, *Reign Over Me*, and *Julie and Julia*, in contrast, incorporate the aftermath of September 11th as an emotional and political backdrop for their characters' behaviours and motivations. These films depict New Yorkers trying to cope with the new era that 9/11 heralded so that while Stone and Greengrass's films are about a de-contextualised event, here 9/11 *is* the context. In doing so, they provide an opportunity to assess continuities and differences that prevail or are noticeable in the films that include 9/11 as a backdrop to their narratives.

25th Hour tells the story of Monty Brogan (Edward Norton), a convicted drug dealer from New York, as he prepares to face a seven-year prison sentence. His last day of freedom is spent with close friends and family: with his girlfriend, Naturelle (Rosario Dawson), whom he suspects of informing on him; his father, James (Brian Cox), a recovering alcoholic whose bar is bedecked with firefighter memorabilia; and with his two closest friends, Francis Slaughtery (Barry Pepper), a cynical and arrogant Wall Street broker, and Jacob Elinsky (Philip Seymour Hoffman), a school teacher who impulsively acts on a crush he has on one of his pupils. Monty flashes back a number of times to reveal significant instances in his

recent past: meeting Naturelle, being ‘busted’ by the police at his apartment, and being interrogated by the same officers. Mindful of the police’s goading of his handsome features, he asks Francis to repeatedly punch him to lessen the possibility of sexual abuse during his time in prison. The film closes with James driving Monty towards Otisville prison, but finishes with some ambiguity: James offers to drive his son to some remote location in the West, to escape his sentence and to establish a new life, and, as the film ends with the pair on the road, it is not clear which of these options Monty decides to pursue.

Though David Benioff’s book was published before 9/11, he and Lee adapted the source material to incorporate the post-9/11 landscape; indeed, according to Christina Rickli, the attacks occurred while the film was being shot, and thus September 11 constitutes the actual dramatic and emotional backdrop to the production.¹⁷¹ Rickli argues that contrary to the possibility that reference to 9/11 simply could not be avoided due to the timing of the attack, the inclusion of the Towers of Light memorial is ‘too crafted and artful to be merely coincidental.’¹⁷²

Lee, himself, provides further evidence to support the claim that there was a deliberate effort to incorporate 9/11 into the narrative. Reacting to witnessing film studios prevaricate around the issue of the terrorist attacks – the removal of images of the Twin Towers from films, for example – Lee told reporters: “What

¹⁷¹ Thompson, Anne, ‘Spike Lee’s Game,’ *New York Magazine*, 23/12/02, <http://nymag.com/print/?/nymetro/movies/columns/hollywood/n_8161/>; Rickli, Christina, ‘An Event “Like a Movie”? Hollywood and 9/11,’ *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, Volume 10, 2009, <http://www-copas.uni-regensburg.de/articles/issue_10/10_06_text_rickli.php>

¹⁷² Rickli, *ibid.*

did [the studios] think?...That we didn't all watch the buildings collapse a trillion times on TV? Don't insult our intelligence.”¹⁷³

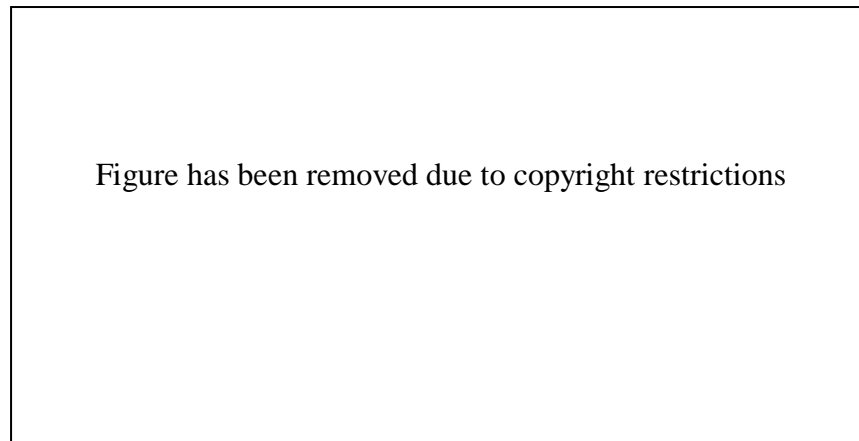


Fig. 2: 'Towers of Light' memorial in *25th Hour*

He also said: “I could not live with myself, being a New Yorker...if I shot this film after 9/11 and went about my business like nothing ever happened.”¹⁷⁴

Explicit references to 9/11 are limited; however, the scenes in which the references are made are critical to the construction of character, and the film's ambience. The first is the afore-mentioned opening credits sequence which is composed entirely of shots of varying angles of the southern skyline of Manhattan at night, which features the 'Towers of Light' tribute: two shafts of light that were shone from Ground Zero to mark the space that had been occupied by the Trade Centre as a memorial to the victims of the attack.¹⁷⁵ Later, in the toilet of James' bar, Monty faces himself in the mirror and, giving vent to his frustration, launches into violent invective against many facets of New York ethnicity including

¹⁷³ Bowles, Scott, 'Head-on Spike Lee says 'Hour' is at hand,' *USA Today*, 19/12/02, <http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2002-12-19-spike-lee_x.htm#>

¹⁷⁴ Thompson, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Rickli, *ibid.*

Asians, Italian-Americans, and Puerto-Ricans.¹⁷⁶ Though he ultimately accepts that it is *he* who most deserves contempt, his initial outburst makes clear his objection to Osama Bin Laden, the attacks he masterminded, and even Middle-Easterns in general.

The third reference to 9/11 is made in Francis' apartment which overlooks Ground Zero. Jacob arrives at the apartment in advance of the subsequent meeting with Monty, and he and Francis discuss Monty's imminent incarceration. The conversation is conducted beside a window through which the World Trade Centre site is clearly visible, and it is the focus of a short debate about the area's air quality: Jacob mentions that the *New York Times* has said the air is bad at Ground Zero, while Francis states that the EPA has said it is fine, and with a degree of wryness he suggests that either the *Times* or the EPA is lying. Francis' own conclusion is that he is not going to move even if Bin Laden were to "drop another one next door!"

When the conversation turns to Monty's forthcoming ordeal, Jacob's initial optimism is aggressively countered by Francis who bluntly opines that not only does Monty deserve his prison sentence, but that their friendship will not survive: whatever happens, whether Monty goes on the run, if he gets abused in jail, or if he serves his time, nothing will ever be the same again, thus echoing the comments about 9/11 changing everything.¹⁷⁷ Though Francis later tries to console Monty by suggesting they could open a bar together when he gets out of prison, the stark realisation of this fundamental shift in the friendship's dynamic is

¹⁷⁶ Thompson, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, Friedman, Thomas, *Longitudes and Attitudes – Exploring the World Before and After September 11* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 325, or 'The War Against America; An Unfathomable Attack,' *New York Times*, 12/11/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/opinion/the-war-against-america-an-unfathomable-attack.html>>

shocking to Jacob. This heart-breaking reality is highlighted by a short montage of close-ups of Ground Zero as Jacob and Francis converse: Jacob leans against the glass and looks down on the site where various people are seen working amidst the rubble and where building-site plant vehicles are being operated. Thus, footage of the site intensifies the emotional impact of Jacob's reality check – what once was secure and reliable is about to suffer a break down which could potentially be terminal.

This reading is in keeping with some of the critical writings that were made of *25th Hour*, particularly those like Mick LaSalle's review in *The San Francisco Chronicle* which offers an interpretation of Monty as an analogy of New York itself. LaSalle says:

Monty's past was full of money and the delusion of omnipotence, and his future is a question mark. In one scene, Monty's two best friends discuss his prospects, sitting by a window overlooking ground zero. To contemplate Monty's future is to look into an abyss.¹⁷⁸

Thus, as a personification of New York, Monty Brogan's circumstances illustrate the juncture at which the city suddenly found itself after the attacks, full of unknowable potential. However, LaSalle's reading includes an assessment of how the post-9/11 mood permeates the film: he argues that the characters all behave as if they have been knocked out and are just regaining consciousness: 'the characters...seem not only uncertain but also in reaction against their uncertainty:' Monty reacts with anger; Jacob reacts with an unwise fixation on his student, and Francis reacts with an aggressive denial (demonstrated by his faith in the EPA's

¹⁷⁸ LaSalle, Mick, 'Spike Lee's love poem to New York,' *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 10/01/03, <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/01/10/DD214388.DTL&type=printable>>

pronouncement that the air is safe in his apartment's environment).¹⁷⁹ Though LaSalle does not mention James, his reaction is also characterised by denial and grief, demonstrated by his misguided plan to drive Monty into the heart of America's West.

A.O. Scott's *New York Times* review revealed that the loss suffered by those on-screen was shared by viewers, resulting in a particularly heightened involvement with the film. His account of how the treatment drew attention to its temporal and spatial setting demonstrates both how he had a self-conscious awareness of his own response to seeing New York in an explicitly post-9/11 context, and his subsequent emotional reaction. Only a year had passed when *25th Hour* was released, and Scott testifies to the rawness that remained when he acknowledged how 'half-buried sorrows' were provoked by the 'lights' sequence at the start of the film, and how he found this to be jarring.¹⁸⁰ Scott also describes the attacks' aftermath as having an obtrusive presence, and cites the conversation between Francis and Jacob above Ground Zero as a scene in which the view stirs up remembrance of the actual rendering it difficult to view with detachment: the 'floodlighted glare and somber activity [at Ground Zero] make it impossible to concentrate on the dialogue: a case of reality overwhelming fiction.'¹⁸¹ 9/11 as a context for *25th Hour*, therefore, allows feelings of anger, uncertainty, sadness,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Scott, A.O., 'Confronting the Past Before Going to Prison,' *New York Times*, 19/12/02, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/19/movies/film-review-confronting-the-past-before-going-to-prison.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

and fear, to be dramatised at a local level, expressed ‘in the language of rage,’ as Scott describes it.¹⁸²

Reign Over Me depicts Charlie Fineman (Adam Sandler), a former dentist, who has suffered an emotional breakdown since the death of his wife and daughters who were passengers on one of the planes hijacked on 9/11, and is suffering from trauma, exhibited by his inability to accept past events as the past, and being able to move on. Disturbed, detached, and in denial, Charlie shuts out the real world by constantly listening to music on his ‘iPod,’ playing the drums or reverting to the fantasy world evoked by hi-tech computer games. Charlie is first seen as a lonely, solitary figure, almost insignificant as he travels among Manhattan’s apartment blocks and skyscrapers on his scooter, and when he is seen in social situations he is visibly uncomfortable. A serendipitous encounter with a former college roommate, Alan Johnson (Don Cheadle), ultimately forces Charlie to come to terms with his past, which he experiences as an intensely difficult path, fraught with an inevitable reliving of his tragedy. Though Alan puts him in touch with two psychotherapists, they fail to help him make progress. Meanwhile, attempts are made by Charlie’s parents-in-law to commit him to a state mental institution although the legal proceedings are truncated when the presiding judge appeals to the couple’s sense of humanity. The result is that Charlie is permitted to ‘find his own way,’ the suggestion being that for the sake of his mental health (and thus, by extension, any 9/11 victim), he is better off indulging his caprice and surrendering himself to the mercy of his new-found friend(s).

¹⁸² Ibid; LaSalle, Mick, ‘9/11: Five Years Later / Spike Lee’s 25th Hour,’ *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 10/09/06, <http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-09-10/entertainment/17310055_1_21st-century-film-edward-norton>

The loss of his wife and daughters on September 11 propels him into a state of denial, and his restlessness testifies to a desire to repress memory from consciousness. The shots of Fineman travelling in the city interspersed between scenes conveying the difficulty he has making human connections underline the fact that he resists participation in normal discourse, be that acting like a 'normal' adult or going to therapy. These scenes are suggestive of not simply a lonely existence, but a degree of comfort with an inanimate and anonymous city to which he can remain anonymous, silent, and emotionally closed. Human contact, on the contrary, would force him to open up and confront his pain, which he refuses to do.

This malaise is resolved by the intervention of Johnston, and both men eventually experience an almost adolescent regression. Johnston, struggling with what he perceives as a smothering domestic life, indulges Fineman's whim which sees them go to all-night film screenings, spin around town on Fineman's scooter, attend rock concerts, rummage through record shops, perform music in Fineman's apartment, and play violent computer games in Fineman's living room. Indeed, it is within the walls of Fineman's home that the viewer witnesses how his emotional disturbance is connected to his physical surroundings. In a session with a psychiatrist, Fineman's eventually reveals that his final conversation with his wife was an argument over whether or not to refurbish their kitchen. This revelation provides a psychological clarification of Fineman's previously unexplained fixation with fitting a new kitchen, then re-fitting it a short time later, something that occurs a number of times in the film's narrative. By acquiescing to his dead wife's wishes repeatedly he can successfully fulfil them and feel some sort of relief. Of course, this is evidence of his illness and it is understandable that

any alleviation of anguish is only temporary. This recurring motif illustrates the emotional bond between man and his surroundings that is triggered by 9/11; however the bond is characterised by painful mental illness and a protracted period of recovery, though the film suggests that Fineman's future looks to be positive.

The adaptation of Julie Powell's book *Julie and Julia* was released eight years after 9/11 amidst global economic turmoil, and thus produced in different circumstances than Lee's and Binder's films. The film depicts Julie Powell (Amy Adams), motivated by her frustration at both her office job and the upward career trajectories of her friends, electing to cook her way through Julia Childs' (Meryl Streep) book of French recipes, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, in one year, and, encouraged by her husband, documents her progress on a 'blog.' She completes her project, and gains a degree of celebrity along the way from a burgeoning group of followers of her website. She is interviewed by journalists, and is even subject of Childs' scornful attention, all of which results in the eventual offer of a book deal that sees her fulfil her dream of becoming an author.

The narrative cuts back and forth between Powell's challenge and the story of Julia Childs' own culinary apprenticeship, learning how to cook in Paris whilst accompanying her diplomat husband to post-war France. At one point in the film, Powell comments on how food played a primary role by providing both Childs' and her own lives with a positive focus, a reflection that calls to mind the necessary change to her life that Powell was forced to make in the aftermath of 9/11. Though her book refrains from naming the government agency for which she was working when she began her project, the film is not so reticent, indicating

that Powell was an insurance claim adjuster at the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) taking phone calls from the public.

The signs in her office testify to both the spirit of resolve evident in New York in the wake of the attacks and yet also to the extremely emotive nature of the event. One sign boldly states: ‘Remember Rebuild Renew;’ another, a list of guidelines, instruct claim adjusters like Powell to listen as objectively as possible to clients, to avoid becoming emotionally involved with the incidents they report, and to take a break if they find themselves unable to remain detached. She is shown taking a number of phone calls that run the gamut of public responses. One woman phones and tells her about her son dying in the second tower, while a man calls to complain about plans for a memorial. Another woman labels Powell and her colleagues heartless bureaucratic goons, after which a woman describes how her husband has fibreglass in his lungs and the insurance company refuses to pay out the money that could buy the medicine that will help him breathe. Powell’s reactions to these types of calls ranges from repeating “I’m sorry,” to “please stop yelling at me!” to helplessly weeping: the shot of Powell crying starts with a close-up of the aforementioned LMDC guidelines to illustrate just how difficult it is to not get emotionally involved in citizens’ calls. Powell’s work involves her being subjected to a constant barrage of harrowing tales and abuse, and is a perpetual reminder both of 9/11 itself, and the insecurity and suffering it caused, experiences she has no power to alleviate. Powell is therefore both unfulfilled (in the book, she describes her position as initially a temping job) and emotionally bruised by her job.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Powell, Julie, *Julie and Julia – My Year of Cooking Dangerously* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 12.

The post-9/11 climate is very clearly identified as the context of the story. One early scene shows Powell walking alongside Ground Zero (a location further identified by the name of the subway stop: ‘Chambers Street/World Trade Center’), a shot that also reveals a row of tributes attached to a railing as she makes her way to work. However, the explicit post-9/11 backdrop once constructed is made to support Powell’s cooking and is rarely mentioned after the initial exposition of her at work.

Indeed, a passage from her book suggests that the context is all but a vehicle for expressing her feelings about her interaction with food: ‘I’m a secretary at a government agency, and so I can talk with some authority about things that are a pain in the ass. Say, for instance, filling out purchase orders. But do you know what’s *really* a pain in the ass? Poulet en Gelée à l’Estragon.’¹⁸⁴

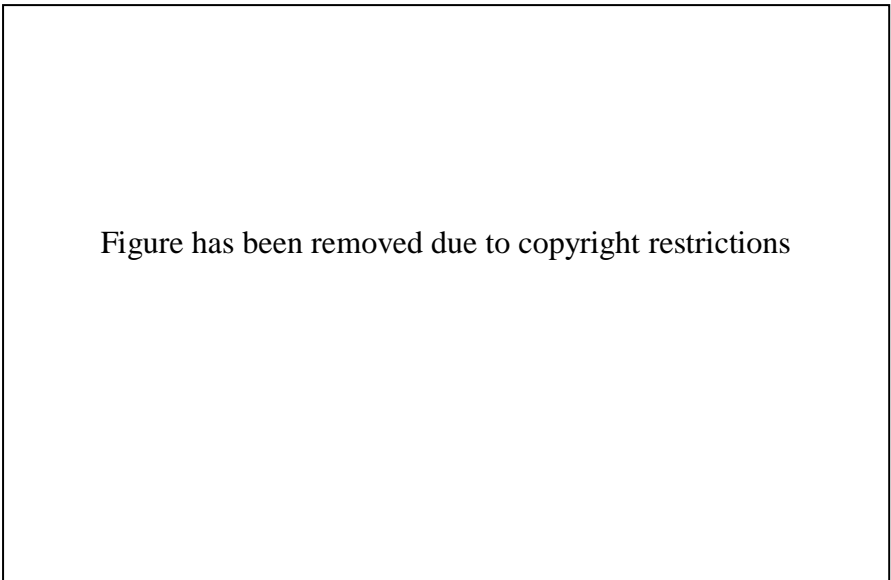


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Fig. 3: Julie Powell at Ground Zero in *Julie and Julia*

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

The fact that the 9/11 context is played-down suggests an unspoken, psychological phenomenon present. Given the stress on food preparation, and Powell's obsession with both Childs' book, and the woman herself, there is a sense that she has taken the frustration from her work, and the feeling of helplessness that arises both from her job and the very climate of insecurity in which she is living, and creates a world that can be micro-managed, ordered, that follows rigid guidelines which will thus promise certain and reliable outcomes. As Samuel Wigley puts it in *Sight and Sound*: 'she seems maniacal, ritualistically working through her project as a means of staving off the darkness.'¹⁸⁵ Her controllable world is in stark contrast to the world beyond the kitchen walls, which cannot be relied upon to be safe and secure, and cannot be truly known. It is no surprise that the few kitchen 'disasters' and disappointments (such as burning or over-cooking food, or not being able to handle boiling a live lobster, not to mention the news that Childs is not favourably inclined to Powell's project) elicit intensely emotional reactions as they represent the break-down of the supposed manageable world, providing a reminder that shocking things happen, and highlighting the fragility of post-9/11 New York. Nevertheless, these instances are uncommon in the film; it would appear that Julie Powell's post-9/11 existence, though challenged, stubbornly and successfully continues.

Therefore, by studying three films that incorporate the actual event of 9/11 into their narratives, two important factors can be detected. Each film has a different tone in their ways of dealing with the attacks: *25th Hour* is angry and raw, and concerned with issues of survival and disorientation; *Reign Over Me* is subdued due to the nature of its protagonist's psychological suffering, while *Julie*

¹⁸⁵ Wigley, Samuel, 'Julie and Julia,' *Sight and Sound*, October 2009, Volume 19, Issue 10, p. 68.

and Julia seems to take 9/11 in its stride: it is a backdrop to Julie's desire to take on a meaningful challenge, and explains why she needs this challenge in the first place. These films illustrate the stages of grief that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross delineated in *On Death and Dying* in 1969. In this book, Kübler-Ross revealed that a patient typically comes to terms with bad news, such as the diagnosis of a terminal illness, gradually, and in five distinct stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.¹⁸⁶ In this way, viewed chronologically, these films track a nation's psychological rehabilitation in the wake of 9/11: an initial denial, confusion and anger, then the almost debilitating depression after suffering pain, then the incorporation of the event into some degree of normality – the event is still remembered, but it features less prominently in daily consciousness. Not all stages are accounted for, but the trajectory of psychological healing from denial to acceptance is consistent with Kübler-Ross' theory.

A second factor is that these films, irrespective of their varying tones, depict individuals attempting to go about their lives in the face of unexpected violence, devastation, and shock: they are depicted either coping with life in post-9/11 New York by adopting certain strategies (getting beat up to avoid being targeted in jail, perhaps not even going to jail, or channelling energy into following recipes that represent logical guidelines with more-or-less reliable products), or eventually overcoming grief through the process of psychotherapy after a period of denial.

¹⁸⁶ Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 51, 63, 93, 97, 123.

Political Tendencies in Post-9/11 Fiction Film

In the way they organise the way characters interact with each other, and exist within a context defined both by terrorist actions and particular governmental responses, these three films also vary in terms of exhibiting political tendencies. In *25th Hour*, there is an almost politically neutral response to 9/11, as if the medium itself is still paralysed by the event, since it closely focuses on people trying to do their best to cope with familiar surroundings in an unfamiliar way. Nevertheless, there is a conservative subtext to the film that synchronises with the actual political climate of the time. The ambivalence of the ending poses a question as regards the political path that was pursued in response to the attacks, particularly if one accepts LaSalle's reading of Monty as standing metaphorically for New York. Going to jail to serve justice, and pay for his criminal activity would represent some kind of acceptance of Monty's/New York's role in how things came to this juncture, some kind of remorse, and an attempt to perform a legally-enforced act of contrition. Delivering himself to prison would symbolise a willingness to comply with wider conventions on accepted behaviour and conform to moral and legal regulations. On the other hand, being driven to a remote town far out in the west to start afresh, to escape punishment, and to avoid any serving of penal time suggests a type of unilateral course of action, one that suits and benefits himself alone, and devoid of reasoned responsibility.

It seems that in the aftermath of 9/11, America was faced with a similar choice over whether it should think of itself as part of a larger social context, or follow its own interests; as Judith Butler puts it, to redefine itself as part of a

global community or pursue a nationalist discourse.¹⁸⁷ Butler lamented the haste with which the United States pursued a militaristic path at the cost of other options that might lead to greater understanding of global suffering. Butler wondered:

[W]hether the experiences of vulnerability and loss have to lead straightaway to military violence and retribution. There are other passages...it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war...To be injured means that one has a chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways.¹⁸⁸

Given that the reaction in the wake of the attacks was to turn its back on international diplomacy in favour of unilateral action, and working LaSalle's Monty-New York metaphor backwards it is possible to speculate that Monty favoured the 'unilateral' option and chose the route West.

Reign Over Me is even less politically coherent, inviting contradictory readings. Charlie Fineman, an indirect victim of the attacks, is on one hand taken care of by the state, receiving financial aid for his loss, and yet he resists his parents-in-law's attempt to have him committed to a state mental institution (which is depicted as being brutal and grim), a struggle ultimately sanctioned by a judge. His legally-approved recovery programme is therefore private. The film suggests, then, that the state has simultaneously provided for Fineman, has let him 'slip through the net' since he is allowed to exist without care, and also unfit for purpose since private care is preferable to state-run care. Implicit is both a positive recognition that Fineman's plight has been acknowledged, but also that those in

¹⁸⁷ Butler, *ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

charge (whether at a federal or state level), are not fully competent and have let him down. Therefore, there are elements of praise and critique detectable in *Reign Over Me*, though they are concealed by the narrative of devastating loss and psychological illness.

In contrast, *Julie and Julia*'s political bent is more apparent. Julie Powell's book makes a number of pejorative references to the 'Republicans' in her office, one of whom is her manager; however, this particular detail is changed in the film.¹⁸⁹ There is a scene in which Julie is summoned to her manager's office after documenting a day's culinary activity on her blog despite phoning in sick. The exchange is the only time in the film when politics are explicitly mentioned: the supervisor says, after admonishing her for her absence, "anyone else would fire you. A Republican would fire you," thereby indicating that he is a Democrat, and a sympathetic man as well. This precise scene does not appear in the book, and, as Paul Goldberger details in his book on politics and architecture in post-9/11 New York, *Up From Zero*, the LMDC had a number of high-profile Republicans on its board of directors, so it is evident that not only is Powell's actual manager's party allegiance deliberately changed to make the agency seem more liberal, but this very change in political orientation is contrary to the provenance and status of the agency and its higher echelons in 2002.¹⁹⁰ This represents a coherent and literal criticism of Bush-era Republicanism, that owes its presence to the fact that the film was made almost a decade after the attacks. In other words, it took a film set explicitly in the wake of 9/11 eight years to be allowed to be openly critical of Republican politics.

¹⁸⁹ Powell, *ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁹⁰ Goldberger, Paul, *Up From Zero – Politics, Architecture, and the Rebuilding of New York* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 43-44.

The political consequences of September 11 have been the explicit milieu of other Hollywood films; as with the three films discussed above, they suggest ideologically divergent readings through which conservative or liberal positions can be discerned. Due to the number and variety of films that dramatise post-9/11 America, only two have been selected to be studied, namely *War of the Worlds*, and *The Manchurian Candidate*, though reference will be made to others in which salient points are evident.

Released four years after 9/11, *War of the Worlds* transposes H.G. Wells' science-fiction story to contemporary America, and is set within a literal and metaphorical 'stone's throw' of Ground Zero. Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) is a divorced father of two who works as a docker across the river from Manhattan, in New Jersey. His immature approach to life leaves him at odds with his ex-wife, and both his resentful teenage son and his wise-beyond-her-years ten year old daughter. The fact that he is late for an arranged weekend hand-over of children, that his fridge is bereft of food, an engine lies on the kitchen table and that he goes to bed leaving his children to fend for themselves testifies to this immaturity, as well as the sense that he is essentially a self-centred adolescent, devoid of any sense of parental responsibility. After this expositional portrait of dysfunctionality, a bleak tenor is suggested by the ominous sight of storm clouds growing. The apocalyptic tone is exacerbated by an intense lightning storm that blows the electrical power in Ray's neighbourhood. Ray walks to the main thoroughfare where people have gathered to discover what is going on, particularly at a hole in the ground where lightning has struck. From inside the hole, a giant alien tripod emerges, vapourising fleeing humans and destroying buildings. Ray manages to find a functioning car, and drives off with his children,

ultimately making for Boston where his wife is visiting her parents and thereby re-uniting the family. Along the way, the attacks continue, his son runs off to assist the army as it mounts a defence, and ultimately the aliens are vanquished by exposure to bacteria to which humans are immune, but to which they are susceptible.

There are a number of factors which combined enable the audience to associate action on screen with actual 9/11 events. First, and most important, is the re-configuration of the concept of the 'Other.' Clearly a crucial aspect of drama, in this sense the Other stands for an extremely threatening, ideological enemy, a construct which was utilised to great effect in the science-fiction films of the 1950s, the era of cold-war paranoia and the threat of the nuclear bomb. In his book *Seeing is Believing*, Peter Biskind explains this concept:

Sci-fi has always been fascinated with the Other, and critics of popular culture have been quick to point out that the Other is always other than itself, which is to say, the pods and blobs are 'symbols' standing for something else.¹⁹¹

Later, Biskind elaborates on the nature and function of the Other:

The idea of the alien was profoundly influenced by the Manichean Us/Them habit of thought that was an occupational hazard of the cold-war battle of ideas. The Other was everything the center was not...If the center was white and Anglo-Saxon, the Other was alien cultures: Martians in sci-fi; Indians in westerns.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Biskind, Peter, *Seeing is Believing - Or How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the 50s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 107.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 111 – 112.

The attacks of 9/11, and specifically Osama bin Laden, provided post-cold war America with an embodiment of the great ideological Other. Releasing a film entitled *War of the Worlds* after 9/11 cannot help but conjure up the past and in particular the division of 'Us and Them.' Audience familiarity with the story, and previous adaptations, is manipulated effectively.

It is this sense of unprecedented and imminent threat that imbues *War of the Worlds* with a powerful impact. This context is explicitly mentioned by director, Steven Spielberg in an interview carried out by German publication, *Der Spiegel*:

Wells' novel has been made into a film several times, notably always in times of international crisis: World War II had just begun when Orson Welles terrified millions of Americans with his legendary radio play version...When the first screen version came into the movie theatres in 1953, the Americans were very afraid of a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. And our version also comes at a time when Americans feel deeply vulnerable.¹⁹³

A second factor that enables the audience to associate the film with 9/11 is the dialogue which explicitly mentions this real-life fear of attack from the Other and, also, other aspects of the immediate aftermath of 9/11. As they attempt to escape from the alien attack in their neighbourhood, Ray's daughter asks if they are the terrorists. Later in the film, explicit reference to the real Ground Zero phenomenon of too many blood donations, as the audience hear, over a loudspeaker that unless the donation is of O+ or Rh-, there is more blood than can be used.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ 'Spiegel Interview with Tom Cruise and Steven Spielberg - Actor Tom Cruise Opens Up about his Beliefs in the Church of Scientology,' *Der Spiegel Magazine*, Issue 17, 27/04/05, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,353577,00.html>>

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Gibbs, *ibid.*; Gibbs, Nancy, 'What a Difference A Year Makes,' *Time*, 09/09/02, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003212,00.html>>

Perhaps most noticeable are the many visual references to 9/11. As Ray Ferrier runs to escape from the alien attack, he is covered in the white residue of burned humans, reminiscent of the many hundreds of people covered in white ash as they escaped the devastation of Manhattan. Later, the Ferriers emerge from the basement of a house to see the wreck of a plane which had crashed into the street during the night, a particularly powerful image in the context of both the film and real life. Furthermore, accompanying the message about the blood donations is the sight of a ‘wall of the missing,’ where people have attached photographs of missing loved ones, hopeful of news of their whereabouts, again a clear reference to 9/11. Also, it emerges that the alien tripods have been lying beneath the earth’s surface for millenia (the lightening storm, in actual fact, being the transportation of aliens to these machines). This can be interpreted as a reference the fact that the 9/11 terrorists spent considerable time living and training in America in anticipation of their assault, that the attack came from within.




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Fig. 4: Scene of urban destruction in *War of the Worlds*

The vista of a destroyed city in *War of the Worlds* is, again, a potent reminder of the destruction of New York. As Mick La Salle puts it in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: the film is 'grounded in a fairly sophisticated understanding of specifically modern fears. The scenes of urban destruction - chaos in the streets, collapse in communications - intentionally call to mind everyone's worst terrorism nightmares.'¹⁹⁵

War of the Worlds does not portray many figures of official authority except military personnel who are fighting a losing battle against a superior force (indeed, at one point Ray has to alert them to the fact that the alien tripods' forcefield is down, rendering them vulnerable, something the army had not spotted). However, as the only vestige of authority, the army is responsible for defence and orderly evacuation to safety and their right to command is never in question. Thus, there would appear to be a further political message beyond the allegorical representation of terrorist attacks. A voice-over imparts the context: earth is coveted by the aliens who undertake to gain complete, unilateral control over it. As innocent victims of a spectacular attack there is no need for humankind to enter into dialogue, only a need to defend themselves. Thus, official power in *War of the Worlds* is to be trusted, and revenge is necessary.

Opposing this viewpoint, making a certain criticism of official power, is *The Manchurian Candidate*. Another remake of a cold-war film, *The Manchurian*

¹⁹⁵ Many other films likewise utilise 9/11's imagery: Chris Gorak's 2006 film, *Right At Your Door*, with its scenes of Los Angeles' skyscrapers billowing with smoke after a terrorist attack, its inhabitants covered in ash, deliberately used 9/11 as a source of inspiration. In *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004), Manhattan is almost obliterated again, this time by tidal waves. LaSalle, Mick, 'Close encounters of the thrilling kind - nothing cuddly about 'War of the Worlds'', *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 29/06/05, <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/06/29/DDGDMDFVCU18.DTL>>; 'Defining Moments,' *Filmmaker Magazine*, Winter 2006, <http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/winter2006/features/defining_moments.php>

Candidate was updated to resonate with its contemporary political climate: not only did the film's release coincide with the 2004 Democratic Convention, but Paramount demanded that its director, Jonathan Demme, finish post-production work for the explicit purpose of releasing it just before the election.¹⁹⁶ Demme highlights this process in an interview with the BBC:

Paramount felt that it was imperative that the film should be released just before the election and that meant finishing the film (doing the editing and sound work) twice as fast as I've ever done before...Once Paramount had their mind set on capitalising on election mania that was it.¹⁹⁷

The film depicts members of a marine patrol, who, years after an ambush in the first Gulf War, experience dreams which conflict so dramatically with what they remember of the incident that it affects their perception of reality. Raymond Shaw (Liev Schreiber), who was awarded the Medal of Honour for his acts of bravery in that ambush, is, at the behest of his overpowering mother, seeking the nomination for vice-president of what appears to be the Democratic Party. His erstwhile Major, Bennett Marco (Denzel Washington), is struggling to come to terms with his dreams, and starts to investigate what they mean after he finds a high-tech chip embedded in his shoulder. His investigations lead him to believe that he and his unit were brainwashed by a group employed by Manchurian Global, a private equity corporation, in order to put a corporate-friendly 'puppet' in the White House. Despite being accused of suffering from paranoia, and post-traumatic stress syndrome, Marco eventually manages to convince Shaw of the plot so that

¹⁹⁶ McNary, Dave, 'Manchurian is Par's summer antidote - Par hopes to build successful 'Candidate' in late summer,' *Variety*, 16/05/04, <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117904912.html>>

¹⁹⁷ Papamichael, Stella, 'Jonathan Demme – The Manchurian Candidate,' *BBC*, 11/11/04, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2004/11/11/jonathan_demme_the_manchurian_candidate_interview.shtml>

the planned assassination, which would see Shaw accede to the highest office, is ultimately foiled.

The film makes clear the corrupt link that can exist between political organisations and big business. It is replete with contemporary, post-9/11 references, visual and verbal, that serve to point an accusing finger at the Bush Administration and its corporate supporters. Firstly, the temporal setting is established as the present, as a title appears displaying the word 'Today.' The nation is vulnerable to terrorist attack and strikes have been initiated against a foreign country (Guinea) because of their stance on chemical weapons. In a speech by Shaw's rival for the vice-presidential ticket, Senator Thomas Jordan (John Voight), the Senator complains about the protracted war on terror, describing the suspension of civil liberties to be as much of a threat to democratic ideals and the Bill of Rights as terrorist attacks, which he blames on twenty years of failed American foreign policy.

The details of Manchurian Global's operations are particularly damning. The corporation is described as a crucial part of geo-political policy since President Nixon; this connection between the corporate and political is made incarnate by Manchurian Global's managing director, David Donovan (Jude Ciccolella), who is co-chair of the U.S. International Policy Caucus. Newspaper headlines elaborate on these details. For instance, 'New Military Contracts Given to Manchurian Global – local area jobs to increase 1000 to 1500,' reads one; 'Manchurian Global to Supply Private Army for Belorussian War,' 'Saudi Arabia Signs Defense Contract With Manchurian Global,' 'White House Demands New Investigation into Manchurian Fund's Guantánamo Role' and 'Manchurian CEO Blasts Congress: We're the Good Guys,' read others.

Shaw's ambitious mother, Eleanor Prentiss Shaw (Meryl Streep), effectively bullies her party colleagues into naming Raymond, instead of the more experienced Jordan, as vice-presidential nominee by witheringly criticising their pusillanimous attitude. Arguing that America is on the brink of nuclear cataclysm threatened by a covert alliance of terrorist nations who are emboldened by 'one worlder' Jordan, she passionately advocates the nomination of her son. *The Manchurian Candidate*'s political invective cannot be doubted. Any doubt, is, instead, cast on the legitimacy of its contemporary administration. The accusation, as Marco states, that the election is "a coup; a regime change in our own country," and the illustrated ties between politics and financial institutions, testify to intense political engagement.

These issues aside, *The Manchurian Candidate* portrays post-9/11 America and situates the event and the issues surrounding it within a global politics. Unlike *World Trade Center* and *War of the Worlds*, whose message was to trust in authority, it penetrates this view to illustrate a world in which power begets power, interference in foreign issues helps to create 'the Other,' the bottom line is pursuit of profit, and in which world leaders operate with an agenda beyond ordinary peoples' control. In short, authority is not to be trusted but should be questioned, and replaced if corrupt or unfit for purpose.

Conclusion

In the representation of the events of September 11, cinema performs a certain function other than simply turning a traumatising event into a visual artefact. When one analyses the content of *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, a lack of

context in the former's case, and a lack of desire to make any sort of conclusion that implicates figures of authority and their negligence in the latter's, one can observe that there is a foregrounding of certain information and an exclusion of other information. In short, these films go beyond preservation to construct 'proper memories' that everyone can use for remembering; that is, texts that distil the 9/11 story into coherent and unifying narratives that simultaneously remove taboo or controversial elements, so that they can be viewed as a history lesson.

This type of memorialising is no substitute for thorough, individual therapy, though, something to which Fritz Breithaupt, himself, draws attention:

[M]onuments are not means of therapy. Rather, they are institutions that master and rule over memories in such a way that the institution echoes the violence that accompanied the initial shock. This does not disqualify memorials and monuments...but it forbids placing them as the destinations of healing to replace the actual work of mourning. Instead, monuments alert us to the fact that the very passage to the past that they open is simultaneously blocked by them (and others).¹⁹⁸

What is important here is that film can be interpreted to be one of these memorials. Due to the emphasis *World Trade Center* and *United 93* place on victimhood and the depiction of an event as essentially outside of history, any sense of dissent is inhibited, and, in a similar fashion to the conditions remarked upon by Judith Butler, there can be no accommodation for a view that suggests an alternative interpretation of the terrorist attacks. Therefore, the process of selecting aspects of the 9/11 story to represent on film is a politically significant one, and the material that is screened is ideologically loaded: in contrast to Oliver

¹⁹⁸ Breithaupt, *ibid.*, p. 73.

Stone's claim, *World Trade Center* is not only a political film, but a rather conservative film.

However, other films depict people existing in an explicitly post-9/11 America, where 9/11 is the literal context for their narratives, thus permitting a different understanding of post-9/11 cinema (particularly of films that actually refer to the events of that day). The passage of time, from 2002 to 2009, demonstrates an industrial development of emotional and psychological characterisations that can be charted by studying a small number of films that use 9/11 as narrative contexts that were made during this period. *25th Hour* was produced during and after 9/11 and its characters are shown trying to deal emotionally with their world being turned upside down; *Reign Over Me*, released five years after *25th Hour*, shows the extreme psychological effects of 9/11-related loss that had developed out of the initial uncertainty and anger, thus implying that people were still struggling to come to terms with 9/11 at the time of its production. However, by the time *Julie and Julia* was released there is evidence of a degree of healing having taken place in the sense that the film's tone is no longer distressed when referring to 9/11. Instead, 9/11 forms the base of a drama that contains elements of romance, comedy, as well as darker themes of obsession and control.

Though there are films such as *War of the Worlds* that conform to the political tendency to dwell on American innocence, victimhood, resilience or defiance, and a denial of a broader political horizon, many others oppose this very approach thereby enriching post-9/11 cinematic discourse with a dynamic, reinvigorated sense of political apprehension and acumen. For example, *The Manchurian Candidate* engages with the post-9/11 political climate, by

illustrating the effect of global capitalism on a domestic front. It demonstrates that it is indeed possible to produce a post-9/11 film which can broaden its narrative scope from victimhood to one incorporating reflection on geo-political dynamics and America's involvement therein.

The presence of films such as *The Manchurian Candidate* illustrates well the expansive nature of trauma in these contexts: indeed, Fritz Breithaupt argues that the medium of memorial is itself susceptible to trauma since this is precisely what happened to the news media immediately after 9/11, in order to attempt to fulfil its self-appointed role of healer. Cinema itself clearly experienced a certain degree of trauma: though the industry itself was initially proactive, *World Trade Center* and *United 93* seem to be traumatised, considering the repetition: both films have committed 9/11 to the perpetuity of film, and then constantly re-enact the day itself through repeated viewings, and so, in a sense, the day is always in the present.

The issue of how psychological states are depicted arises from these analyses. The sense of emotional pain, particularly in *United 93* and *World Trade Center*, is accentuated by the concentration of action on a few main characters, the painstaking attention to detail, camera movement and editing techniques that all combine to demonstrate a particular realist aesthetic at work. Since the films were produced in a context of a renewed focus on 'the real' in the wider cultural and political horizons, the discussion is therefore oriented towards analysis of the various styles these films adopt.

Chapter 3: Realist Aesthetics and Politics

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, one of the principal themes to emerge in newspaper and magazine columns was that of a new realisation and apprehension of 'reality' or 'the real.' *Time* magazine provides a number of good examples: Roger Rosenblatt comments, for instance:

The kindness of people toward others in distress is real.... Honor and fair play? Real. And the preciousness of ordinary living is real as well - all to be taken seriously, perhaps, in a new and chastened time. The greatness of the country: real. The anger: real. The pain: too real.¹⁹⁹

Nancy Gibbs subsequently commented, on the eve of the first anniversary of the attacks that in firefighters and policemen, children now had 'real role models' as opposed to 'radioactive rock stars and bionic athletes.'²⁰⁰ Significant culture-theory texts written for the purposes of reaching an understanding of 9/11 also favour titles containing the word 'real': *Portents of the Real* by Susan Willis and *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* by Slavoj Žižek. There is a sense here that the terrorist attacks established a new paradigm, suggestively articulated by some as the end of a 'holiday from history,' and by others as the end of irony.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Rosenblatt, Roger, 'The Age of Irony Comes to an End,' *Time*, 24/09/01, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000893,00.html>>

²⁰⁰ Gibbs, Nancy, 'What a Difference A Year Makes,' *Time*, 09/09/02, <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003212,00.html>>

²⁰¹ Rightist commentator, George Will quoted in Žižek, Slavoj, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), pp34 – 35; Rosenblatt, *ibid*.

The notion of a 'holiday from history' also implied that there was a renewed awareness of America's role in global politics. However, the recognition of this role, not to mention the abrupt awareness of antagonism towards the United States (albeit of a fundamentalist nature), engendered a sometimes hostile division between those who believed America to be an innocent victim who could retaliate against the Arab world with justified revenge, and those who sought to delve deeper into the complex economic, political, and social issues at the root of the conflict.

Both of these positions are represented in post-9/11 cinema, but the crucial aspect of the most powerful of these films lies in how they visualise the new understanding of 'the real' in their chosen styles which, in turn, serves to underpin and form their political stance. This chapter, rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of the emerging realist styles, focuses on just three approaches to film-making that differ in style and political outlook, with recourse to theoretical frameworks elaborated by André Bazin, Colin MacCabe, Bertolt Brecht and Jean Baudrillard which provide a valuable foundation through which to discuss the various films' meanings. Returning to *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, this chapter also analyses *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) and *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), as well as *Death of a President* (Gabriel Range, 2006) and *Redacted* (Brian De Palma, 2007).

Cinematography and Subjective Realism

André Bazin, one of the foremost theorists of film aesthetics, isolated a number of concepts which enable a systematic analysis of cinematic realism. In *What is*

Cinema? (Volume 2), Bazin set out his theories with reference to Italian neorealism, and though writing about post-war cinema, his conclusions can be applied to contemporary cinema. For instance, when Kent Jones writes in *Film Comment* (referring to *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters From Iwo Jima* (both Clint Eastwood, 2006)):

It has been noted...that American cinema is tied to a perpetually evolving modernity always moving closer to...‘absolute proximity’...The ultimate destination may remain unattainable, but we always feel...that we’ve been nudged a little closer with each new movie...²⁰²

he all but reprises Bazin’s own assertion that ‘the general trend in cinema has been toward realism...film sought to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique.’²⁰³

A number of elements constitute the thrust of Bazin’s analysis of neorealism. Firstly, he sets out its rejection the ‘star’ system in favour of combining the talents of professional actors (if cast in roles contrary to expectation or type) with non-professionals and those who act only occasionally, what he describes as ‘the law of the amalgam.’²⁰⁴ This law, when successfully implemented, imbues the film with an ‘extraordinary feeling of truth’ which stems from an avoidance of theatrical affectation, and the peculiar equilibrium of

²⁰² Jones, Kent, ‘Double Requiem: How *Letters From Iwo Jima* and *Flags of Our Fathers* Complete Each Other, *Film Comment*, Volume 43, Number 1, January – February 2007, p. 24.

²⁰³ Bazin, André, *What is Cinema?* (Volume 2) (London: University of California Press, 1971), p. 26.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

performance where the non-professional actors benefit from the experience of their professional counterparts.²⁰⁵

Clearly, the film to which this ‘law’ most clearly applies is *United 93*. In order to accentuate the sense of believable drama, *United 93* employs unknown actors so the film’s story and impact, as well as the implicit statement that this could have happened to anyone, are not sacrificed to audience recognition of a ‘star.’ *United 93* adheres to the law of amalgam in a unique way by using some of the actual people involved in various positions on the ground to re-enact their experiences, thereby helping the film attain a high level of physical authenticity. Into this category falls Ben Sliney, who on September 11 arrived at Herndon (Virginia) air-traffic control for his first day as Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) head of operations. Additionally, playing themselves at the Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS) are Staff Sergeant Shawn Fox and her superior, Major James Fox.²⁰⁶ Paul Greengrass states in an interview with *Film Comment*, that in the preparation for shooting, the cast and crew decided:

Let’s not have actors playing airline pilots. We need working pilots...The same with the stewardesses, the air-traffic controllers, the military air-traffic control people. A high number of those people are either current professionals and/or professionals who were in those places on that day.²⁰⁷

In the same interview, Greengrass illustrates the benefit of involving aviation professionals in the construction of a believably authentic story: stewardesses dispelled the popular notion that passengers used a food-trolley as a ‘battering-

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁰⁶ Doherty, Thomas, ‘United 93,’ *Cinéaste*, Volume 31, Number 4, Fall 2006, p73.

²⁰⁷ Smith, Gavin, ‘Mission Statement: Paul Greengrass Discusses the Creative Process Behind His Reconstruction of the Worst Day in Modern American History,’ *Film Comment*, Volume 42, Number 3, May – June 2006, p. 28.

ram' against the hijackers, since the units are so heavy the passengers could not have pushed them and maintained the speed necessary to surprise and overpower their captors.²⁰⁸ The resulting mixture of unfamiliar professional actors and non-actors is blended well in direction and performance, creating a successful and convincing illusion of reality as neither set of 'actors' draw attention to the combination.

Secondly, as regards aesthetic form, Bazin argues that while fidelity to everyday life is a basic necessity of realist film, certain mediation is required to accentuate the effect.²⁰⁹ As he says: 'realism in art can only be achieved in one way – through artifice.'²¹⁰ He admits that this implies a contradiction between the necessity of choosing what aspects of the actual to feature and what aspects to discard, and the fundamental unacceptability of this choice since it is made at the expense of the reality effect. It is this very contradiction, however, which for Bazin infuses the art of cinema with its vitality.²¹¹

Both Stone and Greengrass went to extraordinary lengths to ground their accounts in fact. Their respective pre-production preparations, a considered approach to set design, and the results of their direction of actors all testify to this. In the case of *United 93*, extensive research and consultation with families was carried out, and information was acquired from the plane's flight data recorder and collated from cell-phone records. Thomas Doherty's *Cinéaste* review notes that a press-statement from the producers of *United 93* states that the film was

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Bazin, *ibid.*, pp. 25 - 26.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

²¹¹ Ibid.

‘painstakingly researched’ with the families of those who were killed, who were kept abreast of production with a bi-weekly newsletter.²¹²

Firmly attached to its database, the narrative’s focalisation respects its sources; the film never strays from the experiences of those involved first-hand: when passengers phone their loved-ones, there are no cutaways to the person receiving the call. Only a brief glimpse of the World Trade Centre itself is offered, from a cabin window when the plane takes off, and the only footage of the attacks is shown from the vantage point of a nearby air-traffic control tower. The sense of realism is heightened further by the events appearing to unfold in real time, the use of shaky, hand-held camera shots mimicking the unsteady movement of a human, and the persistent use of overlapping dialogue.

Oliver Stone’s approach to *World Trade Center* similarly resulted in viewing, and shooting, the events in Manhattan in such a way that the narrative was primarily focalised through very few individuals, but as closely and as faithfully as possible. Thus, on screen, Jimeno only sees a shadow of the first plane to hit the World Trade Centre as he speaks to tourists outside the Port Authority building; whilst trapped in the fallen tower, McLoughlin and Jimeno are unaware that the attack was carried out by terrorists, and only cursory glimpses are caught of President Bush and Mayor Giuliani on television screens.

Stone spent considerable time with McLoughlin and Jimeno and their families, and the film was produced with their co-operation. Indeed, access to the ‘ordinary lives’ of the principal characters helped form the aesthetic of the film, as

²¹² Doherty, *ibid.*, p. 74.

Stone writes in *Newsweek*: ‘The style of this movie...is dictated by its subject - its simplicity, its modesty, its working-class origins.’²¹³

More specifically, Stone directed his crew to watch Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), to assist in the formal construction of his own film;²¹⁴ Seamus McGarvey, Stone’s cinematographer, explains that Bresson’s film had a:

[S]implicity and Spartan nature...That spare and unadorned approach had the ring of truth that Oliver wanted. The idea was to create a subjective sense, fuse the camera with the central character, or in this case, the two central characters. We wanted to find a way to absorb their dilemma and project what the two characters and their families were feeling.²¹⁵

The style achieved, McGarvey argues, is imbued with the realism and clarity associated with non-fiction films: ‘We opted for an almost documentary style...Not handheld, but with a...straight-forward photographic quality.’²¹⁶ In order to accentuate the authenticity, Stone shot some scenes in the actual homes and workplaces of those involved.²¹⁷ Indeed, he initially wanted to shoot at Ground Zero and, in keeping with his realist approach, there are only two discernibly obvious special effects – the apparition Jimeno has of Jesus, and the zoom out into space from the destroyed World Trade Centre. Stone’s sparse, unadorned aesthetic, and his desire to avoid ostentation thus indicates his respect for the 9/11 story.

²¹³ Ansen, David, ‘Oliver Stone’s 9/11 is a Tale of Courage,’ *Newsweek*, 07/08/06, <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14095532/site/newsweek/>>

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Rogers, Pauline, ‘Beneath the Ashes,’ *International Cinematographers Guild Magazine*, August 2006, re-posted at <<http://www.hylensystem.com/NewsSeamus.pdf>>

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Duncan, Jody, ‘World Trade Center,’ *Cinefex*, Number 107, October 2006, pp. 15 - 16.

One shot in particular stands out as an example of the attempts made to create the reality effect. When John McLoughlin is finally rescued, being lifted out of the rubble on a stretcher, the fire-fighters and rescuers who line the path and who each pass him along to the ambulance are those that were actually involved, reprising their actions of that day. McGarvey describes this shot in *International Cinematographers Guild Magazine* thus:

To shoot this...the camera takes the perspective of Nicolas Cage. As 'he' is pulled out, I used the handheld Arriflex 235 to move from face to face, while lying down in the gurney...The background performers were the actual firemen and EMT workers who were brought here to Los Angeles, to appear in the film - to heighten the reality... As I watched through the lens, I could see and feel their memories. Tears came to their eyes and some crossed themselves.²¹⁸

One would assume that the involvement of actual emergency workers was intended to bestow the scene with the added sense of reality which would have been missing had they been actors or conventional extras. However, beyond a slight awkwardness (perhaps a result of looking straight into the camera due to it temporarily filming the shot from McLaughlin's point of view), there is little that obviously marks these people out as actual firefighters (other than this information disclosed in newspaper reviews or in interviews as McGarvey does above). The fact that they re-enact their roles, and utter words of encouragement which might have been said when rescuing the actual McLaughlin and Jimeno, ultimately testifies to the therapeutic function of film as memorial: replaying an incident to heal both the audience, actors, crew and real emergency workers reprising their actual roles.

²¹⁸ Rogers, *ibid.*

However, there is evidence to suggest that this attention to detail is undermined by various other strategies and effects. *United 93* and *World Trade Center*'s version of realism was not achieved without recourse to techniques which would at first glance appear to hamper a faithful and honest reproduction of the actual events of 9/11. In *United 93*'s case, Paul Greengrass had to piece together information as best he could from available sources, including recollections of family members. Ultimately, however, the constructed story involves much speculation, inferring the unknown from the known, and is as Greengrass himself says, 'a hypothesis.'²¹⁹ The director himself describes the process of constructing the story as a group debate amongst the cast and crew, in which knowledge acquired from family and friends, other information which was definitely verifiable, and what could be considered 'reasonable supposition' were discussed, then the actors would 'play' and rehearse in such a way as to 'unlock a believable truth.'²²⁰

Thomas Doherty points out that while verisimilitude is assisted here by co-operation with the families, the fact that their input is so crucial and prominent probably prevents the depiction of any passenger in anything less than an unequivocally positive light. This is seen as an issue in the portrayal of staff at NEADS, and the FAA as well as the airline's own on-board staff, which, given the fact that the military are often consulted for approval, is easy to comprehend. As Doherty states:

[T]he arrangement grants an emotional veto power that assures no flight attendant or passenger will behave less than hono[u]rably,

²¹⁹ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 26.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

that the mood of noble uplift will not be broken by a simpering guy pleading with the hijackers for mercy.²²¹

As such, the veracity of the story is cast into a degree of doubt by the obvious need to avoid controversy or offence when portraying those who were involved in the actual 'United 93' events.

Other conditions also compromised any realism of the 'actual.' It has been mentioned above that Oliver Stone had originally planned to shoot *World Trade Center* at Ground Zero. While it was practically possible to shoot there (and while some locations in New York and New Jersey were used), Ground Zero was reconstructed, from scratch, at the Hughes airfield in Playa Vista, Los Angeles, covering the same area as four football fields (roughly a third of the size of the actual World Trade Centre site).²²² According to *Cinefex*, the digital effects company Double Negative, were employed to create the effects of dust and debris, since the World Trade Centre shots were shot 'clean' and in front of a huge greenscreen. This approach was revisited for the rest of the shoot, which incorporated 115 visual effect shots, where many scenes were layered in the laboratories of digital effects companies.²²³

For instance, representation of the Twin Towers, both pre- and post-attack, remains the most noticeable sign of the intervention of digital technology. The morning sequence, following the policemen as they make their way to work, features a vista of Manhattan, complete with the World Trade Centre, which looks

²²¹ Doherty, *ibid.*

²²² Duncan, *ibid.*; Rogers, *ibid.*

²²³ Duncan, *ibid.*, p. 15.

photo-realistic but involved Double Negative pasting the towers onto live-action shots of the city, from various angles.²²⁴

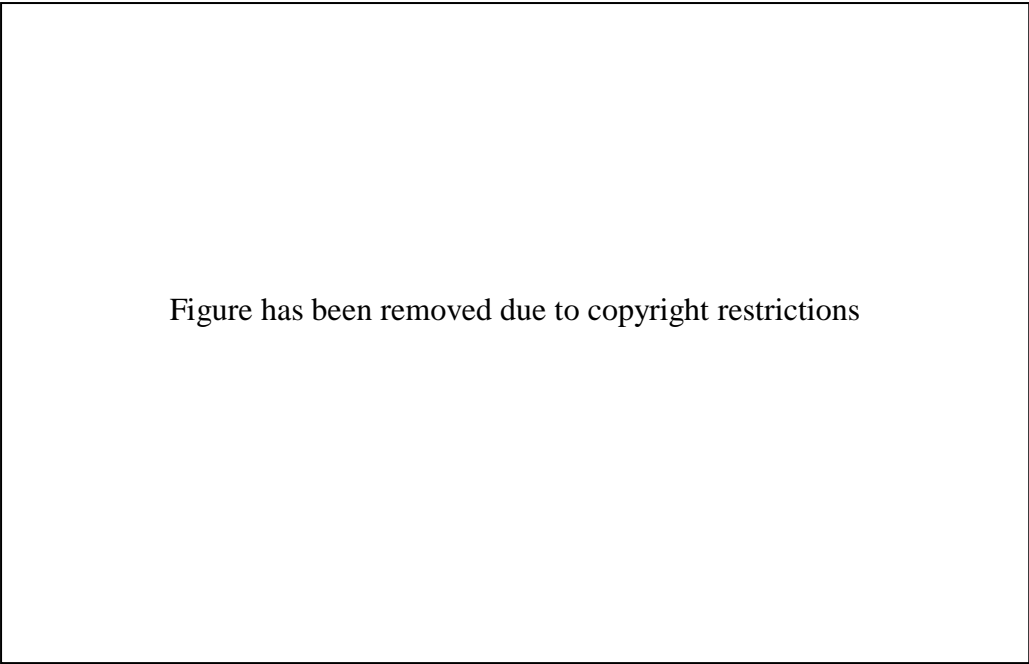


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Fig 5: Computer-generated Twin Towers in *World Trade Center*

Similarly, instead of using pre-existing television or amateur video footage of the smoking towers after they were hit, and then improving their resolution, Double Negative were commissioned to recreate the various views and angles for the film.

Jody Duncan explains the process in *Cinefex*:

Double Negative created [computer-generated] structures expelling simulated fire and smoke...Double Negative referenced both television footage and video coverage that was shot by regular people on the streets. They sought to recreate the emotional feeling in these shoots, but also intensify them and bring them up to a higher level.²²⁵

²²⁴ Duncan, *ibid.*, p. 16.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Together with the digital creation of a composite figure jumping from the top of the towers (created out of a synthesis of many figures, so as not to upset relatives by depicting an actual ‘jumper’) and the zoom out of New York into space to emphasise the global effect of the attacks, Duncan’s explanation implies not simply a recreation of an event, but an actual ‘upgrading of reality’ to maximise the emotional and visual impact on the audience. Such aesthetic ‘enhancement’ is also evident in the interior shots of the World Trade Centre, where set designer, Jan Roelfs, consulted advertising brochures and photographs to recreate the shopping arcade, although this concourse was, again, extended and ‘up-graded’ by digital companies Giant Killer Robots and Animal Logic, especially in scenes where the tower collapses.²²⁶

Built on the same Playa Vista set, post-collapse Ground Zero was based by Roelfs (with supervision from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)) on high-resolution ‘lidar scans’ which were shot by FEMA in 2001 to monitor shifts in debris so that danger to rescuers could be minimised.²²⁷ With reference to such scans, the contours and lay-out of the area could be easily discerned, and they proved to be invaluable for the construction of the site at the airfield. An example of this is the way the scan was able to pick out John McLoughlin’s abandoned car on Church Street, the location of which is referred to in the film, just before the police team enters Tower five.²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

²²⁸ Ibid.

In a Hollywood cinema now saturated by Computer Generated Imagery technology, it would be almost impossible to avoid using computers to create the World Trade Centre, and the effects are dexterously crafted and credible, yet their use may be so comprehensive and substantial that one could argue that there is an irony in the reliance on digital image-making for a film-maker whose explicit quest was for authenticity, particularly when it was technically possible to shoot at Ground Zero.²²⁹ Perhaps, that is the point: the believable creation of the illusion of reality is now dependant on, or at least benefits from, the work that can be done by computer. Such a combination of faithful narrative details and digital techniques illustrates well Bazin's concept of cinematic realism as 'artifice.'

The third aspect central to Bazin's theory of the realist effect in cinema concerns the nature of spatial continuity. Bazin credits Orson Welles with restoring 'to reality its visible continuity' since, in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), the use of deep focus rendered everything on screen equally sharp.²³⁰ Through the use of deep focus, meaning, Bazin argues, is no longer the sole construct of the director for a number of reasons. The audience is invited to actively engage with the image because the resulting sharpness of all areas of the dramatic field, as opposed to the direction of our attention to areas of significance through montage, produces the decentred experience of the real. The spectator is brought into 'a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality...independently of the contents of the image [deep focus]' structure is more realistic.'²³¹ Montage, by selecting what we see, is a force of control, while depth of focus reintroduces an element of ambiguity, which Bazin sees as less of

²²⁹ Duncan, *ibid.*, p. 16.

²³⁰ Bazin, *ibid.*, p. 28.

²³¹ Bazin, André, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,' in Lehman, Peter (ed), *Defining Cinema* (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), p. 68; Bazin, *What is Cinema? (Volume 2)*, *ibid.*, p. 28.

an artificial effect than montage, rendering the image more realistic by providing the entire dramatic spectrum and visible continuity, referred to above.

In *United 93*, Greengrass shifts the plane of focus dramatically. For example, in the airport scene and, later, in the plane itself, various individual characters are held in focus at one point, then the plane of focus is shifted to another. This is repeated in the other loci of the action.

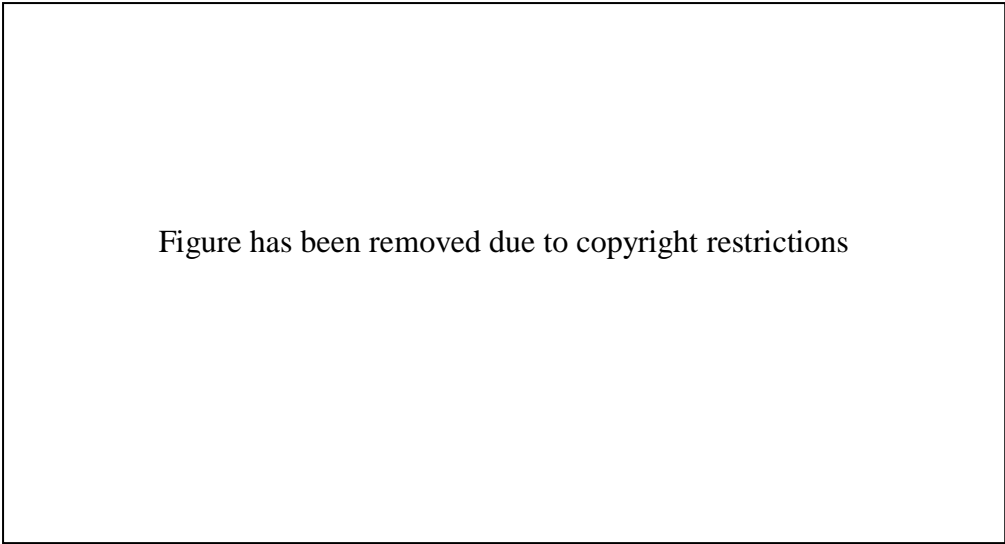


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Fig 6: Separate planes of focus observable in *United 93*

There can be no doubt who or what Greengrass feels is most important at a given time, and who he intends the audience to focus on, since they are the only ones the audience can see clearly. This device registers the chaos and confusion of the event very well, but it remains arguable that Greengrass's claim that the hostages' insurrection was a collective experience is somewhat undermined: a collective experience would require a depth of focus that included all passengers while the

constant shift of focus from person to person would suggest that it was, on the contrary, a collection of individual experiences.²³²

World Trade Center contains less dramatic manipulations of focus. Indeed, many scenes feature medium-shots and close-ups of characters (particularly the two buried policemen) which ensure that the majority of the action is in focus, and, additionally, there are long-shots of the Manhattan skyline pre- and post-attack. However, deep-focus is not used throughout so ‘certainty’ rather than ‘ambiguity’ is programmed into the design of the image.²³³ Many shots feature actors in focus with their environment out of focus (a shot of Will Jimeno’s wife, Allison (Maggie Gyllenhaal), in her house for example). The effect, in both films, is to disconnect characters from their environment. This contributes to a neutered social commentary: namely that the characters’ social settings are less important than their experience since they are not a part of it. The films’ narratives focus primarily on personal experience as opposed to that of the wider community, national, or even class experience (despite Jimeno and McLoughlin being described by Stone as being working class).²³⁴ More specifically, in the case of *World Trade Center*, the lack of deep focus underlines the personal nature of the events providing no real social context which is consistent with the fact that no geopolitical context is provided by the narrative to explain the terrorist attack.

United 93 and *World Trade Center*, in their own ways, approach a realist aesthetic but, ironically, their efforts to present 9/11 as authentically as possible only removes them further from any tangible ‘objective’ reality. It would appear that despite their determination to stick to details and facts, even the two films

²³² Smith, *ibid.*

²³³ Bazin, ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,’ *ibid.*

²³⁴ Ansen, *ibid.*

based on actual events have question marks over them when studied through the prism of Bazin's theories that focus on issues surrounding the literal clarity of the image. Nevertheless, the styles the two directors use suggest that these films represent the truth and, given the films' uncritical stance and narrow narrative horizons, they arguably legitimise both the dominant 9/11 narrative of innocent victimhood (it was an unwarranted attack) and the measures adopted by the Bush administration by way of revenge.

Discursive Order and Political Realism

World Trade Center and *United 93* are described above as works essentially faithful to the official account of 9/11 – that terrorists attacked an innocent nation due to their irrational hatred of the freedoms that nation enjoyed and cherished. Analysing the way these films organise the main discourses within their narratives reveals that the political effect of the films owes as much to this organisation as to the clarity of the image to impart their meanings.

It is useful at this juncture to introduce Colin MacCabe's concept of the 'classic realist text' as a framework through which to analyse the films' discursive structures. MacCabe, writing in *Screen* in 1974, argued a film could be classified in terms of how it organised its discourses in relation to each other: he describes the classic realist text as 'one in which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth.'²³⁵ The camera shows the viewer what happens, acting as a

²³⁵ MacCabe, Colin, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses,' in MacCabe, Colin, *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 34.

standard of the truth against which the way characters act and what they say can be measured, and through the knowledge to which the viewer is privy, one can detect and separate the various characters' discourses judging how these discourses compare to the otherwise 'apparent' narrative of events.²³⁶

A 'classic realist text' will not be able to challenge the dominant discourse since, in its representation of 'truth,' it is not present as discourse: 'unarticulated,' it simply is, and therefore cannot be questioned.²³⁷ This has implications for a film's political meaning: a classic realist text as defined above seems incapable of coherent political critique unless it has narrative discourses at work that employ 'strategies of subversion' which deny the eminence of a dominant discourse, particularly if the film challenges political orthodoxies of its time. MacCabe writes: 'Instead of a dominant discourse which is transgressed at various crucial moments, we can find a systematic refusal of any such dominant discourse.'²³⁸ A film thus constructed, as he suggests *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948) is, for example, can be considered progressive.

In short, the 'real' according to MacCabe is a perceptual construct involving a series of relationships between discourses, and the text and its reader. As he states:

What [is] crucial [is] not the content of the text but the relations inscribed for the reader. The real [is] not an external object represented in the text but the relation between text and reader which reduplicate[s]...the subject's relation to his or her experience...Realism is no longer a question of an exterior reality

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

nor of the relation of reader to text, but one of the ways these two interact.²³⁹

World Trade Center and *United 93* construct the relationships between their narratives' discourses in slightly different ways. Turning to *World Trade Center* first, one can discern several main discourses at work. These are namely, the discourse of the two trapped policemen, the discourses of the mens' families, the discourses of the former Marine who travels from Connecticut to Manhattan to volunteer and other emergency workers (such as fire-fighters), and the narrative discourse itself.

The relationship between the discourses clearly demonstrates the surprising nature of the attack, since all the characters in these discourses remain more or less in the dark about the attack's exact circumstances. As the film nears its conclusion, the hierarchy of knowledge of the incident and its effects - the crux of the drama - can be classified as follows: the various emergency rescuers know that there has been a terrorist attack with America as the target; the families of the policemen gradually become aware that America has been the target of an attack and know that they have loved ones trapped in the rubble of Ground Zero but do not know if they have survived; and, the policemen themselves who are completely unaware that there has been any kind of attack, just that a plane hit one of the towers. The narrative discourse, however, operates over all of these discourses since is in a position to know what all the film's characters know (and do not know), thus filling in blanks in the characters' own knowledge for the

²³⁹ MacCabe, Colin, 'Theory and film: principles of realism and pleasure,' in MacCabe, Colin, *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 77 and 78.

audience. For instance, the narrative discourse informs the viewer that in spite of Jimeno and McLaughlin's families' fears, the two men are alive and in the process of being rescued. These characters are unaware that in a neighbouring state, a former Marine has set out to Ground Zero to assist in rescue operations, as an initial step on his way to re-enlistment and the exacting of revenge for the attack. In this omniscience (to which the viewer has access), the narrative discourse, nevertheless does not supply any details regarding the 'absent' discourses— those of the terrorists, and the geographical and ideological origin of their antagonism towards the United States. Because of this omission the narrative discourse, which concentrates completely on the immediate experiences of a few Americans on September 11, conforms to the notion of American innocence and thus acts as one part of the dominant 9/11 narrative.

United 93 acts as another, but unlike *World Trade Center* its project necessitates the depiction of the terrorists' discourse. The other discourses one can detect in the film are those of the various passengers on-board the plane, the cabin crew and the pilots; the United States military; the air traffic control personnel; staff at Herndon; and the narrative discourse. As has already been noted, the film cuts from one location to another to emphasise the gradual realisation that multiple hi-jackings have occurred and the growing confusion and despair as the planes crash into various targets, or are diverted into a field. Despite having access to bits of information that helps the characters in each of the discourses to piece together what is happening, their picture is not complete since those on-board the plane do not know what is happening on the ground, while those in Herndon do not know what is happening at NEADS and so on.

This means that *United 93* is arguably more ‘progressive’ in MacCabe’s terms than *World Trade Center* since it shows the terrorists and their actions (and even attempts to humanise them). However, it would be impossible to make a film about what happened on ‘Flight 93’ without depicting the terrorists, and the terrorists’ discourse fundamentally serves to uphold the dominant discourse and the meta-narrative of American innocence, because it shows them committing the crime but does not investigate the reasons behind the hi-jacking: it remains an unwarranted attack.

MacCabe’s point is that classic realist texts, here exemplified by Greengrass and Stone’s films, cannot and do not mount any challenge to the dominant ideology of the historical period in which they are produced. However, *Syriana* and *Babel* do allow such a challenge to take place, arguably fulfilling the criteria MacCabe sets out to be considered progressive texts, due to the films’ strategies of subversion (in their contextualisation of the acts of violence) and the way they organise their discourses that refuse a dominant discourse to be established.

For director and script writer, Stephen Gaghan, the path to *Syriana* was a political journey, which, according to *LA Weekly*, began on September 11, 2001, and continued with America’s subsequent unilateralism, when he was jolted out of his belief that, as Francis Fukuyama argued, ‘history was over: democracy and capitalism had won.’ Shortly afterwards, he read the memoirs of a former CIA agent, Robert Baer, *See No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA’s War on Terrorism*, which documented his experiences in the Middle East, and was inspired by the exposé of American governmental corruption: ‘It seemed like maybe there was a way to tie up a lot of the things I’d been thinking about - the

war on terror, crony capitalism, the oil business, campaign finance reform - into one big, sprawling thing.’²⁴⁰

Gaghan’s research for *Syriana*’s script lead to extensive travel throughout Lebanon, Syria, the Persian Gulf and elsewhere in the Middle-East with Robert Baer, as well as Switzerland, and France. Furthermore, he met with a group of Hezbollah operatives as well as a member of President Bush’s inner sanctum, Richard Perle, all in order to ‘take the real temperature of what is going on over there, and not operate from Western stereotypes.’²⁴¹

Appropriately, then, the film intricately weaves a labyrinthine mesh of many narrative strands which illustrate the ripple effect that global capitalism (in this case, the oil industry) has on each constituent character and locale: Bob Barnes (George Clooney) is a CIA agent based in the Middle East, who, though fluent in Farsi and Arabic, finds himself frozen out by the Agency. He comes into conflict with a powerful Washington lobby group, the Committee to Liberate Iran, who are trying to force change in the country, and suffers extreme torture when betrayed. Simultaneously, a Middle Eastern royal family experiences a sibling power-struggle that threatens their country’s security and economic stability; Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon), a Swiss-based American energy analyst, suffers a personal tragedy, though it grants him access to the more conscionable of the Princes, Nasir (Alexander Siddig), (who is also attempting to wrest control of his country’s resources away from America) and is employed as his consultant. Elsewhere, a lawyer, Bennett Holiday (Jeffrey Wright), is employed to monitor

²⁴⁰ Foundas, Scott, ‘Behind the Oil Curtain,’ *LA Weekly*, 24/11/05, <<http://www.laweekly.com/film+tv/film/behind-the-oil-curtain/96/>>

²⁴¹ Jaafar, Ali, ‘Interview: Ali Jaafar talks to Stephen Gaghan,’ *Sight and Sound*, March 2006, Volume 16, Issue 3, p. 19; McGavin, Patrick Z, ‘Gaghan’s current affair,’ *Screen International*, November 25, 2005, Number 1525, p. 8.

the legality of a merger between two major oil companies, and a young Pakistani employer of one of those companies in the Gulf drifts towards a fundamentalist Islamic sect, and is recruited as a suicide-bomber. The complicated plot is ultimately resolved as the merger is approved, the American-friendly Prince Meshal (Akbar Kurtha) is selected by his father to succeed him while Barnes and Prince Nasir are casualties in a CIA strike. Nevertheless, the film's conclusion suggests that business continues, as usual, for the oil industry.

From the evidence of both the synopsis and the context of its production, *Syriana*'s narrative obviously operates at a global level, incorporating an investigation of forces that have effects on a vast range of people, and its array of discourses are organised in a way that reflects this scope and scale. The film's discourses include those of the two princes, that of Barnes, the CIA's headquarters, the migrant workers, corporate executives, the energy consultant, and Bennett Holiday. The volume of discourses effectively renders the division of screen time more democratic, with no one narrative 'voice' obviously privileged over the others.

Babel examines the effects of a single incident although it, too, operates on a global scale. The film contains a series of scenes intercut in a non-chronological, sliding time-frame: a young teenage boy in Morocco, given a rifle to prevent attacks on his father's flock of sheep, accidentally shoots an American tourist on a bus (thereby generating fears that this is another terrorist attack targeting Americans). Her husband seeks medical attention in a small village, persistently petitioned by the other tourists to leave as they, unjustifiably, feel vulnerable to attack from the locals. Meanwhile, in San Diego, the Americans' children are taken to Mexico by their nanny so she can attend her son's wedding but, returning

across the border, her nephew provokes the border patrol and they are forced to enter America illegally, eventually having to run across the desert border terrain. The nanny is caught by the police and deported. In Japan, a deaf-mute teenage girl struggles to come to terms with both her mother's suicide and her sexual awakening, amidst a fractious relationship with her grieving father. It was his gun, given to a Moroccan guide as a gift, with which the boy shot the tourist.

Like *Syriana*, *Babel*'s organisation of discourses subverts the classic realist text's need to have a hierarchy of knowledge that, specifically in the case of *World Trade Center* and *United 93* in the post-9/11 context, corresponds to and supports the dominant ideology of the time. The film sets up contradictory discourses that construct a narrative implying a need for a deeper appreciation of global humanity in a climate of fear and terror rather than accepting the strictures of Bush-era security conscious policies and his administration's war-mongering. Iñárritu attempts this by democratically allotting time to each particular strand. By refusing to privilege one testimony over the other, *Babel* employs 'strategies of subversion.' The scenes in San Diego and Mexico are thus given equal weight to scenes in Japan and those in Morocco. The Mexican nanny's tragedy is no less important than the American couple's or the Japanese girl's or that of the Moroccan boy.

On the other hand it is arguable that the American couple experiences something of a narrative advantage that, after analysis, can be viewed as the director's way of demonstrating to American audiences that their sense of national innocence is less clear-cut when viewed in the context of a global narrative. For instance, all the characters suffer at the hands of authority in one way or another, except the Americans. The Moroccan boy's family is beaten, then shot at, by

police; the Mexican nanny is threatened and treated like a criminal by border officials; the Japanese girl suffers the humiliation of rejection at her most vulnerable in front of a police officer. In contrast, the Americans shout orders at locals, enjoy their hospitality, meagre though it may appear, and ultimately are able to avail themselves of their embassy's support. All this takes place as the shooting incident, though accidental, is falsely reported around the world as a new anti-American terrorist attack. As Jim Ridley puts it, in *The Village Voice*:

The director and screenwriter mean to show the butterfly effects of American arrogance and post-9-11 solipsism throughout the world. Thus wealthy Californians Pitt and Blanchett turn their life-or-death dilemma into an international *cause célèbre*, other tourists or citizens be damned, while the sweet blond children end up in a border-patrol wasteland. The Americans' linguistic helplessness becomes a dully literal metaphor for I-stand-alone isolationism.²⁴²

The sense of equality is thus deliberately subverted in order to expose the ultimate post-9/11 narrative contradiction: just as *United 93* and *World Trade Center* support the 'trauma narrative' by portraying America as an innocent victim, *Babel* and *Syriana* argue that America suffers no more or less than the rest of the world and in fact enjoys some benefits beyond the grasp of other nationalities. *Syriana* and *Babel* both reveal a much more complex global political context than the 9/11 films suggest.

The implicit comparison of the films' contextual horizons is symptomatic of the way they construct their narrative worlds. Indeed, for some aesthetic theorists, such as Georg Lukács, the most valuable and meaningful realist cultural texts –

²⁴² Ridley, Jim, 'Communication Breakdown,' *The Village Voice*, 24/10/06, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0643.ridley.74821.20.html>>

albeit in terms of illustrating the dynamics of class relations – are texts grounded in a recognisable, concrete historical period and which dramatise man in his environment. Lukács, in opposition to the themes of disintegration and the expressionist styles he discerned in modernist literature, argued that since man is a social animal, his story is always inextricably linked with his community. As he put it himself: mens’ ‘individual existence...cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created.’²⁴³

Elsewhere he urged that:

[T]he realist must seek out the lasting features in people, in their relations with each other and in the situations in which they have to act; he must focus on those elements which endure over long periods and which constitute the objective human tendencies of society and indeed of mankind as a whole.²⁴⁴

Essentially, a narrative cannot provide a meaningful critique of human experience if, like *World Trade Center*, its characters are cut-off from their community despite the entire nation experiencing the backlash of an antagonistic ideology; or, as in both *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, the overall narrative occurs outside of any recognisable political context, one defined in the years after 9/11 by security fears and war, as well as corporate greed. *Syriana* and *Babel* locate their narratives and discourses solidly within this context, investigating and dramatising the relations and connections between energy company executives, Middle-Eastern royalty, legal and intelligence institutions and migrant workers, for

²⁴³ Lukács, Georg, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1963), p. 19.

²⁴⁴ Adorno, Theodor, Benjamin, Walter, Bloch, Ernst, Brecht, Bertolt and Lukács, Georg, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 47.

example, in the former's case, and poor Moroccan farmers, Mexican immigrants and rich Americans in the latter's case.

In contrast, *United 93*, avoids a comprehensive analysis of the inaction of personnel higher up the military and governmental chain-of-command, despite certain routine military procedures being inexplicably ignored. Greengrass is no stranger to political issues, having directed *Bloody Sunday* (2002) and, while Stone contends that he is not a political film-maker, his engagement with politically controversial issues has characterised his career.²⁴⁵ Therefore, the absence of political or historical context is a strange, even negligent, omission, and suggests a desire to placate, and to avoid controversy, even though the choice to avoid politics is itself a political decision with political effects.

MacCabe proposes that a film can be considered progressive if its narrative 'does not produce...the knowledge with which [one] can judge the truth of [the characters'] discourses;' and whose narrative introduces elements that are not resolved, and 'which deny the possibility of regarding the film as integrated through a dominant discourse.'²⁴⁶ Both *Syriana* and *Babel* are comprised of discourses that deny this dominance of an over-arching discourse since they do not resolve their narratives, both providing elements that, in MacCabe's terms, stretch outside the film's narrative and rather suggest a sense of potentiality: *Syriana* concludes with the act of terror, unable to let the viewer know what will happen to the Prince's people after the disputed succession, the lawyers, the executives, or the laid-off workers. *Babel* also remains ambiguous as to the future of its many afflicted and troubled characters. In each case the viewer is left to

²⁴⁵ Jaafar, Ali, 'I'm Not a Political Filmmaker Goddamit! Ali Jaafar Talks to Oliver Stone,' *Sight and Sound* internet-only article, <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49325>>

²⁴⁶ MacCabe, Colin, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses,' *ibid.*, p. 48.

speculate as to what may or may not happen after the films conclude. In contrast, *World Trade Center* provides narrative closure as it depicts the two policemen reunited with their families, traumatised but clearly on the road to recovery. Interestingly, *United 93* concludes abruptly at the moment of impact as the plane collides with the ground, so perhaps it arguably has more in common with *Syriana* than at first glance.

Therefore, both *Babel* and *Syriana* can be described, in MacCabe's terms as progressive realist texts. Their use of multi-strand narratives that seem to democratise rather than order a hierarchy of the films' discourses, nevertheless provides a variety of ideological and subjective perspectives, all intersecting to contribute to a fuller, more complete, but essentially more ambiguous account of the real. This form arguably allows a deeper exploration of contemporary power relations. The political significance of the multi-strand narrative structure is that it enables each stratum in the class divisions to be present in the construction of the event around which the narrative revolves, something that *United 93* and *World Trade Center* cannot do.

Docudrama: Politically Engaged or Hyper-real Form?

A category of film that appears entirely consistent with Bazin's assertion that the realist illusion can only be achieved successfully through artifice is the fiction film that adopts the visual style of the documentary to the extent of even posing as one. Here, political 'fictional documentaries' are discussed with particular focus on how their form may negate any political critique which they superficially seek to perform.

Firstly, *Death of a President* is set in October 2007 (in terms of the film's production, this constitutes the near future), and traces the visit of President Bush to Chicago, amidst fierce protest demonstrations. In Chicago, Bush is assassinated, and the subsequent investigation eventually leads to the conviction of an innocent Muslim despite there being evidence to suggest it was someone else – a former soldier who had lost one son in the Iraq war, and whose other son (also a soldier) had become disaffected. Much of the film is shot with a hand-held camera, there is use of archival footage, particularly of Bush, Dick Cheney, and footage of Ronald Reagan's funeral - and use of 'talking heads' and mock interviews, even using a mobile phone camera to capture footage of the riot. The effect is convincing. As head of production, Donall McCusker, explains: 'For our re-creation scenes, we didn't always want the pro look, so sometimes we gave the...cameras to the actors...The goal was to create a tapestry of different looks and multiple strands of material.'²⁴⁷

Ultimately, this aesthetic technique, involving a range of media sources, is developed further by using computer-generated effects to 'paste' actors onto the background of existing actuality footage, thereby 'corrupting' the actual news footage to make it look like the actors were indeed part of Bush's entourage, as security personnel or members of his cabinet.

McCusker describes the process in this way:

We used [computer effects] to put our actors into archival shots or shots we got of Bush in Chicago. The goal was to establish a clear relationship between our actors and Bush. We had a double for him in some shots, but the match wasn't perfect, so we did little things like shift his collar up to make the look more

²⁴⁷ Kadner, Noah, 'A Counterfeit Documentary,' *American Cinematographer*, January 2007, <http://www.theasc.com/ac_magazine/January2007/PostFocus/page1.php>

convincing...The rest of the illusion is [accomplished with] very clever editing.²⁴⁸

Figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 7: Actor Brian Boland, extreme right, 'pasted' on to footage of President Bush, in

Death of a President

Furthermore, Range places actors, with 'fictitious' placards, amidst real-life protestors, a technique so successful that he admits that, at times, he could not tell which footage was that of the actual demonstration and which contained the demonstration with his actors.²⁴⁹ In this respect, *Death of a President* is reminiscent of Haskell Wexler's film *Medium Cool* (1969), in which he shot hand-held footage of his actors during Chicago's riots in 1968, as those events occurred.

In *Redacted*, on the other hand, De Palma sets his action in the Middle East.

The film meshes different types of 'found' footage to illustrate the story of the

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Gabriel Range speaking in an interview in bonus features of *Death of a President* DVD, Optimum Home Entertainment, 2006, Number OPTD0778.

soldiers of Alpha Company in Camp Carolina, Samarra, Iraq. One soldier shoots his own documentary on a video camera that, he hopes, will get him into film school; other footage is provided by security cameras, internet sites (including Iraqi sites that enable the up-loading and viewing of videos), television channels, mobile phones, embedded journalism, and a French documentary entitled *Barrage*.²⁵⁰ The film's *dénouement* revolves around two incidents: firstly, a car does not stop at a check-point and is shot at, whereupon it is discovered that the vehicle was carrying a pregnant woman who was being driven to hospital, and secondly, a local teenage girl is raped and then, along with her family, is killed by two American soldiers. The film closes with a ten-minute montage of actual dead Iraqis, entitled *Collateral Damage*.

Death of a President and *Redacted* invite a reading based on the principles Bertolt Brecht conceived for his theatrical works; and though the films are part of a medium that was not originally included within the parameters of his theory of Epic Theatre, the influence of Brecht's thinking on film has been the subject of a study by Martin Walsh as part of his interest in radical cinema, namely *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*. Brecht's theories represented a break from traditional theatrical practice in that he felt that performance should be inextricably linked with the social conditions and needs of the time, and that the audience's experience, in Brecht's framework a dynamically self-conscious one rather than inert, would lead to an awareness of political forces since the Epic

²⁵⁰ Elley, Derek, 'Redacted,' *Variety*, 10/09/07, <<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934538?refcatid=31>>; Corliss, Richard, 'Iraq War Films Focus on Soldiers,' *Time*, 01/09/07, <<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1658403,00.html>>; LaSalle, Mick, 'Review: De Palma's 'Redacted' brings you face to face with war,' *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 16/11/07, <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/11/16/DD9CTB7AB.DTL>>

Theatre would appeal to ‘reason’ rather than ‘emotion.’²⁵¹ Brecht saw the theatrical production as foregrounding the way the performance was carried out that rendered it comparable to the ‘detached demonstration of technique,’ that one experiences when watching a boxing match.²⁵²

Brecht was opposed to the illusionist tendencies of conventional drama that disguise its workings so as to evoke an emotional reaction in the audience, since emotion is private and limited, and therefore less reliable than reason. Against the ‘transparency’ and ‘closedness’ of form, which seeks to induce a passivity in the spectator, and the manner in which theatrical performance was perceived to want to psychologically comprehend character, Brecht posited an experimental, and ‘interruptive’ experience that undermined illusion, ‘showed the machinery,’ and involved ‘complex seeing’ – that is perceiving and understanding varying levels of modes of address and speech (for instance, plain speech, heightened speech, song) – as well as incorporating a variety of visual sources that included film projections.²⁵³ In short, technique was showcased, illusionism was abandoned, and the audience was therefore participating in the performance in a more dynamic way. As Walsh argues:

Brecht’s formulation of the principles of epic theatre evolved as the simple antithesis of illusionist precepts: the generic focus of epic replaces the individualist focus of most dramatic and lyric art; intellectual activity replaces emotional involvement; the audience becomes the co-creator of the work, rather than its receptacle.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Lyons, Charles R., *Bertolt Brecht – The Despair and the Polemic* (London: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 58.

²⁵² Walsh, Martin, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1981), p. 14, Lyons, *ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁵³ Walsh, *ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 14.

Brecht, although writing about mid-twentieth century theatrical drama, makes a point that applies to post-9/11 politics, especially when considering contemporary corporate and media power. His argument is that artistic realism becomes politically important in the struggle against the ruling class's hegemony and the lies it spreads, and provides a means to express the truth of society's relations.²⁵⁵ The artist's natural ally in such a struggle is a realism by which the majority of the population can be stimulated into action since it is the majority who suffer under capitalism, and it is important to articulate the nature of things in an intelligible and recognisable way to the masses.²⁵⁶

While Walsh considers the cinema of Jean-Marie Straub and Jean-Luc Godard, for example, to exemplify a kind of 'Epic Cinema' that correspond to Brecht's theories for theatrical practice, in this case *Death of a President* and *Redacted* can be interpreted as the kind of experimental art form that Brecht advocated. Both films critique President Bush's policies, and U.S. military presence in Iraq, demanding an intellectual response in their viewers, but they also draw attention to their own production, denying the illusion of real space by pasting fake images onto pre-existing footage of Bush, and playfully alternating between media sources, respectively. They incorporate a range of cinematic idioms emerging as fiction films rendered in a documentary style, interspersed with footage of actual events. They both appear to transcend cinematic conventions of visual continuity (produced at a minimal level by consistently using the same film stock, be it celluloid or digital technology, throughout a film's entire duration). As such, they recognise the contemporary proliferation of media sources, and their distinctive visual textures: mobile phones can film action, and

²⁵⁵ Adorno, *ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

films can be watched on the internet. The fact that 35mm film is no longer the sole medium of cinema, but is now only one of many, is a fact registered in both films.

In their dramatic portrayal of actual, contemporary political grievances, both *Death of a President* and *Redacted* act as realist political cinema designed to politicise the masses. A number of these issues are explored in these films, certainly issues which have emerged in the wake of 9/11 in particular those of security legislation, anti-Islamic racism, and American's position in global politics. In *Death of a President*, anti-Bush and anti-war political demonstrations occur reflecting a level of resistance to President Bush and his policies, particularly the detrimental effect they have had on civil liberties.²⁵⁷ *Redacted*, similarly, makes its anti-war agenda clear and its angry tone has been acknowledged.²⁵⁸

Both films utilise popular media forms (mobile phones, for instance) to solidify the connection with the real. Indeed, this can be read as a critique of mainstream media. The dissemination of news by the major corporations is being threatened by more democratic sources such as the internet which can relay information (both written and visual) almost instantaneously, as events occur. Thus, the footage in the films are associated with, and thus imbued with the spirit of, the more trustworthy information in the digital arena, particularly websites maintained by individuals or activist groups as opposed to those associated with mainstream media networks or corporations. Carina Chocano argues in the *Los*

²⁵⁷ Chocano, Carina, 'Death of a President- Asking, "What if?" The consequences ripple,' *The Los Angeles Times*, 27/10/06, <<http://articles.latimes.com/2006/oct/27/entertainment/et-death27>>

²⁵⁸ Ansen, David, 'The Hollywood War Front,' *Newsweek*, 01/10/07, <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/41887>> ; LaSalle, ibid., Scott, A. O., 'Rage, Fear and Revulsion: At War With the War,' *The New York Times*, 16/11/07, <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2007/11/16/movies/16reda.html?ref=movies>>

Angeles Times that this critique articulates scepticism towards mainstream media companies due to their blatant patriotic or ideological bias. As she says:

The movie manipulates reality to show how easily reality can be manipulated. *Death of a President* is one of two films out this week (the other is Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*) that comment on the issue of media distortion of real events ... how insidiously it shapes our perceptions.²⁵⁹

Through the points raised by Brecht it can be argued that the type of film which *Death of a President* and *Redacted* exemplify is politically powerful in the way it requires its audience to intellectually engage with it. These films experiment with form, are bold in their representations of political issues, in a medium (or proliferation of media) recognisable and accessible to the general population and, in such an interpretation, can be said to be engaged with society.

However, the limitations of the fictional documentary as a politically progressive medium can be exposed: arguments formulated by Jean Baudrillard, particularly those concerning 'simulation' and the 'simulacrum,' and also by Umberto Eco, provide useful perspectives here. Baudrillard's concern for contemporary culture was that in the era of simulation, sign systems go beyond mere imitation or parody and move into a realm where signs of the real are substituted for, and valued above the real.²⁶⁰

The simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, is an imagined 'real' without an origin in actual reality, that relegates the actual to secondary importance, the

²⁵⁹ Chocano, *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.02.

effect of which he calls the hyper-real.²⁶¹ In *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco provides numerous examples of the hyper-real: he writes about the many toy cities, or cities that imitate cities that can be found in America, and focuses in particular on his experiences at the Knott's Berry Farm in Los Angeles, and Disneyland. Knott's Berry Farm is a realist reconstruction of a Western-style town, with a number of features that resemble with 'absolute fidelity' stables, 'sagging' shops, the sheriff's quarters, and the telegraph office, down to the details of having old carriages covered with dust and the Chinese laundry being dimly lit.²⁶² However, the buildings all largely function properly, the shops are all open selling real soft-drinks advertised with 'aged' posters, and merchandise (such as 'pseudo-Indian' craftwork) is real so that that, as Eco says, the Farm 'blends the reality of trade with the play of fiction...and the customer finds himself participating in the fantasy because of his own authenticity as a consumer.'²⁶³ The 'theatricality' of the experience is exacerbated by the fact that 'cowboy' extras walk about the complex and stage occasional shoot-outs, though they often go unnoticed because their dress (denim) is similar to the visitors'.²⁶⁴

Eco's reflections on Disneyland similarly foregrounds the consumer experience: premises on Main Street appear on the outside to be like toy houses, but inside are 'disguised supermarkets' that induce the visitor to feel like s/he is merely 'playing' at buying.²⁶⁵ More interesting, however, is that in the parts of Disneyland that incorporate the display of animals as part of the design, the rocks and water are actual rocks and water, but the animals are fake. This, Eco

²⁶¹ Ibid, p.1.

²⁶² Eco, Umberto, *Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Picador, 1987), p. 41.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

concludes, is so that they can be seen and their perfection admired by the visitors, though their programmed appearance is at odds with real animals' behaviour elsewhere:

In this sense Disneyland not only produces illusion, but...stimulates the desire for it: A real crocodile can be found in a zoo, and as a rule it is dozing or hiding, but Disneyland tells us that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands.²⁶⁶

Eco then tells of leaving Disneyland to visit New Orleans, and, unable to observe the alligators that the captain of the paddle-steamer on which he is travelling says can be visible, finds himself 'homesick' for Disneyland, because the animals there actually appear: 'Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can.'²⁶⁷

'Hyper-reality' then would appear to be a version of the real that is augmented, supplemented and enhanced: elements of the actual and elements of fiction, or 'the staged,' are arranged and joined together producing a particular realist effect that can seem feasible and life-like but can also elicit a disturbing response in the individual who engages with the work, but cannot distinguish between what is fake and what is actual. This aspect of the hyperreal phenomenon is perfectly illustrated by Eco who describes the village school in Knott's Berry Farm, whose teacher sits behind a desk but whose pupils' seats are populated by young visitors passing through, where a male visitor turns to his wife to ask if the children are real or fake.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

In terms of cinema, then, the hyper-real film would necessarily appear to be faithfully recording an actual event, and arguably conforming to aesthetic conventions of the documentary film. However, the hyper-real film would incorporate scenes that were staged with actors, and therefore fiction, with scenes of ‘actualities.’ *Death of a President* is a good example of this approach: extant footage of President Bush is digitally manipulated and edited together with staged, fictional footage of other characters (not to mention a Bush look-a-like for some scenes) to produce a film that looks like it is investigating an actual political assassination that has of course not happened. Elsewhere in the film, an actual anti-Bush protest is supplemented with actor-protestors to the extent that it is impossible to distinguish between them and the actual protestors. The effect is that a fictional event is made to look like an actual event. In *Redacted* a similar process is evident. Footage of actual war atrocities is intercut with still photographs of scenes the audience has already seen and understands to be fiction all within the context of a fiction film that is presented as a documentary. Films like these can be described as hyper-realist works, then, because their images masquerade as actuality whilst actually being comprised of a mixture of actual and staged events, invariably manipulating the audience’s perception of the reality effect.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard, using the feigning of illness as a metaphor, suggests that simulation of an illness is more complicated phenomenon than just ‘faking it’ since simulation is not merely pretending; it actually produces some of the symptoms.²⁶⁹ This idea is pertinent to both Range’s and De Palma’s films. Essentially fiction, they both feature scenes that are not staged but show

²⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *ibid.*, p. 3.

actual events; in other words, they produce ‘symptoms’ of the actual within a larger context of imitation. The effect of the illusion is that everything on screen seems to actually take place, so there is a blurring of the divisions between real and fiction that approaches, in Baudrillard’s view, the complete undermining of the real and thus of meaningful critique: far from being social commentaries, neither *Death of a President* nor *Redacted* impart reliable information with which the viewer can assess actual societal relations.²⁷⁰

For example, upon watching *Death of a President* one must begin to question if any portrayed anti-Bush protests are real and thus if anti-Bush activism is as widespread and dynamic as one might initially think. The emptiness of such a phenomenon renders an artwork unable to participate in political interrogation because it cannot articulate any reality, nevermind a specifically political one. All it can do is perpetuate a cyclical ‘game’ of image production which, Baudrillard argues, ‘leaves images no other destiny than images.’²⁷¹ In such a state, images become more spectacular and ‘attractive’ than the real due to their absolute perfection, albeit a staged and artificially constructed perfection.²⁷²

Baudrillard’s theories have repercussions for *United 93* and *World Trade Center* as well, and a general disconnection between cinema and objective reality, particularly as regards the spectacle of 9/11. According to Baudrillard, the issue of history is a problematic one for cinema. Echoing Bazin’s assertion, Baudrillard notices that the trend in representing historical events is towards absolute perfection, and that re-makes of certain historical types of films (such as the silent

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁷¹ Baudrillard, Jean, ‘The Evil Demon of Images,’ in Simpson, Philip, Utterson, Andrew and Shepherdson, K. J., (eds), *Film Theory – Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Volume 4 (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 189.

²⁷² Ibid.

film) will look more convincing than the originals from the particular period because they will be able to represent the period more authentically.²⁷³ The argument is that the effect of such a film, particularly of 'period' films, is alarming because its simulation is too good, it draws attention to its technical quality rather than the content, thus leaving the viewer indifferent to its portrayal of social relations. It could be argued that a film such as *World Trade Center* falls into this category. The efforts to conform every detail in a frame to the facts as experienced by McLaughlin and Jimeno, and the digital effects which reconstruct the pre-attack Manhattan skyline are, in Baudrillard's theory, more remarkable than the narrative. Also, the re-enactment of real-life roles in *United 93* illustrates the self-reflexivity at the root of such a theory, just as the shooting in real life locations does.

Baudrillard's argument has a further angle to it, however. Using the example of the way *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges, 1978), a film about a nuclear accident, was released just before the actual accident at Harrisburg, he postulates that the real arranges itself in accordance with the film's imagery as if to produce a simulation of disaster.²⁷⁴ In short, the effect of contemporary culture is that the image appears to be thought, or come, first: it is superior to the actual incident to the extent that the image precedes the real and that the real is a symptom of the imaginary.²⁷⁵

In terms of 9/11, this condition sometimes results in the assertion that the cinematic image appears to have presaged the actual event so that the real/imaginary dichotomy is inverted: a number of factors point towards a cycle of

²⁷³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, *ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁷⁴ Baudrillard, 'The Evil Demon of Images,' *ibid.*, pp. 184 – 185.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

imitation that involves 9/11 and cinema. Firstly, there is the phenomenon of people who watched the attack and collapse of the twin towers on television, initially thinking they were watching a disaster film.²⁷⁶ This perception has its roots in both the explosive action of cinema to which society has been accustomed and in the psychological phenomenon whereby no one can avoid imagining an attack against any power as globally dominant as the United States.²⁷⁷ In addition, as has been mentioned already, there were a number of films on the verge of being released at the time of the attacks, which featured motifs uncannily similar to the events of 9/11, and which subsequently had to be edited or shelved. Consider, for example, *Big Trouble*, which uses a plane as the location for a terrorist scenario.

More broadly, the visual and political climate of the 1970s looms over 9/11, a lineage that influences contemporary representation and, thus, anticipates aspects of post-9/11 culture. On the one hand, there is a conscious effort by filmmakers such as George Clooney and Jonathan Demme to imitate the noir-ish cinema of the 1970s, in both narrative and visual style.²⁷⁸ The 1970s featured films such as *All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976), *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974) and *Three Days of the Condor* (Sidney Pollack, 1975), all made and released within a context of a nation attempting to deal with destabilisations occasioned by Vietnam, Watergate and the Arab Oil Crisis.²⁷⁹ A

²⁷⁶ Virilio, Paul, *Ground Zero* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 68.

²⁷⁷ Baudrillard, Jean, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 5 – 7.

²⁷⁸ See, for example, Haskell, Molly, 'Reel Conspiracies; Whatever the Public Fears Most, It's Right Up There on the Big Screen,' *The New York Times*, 08/08/04, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800E5DD103CF93BA3575BC0A9629C8B63&scp=9&sq=Jonathan+Demme+Manchurian&st=nyt>; Powers, John, 'Paranoia Strikes Back, *LA Weekly*, 29/07/04, <<http://www.laweekly.com/2004-07-29/film-tv/paranoia-strikes-deep/>> ; Lowry, Brian, 'Michael Clayton,' *Variety*, 03/09/07, <<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934536/>> ; Geffner, David, 'Robert Elswit, ASC Channels the '70s Look,' *International Cinematographers Guild Magazine*, September 2007, <<http://icgmagazine.com/2007/sept/sept07.html>> .

²⁷⁹ Ryan, Michael and Kellner, Douglas, *Camera Politica – The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 95 – 100.

seemingly homologous link between post-9/11 culture and that of the 1970s provides several film-makers with a template with which to articulate post-9/11 anxieties. Clooney, in an interview with *Sight and Sound*, explicitly refers to the influence the films of the 1970s had on his desire to make films that had political commitment and tackled social issues, the result being that press junkets became discussions about political issues.²⁸⁰ *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy, 2007), *Silver City* (John Sayles, 2004), and *Syriana* adopt the investigative stances of the 1970s films mentioned above whilst updating them for the post-9/11 age.

In *Three Days of the Condor*, the World Trade Centre was used as a location for CIA offices, and this reference is critical to this discussion. It is as if the film, anticipating the global antagonisms that culminated in 9/11, recognized in advance the symbol, the likely focal point, of those attacks. The number of disaster films and the precession of films depicting terrorist attacks on planes and the World Trade Centre, just before September 11, similarly point, in Baudrillardian terms, to the image overtaking reality. The event itself can thus be considered as readily conforming to a cinematic frame of reference, since nowhere else is the event's spectacular image more at home. Indeed, Thomas Doherty asserts that '9/11 was always destined for a multiplex marquee.'²⁸¹

If Baudrillard is to be believed, the 9/11 films of Greengrass and Stone refer principally to cinematic spectacles of disaster, rather than some contemporary reality. As such, paradoxically, they are as much about cinema as 9/11, and thus cannot be relied upon to deliver a focused critique of politics, history and society.

²⁸⁰ Jaafar, Ali, 'Interview: Ali Jaafar talks to George Clooney,' *Sight and Sound*, March 2006, Volume 16, Issue 3, p. 17.

²⁸¹ Doherty, *ibid.*, p. 73.

As hyper-real entities, these films cannot engage directly with reality, because it is unclear where the real ends and the imaginary begins, and the question arises as to whether the films can show things as they ‘really’ were. As he says: ‘Simulation is infinitely more dangerous [than the real] because it always leaves open to supposition that, above and beyond its object, law and order themselves might be nothing than simulation.’²⁸²

Given such a negative interpretation, it would appear that cinematic imagery’s dialogue, in terms of Baudrillard’s theories, is only with itself, and cannot comment on reality because it perverts the natural logic of cause and effect.²⁸³ From this perspective, the images become apolitical, in the sense that they do not concern themselves with contemporary society, but politically conservative because they do not challenge conservative ideology in any tangible way. September 11 was thus considered a film before a real attack: witnesses thought they were watching a movie before they registered it as reality, testament to the distinction between fact and fiction having been confused. Thus, *United 93* and *World Trade Center* become films that were already conceived, Hollywood’s fulfilment of expectations and its part in the cycle of imitation. They ultimately organise a spectrum of imagery into two palatable, uncontroversial, but politically neutered entities.

Conclusion

It was fitting, given the shock of 9/11, that cinema would respond with recourse to realist aesthetics, and this chapter has focused on three different realist modes

²⁸² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, ibid., p. 20.

²⁸³ Baudrillard, ‘The Evil Demon of Images,’ ibid., p.181.

which demonstrate the diverse strategies and choices employed by directors, the different intentions finding expression, and the political implications that might be drawn with the support of attendant theory. The three variants under discussion highlight the profound effect 9/11 had on culture as they, in turn, represent the events themselves, investigate the wider, global causes and ramifications of 9/11, or exemplify the need to represent incidents not only in a realist style, but in a style consistent with the proliferation of contemporary technology which can record and screen different types of footage. What they all have in common, however, is the ambition to represent events in such a way as to make a claim on the real, and on truth, though each variant uses different means of making this claim. Though, as Bazin says: ‘We would define as ‘realist,’ then, all narrative means tending to bring an added measure of reality to the screen.’²⁸⁴

The differing natures of this ‘claim on the real’ represent the political significance of the various styles. *United 93* and *World Trade Center* claim to depict the fundamental truth of 9/11 via their subjective rendition of the events. Everything the audience needs to know about that day occurs within their frames, nothing exists outside these parameters. The truth of 9/11, according to these films, is only to be found in the experience of the attack, and in the response and the struggles of the victims and emergency services. In short, politically speaking, America is portrayed as a victim of an unprovoked attack, and the assertion is made that selflessness and community spirit in adversity can strengthen and unite a suffering nation.

The realism of *Death of a President* and *Redacted* muddy the waters even further, since they can be viewed both as engaging with society, in an

²⁸⁴ Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? (Volume 2)*, ibid., p. 27.

experimental way or, as hyper-realist texts, and are thus unable to impart any comment on society at all. Indeed, the very same question mark hangs over *United 93* and *World Trade Center*. Their ‘perfect’ reproduction of 9/11, by employing people to re-enact their exact roles or digital enhancement (or, in *Ground Zero*’s case, both digital *and* physical reconstruction), draw attention to the spectacle of the film and its technical brilliance instead of the real world. To paraphrase Jean Baudrillard, *United 93* and *World Trade Center* are the continuation of the absence of political realities by other means.²⁸⁵

Syriana and *Babel*, on the other hand, with their myriad contradictory perspectives, and capacity to give a voice to conflicting ideological discourses, suggest that America’s role in global affairs is more complex than *United 93* and *World Trade Center* would suggest, whose claim of innocence is not entirely justified. Their engagement with political realities can thus be viewed as part of a tradition of politically-committed cinema that extends back many decades. George Clooney remarks on this phenomenon and by doing so sheds light on the fundamental difference between his film and Stone and Greengrass’:

When we were at our best in terms of film making we were at our most volatile as a society. The decade from 1965 to 1975 coincided with the civil rights and women’s movements, Vietnam, Watergate. And I think we’re again at a time when society is polarized, so it’s worth bringing up the issues that reflect the questions we’re asking...We didn’t answer anything in *Syriana*...but we do examine the elements that create them as opposed to just labeling them.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, *ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁸⁶ Jaafar, *Ibid.*

It would therefore be instructive to think of the different modes of realism as a certain type of response to a particular stimulus (that being 9/11 and subsequent wars) in service of a particular political agenda.

One further conclusion can be drawn from the study of realism in post-9/11 cinema: the aesthetic influence of the documentary film can be detected in many of the films discussed, and is explicitly referred to as a stylistic template of sorts by many film makers. In terms of the connection between aesthetics and politics, then, particularly in the post-9/11 climate of uncertainty and a new appreciation of the real, the documentary mode of film production requires further study.

Chapter 4: The Resurgence of the Documentary After 9/11

Introduction

In October 2006, Judith Rubin posed the following question in *Film Journal*: ‘What do the giant-screen films [like] *The Dream is Alive* [Graeme Ferguson, 1985] have in common with the mainstream releases *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *March of the Penguins* [Luc Jacquet, 2005]?’ Rubin’s answer was that they were all documentaries to have taken more than \$100 million at the box-office.²⁸⁷ This statistic, particularly regarding documentary films made in the 2000s, illustrates both the conspicuous surge in documentary production and their remarkable popularity at the theatre. Such a growth is an impressive phenomenon in itself: as Paul Arthur remarked in early 2008, ‘more American filmmakers are completing more documentaries than at any time in the past...Last year, roughly 100 docs– or more than 17 percent of all releases – had theatrical openings, a new benchmark.’²⁸⁸

While the documentary ‘push’ has engendered its own wide circle of theorists and commentators, and while post-9/11 documentaries have been the subject of many journal articles, it would be remiss of any study of post-9/11 cinema to fail to address the remarkable rejuvenation of the documentary as a viable theatrical commodity, both in terms of it being a phenomenon in its own right, and its influence on fiction film, since 2001.

²⁸⁷ Rubin, Judith, ‘Documentary Giants,’ *Film Journal*, 23/10/06, <http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003286814>

²⁸⁸ Arthur, Paul, ‘Art of the Real: Hidden in Plain Sight,’ *Film Comment*, January/February 2008, Volume 44, Number 1, p. 14.

Certainly, the documentary phenomenon has stimulated a wealth of scholarship and a critical reaction of which Bill Nichols, for example, is a part. Nichols' response was to attempt a categorisation of documentaries into expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive modes, which, though helping to construct a working language with which to describe documentary films, has been challenged by other scholars.²⁸⁹ Stella Bruzzi in *New Documentary*, James McEnteer in *Shooting the Truth*, and Michael Renov in *The Subject of Documentary* point to deficiencies in his thesis: a shared criticism being that systematic pigeon-holing of films is too restrictive to 'reflect the dynamic nature of the documentary form.'²⁹⁰ It should be pointed out in Nichols' defense, however, that he has accepted that documentary form is in a state of perpetual mutation. The modes he delineates 'belong to a dialectic in which new forms arise from the limitations and constraints of previous forms and in which the credibility of the impression of documentary reality changes historically. New modes convey a fresh, new perspective on reality.'²⁹¹

In this chapter, the discussion of post-9/11 documentaries bears relation to questions of taxonomy, but also requires exposition of the many political issues that emerged after the terrorist attacks: neo-conservative policy, security, war in Iraq, the media, and the environment, for instance. This leads to inquiries concerning the development of documentary aesthetics, and why documentary film-makers have been the ones to tackle these issues. Ultimately, however, the issue of whether documentary film typologies and accompanying scholarships are

²⁸⁹ Nichols, Bill, *Representing Reality – Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), pp. 33 – 34.

²⁹⁰ Bruzzi, Stella, *New Documentary* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3 – 5; McEnteer, James, *Shooting the Truth – The Rise of American Political Documentaries* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006), p. 155; Renov, Michael, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 97.

²⁹¹ Nichols, *Ibid.*, p. 33.

adequate is relegated to secondary importance in relation to the quest of seeking an explanation to account for the phenomenal rise in popularity of the documentary film, and what needs the documentary meets in the post-9/11 era.

Key Documentaries

Firstly, it would be beneficial to provide an overview of a small number of documentaries in order to illustrate the issues that documentaries investigate, especially the issues that have become pertinent in the wake of 9/11 (always bearing in mind that such a selection represents the tip of the iceberg in terms of contemporary documentary production): in particular, political responses to terrorism, war, media practice, contemporary capitalism and the environment. These films include *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Why We Fight* (Eugene Jarecki, 2005), *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* (Robert Greenwald, 2004), and *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006), although subsequent reference will be made to others where appropriate.

In an interview with *Film Comment*, Michael Moore explicitly stated that his film *Fahrenheit 9/11* was deliberately produced in order to convince voters to elect Senator John Kerry, Bush's opponent in the 2004 presidential election: 'I hope that people go see this movie and throw this bastard out of office...The ending of this movie takes place on November 2, 2004.'²⁹² *Fahrenheit 9/11's*

²⁹² Smith, Gavin, 'The Ending is Up to You,' *Film Comment*, Volume 40, Issue 4, July/August 2004, p. 22; Moore's film's title, and its tagline, 'the temperature where freedom burns,' is a reference to Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*. The temperature referred to by Bradbury is that at which paper burns; this refers to a futuristic society in which the reading of written words is prohibited and books are routinely set on fire. As Cynthia Weber suggests, Moore's film's title 'infers that Bradbury's nightmare of state censorship arrived in the US on 9/11, and America's best chance for a better future is to remember its past,' Weber, Cynthia, '*Fahrenheit 9/11*: The Temperature Where Morality Burns,' *Journal of American Studies*, Volume 40, Number 1, April 2006, p. 117.

mandate is to expose the Bush administration as opportunistic in using the tragedy of 9/11 to implement arch-conservative policies (such as the PATRIOT Act) in order to consolidate American global power. The film also draws attention to the business links between the Bush family and Saudi Arabia through the Carlyle Group, suggesting there was a conflict of interest in the aftermath of 9/11, not only due to the fact that members of the Bin Laden family were spirited out of America immediately after the terrorist attacks, but that the Saudis stood to profit from America's war on terror through their investment in U.S. corporations. Moore also mentions how Richard Clarke, head of counter-terrorism for successive administrations, was told by Bush to demonstrate that Iraq was responsible in some way for 9/11, a revelation that suggests that war in Iraq was part of a long-term plan devised before the attacks.

Moore includes a number of vignettes that encapsulate both the film and his style of irreverent and confrontational antics, constantly underpinned by a sense of outrage, namely: when he discovers that the PATRIOT Act was ratified without being read, he drives around Washington D.C. reading the document through a megaphone; and he confronts members of Congress (in the company of a disillusioned soldier) trying to convince them to send their own children to Iraq. He visits Lila Lipscomb, a patriotic, bereaved mother who undergoes a 'u-turn' in her support for U.S. intervention in Iraq: having lost her son, especially for such dubious reasons, she is forced to re-assess her position on the war. The start of the film establishes Moore's sense of incredulity as he details how Gore's seeming election victory in 2000 was usurped by Fox News, and an electronic voter register in Florida that unfairly disenfranchised a number of black (assumed to be Democrat) voters, comparing it to a dream. He also laments the culture of fear that

was cultivated by the government after the attacks, leading to a curtailing of civil liberties and widespread suspicion. Indeed, the police are shown to have infiltrated an ostensibly harmless peace organisation in Fresno and a man relates how he was approached by the FBI after criticising the president whilst exercising at a gym.

Moore incorporates unaired news footage called ‘feeds,’ which serve to ridicule several members of government who are filmed as they prepared for interviews. For example, Bush is seen practicing facial expressions before serious announcements making his affected gravity appear insincere; elsewhere, Bush invites reporters to watch his golf drive thereby both undermining the seriousness of his policy of war against terror and suggesting that his sporting ability, not the war on terror, is the significant issue at hand. Some of Bush’s cabinet members are shown having make-up applied, and Paul Wolfowitz is shown liberally applying his own saliva to a comb in order to slick his hair back. The use of this type of footage makes a claim on the real that exceeds fiction film, specifically in the sense that the feeds capture public figures relaxing or otherwise behaving in a natural way before they compose themselves for the interview, thus presenting a side of their persona that may appear strange but depicts them as they ‘really are’ in ‘real life.’

Moore’s personal appearance, recognisable commentary, and unapologetically partisan tone in *Fahrenheit 9/11* cast *Why We Fight* in a more sober light. September 11 looms over Jarecki’s film as a particularly intense and tangible backdrop; however his main focus is on the issue of war-profiteering in a historical context. While his investigation focuses on the Bush administration, Jarecki’s parameters are set by footage of President Eisenhower’s farewell speech, in which he acknowledged the need for an arms industry, but warned against its

increasing influence. Jarecki assembles many interviews with conservatives (such as Richard Perle, and Project for a New American Century's William Kristol) alongside liberals (Joseph Cirincione from the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, for example), intellectuals (such as Gore Vidal), soldiers, security analysts (including Chalmers Johnson, who was a CIA agent from 1967 to 1973), and civilians alike, underlining that the film is intended to be as balanced as possible in its discussion.

Why We Fight details that, in the aftermath of 9/11, a security meeting was convened to discuss a response to the attack that included a strike against Iraq. In interviews for the film, various opinions are offered as to the legitimacy of these strikes, with reference to the war industry and its dynamic relationship with politics throughout history. Chalmers Johnson states that 9/11 was an example of 'blowback' (that is, unforeseen response to American policies of which the American public were unaware) and could be easily dismissed as acts of evil that could legitimise the conservative policies the Bush administration wanted to pursue. Richard Perle argues that no-one would have a problem with shooting someone who was threatening one's own life, so the concept of pre-emptive war should be easily accepted and that Saddam Hussein had to be removed as an obstacle to real democratic change in Iraq. Karen Kwiatkowski, formerly employed at the Pentagon, states that the war in Iraq is nothing to do with the 'War on Terror,' while the stealth fighter jet pilots' stance on the war is an amoral one: dropping bombs on Baghdad was simply a job, albeit an exceptional one, that they had been ordered to execute. Senator John McCain's moderate position is somewhat out of alignment with his fellow Republicans in that he recognises that at a certain point America must begin to question if it is an imperialist force rather

than one for good, and that Eisenhower's warning has not been heeded as decisions are made in government to benefit corporations, not the entire country.

Like *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Why We Fight* contains a number of sequences that provide an illustration of the human cost of war. Jarecki follows the emotional trajectory of a retired police officer, Wilton Sekzer, who lost a son in the World Trade Centre, from an initial desire for revenge to profound disillusionment caused by perceived lies about Hussein's involvement, and a sense of regret at having his son's name painted on a bomb that was dropped in Iraq. Jarecki also follows 23-year old William Solomon, whose only viable option, following the death of his mother and his inability to fund his studies, is to join the army.

Jarecki's purpose is not to foreground ideological conflict, nor to attempt to construct consensus, but rather to foment a dialectical debate in order to meaningfully exercise one's democratic right to hold one's government to account. However, the footage is edited together in such a way as to undermine and critique right-wing opinion: for instance, Wilton Sekzer's hope that he can do something for his son's memory that will help prevent another 9/11 happening is juxtaposed with a sequence in which a new weapon is unveiled. This implies (particularly coming after Johnson's description of 'blowback') that Sekzer's efforts are in vain since war, and other foreign policy decisions, are made according to the dictates of business.

One of the most remarkable aspects of *Why We Fight* is that it features a number of high-level personnel, analysts and soldiers. Jarecki states that he was given access to people along the chain of command, and only one request for an

interview, with Paul Wolfowitz, was turned down.²⁹³ Whilst on the surface it may appear surprising that such unfettered access was approved, Jarecki points out that:

PR is PR, so when [the military] hear that a film crew is coming to make a film about the military at a time of war, they are basically inclined to participate...I think they saw the film as an opportunity to talk about issues they care deeply about and simultaneously remind the public, and the lawmakers, that they are there and doing what they consider to be God's work.²⁹⁴

Questions arise, however, over the efficacy of Jarecki's intended nurturing of non-partisan discussion: war-related business has made some powerful people very rich and it is difficult to imagine how on-going dialogue can change that relationship. Nevertheless, *Why We Fight* is a subtler film than *Fahrenheit 9/11*, although its critique of war-time capitalism remains scathing. Jarecki's intention of posing the question 'why *do* we fight' to foster healthy debate becomes more of an coherent answer – as if answering Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* with the suggestion that, fundamentally, profit is why we fight. Jarecki therefore highlights how America has changed over the years, from its sponsorship of a 'good war' against Fascism and Nazism, to acceptance of the current concepts of interminable war underpinned by the generation of huge income.

9/11: Press For Truth (Ray Nowosielski, 2006) offers an interesting counterpoint to the two films discussed above: since its subject is governmental action and transparency after 9/11, its parameters are initially domestic. Its perspective is framed by 9/11 widows, 'The Jersey Girls,' angered by the lack of

²⁹³ Crowds, Gary, 'Why We Fight: An Interview with Eugene Jarecki,' *Cinéaste*, Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2006, p. 36

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

official investigation into 9/11 (why the hijacked planes were not intercepted, for instance) but historical background is provided by Paul Thomson whose independent research into the events and causes of 9/11 (first a website, and later published as *The Terror Timeline*), highlights a crucial issue of contemporary documentaries: the failure of the media to adequately question the government.

9/11: Press For Truth follows the emotional and bureaucratic ordeal facing a group of four women, all of whom lost husbands in the World Trade Centre, as they try to convince the government to thoroughly investigate the 9/11 attacks. Once the investigation is underway, they are dismayed to learn that it seems no more than a whitewash: they perceive the investigation and findings to be perfunctory and superficial, especially bemoaning the fact that President Bush and Dick Cheney are permitted to give testimony together behind closed doors, and that government officials are not questioned more intensively about intelligence with which they had been provided about the possibility of a terrorist attack. Their struggle includes overcoming the various conflicts of interest of officials selected to lead the 9/11 inquiries. For instance, President Bush's choice of Henry Kissinger to head the 9/11 Commission is undermined by the Jersey Girls' discovery that he was also representing members of the Bin Laden family in another business. Indeed, Kissinger's appointment divided general opinion, some believing both his wealth of experience and his period out of governmental office to be advantageous (due to a lack of personal associations with those he was charged with investigating), whereas others (including a registered Republican who wrote to *The New York Times* to complain about his appointment) suggested his past involvement in foreign events like the 1973 coup in Chile, and his manner of working in secrecy, to be likely to create further distrust in the commission's

findings and the government itself.²⁹⁵ Elsewhere, the film introduces footage of Senator Max Cleland, also on the 9/11 Commission, complaining on television that only a minority of commissioners was permitted to see a small number of documents pertaining to 9/11, and that even then their notes were subject to approval by the Bush administration.

Nowosielski then focuses on Thomson's timeline, a resource that provides historical context going back many decades, and ultimately critiques the role of the media. Thomson's information on the lead-up to 9/11 is culled from newspapers, television and radio, which, when compiled, gives a dramatically different story to the one officially endorsed. He details how the Bush administration asserted they had no knowledge of specific terrorist threats, and uses the example of the President's Daily Briefing of August 6, 2001 (that drew attention to Al Qaeda's intentions to attack America) to show how this claim is false. Nowosielski also concludes that it must be more than coincidence that Attorney General John Ashcroft was warned on July 26, 2001, to fly by private jet, and that on September 10, 2001, the Florida resort at which Bush was staying, had surface-to-air missiles on the roof. In short, the film suggests that Bush and his cabinet had knowledge that attacks were imminent but did not share it. The film's fundamental criticism seems to be that both the government and the media failed to do their respective jobs properly; that is, to fulfill their responsibilities as elected officials to prevent the attacks or, at least, to act on the information to

²⁹⁵ Stevenson, Richard W., 'Threats and Responses: The Investigation; President Names Kissinger to Lead 9/11 Commission,' 28/11/02, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/28/us/threats-responses-investigation-president-names-kissinger-lead-9-11-commission.html>>; Aldinger, Deborah, 'Kissinger: Right Man For The Job,' 30/11/02, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/30/opinion/1-kissinger-right-man-for-the-job-165530.html>>

which they were privy, and, as journalists, to investigate and report on government behaviour.

Jennifer Abbott, co-director and editor of *The Corporation* (Jennifer Abbott and Mark Achbar, 2004), alludes to the importance of the issue of governmental behaviour, and connections with 'big business' in particular in *Cinéaste*: 'Without question the rise of the corporation as a governing body in society is one of the biggest stories of the last century. It is probably the most pressing political issue of our day.'²⁹⁶ Documentaries' tendency to investigate corporations' roles in influencing government policy is exemplified by Robert Greenwald's *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*. Greenwald does not appear in his film, relying instead on the testimony of employees, former employees (including managers) and archive footage (some culled from television and others from actual Wal-Mart conferences) to underpin his critique of Wal-Mart and its claims of virtuous corporate behaviour. The film begins in Middlefield, Ohio, where a family-run hardware store braces itself for the imminent arrival of a Wal-Mart complex that is anticipated to take customers away, putting local shops and services out of business. Later, Greenwald visits Asia where working conditions in Wal-Mart factories are portrayed as dismal and inhumane. Intercut with these stories are testimonies from workers and insiders that help complete an alarming portrait of corporate malfeasance. For instance, Weldon Nicholson, a manager trainer, tells of how he had to stop eating in staff canteens because the sight of full-time staff unable to afford lunch was too much to bear. Edith Arana reveals how, as a female and an African-American, she was bluntly told she would have no chance of promotion despite fulfilling all the requisite criteria. Elsewhere, employees in

²⁹⁶ West, Dennis and West, Joan M., 'The Life and Times of the Corporation: An Interview with Jennifer Abbott,' *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 1, Winter 2004, p. 29.

Bangladesh work seven days a week and are paid between 13 cents and 17 cents an hour. The film also juxtaposes Wal-Mart's aggressive anti-union activities with an employee, Josh Noble, who struggles to organise a protest for better conditions. Greenwald shows how Wal-Mart uses surveillance to watch for possible union activity, has an undercover spy-van at every store, and a rapid response team with a corporate jet (costing \$7 million to operate) that fires any employee suspected of engaging in union activities.

Greenwald also interviews teachers and other public servants who lament the fact that Wal-Mart is given subsidies from public funds to help the infrastructure for new developments (such as roads and sewerage) that direct money away from schools, police services, and fire fighters to their locale's detriment. Benefits such as Wal-Mart health insurance, lauded by CEO Lee Scott, are exposed as insubstantial as many workers are forced either to pay for medication in addition to their insurance or turn to welfare. Greenwald's message is clear: Wal-Mart destroys small businesses and communities, both domestically and abroad, and contributes to low morale within its own ranks.

Greenwald's film has had a significant measure of 'practical' success in that concrete sanctions were imposed on Wal-Mart following the film's release. Planning permission was not granted for further expansion, and building subsidies have been stopped on the strength of community activism. Greenwald, himself, acknowledges this phenomenon when he says: 'Hundreds of thousands, millions of people saw the movie. People made phone calls, wrote letters, got involved.

Laws got passed in different states. Wal-Mart got stopped in different communities.²⁹⁷

Further proof of a wider context of films dedicated to documenting corporate excess can be found in Robert Greenwald's intention of eventually weaving together a vast portrait of global capitalism through specific issues:

The trick is to go from the specific to the general...My goal was Wal-Mart and then it was profiteering in Iraq. But they are both consistent with the criticism of neoliberalism...with making that case against corporate capitalism...I felt these films would be stronger by taking these first steps for people and then, over time, beginning to stitch these themes together more and more.²⁹⁸

The state of the environment, particularly after Bush's u-turn from his campaign promise to cut CO2 emissions and rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty designed to commit countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions, represents one of these political themes, and has been embraced by a number of film-makers.²⁹⁹ An article in *Mother Jones'* environmental issue of Autumn 2003 illustrates Bush's attitude towards environmental issues as it presents a litany of his appointees to various environmental agencies, who had previously lobbied for the deregulation of rules that the very organisations to which they were appointed were supposed to enforce.³⁰⁰ For example, Mark Rey, formerly a lobbyist for the timber industry, was appointed by Bush to the post of Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department of Agriculture, and was responsible for legislation that permitted extensive logging in areas that had

²⁹⁷ Haynes, John and Littler, Jo, 'Documentary as Political Activism: An Interview with Robert Greenwald,' *Cinéaste*, Volume 32, Number 4, Fall 2007, p. 27.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Bakan, Joel, *The Corporation* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2004), p. 40.

³⁰⁰ 'The Ungreening of America: Behind the Curtain', *Mother Jones*, September/October 2003, <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2003/09/ma_534_01.html>

previously been off-limits to timber companies.³⁰¹ This seemingly clear conflict of interest attests to an agenda of corporate and industrial compliance to which Bush was party.

It is within this context that *An Inconvenient Truth* attains political relevance. Essentially a science lecture by former Vice-President Al Gore, the information contained within the film is delivered in the form of a power-point presentation that impresses on the viewer the irrevocable damage done to the planet, its resources, and the environment. Gore specifically links the steady rise in carbon dioxide to the rise in global temperature which in turn is having a devastating effect on the fragile ecosystem that enables life to flourish on Earth. Gore observes that 40% of Earth's population derives its drinking water from melting glaciers, yet the glaciers are diminishing at an alarming rate resulting in future shortages and possible human catastrophe. He also demonstrates how the warming of the oceans results in more violent storms such as Hurricane Katrina, which was only a category one hurricane until it built up pace and strength when passing over the Gulf of Mexico. Gore's fundamental message is that since the consequences of our actions (as individuals, industries, and nations) bode ill for the welfare of future generations, climate change is both a political and moral issue.

Drawing critical and disturbing parallels at a range of levels, the viewer is essentially offered two separate films intercut together. As described above, one comprises the film of the lecture; the second introduces a staggered biography of the important stages in the development of Gore's ecological consciousness (including recollections of the pastoral idyll of his family farm, his science

³⁰¹ Ibid.

education, his sister's death from cancer, and his son's near fatal accident, not to mention his election defeat in 2000 and how it inspired him to start giving his presentation again). Thus, the film is as much about Gore and his convictions as the environment itself. He criticises Bush's administration, although his fundamental criticism is directed at global energy consumers as a whole, rather than at any particular regime. However, given Bush's environmental record, Gore symbolises a considerably more progressive outlook, and as his lecture is delivered in an engaging, humorous, yet passionate manner, as he cast significant doubt on Bush's ability to avert natural disasters that were on-going and yet to come.

Documentary Aesthetics

In an article in *Cinéaste* in 2005, Pat Aufderheide attests to the contemporary audience's apparent desire for realist cinema: 'a high-end market in documentary as artful entertainment is...developing. The theatrical market-place has become ravenously hungry for films that scream authenticity.'³⁰² This comment, underlining positive response to representations of reality, recalls Bill Nichols' account of a documentary aesthetics in which film incorporates the human desire for knowledge:

Documentary realism aligns itself with an epistophilia...a pleasure in knowing, that marks out a distinctive form of social engagement. The engagement stems from the rhetorical force of an argument about the very world we inhabit. We are moved to

³⁰² Aufderheide, Pat, 'The Changing Documentary Marketplace,' *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 25.

confront a topic, issue, situation, or event that bears its mark of the historically real.³⁰³

Since the issue of form, its complexity and its derivation have been discussed in previous chapters with reference to fiction film, it is appropriate to investigate non-fiction film in a similar manner. Nichols has already emphasised the inherent difference between fiction and non-fiction realism, which acts as a platform from which to explore the use and function of style:

[D]ocumentary realism negotiates the compact we strike between text and historical referent, minimising resistance or hesitation to the claims of transparency and authenticity...In fiction, realism serves to make a plausible world seem real; in documentary, realism serves to make an argument about the historical world persuasive.³⁰⁴

This initial definition of documentary realism supposes that fiction and documentary have their own distinct sets of rules and characteristics. While this may be true of form, it cannot be said of style, since both types of film have been influenced by each other in order to accentuate their connection with the historical world. Peter Bowen has noted in *Screen International* the mutual borrowing of techniques and styles between fiction and documentary, while Paul Arthur has commented in *Cinéaste* that there is a new breed of documentary ‘edging ever closer to the stylistic prerogatives of fictional cinema.’³⁰⁵

Bill Nichols’ demarcation of documentary modes of representation in *Representing Reality*, one of the seminal studies of the stylistic techniques

³⁰³ Nichols, *ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

³⁰⁵ Bowen, Peter, ‘Matters of Fact,’ *Screen International*, July 14 – 27 2006, Number 1555, p. 12; Arthur, Paul, ‘Extreme Makeover: The Changing Face of Documentary,’ *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 20.

associated with documentary films, assists in revealing and describing the complexity of the contemporary non-fiction feature. According to Nichols, there are four which are dominant: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive.

Expository documentaries claim a certain authority by imparting understanding of the historical world, using such discernable techniques as the ‘voice-of-god’ commentary, and provide illuminating information that enriches knowledge of the subject through an ‘impression of objectivity and of well-substantiated judgement.’³⁰⁶ The expository film can make use of such devices as interviews, but the opinions and comments of other individuals are used to confirm and substantiate a particular stance in a preconceived argument.³⁰⁷ The viewer of these types of films will also note, and expect, the trajectory of problem resolution.

Arising from the innovations in technology during the mid-twentieth century allowing freedom of movement for cameramen and synchronous sound recording came what Nichols describes as observational documentaries. The purpose of films in this mode is to observe the quotidian nature of everyday life, where long takes are an aesthetic feature as are over-lapping speech since people being recorded are engaging with each other rather than with the camera. Non-intrusive camera and crew behaviour is the fundamental characteristic of the observational mode (although it engenders ethical questions about the effect filming has on the lives of those being filmed).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Nichols, *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-44.

In contrast to the observational mode Nichols posits the interactive documentary. These films feature the director's presence and voice as part of the location filming and not a result of post-production recording because the filmmaker participates in the film and intervenes in the lives of those he or she is filming. There is a sense in the interactive film that, since the detached distance of observational documentaries is replaced by direct involvement, its *dénouement* or direction is influenced by every interaction and exchange. Thus, the various people participating in the film will have an equal share in the shaping of the text. What Nichols describes as 'unexpected juxtapositions' (unusual framing, graphics, or differing views on a single issue, for example) emphasise a dialectic approach where contradictory opinions require the audience to constantly reassess previous opinions.³⁰⁹

Nichols also delineates the characteristics of a reflexive mode in which attention is drawn to the problems and possibilities of the act of filming; that is, of representation itself. Clearly a self-conscious mode of film-making, the reflexive documentary can use the ethical considerations of how the camera interacts with the people it is filming as a subject of textual inquiry. This, Nichols believes, provides a means to 'challenge the impression of reality which the other three modes normally conveyed unproblematically.'³¹⁰

Documentary scholars have contested Nichols' typologies. Stella Bruzzi accuses Nichols of imposing a chronology on to the development of the documentary as an art-form, as if this development is as linear and convenient as

³⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 44 – 56.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

Nichols is perceived to have pigeon-holed it.³¹¹ McEnteer laments a certain academic rigidity that prevents true understanding of a dynamic form.³¹² Furthermore there is a slight but discernable confusion about the type of films that adhere to the observational or interactive modes as Nichols says: ‘Observational documentaries are what Erik Barnouw refers to as direct cinema and what others like Stephen Mamber describe as *cinema vérité*. (Barnouw reserves *cinema vérité* for the interventionist or interactive filmmaking of Jean Rouch and others.)’³¹³

In terms of post-9/11 documentaries, the main problem with debating aesthetic development is that, considering the descriptions of the modes, many films simultaneously exhibit the properties of more than one. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that any film adheres to one single mode at all, and rather (especially by looking at some the films discussed in the section above) the mixing of modes is more prevalent. *Fahrenheit 9/11* employs the use of voice-of-god commentary through Michael Moore’s own narration; features sections with hand-held cameras; Moore interacts personally with many people in the film, most notably Lila Lipscomb; and yet, while the interactive mode would be expected to allow different points of view to emerge and influence the course of the film, there is no doubt that Moore’s film has an agenda that is never significantly challenged.

In *Why We Fight*, on the other hand, a sense of detachment can be detected as Eugene Jarecki specifically intends a multi-perspective approach to underline the importance of dialogue, and the lack of Jarecki’s visual or audio presence assists this. However, while this may indicate elements of the expository mode, Jarecki includes sequences in his film that follow some of his characters around

³¹¹ Bruzzi, *Ibid.*, pp. 3 – 4.

³¹² McEnteer, *Ibid.*

³¹³ Nichols, *Ibid.*, p. 38.

(for instance, Wilton Sekzer on the train, William Solomon in the army recruitment centre and at his apartment, and Karen Kwiatkowski at her farm) that might be construed as observational, yet Jarecki clearly uses them as evidence of conflicting views of war (revenge, disillusionment, and employment), which can only be achieved by interacting with them over a period of time. The impression is, though, that the weight of Jarecki's judgement comes down in favour of 'criticism of perpetual war profiteering,' even if he allows conservatives like Richard Perle and William Kristol to air their views.

Though *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* clearly adopts an anti-Wal-Mart position, and though neither the style of interviews, nor the people Greenwald chooses to interview challenge his critique, it is interesting to note that his initial plan involved interviewing Wal-Mart's CEO, Lee Scott.³¹⁴ It seems that what might have been more interactive, allowing a dissenting view time and space, became more observational by necessity. Yet, Greenwald's style does not remain distant from the film's subjects. The emotional impact delivered by the film, particularly the discrimination suffered by poverty-stricken families, African-American and female employees, depends on, and results from, Greenwald's prior political convictions and as such he does not simply remain objective and disengaged, although the film's possible status as 'interactive' can be contested.

The film that appears best to exhibit properties associated with 'reflexive' documentaries is *The Corporation*. Although it could more easily be labelled 'interactive,' as it features 'talking head' interviews with anti-corporate activists and pro-corporate businessmen, the narrator questions the film's use of the 'bad

³¹⁴ Haynes, *Ibid.*, p. 29.

apple' as an appropriate metaphor for corporate behaviour and excess. One could also point to the film *Manufacturing Dissent* (Rick Caine and Debbie Melnyk, 2007) as an example of a reflexive documentary since it was made as a direct criticism of Michael Moore's film-making practice.

What most post-9/11 documentaries share, however, is the adoption of techniques that heighten the cinematic (and entertainment) value of the documentary, but that arguably have nothing to do with the subject, or techniques from fiction film. Pat Aufderheide draws attention to the balance film-makers feel they need to strike between fact and entertainment as she quotes Alex Gibney, director of *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005), as saying he structured *Enron* to mimic a heist film in order to embellish its cinematic appeal; likewise, Eugene Jarecki believes that the more serious the documentary's subject the more imperative it is to deliver it in a compelling form, 'otherwise, docs can become victims of the seriousness of the subject matter.'³¹⁵

Again, taking some of the films discussed earlier as examples, there are a number of stylistic devices, many drawn from the medium of television, used to prevent the sacrifice of a film's appeal to its 'seriousness.' *Fahrenheit 9/11*, for instance, incorporates footage from the fictional Los Angeles Police television show *Dragnet* to demonstrate how law enforcement agencies should have questioned the Bin Laden family before they were allowed to leave America after the terrorist attacks. Later, he pokes fun at the Bush administration's cavalier attitude to war in Afghanistan by superimposing the faces of Bush, and Rumsfeld *et al.*, onto cowboys from a Western-style television show. Viewed from a critical position, these clips clearly do not make much of a connection between post-9/11

³¹⁵ Aufderheide, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

politics and 1950s Los Angeles or Nineteenth Century range culture beyond a metaphorical relation, yet they make effective satirical points.

The directors of *Why We Fight* and *An Inconvenient Truth* incorporate computer graphics to accentuate the subject matter of their films by illustrating certain specific points they make. *Why We Fight* shows a graphic of a flattened Earth indicating countries that have experienced American military intervention as the date (shown in red at the bottom right-hand corner) increases steadily from 1953 to 2004. *An Inconvenient Truth* features a vast number of graphics (unsurprisingly, since it is the film of a power-point lecture), including graphs and digital globes but it also shows a cartoon frog in boiling water to demonstrate metaphorically, how human response to the environment requires a jolt otherwise we will not notice climate change until it is too late.




Figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 8: The 'frog and boiling water' animation in *An Inconvenient Truth*

Guggenheim's film, in fact, poses a number of difficulties in terms of categorisation. As Jayson Harsin says: 'While many critics call it a documentary,

it is a generic hybrid: part PowerPoint public-speaking tour de force, part jeremiad, part documentary, part potential campaign film.³¹⁶

The issue of animation in documentaries demonstrates that the field of documentary aesthetics is still more dynamic and complex, particularly in terms of attempting to establish specific modes, than when Nichols first tried to label them and illustrates how the boundaries of the documentary form have been stretched in the recent past in tandem with technological advances. Beige Luciano-Adams reaches this conclusion in an article in *Documentary* in which she argues that the utilisation of animation seems to undermine the ‘false ultimatum’ that a documentary must be either aesthetic or political.³¹⁷ Animation, she says, can depict states of subjectivity such as ‘the realms of the subconscious and dreams...the color of emotion.’³¹⁸ It can perform other functions too, as is the case with *Chicago 10* (Brett Morgen, 2007) whose director used motion-capture animation to recreate the trial scenes since cameras were not allowed in the courtroom during the trial in 1968. Elsewhere, Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlain used a type of animation that Luciano-Adams compares to Frank Miller’s graphic novels’ style, in *The Prisoner or: How I Planned to Kill Tony Blair* (2007) to emulate comics’ capacity to establish moral dualities of good and evil in their film.³¹⁹ Though Luciano-Adams admits that the process of categorising documentaries will become more complicated because of animation,

³¹⁶ Harsin, Jayson, ‘Eco-Apocalypse and the Power-Point Film – Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*,’ *Bright Lights Film Journal*, Issue 53, August 2006, <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/53/gore.htm>>

³¹⁷ Luciano-Adams, Beige, ‘When Docs Get Graphic: Animation Meets Actuality,’ *Documentary*, Spring 2009, <<http://www.documentary.org/content/when-docs-get-graphic-animation-meets-actuality>>

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

its usage demonstrates that the form is evolving in an exciting way, ‘expanding the vocabulary’ of non-fiction as it evolves.³²⁰

Both *The Corporation* and *9/11: Press for Truth* feature the stylistic device of ‘grids’ representing separate, constituent parts of a larger story. In *The Corporation*, the grid acts as chapter headings symbolising many aspects of corporations’ effects including ‘health of workers conditions,’ ‘harm to animals,’ ‘harm to health,’ and ‘harm to biosphere.’

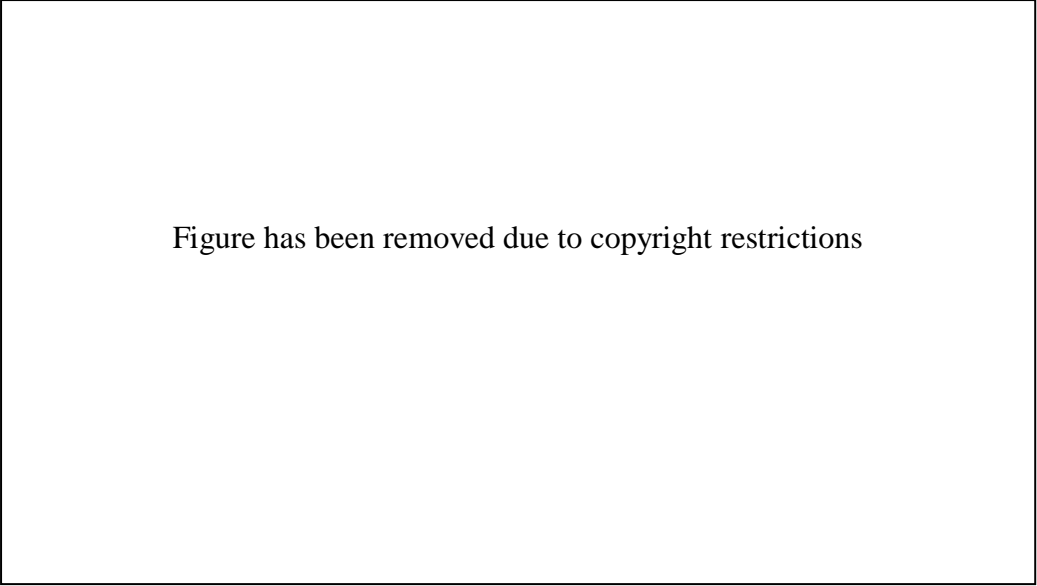


Figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 9: The ‘grid’ device in *The Corporation*, in the ‘harm to biosphere’ sequence

Again, the grid does not have anything to do with the subject of the documentary, though it reinforces the coherence and methodical nature of the film’s direction, as well as suggesting that the effects of corporations are multitudinous. In *9/11: Press for Truth*, the director shows the image of a dark wall, reminiscent of a memorial wall, comprising a myriad of television screens which light up in various places as different strands of the story are focused upon.

³²⁰ Ibid.




Figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 10: The 'wall' of screens in *9/11: Press for Truth*

This subtly underlines the film's depiction of reality: the wall suggests that there are many different points of view in the 9/11 'story,' many of which have been suppressed until now. Given that the Bush administration is ultimately being criticised, it is a powerful ploy by the film-makers, one that permeates the entire film since it is the first image to be seen.

An editing technique employed by many of these documentaries is the juxtaposition of one image or statement with an opposing one to undermine a particular point of view. This occurs frequently and usually when criticism is made of official statements. Some examples can be found in *9/11: Press for Truth*: Nowosielski creates an extremely effective visual criticism of the Bush administration's official assertion that there were no specific threats about possible terrorist attacks in the U.S. by intercutting an interview with Paul Thomson with archive television footage of Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice and President Bush. Thompson explains that the administration had information regarding simultaneous plane hijacking, that the planes would be used as weapons, and that the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre were mentioned as

specific targets. After the first of these points Cheney is shown saying there were no specific threats; after the second, Rice is shown saying that no-one could have predicted such an occurrence, and after the third Bush is shown saying that no-one in his, or the previous administration, could have envisioned planes being flown into buildings. The effect is that they all appear to have lied.

In *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, titles that resemble headlines appear dramatically as if ‘stamped’ on the screen to undermine claims made by Lee Scott and others. One title states that Wal-Mart drives retail wages down \$3 billion every year immediately after a woman in a Wal-Mart advert claims that Wal-Mart was great for her community. Later in the film, another commercial is intercut with titles that detail how Wal-Mart’s internal charity fund for employees in crisis raised \$5 million in 2004. Of that amount, the titles declare, the Walton family (a widow and four children) only contributed \$6000 (despite making \$3.2 million worth of political donations in the same year, and each having a personal fortune of \$18 billion or more).

The documentaries mentioned above also borrow techniques from fiction, in particular, a sense of narrative *dénouement* and suspense. In *Why We Fight*, Wilton Sekzer and the stealth bombers imbue the film with a sense of narrative trajectory. Sekzer’s story is cut into the film at different stages so that his experience of loss, revenge, disillusionment, and regret spans the length of the film and underpins its critical tone. Likewise, the bombing of Iraq provides the film with a structure as the viewer is tantalised with interviews with the pilots as they talk about their mission, and with portentous clips of Baghdad during the early hours of March 19, 2003, in which nothing happens until late on in the film. In *Wal-Mart*, suspense is created by Josh Noble’s attempt to organise his

colleagues. This occurs within the context of viewers' fore-knowledge of Wal-Mart's contempt for union activity.

This innovative approach to documentary-making, however, can lead to accusations of manipulation. Michael Moore in particular has been most widely castigated for this. The fact that he is uncomfortable with the term 'documentary' in reference to his films gives an indication of his approach, yet the excoriation, both personal and of his films, sometimes appears out of proportion to what he produces.³²¹ Nevertheless, in *Fahrenheit 9/11* there are episodes worthy of criticism.³²² His caustic humour is very much to the fore: the 'feeds' footage is clearly included to poke fun at government officials without allowing them the chance to respond apparently only for the sake of undermining their seemingly impervious veneer of power. Also, Moore's confrontational style amounts, in some cases, to an ambush of the powerful and as such offers no real critique of an issue except to briefly render the powerful vulnerable. His use of songs to comment on events is a further example of this: for instance, the footage of Bush's military records is accompanied by Eric Clapton's song 'Cocaine.'

Sergio Rizzo, in *Film Quarterly*, criticises this aspect of Moore's film-making since it firstly illustrates that his political activism, in contrast to that of 1960s radicals who attempted to overturn oppressive institutions, limits itself to humiliation, and ultimately results in the sacrifice of a coherent argument in favour of 'Michael Moore' the celebrity and his antics.³²³ This has backfired on Moore to the extent that he cannot attend some of his own film-shoots because his

³²¹ Arthur, Paul, 'Extreme Makeover: The Changing Face of Documentary,' *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³²² These criticisms are dwelt upon, and quoted, by Cynthia Weber in her critical evaluation of *Fahrenheit 9/11*: Weber, *ibid.*, pp115-116.

³²³ Rizzo, Sergio, 'Why Less is Still Moore: Celebrity and the Reactive Politics of *Fahrenheit 9/11*,' *Film Quarterly*, Volume 59, Number 2, Winter 2005-06, p. 33.

celebrity ‘undermines his direct access to...‘ordinary people’.’³²⁴ Rizzo also argues that while Moore states that he uses ‘real people’ in his films, he (along with documentary directors in general) edits and cuts interviews to fit his own message.³²⁵ Cynthia Weber criticises Moore’s constant commentary and voice-overs that editorialise and explain, ultimately brow-beating the viewers to comply with his viewpoint instead of leaving them free to interpret for themselves. As she says:

Overall, if Moore trusted images alone, then he would not have needed to manipulate never-before-seen footage by intercutting it with popular cultural sounds and images that solicit immediate, anticipated thoughts and feelings from his American viewing public. He would not have needed to exclude images and arguments that undercut his case against Bush.³²⁶

On the other hand, Rizzo ultimately agrees with Richard Porton who argues that Moore’s films present, in a high-profile medium, the images and debate which the American press refuse to provide, especially images like the sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners, where traumatised Iraqis are juxtaposed with pictures of Donald Rumsfeld enthusiastically talking about ‘humane’ weapons – images, which Rizzo says, ‘are true and need to be seen.’³²⁷ Porton’s argument is that these images are suppressed by a press so willingly censored by the President and the Pentagon that it takes ‘sledgehammer’ editing to get the message across, ‘a

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

³²⁶ Weber, Cynthia, *ibid.*, p. 121.

³²⁷ Porton, Richard, ‘Weapons of Mass Instruction: Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*,’ *Cinéaste*, Volume 29, Number 4, Fall 2004, p. 06; Rizzo, Sergio, *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

subtler approach would probably have been ineffective in an era when a leisurely pace is equated with boredom.³²⁸

When one attempts to articulate aesthetic style it is arguable that contemporary documentaries are more complex, and more innovative, than their antecedents. It would be too extreme to argue that Nichols' classifications are obsolete, since they still provide a means to articulate style, to clarify the techniques a documentary director utilises, or to describe his or her type of presence. Indeed, it is arguable that, aesthetically, what appears to set the current wave of films apart from prior movements is a willingness to adopt many styles, borrowing from fiction as well as non-fiction, to create an exciting, engaging and stylistically diverse single text. As Alex Gibney says: 'The great thing about these new docs is that the form is so elastic, and in the hands of talented and committed people, it will continue to change and morph.'³²⁹

The sheer volume of documentaries produced since 2001 renders the effort to categorise contemporary documentary-aesthetics, or ascertain whether there is a preferred style, almost futile since there is such diversity in styles and approaches. In terms of 9/11, though, the issues of content or aesthetic diversity cannot be appreciated fully without discussing the historical context of the documentaries' productions. What is of paramount importance here is explaining why so many documentary films have been made since 2001.

³²⁸ Porton, *ibid.*

³²⁹ Bowen, *Ibid.*

Explaining the Resurgence

According to Peter Bowen, in *Screen International*, '[t]he resurgence of the theatrical documentary has been one of the industry's biggest success stories in recent years and a cascade of hits...have helped establish a new-found commercial confidence in the form.'³³⁰ Of these hits, there is no doubt that the success of Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), winning Academy Award for Best Documentary of 2002, had an impact both in terms of inspiration and on the industrial recognition of theatrical and economic viability.³³¹ Made for \$4 million, *Bowling for Columbine* recouped over \$21 million in America, and over \$35 million abroad.³³²

As an indication of the widespread influence Moore has had on political discourse across the political spectrum one can point to Jesse Larner who quotes David Bossie, activist with Citizens United, a right-wing organisation (and former member of the House committee that investigated President Clinton's Whitewater land-zoning controversy), as saying: 'I will credit Michael Moore with [opening] up a new genre in politics...Whether you agree with it or disagree with it, he did make people open their eyes to that. And delivering political messages through that medium is now going to be commonplace.'³³³

Elsewhere, a survey was carried out by *Cinéaste* magazine, in which solicited commentators cited a number of reasons to account for documentary growth: Jon Miller, president of distributors First Run/Icarus Films, for example,

³³⁰ Bowen, *ibid.*

³³¹ Larner, Jesse, *Moore and Us – The Rise of Michael Moore and His Quest for a New World Order* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2005), p. 9; something to which fellow film-maker, Danny Schechter, explicitly refers in *Cinéaste*'s survey: 'The Political Documentary in America Today, *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 31.

³³² Larner, *ibid.*, p. 118.

³³³ Larner, *ibid.*, p. 170.

offered 9/11, the war in Iraq, and the elections as the main reasons; film maker, Thom Andersen, believed that Bush, Hollywood, and television were the fundamental factors.³³⁴ Whilst different people focused on different phenomena, the reality is that all of these elements are significant and so there is a great number of factors to be considered, all of which point to near-optimum conditions for the flourishing of non-fiction films being in place. The main factors discussed here, though, include 9/11 itself, politics, and the communications industry (including broadcast news).

One of the effects of the terrorist attacks of 2001 was the development of a climate of uncertainty. The world that had existed on 9/10 was replaced by one characterised by questions like ‘why did this happen?’ or ‘why do they hate us?’ The secure, functional knowledge that acted as the foundation for a normal existence was violently proven to be inadequate. In other words, 9/11 heralded a renewed awareness of the need for the factual and the real, and the need for a base of knowledge that would provide a foundation on which peoples’ perceptions of their surroundings could be beyond doubt, and confidently be used to re-build their existence. George Hickenlooper, director of *The Mayor of the Sunset Strip* (2003), explicitly accounts for the documentary phenomenon with recourse to September 11 when he says, ‘I think people are clamoring to connect – particularly since 9/11 – with things that are genuine and real and I think documentaries are filling that need.’³³⁵ The point appears to be that the terrorist attacks created a hunger for facts: on the one hand exemplifying a sense of epistophilia but on the other hand demonstrating that what might be termed

³³⁴ Jon Miller in ‘The Political Documentary in America Today, *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 36; Thom Andersen in ‘The Political Documentary in America Today, *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 32.

³³⁵ Arthur, Paul, ‘Extreme Makeover: The Changing Face of Documentary,’ *ibid.*, p. 19.

pleasure of knowledge, in the wake of 9/11, was actually also a *need* for knowledge. The documentary movement as a whole is deemed perfectly placed to perform this function as it is perceived to be able to supply secure, certain information in spite of its own peculiar biases and agendas.

If 9/11 engendered a desire to record and transmit secure and reliable knowledge, it also had explicitly political repercussions, not least the ‘war on terror,’ the curtailing of civil liberties as set out in the terms of the PATRIOT Act, and the war in Iraq. Thus, at the same time as provoking a mood of reflection, it provoked a political aggression, and provided the Bush administration with its *raison d’être* defining an era, both in American and global culture.

The Bush administration was responsible for severe security-conscious legislation, not to mention a discernible obsequiousness to corporations, and an embroiling of America in foreign military operations. The military quagmire in Iraq, the abuses of prisoners both in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, and the revelations of official deception to generate support for the war in Iraq, form part of a litany of controversial episodes that have politicised the populations of the United States. Bush’s tenure in office was gradually met with elevated opposition throughout his administration: in 2003, it was reported that Bush’s approval ratings had sunk due to the situation in Iraq, despite not only enjoying domestic approval after September 11 but international goodwill as well.³³⁶

For example, *The New York Times* reported in 2003 how concern and outrage at the powers granted to the government under the terms of the PATRIOT

³³⁶ Wallace-Wells, Benjamin, ‘Mourning Has Broken – How Bush Privatized September 11,’ *The Washington Monthly*, October 2003, re-posted at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1316/is_10_35/ai_n27677091/

Act were developing, a situation that the American Civil Liberties Union also warned against.³³⁷ Former government and military officials, who had previously served under Presidents Reagan and Bush (senior), were reported to be campaigning against the president due to his perceived extremism, as was former NATO commander General Wesley K. Clark who criticised Bush's economic and unilateral foreign policies calling for a 'New American Presidency' as he announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2003.³³⁸ Furthermore, a moderate religious organisation, Clergy Leadership Network, was set up to campaign against Bush and the religious Right while an estimated half a million people took to the streets in New York on August 29, 2004, protesting against Bush's administration.³³⁹

In short, 9/11 and the political response from the Bush administration thereafter, created the emotional, psychological and political conditions in which documentary features could thrive and fulfil a need that fiction film could not in its own ground of the movie theatre. A film that exemplifies this phenomenon is *Sir! No Sir!* (David Zeiger, 2006) in which several former activists in the GI Movement - a movement of returning Vietnam veterans who campaigned covertly and at the risk of court-martial against the Vietnam War – look back, in 2006, on

³³⁷ 'An Unpatriotic Act,' *The New York Times*, 25/08/03, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/25/opinion/an-unpatriotic-act.html>>; 'Five Years After 9/11 Attacks, the Fight to Uphold Americans' Fundamental Freedoms and the Constitution Continues, ACLU Chief Says,' American Civil Liberties Union Press Release, 11/9/06, <<http://www.aclu.org/national-security/five-years-after-911-attacks-fight-uphold-americans-fundamental-freedoms-and-const>>

³³⁸ Vanden Heuvel, Katrina, 'Former Bush (41) and Reagan Officials Say Bush (43) Must Go,' 28/06/04, *The Nation*, <<http://www.thenation.com/article/former-bush-41-and-reagan-officials-say-bush-43-must-go>>; Schmitt, Eric, 'Clark Calls for a 'New American Patriotism', 23/09/03, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/us/clark-calls-for-a-new-american-patriotism.html>>

³³⁹ Clemetson, Lynette, 'Clergy Group to Counter Conservatives,' 17/11/03, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/17/us/clergy-group-to-counter-conservatives.html>>; McFadden, Robert D., 'The Republicans: The Convention in New York – The March; Vast Anti-Bush Rally Greets Republicans,' 30/08/04, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/30/us/republicans-convention-new-york-march-vast-anti-bush-rally-greets-republicans.html?scp=22&sq=anti-Bush&st=nyt&pagewanted=print>>

their experiences in military bases and off-base coffeehouses that served as their activist headquarters in the 1960s. The subject matter was close to Zeigler's heart, who had been a civilian activist in Killeen, Texas (home of Fort Hood) at the time.³⁴⁰ The film was made in direct response to 9/11, and the military operations that followed it, since Zeigler felt that the political climate made the story relevant. It was also designed to act as a critique of contemporary warfare in Iraq.

As he said in an interview with *Mother Jones*:

What prompted me to make the film was September 11, and the War on Terror's segue into the Iraq War. I saw that this had suddenly become a story that would have current resonance, something that would immediately connect with what's going on today...A big strength of the film....is that this is historical metaphor. We don't have to say a word about Iraq in the film for it to be clearly identified with Iraq for people.³⁴¹

Another reason Zeigler cites for wanting to make *Sir! No Sir!* is that the GI Movement's activism against the Vietnam War was not told at the time.³⁴² What this film shares with most of the other films discussed in this chapter is the phenomenon whereby they expose a gap in reporting left by mainstream media (newspapers and television broadcast news, for example). There is the perception that there has been a fundamental failure of the news media in its duty to comprehensively investigate the relationships and dynamics of political administration and power. Into this vacuum has stepped the documentary filmmaker to provide the journalistic interrogation and expose the truth (or, more accurately, a particular version of the truth).

³⁴⁰ Stein, Jonathan, 'Sir, No Sir! An Interview with David Zeiger,' *Mother Jones*, September 2005, <<http://motherjones.com/politics/2005/09/sir-no-sir-interview-david-zeiger>>

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

When such issues as the curtailing of civil liberties arise, and in periods when a government is preparing to commit personnel to war, the need for detached and independent media is at its most crucial. In the wake of the terror attacks and war, television news and the print media were roundly condemned by a wide variety of people, both scholars and film makers, for this deficiency, whilst acknowledging the opportunity this has provided in the field of documentary.

Why We Fight director, Eugene Jarecki, stresses this point in an interview with *Cinéaste*:

[Box-office success of documentaries] is happening because in large part documentaries are being looked to fill a void left by the collapse of standards in contemporary journalism. Everyday people have lost confidence in the media. They feel...that there is far too much corporate interest weighing on and influencing the kind of reporting that we're seeing on mainstream television... [The public] would rather have the truth uncorrupted than the truth corrupted by the aspirations of a large corporation, which wants information that supports the status quo that promotes that corporation's interests.³⁴³

Jarecki also argues that the climate within television news organisations is such that any deviance from the line favoured by the owners will be detrimental to a reporter's career; and as director Amy Berg argues from experience, documentarians are free from having to conform to a company 'look' in terms of constraints on creativity of shooting style and storytelling.³⁴⁴

A report by Normon Solomon of the liberal media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting highlights how 9/11 led to an intensification of the dualism

³⁴³ Crowds, *ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁴⁴ Greenbaum Kasson, Elisabeth, 'The Message Is the Medium: The Difference between Documentarians and Journalists,' *Documentary*, Fall 2010, <<http://www.documentary.org/magazine/message-medium-difference-between-documentarians-and-journalists>>

of the ‘we are good and those who do not like us are evil’ phenomenon, that stifled debate and represented the limits of acceptable discourse. Solomon links this to the media some years after the attacks:

[T]hose limits are less narrow than they were. But mass media and politicians still facilitate the destructive policies of the Bush administration. From Baghdad to New Orleans to cities and towns that will never make headlines in the national press, the dominant corporate priorities have made a killing. Those priorities hold sway not only for the Iraq war but also for the entire ‘war on terrorism.’³⁴⁵

Michael Renov, in his response to *Cinéaste*’s survey questions, explicitly states that the documentary tradition is one of the significant reasons why documentaries in the new millennium have flourished: ‘these recent breakthroughs – the new commercial life for documentary, the higher profile of the documentary polemicist – deserve to be considered in the light of history.’³⁴⁶ Renov’s argument foregrounds an initial desire to film social conflict, but also stresses the importance of television, which became the ‘delivery system of choice’ for documentarians since it was a direct means of communication with an audience. However, the development of television news programmes resulted in a preferred style of neutral reportage within which ‘advocacy,’ especially the kind exemplified by ‘direct cinema’ directors, was somewhat out of place. As he states: ‘Television and documentary advocacy – at least in the U.S. – have proved to be incompatible.’³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Solomon, Norman, ‘9/11 and Manipulation of the USA,’ 10/09/05, <<http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2662>>

³⁴⁶ Michael Renov, in ‘The Political Documentary in America Today, *Cineaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 29.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

In terms of considering new documentaries in the light of such a history, there are a number of ways in which previous eras' documentaries assert an influence or act as points of reference. Firstly, many contemporary documentaries include clips of archive footage to make visual reference to a previous era. For example, *Fahrenheit 9/11* includes footage shot in Vietnam during the war in the 1960s and 1970s. *Sir! No Sir!* includes footage both from *Summer '68* (1969) by the New-Left Newsreel collective and returning veterans' testimonies from *Winter Soldier* (Winter Film Collective, 1972).³⁴⁸

Jarecki's *Why We Fight* owes its name to Frank Capra's series (1943 – 45) which was made to provide World War II enlistees with information about world history from the First World War, up to the point where America entered the Second. Even though Jarecki's film turns Capra's patriotism into an inquiry into modern-era military business, it nevertheless necessitates an understanding of Capra's films to deliver the full force of his contemporary twist.³⁴⁹

In contrast, though, Jarecki acknowledges the influence of Capra's series on his own film in terms of the message about widespread democracy, that Capra's films are perceived to transmit:

[the] idea that we will win, not because we are superpowerful, but because we are a motley collection of everyday people working together despite our differences. My film is still a Capraesque look at America; it's inspired by the same aspirations of global

³⁴⁸ Halbfinger, David M., 'Film Echoes the Present in Atrocities of the Past,' 09/08/05, *The New York Times*,
http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/09/movies/09wint.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=Halbfinger,%20David%20M.,%20%.E2%80%98Film%20Echoes%20the%20Present%20in%20Atrocities%20of%20the%20Past&st=cse

³⁴⁹ Crowds, Ibid., p. 33.

democracy. It underscores the tragedy in the derailment of those qualities.³⁵⁰

Additionally, the events in previous ages in American history are themselves subjects of contemporary documentaries, which both seek to illuminate the events for the benefit of contemporary audiences as well as establish connections between the two (or more) eras. One of the main issues that helps to forge this connection is war and conflict. Unlike, *Sir! No Sir!* which was deliberately intended to connect anti-war activism in the 1960s and the 2000s, *The Weather Underground* (Sam Green and Bill Siegel, 2003) instead makes that connection implicitly by shedding light on a series of specific historical events (the activism of Students for a Democratic Society, the organisation's disintegration and the tactical use of bombings by a splinter group, The Weather Underground, in the 1960s and 1970s) by later interviewing many former members, as they recollect their opposition to war, and their senses of idealism. In this sense, the benefit of making these documentaries now, whose contents are concerned with previous historical eras serves, as Jarecki suggests, is to place historical events (including recent events) in context, to correct the misinformation that abounds in a society that withholds information about its own actions, and to inspire change.³⁵¹ As an historical event, 9/11 can thus been seen as a catalyst that accelerated and intensified a latent documentary movement that has flourished in its wake.

In terms of actual production, the flourishing of the documentary movement is largely due to the accessibility of digital technology. The increase in

³⁵⁰ Cardilli, Darianna, 'A Capraesque Nightmare: Eugene Jarecki Reveals Why We Really Fight,' *Documentary*, February 2006, <<http://www.documentary.org/content/capraesque-nightmare-eugene-jarecki-reveals-why-we-really-fight-0>>

³⁵¹ Ibid.

affordable digital video (DV) cameras and computer software has facilitated the production of film to a considerable extent, since, particularly for documentary makers, concern about finance is a crucial element of production. Clinton McClung, puts it like this:

With the rise of digital technology, it is now much more affordable to produce and release an independently made documentary. One can practically make a film all by themselves with merely the use of a digital camera and a home computer. The rise is quite natural, a combination of the technology being accessible to nearly everybody, and the large number of dissenting voices wanting to be heard.³⁵²

James McEnteer adds that digital post-production has likewise made editing considerably easier. His take on the digital transformation underlines the impact technological development has had on film:

Any editor with a Mac could afford a high-quality editing solution, and every desktop could be an editing station. Many middle-class homes and schools in North America have digital 'movie' DV cameras, easy-to-use editing software, and computers on which to run them, as well as access to...the internet, where almost anyone can share their 'movies' with whomever they choose.³⁵³

Also, the ease with which digital video can be viewed on-line has improved. For example, Pat Aufderheide mentions how previous conventions of film or television-watching according to rigid channel (or theatre) schedules are being revolutionised, perhaps even rendered obsolete, due to the rise in video file-sharing on the internet. Explicitly mentioned is BitTorrent, a company that 'slices

³⁵² Clinton McClung, in 'The Political Documentary in America Today, *Cinéaste*, Volume 30, Number 3, Summer 2005, p. 35.

³⁵³ McEnteer, *ibid.*, p. 327.

up' large digital files facilitating the quick and easy up- and downloading of film on the internet.³⁵⁴ Emerging technologies have facilitated the growth of documentary production, and it is almost impossible to conceive of such growth without the internet, and it has been noted how films' internet sites are now no longer inert spaces but integral resources that act as both community forums and centre for co-ordinating further action, triggered by the movie.³⁵⁵

In terms of the effect of this relationship one can point to the integrated process favoured by Robert Greenwald that involves film-making, the internet, promotion, and activism. A strategy was devised by Greenwald's own production company, Brave New Films, in conjunction with such sites as AlterNet and BuzzFlash, which sold DVD copies of his films, and also MoveOn.org and the left-wing think tank Center for American Progress, both of which supported the promotion of his films through their access to activist circles, maximising a type of marketing labeled 'viral' or 'guerilla.'³⁵⁶

To distribute his film *Uncovered: The War in Iraq* (2004), and in order to maximise its impact and to be as synchronous with the issue as possible, Greenwald essentially innovated a method of distribution that included encouraging people who bought the DVD to host screenings in their homes, local shops and cafes, or other establishments, and then discuss the film and ideas for possible action thereafter. So-called 'house parties' attracted thousands of viewer-participants, an alternative form of distribution that allowed for group discussion and action planning after the viewing.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Aufderheide, *ibid.*, p. 26; See, also, <<http://www.bittorrent.com/company/?csrc=splash>>

³⁵⁵ West, *ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁵⁶ Haynes, *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁵⁷ Bowen, *ibid.*; Haynes, *ibid.*

The implementation of this type of screening achieved a further degree of sophistication with *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, to the extent that the house party scenario could be favoured over the usual commercial mode of distribution resulting in a degree of independence since the documentaries can almost completely by-pass theatrical release and still manage to find an audience.³⁵⁸ This was achieved through word of mouth and those willing to engage by visiting internet sites that partnered Greenwald's Brave New Films. The model pioneered by Greenwald has created a new dynamic that has invigorated 'fellow travellers' whilst reaching out to more and more viewers. Michael Gubbins, in *Screen International*, assessed this viral, house-party model with a degree of optimism: 'The idea not only proved a very strong means of marketing but also incidentally created a new trend that may yet prove enduring.'³⁵⁹

Conclusion

Contemporary documentaries can be explained and discussed, therefore, with reference to three main areas: their choice of subject, their form, and the various structural forces that combine to facilitate their production and distribution. Many documentaries have been made concerning the policies of the Bush administration, and the effects thereof, and a common function of explicit critique can be detected. Since Bush has largely defined his term in office around waging a war on terror and since his policies have, in the case of the PATRIOT Act, the

³⁵⁸ Haynes, *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Gubbins, Michael, 'Nouvelle Web Vague,' *Screen International*, November 3 - 9 2006, Number 1570, p. 6.

inception of the Department of Homeland Security and the pre-emptive war on Iraq, been direct responses to 9/11, it is not difficult to posit 9/11 as a crucial event in politics and the addressing of these issues in film. Thus, in this context, it would appear that 9/11 was a catalyst, accelerating the realist tendency in cinema, one result being the stylistic and industrial development of documentary films.

The attacks' importance can be detected in films that apparently have little to do with them, some referring to them as a way of illustrating or consolidating a point. In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore uses 9/11 and its physical aftermath as a means of constructing a standard against which can be measured the emotional and geographical devastation that rising sea-levels may cause in New York. Robert Greenwald includes a sequence in *Wal-Mart* in which there is a discussion of the Walton family having built a multi-million dollar bunker due to feelings of vulnerability following the attacks. Ironically, this underscores the family's parsimony due to the film's context of employee poverty and the sense of American unity that 9/11 traditionally evokes. *The Corporation* uses 9/11 as a reference point to underline the phenomenon where pursuit of profit is maintained even in the face of national tragedy. A commodities trader, Carlton Brown, admits that when news of the terrorist attacks reached the floor of his stock exchange, thoughts immediately turned to the inevitable rise in the price of gold, and how those who owned gold stood to make a fortune. September 11, in Brown's words, was "a blessing in disguise."

Not all documentaries mention September 11; however, the political climate that 9/11 engendered (or was used to engender) has cast into dramatic relief the role of reporting and journalism in mainstream media. Whatever the subject matter of a particular documentary, the finished film will usually raise

questions about why that topic was chosen to be filmed in the first place. Documentaries in this sense are fundamentally about the media: there would be no need to record the grievances of 9/11 widows, for example, had their stories been comprehensively investigated and reported by television or print news. The role of documentaries seems often to be the filling of a vacuum left by lazy or ideologically mediated journalism. This vacuum has resulted in a plethora of issues being broached by documentarians – from ‘war’ to corporate corruption to the health implications of fast food – as well as innovative approaches to production, style, distribution and exhibition. Ultimately, the ideological effect of the perceived media failure to hold corporations and the Bush Administration to account, is that the enforced documentary investigations are largely Left in political bias. As Richard Corliss argues:

[M]ost of these films, if they have a political slant, tilt left. Except for a few errant jabs at *Fahrenheit 9/11*, there are virtually no right-wing docs. If there’s a sympathetic take on the Bush Administration’s Iraq policy, or a study of Third World sweatshops...from the owner’s viewpoint, I haven’t seen it.³⁶⁰

The resurgence in documentaries suggests that the realist conventions of fiction are seemingly inadequate to deal with the seriousness of a national tragedy like 9/11, and that documentary conventions are required to apprehend the real by providing secure knowledge that can be relied upon. Crucially, the provision of secure knowledge by documentaries takes place in the film theatre, and thus acts as a critique of Hollywood realism.

³⁶⁰ Corliss, Richard, ‘A Feast of Documentaries,’ 05/05/06, *Time*, <<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1191434,00.html>>

The 'absolutely real' effect of documentary aesthetics ensures that the form stands as an important feature of the post-9/11 cultural landscape. However, apprehension of the real is only one facet of this landscape: in periods of crisis the desire and need to 'understand' is met by the documentary, but this need is also addressed by films that represent and organize fictional and mythological archetypes, which are equally important features in the post-9/11 era.

Chapter 5: Ideology and Mythology in Post-9/11 Westerns

Introduction

In his structural study of myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss describes its peculiar temporal significance when he says:

On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future.³⁶¹

Myth is thus described by Lévi-Strauss as having both a historical and ahistorical double structure.³⁶² John Ford's film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) explicitly dramatises the mythological function that Lévi-Strauss describes as it depicts an incident that results in a rise in fortune of one man, and to the eventual downfall of another, told in a way that foregrounds the power of historical memory. In the film, a Senator and his wife visit the town of Shinbone, where he once lived, to bury a former acquaintance, Tom Doniphon (John Wayne). Though the Senator's arrival generates much excitement in the town, the Press eventually becomes more inquisitive about the unknown man the dignitaries are mourning, and so Senator Stoddard (James Stewart) recalls the story of his own relationship with Doniphon. Stoddard recounts how his own civilised manner, focus on the benefits of education, eschewing of firearms, and law career contrasted sharply with Doniphon, who was an individualistic, self-reliant man of the outdoors, and

³⁶¹ Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 'The Structural Study of Myth,' in *Structural Anthropology* (London: Basic Books Inc., 1963), p. 209.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

one willing to intimidate or use violence (while embodying a certain masculine narcissism).³⁶³ The crux of the film, though, revolves around the remembering of a shoot-out between Stoddard and the film's villain, Valance (Lee Marvin): against the odds, Stoddard appears to shoot and kill Valance, after which he pursues a successful political career as well as marrying Doniphon's former love interest, Hallie (Vera Miles). However, Doniphon, trying to ease Stoddard's guilty conscience, tells him that it was he, not Stoddard, who shot Liberty Valance, a claim confirmed by flashback. Doniphon's own life thereafter spirals into dissolution. The newspaper editor, upon hearing that Stoddard's background is not quite as heroic as popular legend suggests, chooses not to run the story, with the words: "this is the West, sir, when the legend becomes fact, print the legend." He realises that exposing the truth behind the popular legend would reveal uncomfortable details about the ways in which American identity had been constructed.

The connection between the West (whether historical or mythic), politics, and cinema is strong in American culture, and has existed from the early days of film itself. The Western genre has consistently depicted the nineteenth century period of 'settler' American existence, including times of conflict, and the development of modernity as presaged by such technological and industrial innovations as the telegraph, and later, the railroad. As studies by such historians as Richard Slotkin demonstrate, the Western film can be used as a tool to help to form, disseminate, and consolidate perceptions of the past and therefore has played a fundamental role in helping to shape American identity. One can argue, therefore, that analysis of the Western is one of many ways to attempt to

³⁶³ Kitses, Jim, *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 20.

apprehend both the necessary fictions, and the *zeitgeist* of the society that produces it.

This *zeitgeist*, clearly, is subject to change, as dominant ideologies constantly give way to opposing ones. It is also clear that the ideological response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, not to mention the shock of the attacks in the first place, is an example of one of those paradigm shifts that require a concomitant cultural articulation with which to reassure and, perhaps, even regulate national discourse. In a previous chapter, for example, the idea has been discussed that a media-sponsored trauma ‘narrative’ was preferred to more sober or reflective ones, as it permitted the sense of just retribution. Genre, and its conventions, assists in expressing, even discussing, such paradigmatic articulations.

In his *Sight and Sound* review of *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik, 2007), Jim Kitses states that it is a film for ‘dark times.’ As he says, its: ‘plays on the theme of the struggle of common men to be heard may resonate with audiences of today, when many in the US feel they live in dark times ruled over by small minds.’³⁶⁴ While this may be a little vague - Kitses does not go into much detail on what exactly constitutes the Western’s method of tackling contemporary political issues in this review - his point remains valid: the Western genre offers a means to analyse the present through re-articulation of perceptions of the past; or, in Lévi-Straussian terms, provides ‘logical tools’ with which to ascertain the significance of 9/11.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Kitses, Jim, ‘Twilight of the Idol,’ *Sight and Sound*, Volume 17, Issue 12, December 2007, p. 20.

³⁶⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *ibid.*, p. 216.

The number of Westerns in production has declined, thus increasing attention on those that appear; that they have been made at all in the wake of 9/11 is an important phenomenon that requires consideration. In this chapter, the way post-9/11 politics impinges on cinema is analysed with reference to the Western genre, especially how historical and mythological structures of American identity evolve (or are subject to revision) and either consolidate, or challenge, the dominant ideology. These structures are approached, nominally, via the issue of masculinity, and the issues of Frontier and race.

Mythology and Genre

Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 thesis, *The Frontier in American History*, according to Henry Nash Smith, is an important text in American historiography as it challenged the preconceived ideas that had shaped American history up to that point. Rather than being defined by either the slave question or being an extension of European historical forces, the American experience was described as rooted in the importance of the taming of the lands of the continental west.³⁶⁶ Turner argued that, based on census statistics, the Frontier had closed by 1890; that is, no longer was there an outer edge where civilisation met 'savagery,' rather, the continent had been comprehensively settled by Westward movement.³⁶⁷ Turner's argument indicated that this movement was accompanied by individualism, democracy, and nationalism.³⁶⁸ Furthermore, a result of this phenomenon was the impact the Frontier experience had on the national psyche

³⁶⁶ Smith, Henry Nash, *Virgin Land – The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), p. 292.

³⁶⁷ Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), p. 3.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

even after it had ‘closed;’ Turner believed it to have a positive and indelible impact, and hints at its encouragement of a certain archetype of rugged masculinity:

[T]o the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom – these are the traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the frontier.³⁶⁹

Subsequent schools of American historiography have taken a contrary view to Turner’s hypotheses, seeking to provide an alternative perspective on history, one that would incorporate the elements seemingly ignored by Turner. Proponents of this historiography include Patricia Nelson Limerick who has rejected the idea that the Frontier was closed in 1890. Limerick is critical of the idea that conventional frontier theory ‘never made much room for the West beyond the ninety-eighth meridian’ since the characteristics of that area (the land’s aridity, she argues, for example) play an insignificant part in Turner’s thesis.³⁷⁰ Indeed, Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest* argues that the social order of the nineteenth century was, in reality, much more complex and dynamic than Turner allowed: Turner’s thesis, for instance, unified many diverse activities (such as exploration, mining, town founding, farming and logging) under the term ‘Frontier’ but excluded many more. The elements that did not fit into his theory included women, and ethnicities that were not White, and he concentrated his studies on

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁷⁰ Limerick, Patricia Nelson, ‘What on Earth is the New American History?’ in Limerick, Patricia Nelson, Milner II, Clyde A., and Rankin, Charles E., eds, *Trails – Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), p. 82.

Midwest agrarian settlements at the expense of desert regions, mountains, railroads, territorial governments, and commercial institutions.³⁷¹ Donald Worster views this so-called 'New Western History' as attempting to achieve 'a more complete, honest, penetrating view of...ancestors as well as ourselves, including the flaws and ironies of their achievements [and] to question their and our collective successes.'³⁷² These two historical trends provide useful conceptual and historical tools with which to examine post-9/11 Westerns in their treatment, or neglect of presences and voices marginalised in Turner's thesis.

Despite critique, Turner's account has nonetheless engendered a mythology that has endured, and has helped to inform interpretations of American identity and culture. One of the most prominent scholars of American mythology, Richard Slotkin, foregrounds and explains its continuing importance in *Gunfighter Nation*. Slotkin contends that myths are dynamic formulations of reoccurring stories that enable a society to explain the development of their experience through history.³⁷³ They are dynamic because over the course of time, through periods of instability such as political upheaval, economic crises, or, say, environmental change, myths are subject to a sort of mutation that combines old elements with new revisions that help to explain the new circumstances.³⁷⁴ Thus, it seems that mythology is almost a dialectical process, subject to change when the old mythology is found to be inadequate. As Slotkin says:

Major breaks in the development of important genres may signal the presence of a significant crisis of cultural values and

³⁷¹ Limerick, Patricia Nelson, *The Legacy of Conquest – The Unbroken Past of the American West –The Unbroken Past of the American West* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Ltd., 1988), p.21.

³⁷² Worster, Donald, 'Beyond the Agrarian Myth,' in Limerick, Patricia Nelson, Milner II, Clyde A., and Rankin, Charles E., eds, *ibid*, p. 25.

³⁷³ Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), p. 6.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

organization. The development of new genres, or the substantial modification of existing ones, can be read as a signal of active ideological concern in which both the producers and consumers of mass media participate.³⁷⁵

If the images and stories of the Frontier and the West are so firmly rooted in the American psyche, and attempts to construct an idealised vision of itself through myth is endemic, then one should be able to find evidence of these processes under renewal in various periods of American history. In *The Fatal Environment*, Slotkin points out a conflict between the way the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (held to commemorate one hundred years of American independence) exhibited a wide variety of artefacts of American technology and ingenuity, and the period's economic realities. Slotkin details how deliberate efforts were made to establish America's greatness, through a mixture of references to its past and hints of its future potential, amidst a political and economic climate that suggested otherwise:

The Exposition's proof of American perfection lay in...a mixture of mechanical symbols of the new age and allusions to an idyllic past...The state pavilions commonly took the form of giant log cabins, evoking memories of a Frontier past...But the imagery was a mask, the oratory hollow. The United States in 1876 was in the midst of the worst economic depression in its history, and of a crisis of cultural morale as well.³⁷⁶

Slotkin also uses President Kennedy's New Frontier speech in 1960 to exemplify the Frontier's power as an image and metaphor:

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁷⁶ Slotkin, Richard, *The Fatal Environment – The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), pp. 4-5.

Kennedy's use of the 'New Frontier' tapped a vein of latent ideological power...The 'Frontier' for [Kennedy and his advisors] was a complexly resonant symbol, a vivid and memorable set of hero-tales – each a model of successful and morally justifying action on the stage of historical conflict.³⁷⁷

One does not need to look very hard to find instances of 'western' motifs appearing in the wake of 9/11, used as easily identifiable reference points and means of forging intelligible commentary on contemporary American experience. President Bush utilised 'old west' imagery in his attempt to assure the nation of his intention of meting out justice to Osama bin Laden: "I want him - I want justice...there's an old poster out West, as I recall, that said: 'Wanted: Dead or Alive.'"³⁷⁸ In 2007, Bush referred to terrorists in Pakistan in a way that immediately invoked associations of lawlessness and violence: "Taliban and al Qaeda fighters do hide in remote regions of Pakistan - this is wild country; this is wilder than the Wild West. And these folks hide and recruit and launch attacks."³⁷⁹

Examples are also to be found outside of Bush's speeches. Not long after the terrorist attacks, a collection of essays discussing the causes and ramifications of terrorism, was published entitled *How Did This Happen?* In his contribution,

³⁷⁷ Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation*, ibid., pp. 2-3.

³⁷⁸ Sanger, David E., 'A Nation Challenged: The President; Bin Laden Is Wanted in Attacks, 'Dead or Alive,' President Says,' *The New York Times*, 18/09/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/18/us/nation-challenged-president-bin-laden-wanted-attacks-dead-alive-president-says.html>>

³⁷⁹ Bush, George W., 'President Bush Discusses Progress in Afghanistan, Global War on Terror,' 15/02/07, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070215-1.html>>

‘The All-Too-Friendly Skies,’ Gregg Easterbrook referred to the freedom of deregulated flying until 11 September 2001, as the ‘wild west of air-travel.’³⁸⁰

Furthermore, when Bush ordered Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, just before he declared war, it was reported in the *New York Times* with clear reference both to a certain historical time, and also the famous Western film, *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), that pits a lone, honourable lawman against an intimidating gang:

Like his father before him, Mr. Bush gave Saddam Hussein a ‘high noon’ deadline to get out of town. And more forcefully than any American president since his fellow Texan Lyndon Johnson, Mr. Bush has argued the need for pre-emptive action to forestall violence that - no less than Cooper’s marshal - he alone was sure would occur.³⁸¹

Also in the *New York Times*, Maureen Dowd criticises the Bush Administration’s deliberate appropriation of ‘Old West’ imagery. Though she acknowledges an apt connection between 9/11 and Frontier mythology, she laments the ways in which Bush inverted the ideals of ‘civilisation’ making the suggestion, by reversing Kennedy’s ‘New Frontier’ motif, that America regressed under Bush:

W. and Karl [Rove] played up western movie stereotypes. After 9/11, the rugged frontier myth, the hunter/Indian-fighter hero in a war of civilization against savagery worked better than ever. But this White House’s frontier is not a place of infinite progress and expansion, stretching society’s boundaries. It doesn’t battle

³⁸⁰ Easterbrook, Gregg, ‘The All-Too-Friendly Skies – Security as an Afterthought,’ in Hoge, Jr, James F., and Rose, Gideon, eds, *How Did This Happen? – Terrorism and the New War* (Oxford: Public Affairs Ltd., 2001), p. 164.

³⁸¹ Hoberman, J., ‘Film; It’s Always ‘High Noon’ At the White House,’ *The New York Times*, 25/04/04, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/25/movies/film-it-s-always-high-noon-at-the-white-house.html>>

primitivism; it courts primitivism. Instead of the New Frontier, Karl and W. offer the New Backtier.³⁸²

The close connection between cinema, legend and history is underlined in the same newspaper, by Paula Burka, who states, after noting the way historian, T.R. Fehrenbach describes President Bush as a nineteenth century Frontier-era character:

Small wonder, then, that after President Bush demanded that Saddam Hussein get out of town, the whole world saw him as Gary Cooper or Jack Palance. Foreign critics see Mr. Bush as Billy the Kid - lawless, violent, solitary and prone to shoot first and ask questions later. Supporters see him as self-reliant, determined, straightforward, never one to look for trouble but never one to run from it.³⁸³

Cinema is one medium that has consistently presented and articulated American mythology since the early days of its development in the form of Westerns (indeed, some of the medium's earliest productions were set in the 'Old West').³⁸⁴ Throughout the years, Westerns have dealt retrospectively with issues such as America's formative years (conflict with indigenous peoples in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) and *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Daves, 1950) for instance, the trans-continental thrust of capitalist civilisation such as *Once Upon A Time In The West* (Sergio Leone, 1968)) as well as making allegorical reference to contentious

³⁸² Dowd, Maureen, 'Rove's Revenge,' *The New York Times*, 07/11/04, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F0DE2DE123CF934A35752C1A9629C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print>>

³⁸³ Burka, Paula, 'Lonesome Hawk; What it Means to be From Texas,' *The New York Times*, 23/03/03, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/23/weekinreview/lonesome-hawk-what-it-means-to-be-from-texas.html>>

³⁸⁴ See, for example, Churchill, Ward, *Fantasies of the Master Race – Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), p. 168; French, Philip, *Westerns* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005), p. 5; Sklar, Robert, *Movie-Made America – A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 26 – 29.

contemporary issues (such as *High Noon* or *Silver Lode* (Allan Dwan, 1954) during the House Un-American Activities Committee's heyday).

The generic significance of Westerns, in terms of how the films operate and what ideological effect they have, has generated many theses, among which are seminal studies by Jim Kitses and Douglas Pye. Kitses' book, *Horizon's West*, approaches the study of Westerns from a point of view that focuses on both the artistic vision of the individual director and the form itself, since 'genre' acts as a 'pre-condition' or dynamic context within which the director can assert his style within a set of recognizable conventions.³⁸⁵ Stressing the tension between auteurism and convention, Kitses argues:

[T]he genre is a vital structure through which flow a myriad of themes and concepts. As such the form can provide filmmakers with a range of possible connections and the space in which to experiment, to shape and define the kind of effects and meanings they are working towards.³⁸⁶

Bearing in mind this range of themes and concepts, Kitses outlines a set of structural oppositions that categorises the tension and conflict underpinning the questions of American identity that are intertwined within Frontier culture. Divided into the two primary headings 'The Wilderness' and 'Civilisation,' the list contains concepts familiar or associated with these oppositions; namely 'The Individual' (a concept that includes the ideas of freedom, honour, self-knowledge, integrity, and self-interest), 'Nature' (purity, experience, empiricism, pragmatism, and savagery) and 'The West' (America, the frontier, equality, agrarianism, and tradition) under the heading 'The Wilderness'. Under the heading 'Civilisation'

³⁸⁵ Kitses, Jim, *Horizons West*, *ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

are to be found the previous categories' oppositional equivalent, 'The Community' (restriction, institutions, compromise, and democracy), 'Culture' (corruption, legalism, idealism, refinement, and humanity) and 'The East' (Europe, class, industrialism, and the future).³⁸⁷ Thus, the Western, Kitses argues, provides a means to creatively combine historical and symbolic (or archetypal) elements, and to resolve their implicit contradictions.³⁸⁸

Douglas Pye shares Kitses' assessment of the structure of the Western genre as a range of potential connections that balance conformity to convention and the desire to experiment. Pye sees Westerns as underlining a choice by the director to foreground certain elements and ignore others within a framework that enables recognition but that permits stylistic leeway:

The recognition of works as belonging to a specific genre may be seen as the result of...the intersection of a range of categories, the interplay of which generates meaning within a context narrow enough to allow enormous individual variation.³⁸⁹

The intersection of categories, Pye argues, involves imposing a particular narrative mode that conveys the status of the protagonist in relation to terms such as superiority, or otherwise, to his environment, and other characters (Pye identifies modes that include 'myth,' 'romance,' and 'the ironic') along with generic conventions. These conventions, for Westerns, include certain plot trajectories and developments; identifiable incarnations of types as regards characterisations (heroes, and villains, for example); particular temporal and geographical locations; iconography peculiar to that time and place (landscape,

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁸⁹ Pye, Douglas, 'Genre and Movies,' *Movie*, No. 20, Spring 1975, p. 32.

architecture, costume, and methods of transport, for instance) and recurring themes. Pye's assessment of the Western film and the different ways in which it generates meaning also echoes Kitses' argument, when he says:

If the West was seen as a potential Eden, the garden of the world, it was also seen as the wilderness, the great American desert. The life of the frontier was both ennobling because it was close to nature, and primitive, at the farthest remove from civilisation. The Indian could be both a child of nature, primitive but innocent, and the naked savage.³⁹⁰

These oppositions, Pye states, were crucial concepts central to the Western, ever since the genre's inception thus rendering it a privileged means of 'reflecting on American themes.'³⁹¹

Pye also acknowledges the significance of representations of the West in painting have had upon the imagery of film Westerns. This influence can be found especially in terms of landscapes, animal and human characterisations, and events; he also argues that nineteenth century attitudes were expressed in these paintings, which found their way on to twentieth century screens.³⁹² The reference to visual culture and its connection with mythology is enhanced by Martha A. Sandweiss, whose study of the development of photography and the American West in the nineteenth century, *Print the Legend*, provides a link between paintings of the West, not to mention maps, prints and drawings and cinema, since it explicitly examines the process whereby a visual medium - photography - did not simply bring a geographical area to life but how this medium was part of a cultural dynamic that saw it informed by public opinion as much as it provided

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid., pp. 36-37

information to the public.³⁹³ In this way, Sandweiss demonstrates the ways in which popular, pre-existing conceptions of the West influenced how photography was marketed and understood. For instance, she describes how photographic images were manipulated to conform to a preferred narrative: a photograph of a bare, empty prairie by Humphrey Lloyd Hime was reproduced with manipulations (birds and vegetation were added) to make the prairie seem more fertile and inviting.³⁹⁴ Elsewhere, A.J. Russell's iconic photograph of the meeting of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads in 1869 featured many of the workers and dignitaries who were present at the laying of the last spike, but excluded the Chinese railroad workers of the Central Pacific company despite amounting to 90% of its labour force. Sandweiss alludes to resistance to the photographic form at the end of the nineteenth century, claiming that there was a persistence of other, more 'dramatic, narrative and decorative forms of illustration' in publications of the time.³⁹⁵ This phenomenon, whereby the realism peculiar to photography could be undermined, its images altered the better to fit pre-existing concepts of the West, highlights nineteenth century practices of myth-construction, or myth-perpetuation, and represents a precursor to, or template for, cinematic projections of the West, particularly *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, the film that provided Sandweiss with her study's title.

Cinema, though not contemporaneous to the nineteenth century West, nevertheless fits into an ongoing stream of visual reference to the West, and further enhances the argument that visual culture is a key component in the construction, perpetuation or mutation of mythologies. In the post-9/11 wave of

³⁹³ Sandweiss, Martha A., *Print the Legend – Photography and the American West* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 3-4, 6.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 147-148.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 323.

Western films there is a discernable re-occurrence of motifs, plots, time-frames and landscapes key to Western mythology: the rescue of captive girls, for example, in *The Missing* (Ron Howard, 2003), or the weathered cowboy in conflict with corporate land-owners in *Open Range* (Kevin Costner, 2003). There are remakes of previous eras' Westerns, namely *The Alamo* (John Lee Hancock, 2004) and *3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold, 2007), and though not a remake, *The Appaloosa* (Ed Harris, 2008) borrows its title from a Western of the same name from 1966. Kitses observes that within the context of contemporary Westerns making inter-textual references to classic Westerns, *Open Range*'s narrative refers back to John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Therefore, though Westerns have always been concerned with the depiction of Frontier life and the articulation of mythology, there is the sense that contemporary Western film-makers are building upon previous eras' foundations, conscious of the process of developing and perpetuating, or dissecting legend through genre.

A good example of this is *The Assassination of Jesse James By the Coward Robert Ford* as it is narrated in the past tense by a male voice-over (whose voice does not appear to correspond to any of the film's characters, thereby granting it an air of objective authority) in the style of one of Robert Ford's 'Jesse James' books. The film's reference to characters reading about their own exploits is historically accurate: as Michael Denning states in *Mechanic Accents*, 'James Gang' stories were published while the gang was still at large, and the books caused moral panic by depicting the gang in a morally ambivalent way (fighting enemies of the people whilst also being indiscriminate thieves).³⁹⁶ At the same time, the gang members are conscious of their own myth(s) being written, and

³⁹⁶ Denning, Michael, *Mechanic Accents – Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 160-161.

their activities are mediated through fiction, a process that involves embellishing some details whilst overlooking others; the film's audience is therefore witness both to the current re-articulation of a myth, but also how the myth was conceived and subject to revision in previous eras. This becomes clear when a song is heard towards the end of the film that casts James (Brad Pitt) as an American 'Robin Hood,' despite there being no evidence in the film to support that claim. James, himself, is depicted as being pre-occupied with his fame on the one hand, and on the other, prone to serious self-doubt as well as to psychotic episodes, including murder and torture. He even plays a significant part in his own death: in this film, James is depicted as catching a reflected glimpse of Ford (Casey Affleck) with gun raised, and yet does nothing to stop him pulling the trigger. The Fords are then depicted re-visiting the scene of the now legendary shooting on stage, until Charley Ford (Sam Rockwell) commits suicide and Robert is shot in retribution for James' death.

The examination of the myth that develops alongside the reality in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, and the literal depicting this process, renders it one of the most significant post-9/11 Westerns as it shows an outlaw conscious of his own myth. It shows the bleakness of James' demise in tandem with the explicit depiction of legend replacing fact, and it dramatises the construction, crystallisation, and the limitations of a new mythology that accounts for the history of the recent past that parallels the same search in post-9/11 America.

Film, here, serves an important cultural purpose: to demonstrate that there has been a transition between two historical eras, and to articulate what has changed in America's mythology and sense of identity. In terms of the post-9/11

era, the one theme that emerges from study of Westerns is the way man responds to the tension between civilisation and the wilderness, how he withstands the aggression of ethnic others and how he can fend for himself. This simultaneously calls to mind Frederick Jackson Turner's list of Frontier-endowed traits of masculinity, but also represents a set of challenges similar to those that arose in the wake of the terror attacks in 2001.

Masculinity in Post-9/11 Westerns

One of the enduring images of American mythology is the rugged, restless and individualistic man of the West, whether in the form of the cowboy, trader, miner, rancher or farmer.³⁹⁷ The sense of strong masculinity inherent in this image has been observed to be a phenomenon of the post-9/11 American cultural landscape.

Susan Faludi, in *The Terror Dream*, details the post-9/11 obsession with masculinity, and demonstrates both how film, particularly *The Searchers* and its 'hero,' John Wayne, provided models for dealing with the new climate, and how this reaction was rooted in a profound historical context:

Our retreat to the fifties reached beyond movie tropes and the era's odd mix of national insecurity and domestic containment. It reached back beyond the fifties themselves. For this particular reaction to 9/11 – our fixation on restoring an invincible manhood by saving little girls – was not so anomalous. It belonged to a long standing American pattern of response to threat, a response that we've been perfecting since our original wilderness experience.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Turner, *ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹⁸ Faludi, Susan, *The Terror Dream – What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p. 13.

In the wake of 9/11, the hero *du jour* was the firefighter. Faludi quotes a variety of articles that reveal an infatuation with the fireman's brawn that also implies a rejection of the 'soft' man. From the *New York Times*, Faludi notes the following: 'Since the September attacks, the firefighter coated with ash and soot has provided a striking contrast to the now prehistoric-seeming male archetype of such a short time ago: the casually dressed dot-commers in khakis and a BMW.'³⁹⁹ Elsewhere in the *New York Times*, she quotes CNN's Camille Paglia as saying, 'I can't help noticing how robustly, dreamily masculine the faces of the firefighters are... These are working class men, stoical, patriotic. They're not on Prozac or questioning their gender.'⁴⁰⁰ Faludi argues that the recourse to both masculine and frontier imagery was so strong that rather than take issue with Bush's 'sporting' posturing, John Kerry was drawn into the same discourse in the election campaign of 2004.⁴⁰¹

There is no doubt that an implicit interrogation of masculinity is a feature of post-9/11 westerns. The film, *3:10 to Yuma* is the story of Dan Evans (Christian Bale), a former sharpshooter in the Civil War, who is entrusted with escorting a notorious outlaw, Ben Wade (Russell Crowe), to a train that will take him to Yuma, and long-term incarceration. Evans volunteers for two reasons: to earn the money he requires to save his ranch from being destroyed (to make way for a railroad) and, to earn the respect of his family, particularly his impressionable teenage son. Ultimately, Evans achieves his aims, despite being beset on all sides: he must overcome the doubts of his wife and eldest son, survive the company of the murderous Wade and the rescue attempts carried out by Wade's gang, and

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 150.

must remain courageous when various members of the entourage are either killed or decide to back out (this number includes the railroad man, eager to rid the territory of threats to his venture, and the town of Contention's sheriff's posse). Though successful, Evans is shot by one of Wade's gang members and dies in the arms of his son.

The tragic end to the film underscores a theme that runs through most of the contemporary westerns, consistent through the range of temporal settings: it appears as if any male character that defies the traditional qualities inherent in popular mythology (the rugged masculinity defined by power, coarseness, strength, practical turn of mind, and masterful grasp of material things, for example) cannot survive or, at least, cannot prosper. Dan Evans, from the outset, is depicted as a weak man. While there is an element of injustice to his story (Evans is a small farmer and suffers violent intimidation from landowners wishing to sell the land Evans occupies to the corporate industrialists developing the rail network), at an early point in the film the audience's attention is nevertheless drawn to Evans' symbolic neutering: injured during the war, he has a wooden leg rendering him unable to move with ease and impeding his attempts to stop the mob from burning down his barn. Indeed, it is his son who manages to save some of their horses from the barn. The audience is made aware that his son rejects any notion of Evans' claims of being able to resolve the situation, his ranch is on the brink of ruin, and his wife criticises him for making financial decisions that have created this state of affairs without her. Though Evans has set himself up as a family man and one who can subsist from the land, the message is clear: this man cannot run a farm nor is he worthy of a father and husband's responsibilities.

When his life intertwines with Wade's, these shortcomings are exacerbated. Wade, while spending time at the Evans ranch *en-route* to Contention, manages to enthrall Evans' entire family: not only does his larger-than-life persona attract both Evans' son and wife, but he also has Evans dance attendance on him, a particularly humiliating experience. Wade's seductive personality leads Evans' wife to assure Evans that he could not possibly manage to contain such a man. Evans' lack of virility is also touched upon here. He replies to his wife's doubts by recognising the disparity in desire that she shows to Wade as compared to him. On their way to Contention, Wade provokes Evans into punching him by remarking that he does not treat his wife properly.

Nevertheless, Evans overcomes the odds. His stubborn refusal to succumb to threat or bribe slowly impresses both his son and Wade. Evans' courageous stand inspires both these onlookers to the point that Wade becomes Evans' accomplice in getting him to the train bound for Yuma. However, a number of narrative details undermine Evans' achievement and make an implicit statement about Evans character. At the point of his triumph, as Wade hoists himself into the train's 'secure'-coach, Evans is shot by Wade's cohorts. Furthermore, though Wade exacts revenge on his own gang-member for Evans' death, and though he places himself in the train's cell, he is shown whistling for his horse that gallops alongside the train. As the audience has already been told that Wade has been to Yuma jail a number of times before and escaped each time, the significance of the horse is clear: Wade does not intend to travel very far to Yuma, and soon (though it will 'occur' after the film has ended) he will escape from the train and be at large again.

Wade's potential escape does not merely have an effect on the final scene, or Evans' rehabilitation as a man of strength and integrity, but the entire film. Evans' short-lived triumph is rendered all but pyrrhic by Wade: one wonders what the point of triumph is when the character cannot enjoy the benefits, financial and emotional, of his struggle. The conclusion one draws from the film is that one cannot survive if one has been weak, even if this weakness is eventually overcome. Wade is the film's only powerful character with a hint of humanity and romance (he is able to brutally kill an even crueler and less moral character – the Pinkerton agent – on the one hand, but is simultaneously able to quote poetry, scripture and draw sketches of birds and women on the other), albeit somewhat twisted and it is he who lives to see another day. This is a particularly bleak conclusion: the man who has displayed integrity and courage, who has been able to win the respect of his son (and one imagines, his wife too - and even of Wade), who has been able to redeem himself with no apparent moral doubts hanging over him (he is a law-abiding citizen), has no future. However, when viewed through the prism of the Bush Administration's appropriation of frontier imagery and tone, and taking into consideration the media's alacrity in providing a means of developing Bush's tone, perhaps there could be no other outcome for Dan Evans. In this context, men who are neither dashing nor completely forthright or self-confident must play only a peripheral role, and cannot be seen to flourish: regardless of occupation or moral superiority, Evans does not conform to post-9/11, Bush-era, mythologised masculinity, while Wade does. In this respect, *3:10 to Yuma* is a version of the outlaw hero-official hero that Robert Ray discusses in relation to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, but with an opposing emphasis. Ray notes that the values associated with Ford's film's official hero, Ransom

Stoddard (such as literacy, law and order, politics, and civilisation) are shown to be incompatible with those associated with the outlaw hero, Tom Doniphon (private justice, action, strength, and physicality), and therefore Stoddard's success can only be achieved at Doniphon's cost.⁴⁰² In *3:10 to Yuma*, this 'success' is reversed: it is the film's outlaw hero Wade who remains powerful, and one imagines escapes to be free at the official hero Evans' expense, who dies. Therefore, in conforming to Bush-era mythologised masculinity, the values of the outlaw hero seem to prevail over those of the official hero.

This rather extreme philosophy is evident not only in *3:10 to Yuma*. Many other films appear to uphold the same tenet and represent a cultural bloc in consolidating Bush's ideological tone and, thus, the dominant mythological functioning of contemporary culture. *Open Range*, for example, pits two cowboys against a 'corporate' farmer. When threatened by the violent and avaricious landowner, the cowboys face the prospect of a bloody show-down to protect their own interest. One of the cowboys, Charley Waite (Kevin Costner), feels guilty about his role in the killing until his fiancé tells him that compromise is impossible, certain circumstances require killing, and that he is a good man at heart. *Open Range*'s resolution is kinder to Waite than *3:10 to Yuma* is to Evans; however, Waite experiences only temporary doubts and is a hardy man used to constantly working hard outdoors for long periods as compared to Evans' ostensibly idiosyncratic and historical lack of physical prowess. Waite's guilt is ultimately assuaged since his blood-letting is absolutely justified by the film's diegetic world; neither is he forced to suffer quite the same psychological and

⁴⁰²Ray, Robert B., *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930 – 1980* (Guildford, Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 220, 229.

physical ordeal to gain respect as Evans does, suggesting that he was not weak enough to require such a level of rehabilitation in the first place.

The Missing parallels *3:10 to Yuma*'s narrative trajectory as regards its 'soft' man. Maggie Gilkeson's (Cate Blanchett) estranged father, Samuel (Tommy Lee Jones), a man who has turned his back both on family and a 'civilised' existence by adopting an indigenous lifestyle instead (a change that represents, for a Euro-American, a move towards 'softness'), is rehabilitated in much the same way as Dan Evans. When the audience is first confronted with this character, he is shunned by his daughter who grudgingly treats her father medically, but makes him sleep in the barn. When Maggie's daughter is abducted by a group of Native Americans and mercenary White Americans, however, Maggie's father demonstrates his ability to track them down and is eventually able to rescue the girl and kill the leader of the kidnappers. Though Maggie reassesses her feelings towards her father and recognises both the good in him and the value of the lifestyle he has chosen, she cannot prevent him from dying: Samuel kills the Native American by hurling him off a cliff, but in doing so he plunges over himself. The conclusion here implicates a deviation not just from strong, family-oriented masculinity but also a non-white paradigm of masculinity as if Samuel's identification with indigenous culture is incompatible with the colour of his skin. It certainly appears incompatible with orthodox Euro-American culture as his rejection of White civilisation is a powerful, if symbolic, gesture. Ultimately, like Evans, Samuel is a problematic character to integrate into post-9/11 society's requirements for its males, and thus, once he has reconciled with his family, he cannot remain in the film's diegetic space. In this interpretation, *The Missing* plays its role in consolidating the dominant ideology as represented by Bush.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford is, likewise, consistent with this interpretation. There are few redeemable characters in this film, if one views it within the context of strong masculinity. The male characters are depicted as ‘soft’ since they all are troubled to some degree: none of them appear to be self-confident, fearless and hardy. Most notably among them, Robert Ford is a fawning sycophant whose devotion to Jesse James borders on obsession; but once he experiences humiliation at the hands of James and his own brother, he betrays James not just by becoming an informant but by shooting him in the back.

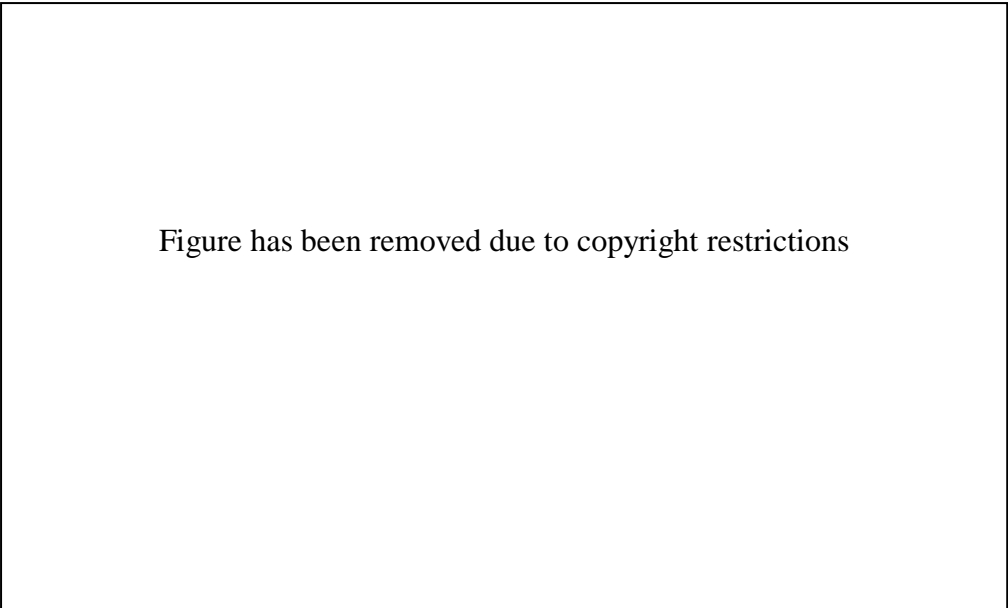


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Fig 11: The ‘coward’ Robert Ford, an example of ‘soft’ masculinity

While the film revises the legend of Jesse James to render the characters more ‘human,’ with their weaknesses and self-doubts as clear as their strengths, it nevertheless concludes with most of its male protagonists dead. Of course, the story of Jesse James is well known, but the tenor of the film is subdued, even melancholic. Like *3:10 to Yuma*, the film’s conclusion is tragic, so this latest

iteration of the Jesse James legend also ‘punishes’ the fragile man who is too introspective.

In stark contrast to the apparent condemnation of insecure male protagonists, there are films that suggest a counter-cultural tendency exists to interrogate masculinity, without judging them too harshly for not conforming to mythic or contemporary types. The film that stands out as an example of this tendency is *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005). This film traces the illicit homosexual relationship (usually synonymous with soft masculinity) that blossoms, then eventually dissipates, between Jack (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis (Heath Ledger), who meet in Wyoming in 1963, when they are hired as seasonal shepherds for the summer. The film then follows the two young men as their relationship grows, and they struggle to reconcile their feelings with a society that largely disapproves of homosexuality: when Jack and Ennis meet again after that first summer, they are both married with children. Both characters suffer varying degrees of torment as the two aspects of their lives conflict, and, like the films mentioned above, *Brokeback Mountain* ultimately ends in tragedy as, firstly, their relationship has little chance of being recognised and accepted by society (and there is even reluctance on Ennis’ part, too), and, later, when Jack is killed. Conflicting explanations for his death are provided although there is a suspicion that he has been a target of homophobic violence. Though Jack dies, and Ennis is left broken-hearted, the political implication of the film is opposite to that of *3:10 to Yuma*: the film makes it clear that such events (including society’s lack of tolerance, Jack’s death, and the way the men feel they have to repress their natural feelings) are needless and tragic.

Clearly the issue of sexuality is central to the emotional impact of *Brokeback Mountain*. Discussion of masculinity within this frame is novel, if not revolutionary, for the Western genre in mainstream cinema. However, in his review of *Brokeback Mountain* for *Cinéaste*, Roy Grundmann points out that historians ‘have unearthed data that shows that the frontier was sexually a lot more fluid than its heroic myth suggests.’⁴⁰³ In *Brokeback Mountain*’s case, the deviation from the presumed heterosexual identity of the mythic cowboy is not treated with disdain, nor does the tone of doom reflect a judgment of the two main characters. Jack and Ennis are portrayed as tender, if confused, humans, trapped between love and the expectations of an ideologically conservative society. In this way, refusing to judge its characters, *Brokeback Mountain* delivers a challenge to neo-conservative ideology. Indeed, Grundmann notes that rather than bestow the film with priceless publicity, right wing reviewers did not even review it: ‘Knowing that nothing makes for better box office than righteous indignation, most conservative critics simply chose to ignore it.’⁴⁰⁴

Seraphim Falls (David Von Ancken, 2006) offers its own particular challenge to contemporary conservative outlooks on masculinity. Set in the years following the Civil War, the film concentrates on the prolonged chase that sees Morsman Carver (Liam Neeson) track down Gideon (Pierce Brosnan), initially through mountainous, wintry forests to a wide, open desert in order to exact revenge for something that is not made immediately clear. Gideon is a grizzly, though resourceful, man and is able to avoid death using his wits and ingenuity, despite being captured on a number of occasions. Carver, on the other hand, pursues his foe relentlessly, is as resourceful as Gideon, and does not stop at

⁴⁰³ Grundmann, Roy, ‘Brokeback Mountain,’ *Cinéaste*, Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2006, p. 51.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

violence to both his hired posse, and an innocent young boy, to gain ground on Gideon. Through a number of flashbacks it is revealed that during the Civil War, Gideon, an officer in the Union Army, had set fire to Carver's home (Carver was a soldier in the Confederate ranks), accidentally killing his wife and their baby.

This revelation renders the entire film a revenge narrative that, in turn, renders its conclusion considerably at odds with post-9/11 ideology. Though both men have been portrayed as conforming to the mythological type of manhood as described by both Turner and Faludi (though, of course, in diametrically opposed ways), the film also depicts Gideon as agonising over the memory of the unintentional deaths, and finally depicts both men as being able to broker a truce. In spite of Gideon's explicit remorse and contrition, it is arguable that the narrative, especially in a post-9/11 context, would have justified Carver's revenge had he chosen to kill Gideon. Nevertheless, neither man can face another death when the opportunities arise, and a degree of forgiveness is achieved instead. Rather than a sign of weakness, this arrangement is seen as beneficial to both parties, a symbol of peaceful resolution when violent retribution seemed inevitable.

Set in 1980, *No Country for Old Men* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2007) represents the middle-ground between these aforementioned positions in its depiction of masculinity, thus presenting the possibility that post-9/11 filmic treatment of manliness is far from consistent. There are a number of male characters that represent different perspectives on masculinity. Firstly, Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin), a Vietnam veteran and a welder by trade, is depicted as uncommunicative and unresponsive, more comfortable hunting than at home, in his trailer, with his young wife. Moss, therefore, represents a contemporary

configuration of the restless and individualistic frontiersman. While Moss does not 'question' himself, world-weary police officer, Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), does: trying to uncover who is (or are) responsible for the growing number of murder victims, Bell gives the impression of having seen too much violence, even appearing to feel a degree of alienation and spiritual unease as he muses at having expected God to come into his life, but it never having happened. His retirement finally allows him to detach from a world of crime that has demoralised him. Another (retired) policeman, Ellis (Barry Corbin), who is wheelchair-bound, tells Bell that he never contemplated revenge on the criminal who crippled him, as it would be pointless. Such a philosophical reaction is certainly at odds with the vengeful nature of the post-9/11 political climate. Finally, Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) represents an extreme point on the discernable spectrum of masculinity in the film: a psychopathic killer, and a loose cannon, he is captured and hurt many times but cannot be held and seemingly cannot be destroyed. Thus, in this case, the two characters that either question their role in society or can refrain from aggression in the face of adversity, live on and are treated sympathetically; Moss, the example of 'strong' masculinity, though also depicted with a degree of sympathy, is killed while the amoral killer manages to survive. Implicitly, then, the film seems to transcend the strict conservative stances on 'soft' and 'hard' masculinity.

The issue of masculinity, therefore, is one that highlights the different ideological positions of the post-9/11 Westerns. There are films that adhere to the archetype of strong masculinity that permeated American mainstream culture (or press, at least), and can be described, therefore, as conservative. However, there are other films that challenge that orthodoxy and therefore represent a counter-

cultural trend that sees their insecure male characters treated with a greater sympathy. On the other hand, *No Country for Old Men* represents another tendency altogether. One is reminded of Patricia Nelson Limerick's appraisal of the function of New Western History, when she says: 'the intention is...simply to make it clear that in western American history, heroism and villainy, virtue and vice and nobility and shoddiness appear in roughly the same proportions as they appear in any other subject of human history.'⁴⁰⁵ It would appear that *No Country for Old Men* illustrates Limerick's point in its depictions of these traits and, in doing so, sets itself apart from Hollywood's preferred approach to themes such as masculinity as well as Westerns' temporal, spatial and, even historical settings.

Race, Nationality, and the Southern Frontier

While Samuel Gilkeson's adoption of an indigenous lifestyle (including attire, and long hair, for example) might be argued to characterise his masculinity as 'soft,' it also draws attention to the issue of the treatment of the culture with which he identifies in post-9/11 Westerns. Hollywood's preferred settings for films of this genre usually locate them in territory that render White characters vulnerable to attack from marauding 'Indians.' Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill makes clear his views on the ways in which Hollywood cinema portrays the indigenous peoples of continental America, and their culture(s) in his book *Fantasies of the Master Race*. He states: 'The cinematic depiction of indigenous peoples in America is objectively racist at all levels.'⁴⁰⁶ Churchill demonstrates his argument with reference to numerous instances of ways in which the indigenes of America

⁴⁰⁵ Limerick, Patricia Nelson, 'What on Earth is the New American History?' *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁰⁶ Churchill, *ibid.*, p. 167.

have been historically illustrated as unenlightened savages, have been misrepresented geographically, and how historical and cultural inaccuracies have been habitually overlooked for the sake of aesthetic spectacle. Certainly, the role of 'Indian' seems perennially to be that of the 'Other:' the violent aggressor, the primitive savage, the inconvenient occupier of lands, and the obstacle to progress. Even in cases when a film sympathises with their plight, it is invariably from a White person's perspective. The issue of racism in depictions of the frontier or the west has remained an important one, but in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, carried out by Middle Eastern Muslims (albeit extremists), becomes more pertinent and demands detailed analysis.

Typically, then, one of the primary archetypes of threat in Westerns, is embodied in the figure of the 'Indian.' However, perhaps even surprisingly, there are very few instances where Native Americans are substantially represented in post-9/11 Westerns. Again, this hints at a consolidation of institutional racism, in two ways, since rather than co-opting the Natives' stories into the new political and cultural landscape, it seems as if the burden of The Other has been displaced onto another group, in this case in national terms. Thus, portrayal (and, also, lack of portrayal) of indigenous peoples remains racist, while the representations of Mexico and Mexicans can be read as either equally racist or progressive.

In terms of representations of indigenous cultures, *The Missing* exemplifies the trend of stereotypically equating the Native American with 'menace.' In this film, Maggie Gilkeson's attitude to native culture is extremely negative; for instance, her choice of description is "savage." She is initially disinclined to welcome her estranged father, and his adoption of an indigenous lifestyle revolts her even further. On their way to town for a day's outing, Maggie's daughters and

partner are attacked: one daughter is abducted and her boyfriend is brutally killed. As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that the kidnappers are led by Chidin (Eric Schweig), a gruesome local Native American. The film follows Maggie's attempt to rescue her daughter, and the other innocent, female captives. Her attitude towards her father and, by association, indigenous people, softens considerably as she witnesses their lifestyles, practices and beliefs first-hand. However, nothing in the film indicates that her change in attitude is anything other than superficial. Indeed, the film conforms to the traditional narratives in which innocent females are abducted by savages, and those savages are invariably guilty of, or at least expected to commit, rape and murder.⁴⁰⁷

Furthermore, Chidin, the leader of the Indian group, represents more than simple, stereotypical savagery: both Philip French and John Izod identify Chidin with Osama bin Laden.⁴⁰⁸ As Izod puts it: Chidin has

[T]he purity of undiluted evil. As such, he fits the early twenty-first century American mold of the 'terrorist' leader such as Osama bin Laden. After September 2001, the latter was not generally perceived as a cold-blooded, quasi-military strategist with political goals – an idea which might plausibly have been generated by reflection on the objectives behind the massacres he allegedly masterminded. Rather, the Bush Administration fostered an image of a man demonically driven by insane hatred of all things American and good. Our fictional villain can thus be read as an allegorical representation of the guerilla leader.⁴⁰⁹

French argues that *The Missing* is not sanctimonious, but rather, reflects the good and bad of both cultures, illuminating and allegorising post-9/11 America.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

⁴⁰⁸ French, *ibid.*, p. 201; Izod, John, 'Westerns and Global Imperialism,' *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture – Spring 73: Cinema and Psyche*, Spring 2005, p. 230.

⁴⁰⁹ Izod, *Ibid.*, pp.230 – 231.

⁴¹⁰ French, *ibid.*, p. 202.

However, the film does not provide any contextual information beyond the parameters of the narrative; that is to say, Chidin is depicted as ‘pure evil,’ and Samuel is depicted as mediating, meaningfully, between the two cultures with which he identifies, but there is no history given of the struggle between the indigenous and the White settlers.

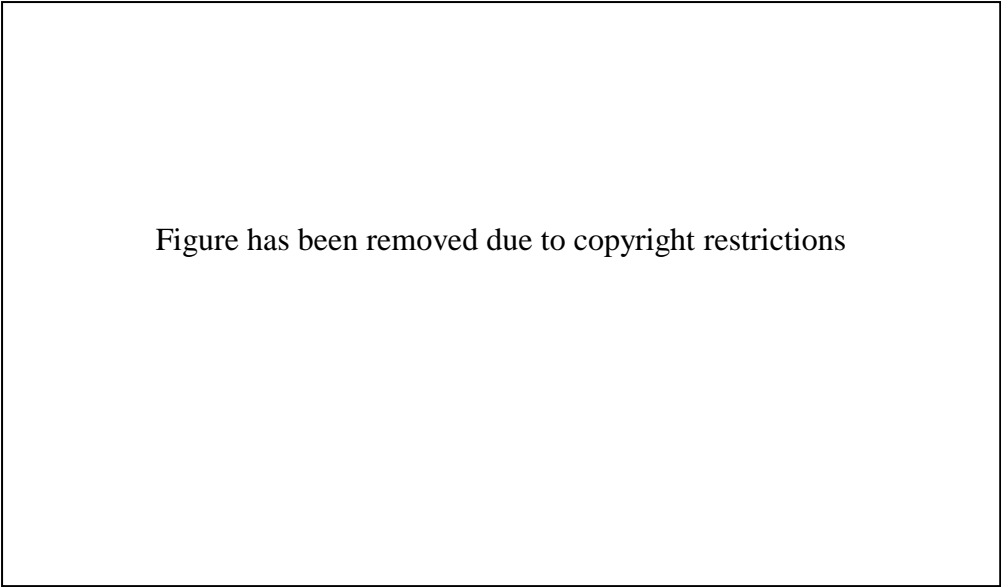


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Fig 12: ‘Indian’ as ‘pure evil’ – Chidin in *The Missing*

While a number of White Americans are depicted as lazy, cowardly, and even totally incompetent, and while good and bad aspects of each ‘side’ are presented, there is no focus on the displacement or dehumanisation of indigenous populations, the criminalisation of their culture, nor of the litany of broken treaties or White atrocities that culminated in the state of affairs that exist in *The Missing*.⁴¹¹ Thus, just as the terrorist attacks are not (allowed to be) seen in the context of dynamic geo-politics, Chidin is not shown within the context of systemic racism in *The Missing*. This social connection made between Chidin and

⁴¹¹ Leading Izod to interpret the film as a political allegory of post-9/11 militarism: Izod., *ibid.*, p. 228.

bin Laden (made by reviewers quoted above), renders the film politically conservative.

Other Western films make more oblique references to the Frontier's actual racial conflicts. In *3:10 to Yuma*, the group escorting Ben Wade to Contention passes through 'Apache' territory, and is attacked. However, the Apaches are never seen, as they are completely hidden by a combination of tall grass and the darkness of night except for a brief glimpse of one or two faces, before Wade shoots them dead.

In *Seraphim Falls*, both Gideon and Carver briefly pass a sage-like Native American, sitting by a trail that leads to a desert, who imparts wisdom in the form of riddles. These characters do not feature very prominently in these films. However, at least they are present: though set in the plains and border lands of the West, none of *Open Range*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005) nor *No Country for Old Men* depict many native people, if any at all.

Ward Churchill has commented on how the geography of the Western is rendered almost completely empty of its indigenous populations by cinema, and when represented, are seemingly from only one possible indigenous 'nation:'

In truth, the area is itself subdivided into several distinct bioregional locales, of which Hollywood selected two, the Plains and the Upper Sonoran Desert region of New Mexico and Arizona (often referred to as the 'Southwest') as being representative...Although the 'empty desert' [of the Southwest] was/is filled with a host of peoples running the gamut from the Hopi, Zuni and other 'Puebloans' to the Pima, Maricopa, Cocopah, Yuma and Navajo, anyone taking their ethnographic

cues from the movies would be led rapidly to the conclusion that there was but one: The Apaches.⁴¹²

The legacy of these films is the suggestion that the Native American plight is a nineteenth century one, consigned to history, and thus devoid of any dynamic present or future, nor requiring any present debate. This reflects the charge George Miles (curator of the Western Americana collection at Yale University) makes of American historiography: the frameworks of this history (viewing indigenous culture either as a dying one, or one of resistance), Miles argues:

[R]ender Indians more interesting and important as foils for white history than as significant participants in it...The process [of making the Indian either the necessary enemy or the victim] reduces American history to a moral fable in which Native Americans become little more than abstract components of an ideological agenda...the Indian's own voice...never reaches the general audience for American history.⁴¹³

Post-9/11 Westerns, it would appear, continue this historical trend in cinema, rather than challenge it.

If the Native American suffers from either racist depiction or no depiction at all, then there is a space to be filled by a different archetype for the 'Other.' It is not difficult to uncover since nearly all post-9/11 Westerns at some point, make reference to, are set near, or even cross, the international border between America and Mexico; thus, many of these Westerns feature Mexicans. The tension that exists between Americans and Mexicans, or the diegetic attitude towards Mexican

⁴¹² Churchill, *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴¹³ Miles, George, 'To Hear an Old Voice: Rediscovering Native Americans in American History,' in Cronon, William, Miles, George and Gitlin, Jay, eds, *Under and Open Sky – Rethinking America's Western Past* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1992), p. 55.

territory, comprise the context in which the Other is situated; and the ways in which these tensions are resolved, reveal the films' ideological position.

A brief outline illustrates how these films implicate Mexico in their plots. In *The Missing*, Chidin and his group of kidnappers are known to be heading south of the border to sell the girls to the highest bidder (whether Mexicans or Americans is unclear). Likewise, Mexico represents a space of refuge for Ben Wade and his outlaws in *3:10 to Yuma*. One of his gang intimates that they will wait for him in Mexico after the initial bankroll robbery and Wade, himself, invites a barmaid to accompany him to Mexico where he will employ her as a singer. In both *The Alamo* and *No Country for Old Men*, Mexicans are portrayed as the enemy: in the former, the defence of the eponymous mission at San Antonio, Texas, is portrayed as a courageous, if almost suicidal, stand in the face of Mexican aggression.

In *No Country for Old Men*, Anton Chigurh is the personification of calculated, violent and murderous psychosis as he methodically and indiscriminately tracks, kills and intimidates both innocent bystanders and contract-targets, and is seemingly indestructible. The level of threat Chigurh embodies is so intense as to render him the post-9/11 archetype. There seems to be no psychological consistency helping to inform the viewer whether he will execute a victim or walk away, most notably 'reprieving' a petrol station manager with the flip of a coin.

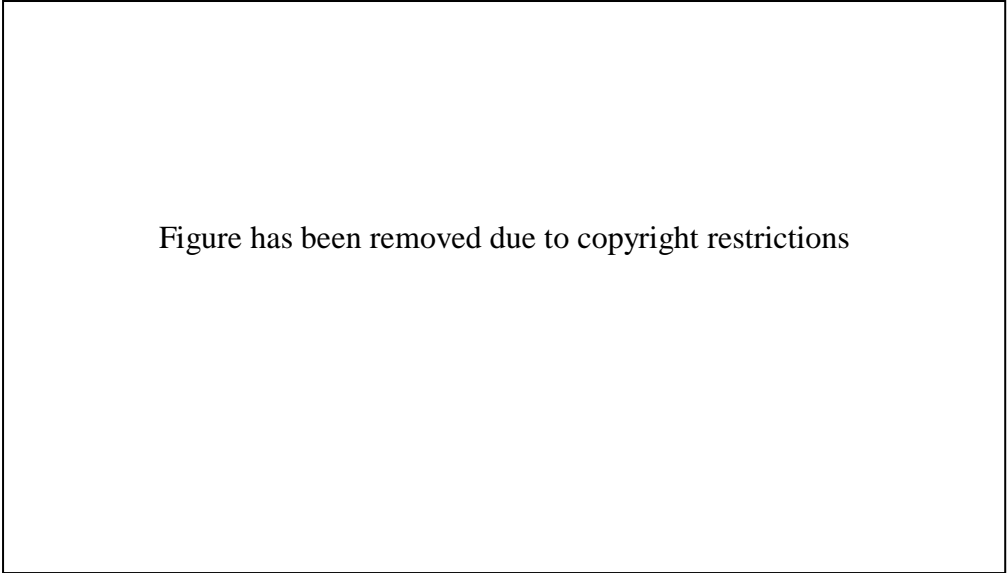


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Fig 13: Mexican as 'pure evil' - Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*

Thus the lack of rationale, and the calm manner in which he dispatches his victims, presents him as omnipotent, capable at striking anyone at any time for no apparent reason. More than Chidin, Chigurh is therefore the archetypal cinematic, allegorical terrorist. Even in *Brokeback Mountain*, Mexico's image is further embellished by an association with transgression, as Jack is forced to cross the border to fulfil his sexual desires in seedy side streets. This is entirely in keeping with long-held Hollywood prejudices against Mexico that Camilla Fojas identifies when she says:

The border is...a vital repository of threatening ideas – homosexuality, prostitution...drug trafficking and abuse, sexual promiscuity, effeminacy and terrorism – and undesirable or inassimilable people such as Mexicans, Native Americans, racially mixed characters, immigrants...terrorists.⁴¹⁴

On a broad level, therefore, the narrative plots that see Mexico producing such an evil character, as well as the Alamo's besiegers, indicate that Mexico is the new

⁴¹⁴ Fojas, Camilla, *Border Bandits – Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 2.

significant Other in Western films. However, that would be to analyse this issue from a single perspective as there are other films that depict Mexico, Mexicans and the border region in a diametrically opposed way. For instance, Mexico is equated with redemption in *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. The inherent racism of the border policeman, Mike Norton (Barry Pepper), who mistakenly assumes that Melquiades Estrada is shooting at him and returns fire, killing him, is symbolic of the dehumanisation of working class Mexican immigrants. Meanwhile, rancher Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones), Estrada's erstwhile employer and friend, undertakes to bury Estrada in his own country. Perkins deduces who shot Estrada and abducts Norton for the often torturous journey to Mexico. The journey is a symbolic one as much as a physical one, as it breaks down both Norton's machismo and prejudice whilst forcing him to confront his racism.

Norton fears that Perkins will administer justice by killing him, but once their mission has been accomplished, Perkins judges that Norton has not only showed requisite remorse, but has experienced an almost Damascene conversion and so sets him free. There is no bloodshed born of revenge, just an angry and determined, if sorrowful, reaction to inhuman conditions and institutional prejudice. It is only Norton's psychological journey, physically represented by crossing into the territory that is home to the very people Norton had mistreated, that can redeem him. Mexico is depicted as a poverty-stricken country and its population as victims, both of economics (having to emigrate to survive) and racism. This sympathetic treatment of the Other stands in stark contrast to the aforementioned Westerns, and thus points to a apparent political liberalism. Indeed, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* is notable in its title sequence: it

shows the film's title in both English and Spanish, thus underlining a certain compassion as well as recognition of a sizeable Hispanic community living and working in the United States.

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada is not alone in its positive portrayal of the Mexico frontier. The final sequence in *Seraphim Falls*, shot in New Mexico, but set in a United States-Mexico border desert, depicts Gideon and Carver engaging in a final showdown.⁴¹⁵ The characters have shared a bloody history (both war-time, and in the chase) that has cut a cross-section through Western American landscapes, thus it is significant that their final truce happens close to the border. Again, the redemptive qualities of the frontier are symbolised in the way political divisions embodied by the characters (in *Seraphim Fall's* narrative, civil-war divisions) are paralleled in the fundamental division symbolised by the national border (in short, America and The Other). This sense of redemption at the border conflicts with the way other films depict a sense of threat from the same place. Therefore, the real possibility of conciliation whilst on this border is a powerful message to impart in the wake of the post-9/11 division between revenge and bloodlust on one hand, and reflection on America's global role on the other.

The issue of 'conciliation on the border,' however, seems to be counter to actual conditions at the border with Mexico in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Tony Payan describes the effect of September 11 on border security in *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars*. After the attacks, the border was temporarily closed so that families were separated, people could not travel to work, students were

⁴¹⁵ McCarthy, Todd, 'Seraphim Falls,' *Variety*, 19/09/06,
<<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117931627.html?categoryid=31&cs=1&p=0>>

unable to travel to their schools, and the waiting time to cross the border into America increased up to 5 hours due to increased inspections.⁴¹⁶ Additionally, Payan observes that issues formerly considered law-enforcement, were redefined as issues of national security. All this stemmed from a misplaced post-attack ‘lash out:’

Those who diagnosed the failure to deter the terrorist attacks of that day focused on immigration procedures; on cross-border commercial practices; on the openness of the border...Thus, the diagnosis of the failure of the government fell heavily on the U.S.-Mexico border, even though the border had very little to do with the terrorists of September 11.⁴¹⁷

The ‘Frontier,’ therefore, in post-9/11 westerns often means a literal border between America and Mexico. It seems appropriate, however, when one considers the circumstances surrounding the 9/11 attacks. The terrorists originally came from outside the country, having to cross an international border to enter the nation before eventually hi-jacking the planes. The attacks resulted in a strengthening of security in many areas of society, but most notably the restrictions at border crossings, not to mention the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. The implied problematic situation of (general) immigration finds a convenient microcosmic ‘narrative’ in the issue of immigration, both legal and illegal, from Mexico (and South America). Therefore, it is no surprise that Mexican immigration is used as a metaphor for terrorist ‘invasion.’ Indeed, a more progressive attitude towards border security and immigration issues being

⁴¹⁶ Payan, Tony, Tony, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars – Drugs, Immigration and Homeland Security* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 13.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

fostered on the eve of 9/11 became one of the indirect victims of the attacks, as reported in the *New York Times*:

[T]he Mexican government is pressing the United States to expand current guest worker programs and give legal status to some three million Mexicans staying illegally in the United States...Hopes for a more open border, freer immigration and new United States investment in Mexico have been buried under the weight of the attacks, the heightened interest in border security to weed out terrorists and the economic slump in the United States.⁴¹⁸

The issue of race, in post-9/11 Westerns, thus reveals two phenomena: firstly, that the ethnic issue at the centre of the terrorist attacks (within the context of the Left's attempt to reflect and debate the geopolitical reasons for the attacks), provided Hollywood with an opportunity to positively incorporate the experience of the indigenous population of the continent in its Western films, an opportunity that was spurned. Secondly, the Western's Other, historically the 'Indian,' was reconfigured as the Mexican, with the Frontier now made coincident with the international border. One can interpret ideological positions of films in terms of their portrayal of the post-9/11 cinematic frontier: conservative attitudes associate Mexico with threat and violence, whereas more a progressive stance allows a debate of the conditions in which Mexicans live, and conveys a sense of redemption and personal renaissance in the border.

⁴¹⁸ Weiner, Tim and Thompson, Ginger, 'Mexico Lower on Bush's List Since Sept. 11,' *The New York Times*, 29/12/01, < <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/29/world/mexico-lower-on-bush-s-list-since-sept-11.html> >

Conclusion

September 11 represented not just an act of terrorism within a context of geopolitical tension, but also triggered significant revision of American mythology. Myths, Richard Slotkin writes:

[A]re stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness...For an American, allusions to 'the Frontier,' or to events like 'Pearl Harbor,' 'The Alamo,' or 'Custer's Last Stand' evoke an implicit understanding of the entire historical scenario that belongs to the event and of the complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it.⁴¹⁹

On the evidence of the films analysed here, '9/11' can be added to the list; and with reference to the mythological significance of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, it could be argued that the effects 9/11 had on the cultural *zeitgeist* as expressed in the Western genre, was, on the surface at least, to rehabilitate the type of character represented by Tom Doniphon – the rugged, violent, practical, self-reliant, 'strong' male.

In the wake of 9/11, President Bush effectively adopted ingrained images, tones and even key words as cultural counters, to consolidate his position, and to fix the meaning of contemporary events by reference to familiar tropes and archetypes. A measure of the success of this strategy can be found in the way the media went along with Bush, resorting to a similar 'frontier' language and imagery that demonstrates the strength of these historical and mythological forces. Thus, the Western films that followed are important and integral artefacts, not only to study the direction of post-9/11 cinema but also to interpret the

⁴¹⁹ Slotkin, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

development of American identities, as well as revealing areas in which confirmation of this dominant ideology, or conflict against it, exist.

These areas of conflict arise when one considers the different approaches to some of the themes that emerge from studies of the American frontier experience, namely masculinity and race. The way these issues are depicted has a direct influence on the film's political implications. As John Izod explains:

[T]he tension between the claims of the individual and those of the collective can often be seen in the Western. It resonates loudly in times of nationally felt disturbances, as when mass paranoia is aroused (formerly directed at Communists, lately against terrorists) or war is waged (whether armed or psychological). How a Western resolves tensions...reflects the ethos of its era.⁴²⁰

In the case of post-9/11 Westerns, conservative resolution of 'masculinity' is demonstrated by a condemnation of insecurity, prevarication and weakness, while a resolution that challenges neo-conservative ideology would allow sympathy for these characteristics. Likewise, a film that depicts the development of civilisation without questioning the effects of these trajectories on society could be described as conservative as they assume the traditional frontier story as theorised by Frederick Jackson Turner. In terms of race, the fact that very few post-9/11 Westerns depict indigenous peoples reminds the viewer that their story is still conspicuously absent from Hollywood productions. However, the films' ideological viewpoints can be discerned from the way in which they treat the new Western 'Other,' the Mexican, and the space from which he/she comes. In some films, both are represented as either depraved or transgressive, while others view

⁴²⁰ Izod, *ibid.*, p. 221.

them more sympathetically. Clearly, due to post-9/11 security issues, examples of the former tend to imply a conservative position.

Due to the Western's survival and function, one might have expected more Westerns to have been produced since 9/11. However, this does not allow for the possibility that what is unique to post-9/11 culture, differentiating it from previous eras, might involve a splitting of mythic articulations about contemporary American experience into more than one genre. It could be argued that, just as new revisions in mythology are required from era to era, new revisions to generic staples occur in a similar manner so that the issues usually associated with the Western have been diverted into other genres. Certainly, there has been a remarkable number of horror films, war films, and computer game adaptations produced since 2001, suggesting that perhaps the cinematic impact in terms of discussion of mythology, not to mention issues of revenge and bloodlust, in the wake of the terrorist attacks, has been in these genres as much as the Western. One other genre in particular stands out in this regard: though the issue of heroism is prevalent in Westerns, it is arguable that the 'darkness' inherent in the post-9/11 cultural climate finds a more appropriate mode of representation in superhero narratives, and comic/graphic novel adaptations.

Chapter 6: Comic-Books, Cinema, and the Psychology of 9/11

Introduction

If masculinity, its potency, and limits are thematic concerns of post-9/11 Westerns, then a similar trend occurs in the superhero film. In this context however, the theme is employed to investigate the issue of power, usually superhuman, in its role of combating evil, and preventing large scale, almost unimaginable, destruction. Martin Flanagan, amongst others, has recognised this trend. Focusing on the issue of maturation to adulthood, he observes that:

Following a classic arc within American culture where the attainment of agency is linked to the assumption of power, self-mastery, and the acceptance of a singular heroic destiny (most evocatively seen in the Western genre), contemporary superhero films view the process of maturation as an emotionally and physically complex and dangerous phase, yet one that must be surmounted if the heroes are to quell their own chronic doubts about their place in the world, or resolve a diffuse identity.⁴²¹

Flanagan's account attests, if inadvertently, to psychological phenomena that surround depictions of familiar superheroes, and contemporary superhero films. In the wake of 9/11 in particular, these are namely: the exposure of superheroes' inadequacy; trauma, both personal to the character depicted, and the social trauma that followed as a result of 9/11; and America's apparent inability to cope with the attacks and their aftermath.

⁴²¹Flanagan, Martin, 'Teen Trajectories in *Spider-Man* and *Ghost World*,' in Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., eds, *Film and Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p.138.

Flanagan, in the same article, consciously acknowledges the growth of superhero films, observing that they have dominated box-office charts in recent seasons. Indeed, the years following 9/11 have witnessed a prominent upsurge in production of films based on comics. The editors of *Film and Comic Books* remind the reader in their introduction, however, that the two entertainment sectors have enjoyed a close relationship since the beginning of the twentieth century, and thus cannot be described as a recent phenomenon.⁴²² In 1906, they note, the comic strip 'Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend' formed the basis of a live-action film by Edwin S. Porter, and that television series featuring the Hulk, Batman, and Superman have appeared since the 1950s.⁴²³ More specific signs of comic-books' appeal to Hollywood can be found in the inspiration they provided for the cinematic spectacle that became known as the blockbuster, associated here with the development of franchise movies, an increasingly global market-orientation, and 'saturation' publicity.⁴²⁴ As Matt McAllister puts it in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*:

[M]odern comic book-based films have helped establish the industrial formula of the Hollywood popcorn blockbuster: fantastic action movie as cultural event. Comic book materials attract a youthful moviegoing demographic, appeal to nostalgic older audiences, and offer thrills and well-defined archetype characters, especially heroes who also have well-established track records for popularity, licensing, and sequel potential.⁴²⁵

⁴²² Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., 'Introduction,' in Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., eds, *Film and Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. vii

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ McAllister, Matt, 'Blockbuster Meets Superhero Comic, or Art House Meets Graphic Novel? The Contradictory Relationship between Film and Comic Art,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Volume 34, Number 3, Fall 2006, p. 110.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

Elsewhere, Kerry Gough underlines how close this relationship has become in the 2000s, drawing attention to both comic-books as a key source of cinema production, and the emergence of comic book companies as smaller divisions of larger media conglomerates. Gough succinctly emphasises the business dynamics of the film industry, in its attempt to maximise profits:

Although the relationship between film and the comic book has had a long history...the intermedia opportunities of comic book properties have been excessively plundered in recent years through the reciprocal relationship between Warner Bros. and DC, Marvel's later synergistic relationships with Columbia Pictures and Twentieth Century Fox...As such the Hollywood comic book blockbuster movie has become a central and complementary part of both the comic book and the Hollywood film industries, in which the revenue generated can be staggering.⁴²⁶

Indications of comic-book film profitability are noted by Gough, who observes that at the start of 2006, *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002) was the most successful adaptation of a comic-book as it had made over \$403 million in America alone, and over double that figure, world-wide.⁴²⁷ *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi, 2002), likewise, performed strongly at the box-office, making \$373.5 million, domestically, in 2004 while *Hulk* (Ang Lee, 2003) made \$129.5 million in the summer of 2003. *X-Men 2* (Bryan Singer, 2003) made more than \$200 million in the first ten weeks of its release and its sequel, *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Brett

⁴²⁶ Gough, Kerry, 'Translation Creativity and Alien Econ(c)omics – From Hollywood Blockbuster to Dark Horse Comic Book,' in Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., eds, *Film and Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 37.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

Ratner, 2006), according to Matt McAllister, set a record for Memorial Day by recouping \$122 million in four days.⁴²⁸

Indeed, the profit potential of the comic-book and Hollywood connection is so well understood that companies that have established themselves first and foremost as comic book publishers are now, in addition, moving into the realm of film production. Some are perhaps learning from earlier mistakes: the terms of deals made between Hollywood companies and Marvel, for instance, in the 1990s, resulted in the comic-book companies earning a comparatively small share of box-office receipts from these profitable blockbusters.⁴²⁹ In an attempt to redress that situation, Marvel has begun to produce its own films, and is, as McAllister notes, ‘redefining itself as ‘an independent film studio.’’⁴³⁰ He also notes that Dark Horse, the fourth largest comic-book publisher in the United States, as of 1992 had its own production company supporting *Hellboy* (Guillermo del Toro, 2004), and entered into an agreement with Image Entertainment to form a production company called Dark Horse Indie.⁴³¹ DC Comics, on the other hand, being owned by Time-Warner, enjoys a synergistic relationship with Warner Bros.⁴³²

While the two industries have had ties, then, extending back to the early days of cinema, September 11 ushered in a new era, not just politically, but also in terms of comic-books’ enhanced relevance as an industry traditionally offering illustrations of the actions of superheroes, often depicted in the context of threat, and imminent destruction. Thus, the connections between comic-book, film, and

⁴²⁸ Johnson, Derek, ‘Will the Real Wolverine Please Stand Up? Marvel’s Mutation From Monthlies to Movies,’ in Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., eds, *Film and Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 66; McAllister, Matt, *ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴²⁹ Waxman, Sharon, ‘Marvel Wants to Flex Its Own Muscles as a Moviemaker,’ *The New York Times*, 18/06/07, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/18/business/media/18marvel.html>>

⁴³⁰ McAllister, Matt, *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴³¹ McAllister, Matt, *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴³² Johnson, *ibid.*, p. 70.

history entered into uncharted territory. In this chapter, the relationship between the two industries is explored, with particular attention paid to the films adapted from comic books that visually ‘quote’ 9/11, and their interrogation of the hero ideal, as compared to the realities of the experience at Ground Zero. The psychological impact of conceptions of ‘heroism’ associated with 9/11, and what, in turn, superhero cinema offers in terms of psychological significance is addressed, with reference to specific senses of ‘national’ trauma peculiar to the United States.

Comics and 9/11

Despite the fictional nature of Superman and his peers, it did not take long for signs of ambivalence towards comic-book superheroism to surface in mainstream American media in the wake of 9/11. On October 2, 2001, *Time* carried an article by Andrew D. Arnold under the headline ‘Will Superheroes Meet Their Doom?’ in which the relevance of an industry that produces graphic stories depicting superhuman aversions of tragedy in the name of entertainment was opened to question.⁴³³ In general, being based in New York would be enough to ensure that any industry would feel some kind of ‘aftershock’ the article suggested, but the main threat to profitability, Arnold postulated, was the publications’ subject matter:

Mainstream publishers Marvel and DC may feel the impact most of all. They are both located in New York, but that’s not the reason why. They both specialize in a kind of entertainment, superhero books, that suddenly seems off-key. Who can now abide the fantasy of an evil madman’s nefarious plot to kill

⁴³³ Arnold, Andrew D., ‘Will Superheroes Meet Their Doom?’ *Time*, 02/10/01, <<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,177759,00.html>>

thousands of people being foiled by a muscle-bound troglodyte?⁴³⁴

Despite such critiques however, the comic book industry soon indexed the nationwide impulse to do something ‘concrete.’ As has been discussed, the popular response to the chaos and tragedy of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 was largely one of wanting to ‘help,’ whether in the form of volunteering with medical aid, helping locate possible survivors or even preparing food for rescue teams, for example. Noted in a previous chapter was the way in which the film industry responded to its own desire to contribute to this effort, with a televised fundraising show, offering just one example of how Hollywood’s creative community acted. As another, albeit distinct, arm of the entertainment industry, those involved in comic book production, likewise, felt a need to mark the gravity of the new emotional climate into which Americans, and in particular those from or living in New York were now thrust.⁴³⁵

The response of Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse, was to create tributes, in their own particular style, to the efforts of the many institutions and individuals involved in the emergency that followed the attacks. These 9/11 comic-books include among their number *The Amazing Spider-Man No. 36*, in which Spider Man is shown overlooking the rubble of the World Trade Center unable to stop the carnage; *A Moment of Silence*; two volumes of *9/11*, the first subtitled *Artists Respond*, a joint project by Chaos! Comics, Dark Horse and Image, published by DC, and another subtitled *The World’s Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists*

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Lew, Julie, ‘Comics Turning Tragedy Into Tribute,’ *The New York Times*, 29/12/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/29/arts/comics-turning-tragedy-into-tribute.html>>

Tell Stories to Remember, also by DC; Alternative Comics' *9/11: Emergency Relief*; and Marvel's *Heroes*.⁴³⁶ The title and concept of *Heroes* apparently came to Marvel's editor in chief Joe Quesada, when he began to receive requests from comic-book fans in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, demanding that Marvel respond in an appropriate way. Indicative of the urgency and desire to create a fitting tribute, the 64-page book was collated in a mere week and a half, when it usually takes three to six months to produce this volume of material.⁴³⁷

The nature, form, and content of these 9/11 comics represent a multi-layered, culturally rich bloc of artefacts, in their illustration of the very real trauma of such a historically unprecedented and era-defining event. Perhaps their most significant feature is the way in which they depict interaction between representations of 'actual' characters (or rather, fictional representations of actual 'types,' such as grieving children and fire-fighters) with fictional superheroes including Spiderman, Captain America and the X-Men.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Cooper, Simon and Atkinson, Paul, 'Graphic Implosion – Politics, Time and Value in Post-9/11 Comics,' in Keniston, Ann and Follansbee Quinn, Jeanne, eds, *Literature after 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2008) p. 60; Nyberg, Amy Kiste, 'Of Heroes and Superheroes,' in Chermak, Steven, Bailey, Frankie Y., and Brown, Michelle, eds, *Media Representations of September 11* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), p. 176

⁴³⁷ Lew, *ibid*; Faludi, Susan, *The Terror Dream – What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), p. 50.

⁴³⁸ Nyberg, *ibid*.

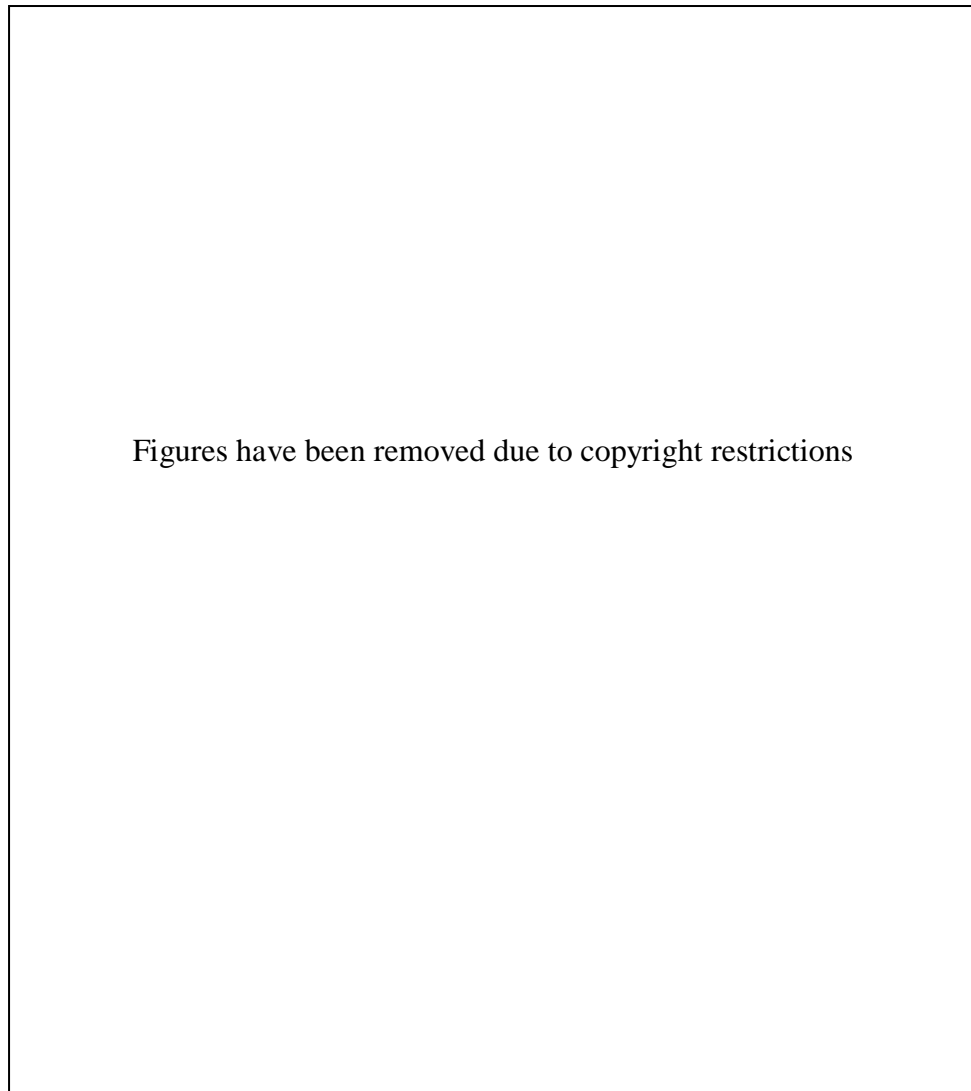


Fig 14: Examples of 9/11 Comic-Books (note Superman's exclamation, "Wow," as he looks at a billboard of emergency workers)

This combination proves a dynamic one, as it introduces a discernible tension between history and fiction that simultaneously runs contrary to established comic-book conventions, whilst also illustrating the global political climate as it was in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. At this moment, the diegetic worlds

of comic books offer clear metaphors for the distinct moral conflict between good and evil.⁴³⁹

A more troubling implication however soon became evident amidst this Manichean, post-9/11 world: namely that, despite illustrations of them grasping the flag and, at times looking defiant, former superheroes could no longer be relied upon to avert disaster. Indeed, this new ‘sceptical’ superhero narrative was exacerbated by attention to real-life experience. As Amy Kiste Nyberg notes, aware of this difficulty, a number of the comics avoided portraying superheroes, deciding to illustrate the personal recollections and experiences of actual Americans instead, whether at Ground Zero or from the perspective of those who experienced the attacks when watching television.⁴⁴⁰ The effect of this, Nyberg argues, is that there is less of an emphasis placed in the publications on the superhero narrative: more precisely, the comics produced in tribute to those who worked at the attack site *inverted* the conventions of superhero comics in order to attribute hero status to ordinary people. Nyberg’s conclusions regarding what the 9/11 comics thus recognise: a newfound sense of superhero powerlessness; a juxtaposition with, and therefore comparison to, real 9/11 heroes (either in partnership with these ‘heroes,’ or on the periphery) and a rejection of superheroes by children, who turn, instead, to fire-fighters and police officers.⁴⁴¹

Cooper and Atkinson summarise thus:

The introduction of an extra-diegetic event into the world of the comic book...entails the convergence of mythological and historical worlds. Generally, serialized comic books (and

⁴³⁹ See, for example, Rhodes, Ryan Indy and Johnson, David Kyle, ‘What Would Batman Do? Bruce Wayne as Moral Exemplar,’ in White, Mark D. and Arp, Robert, eds, *Batman and Philosophy – The Dark Knight of the Soul* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

⁴⁴⁰ Nyberg, *ibid*; Lew, *ibid*.

⁴⁴¹ Nyberg, *ibid*., p. 177.

superhero comics especially) are predicated upon the exclusion of history in the sense that characters cannot directly intervene in history.⁴⁴²

As a real event in history, 9/11 exposed fictional superheroes' shortcomings. A number of the comics do, nonetheless, include superheroes in their pages, and although sometimes appearing defiant, as noted above, the most striking imagery is that which demonstrates qualifications of superhero 'capacity.' In this context, Superman, Captain America, the Hulk, and Spider-Man, typically kneel, grieve, display their frustrations, and stand in front of destroyed buildings, unable to act; Captain America, in *Heroes*, for example, is attended to by a fire-fighter and consoled by a policeman and distressed women.⁴⁴³ Elsewhere, Spider-Man is left unable to respond convincingly when passers-by ask "where were you?!" and "how could you let this happen?" before he comforts a bereaved boy, again unable to offer reassuring words. Spider-Man is seen bowing down, head in hand, an image that demonstrates how the once-powerful are now found desperately wanting.⁴⁴⁴ In retrospect, these images almost offer a fictional snap-shot of American history: these one-time American heroes are, in one case literally, on their knees. As Nyberg puts it, 'these characters are representations of America. The world's remaining superpower has been shown to be vulnerable, ill-prepared, momentarily defeated by unseen forces. Superheroes, and by extension, America, are not invincible after all.'⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Cooper, *ibid.*

⁴⁴³ Nyberg, *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁴⁴ Straczynski, J. Michael, *et al.*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Volume 2, No.36, December 2001, pp 4 and 19-20.

⁴⁴⁵ Nyberg, *ibid.*

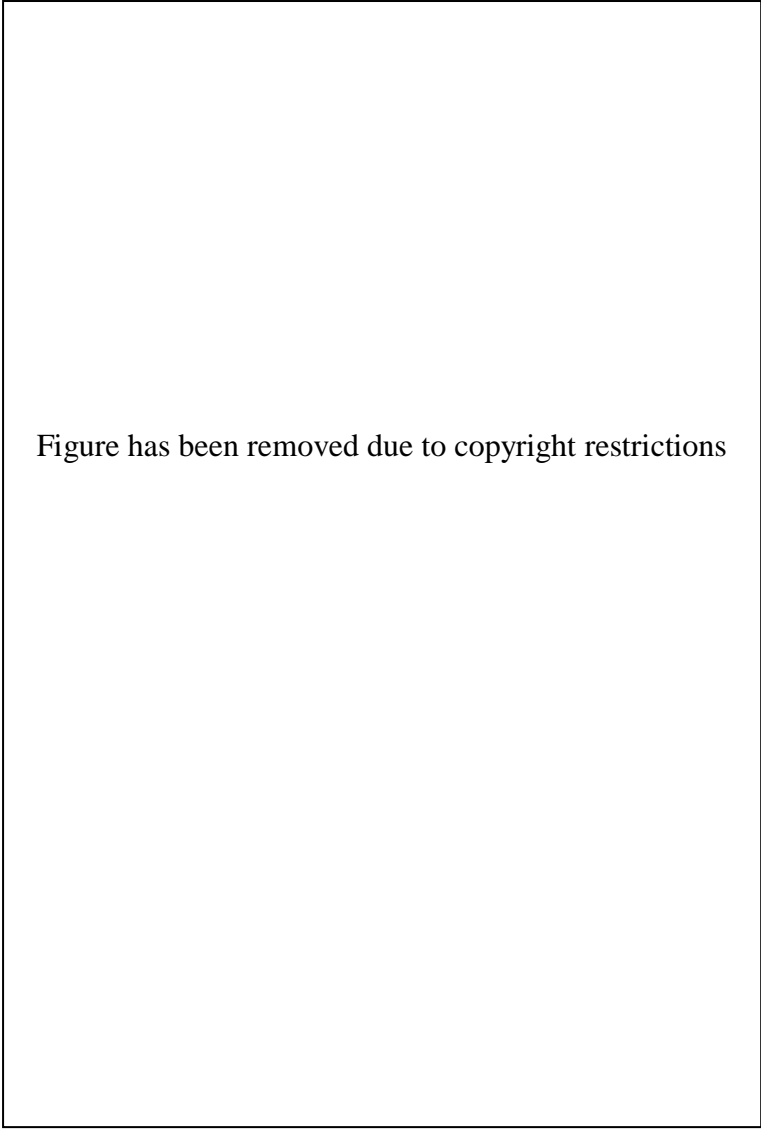


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Fig 15: A helpless Spider-Man in *The Amazing Spider-Man* 36

The post-9/11 comic-book narrative, therefore, combines the real with fiction to mythologise human efforts, whilst at the same time, helps to create and embody, or at least validate, the language and symbolism of comic-book heroism as an applicable means of articulating the aftermath of the attacks. So successful was this form that two comic-book adaptations were even made of the 9/11 Commission Report and the war on terror.⁴⁴⁶ The 9/11 comic-books also assisted

⁴⁴⁶ Jacobson, Sid and Colón, Ernie, *The 9/11 Report – A Graphic Adaptation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), and Jacobson, Sid and Colón, Ernie, *After 9/11 – America's War on Terror (2001 -)* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

the media at large in constructing and consolidating the official version of the 9/11 trauma narrative: that of innocent victimhood, senseless loss, but one complete with heroes, defiance, and the justification for revenge. It is no surprise, therefore, that Hollywood eventually emerged to rehabilitate the discredited superheroes and rediscover their potency as America picked itself up.

9/11 and (Super) Heroes

It is unclear whether the majority of references made in comic-book films to 9/11 and its aftermath are conscious or unconscious, or deliberate or inadvertent. Nevertheless, most of these films on some level provide evidence of impact by the terror spectacle, and of having been influenced by its aftermath. Certainly many of these films, and familiar characters, have had their narratives and imagery ‘updated’ to adjust to the post-9/11 cultural and political climate and, thus, diverge noticeably from settings or narrative incident illustrated in the pages of the comics on which they were based.

Take the two post-9/11 Batman films, *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005) and *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008), for instance. *Batman Begins* features dialogue, scenarios, and a number of characters that vividly recall representations of 9/11 – the spectacle, the panic, and the unrestrained malevolence of a terrorist organisation. The film itself provides a history of a pre-Batman Bruce Wayne (Gus Lewis (Bruce Wayne age 8), and Christian Bale), and the events that lead up to the emergence of his heroic alter-ego. While incarcerated in a far-East Asian jail, he is confronted by a mysterious agent of the ‘League of Shadows’ – an organisation that purports to fight against global

corruption. Initially attracted to their uncompromising stance against injustice and crime, Wayne undertakes training with this group, whereupon he masters the requisite martial arts that will endow him with ostensibly superhuman powers. Contrary to the League of Shadows' wishes, he is drawn back to Gotham City to fight injustice and corruption there, rather than lead the League in its various conflicts around the globe.

Despite Wayne's involvement with the League of Shadows, and long before he decides to part from their company, there are several indicators which invite interpretation of the League as an *Al-Qaeda-esque* cell of terrorists. Firstly, the name of its enigmatic leader, Ra's al Ghul (Liam Neeson), not to mention the society's name itself, holds connotations, especially in the light of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda's infamy, of an extremist terrorist and his accomplices (even the tripartite nature of both leaders' names assists making this connection). This interpretation is backed up by excerpts of dialogue that sound like extremist philosophy (even if some of it initially resonates with Bruce Wayne's sense of injustice) or instructions from a terrorist's training manual. For example, Ra's al Ghul tells Wayne that the League's fight is against 'evil;' he urges Wayne to "become more than just a man, devote yourself to an ideal;" and reminds him that "to conquer fear you must become fear...become a wraith, become an ideal."

The depiction of the League of Shadows is particularly reminiscent of references made by President Bush to Al-Qaeda in the aftermath of 9/11. At that time, his comments described a nebulous affiliation of extremists and terrorists with an international span, likely to cause more destruction because of their

radical and evil beliefs, as well as influencing a despotic regime in Afghanistan.⁴⁴⁷

In an address made to Congress in June 2002, Bush described Al Qaeda as being a dedicated enemy of global progress and modernity: “Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations still have thousands of trained killers spread across the globe plotting attacks against America and the other nations of the civilized world.”⁴⁴⁸

Bush’s words allude to the process of combat training, something that the League of Shadows is shown undertaking with great skill and discipline. In the same address, Bush also referred to Al Qaeda’s strategy of concealment in ways that overlap suggestively with the on-screen militants. Describing the terrorist network as an ‘often-invisible enemy,’ he had this to say on September 12, 2001:

The American people need to know that we’re facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy hides in shadows, and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, runs for cover... This is an enemy that tries to hide. But it won’t be able to hide forever.⁴⁴⁹

The League of Shadows’ extremism is deliberately set-up and entertained, therefore, in order to be vanquished when it becomes clear that its target is Wayne’s home town. When it emerges that the League of Shadows is behind the poisoning of Gotham’s water supply with a toxin that will make its citizens hallucinate their darkest nightmare, Ra’s al Ghul makes remarks to Wayne that confirm the validity of a ‘League of Shadows-as-Al Qaeda’ interpretation. He tells

⁴⁴⁷ President Bush, George W., ‘Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team,’ 12/09/01, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html>>

⁴⁴⁸ President Bush, George W., ‘Message to the Congress of the United States,’ 18/06/02, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020618-5.html>>

⁴⁴⁹ President Bush, George W., ‘Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team,’ *ibid.*

Wayne that in his view Gotham has become a breeding ground for injustice and suffering, and like Rome and Constantinople before it, it is evil and must be destroyed. A life lived in the grip of crime and despair, he argues, was not how man was intended to live, and promises that he and the League of Shadows will watch as Gotham tears itself apart through fear.

The League of Shadows, he states, “has been a check against human corruption for thousands of years. We sacked Rome. Loaded trade ships with plague rats. Burned London to the ground...Every time a civilisation reaches the pinnacle of its decadence we return to restore the balance.” Comparisons with Al Qaeda and its role in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 are enhanced when the League of Shadow’s plan to destroy Gotham involves loading a city train with explosives and riding it straight into Wayne Tower - a conspicuous skyscraper in downtown Gotham City – thereby blowing it up.

The allusions to 9/11 continue in the subsequent installment of the (filmed) Batman canon, *The Dark Knight*, in which Batman’s struggle against the violent and amoral Joker (here played by Heath Ledger) is renewed and ‘updated.’ The resemblances here include another building being blown up, in this case a hospital; another calculating and ruthless enemy; and city streets crowded by fleeing citizens, trying to escape the Joker’s bloody mayhem.

Besides such images of a modern American city physically destroyed by acts of terror, Batman’s antagonist is endowed with traits that characterise him (and by extension, all terrorists) as the personification of pure evil, taking much perverse pleasure in others’ pain (and even his own). The Joker appears to have no cause to advance – he admits as much to Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), the city’s

morally-upstanding District Attorney, in Gotham General Hospital while Dent is recovering from horrific facial injuries; “Do I really look like a guy with a plan? I just do things,” he claims, adding that in his opinion, the mob and the police are pathetic in trying to control their worlds. His own intention, he states, is to “introduce a little anarchy, upset the established order.” he is an agent of chaos, who refuses attempts at any rationalisation of motivations.

When Bruce Wayne is trying to understand The Joker’s motivation, Alfred (Michael Caine) tells a tale about how, when working in Burma, he came across a bandit who stole precious stones but he never met anyone who traded with him, and therefore had no information with which to trace the man. One day he saw a young girl playing with a huge gem, and realised that the bandit had simply thrown the stones away. When Wayne asks what was the point in stealing the stones, Alfred replies: “because he thought it was good sport. Because some men aren’t looking for anything logical, like money. They can’t be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn.” Intermittent close-ups of video footage of The Joker that Wayne had been studying before the conversation, underline the fact that Alfred is referring to The Joker and his criminal type. Alfred’s story also recalls comments President Bush made to Congress on the 20th September 2001, when he spoke of Al Qaeda’s intentions: “Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world – and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.”⁴⁵⁰ Perhaps those viewers familiar with this description of Al Qaeda would bring this association into the theatre with them, potentially reinforcing the connection between The Joker and the 9/11 terrorists.

⁴⁵⁰ President Bush, George W., ‘Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,’ 20/09/01, < <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>>

The Joker's attitude is once again illustrated when he sets fire to a huge pile of paper money – clearly he is not interested in 'logical' things, as Alfred puts it, but rather in the pleasure of causing disorder in the city for the sake of watching its inhabitants descend into fear. This lack of interest in money is partly explains why he is so disturbing: he represents an anarchic world in which ownership and wealth are of little value, a dangerous philosophy to let prosper in a capitalist society, and in which 'sport' may consist of terrible violence.

The contextual information that the film provides for The Joker, and would perhaps yield some explanation of his behaviour, is, however, ultimately inconsistent: at one point he says that that his father was a violent man who disfigured him by cutting the edges of his mouth with a razor blade when he was young, though later, he says he administered the wounds himself. The effect is that neither account can be relied upon and so the Joker's background remains unknown. The film thus posits The Joker as a willful and unrestrained menace to society. Though Al Qaeda had a cause and a plan, The Joker, as a symbol of unbridled, pure terrorism, represents all forms of terrorist activity in urban America, and certainly his behaviour and the devastation he visits upon Gotham – both physical and emotional – recalls the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Therefore, as The Joker is a representation of a terrorist archetype, then any critique that could legitimately be made of American corruption, greed and decadence is completely neutered: his 'cause' is not a cause but a wanton pursuit of terror for its own sake.

The Batman films are not alone in their appropriation or absorption of elements of the 9/11 spectacle, be they visual, aural or thematic. There are a number of times films visually 'quote' images fundamental to 9/11, particularly airplanes in distress, images or references to fire fighters, and buildings being

destroyed, for instance. One can point to such films as *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer, 2006) and *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008) for further examples. At the beginning of *Superman Returns*, the eponymous return sees Superman (Brandon Routh) crash into the field next to his foster parents' farm and the ensuing debris resembles the teetering shell of one of the Twin Towers' *façade* in the wake of the attack:

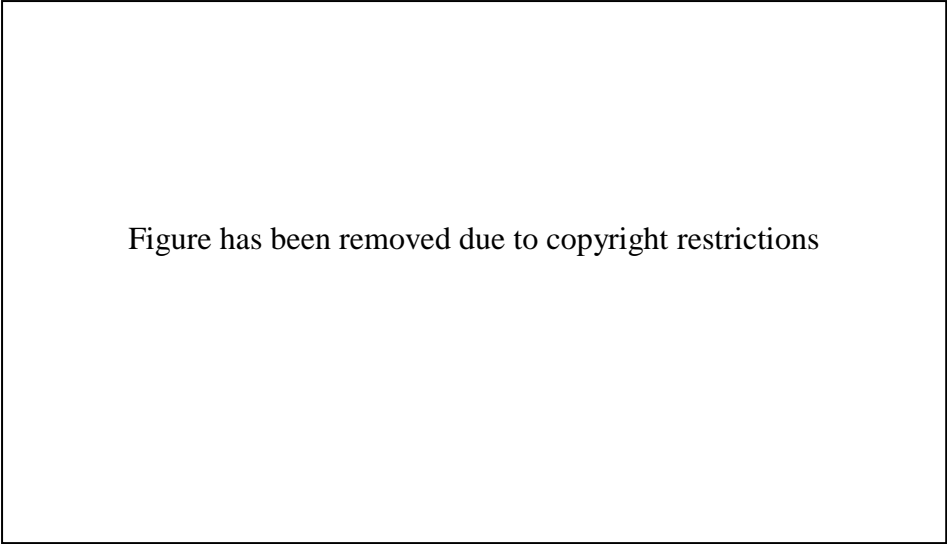


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Fig 16: Crash debris in *Superman Returns*




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Fig 17: Fire-fighters at Ground Zero

Later, a plane on which Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth) is covering a news item gets into difficulty, starts to plummet to the ground (here, reminiscent of the final scene in *United 93*) and is only prevented from crashing at the last moment by Superman. News reports in the background reference fire-fighters, and even Lex Luthor's (Kevin Spacey) train-set city symbolically gets inadvertently destroyed, all within a context of a New York-*esque* Metropolis (and the entire country) in danger of being destroyed by a crystal continent Luthor is growing off the Eastern seaboard.

Iron Man, in contrast, has its temporal setting in a distinctly post-9/11 world, where weapons innovator and entrepreneur, Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), head of a huge and profitable arms corporation that he has inherited from his father, makes money by selling his wares to the U.S. Military. Before his capture and subsequent Damascene conversion, Stark is seen making a presentation in Afghanistan where the 9/11 aggressors are still being fought. In a preceding scene, at an awards ceremony, a biographic film detailing his achievements echoes post-9/11 political discourse, even if it discretely satirises it: references are made to his company's products "ensuring freedom and protecting America – and her interests abroad" and to Tony Stark, himself, who is characterised as an American patriot. In Afghanistan, Stark's dialogue betrays the same desire as the Bush Administration's to use force, and even invites reference to the Bush dynasty, when he asks if it is "better to be feared than respected?...Is it too much to ask for both?...They say the best weapon is the one you never have to fire...I prefer the one you only have to fire once. That's how Dad did it. That's how America does it. And it's worked out pretty well so far." Spoken in front of a picturesque Afghan mountain range, this is a powerful and blunt portrayal of the era of the

‘war on terror.’ The film even features a governmental investigative body whose name recalls the Homeland Security Department (given the self-conscious acronym ‘SHIELD’ and its associations with defense): the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division.⁴⁵¹

Once conscious of *Spider-Man*’s production history (discussed in Chapter One), it is difficult to view it without recalling the controversy that surrounded the hasty deletion of images of the World Trade Centre in its promotional material. This phenomenon is barely registered in reviews, although Kim Newman, in *Sight and Sound*, is one critic who found the legacy of 9/11 to be conspicuous, even if the World Trade Centre was absent: ‘The World Trade Center isn’t seen but neither is its former site; a sense of post-9/11 New York resilience is suggested by a glimpse of the stars and stripes in the final shot.’⁴⁵²

The references to 9/11 do not begin and end with imagery and dialogue, however. A fundamental theme of these comic-book films is a search for, and the ordination of, ‘post-attack’ super-heroes. The move is perhaps predictable. Superheroes have been employed by their creators to ‘help’ fight America’s enemies in previous eras of conflict: Captain America, Batman, and Superman were all ‘drafted’ at one stage or another during the Second World War (Captain America even managing to punch Hitler’s face) and recalled to service during the Cold War.⁴⁵³ However, in the new historical era defined by 9/11, the unprecedented feeling of intense vulnerability was expressed, as regards the

⁴⁵¹ However, it may probably be more accurate to suggest that the Homeland Security Department’s name recalls the fictional SHIELD, since SHIELD was conceived in 1965.

⁴⁵² Newman, Kim, ‘Spin City, *Sight and Sound*, July 2002, <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/1676>>

⁴⁵³ Faludi, *ibid.*, p. 51; Dawson, *ibid.*, Lovell, Jarret, ‘Step Aside Superman... This Is a Job for [Captain] America! Comic Books and Superheroes Post September 11,’ in Chermak, Steven, Bailey, Frankie Y., and Brown, Michelle, eds, *Media Representations of September 11* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), p. 168.

Superheroes' previous record of successful guardianship, with a deep sense of incredulity: since they had, in the hour of need, failed. As Jeff Dawson put it: 'Such is the supes' tradition that, immediately post-9/11, some Americans wondered why their avengers had gone Awol.'⁴⁵⁴

Indeed, in *9-11 Volume 2 – September 11th 2001*, one of the 9/11 comics, Superman laments his inability to prevent the attacks from taking place. He lists his multifarious powers, but ultimately acknowledges that 'the one thing I can *not* do is break free from the fictional pages where I live and breathe...Become *real* during times of crisis and right the wrongs of an unjust world.'⁴⁵⁵ This remarkable apology, made by fiction to the real, exemplifies the tone of the comics' rhetoric – emphasising that the heroes of 9/11 are the real citizens of America, who eclipse the stamina and power of erstwhile paradigmatic paladins. As if to underline Superman's demotion, a strip later in the same comic-book depicts a boy in a Superman t-shirt ducking into a telephone booth to change his costume, in the manner of Superman himself, only to emerge in a Fire Department of New York t-shirt instead.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Dawson, *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ Seagle, Steven T., Rouleau, Duncan and Sowd, Aaron, 'Unreal,' in Berganza, Eddie, Cohen, Ivan et al, eds, *9-11 Volume 2 – September 11th 2001* (New York: DC Comics, 2002), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵⁶ Sale, Tim, in Berganza, *ibid.*, p. 70.

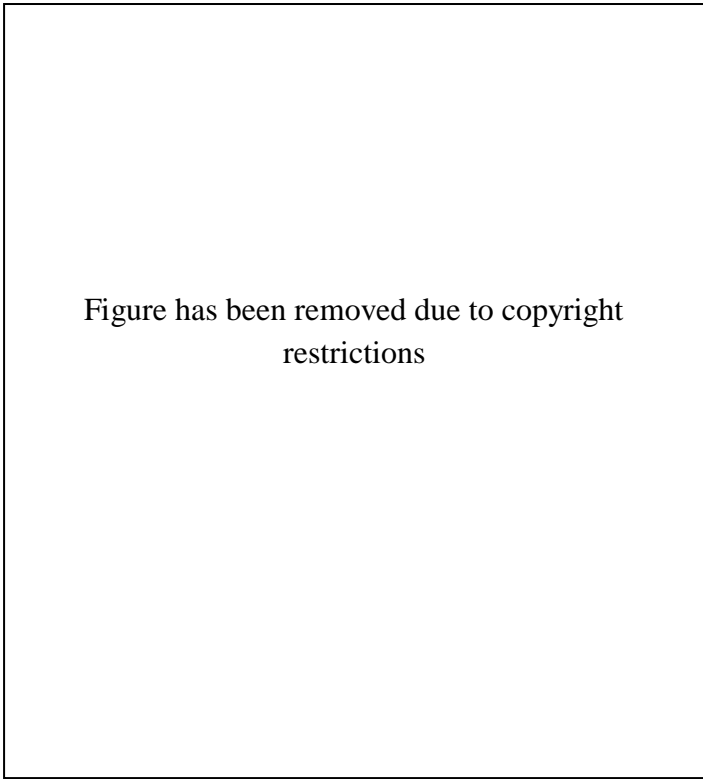


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Fig 18: Boy changes into 'FDNY' t-shirt in *9-11 Volume 2 – September 11th 2001*

The phenomenon of searching for, and 'locating,' heroes amongst the living – whether ordinary citizens or politicians – and the subsequent psychological vacuum left by the ultimate realisation of national impotence is examined by Susan Faludi, who critiques the phenomenon in *The Terror Dream*. As part of her research, Faludi scanned the press, discovering that the male politicians at the epicentre of the immediate response to 9/11 – Bush, Rumsfeld and Giuliani – were all being described in terms that provided evidence of an idolatry usually reserved for superheroes, and indeed used a terminology often appropriated directly from comic books. She quotes *The Wall Street Journal*'s Peggy Noonan, writing (albeit with a degree of exaggeration) about expecting to see Bush open up his shirt to reveal his Superman's outfit underneath.⁴⁵⁷ Faludi also illustrates how the media accentuated the physical prowess of the men in charge, as if to

⁴⁵⁷ Faludi, *ibid.*, p. 47.

demonstrate that their leadership was of the requisite strength and resolve to guide the nation through its crisis: one such example provided by Faludi shows how *Newsweek* compared Bush to a thoroughbred horse at his optimum condition.⁴⁵⁸

Other writers have observed similar comparisons of the aforementioned politicians to comic book heroes. Andrew Klavan's *The Wall Street Journal* article, 'What Bush and Batman Have in Common,' argues that *The Dark Knight* is a conservative film about the war on terror, in which Batman's struggle represents that of Bush:

There seems to me no question that the Batman film...is at some level a paean of praise to the fortitude and moral courage that has been shown by George W. Bush in this time of terror and war. Like W, Batman is vilified and despised for confronting terrorists in the only terms they understand. Like W, Batman sometimes has to push the boundaries of civil rights to deal with an emergency, certain that he will re-establish those boundaries when the emergency is past.⁴⁵⁹

Elsewhere, Jeff Dawson recalls that when German publication, *Der Spiegel*, depicted the President, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell as Rambo, the Terminator, Xena, and Batman on the cover of their 18 February, 2002 edition, the U.S. Ambassador called to their offices to report that Bush was 'flattered' and ordered a number of poster-sized copies of the cover.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁵⁹ Klavan, Andrew, 'What Bush and Batman Have in Common,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 25/07/08, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121694247343482821.html?mod=opinion_main_commentaries>

⁴⁶⁰ Dawson, Jeff, 'Has the new Batman plundered its plot from 9/11?' *The Sunday Times*, 18/07/08, re-posted at <http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=0f8_1216572480>

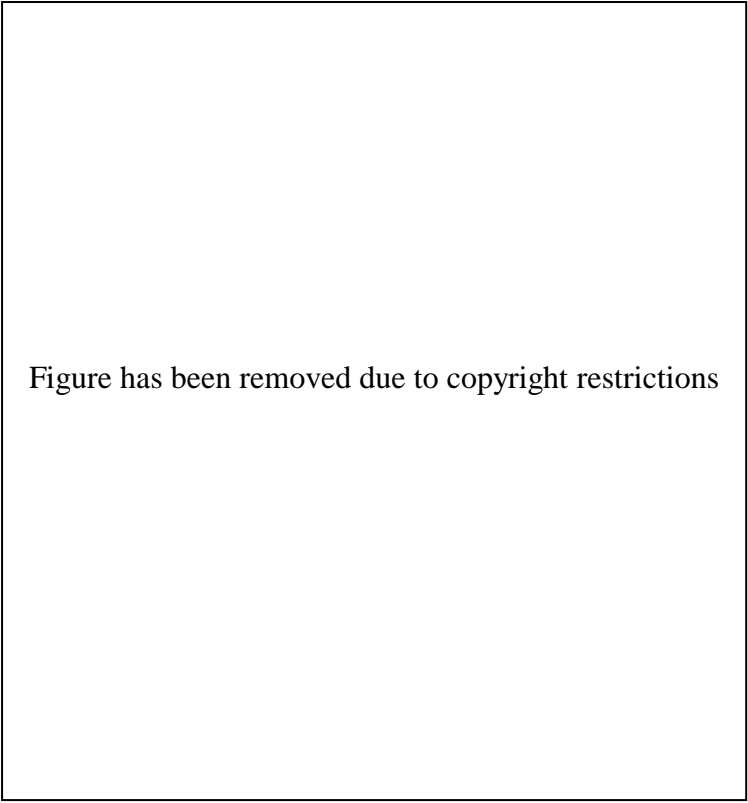


Figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig 19: Bush *et al.* on the cover of *Der Spiegel* in February 2002

Politicians were, of course, not the only real figures *fêted* as heroes. Firefighters and volunteers from around the country who worked at Ground Zero, as well as the passengers of the terrorist-commandeered plane that crashed in Pennsylvania, were also lauded in the press. Again, Faludi documents the nature of these editorials and the speed with which the terms ‘hero’ and ‘heroism’ became key to the new meta-narrative: ‘Within hours of the attack, the word [hero] was on every media lip.’⁴⁶¹ She uses headlines and quotes from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* to illustrate the kind of language that was being used to describe the efforts and character of those working amongst the rubble of the World Trade Centre: ‘Necessary Courage,’ ‘The Horror and the Heroes,’ ‘Common Valor,’ and ‘heroism on a Homeric scale’ are examples of

⁴⁶¹ Faludi, *ibid.*, p. 54.

this.⁴⁶² Faludi also demonstrates the esteem in which the New York Fire Department came to be held, as she describes cartoons that showed pictures of Superman, Batman, and a fire-fighter with the question: who is your favourite superhero? Another cartoon has a trio of comic-book superheroes asking a fire-fighter for his autograph.⁴⁶³ Faludi's interrogation of the post-9/11 hero culture continues with a discussion of how the passengers of Flight 93, were granted hero status not just by the media, but by a special act of legislation drafted by Congress, called the True American Heroes Act. Controversially, only four passengers were originally to be awarded the medals until family members of the other passengers protested that their loved ones should be officially recognised as heroes too.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, the need for heroes and subsequent worship thereof, whether it requires the rejection of fictional, erstwhile reliable creations, is a powerful phenomenon at the heart of the emotional response to the terrorist attacks. The concept of the 'hero' is clear, then, across both reality and fiction, and comic book and film: whoever the hero is, be he Batman, Superman, the President or the archetypal fire-fighter, he is (being, almost always male) patriotic, strong, dependable, honourable and a guardian of the people; and, crucially, he fulfills a *psychological* need.

Psychological Significance of Post-9/11 Superheroes

Cinema, by its very nature, is a medium that makes itself accessible to psychoanalytic interpretation. For example, Stephen Heath, in an article entitled

⁴⁶² Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

‘Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories,’ acknowledges that, from its inception, film was reckoned to be an effective means of ‘imaging the workings of the mind.’⁴⁶⁵ The author quotes Lou Andreas-Salomé, a psychoanalyst practicing in the early twentieth century, who said: ‘cinematic technique is the only one which allows a rapid succession of images approximating to our own imaginative activity, even imitating its volatility.’⁴⁶⁶ Amongst the many genres and sub-genres, films featuring monsters and mutant-beings are particularly fruitful texts for study along these lines, given the issues of fear and repression that they dramatise, as well as their depictions of the ‘Other’ (an entity that threatens to disturb the ideological equilibrium of a particular era). While there is a danger of conflating terminology specific to horror and science-fiction genres, there are elements of those genres that overlap with superhero cinema. In this section, the comic-book adaptations are analysed through the notion of repression, after a brief exposition of how films in other eras defined by conflict have represented the Id (that is, the unconscious drives and instincts that forms part of a human’s psyche) and the Other.

Several critics have noted how horror or science-fiction films have re-emerged in particular periods of political conflict or turmoil in American history, as if illustrating the fears peculiar to that era. As Harlan Kennedy put it in *Film Comment* (in 1982): ‘If werewolves are loping onto the screen now – plus...other

⁴⁶⁵ Heath, Stephen, ‘Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories,’ in Bergstrom, Janet, ed, *Endless Night – Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 26.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

marauding incarnations of the id...it's because the age has suddenly invoked and demanded these ogres.'⁴⁶⁷

One earlier period of conflict is the Cold War, particularly during the 1950s, an era which has been the focus of many studies relating to film and its connection with society. Brian Murphy, for instance, recognises the symbolic importance of cinema, particularly 'monster' films, in this period; he argues: 'What makes the fifties' monster movies a species unto themselves is the combination of the two forms – the horror and sci-fi – and the ideological purpose to which they were put in that age.'⁴⁶⁸ Murphy develops this idea further, specifically mentioning the ideological significance of the period:

What the monster movies did accomplish...was a rendering of the special kind of fear which ran deep in the bones of the 1950s. *The Thing* [John Carpenter, 1982] makes this fear perfectly plain: there was a new world war after World War II...by 1950 the phrase 'Iron Curtain' contained such horrible poetry that one yearned for prose...it seemed all America was tunneling through its bowels to build bomb shelters...doom seemed imminent.⁴⁶⁹

In terms of later Cold War years, the psychological traumas of the 1970s and early 1980s were, Kennedy argues, products of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, the two nightmare scenarios that have left their indelible mark on the American psyche. Arguing that Nixon's 'wolf-like' features inspired a trend in horror films and that the Vietnam war ensured that '[n]ature throbs with silent menace,' Kennedy believes that the most significant aspect of these films was the

⁴⁶⁷ Kennedy, Harlan, 'Things That Go Howl in the Id,' *Film Comment*, Volume 18, Number 2, March – April 1982, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁸ Murphy, Brian, 'Monster Movies: They Came from Beneath the Fifties,' in Marsden, Michael T., Nachbar, John G. and Grogg Jr., Sam L., eds, *Movies as Artifacts: Cultural Criticism of Popular Film* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Inc., 1982), p. 177.

⁴⁶⁹ Murphy, *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183.

creation of characters with split-personality, where the monster lay hidden beneath the normal features of WASP America. His contention is that the 'post-Nam and post-Nixon nightmare imagery, rollercoasting up through the unconscious, is now working itself into American popular cinema.'⁴⁷⁰

An article by Robin Wood, in which he theorises the relationship between cinema and psychoanalysis, offers the means with which to analyse cinema in a specific historical era, in this case post-9/11 cinema, using psychoanalysis as an interpretative framework.⁴⁷¹ While Wood deals with horror films specifically, there are elements within his framework that can be applied to a range of genres, and despite the comic-book film being generically uncategorised (as yet), it clearly shares characteristics with the horror film, and the science-fiction film. That comic-book films can lapse into comedy or can exude a certain camp quality is indisputable; however, their incorporation of monsters, genetically-modified entities or superhuman characters, the dark tenor, apocalyptic imagery and consistent narrative themes that propel the innocent into mortal danger, ensure that Wood's theory is pertinent to a psychological analysis of comic-book films.

Firstly, Wood identifies in human psychology the strands of basic and surplus repression. Basic repression, Wood states, is a necessary and universal process that ensures we grow into human beings capable of successfully integrating with others, and involves both the development of mental processes, the acceptance of the delay of gratification, and the ability to self-control. Wood argues that it is surplus repression that moulds us, against our natural inclinations,

⁴⁷⁰ Kennedy, *ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Originally published as an introduction to a collection of essays on the American horror film that accompanied a season of horror films at the 1979 Toronto Festival of Festivals: Cook, Pam and Bernink, Mieke, *The Cinema Book* (2nd Edition) (London: BFI, 1999), p. 197.

in the image of the dominant ideology of a particular culture.⁴⁷² In Western society we are conditioned to be, as he puts it, monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal capitalists; if this process is unsuccessful, however, the individual becomes neurotic, a revolutionary, or both: society either must destroy, or assimilate and make safe these Others.⁴⁷³ The significance of this figure:

[R]esides in the fact that it functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned...It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative: the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist.⁴⁷⁴

In other words, since everyone represses *some* aspect of their personality, and must negate that Other in order to integrate less awkwardly into society, the majority of us 'incarcerate' an Other immanently, and so the experience of repression is universal. Wood provides some examples of Others for ease of identification that include: woman, the proletariat, other cultures, ethnic groups within the culture, alternative ideologies, and sexual 'deviance.'⁴⁷⁵ Thus, in Wood's formulation, the essential operation of films in the horror genre involves the attempt to recognise and give dramatic form to that which the dominant ideology represses: 'its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the 'happy ending' (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression.'⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷² Wood, Robin, 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film,' in Grant, Barry Keith and Sharrett, eds, *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), p. 108.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 111–112.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

Mutatis mutandis, this offers an extremely useful tool for studying the psychological significance of post-9/11 comic-book films, as it gestures towards the points where cinema, psychology, and post-9/11 politics converge. Scott McCloud's writings about the workings and functions of the comic-book, reveal specific aesthetic potentials that enable comics to more imaginatively and effectively capture the Other than realist art; the process of cartooning, he argues, is a form of amplification, distortion and transformation, grounded in simplification:

When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.⁴⁷⁷

Writing about comic-books and film, Michael Cohen comments on the metaphysical effect of cartooning: 'The more abstracted the image becomes the more it represents concepts and ideas.'⁴⁷⁸ This process, judging by Cohen's statement, can be argued to assist in rendering psychological conditions and ideological positions visible or more easily identifiable. The various characters created in comic-books can take any form imaginable, and artists are unrestrained by having to conform to representations of the actual world. Therefore, the Hulk's rage, for instance, may be vividly expressed by the expansion of his body and development of green skin, while Peter Parker can shoot spiders' webs from his wrists. The form of the comic-book, though (and the films that are based on them), is dictated by an ordered sequence of blocks or frames, that break down the

⁴⁷⁷ McCloud, Scott, *Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 30.

⁴⁷⁸ Cohen, Michael, 'Dick Tracy – In Pursuit of a Comic Book Aesthetic,' in Gordon, Ian, Jancovich, Mark, McAllister, Matthew P., eds, *Film and Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 22.

narrative into simplified, dramatic, and easily consumed segments. As regards form, Cohen adds: 'Typically, comics are excessive and flamboyant in their use of color, character proportion, and the choreography and depiction of action,' whose aesthetic is adapted for cinema by the process of 'cartooning.'⁴⁷⁹ When combined, fantastical, exaggerated characters, and colourful, spectacularly dramatic form can render graphic and explicit the moral divisions in narratives that concern themselves with the perpetration of, and fight against, crime; that is, the struggle between good and evil. When the context of many of the comic-book films' production and release is the devastating historical event of September 11th, the issues of how the Other is depicted, and what psychological and ideological meanings these depictions generate, become central concerns.

The necessary alterations to Wood's theory involve 'Othering' what post-9/11 America repressed that might emerge, later, in comic-book films. Certainly, examples of 'Other cultures' that come uncomfortably close (or, in short, attack) America can be detected in the 'evil' characters that pervade the films, such as the League of Shadows in *Batman Begins*, the Joker, or other quasi-terrorists. However, narrowing the investigation to these characters would neglect the nature of the repression that necessitated the proliferation of heroic characters like Superman, or perhaps more appropriately, extra-human characters such as the Hulk and Batman: in other words, humans with powerful alter-egos.

Susan Faludi's writings, discussing the circumstances leading to the designation of certain people as 'heroes,' are particularly helpful in revealing what was repressed in America on and after 9/11. Faludi's analysis of 9/11 leads her to conclusions that conflict with the idea, encouraged by broadcast media, of

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

unprecedented universal, stoic, and heroic behaviour in and around Ground Zero in the wake of the attacks. The reality, Faludi argues, was much more complex. When volunteers offered their services, there was very little they could physically accomplish due to the absolute devastation, save, perhaps, encounter a sense of their own fragility and helplessness. Faludi details how people presented themselves to work in emergency hospitals, donate blood or employ their trowels and buckets to search for survivors.⁴⁸⁰ However, during the day itself, many of the medical centres only treated a small number of patients for minor ailments, and most hospitals waited in vain for the expected wave of wounded that did not materialise.⁴⁸¹ As she says:

Consider the tasks that followed: the turning away of the blood donors, the rolling back of the empty wheelchairs and stretchers, the folding of winding sheets meant for bodies that never arrived. Consider the fire and police and K-9 rescue teams that found no one to rescue, the volunteer excavators who excavated only a confetti of office memos and the occasional cell phone, and the medical examiners who examined only fragments of human flesh. And then consider the question: what was a rescuer without someone to rescue?⁴⁸²

The scenario Faludi describes is extreme in its physical and psychological implications, and, even though her question is supposed to be rhetorical, she provides an answer of sorts, a few paragraphs later: the conditions that prevented constructive and potentially life-saving endeavor led to despondency, humiliation and a feeling of impotence.⁴⁸³ The negative side of the sentiment of voluntary assistance, in this case, is the recognition that this energy and desire is ultimately unrealisable: a failure to fulfil the most crucial *telos* imaginable. The subsequent

⁴⁸⁰ Faludi, *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

negative feeling generated by this blocking of constructive action goes a long way in explaining the recourse to fictional heroes.

Paradoxically, though fictional superheroes were initially illustrated as ineffective when the attacks commenced, they remained the only figures who might consistently reach the necessary level of conduct to deserve hero worship. Existing in a realm where their achievements can be controlled by an author, they can sustain the requisite heroic activity. Faludi suggests that part of the problem of hero worship is that irrespective of what an individual may have actually experienced, witnessed or suffered, they had to adhere to what Faludi describes as a constraining fantasy for which they had to remain in character, as if the post-9/11 response was an unwritten script.⁴⁸⁴

Due to being subject to outside, authorial control, one thing comic-book superheroes are good at is staying in character. It is understandable, therefore, how Hollywood could fill this psychological vacuum with films featuring ready-made heroes whose storylines furnish them with solvable problems and achievable goals: they are autonomous texts that will forever remain constant and absolute, and their superheroes will avoid disappointment by always saving the day. Comic-book adaptations, more specifically, permit a re-telling of catastrophic, and, crucially, traumatic incidents, in ways which can prolong the superhero narrative. This could be indicative of an inability to fully comprehend 9/11 that manifests itself in the recurring cycle of superhero films, and other films based on comic-books or graphic novels, that contain comparable apocalyptic imagery or depict scenes of disaster, and violent conflict (such as *Constantine*

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

(Francis Lawrence, 2005), *Sin City* (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005), and *300* (Zack Snyder, 2007)).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud identifies the ‘compulsion to repeat’ in traumatised patients when he or she ‘is driven to *repeat* the repressed matter as an experience in the present, instead of *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.’⁴⁸⁵ The patient’s experience in ‘repeating’ is not a pleasurable one in this case, yet the psychoanalyst must ensure this process takes place so that the patient starts on the road to eventual recuperation:

[T]he physician cannot spare the patient this phase of the treatment; he must necessarily make him re-experience a certain portion of his past life, and must see to it that he remains to some degree above it all so that he remains cognizant...that what appears to be reality is in truth the refracted image of a forgotten past. If the physician manages to achieve this, then...the therapy can be successfully concluded.⁴⁸⁶

The psychology of trauma is elucidated upon by Cathy Caruth, who underlines the significance of the peculiar pathology operating when thinking something new is happening, when in fact it is being repeated:

[T]rauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on.⁴⁸⁷

Janet Walker adds another dimension to the investigation of trauma and mental processes. She has argued in the journal *Screen* that real disasters can disturb

⁴⁸⁵ Freud, Sigmund, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle,’ in Phillips, Adam, ed, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 145.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative, and History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1996), p 4.

memory processes so comprehensively that memories of a traumatic event may not correspond exactly with the actual event. This false memory, rather than discredit the victim, actually testifies to the intensity of the event. As she says: 'It is precisely the quality of exaggeration that enables us to read the event as momentous, thus giving the memory its historical resonance.'⁴⁸⁸ The connection Walker makes between misremembering and trauma may go some way in explaining the persistence of the popular notion of widespread heroism that Faludi interrogates. Both Walker and Caruth regard visual art as significant: Walker notes a rise in 'trauma cinema' while Caruth studies *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959).⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, Caruth's theories become applicable to post-9/11 superhero films, as she argues that a plot within an artefact can refer back to the original incident of trauma, although being seemingly disconnected from it: 'The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life.'⁴⁹⁰

Therefore, when encountering post-9/11 comic book films, it is arguable that what the viewer is viewing is this return, and repetition, of what was repressed in the aftermath of 9/11. However, as Robin Wood noted, in this interpretation each happily resolved ending merely contributes to further repression and, thus, to the perpetuation of the repeated cycle which, ultimately, points to a lack of healing on the patient's part. It would be prejudicial to the myriad stages of production that involve many individuals and vetting procedures (re-writes, for example), to suggest that psychological trauma alone be responsible

⁴⁸⁸ Walker, Janet, 'Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience,' *Screen*, Volume 42, Number 2, Summer 2001, p. 213.

⁴⁸⁹ Walker, *ibid.*, p. 214; Caruth, *ibid.*, Chapter 2.

⁴⁹⁰ Caruth, *ibid.*, p. 7.

for the rise of films based on comic-books. Additionally it would assume that those involved in the production - and viewing - of the film shared the same psychological state. Nevertheless, this theory helps to explain why films involving threatened but successful superheroes appear in number immediately after a period when human hope was unfulfilled, and incapacity was exposed.

In the film adaptations of comic-books, underpinning the experiences of many of the characters, superhero and non-superhero alike, there is an instance of trauma that shapes an individual character's psyche, usually resulting in the condition that enables metamorphosis from ordinary human to a subject with extraordinary powers. In some cases, these are related to the nature of the traumatic event: Bruce Banner/Hulk's (Eric Bana) rage is linked with the frustration he feels due to his mental block of the events surrounding his mother's death; Spider-Man's (Tobey Maguire) ability to shoot webs stems from the bite he sustains from a spider; Iron Man's technological capabilities are inspired by his post-abduction survival secured by having an electromagnet attached to his chest. This traumatic incident can happen early in the character's life (for example, Bruce Wayne in *Batman Begins*, John Constantine (Keanu Reeves) in *Constantine*, or Superman) or can occur immediately before (perhaps causing) the acquisition of new power (as in *The Fantastic Four* (Tim Story, 2005)) or perhaps even both (*Spider-Man*, *Hulk*). Furthermore, these traumatic events can involve the death of a loved one (*Hulk*, *Batman Begins*, *The Punisher* (Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004)) or the alteration of the body's natural biological and chemical constitution (*The Fantastic Four*, *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006), *Iron Man*).

The significance of these instances of trauma, for this study, is that they permit the films to act, and to be studied, as appropriate and important metaphors for post-9/11 experience. These films, therefore, help to connect and map culture, history (in the sense of an historical event) and psychology together, since they not only illustrate the intervention of ‘heroes’ – a noticeable post-9/11 theme - but also articulate the effects of trauma: that is, repressed feelings of helplessness, not to mention the possibility of repressed guilt, anger and vengeance. In this section, *Hulk* and *Batman Begins* offer themselves for such a reading. Not only do they capture and illustrate the post-9/11 climate (near-apocalyptic destruction and/or the need for heroes), but they contain dialogue that explicitly refers to repression and other psychological phenomena.

Taking *Hulk* first, Bruce Banner’s moment of trauma occurs when he is a boy. Unbeknownst to him, as a baby he was subject to chemical experiments by his father, David Banner (Nick Nolte), who was working for the U.S. Military as a scientist. A scientist, himself, Bruce Banner researches into the effects of gamma-radiation combined with ‘nanotechnology’, with the aim of developing self-repair in living organisms. The experiments take an almost fatal turn when he is accidentally exposed to this radiation, an event that releases his latent power, and which coincides with the break-up of a relationship with his colleague, Betty Ross (Jennifer Connelly).

Up until the moment of his metamorphosis into the Hulk, not only can he not remember the formative incident, but the traumatic incident itself has repercussions on his ability to form loving relationships: he is accused of being too emotionally distant by Betty, for example. When he dreams or thinks about the event - a domestic fight between his parents that happened behind the closed

door of their bedroom – the door opens to reveal literally nothing but darkness. It is only after he is transformed (whether this is due to the chemical reaction, the pain of Betty's rejection, the combination of his father's experiments, or all three) that he is able to unleash the emotional power of his (id's) rage. In the throes of his metamorphosis, Banner becomes a primal beast, his conscious self powerless and subsumed by the previously repressed energies of the Hulk: his transformation is thus an involuntary reaction to an involuntary process of remembering and memory repression.

The psychological relevance of *Hulk* is made evident in the film's dialogue. After the Hulk has rescued Betty from an attack carried out by dogs sent by David Banner, and after he has returned to his human form, the following exchange takes place, indicating the immanence of Bruce's transformation and the effect his past has on him:

Betty: "It must be the nanomeds. It must be the gamma exposure. But we've never seen any effect like this before."

Bruce: "No. Deeper. The gamma just unleashed what was already there."

Betty: "Unleashed what?"

Bruce: "Me. It."

The conversation continues:

Betty: "I think that somehow your anger is triggering the nanomeds."

Bruce: "How could it? We designed them to respond to physical damage."

Betty: "Emotional damage can manifest physically."

Bruce: "Like what?"

Betty: “Serious trauma. Repressed memories.”

Whilst being subjected to army experiments, Bruce recalls what happened when he was young. The fight between his parents took place behind the closed door of their bedroom, but when the door flung open, both parents entered the kitchen whereupon Bruce’s mother was accidentally killed with a knife. Bruce’s father was sent to prison, although when released continued with his own experiments. The film reaches a climax with David Banner exposes himself to gamma radiation and acquires his own peculiar powers in order to harness those of his son. Meanwhile, Bruce/The Hulk is chased by the military, commanded by Betty’s father (who was also David Banner’s superior at the time of David’s initial experiments), who have contracted research into this ‘super soldier’ out to a private corporation. The film ends with Bruce Banner escaping to South America, David Banner foiled, and the military determined to track down what they consider to be their asset.

Hulk can be argued to occupy a liberal position, in no small part due to its depiction of the conflict between university and corporate science research, as well as its depiction of the military. In the former case, Bruce and Betty, the protagonists with whom the audience is led to identify, are laboratory researchers in a university, and their studies are at the mercy of security of funding, while Talbot (Josh Lucas) represents a more corporate, and privatised interest: he tries to charm then intimidate to gain knowledge of Banner’s research. While the film depicts Banner trying to come to terms with his personal trauma, and the new expression of his id, Talbot treats him as a patentable and sellable entity, and the army sees him as a powerful weapon. Thus, the audience’s desire to understand

Banner/The Hulk directly conflicts with the film's business and military complex who do not care about his feelings, but rather want to profit from him. David Banner, on the other hand, is depicted as radically anti-American, his philosophy aims to rid the world of anthems and flags, and to hold the United States military to account for their misdeeds. Such an ideology, an alternative to contemporary American capitalism, is tainted by his mania and mental instability. Ideologically, the film situates itself somewhere between the military-industrial complex and David Banner: liberal, but not so far to the left to be considered anti-capitalist.

Freud's concept of 'actual repression' is a particularly helpful one to introduce at this juncture, since it provides an explanation and terminology to articulate what film superheroes might psychologically signify.⁴⁹¹ Actual repression, Freud says, 'affects psychic derivatives of the repressed representative, or trains of thought that, although originating elsewhere, have become associated with it.'⁴⁹² In other words, as J. Laplanche understands it, 'the unconscious tends to thrust certain products back into consciousness and action even though their connection is a more or less distant one;' what he calls derivatives of the unconscious or repressed.⁴⁹³

The argument, here, however speculative, is that the Hulk is a derivative of the repression associated with 9/11 and its attendant phenomena; that is, that he is an expression of the desire to transcend the limitations of a weak human body when threatened and successfully fulfil the *telos* of meta-human power, and thus to alleviate the emotional pain associated with 9/11. In this reading, September 11

⁴⁹¹ Actual repression is the stage after primal repression, when a fixation is established; that is, after a drive is denied access to the conscious: Freud, Sigmund, *The Unconscious* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 37.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.-B., *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 116.

is not alluded to, visually or in dialogue, but, rather, psychologically. Though a number of reviews observe *Hulk's* psychological structure, attention is consistently drawn to the Oedipal aspect rather than to the broader cultural trauma of which Hollywood, industrially, cannot help but be a part.⁴⁹⁴ Viewing *Hulk* within a context of other comic-books films that do, in fact, visually allude to 9/11, helps to make the argument more apparent.

Batman, too, can be argued to be derivative of the 9/11 unconscious. *Batman Begins* has been described above as being an allegory of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In *Batman Begins*, a young Bruce Wayne is depicted experiencing two episodes of trauma. The first takes place when he accidentally falls down a disused well and disturbs a colony of bats which then fly out past the terrified child. This fear haunts Bruce to the extent that any violent, flapping movement instills in him an incapacitating terror. Whilst at the opera with his parents, such a movement occurs on stage; when Bruce urges his parents to leave the theatre, they are accosted by an armed thug who shoots and kills Bruce's mother and father. Both incidents are crucial to Bruce's motivation to fight injustice, inspired by his socially benevolent father, and the nature of his parents' deaths, and eventual adoption of the bat as his symbol, inspired by Ra's al Ghul's training to not simply fight, but *become* his fear.

After parting company with the League of Shadows, Wayne is picked up by his indefatigable butler Alfred with whom he discusses his intentions of utilising the League's extreme training in his proposed fight against crime in Gotham.

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example, Atkinson, Michael, 'Beasts of Burden – Incredible Bulks in Parent Traps,' *Village Voice*, 17/06/03, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/2003-06-17/film/beasts-of-burden/1>> ; Taylor, Ella, 'Gods and Monsters – And a big hello to Mr. Green Genes,' *LA Weekly*, 26/06/03, <<http://www.laweekly.com/2003-06-26/film-tv/gods-and-monsters/1>> and McCarthy, Todd, 'Hulk,' *Variety*, 11/06/03, <<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117920999?refcatid=31>>

Wayne states his ambition to shake the rich of Gotham out of their apathy which he cannot do as himself since, as flesh and blood, he can be ignored and destroyed. As an elemental, terrifying symbol, however, he can be indestructible. So, by transcending his fear, by absorbing the very thing that terrifies him, he negates that fear and is empowered, and is able to combat the criminal forces that have run riot in Gotham. Again, within the context of a film that re-stages the scenarios of 9/11 (a New York-*esque* city threatened by terrorists who target a landmark skyscraper), Wayne's intent becomes a powerful articulation of a desire and ability to heroically overcome severe adversity and, despite the absence of a conventional happy ending in either movie, a symbol of hope for America's actual population.

Elsewhere in *Batman Begins*, Ra's al Ghul is assisted by a willing Gothamite accomplice in the form of Dr. Crane (Cillian Murphy), a psychiatrist at the Arkham Asylum. Crane is depicted as being a pawn of organised crime: his orders include providing spurious psychological evaluations of hardened criminals in order to have them remanded in his custody as opposed to incarceration in a regular prison. In his professional capacity, he explains a patient's distressed repetition of the word 'scarecrow' to a questioning District Attorney in psychological terms: "Patients suffering delusional episodes often focus their paranoia on an external tormentor...usually one conforming to Jungian archetypes." Once again, this helps to establish a discernibly psychological foundation for the film but, crucially, also succeeds in describing the post-9/11 fear that gripped America and its object, Osama bin Laden. Crane, here, dismisses this fear of terrorism as paranoid delusion so as to clear the way for the terrorists

to attack Gotham, revealing in the process his nefariousness and complicity in the League of Shadows' plan.

Regardless of parallels that can be drawn between 9/11, the repression of feelings of failure and the desire to actually be heroic, this context appears to be insignificant to many of the film's reviewers, who, as with the reception of *Hulk*, acknowledge psychological phenomena but concentrate on the neurotic aspect (in the way Bruce Wayne can positively channel his neurosis), or, vaguely as the force of the id.⁴⁹⁵ While these are plausible interpretations, they seem one-dimensional in the light of both the historical importance of 9/11 and the psychological effects of trauma. When the historical and the psychological are given serious consideration together, the superhero films become much more significant in their depictions of heroes battling against violence and crime.

Conclusion

The rise in comic-book adaptations for the screen is another notable feature of post-9/11 Hollywood cinema with the films dramatising a dynamic set of relationships. Firstly, before the terrorist attacks, the two industries were historically close, already benefitting from each other in a synergetic association. However, a certain element of divergence between their different approaches emerges thereafter. As part of the comic-books' tributes to the post-9/11 rescue effort, real life emergency workers *et al.* were afforded hero status at the expense

⁴⁹⁵ See, for example, LaSalle, Mick, 'Batman - The caped crusader has come back. He's brawnier, but he still has brains,' *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 14/06/05, p. D. 1, or Hornaday, Ann, 'Batman and Freud - Latest Take On Comics Hero Spends Too Much Time on the Couch,' *Washington Post*, 15/06/05, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/14/AR2005061401661.html>>

of traditional superheroes, who were depicted as utterly powerless. This inversion of the normal relationship between superhero and ordinary citizen testifies to a peculiar cultural phenomenon that saw fictional characters judged for their lack of action in the face of an actual event, uncannily familiar from their previous adventures.

If the 9/11 comics were implicitly or explicitly critical of the value of popular superheroes in the face of real American tragedy, then, very quickly, Hollywood endorsed them by rehabilitating and, thus, re-establishing them as trustworthy guardians. Indications that Hollywood was successful in its attempt to polish a tarnished image can be seen in Matt McAllister's account:

The film and comic book industries have been profoundly affected by the connection between the two institutions, and industry discourse frequently acknowledges this connection. The success of both *Fantastic Four* in 2005 and *X-Men 3* in 2006 were publicly credited with turning around (if only temporarily) a stale box office, for instance. This success has been generalized by the film industry to include the suitability of comic book films for modern blockbusters. One box-office analyst noted about *Fantastic Four*'s performance that 'comic book movies, if properly marketed, are exactly what mainstream audiences want to see in their summer movies.'⁴⁹⁶

However, there are other reasons that explain the success of films featuring superheroes, besides those of marketing. This chapter argues that the superheroes depicted in film adaptations of comic books can be described as derivatives of a specifically American unconscious, and is particular to the post-9/11 experience. This represses the negative feelings of despondency, humiliation and impotence that were a feature of the palpable inability of the ordinary citizen and Ground

⁴⁹⁶ McAllister, Matt, *ibid.*, p. 111.

Zero volunteer, to either prevent the attacks from taking place, or do much constructive on the required scale in their wake, to avert death and destruction. These feelings were repressed, arguably, due to the overwhelming power, omnipresence and endurance of the 'hero' narrative that required strength and resolution in the face of crisis, but were re-expressed in the superhero films that followed.

Seeing superheroes respond positively to threat, battle against adversity, defeat terrorists or otherwise save the day, can be interpreted as articulating an aspiration that was frustrated by an understandable human inability to prevent what is beyond it. The post-9/11 comic book films were able to fulfill the unrealised voluntary desire to help on 9/11, if only by proxy. In the post-9/11 era, however, it is the much lauded heroes of 9/11- the fire-fighters, Bush, Guiliani *et al.* – who, rather, inspired the superheroes like Superman. They also, on the other hand, inspired the darker characters like the Hulk, who exists deep in Bruce Banner's unconscious, and Bruce Wayne who can (although with conscious choice) transform into Batman. The recent adaptations of 'The Watchmen' and 'Captain America', not to mention the television series, *Heroes*, and the plethora of sequels (for instance, the Spiderman series, the X-Men series, *Hellboy* and its sequel, *Fantastic Four* and *its* sequel) testify to a cycle caught in a mode of traumatic repetition. This could point to the profitability of the sub-genre or perhaps, as Robin Wood suggests, that the basic issues of repression are still waiting to be resolved before real healing can take place.

Chapter 7: 9/11 and Cinema's Global Impact

Introduction

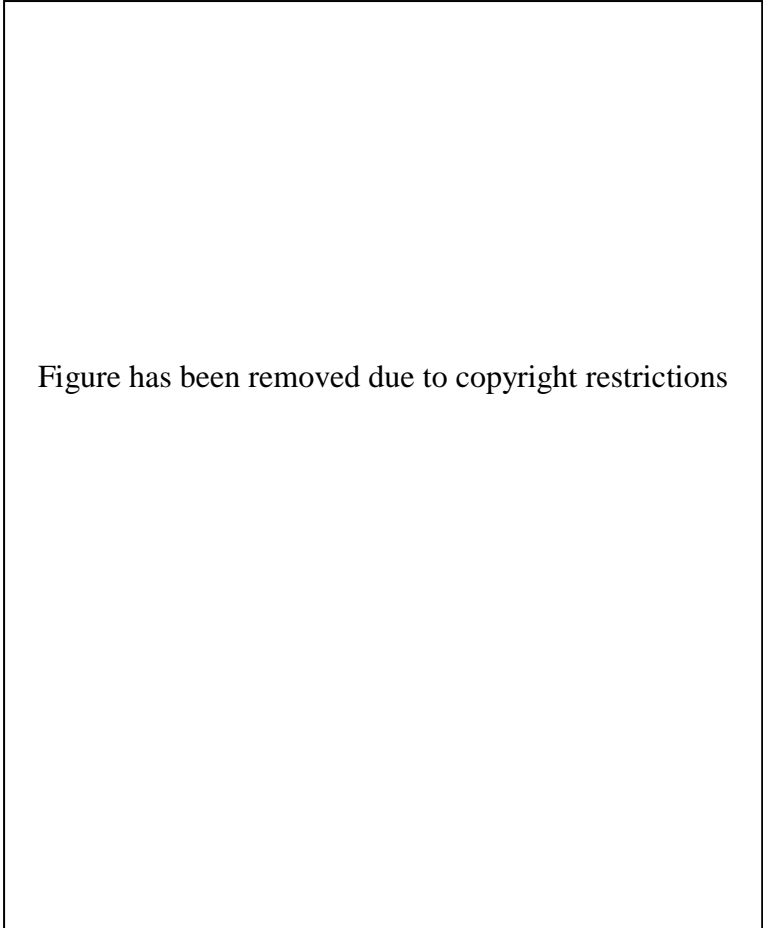


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Fig 20: Superheroes with flags of the world

In the memorial comic, *9-11 September 11th 2001 - The World's Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember*, a full-page frame is incorporated depicting Superman, Wonder Woman, and Batman standing atop a globe that represents Earth as the trio of superheroes hold a trail of world flags that, attached together, encircle the sphere. The message is clear: not only are these heroes charged with protecting the whole planet, but that 9/11 was an event

with global ramifications and warranting global tributes. Indeed the section in which this image appears is entitled 'Unity,' suggesting that this event precipitated not simply a new American solidarity, but an overall integration of global relations.⁴⁹⁷

Oliver Stone achieves a similar effect in *World Trade Center* (2006). Approximately half an hour into his film, the camera pulls out of the rubble, leaving behind it two trapped police officers, and describes an ascent into space, its gaze always directed towards the focal point of Manhattan's terror attack. A wide and clear view of planet Earth soon renders invisible the sight of New York's destruction, indicating the global 'reach' of the attacks, further emphasised by the shot of a satellite, accompanied by a soundtrack introducing distorted excerpts of radio broadcasts reporting the news from New York. A montage sequence, culled from television news footage, follows this short camera movement, registering the shocked reaction to news of the attacks as it flashes across the world: there are scenes from England, France, the Middle-East, and Far East Asia. Thus, cinematically at least, the global effect of 9/11 on individual human beings is swiftly established.

Neil Smith discusses, in *After the World Trade Center*, the three 'scales' along which the terror attacks can be measured: for Smith, 9/11 can be understood as a local, a national, and a global event.⁴⁹⁸ In the 'global' sense, he records that the hijackers were from many different countries, with driving licenses from several nations, having resided most recently in London, Toronto, Hamburg, Boca

⁴⁹⁷ Art by Lucas, John, and Chiarello, Mark, in Berganza, Eddie *et al.*, eds, *9-11 September 11th 2001 - The World's Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember* (DC Comics: New York, 2002), p. 118.

⁴⁹⁸ Smith, Neil, 'Scales of Terror: The Manufacturing of Nationalism and the War for U.S. Globalism,' in Sorkin, Michael and Zukin, Sharon (eds), *After the World Trade Center – Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 98 – 99.

Raton, and New Jersey; furthermore, the many victims included nationals of many countries too, including Pakistan, Mexico, Colombia, and the United Kingdom.⁴⁹⁹ The impact of the attacks were experienced, too, he suggests, on an immediate and global scale, and recalls how Americans phoning relatives abroad discovered that they were already watching reports of the destruction.⁵⁰⁰ His discussion infers that the very fact that two of the targets were international symbols (the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon) rather than what he perceives as *national* symbols (such as the Statue of Liberty or Disney World) underlines the pre-eminence of ‘the global,’ and the necessity of analysis on this ‘scale.’⁵⁰¹ While Disney World may be argued to be also symbolic of America’s global reach (one need only refer to Ariel Dorfman and Arman Mattelart’s critique of Disney’s imperialist ideology to see how the company’s international presence is felt), Smith’s argument is that 9/11 was fundamentally an attack on *global* economic and military strength, the power loci of which are largely to be found in America.⁵⁰²

Smith specifically mentions Hollywood as one of these national symbols that averted attack. His suggestion is that Hollywood is widely acknowledged to be associated, primarily, with America and not explicitly with the type of global exchange that drew the terrorists’ attention to the symbols of global capitalism and global military power. If Smith suggests that the terrorists believed Hollywood to be of only local, or even national (or, at least, not sufficiently global) significance, and thus not to be appropriate for attack, then he, they, or both, are arguably guilty of inadequate scrutiny of Hollywood’s worldwide reach.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Dorfman, Ariel and Mattelart, Arman, *How to Read Donald Duck – Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General, 1984).

Whilst there is no doubt that Hollywood is an American icon, in practice its product enjoys a great deal of exposure internationally, and is marketed forcefully around the globe, recouping millions of dollars every year from theatres all over the world. Indeed, data released by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) clearly indicates the importance of non-domestic box-office receipts to Hollywood: since 2001, revenue from overseas has represented well over half its total box-office revenue, rising steadily to 64% in 2007. In terms of dollars, in 2007 Hollywood took in \$26.7 billion, \$17.1 billion of which came from international theatres (compare this, for instance, with China's international sales of films between 1996 and 2000 which totalled altogether the equivalent of \$13.86 million).⁵⁰³ As purveyor of such statistics, the MPAA's primary function is to represent the American film industry officially at home and internationally, particularly to protect intellectual property rights, and ensure free and fair trade.⁵⁰⁴ The organisation's Hollywood representatives wield considerable power then, arguably out of proportion with their occupation: a letter from the then President of the MPAA, Jack Valenti, in 2003, quoted in the aptly named *Global Hollywood 2*, sums up this leverage. Valenti wrote to Mexican President Vicente Fox, complaining about Fox levying a 'tax' of 1 peso on every film ticket in order to fund local film-making, saying: '[T]he adoption of such a measure without previously consulting [the MPAA] could force us to cancel our backing of the Mexican film industry...this also would cause difficulties to our mutual

⁵⁰³ Motion Picture Association of America, 'Theatrical Market Statistics 2007,' <<http://www.mpa.org/2007-US-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf>> p. 2; Miller, Toby; Govil, Nitin; McMurria, John; Maxwell, Richard; Wang, Ting, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), p. 9.

⁵⁰⁴ Motion Picture Association of America, <<http://www.mpa.org/about>> ; Motion Picture Association of America, <<http://www.mpa.org/about/history>>

relations.’⁵⁰⁵ In particular, the book’s authors note Valenti’s arrogance in the manner with which he addresses and threatens his interlocutor, despite Fox being the President of a nation.⁵⁰⁶ As Thomas H. Guback notes, Valenti had previously written of his belief that the film industry is the only U.S. enterprise that negotiates alone with foreign governments, thus demonstrating both a self-consciousness of power and a certain hubristic attitude.⁵⁰⁷

In this chapter three main approaches are made to questions surrounding the global reach of the 9/11 event and its ramifications in Hollywood cinema. Firstly, trends within American cinema, particularly *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, 2006) and *Knowing* (Alex Proyas, 2009) are analysed with reference to their treatment of global issues, and America’s position within such global affairs. Following this, some examples of non-American cinema will be discussed in terms of its articulation of the 9/11 experience from afar, and how a ‘remote’ view of America is formed in light of such an event and its own particular history.

The Global Context

The events of September 11 occurred in a particular global context, defined by certain economic and political paradigms (that is, the dominance of capitalism), as well as by the development of technological phenomena that have encouraged a sense of closer connection across the world. By teasing out the connotations of the term ‘globalisation,’ and what its ideological effects are, inherent issues emerge and form axes along which both 9/11 can be contextualised, and Hollywood, as an

⁵⁰⁵ Miller, *ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Guback, Thomas H., ‘Hollywood’s International Market,’ in Balio, Tino, ed, *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 471.

industry, can be understood. Globalisation, defined and understood with such references, helps to demonstrate the connections between America, 9/11 and the film industry on the one hand, and the rest of the world, on the other.

Fundamentally, the term globalisation concerns itself with the ideas, policies, and technologies that facilitate the transmission and exchange of capital and information across the world, exchanges that transcend national borders and which maximise the potential profit that a global market provides. In *Articulating the Global and the Local*, Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner define it thus:

The expansion of the capitalist world market into areas previously closed to it...is accompanied by the decline of the nation-state, and its power to regulate and control the flow of goods, people, information, and various cultural forms. Globalization involves systematically overcoming distances of space and time and the emergence of new international institutions and forces.⁵⁰⁸

In the light of this definition, globalisation has a distinctly financial implication: the international bodies in question, whilst including those such as the United Nations, also include the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation. Indeed, Roland Axtmann, in an essay in *Articulating the Global and the Local*, stresses the impact of contemporary economics on ‘the creation of a global world’ at the expense of national economic determination:

A global economy has emerged that has become institutionalized through global capital markets and globally integrated financial systems, global trade, and global production networks. In such a ‘global economy,’ the patterns of production and consumption in the world are increasingly interdependent, income and employment are determined at a global level, and national

⁵⁰⁸ Cvetkovich, Ann and Kellner, Douglas, ‘Introduction: Thinking Global and Local,’ in Cvetkovich, Ann and Kellner, Douglas, eds, *Articulating the Global and the Local – Globalization and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 3.

macroeconomic management is becoming increasingly anachronistic and doomed to failure.⁵⁰⁹

While, he argues, organisations like the ones mentioned above do not constitute political administration of a global economy, they do represent a tangible international co-ordination.⁵¹⁰ There is, of course, the sense here that what is called globalisation is the current stage of a specifically *capitalist* development, a culmination (however temporary) of particular historical, economic and imperial forces.⁵¹¹ One can point to a number of relatively recent landmark events, though, that have also helped to shape this expansion of capitalism such as the demise of Communism in 1989, and the first Gulf War, since they opened up markets to foreign investment that were previously inaccessible, as well as China's openness to trade.⁵¹² However, it is the advent of George W. Bush's presidency, and specifically the post-9/11 climate, that defines, or crystallises, contemporary American politics within a 'globalising' world. This is partly to do with the dawn of the new era that 9/11 heralded, but also a trace of Bush's preferences in terms of personnel selected as cabinet members, a number of whom had served under President Reagan, and many of whom were instrumental in conservative think-tanks such as Project for a New American Century, that provided a blueprint for global dominance in order to maximise power and profit.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁹ Axtmann, Roland, 'Collective Identity and the Democratic Nation-State in the Age of Globalization,' in Cvetkovich, Ann and Kellner, Douglas, (eds) *Articulating the Global and the Local – Globalization and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 33.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Cvetkovich, *ibid.*; Mann, Michael 'Globalization and September 11,' *New Left Review*, Number 12, Second Series, November-December 2001, pp. 52-53.

⁵¹² See, for example, Nolan, Peter, *Capitalism and Freedom – The Contradictory Character of Globalisation* (London: Anthem Press, 2007), pp205 – 207.

⁵¹³ Armstrong, David, 'Dick Cheney's Song of America: Drafting a plan for global dominance,' *Harper's*, October 2002, <<http://www.harpers.org/archive/2002/10/0079354>>

In addition to economics and politics, cultural ‘exchange’ is an integral component of globalisation. While Cvetkovich and Kellner warn against neglecting the vigour of national, regional, and traditional cultural models in favour of a culturally inexact totalising system, they also recognise the power of specifically American figures (they mention Rambo, Madonna, and Beavis and Butt-Head as examples) as models around which people all over the world construct their *own* identities: ‘Most of the new global populars that produce resources for identity come from North American media industries, thus from this perspective globalization becomes a form of Americanization...Global culture is indeed disseminating across the world.’⁵¹⁴ That globalism and ‘image’ go hand in hand is evident in Kellner’s study of the development and prominence of the spectacular in global media culture. His argument stems from a core belief that media spectacles ‘are those phenomena of media culture that embody contemporary society’s basic values, serve to initiate individuals into its way of life, and dramatize its controversies and struggles as well as its modes of conflict resolution,’ and are incorporated into all aspects of our lives, from sports stadia and coverage, to architecture, computer gaming, corporate branding, celebrity and television and film, not to mention politics and war.⁵¹⁵

Contributors to *Global Hollywood 2*, provide an extensive investigation into the globalisation of Hollywood production and the increasingly worldwide dissemination of its product. They pose three questions in relation to Hollywood’s business practices both to frame their study, and to formalise the term ‘globalisation’ theoretically: is Hollywood global; what are the implications of

⁵¹⁴ Cvetkovich, Ann and Kellner, Douglas, ‘Introduction: Thinking Global and Local,’ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵¹⁵ Kellner, Douglas, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2, 4 – 10.

this dominance; and, where is Hollywood?⁵¹⁶ Ultimately, they conclude that since Hollywood sells its product to almost every nation on Earth, controlling the systems of copyright, promotion, distribution, and labour in order to maximise profit, yes, the industry is global. The implications of this status is that this ‘global infrastructure’ in which Hollywood operates needs to be analysed so that the exchange of cultural texts might become representative of all film-making centres across the world.⁵¹⁷ In response to their third question, Miller *et al.* essentially argue that it can be anywhere in the world that fits the criteria of cheap labour and cheap locations.⁵¹⁸ The power Hollywood – and its creditors – holds over the film world is secure: as Miller *et al.* state, American companies own between 40 and 90% of films screened around the world. While they acknowledge that non-Americans comprise the majority of global film-makers, they note that Hollywood has nevertheless become a model for international export due to its unrivalled success, particularly in the wake of developments such as the privatisation of media ownership, the opening of markets in the former Soviet republics, and the de-regulation of national broadcasting in European and South American countries.⁵¹⁹

In contrast, Anthony Giddens stresses the tension between concepts of the global and the local in *The Consequences of Modernity*, a study that presents a view of globalisation that has further significance for the context of 9/11. He argues that due to increasing global ‘connections,’ an incident in one part of the world can have repercussions on others regardless of distance:

⁵¹⁶ Miller, *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

Globalisation refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole. Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.⁵²⁰

Giddens' formulation has distinctly cultural resonances and demonstrates a way in which a study of non-American film can be undertaken, that acknowledges the impact 9/11 had on global locales and global cinema.

The globalised context in which 9/11 occurred, then, is characterised by an increasing sense of connection. This connection incorporates a geopolitical dynamics to which the United States is central, a media culture motivated by the 'spectacular,' and, specifically, an American film industry that enjoys the lion's share of global ownership and revenue. With these frames of reference in mind, 9/11 can be considered a *global* event: images of the attacks were broadcast all over the world and were so shocking and unprecedented that, because of the symbolic centrality of the target, military or economic, one realised the rest of the world would be affected too. Outpourings of sorrow and sympathy flooded from a plethora of countries all over the world: *Le Monde's* September 12, 2001 article, 'We Are All Americans,' in which Jean-Marie Colombani asked 'just as in the gravest moments of our own history, how can we not feel profound solidarity with...the United States, to whom we are so close and to whom we owe our freedom...?' is but one example.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ Giddens, *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵²¹ Colombani, Jean-Marie, 'We Are All Americans,' *Le Monde*, 12/09/01, a translated version of which appears on <http://www.worldpress.org/1101we_are_all_americans.htm>

Through cinema, the way America sees itself in a global context and how it envisions this context after 9/11 can be compared with how the rest of the world sees 9/11 and America, and how 9/11 is a lens through which other countries can view their own experience and history. This framework, then, of global politics, power, and culture, particularly through the concepts of global connection and local resistance, contextualises and informs both the discussion of 9/11's global implications in both American, and non-American films, and also the ways in which connections are established and maintained or oppositional positions mounted.

American Perspectives of Global Contexts

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the *New York Times* surmised that a new era had begun.⁵²² One of the responses when confronting this realisation, particularly amongst those with left-wing convictions, was a hope that America would accept that it had a certain, positive role to play in global affairs, and a responsibility to act with consideration towards other nations and peoples. Sharon Zukin, for instance, argues that the 'finest memorial to 9/11 would be to use the destruction of the World Trade Center to understand people's ambitions in other parts of the world – and to understand our own.'⁵²³ M. Christine Boyer, likewise, reflects on the destruction of the World Trade Centre and sees the symbolism inherent in the phrase 'Ground Zero,' especially its sense of concentric circles, as a metaphor for the centre's collapse as it links 'problems of both the center and

⁵²² 'The War Against America; An Unfathomable Attack,' *The New York Times*, 12/09/01, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/opinion/the-war-against-america-an-unfathomable-attack.html>>

⁵²³ Zukin, Sharon, 'Our World Trade Center,' in Sorkin, Michael and Zukin, Sharon, eds, *After the World Trade Center – Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 20.

the periphery – the financial district and the rest of [the] city, the nation, and the world.’⁵²⁴ One can detect in these sentiments the expression of a hope, if not the need, for the development of progressive global connections that will benefit everyone across the world.

Ultimately, the Bush administration did indeed accept that its role in global politics was an important one, but an invasion of Afghanistan, carried out in order to eradicate the Taliban and to capture Osama bin Laden, suggests that Bush’s conception of America’s global position was unilateral and, initially, motivated by revenge as much as by enlightenment. Nevertheless, in spite of the tension and opposition between these competing notions of American presence, the fact remains that the post-9/11 U.S. political climate foregrounds intense involvement in global geopolitics and remains a particularly critical issue.

The question can therefore be posed: how is the outside world treated in Hollywood as an aspect of American consciousness, and not simply a sphere of American political interaction or commercial exchange? Specifically, one should ask how does American cinema register the connection between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ in the wake of 9/11, and how does it fuse these strands together? Films like *Knowing* and *Munich* demonstrate American perspectives both on America itself, in a global context, and also on the rest of the world after 9/11.

Knowing places an American experience within a context of global catastrophes, both man-made and natural. However, *Knowing* both explicitly and implicitly evokes 9/11 as this experience, and delivers a particularly doom-laden conclusion that suggests mankind’s only salvation lies in a total re-assessment of

⁵²⁴ Boyer, M. Christine, ‘Meditations on a Wounded Skyline and Its Stratigraphies of Pain,’ in Sorkin, *ibid.*, p. 118.

its lifestyle. The film depicts John Koestler (Nicolas Cage), a science lecturer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology whose son, Caleb (Chandler Canterbury), attends a school that is about to celebrate the opening of a time-capsule. Buried fifty years earlier, this capsule contains envelopes in which former pupils placed pieces of paper on which they had drawn their vision of what 2008 would look like. Handed out at random, the envelope given to Caleb reveals no more than a sequence of apparently random numbers. Later on at home, Koestler detects what he believes to be a pattern: the date of the 9/11 attack and the number of those who perished at the World Trade Centre. Driven by this discovery, he continues his investigation and soon realises that all the other numbers correspond to other disasters, but ones that have occurred all over the world in the previous five decades, and the number of people who die in each one (as well as their spatial coordinates). Koestler realises that there are three sequences of numbers that remain unmatched to any tragedy, but rather actually predict imminent events.

With a deadline set, he engineers a meeting with the daughter and granddaughter of the girl who, in class 50 years previously, had written the list of numbers. Overcoming their initial reservations about Koestler's theory, they join him and his son in attempting to unravel the meaning of the dates and imminent disasters. The two children are followed by mysterious men who contact them and seem to be exerting control over them, much to their parents' alarm. However, widespread panic amongst the region's populace, terrorised by the knowledge of an impending meteorological disaster, and the eventual knowledge that the two children will ultimately be saved, overtakes Koestler's sense of parental protective responsibility. The final scenes in *Knowing* depict an apocalypse in which a surge of solar energy burns the entire planet and only a select few (all children, notably)

are chosen by the mysterious extra-terrestrial beings to start the human race over, this time on another, pastoral-utopian planet. Thus, the catastrophe is seen as a necessary step on the road to redemption.

There is a strong connection with 9/11 that is forged on two levels: firstly, there is the explicit reference to its occurrence and its function as a means by which Koestler is able to correctly interpret the list of numbers. Indeed, this overt and necessary narrative incorporation of 9/11 and its traumatic significance helps to construct a particular frame that informs the film's trajectory: America is still traumatised in the years following 9/11, but is only one of a plethora of nations experiencing violent tragedy.

Secondly, there is the implicit reference to September 11th that can be detected in *Knowing*, and can be articulated as its 'visual quotation' of 9/11's imagery. The first of these visual quotations occurs when Koestler first realises that some unexplained numbers in the sequences are map co-ordinates. Stuck in traffic, he glances at his 'satellite-navigation' system and recognises the numbers as corresponding exactly to one sequence on his list. He gets out of the car just in time to witness a plane hurtling out of the sky, partially crash on the road in front of him, and finally come to rest in a nearby field.

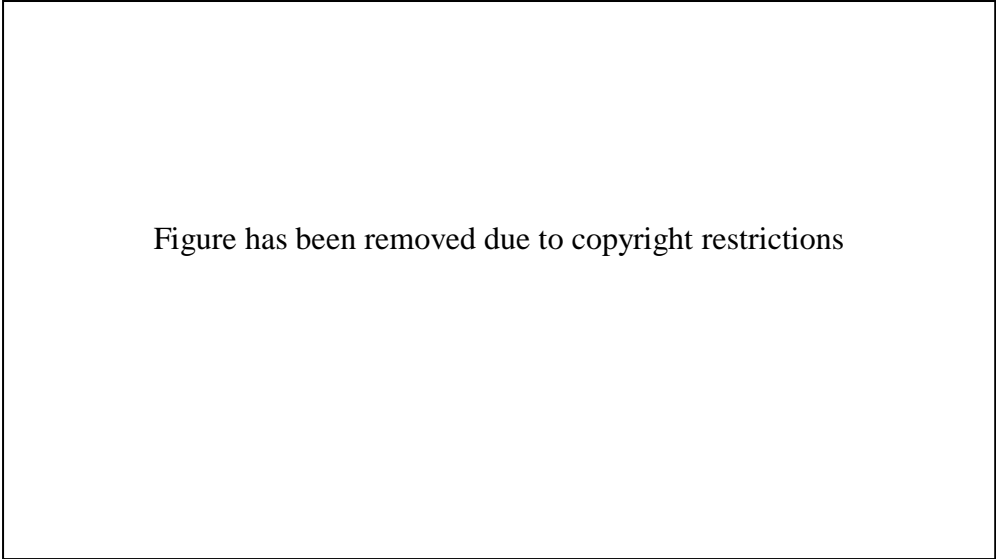


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Fig 21: Plane crash in *Knowing*

The way this crash is depicted, in particular the terrifying sight of a plane flying dangerously (perhaps even threateningly, given the expectancy of ‘death and destruction’ that accompanies this scene) in an area in which it should not be, is extremely reminiscent of the footage of the hijacked planes attacking the World Trade Centre.

Munich, like *Knowing*, places an American experience within a context of global disaster but for very different purposes. In *Munich* the issue of organised terror is discussed, and its conclusion offers a bleak outlook on the chances for global peace, both in terms of the on-going Israel-Palestine conflict and the current, post-9/11 climate. Spielberg’s film takes place in the early 1970s, beginning with the immediate aftermath of the murder of the Israeli Olympic squad in Germany in 1972. Israel’s Prime Minister, Golda Meir (Lynn Cohen), decides that revenge should be carried out in the form of covert assassinations of those who perpetrated the killings. Mossad agent, Avner (Eric Bana), is approached to organise and lead the small team of agents, which includes a bombmaker, gunmen, and a man employed to ‘clean up’ after his colleagues strike

(or make mistakes), who all leave Israel to travel around Europe, pursuing their Arab targets. Their journey takes them through Rome, Paris and Athens as they make contact with a mysterious French organisation that sells Avner information regarding the locations of the men they seek.

Over the course of a number of years, Avner begins to develop a sense of paranoia, in no small part due to the amoral stance of the French organisation when it comes to taking sides: they will accept money from any and all ideological parties and nations; indeed, they actively encourage Avner to avoid passing information on to the CIA. Avner eventually feels that he is a target himself whose own whereabouts have been sold by his erstwhile (albeit knowingly self-expedient, and therefore untrustworthy) French accomplices. Compounding his paranoia is the belief that he is being used by his unofficial Israeli superior to assassinate Palestinians who were not responsible for the original killings, thus systematically weakening their position by deliberately depriving them of a political leadership. The film ends with Avner joining his wife in Brooklyn and telling his chief he refuses to take part in any further operations.

Munich, by concentrating on the theme of terrorism and by implicating three geopolitical blocs in its narrative (North America, Europe, and the Middle-East) invites analysis in the context of the global impact of 9/11. An implicit connection with 9/11 is made with the concluding shot of the film in which the New York skyline is depicted complete with the towers of the World Trade Centre clearly visible, and, arguably due to the nature of the spectacle, they are the dominant attraction in the frame. This is an odd image to portray: in terms of plot or narrative structure, the city of New York plays a very small part, and the skyline

of Manhattan is depicted due to Avner's experiential, perceptual relationship to it in the closing scenes. It might be inferred that the shot of the skyline is included to either illustrate Avner's environment or to herald the 'future' experience of terror, and thus can be argued to be a deliberate attempt to invoke a sense of shared victimhood. It may even suggest, that the story of the towers' demise started at this point – only recently opened, in the context established by *Munich*, they were nevertheless 'born' in a period of conflict associated with the Middle-East, the region that would eventually produce their ultimate antagonists. However, in terms of this particular film, the question remains, with whom does America share this suffering? In *Munich*, the character with whom we most sympathise, Avner, though pursuing terrorists, is himself a terrorist. While he eventually begins to question the morality or legitimacy of his course of action, he is, nevertheless, a professional killer in service of a governmentally-sanctioned, if supposedly unofficial, operation.

A similar image concludes Martin Scorsese's film, *Gangs of New York* (2002). Although set in the Civil War era, the film ends with a wide shot of the 'then' New York skyline that gradually merges into its modern, but pre-9/11, counterpart. In the DVD commentary, Scorsese mentions he deliberately decided against removing images of the Twin Towers from the film since it was about the construction of the city, not its destruction, and suggests that to deny this, in whatever form the construction and reconstruction takes, would be disingenuous. This is an interesting framework within which to view the inclusion of pre-9/11 images of the World Trade Centre in post-9/11 films. However, the theme of *Munich* is terrorism, not construction, nor the definition of a physical place, and must be read as a statement on violence. Yet, this too is problematic since

Spielberg contends that the film is not to be read as taking a stance against violence. In an introduction to the film he says:

This movie is not an argument for non-response. On the contrary, what this movie is showing is that a response that may be the right response is still one that confronts you with some very difficult issues. And when we have to respond to terror today, what's relevant is the need to go through a careful process. Not to paralyse ourselves, not to prevent us from acting but to try and ensure that the results that we produce are the ones that we really intend.⁵²⁵

It would seem that the shots of the Twin Towers in *Munich* serve to act as a reminder to audiences, domestic and international, of 9/11, as well as serving to defend the policy of carefully-considered retribution. *Munich*'s double reference to both historical contexts (the murder of Israeli athletes and 9/11) serves to legitimise both Israeli and American responses: just as the film's narrative highlights the brutal murder of innocent Israelis which, when one sees the Twin Towers, is like a comment on the status of American victims of 9/11, so the presence of the Twin Towers and the sense of innocent victimhood that *they* represent, functions as a comment on Israel's struggle. In short, the message seems to be that violence against America and Israel is abhorrent, though their violent responses, as long as the consequences are anticipated and evaluated, are acceptable. Therefore, in *Munich*, Spielberg, essentially, passes comment on post-9/11 America by mediating it through a narrative ostensibly concerned with the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

What is of particular interest, though, regarding the references to 9/11 is how, or if, films contextualise an incident within a broader spectrum of time and

⁵²⁵ Introduction to *Munich* by Steven Spielberg in bonus features of the *Munich* DVD (DreamWorks Home Entertainment, 2006), Number DSL1526.

events. In *Knowing*, there are references to other American disasters such as the Oklahoma City bombing, and the humanitarian emergency that followed Hurricane Katrina. However, global disasters are also mentioned, such as the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985, as well as the Lockerbie PanAm crash in 1988. The terrorist attack of 2001, therefore, is experienced as a significant event, but one that conforms to a pattern of periodic and frequent episodes of world-wide disaster and, as such is, incidental rather than unique. Here, *Knowing* differs from *Munich* since it places America and the attacks of September 11, 2001, as merely one entry in a litany of disasters that lead to, and foretell, the extinction of the entire human race on Earth, not just one national trauma. *Munich*, focuses on one localised instance of victimhood – the Israeli Olympic team’s assassination – and ultimately connects it to only one other. Both acts of violence are, therefore, distinct; if there is any context or common thread it is that the 1972 and 2001 acts were perpetrated by men of Arab ethnicity, a phenomenon that solidifies a connection between only two countries as opposed to a common global humanity.

Both films foreground American experience, and tell the story of how America views the world after 9/11, yet they differ in their conclusions: *Munich* alludes to America’s shared experience with Israel as victims (and perpetrators) of terror, while *Knowing* testifies to the position America holds in the world: just one of many victims, and, also, equally one of many perpetrators. Indeed, *Knowing* seriously challenges senses of American exceptionalism and unilateralism and seems to uphold the hope, expressed by Butler *et al.*, that America can, and needs to, contribute positively to global affairs. *Munich*, in contrast to *Knowing*’s liberal position, legitimises considered revenge in its emotive rhetorical connection of

Israeli and American tragedies, thereby discounting both legitimate grievances of the Muslim world, and the option to settle matters without recourse to force.

‘Outsider’ Perspectives After 9/11

In her contribution to a collection of essays on post-9/11 trauma, *Trauma At Home – After 9/11*, Judith Greenberg comments on the importance of the ‘visual’ in the aftermath of the attacks. In response to viewing photographs taken on 11 September in a museum exhibit and, specifically, watching video footage shot on the same day, she says:

I am struck by the need to witness...A need to see the destruction, the wound, overwhelms. A similar need exists for the crowd at the museum...that mirrors the spectators on the scene, unable to fathom what’s before our eyes and possessed...The repetitive witnessing testifies to something that evades. Will we see that which cannot be seen?⁵²⁶

While Greenberg goes on to suggest that this ‘thing’ that cannot be seen is psychological in nature, there is another way to interpret this question that has particular resonance for the millions of people who experienced 9/11 outside America, whether by watching the aftermath on televisions, or hearing reports about the attacks on radio, but who also experienced the pain and trauma in their own peculiar way. The issue of witnessing and the psychological importance of telling one’s ‘9/11 story,’ are phenomena that unite the United States, but may transcend America’s borders. The question remains, how was this event witnessed and absorbed by the rest of the world? Film, in a globalised context, provides a

⁵²⁶ Greenberg, Judith, ‘Wounded New York,’ in Greenberg, Judith, ed, *Trauma At Home – After 9/11* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 27 and 30.

means to express how these citizens of other countries felt about 9/11 and its aftermath, how it affected their particular culture, and an opportunity to ‘return’ those accounts *to* America.

The most obvious obstruction to witnessing an event beyond a physically observable distance, if ‘witnessing’ is something more than a visual experience, is that it literally can *not* be witnessed, at least not first-hand, not in the flesh. This issue, perhaps inadvertently, adds a dimension to what Greenberg says when she questions our desire to see what cannot be seen. However, on second glance, it is also arguable that witnessing 9/11 on a television screen in Europe, Asia or the Middle-East does in fact provide another dimension to the issue of witnessing the terrorist attacks. While television viewers beyond the East coast of America will not know what it was like to observe the attacks from a Manhattan street, from a Washington, D.C. motorway, or from rural Pennsylvania, neither are those first-hand witnesses able to experience remote observation that those elsewhere experienced: New Yorkers, for instance, will never be able to see what, and how, a viewer in Baghdad, *et al.*, saw. In short, in this case, remote witnessing is by definition partial and perhaps divisive. The question remains how foreign filmmakers express the phenomenon of remote witnessing an event that connects their own lives, and countries, with a foreign country and experience. An initial focus, then, analyses the view of America from the outside with particular reference to *Man on Wire* (James Marsh, 2008) and *Land of Plenty* (Wim Wenders, 2004).

Man on Wire is a documentary that traces Philippe Petit’s preparations for, and successful execution of, a wire-walk between the two towers of the World Trade Centre in 1974; it also provides a historical explanation of Petit’s

inspiration to achieve this feat before the towers were even completed, and records his earlier wire-walks in his native France, and Australia. Though *To Reach the Clouds*, the book on which the film was based, makes reference to the terrorist attacks (indeed, the attacks occurred while Petit was writing the account of his walk, and he composes a memorial poem to close the book), *Man on Wire* does not. Thus, stripped of the issues of destruction and devastation the film acts as a vehicle to remember the towers in a different light. It humanises the inanimate, illustrating an individual's affection for concrete and steel that transcends concepts of 'terror' and 'death' that are usually associated with the towers and their collapse (particularly at the time of the film's production), not to mention displacing the towers' symbolic representation of American wealth and power.

Whilst Petit's crossing was undertaken in 1974, the film's narrative structure creates a sense of suspense, though overall in recording Petit's triumph, the film is positive and uplifting. It is understandable that this positive portrayal of the physical and emotional relationship between a human and the towers had to originate outside of the United States. This detachment is crucial, perhaps, to the depiction of the towers as a site of achievement, and not only *not* destroyed, but alive and only recently created, precisely the opposite of their experience as the book was being written, and the film produced and exhibited. The multiple visits Petit and his companions took to the World Trade Centre to formulate his plan, and the close proximity to the centre with which they worked in their night-long preparations, instilled in him an attachment with the buildings that began as a challenge but developed into something more profound and positive.

At an early point in the film, Petit describes how, on the day before the walk, he was driving with his accomplices into the World Trade Centre complex in order to sneak in and execute his plan. He indicates with his hand the dramatic drop in height from street-level to the basement they experienced as they drove. This gesture may have referred to the incline between two low levels, but also, perhaps inadvertently, refers to the wider context of New York's varying vertical configurations. It recalls more specifically Michel de Certeau's observations about New York's physical appearance, and the World Trade Centre's relationship with the rest of the city.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau emphasises the ideas of verticality as well as the city as a text, written by 'pedestrian speech acts,' ideas that can be read as politically significant.⁵²⁷ There is a clear distinction, here, that signifies delineations of class: it suggests how one group of people can ascend to apprehend a panoptic view of the city, while the other is ostensibly situated in a 'murky,' banal existence.⁵²⁸ Merlin Coverley's interpretation of de Certeau's writings underlines the importance of the latter in particular, since an experience of the city at ground-level is not only more democratic but enables one to reconnect with 'life.'⁵²⁹ De Certeau himself argued that the vertical waves of the New York City skyline produce a dynamic form, characterised by the collision of opposing forces; this wave of verticals, he states, 'is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its

⁵²⁷ De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 91, 93 and 97.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

⁵²⁹ Coverley, Merlin, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden, Herts.: Pocket Essentials, 2006), p. 105.

space.⁵³⁰ Those who dwell at the foot of these verticals, however, are denied a view of their urban 'speech acts' which can only be seen by those privileged by access to great height, precisely the vantage point achieved by Petit.

The structure de Certeau uses to illustrate his ideas is entirely appropriately the World Trade Centre, particularly viewing the city from its 110th floor, as he asks:

To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what the source of this pleasure of 'seeing the whole,' of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts. To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp. One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law.⁵³¹

De Certeau's answer ultimately posits two opposing 'erotics of knowledge,' those of the voyeur and the walker. The voyeur is elevated, god-like, and 'leaves behind the mass' and 'puts him at a distance,'⁵³² whereas the walker is the ordinary inhabitant, or city 'practitioner,' 'whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it.'⁵³³ Indeed, the descent from height to street-level is described by de Certeau as 'an Icarian fall,' a phrase that, in its allusion to classical mythology, implies that such a journey is both distressing and devastating due to it being punishment for overarching human ambition.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰ De Certeau, *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Closer inspection of *To Reach the Clouds*, to complement an analysis of *Man on Wire*, reveals the extent of the connection between human and building. For instance, in addition to the young Petit believing the Twin Towers to be a critical aspect of his own destiny, there are numerous references to the crossing being a matter of life and death (even a suicidal mission). Indeed, Petit's adventure can be read as an inadvertent attempt to overcome the disconnection between the various strata of society and classes that are separated (and symbolised, at least for de Certeau) by the distance of skyscrapers' peaks from the ground, in the way he humanises the towers. He performs his 'pedestrian speech act' in the 'sky' thereby linking the two disparate levels denoted by the terms 'walker' and 'voyeur' by looking up whilst walking, not down.⁵³⁵ He might dream about crossing from one tower to the other, but he envisions them as being a part of his very lifeblood, thus blurring the boundary between man and building, and incorporating this new entity into everyday life:

[L]ike these two silvery pylons whose summits deface the clouds, and between which the sun must sneak in order to chase out the last of night; similarly, inexorably, my insane dream of the twin towers has once again infiltrated my veins, has once again become essential to my existence.⁵³⁶

Elsewhere in the film, Petit recounts the effects of powerful and dangerous winds at the top of one of the towers during one of his reconnaissance missions, which were so strong as to require him to hold on to a pole to prevent being swept away. In his book, however, Petit's account of this episode reveals his 'anthropomorphisation' of the Towers. In a passage that attributes both physical

⁵³⁵ Petit, Philippe, *To Reach the Clouds – My High-Wire Walk Between the Twin Towers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 179.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71 – 72.

and emotional feeling to the tower, Petit describes it as if it were a person with nerves and a soul, thus placing a value on it that transcends its actual composition:

Through the masonry came the cry of the tower: its steel structure being lengthened and shortened, twisted and squeezed, it let go a plaint of pain. As if guilty of having expressed secret feelings, instantly the tower went totally quiet and totally still.⁵³⁷

His book also details how he protected the edge of the Towers with some carpet so as not to damage the building with the cable: ‘I do not wish to leave even the tiniest scratch on the towers I love.’⁵³⁸ Ultimately, when Petit made his crossing, the towers were functional; indeed one of his accomplices was an office worker in the towers. However, one of the towers was not fully completed at the time of his walk and it is as if Petit, and the film, suggest that his loving contact was required as a final ingredient to imbue them with a sense of human warmth. Though it is debatable whether this act of humanisation was sustained during the towers’ lifetime, it certainly offers such a distinct paradigm given the focus both the book and film give it intensified in the wake of their passing.

De Certeau argues that the height of buildings is detrimental to the human experience since those who occupy the tops of these buildings, with their ‘privileged’ vantage point, are fundamentally cut-off from ground-level experience, thus creating a hierarchy of those who can see all and those who cannot, those that ‘possess’ and those who do not. Therefore, Petit’s crossing subverted the dynamics that de Certeau formulated and critiqued, thus rendering it a political act in his connection of levels of society.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 150

Though a resident of Los Angeles, Wim Wenders' film *Land of Plenty*, like *Man on Wire*, offers an outsider's (in this case a German *émigré*'s) take on what effect 9/11 had on America. However, Philippe Petit's perspective is not shared by Wenders whose response to the destruction of the towers, not to mention the political and security-conscious climate the attacks engendered, is founded on anger rather than love.⁵³⁹ In *Land of Plenty*, a young woman, Lana (Michelle Williams), returns to America for the first time since the attacks having spent years in Israel as a peace activist. She volunteers at a Christian homeless shelter/soup kitchen in Los Angeles in order to continue her work with the destitute, and is appalled by the extent of the poverty. At the same time she attempts to make contact with her deceased mother's brother, Paul (John Diehl), who has developed a deep paranoia since 9/11. He maintains a roving surveillance over the city, investigating occurrences of what he considers suspicious behaviour, and tests samples of city water for toxins. There is no doubt that he is slightly dysfunctional, and though associated with US Army Special Forces, he seems to be merely tolerated by LAPD officers. Following a number of brief meetings the two relatives bond after a drive-by shooting outside the homeless shelter. Their relationship is complicated by Lana's desire to track the dead man's family so he can be properly buried, while Paul wants to follow up his investigations into the same man's activities which he suspects are of a terrorist nature (he has been spotted with boxes of the detergent 'Borax'). The two track the dead man's only living relative to a trailer park in Trona, California where the deceased's body is delivered, and where Paul's investigations are shown to have had no basis: the dead man had only been trying to sell the detergent, and the

⁵³⁹ Interview with Wim Wenders for bonus feature of *Land of Plenty* DVD (Axiom Films, 2004), Number AXM555.

‘cell’ Paul had been following had merely been delivering empty boxes to a sick, old lady for her to pack some of her belongings. Compounded by this state of affairs, Lana and her uncle express their conflicting views in a frank discussion about 9/11, before embarking upon a cross-country trip, finally arriving in New York to gaze over Ground Zero.

In an interview conducted in 2008, included on the *Land of Plenty* DVD as a bonus feature, Wenders talks about the film’s genesis, and the context of its production. In the autumn of 2001, he states, the entire world was appalled by the terrorist attack and there existed a chance to turn the tragedy of 9/11 into something positive. However, the subsequent wars, particularly the one waged against Iraq in 2003, had the opposite effect as it turned the American victim into the aggressor, thereby losing the Bush Administration its moral support across the globe. According to Wenders:

[T]he rightful sorrow and the rightful anger and fear [felt by] Americans was, by means of politics, turned into its opposite. And that was a terrible and historical mistake that we all suffered from ever since, and might suffer from for another decade or even longer.⁵⁴⁰

Although Wenders does not specify what that ‘something positive’ might be, judging by the context of other comments in the same interview, it would take the form of some kind of multilateral, multi-faith, global peace and justice movement in which America would play a role along with all other nations of the world. Instead, however, the United States pursued a violent and misguided policy of revenge whilst creating a paranoid climate at home that was hostile to those, like

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

Wenders himself, who opposed the war. Indeed, the director's disappointment and anger about post-9/11 America are expressed in sensational terms:

I was angry at America to have reacted the way they had, [and how] American politics had reacted, and they had...betrayed all American virtues in the book and had sort of turned them into their perversion; the very words of freedom and liberty were turned into perverse anti-Christ messages.⁵⁴¹

This anger at the American response, which Wenders felt fostered suspicion of Muslims, as well as at the money that he considers was wasted on the Iraq war when it could have been spent to alleviate domestic poverty, forms the sub-text of the conflict between Lana's global perspective and Paul's narrow patriotism. Lana and Paul's debate about 9/11 and America could therefore be described as dramatising tensions between Left and Right in America in the wake of the attacks: Lana's perspective, informed and shaped by her work with the poor and oppressed, and years of living abroad, leads her to convey a sadness both for herself as an American, and for the world that has been subsequently shaped by the Bush Administration's response to 9/11. She tells Paul that the attacks occurred when she was in the Middle-East and expresses how she felt so disturbed by witnessing so many ordinary people cheering at the news, and feeling their hate for America coming from such an honest place. However, in her opinion, the innocent thousands who died in New York would not want more people killed in their name, and so, when she and Paul reach Ground Zero, she urges him to close his eyes and listen – a reference to her belief that it's the innocent dead's voices that she (and Paul) need to hear, presumably to reinforce the idea that more lives ought not be taken.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

Conversely, Paul's perspective is informed by a more complex experience: firstly, he responded to the attacks on America by proactively, in his mind, securing his environment the better to prevent further attacks. However, on a deeper level, 9/11 evoked the trauma of his experience in Vietnam that he had still not overcome. This trauma, manifesting itself in the form of recurring nightmares about the war, had disappeared only to be re-awakened by the events of 9/11. Convinced of America's superiority, Paul is bewildered by the attacks, and is paralysed to an extent, since no amount of surveillance can undo either traumatic event. He does not share Lana's more inclusive view of global politics, and there is no equivocation regarding his right or need to pursue suspects that fit particular profiles and archetypes of evil, indiscriminately. The strength of Lana's position is assisted no doubt by her calm understanding, and the humiliation Paul suffers when it transpires that none of his suspects were terrorists: one was a homeless man, the 'sleeper cell' was delivering empty boxes and the other 'cell' who killed the initial suspect outside the shelter was comprised of two young, white males on crack.

Clearly, Lana's horizons are wide and she is able to incorporate the experience of the Other (in whatever guise) into her world view. Ultimately, through her Wenders' liberal position is validated: she is able to cut through Paul's layers of trauma and convince him of the necessity of a sense of humanity, and the *non-desirability* of further war operations. Such a neat conclusion as *Land of Plenty* offers can only be drawn in the realm of fiction perhaps. Nevertheless, as Frank Mehring's reading of the film in *European Journal of American Studies* highlights, Wenders' criticism of Bush-era America is coloured by a sense of hope

that Americans, here embodied by Lana, to demonstrate a more respectful way to heal the wounds inflicted on September 11:

Through the act of closing one's eyes, Wenders counter-balances what he identified before as an American patriotic blindness...The addiction to sights and ideological filters in the act of seeing has led to a lack of vision. In order to understand the reasons, symptoms, and potential answers to the site of Ground Zero, familiar ways of apprehension need to be unlearned, changed, and put to better use than before.⁵⁴²

Therefore, the two films discussed here, though reaching opposing conclusions nevertheless share the characteristic of foregrounding the vision of 'foreigners' as regards the Twin Towers and even September 11th itself. *Man on Wire* acts as a cinematic eulogy to the lost towers even though it, crucially, refrains from referring to the terrorist attack. *Land of Plenty*, however, represents a different tendency: its outsider vision is extremely critical of the political and global repercussions of 9/11, particularly the Bush Administration's policies that Wenders argues are pursued to the detriment of America and the rest of the world.

These tendencies that divide outsider analyses of America and 9/11 are similarly evident in some of the short films that form part of the *11'09''01: September 11* (various, 2002) collection. Indeed, the few that originate from an outsider's perspective but whose narrative primarily unfolds in the United States, display a discernible tension between the poles of eulogy and critique.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's film, the seventh in the collection, depicts the people who jumped from the burning Twin Towers, though the images of these

⁵⁴² Mehring, Frank, 'From Independence Day to Land of Plenty: Screening American Patriotism from German Émigré Perspectives before and after 9/11,' *European Journal of American Studies*, Special Issue 2010, <<http://ejas.revues.org/8682>>, p. 12.

'jumpers' only briefly appear, flickering amidst long periods of black screen and accompanying media reports and Islamic prayers. The film's minimal visual elements create a very shocking effect: at times all one can make out are human bodies falling through space and the edifice of the Towers behind them. This visual motif is repeated again and again, the effect of which is to inextricably link the human body to the building. This short film, therefore, has elements in common with *Man on Wire*, in its illustration of the profound connection between human body and (the exact same) construction of cement and steel, that demonstrates a certain life and death cycle with regards to this building . However, in its recording and vivid portrayal of *actual* suicides, it critiques the harrowing and needless loss of life, albeit discreetly neither naming militant Islamic terrorists nor contextualising America's role in creating this antagonism or its role thereafter.

The second short in the same film is the French contribution by Claude Lelouche, almost entirely silent, in which a deaf French woman, living in New York and traumatised by the demise of her relationship with a local tourist guide for the deaf, sits down to write a 'break-up' letter to her partner. Urging fate to give her a sign that will convince her that the relationship can be rescued, she opens the door to the man, completely oblivious to the attack on the World Trade Centre that has happened whilst she has been writing. Her boyfriend is covered in ash and they embrace emotionally. Again, Lelouche's short deprives the viewer of any context but illustrates how an ordinary - if upsetting for the woman involved - relationship breakdown is transformed by the extraordinary and tragic events of the morning. Here, the death and destruction elsewhere in the city renews and invigorates a love that was in danger of collapsing.

Indian filmmaker Mira Nair presents a highly emotive story in which an Indian immigrant family, living in New York at the time of the attack, suffers the tragedy of a son dying in the rubble of the World Trade Centre after trying to rescue survivors. However, this information only emerges after his family has endured investigation by various authorities, who suspect the young man of having been involved in the organisation behind the attack. At his funeral service, despite the indignity and humiliation of such suspicion, all the more amplified because of their race and their neighbours' ignorance, his mother remains proud that her son is ultimately recognised as the hero she believes him to be.

Nair's short contains an actual funeral and eulogy, and illustrates the sorrow of a grieving family and community after the young man's death in heroic circumstances. In keeping with the kind of critical tendency demonstrated by Wenders, though, there is a sense of anger, even if it is subsumed or repressed within the immediate emotion of grief as a mother mourns the loss of her son: the speed of the family's neighbours to suspect them of harbouring a terrorist, and their implicit racism, is hard to take for the family, and is shocking for the viewer, since the sense is that many Asians and Arabs living in America were subjected to the same suspicion and accompanying maltreatment. Crucially, there is an examination of the panic of White Americans as they become more and more paranoid, more willing to see an enemy in their midst than recognise the different effects that 9/11 had on different members of society. This film, in opposition to *Man on Wire*'s attempt to humanise the Twin Towers, is a call to ensure a sense of common humanity prevails in periods of crisis.

Global Perspectives on Rest of World After 9/11

The majority of the remaining shorts in the *11'09''01: September 11* collection testify to the impact 9/11 had on other places in the world though they illustrate how they view their own world through the prism of 9/11. In short, 9/11 is seen as a means by which non-American filmmakers can view their own history. Explicit indication of *11'09''01: September 11*'s global context and the world-wide impact of 9/11 is provided by titles before the short films commence. Here, an editorial statement reads: '11 Directors from different countries and cultures. 11 Visions of the tragic events that occurred in New York City on September 11th 2001. 11 points of view committing their subjective conscience. Complete freedom of expression.'

A brief synopsis of a selection of these shorts illustrates the kinds of approaches made to global perspectives of 9/11, and some of the themes that emerge from them. The first film is by Samira Makhmalbaf from Iran. A young female teacher, after finally managing to assemble her class in a make-shift classroom under some arches, attempts in vain to hold a minute's silence for a disaster that has occurred in America. The children struggle to comprehend the scale and significance of this event and instead resort to a theological debate about God's capacity for destruction. The teacher takes them outside to look up at a huge chimney in order to make a comparison between that and the larger size of the World Trade Centre. The camera angle, focalising the narrative through the children's experience, makes the chimney look like one of the Twin Towers, complete with voluminous plumes of smoke billowing forth.

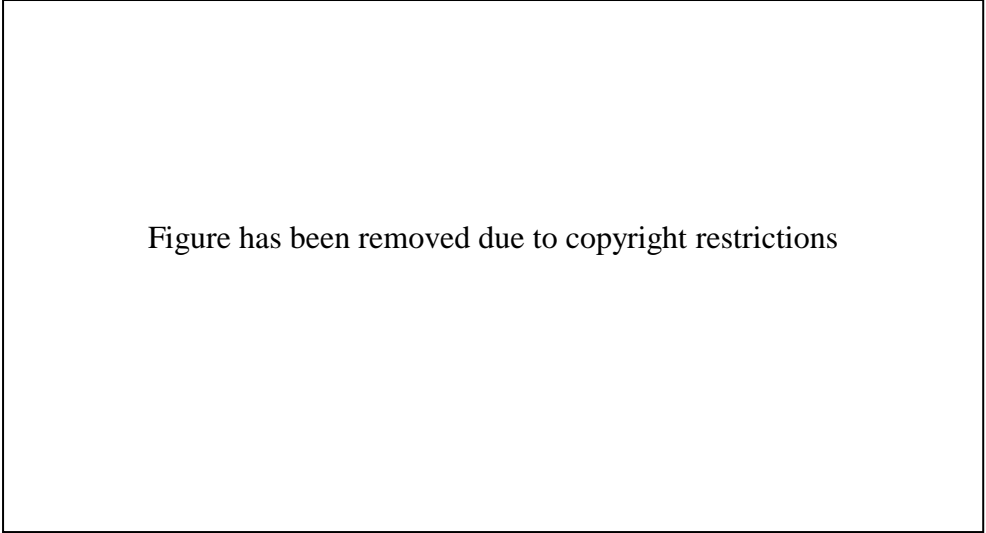


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Fig 22: Samira Makhmalbaf's short in 11'09''01: *September 11*

Following Lelouche's short, there is one by Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine. Chahine's film initially takes place at the World Trade Centre as he is shooting a film on location there. At a press conference back home, the day after the attacks, he finds he cannot indulge journalists' questions and instead wanders to the shore. Here he witnesses the ghost of an American soldier as it emerges from the sea, whereupon they discuss the impact of American foreign policy over the years, using 9/11 as a platform for this discussion. They are joined by the ghost of a Palestinian suicide bomber with whom they continue the debate, in terms of terrorist violence. The film is, essentially, a humanist lament that wonders why 'we do not do enough for others.'

The sixth short, by Ken Loach, records the writing of a letter whose global narrative spans three continents: it is set in London, inspired by the attacks on New York and recollects events in Chile on September 11, 1973. Its author recalls the election of Salvador Allende, the feeling of empowerment it gave the working class of Chile, the CIA-backed coup in Chile in 1973, the torture he, and thousands like him, endured at the hands of the Pinochet regime, and his subsequent emigration to

England. This short literally enunciates the connections of global relations as it is first and foremost a letter of sympathy and an expression of shared pain.

Collectively, the inherent difficulties at the heart of being a witness to an event like 9/11 that is simultaneously local, national, and global are evident in the short films comprising *11'09''01: September 11*. In particular two distinct tendencies are discernible which, in terms of an individual's perception of the terrorist attacks and location; both attest to the concept of 'foreign-ness.' Namely, these are witnessing from another location or, if present in New York being 'obstructed' from the event in some way, be it culturally, racially or even through deafness: in these shorts, characters are either removed from the event by great distance or, if they are present in New York, are still essentially strangers or, at the very least, foreigners, bearing witness to the spectacle first hand, albeit with a certain detachment.

These complexities are illustrated in a number of ways. Most of the eleven shorts depict a character who suffers a form of bodily debilitation, whether physical or mental. In the Iranian film, the teacher cannot get her pupils to grasp the enormity of the 'global event' that has taken place in New York, for they are simply too young to understand the gravity of the attacks. An important global event, for them, is the news of the locals who have fallen down a well. The French film depicts a deaf woman who is completely unaware that the Twin Towers have been hit or collapsed; indeed, to illustrate her cut-off, almost solipsistic existence, the buildings' collapse are visual metaphors for her relationship breaking up. Chahine's film, features the ghost of an American soldier, who debates America's foreign policy with the film maker, as well as a Palestinian suicide bomber who discusses the reasons behind his decision to sacrifice himself so violently: in short, two of the film's main characters are dead but have 'moved on' to another plane of understanding. Danis Tanovic's short portrays a

young woman who participates in monthly political demonstrations whose male friend is wheelchair bound. The reason why the boy in Burkina-Faso leaves school is so that he can get a job to pay for his sick mother who is depicted in seriously poor health, lying on the ground with a drip fastened to her arm. The old man in Sean Penn's film suffers from a mental disorder illustrated by the denial of his wife's death. Furthermore, in the Japanese contribution, a soldier's traumatic response to the horrors of the second world war affects him physically and mentally to the extent that he acts like, and possibly thinks himself to be, a snake.

These sensory or bodily impediments allegorise the difficulties in remote witnessing: clearly one cannot perceive phenomena in all their aspects when the senses with which one gathers information are imperfect, incomplete, or overwhelmed. Other bodily imperfections can be linked to this breakdown of sensory perception since there is a necessary breakdown or lapse in wholistic sensory – thus witnessing – experience. And so bodily imperfections weaken complete, or authoritative appreciation or understanding of the event, even if, on the other hand, geographical distance can provide more of an overview.

Physical distance plays a clear part in all these films but is particularly central to Ken Loach's film since it depicts an exiled Chilean, who expresses his sorrow with Americans. Though living, now, in London following the coup in 1973, he uses his witnessing of 9/11 to recall the September 11 that personally affected him first hand. The camera watches as he writes and recites his letter to the citizens of the United States, focusing on their separate but shared experiences, and emotionally concludes by saying he will remember them and hopes that they will remember him in return. The physical distance between this Chilean man, his homeland and New York is nevertheless translated into an expression of empathy and solidarity. On the other

hand, distance has the opposite effect on the television reporter from Israel, who refuses to accept that a simultaneous tragedy occurring so far away can be registered as more dramatic than the one she is trying to cover. There is no sign of empathy or solidarity here.

Regardless of the manner in which 9/11 interrupts or disrupts or the extent to which it is registered in the lives and behaviour of individuals in different countries around the world, it is clear that these short films illustrate the impact of the attacks on a globalised world and also demonstrate the diverse reception of the event, particularly the very different ways it can be witnessed accounting for distance and national or cultural emplacement.

If the collection of shorts serves as an initial response to 9/11 that articulates how events in America were absorbed into the life and discourse of other nations, then *A Few Days in September* (Santiago Amigorena, 2009) also makes such connections incarnate, albeit many years later, perhaps providing a more reflective, perhaps a more judicious perspective. The elements that feature in the shorts (and indeed, in most of these post-9/11 global films) are present in Amigorena's film too, namely a narrative that spans different continents, characters from different nations, but crucially also a number of American characters. However, *A Few Days in September* contrasts with *11'09''01: September 11*, not simply in terms of its cynical tone, but also because it neither documents the aftermath of the tragedy of 9/11. Indeed, the film, while firmly establishing physical and financial connections between the United States and Europe, seems unconcerned with offering a sympathetic view of the event, and its perspective is clearly Euro-centric. It stands detached from a sense of the spectacular, emotional, and sensational (three phenomena that usually surround treatments of 9/11) and offers

a polemical back-story, and a sometimes irreverent judgement on the circumstances, and human expediency, that led up to the terrorist attack on September 11.

A Few Days in September begins on 5 September, 2001 and follows French agent Irène Montano (Juliette Binoche) as she picks up a young woman, Orlando (Sara Forestier), and takes her to Paris to meet with her estranged father, Elliot (Nick Nolte), whom she has not seen for ten years. At the small hotel where they meet, Elliot's step-son, David (Tom Riley), arrives from America for the same reason, though he had seen Elliot some weeks previously. The unexpected arrival of another American agent, William Pound (John Turturro), also on Elliot's trail, causes some consternation for Irène and she ushers the two step-siblings out of the hotel to the safety of her own apartment. Over the course of the following week, a game of cat-and-mouse takes place where Irène, Orlando and David track Elliot down to Venice (on the advice of a mysterious duo who represent a banking group) and William Pound, initially thrown off the scent in Paris, eventually catches up with them there.

It becomes evident to the two siblings that their father is, and was, involved in governmental intelligence work, work that initially resulted in the death of Orlando's mother in Baghdad on the eve of the first Gulf War, and also to him needing to escape back home to America. Now that Elliot has returned to his former occupation, he is privy to delicate political information that he benefits from by passing on to the bankers' representatives who make appropriate stock market transactions and give him a percentage of their profits. They are particularly agitated at the current juncture as he has disappeared after advising a withdrawal of all their assets from American territories due to an impending stock market crash. The sum that they envision he would make from his percentage is in the tens of millions, and he has summoned his children in order to pass on that money to them. The bankers' representatives impart

this information confidentially to Irène, who reasonably questions what kind of an event could trigger such a dramatic economic meltdown. She is told that the assassination of the United States President or a war would be examples of such a catastrophic incident, although, with hindsight, the viewer can afford to assume that the incident in question is actually the terrorist attacks. Indeed, as the film concludes, local television sets in Venice display reports, and images, of the attack on the World Trade Centre.

Thus, the preferred reading of the film is that, ultimately, there *was* information of terrorist activity in advance of the attack: while the incidental drama is fictional, especially concerning intelligence agents cashing-in on impending tragedy, there is a factual element underpinning the narrative as well. Therefore, with fore-knowledge of 9/11 as the film's theme, a coherent critique of American foreign policy, intelligence activity, and governmental negligence develops at the heart of the narrative. The film notes a kind of conspiracy, or at least a collective expediency, among those who stood to gain from the attacks. The film, therefore, accuses the politicians, and intelligence agents, in possession of information and money of elitism and selfish disregard for human life.

A device that acts as a visual metaphor for this European, ambiguous perspective, is Irène's blurred vision: she regularly takes off her glasses, and when she does the shot (not necessarily from her viewpoint) goes out of focus. Eventually, when asked by the somewhat naïve David why she does this, she replies, "to see things differently." This can be interpreted as the difference between the two cultures: the clarity associated with David's vision needs to be altered to achieve a more penetrating view of geopolitical machinations. David's clear, but naïve vision takes the world at face value. Irène's is a sceptical view, based on years working in an arena

that is covert and kept hidden from the public, that assumes the truth is so incomplete as to render their conclusions imperfect.

The criticism of American foreign policy, in a similar tendency to American films such as *Syriana* contextualises 9/11 rather than simply depicting the day's events alone. However, in this particular case, *A Few Days in September* foregrounds a European perspective. Though the entire world was to feel the effects of 9/11 and America's reaction to it, here, due to the way the film ends just as the attacks occur, 9/11 is experienced not as an event and its aftermath but as a lead up to an event. Thus, there are a series of incidents that connect France and Italy to America, which imply the well-known 'future,' but the subtle reference to the attacks both underlines the distance from America and the amoral actions of the few – 9/11 is reported on a small television, almost insignificant in the midst of such political and financial intrigues (not to mention a shoot out between Irène and William Pound). The viewer is thus left with the experience of an American event as a high-stakes gamble, and for the time being, life seems to carry on as usual.

Conclusion

A poster for the film *Syriana* asserts that 'everything is connected,' and 'everything' in the context of the film is politics, law, the oil/energy industry, migrant labour and terrorism. The poster depicts a close-up of the face of George Clooney, as Bob Baer, with what appears to be a rip in the paper that has 'torn off' Baer's eyes. Baer is one of the few characters in the film who is able to observe these connections and can, thus, appreciate the political ramifications thereof, but his organs of observation are shown, in the poster, to be removed and, therefore, literal observation is impossible.

This image offers comment on the act of observing the machinations of political and commercial interaction, then, but remains somewhat ambiguous: it obscures Baer's identity, so does it suggest that the audience, too, ought to be making these connections? Is it to be taken as a *punishment* for witnessing – and, thus, knowing – too much, an act to deter scrutiny of the relationship between politics and global commerce?

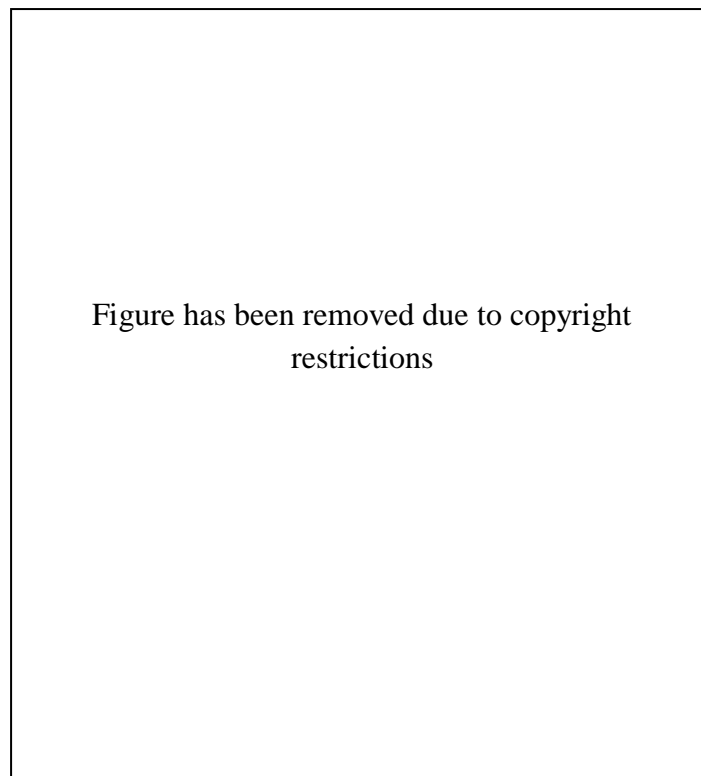


Fig 23: Poster for *Syriana*

Certainly Baer's counterpart in the French film *A Few Days in September*, Elliot, also suffers for his knowledge. Still, the image has a pessimistic tone that, firstly, is in keeping with the punishment meted out to Baer in the film, and his ostracism from the CIA, and secondly, suggests that making these connections is a subversive activity, and the knowledge thereby gained is dangerous to its recipient. Nevertheless, it is an appropriate image to advertise such a film as it highlights the issues of global

connections, to which the film alludes, as well as the phenomenon of witnessing, central to understanding reactions to 9/11 across the world.

The global connections that are manifested through various interactions, be they commercial, political, or, culturally, in terms of information and image transmission, ensured that the events of September 11 would be registered all across the world. This, and the fact that it was perpetrated by a disaffected terrorist organisation from the Middle-East (a group that had received financial support and training from America), harboured by Afghanistan's Taliban regime, the fact that its repercussions engendered not just a war but a new *casus belli*, all contribute to defining how 9/11 can be understood as a global event. Its context involved global dynamics and the attacks, in turn, became a context for a new era in global relations.

In the realm of culture, as the authors of *Global Hollywood 2* point out, Hollywood derives a significant proportion of its financial income from overseas box office revenue. Due to what Tino Balio describes as the globalisation of Hollywood in the 1990s, in which corporate mergers that saw control of vertical and horizontal integration limited to a very few companies as well as such issues as commercialisation of state broadcasting and innovations in distribution technology, saw Hollywood become one of the most, if not *the* most dominant cultural force in the world.⁵⁴³

One can look at the sheer number of films produced in the last decade that take place in both America and in places across the world to see the strength of global connections that have solidified since the terrorist attacks. Apart from films already

⁵⁴³ Balio, Tino, "A major presence in all of the world's important markets": The globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s,' in Neale, Steve and Smith, Murray, eds, *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.58 – 73.

mentioned in this chapter, one should consider *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), the Jason Bourne trilogy, *The Interpreter* (Sidney Pollack, 2005), *Lord of War* (Andrew Niccol, 2006), and *Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007). Film, here, has the effect of essentially establishing ‘global’ relationships that the Bush Administration only managed to achieve in a very narrow and militaristic understanding of the term. Through cinema, then, September 11th is mediated through interaction with other nations.

The opposite is also true, that foreign or non-American cinema illustrates the impact of September 11th on the rest of the world by articulating its effects across the globe. This could be literal expressions of its impact, as in the shorts, that arguably underline the complexities of witnessing an event from a physical or cultural distance. It could be by providing a particular context for this historical event in the same manner as American films like *Syriana*, but as seen through the eyes of a more detached culture, as in *A Few Days in September*, while non-American film can also treat the aftermath of 9/11, and provide a different perspective on international issues. Thus, in terms of depicting connections with other nations, an event such as 9/11 can be understood in a twin global context: acting as a prism, via cinema, for the articulation of American experience in relation to other countries, and, also, for other nations’ articulation of their own experiences, including their own history.

Conclusion

The relationship between the events of September 11, 2001 and film is a close one, and for the historian pre-dates the day of the World Trade Centre attacks: many television viewers' accounts of witnessing the images of the hi-jacked aircraft crashing into the Twin Towers momentarily mistook the news broadcast for a Hollywood blockbuster. This misrecognition phenomenon subsequently plays a fundamental role in the connection between 9/11 and cinema; because the American film industry had long produced similar spectacles, witnesses at first found it difficult to distinguish the actuality from familiar, but fictitious, images of similar occurrences. In a sense, then, the story of 9/11's influence on Hollywood begins with Hollywood's influence on 9/11 – or rather, its influence on perceptions of 9/11.

Study of American cinema after 9/11 therefore usefully begins with the problem of how to disentangle the blurring of fiction and reality. Whilst there is no doubt that the film industry adapted to the new cultural environment, after an initial paralysis that suggested an understandable incapacity, and inability to know how exactly to react to this blurring of representational effects. Studios were hesitant to release many types of films – those that depicted attacks on American soil, films that included scenes of graphic violence, and films that included shots of the towers of the World Trade Centre, several of which were shelved until such time as they could be deemed acceptable.⁵⁴⁴ The fact that it took only two months

⁵⁴⁴ See for example, Jensen, Jeff and Svetkey, Benjamin, 'Script Check – In the wake of terrorism, execs scramble to rework their film schedules,' *Entertainment Weekly*, 21/09/01, <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,175677,00.html>>

for temporarily-postponed films to be screened to test audiences testifies to Hollywood's overwhelming profit-motives, and capacity for capitalising on the emerging thirst for revenge it detected in the film-going public. Eventually the film industry adjusted successfully to existence in the wake of 9/11, even if in the immediate aftermath it paused for a degree of self-reflection. Contrary to claims that nothing would ever be the same again after 9/11, it is evident from trade figures and production slates that it has been business as usual in Hollywood.

This study confronts the issue of how Hollywood reacts to historical events. As the above claim states, the relationship between Hollywood and 9/11 was a close one, a tie strengthened by depictions of actual events that occurred on that day, or believed that have occurred, but also a relationship that grew due to subsequent inclusion of, absorption into, and dramatisation of post-9/11 issues in a wide number of films, and a wide number of types of films. The connection between culture, in this study's case cinema, and history seems to be complex: events stimulate and inspire cultural expression and content while the dramatisation of the myriad possibilities and potential outcomes of events, in this case influenced by post-9/11 concerns, offer a template or model to film-goers in terms of how to respond or how not to respond, how to behave or how not behave, how to cope or how not to cope, in the face and in the aftermath of these historical events. This does not mean that film can properly heal victims of violence, but it does show that Hollywood does not exist in a vacuum isolated from what is happening in the outside world, and that film engages these issues (though it should be acknowledged that this is not a new phenomenon since Hollywood has responded to many crises in the past).

The attacks of September 11 did not happen in a political vacuum: the political and ideological functions of film in the wake of the attacks are central concepts that underpin this thesis. The way in which films treat post-9/11 issues such as historical or political contexts for 9/11, heroism, trauma and other psychological phenomena such as repression, race relations, and globalism for instance, can be interpreted in terms of political inclination. For example, this thesis argues that the films *World Trade Center* and *United 93* fulfil the function of a memorial in their uncontroversial, but selective and unifying representations of the attacks and their aftermath. The unity achieved by these films comes at a cost: their refusal to place their narratives in a context that would explain the terrorists' motivations and reasons for executing such an extreme plan. Their conclusions that Americans were innocent victims, and the attacks completely unprovoked cannot but affirm that any measure or policy pursued by the Bush Administration was legitimate, mounts no challenge to any of these policies and therefore renders them conservative.

The acknowledgement of a new and painful reality contributes to the employment and development of various realist aesthetics. Different realist strategies implicate the dominance of a particular ideology in each type of film: *World Trade Center* focuses viewer attention on the brutal spectacle of 9/11 but, concentrating its narrative on a select few characters, permits only a narrow understanding of the event itself. In contrast, the terrorist events in *Syriana* and *Babel* are but one event in an array of encounters and incidents; the democratic allotment of screen time suggests a dynamic network of forces at work and a complex series of cause and effect. The difference in approach to *Syriana* and *Babel* as compared to *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, render them more

progressive than the American films since their narrative structures allow for a more detailed and expansive portrayal of the many forces and factors (and even sympathetic portrayals of potential extremists) that, combined, lead to terrible and violent acts.

However, realist strategies do not always lead to single interpretations of a film's political implication, indeed it would be a mistake to try and pin down an absolute meaning. For instance, *United 93* can be considered conservative due to its lack of context, but it does at least include terrorist characters, and it depicts them as humans experiencing feelings such as doubt and nervousness, despite the murderous nature of their plans. In that respect *United 93* seems less conservative than *World Trade Center*. Also, when analysed through the prism of theories of epic theatre (as applied to cinema), *Death of a President* would appear to fulfill Bertolt Brecht's terms as a politically radical work designed to draw attention to its own form, and thus to the issues it elaborates. Yet, when studied alongside writings by Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard and their critiques of the cultural tendency where aspects of real life are copied and passed off as the real thing, the same film can be argued to not be engaged at all, nor contribute anything meaningful to a political debate.

The realist tendency is not confined to fiction films, but has also witnessed an increase in documentary film-making that has continued to flourish since 2001. The reasons behind the growth of non-fiction films suggests the underlying significance of the connection between realism and the post-attack American psyche at the time, namely the construction of a secure narrative that can be relied upon to provide an infallible and substantial body of knowledge in a context of uncertainty and vulnerability. However, a number of these documentaries were

produced in the first place because of the perceived failure of mainstream news organisations' inability or reluctance to hold the Bush Administration to account for its actions, particularly restrictions on civil liberties, security legislation, and an aggressive foreign policy.

Discourses of the real do not account for all the ways in which the 2001 terrorist attacks had a bearing on American society and film, as analyses of certain genre films demonstrate. A wave of Westerns were produced in the years after 9/11 into which penetrated the debates surrounding 'hard' and 'soft' masculinity (as highlighted by Susan Faludi), and those surrounding immigration and race. The manner these issues were dealt with by a director would indicate a distinct political position. For instance, a Western that required its male protagonists to be tough and rugged in order to survive and be considered a 'hero' conformed to a conservative view of masculinity while one that depicted 'soft' masculinity with compassion challenged this idea.

Relying on film to assuage the emotional and psychological effects of a disaster such as 9/11 has its limits. The extent of emotional healing is questioned by study of comic-book films and *their* treatment of the hero figure. Most notable is the revelation of the psychology of trauma peculiar to post-9/11 America. The conclusions that are drawn from analyses of super-heroism in recent super-hero films suggest that the depictions of super-heroes, their own personal traumas and discovery of their particular power, are available as metaphors and proxies for Americans who were frustrated by their inability to prevent disaster or save the day on September 11th. The continuing adaptations of comic-book characters - recent examples include *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Joe Johnston, 2011), and *Green Lantern* (Martin Campbell, 2011) - and suitably 'compensatory'

narratives points to the fact that the recovery process, alluded to above, is still ongoing.

This thesis, then, suggests the ways in which Hollywood, and by extension America, has adjusted and adapted to life since 9/11. It also suggests that the films that were produced in 9/11's wake constitute a distinct era, thematically and visually, in Hollywood history.

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25th Hour (Spike Lee, 2002)

3:10 to Yuma (James Mangold, 2007)

300 (Zack Snyder, 2007)

9/11: Press For Truth (Ray Nowosielski, 2006)

A Few Days in September (Santiago Amigorena, 2009)

The Alamo (John Lee Hancock, 2004)

All The President's Men (Alan J. Pakula, 1976)

An Inconvenient Truth (Davis Guggenheim, 2006)

Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

The Appaloosa (Ed Harris, 2008)

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (Andrew Dominik, 2007)

Babel (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

Batman Begins (Christopher Nolan, 2005)

Behind Enemy Lines (John Moore, 2001)

Big Trouble (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002)

Black Hawk Down (Ridley Scott, 2001)

Bloody Sunday (Paul Greengrass, 2002)

Bowling for Columbine (Michael Moore, 2002)

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005)

Broken Arrow (Delmer Daves, 1950)

Buffalo Soldiers (Gregor Jordan, 2001)

Captain America: The First Avenger (Joe Johnston, 2011)

Chicago 10 (Brett Morgen, 2007)

The China Syndrome (James Bridges, 1978)

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941)

Code Name: Geronimo (John Stockwell)

Collateral Damage (Andrew Davis, 2002)

Constantine (Francis Lawrence, 2005)

The Corporation (Jennifer Abbott and Mark Achbar, 2004)

The Dark Knight (Christopher Nolan, 2008)

The Day After Tomorrow (Roland Emmerich, 2004)

DC 9/11: Time of Crisis (TV) (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 2003)

Death of a President (Gabriel Range, 2006)

Delta Force One (Joseph Zito, 1999)

Diary of a Country Priest (Robert Bresson, 1951)

Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)

Die Hard 2 (Renny Harlin, 1990)

The Dream is Alive (Graeme Ferguson, 1985)

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)

Elektra (Rob Bowman, 2005)

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (Alex Gibney, 2005)

Fahrenheit 9/11 (Michael Moore, 2004)

The Fantastic Four (Tim Story, 2005)

Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999)

Flags of Our Fathers (Clint Eastwood, 2006)

Gangs of New York (Martin Scorsese, 2002)

Germany Year Zero (Roberto Rossellini, 1948)

Grease (Randal Kleiser, 1978)

Green Lantern (Martin Campbell, 2011)
Green Zone (Paul Greengrass, 2010)
Hardball (Brian Robbins, 2001)
Hellboy (Guillermo del Toro, 2004)
Hiroshima, Mon Amour (Alain Resnais, 1959)
Hulk (Ang Lee, 2003)
The In Crowd (Mary Lambert, 2000)
Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996)
The Interpreter (Sidney Pollack, 2005)
Iron Man (Jon Favreau, 2008)
Julie and Julia (Nora Ephron, 2009)
Knowing (Alex Proyas, 2009)
Land of Plenty (Wim Wenders, 2004)
Letters From Iwo Jima (Clint Eastwood, 2006)
Lions for Lambs (Robert Redford, 2007)
Lord of War (Andrew Niccol, 2006)
The Manchurian Candidate (Jonathan Demme, 2004)
Man on Wire (James Marsh, 2008)
Manufacturing Dissent (Rick Caine and Debbie Melnyk, 2007)
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (John Ford, 1962)
March of the Penguins (Luc Jacquet, 2005)
The Matrix (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999)
The Mayor of the Sunset Strip (George Hickenlooper, 2003)
Medium Cool (Haskell Wexler, 1969)
Men in Black 2 (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002)
Michael Clayton (Tony Gilroy, 2007)
The Missing (Ron Howard, 2003)

Munich (Steven Spielberg, 2006)
My Darling Clementine (John Ford, 1946)
No Country for Old Men (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2007)
Norma Rae (Martin Ritt, 1979)
Nose Bleed (unreleased)
Ocean's Eleven (Steven Soderbergh, 2001)
Once Upon A Time In The West (Sergio Leone, 1968)
Open Range (Kevin Costner, 2003)
The Parallax View (Alan J. Pakula, 1974)
The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson, 2004)
People I Know (Daniel Algrant, 2002)
The Prisoner or: How I Planned to Kill Tony Blair (Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlain, 2007)
The Punisher (Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004)
The Quiet American (Phillip Noyce, 2002)
The Recruit (Roger Donaldson, 2003)
Redacted (Brian De Palma, 2007)
Reign Over Me (Mike Binder, 2007)
Rendition (Gavin Hood, 2007)
Right At Your Door (Chris Gorak, 2006)
Rudy: The Rudy Giuliani Story (TV) (Robert Dornhelm, 2003)
The Searchers (John Ford, 1956)
Seraphim Falls (David Von Ancken, 2006)
Sidewalks of New York (Edward Burns, 2001)
Silver City (John Sayles, 2004)
Silver Lode (Allan Dwan, 1954)
Sin City (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005)

Sir! No Sir! (David Zeiger, 2006)
Spider Man (Sam Raimi, 2002)
Spider-Man 2 (Sam Raimi, 2002)
Spirit of America (Chuck Workman, 2001)
Stagecoach (John Ford, 1939)
Stealth (Rob Cohen, 2005)
Summer '68 (Newsreel Collective, 1969)
The Sum of All Fears (Phil Alden Robinson, 2002)
Superman Returns (Bryan Singer, 2006)
Syriana (Steven Gaghan, 2005)
The Terminal (Steven Spielberg, 2004)
The Thing (John Carpenter, 1982)
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005)
Three Days of the Condor (Sidney Pollack, 1975)
The Time Machine (Simon Wells, 2002)
The Towering Inferno (John Guillermin, 1974)
Uncovered: The War on Iraq (Robert Greenwald, 2004)
United 93 (Paul Greengrass, 2006)
V for Vendetta (James McTeigue, 2006)
Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price (Robert Greenwald, 2004)
War of the Worlds (Steven Spielberg, 2005)
Waydowntown (Gary Burns, 2000)
The Weather Underground (Sam Green and Bill Siegel, 2003)
We Were Soldiers (Randall Wallace, 2002)
Why We Fight (Eugene Jarecki, 2005)
Why We Fight series (Frank Capra *et al*, 1943 - 45)
Windtalkers (John Woo, 2002)

Winter Soldier (Winter Film Collective, 1972)

World Trade Center (Oliver Stone, 2006)

X-Men 2 (Bryan Singer, 2003)

X-Men: The Last Stand (Brett Ratner, 2006)