THE DAMAGED MALE AND THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WAR FILM: MASOCHISM, ETHICS, AND SPECTATORSHIP.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the depiction of the damaged male in contemporary American war films in the period 1990 to 2010. All the films in this thesis deploy complex strategies but induce simple and readily accessible pleasures in order to mask, disavow or displace the operations of US imperialism.

It is my argument that the premier emotive trope for emblematising and offering up the damaged male as spectacle and political tool is the American war film. I also argue that masochistic subjectivity (and spectatorship) is exploited in these films, sometimes through using it as a radical transformative tool in order to uncover the contradictions and abuses in US imperial power, but mostly through utilizing its distinct narrative and aesthetic qualities in order to make available to spectators the pleasures of consuming these images, and also to portray the damaged male as a seductive and desirable subjectivity to adopt.

The contemporary war film offers up fantasies of imperilled male psychologies and then projects these traumatic (or "weak"/"victimised") states into the white domestic and suburban space of the US. Accordingly this enables identification with the damaged male, and all his attendant narratives of dispossession, innocence, and victimhood, and then doubles and reinforces this identification by threatening the sanctity and security of the US homeland.

My argument builds towards addressing ethical questions of spectatorial passivity and culpability that surround our engagement with global media, and mass visual culture in the context of war. I ultimately identify ethical spectatorship of contemporary war films as bolstering a neo-liberal project advancing the "turn to the self", and hence audiences could

unwittingly be engaged in shoring up white male ethno-centricity and the attendant forces of US cultural and geopolitical imperialism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

"What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?"

A Winter's Tale III.ii

Through American cinema of the 1990s and 2000s there seems to be a preponderance of (mostly white) male military characters suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or similar psychological ailments, populating war films, or films which use war as their backdrop. Accordingly, this thesis is about the depiction of the damaged male in contemporary American war films in the period 1990 to 2010. In this introduction, I shall first lay out what I mean by 'the damaged male' and the 'contemporary American war film', and then explain the formal aesthetic and narrative qualities that link the films I wish to bring into my argument. I will then culturally and politically justify why I have selected the time period 1990-2010 for study. The remainder of my introduction will then serve to explore in depth the key analytical tools I will be deploying in order to clearly delineate my framework and methodology. This will then be followed by a summary of the chapters that follow this introduction.

It is my argument that the premier emotive trope for emblematising and offering up the damaged male as spectacle and political tool is the American war film. I also argue that masochistic subjectivity (and spectatorship) is exploited in these films. Sometimes it is used as a radical transformative tool in order to uncover the contradictions and abuses in US neo-imperial[1] power, but mostly masochism's distinct narrative and aesthetic qualities are exploited

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[1] Joseph Nye has argued that US power is now increasingly rooted in the 'soft power' of cultural hegemony and globalized media, in addition to military action or physical, territorial, strategic and economic power. See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). Power, instead of solely being a function of physical force and military domination, is also located in the high-speed networks of data of the information economy, in which the internet, satellite communications, and global media are key

to make consuming images of pain and violence a pleasurable sensation, and also to portray the damaged male as a seductive and desirable subjectivity to adopt. I wish to explore why there is an emphasis on the damaged male in contemporary war cinema, how this damage is communicated to us, and ultimately, in the course of the textual analysis in my chapters, to investigate how spectators are sited in relationship to this portrayal of masculinity. The damaged male soldier or war veteran is postulated as a victim *par excellence* and is deployed in these films in order to disavow the belligerent neo-imperialism of US power. This process compels the spectator to 'desire' victimisation and self-abandonment, and hence posits a masochistic spectatorship, a spectatorship that can be read as either transformative or status quo confirming. Always though, whether this masochism is used in radical or conservative ways, there remains the ebb and flow of the ideological reserve[2] that endorses and seduces spectators into the masochistic fantasy of power and subjugation. To corrupt one of Kaja Silverman's key phrases[3], the subject in popular US visual culture is recruited to a 'submissive fiction'; a hegemonic mode that lauds victimhood, weakness, crisis, and self-abandonment as a means of formulating a contemporary national identity that discharges itself of culpability for the US's neo-imperial violence. This process conveniently entails the erasure of gender, race and class in formulating US national identity, replacing it with a monolithic image of crisis and suffering. This thesis will therefore attempt to reinsert questions of race, gender and class into the discourse of US national identity through examining the narratives of victimhood to be found in its depictions of damaged men in contemporary war films. Through using radical re-thinkings of masochism, masculinity studies in contemporary cinema, and the recent turn to

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players. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[2] Louis Althusser asserted that ideologies require an element of a belief in them, and this belief is manufactured and maintained outside of conscious thought processes. An ideological reserve then, is a pool of collective ideas, propositions, facts etc. that assist in the maintenance of this belief and hence perpetuate the dominant ideology. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 171-172

[3] "The dominant fiction", meaning the ideological reserve informing and constructing normative and compulsory patriarchal culture, used throughout *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992)

ethics in film spectatorship studies, I will attempt to disassemble this emphasis on victimhood and crisis. As mentioned above, Hollywood and American war films tend to be the premier emotive trope for emblematising and offering up the damaged, victimised male as spectacle, but more specifically, these films are generally the texts where victimhood and violence are distinctively sited as US-centred. Therefore, one of the primary reasons for focussing on these films is due to the privileging of a US perspective of pain and victimhood. Accordingly, it is rare to receive extended narrative and empathic involvement with civilian casualties, see the deaths of (what Hollywood identifies as) the enemy, or witness destroyed homes and cities. Instead, the most narrative time and space is devoted to the corporeal and psychological pain of US soldiers and their various turmoils. We never see the bombs from below.

So one of the principle questions this thesis seeks to answer is why is there this emphasis on American male trauma in this context, and also how is this trauma communicated to us, and how do we as spectators react to this, or site ourselves in relationship to this? The importance of these questions is rooted in the manner in which American foreign policy is represented on screen: it is presented as enthralling, visceral spectacle mired in the adrenaline soaked excitement of battle scenes and carnage. But it is also a nostalgic and conservative form of depiction which celebrates, commemorates, and memorialises images of its international occupations and interventions.[4] The manner in which the US manufactures its myths of national identity can tell us about the ways in which we, as cinema spectators, negotiate our

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[4] The foreign policy in itself is compelling; since the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001, strategic power in the US was consolidated with a massive shift towards a neo-conservative foreign policy influenced by think-tanks and private academic institutions such as the Project for a New American Century, the Bradley Foundation, the Hoover Institute at Stanford, and the School for Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University. For an account of the development of the influence of this ideology see Susan George, "Manufacturing Common Sense, or Cultural Hegemony for Beginners," *Selling US Wars*, ed. Achin Vanaik (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch, 2007), 53-87.

relationships to geopolitics and the system of global capitalism presided over by US market and trade dominance.

The films under consideration in this thesis are all remarkable for their shared characteristics. Obviously, they all share the same characteristic of being war films and hence depicting scenes of battle and violence, but there are also commonalities in the manner in which this violence is conveyed, both in terms of narrative and aesthetics. Many of the films include the unique narrative device of the 'surprise ending' in which a previous diegetic reality is subverted by crucial information disclosed towards the conclusion of the film. Most of the films under consideration also possess either a sense of achronology or chaotic narrative, or an emphasis on flashbacks and hallucinations that are embedded in the formal techniques of the film and form part of the film's diegesis. In terms of trauma, all the films either insist on a narrative focus on traumatic memory, or depict a central character who possesses post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this trauma being communicated through cinematic practice. This is achieved in these films by a specific stylistic practice. This might include using a bleached and washed out colour scheme and low density film stock; skin colour treated with make-up in order to seemingly possess a deathly pallor; geographies and locales of waste and ruination; blood, damage and debris; and images of death and bodily dismemberment and annihilation. It is also achieved through editing techniques such as the jump cut, shot fragments, and the overlaying of chaotic images. Finally, most of these films fetishize the hard male body or the technology and costume of war, and include within this fetishizing scenes of self-abasement and annihilation.

Later on in my introduction, many of these common characteristics of contemporary war films will be identified as compositing a "masochistic aesthetics", and the formal descriptions of what constitutes contemporary cinematic textual depictions of trauma. However, it is part of my argument that the films deploy these aesthetics without necessarily conforming to all the other formal properties of masochistic or traumatic subjectivity.

The Contemporary American War Film

Steve Neale has stated that the war film is more ambiguous than films in which 'scenes of combat are central and these scenes are dramatically central.'[5] This ambiguity is largely to do with the pre-eminence of the 'combat experience of World War II' remaining 'at the heart of most models and historical understandings of the Hollywood war film as genre'.[6] The term 'war film' in itself has slipped the moorings of its original meaning, since it was originally deployed to refer to films depicting 'the Civil War or the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century.'[7] A war film though is clearly more than just a text that for the large part depicts combat experiences. Indeed, even the term "war" is contentious in itself referring variously to grand multi-lateral military campaigns, or small regional conflicts, insurgencies, civil unrest, mass protest, and the like. War is to some extent a socially constructed and instituted term that may be applied to certain collections of violent acts, but not others.[8] So we have two problems here, firstly, a struggle to adequately define and map out what a war film is, and secondly, a difficulty in fixing the term "war".

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[5] Steve Neale, "War Films," *Hollywood and War: The* Film *Reader*, ed. J. David Slocum (London: Routledge, 2006), 23

[6] J. David Slocum, 'General Introduction', *Hollywood and War*, 2

[7] Neale, "War Films", 23

[8] Tim Allen, "Perceiving Contemporary Wars," *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (London: Zed, 1999)

Clearly, what a war is has changed dramatically since the days of the Hollywood war film's formative narrative and structural template, World War II. As Paul Virilio states, 'since Vietnam and throughout the seventies, the mediation of battle has grown ever more pronounced.'[9] The numerous technological advances in using digital, computer, and satellite technology in the arena of battle has led to combat becoming increasingly abstract and virtual for those who fight it. In addition to this, the depiction and reporting of war in film, television, news media, and other such channels of mass visual culture, has been transformed by similar technological advances. George Gerbner, discussing this issue in the light of the Persian Gulf War, has asserted that 'Desert Storm was the first major global media crisis orchestration that made instant history.'[10] Obviously, an important component of this was the way in which the war was managed by the military and covered by the media. Significant events were staged for the television news cameras including video footage from bombing raids and cruise missiles being displayed at press conferences. In addition, numerous frontline reports were televised in front of a backdrop of the Baghdad night sky lit up with mortars exploding and tracer fire.[11] In this sense, Gerbner demonstrates that the visual culture of global news networks, combined with a strict control of war-time media by governments, has produced a new form of public interaction with the media, and vernacular visual culture. News reports and media images are used in order to manufacture an interpretation of historical events in more or less real time, a distinctly new phenomenon that has only emerged post-Gulf war. Therefore, the Persian Gulf War marks a watershed in representation of warfare and

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[9] Paul Virilio, 'A Travelling Shot Over Eighty Years', *Hollywood and War*, 52
[10] George Gerbner, "Persian Gulf War, The Movie," *The Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Persepctive*, ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 247
[11] For a fascinating account of media organisations' moral culpability in perpetuating this dispassionate portrayal of warfare and the effect this has on media spectatorship see Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media At War* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 197-243

delineates a precise historical moment when both the depiction and consumption of images of war changed.

This changing conception of war also means that the idea of the war film genre is in flux too. Guy Westwell has stated that the contemporary war film is rooted in a 'shift' that 'sits atop a massive change in the actual way in which war is waged, a change precipitated by the end of the Cold War and the uncontested dominance of American hegemony in both political and military terms'.[12] The period after 1990, in political terms, was characterized by a marked shift in US foreign policy and a massive global reconfiguration of power relations. This was partially due to a repudiation of the damaging effects of Vietnam on the US national psyche. Vietnam was arguably the first time that the American public became aware of or questioned on a mass scale the brutal and belligerent basis of US foreign policy.[13] The American project of military interference in world affairs under the guise of 'bringing freedom' (when in fact US foreign policy is geared towards bringing free enterprise to US shores) lost its 'aura of idealism.'[14] What the Vietnam War did to the public reputation of US foreign policy is essentially to temporarily halt the progress of American exceptionalism – that is, the doctrine by which the US defines itself as 'an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but superior among nations.'[15] Accordingly, under Ronald Reagan and George Bush, the US embarked on a process of 'national renewal', a project that would culminate in a spectacle of large-scale military power and domination, i.e. the Persian Gulf

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[12] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 84

[13] Although public campaigns against US imperialism are anything but a new concept; Mark Twain famously campaigned against the exceptionalist patriotic chest beating of the Spanish-American war (1898) and a significant discourse protesting the US's international relations plans arose. However, it was only really with the Vietnam war that protest, opposition and debate became woven into the fabric of daily life.

[14] Mike Marqusee, "The Iron Click: American Exceptionalism and US Empire," *Selling US Wars*, ed. Achin Vanaik (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch, 2007), 103

[15] Trevor McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Foreign Policy since 1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 1.

War. Therefore, the changing conception of the contemporary war film is predicated on a crucial shift in how the US positioned itself on the global stage, and stepped out of the shadow of Vietnam. The US's new position was predicated on the twin pillars of clear strategic aims[16], and the spectacle of immense force.[17]

The changing nature of war and war films also means that monumental organising schemes such as the concept of "genre" may not be useful anymore. Indeed, as Westwell observes, it is probably more useful to conceive of 'cycles' of films, rather than grand, monolithic genres.[18] The very notion of genre itself may not be that helpful, since 'different genres are designated according to different criteria' with science fiction and the western 'defined by setting and narrative content', but horror and comedy 'defined or conceived around the intended emotional effect of the film upon the viewer'.[19] Further instability in the concept of genre is noted in the 'ironic hybridisation' of Hollywood film since the 1980s, in which genres, styles, and conventions are blended.[20] This hybridisation is notable in films as diverse as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), which mixes elements of science fiction, film noir, and conspiracy films, and *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), which blends the gangster movie, romance, blaxploitation, and the road movie. Janet Staiger points out additionally that this hybridisation has been present in its un-ironic form throughout the history of Hollywood film, with many films not 'easily arranged into categories'.[21]

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[16] Andre Gunder Frank, "A Third World War: A Political Economy of the Persian Gulf War and the New World Order" in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Perspective*. Ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner and Herbert I. Schiller (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992)

[17] See the 'Shock and awe' tactics deployed by the US military during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the frankly ludicrous sight of US marines ostentatiously displaying their attack drills on a largely deserted airfield during the 1994 invasion of Haiti.

[18] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 9

[19] Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 23

[20] Jim Collins, 'Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity' in *Film Theory Goes To The Movies*. Ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (London: Routledge, 1992), 245

[21] Janet Staiger, 'Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History' in *Film Genre Reader 3*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2003), 185

The product of this seems to be a necessity to avoid a grand and totalising conception of what constitutes the contemporary war film. Insofar as my argument is concerned, a flexible definition of the war film is required that can accommodate the numerous differing narratives, subject matters, marketing and media contexts, and cultural and social frameworks that account for the production and consumption of these films.

Due to the US's reconfigured foreign policy, the hybridisation of film styles, the shifts in cultural and political conceptions of war and its representation, and the useful concept of cycles of films (over the more conventional term, genre), most of the films discussed in this thesis are not regular combat movies. Although they feature scenes depicting combat violence, these scenes (although essential in some ways) are not central to the narrative. For example, *Courage Under Fire* concerns the attempted reconstruction of a narrative chain of events of an evacuation operation during the Persian Gulf War, most of *Jacob's Ladder's* narrative is located in (apparently) New York, and in *In The Valley of Elah*, the only military action we see is courtesy of brief diegetic inserts of corrupted digital audio-visual files. We are therefore dealing with films that although may be grouped together, do not adhere to a set of generic conventions. These are films that instead of being exclusively to do with a particular war, use wars, combat scenes, and military violence in order to assert the primacy of American male pain and victimhood.

For the purposes of this thesis, the contemporary American war film is therefore one that crucially depicts military action as a result of US foreign policy (even if this is peripheral to the main action), makes a spectacle of male suffering, incorporates (through pastiche, or un-

ironically ingrained into the aesthetic style) the new post-Gulf War visual regimes for representing war, and narrates anxieties regarding the shifting nature of the US's geo-political position and the transforming nature of war itself.

The Damaged Male

Steve Neale argues that war films are contemporaneously being studied 'in light of the fact that the war film is one of the few genres, as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) has recently confirmed, in which male characters are regularly permitted to weep as a means of expressing their physical and emotional stress and hence their physical and emotional vulnerability.'[22] So the current cycles of war films can be seen as the site of what might be dubbed, an unblocking of male emotion, and are therefore an appropriate form for making a spectacle of male suffering. Historically, Hollywood war films are the foremost vehicle for emblematising US national identity. In their iconographies of soldiering and male interaction, they 'produce a mythologised version of America and Americanness', and a 'privileging of male experience.'[23] Therefore, it is clear that, as John Newsinger has declared, 'all war films are tales of masculinity.'[24] Therefore, in the war film throughout history we have the crucial collision of violence, suffering and masculinity, where the site of this collision is a privileged space in which the representation of the damaged male can flourish.

War films, therefore, perform or work through the masculinities pertinent to their cultural context. This is because war films are, by their nature, historical films (since they mainly deal in historical events) and also draw on film history to inform their mise-en-scene and

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[22] Steve Neale, "War Films", 29

[23] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 112

[24] John Newsinger, "'Do You Walk The Walk?' Aspects of Masculinity in Some Vietnam War Films," *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies, and Men,* ed. Pat Kirkham and Janet Thurim (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), 126

performance. Of course, the reverse side of the representation and screened embodiment of damaged men is the ability to revel in and almost secretly celebrate this damaged status. As Powrie et al put it, 'look how I suffer, look how I am feminised through that suffering (but don't look at the way in which I consolidate my power over you).'[25] The centrality and visibility of US male pain and suffering in the Hollywood war film bestows a certain power on the male subject. This central representative presence in contemporary American film will be critiqued in this thesis in order to uncover the structures and functions of the power the male subject holds courtesy of his essential and crucial suffering.

The damaged male, however, is by no means a phenomenon unique to contemporary war films. In *All Quiet On The Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930), we have perhaps, one of the first examples of a critically lauded and commercially successful film unabashedly depicting anxious, disturbed and psychologically traumatised male soldiers. Numerous films made during and in the immediate aftermath of World War II show male trauma and victimhood. *Bataan* (Tay Garnett, 1943) and *The Story of GI Joe* (William A. Wellman, 1945) go to great lengths to convey the arduous and damaging effects of combat experience, whereas *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946) shows the lingering traumatic impact of war on its veterans. The complex cultural manoeuvres and narratives that account for the production of a damaged, crisis-riddled, victimised, but ultimately recuperated masculinity in the context of the huge cycle of films addressing the Vietnam war have been covered in depth and at large.[26] Suffice to observe here that in films as diverse as *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*,

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[25] Phil Powrie, Bruce Babington and Ann Davies, "Introduction: Turning the Male Inside Out," *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Phil Powrie, Bruce Babington and Ann Davies (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 13

[26] For example, Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (eds), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: the Vietnam War in American Film* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Michael Anderegg (ed), *Inventing Vietnam: the War in Film and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989); John Carlos Rowe and Richard Berg (eds),

Tracks, *Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now*, Vietnam veterans (and soldiers), and more specifically, white male veterans/soldiers are depicted as 'victims' and 'emblems of an unjustly discriminated masculinity'.[27]

Hollywood cinematic history is ripe with iconic figures who are broken and damaged male characters. This occurs across genres and cultural contexts. For example, James Stewart's performance in *It's A Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), and Robert De Niro's in *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) belong to different schools of acting and social frameworks, however, in both films, we are presented with a post-war (whether this is Vietnam or WWII) account of male crisis. I am not claiming fixity to the figure of the damaged male throughout these differing contexts, but rather stressing that this figure, through reconfiguring itself, is capable of transcending generic and artistic boundaries, and is not exclusively associated with one particular time period or form of cinema. That said, it does seem to be the case that certainly since at least the early 1990s, Hollywood has experienced an upwards turn in its utilization of male suffering and corporeal ruination.[28]

Masculinity and its relationship to themes of crisis, pain, and victimhood have met with extended critical attention in the field of film studies. Susan Jeffords examined what she dubbed 'terminal masculinities'[29] in the early 1990s, whereas in Steven Cohan and Ira Rae Hark's volume, *Screening The Male*, we have, in part, an examination of 'filmed men and male

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The Vietnam War and American Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[27] Jeffords, *Remasculinization*, 116

[28] David Savran tracks this trajectory in US popular culture by in part pointing to the numerous "hero-as-victim" roles played by Michael Douglas throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s and the typical heroes in action movies throughout the 1990s. Please see David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)

[29] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 140-177

film characters overtly performing their gender, in neurotic (and even psychotic) relationships to it'.[30] Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin's *You Tarzan: Masculinities, Movies and Men* proclaims in the introductory chapter that 'the absorbing question of male anxiety […] figures large in many of the essays'[31] and later states 'we are still left with "masculinities" as organized by patriarchal power into certain structures with their signs, their images and their imperatives. They still produce anxiety and instability in the male subject'.[32]

Similar themes appear in more contemporary texts on men and film, such as the edited volume *The Trouble With Men* which specifically states 'the screen male appears to be even more damaged than ten years ago, according to the work of many of the contributors to this volume' and adds that these damaged men are 'damaged *from the start* […] the damage is not just a climax, a moment of spectacular display'.[33] The crux of the point appears to be that whereas in 'classical'[34] Hollywood, or even as recently as the early 1990s, damaged male characters were more often than not depicted *en route* to their respective crises, in contemporary cinema, the damage is inherent. As a general pattern this seems fine; we can clearly see in *It's A Wonderful Life* George Bailey's inexorable slide into suicidal despair, and although the D-FENS character in *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1992) is shown from the outset as barely suppressing his malingering sense of disenfranchised violence and rage, the film shows him successively succumbing to this rage in more spectacular ways. However, it seems to me that the point is not that contemporary films do not contain these spectacular displays, but rather now, the *whole film* is one, especially when the audio-visual environment of the film is meant to denote

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[30] Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, "Introduction," *Screening The Male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Coham and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 3
[31] Kirkham and Thumin, *You Tarzan*, 22
[32] Ibid., 26
[33] Powrie, Davies and Babington, *The Trouble With Men*, 12
[34] The style and means of production for many typical Hollywood movies made during the studio-system era, as defined in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classic Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

the psychology of our central male character. This means that their psychosis/trauma/collapse cannot help but become spectacular. The film becomes one long drawn out sigh or scream of despair.

Since the damaged male seems to be a ubiquitous presence throughout cinematic history, further delineation and fleshing out of this concept is required. It is clear that the concept of the damaged male is a little simplistic, and so therefore we are more precisely dealing with what may be considered the determining synecdoche of mainstream US national identity, namely, the damaged *white* male, or the white male *as victim*.[35] Therefore, it is not just his damage, but crucially the male's *whiteness* intersecting with *victimhood* that encapsulates and renders authentic his national identity, his Americanness. It has been argued that 'the history and tradition of the United States is replete with relentless efforts to retain and guard the boundaries of nationality with whiteness'.[36] So the exemplary American is one who is white, but not only this, when this whiteness is allied to notions of 'hegemonic masculinity'[37] through the male occupying a conventional or stereotypical gender role (such as the soldier), then the American *in excelsis* is born. Whiteness and hegemonic masculinity produce a normative US national identity, and when allied to the spectacle of pain and suffering, an authentic and desirable subjectivity of damaged American white masculinity emerges.

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[35] The synecdochal nature of the white straight male in US national identity has been explored by David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Liam Kennedy, *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); and Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[36] Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek, 'Whiteness: A strategic rhetoric' *Quarterly Journal of Speech. 81 (1995),* 301

[37] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005)

Therefore, in this thesis, the damaged male in contemporary war film is mostly white, and is posited as a victim. Since we already have a conception of the whiteness and hegemonic masculinity combining to forge a normative US national identity, we must now look at why this combination is inflected with or debased by structures of damage and pain. The idea of the white male specifically as victim (and one who ostentatiously *performs* or makes a spectacle of his crisis or embattlement) therefore needs fleshing out. It is imperative to examine the damaged male in the contemporary war film in the context of this narrative of white male victimhood since this will assist in framing the representative practices, ideological functions, and political and cultural contexts for the damaged male.

Arguably, the trope of the white male as victim reached its apotheosis and is provided with its particular emotional and cultural resonance throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. A crucial part of this was the emergence of white male victimhood as a coherent and legible subjectivity in the wake of numerous incoherent, formative precursors. These included Norman Mailer's concept of the "white negro", popular discourses surrounding alleged victims of civil rights-derived affirmative actions, and numerous anti-federalist, white supremacist interest groups across the US.[38] The arrival of the white male as victim as a potent, resonant, coherent subjectivity that was crucially accessible in popular vernacular discourse was due to three principle factors: the first of these was the loss of many manufacturing jobs due to the laissez-faire economics of the Reagan years, hence alienating many working class white men from their traditional incomes.[39] Second was the eventual boiling over of the post-feminist critical backlash which found its outlet in many "men's groups".[40] Finally, a mobilisation occurred

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[38] David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man*, 3-9
[39] Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal Of Modern Man* (London: Vintage, 2000)
[40] Whose High Priest, Robert Bly, espoused bonding over primal screaming in the woods and tribal drumming.

whereby white masculinity attempted to muscle in on identity politics and pronounce itself "victimized".[41]

So what are the cultural manoeuvres that allow the privilege and advantage of white masculinity to be circumvented and posit in its place a narrative of victimhood and crisis? Richard Dyer has stated that 'whites are everywhere in representation'[42], suggesting that whiteness is a pervasive and ubiquitous presence in mass visual culture. Dyer goes on to specifically state that this ubiquity is a product of the white male insisting he is 'not of a certain race […] just the human race'.[43] Accordingly, this 'equation between white and human secures a position of power.'[44] So whiteness possesses a centrality in representation, but it is not just this centrality that affords whiteness its power, it is also the fact that it invisibly occupies this position, due to it not being raced. Therefore, as Sara Ahmed reminds us, 'whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it.'[45] This simultaneous invisibility and centrality means that 'whiteness has to be read critically, rather than simply assumed as a fact of life.'[46]

Despite whiteness's centrality, invisibility and cultural power, Sally Robinson identifies a narrative of 'white decline' which has emerged post 1960s in which the alleged disenfranchisement of the white man has symbolized a 'decline of the American way.'[47] Through claiming a 'symbolic disempowerment', normative white masculinity may 'negotiate its position within the field of identity politics'[48] – an identity politics which has emerged due

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[41] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 12
[42] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 3
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 9
[45] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2004), 157
[46] Alice Bardan, "'Welcome to Dreamland': The realist impulse in Pawel Pawlikoski's *Last Resort*." *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 6.1 (2008), 52
[47] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2
[48] Ibid., 12

to civil rights, women's liberation, gay liberation, the increasing visibility of racial diversity, and other progressive developments. Accordingly, attributing to the dominant class of white hetero-normativity in American culture the status of victim becomes a means of re-centring white male power. So whiteness successfully occupies a position of central, invisible power and is considered the normative cultural touchstone by which differences in race, gender, class, and sexuality are defined. However, in reaction to the developments of identity politics, seemingly white men 'both resist and welcome the marking of their bodies and minds'.[49] In reaction to Robinson's narrative of white decline and the development of crises in traditional or hegemonic modes of white masculinity, invisible and central whiteness is figured as simultaneously victim of and partaker in identity politics. To achieve the marginalization and decentring of the authentically disempowered, and for white masculinity to reclaim cultural authority in the wake of progressive identity politics through asserting its victim status, the wounded body of the white male and the performance of crisis must be centralized.

The centrality and visibility of victimized or assaulted white masculinity narrates one of the central paradoxes of American culture. This paradox is built around the fact that it is 'a nation engaged in a long-term imperial project' and is the world's 'sole superpower', and yet 'its culture is immersed in concepts of innocence and victimhood and a belief in the transcendent power of healing to smooth over history's burdens'.[50] US national identity is predicated on the disavowal of US claims to imperialist policies, allowing for a self-image of perennial innocence. Or to put it another way, after both Kennedy assassinations, the Watergate affair, the Challenger space shuttle disaster, the Waco siege, the Oklahoma bombing, the Columbine high school shooting, and of course 9/11, each of these events was post-scripted with

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[49] Ibid., 4
[50] Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 31

assertions of America's lost innocence. The ability for US mass culture to encounter public collective traumas and effectively erase them and create a collective amnesia is remarkable. US culture is stuck in a perpetual loop oscillating between damaged and then swiftly recuperated innocence. This manufactures the condition whereby in the context of a government that enacts 'imperialist and unilateralist ventures', Americans 'see themselves as innocent and passive victims, rather than aggressors, in relation to world politics.'[51]

The maintenance of this self-perception is an act performed by contemporary Hollywood war films. In fact, they go further, not just stressing the victimized nature of the US male soldier, but also specifically and pleasurably offering up his suffering and torment for consumption. These fantasies and pleasures aid the entrenchment of an exceptionalist[52] account of the US's global status, and the exceptional nature of American pain and victimhood. This entrenchment is achieved through a central privileging of the white damaged male, rendering his ruination and the mise-en-scene of his crisis pleasurable. It is also achieved through narratively coercing spectators into privileging US accounts of victimized subjectivity and national identity (for example, focusing on the guilt of soldiers, rather than the people they have killed).

It is specifically where the white male figures in US fantasies of victimhood that is of crucial concern to this thesis, since as stated previously, the premier emotive trope for emblematising and offering up the damaged, victimised male as spectacle and political tool is the American

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[51] Ibid., 7

[52] Earlier defined as the doctrine by which the US asserts itself as 'an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but superior among nations' and, according to Kaplan, as 'the apotheosis of the nation-form itself and as a model for the rest of the world'. So the specialty or uniqueness of the US is partly founded on its self-belief in a perfected model of government and state organization. See Trevor McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: US Foreign Policy since 1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 1, and Amy Kaplan *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 16

war film. Part of this rendering into a political tool is the marking of the soldier as 'authentic' courtesy of his victimized status. American culture embraces survivor stories and victim stories and exhibits on almost pathological desire to consume these narratives. The status of survivor bestows a crucial sense of authenticity on people that is prized in a society like the US that contains a 'pervasive sense of inauthenticity.'[53] This idolisation of the survivor and the victim is a dangerous manoeuvre since, it is all too easy to inculcate a sense of 'innocence' to accompany this victim status, and in the simplified duality of the victim and perpetrator, it is the victim who possesses all the public empathy and cultural power. Hence, a culture of innocent victimhood is nurtured and sustained in the US as a means of veiling the economic and military neo-imperial belligerence that the nation is predicated upon. US exceptionalism depends on a culture of innocence and victimhood in order to smooth over or heal traumatic collective memory and erase the psychological burden of any moral culpability for the distressing history of the nation's transformation into the sole global super-power.

The Aesthetics of Contemporary War Films

Now that the theorisation of the damaged male in US culture and the contemporary war film has been explored, I shall turn to the question of how the damaged male is represented. Many contemporary war films go to great lengths to depict the broken and shattered body and the fraught psychological realm of the soldier. All too often the emotional and psychological pain of the soldier or war veteran is foregrounded in contemporary film at the expense of the representation of, for example, bombed civilians or some emotional investment in the deaths of the 'enemy'. One might even go so far as to say that the psychological aspect of contemporary war films contributes to their aesthetic style, and they reference what has emerged to be called 'trauma cinema'. This is a particular aesthetic and narrative style that,

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[53] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 28

according to E. Ann Kaplan, consists of cut-up narration, emphasis on circularity, paralysis, and repetition.[54] These elements assist in conveying the experiential sensations of the traumatized subject, a subjectivity typified by belatedness, latency, repetition compulsion, and visceral imaginative re-enactments of traumatic experiences.[55] It therefore literalizes some aspects of non-representable trauma. Crucially, Kaplan also declares that in trauma cinema, 'images erupt into cinematic space' and that 'the struggle to figure trauma's effects cinematically leads to means other than linearity or story' (for example, flashbacks.)[56]

But let us turn specifically to how trauma cinema has been theorized, with particular emphasis on how this is applicable to contemporary war cinema. Film criticism emerging in response to Holocaust documentaries and films can provide us with theoretical in-roads for dealing with the very different traumas of fictional war films. Joshua Hirsch asserts that 'cinema constitutes a kind of witnessing to both the outer physical reality of historical events and the inner, psychological reality of the effects of those events on people'[57], and as such, historical films 'embody a contradiction within historical consciousness.'[58] He has also stated that 'cinema constitutes a kind of witnessing to both the outer, physical reality of historical events and the inner, psychological reality of the effects of those events on people.'[59] Additionally, he outlines the notion of exogenous (caused by external forces, e.g. war) and endogenous (caused by internal processes e.g. fantasies) trauma.[60] It is argued that what is broadly (and debatably) named 'posttraumatic cinema'[61] is an attempt 'to formally reproduce for the

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[54] E. Anne Kaplan, "Melodrama, Cinema, and Trauma." *Screen* 42.2 (2001), 201-205
[55] Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 2-10
[56] Kaplan, "Melodrama, Cinema, and Trauma", 204
[57] Joshua Hirsch, *After Image: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 6
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 6
[60] Ibid., 8
[61] I prefer the simpler term 'trauma cinema'

spectator an experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable'[62], a term which seems most applicable to contemporary war cinema, especially in its deployment of visceral shocks, scenes of exaggerated carnage, and bodily shattering, not to mention the sheer 'gross out' function of many films of this type. Also, the 'unthinkable' arises in the form of the fraught psychological realms of the traumatised soldiers we are narratologically impelled to empathise with; we witness the twisted, unchecked drives, desires and nightmares of these men, embodied in dark, uncanny, unsettling cinematic aesthetics.

Hirsch mentions that there can be a sense of 'vicarious trauma'[63] in which film and photography has the potential to traumatise spectators and not just the victims it depicts. The contradictions inherent in trauma and representation are bound to temporality and the 'deforming effects of pain on representation.'[64] Historical films are concurrently engaged with both the past and the present and so we experience a disintegration of chronological history; 'time is experienced as fragmented and uncontrollable.'[65] Post-traumatic narration is therefore a 'failure of narration' and a 'collapse of mastery over time and point of view.'[66] Janet Walker confirms this by stating that she defines 'trauma films and videos as those which deal with traumatic events in a non-realist mode characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the films' narrative and stylistic regimes.'[67] Therefore, trauma cinema seems to be founded on the complexities and even impossibilities of linear chronology and narration, and also it seems to utilise non-conventional forms of representation which use the psychological maps of

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[62] Joshua Hirsch, *After Image*, 19
[63] Ibid., 6
[64] Ibid., 11
[65] Ibid., 21
[66] Ibid., 23
[67] Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 19

memory (whether these be clearly delineated, or torn and frayed beyond recognition) in order to shape its aesthetics and style.

It is the uses and functions of this contemporary visual style (or mode), in conjunction with the damaged male, that is under sustained analysis in this thesis. I refer to this throughout as a "masochistic aesthetics", most simply due to the oscillating sense of pain and pleasure that emerges in relationship to images of disaster, catastrophe and corporeal ruination (and which shall be explored later at greater length). It describes a certain aesthetic and narrative regime unified by its formal qualities and its ideological functions, namely, mediating and contextualising the damaged male in contemporary American war films. This is achieved in order to centralise the damaged male's pain and victimhood, use narratives of innocence, paranoia and suffering to mask US imperial belligerence, and to hail, or signal a certain form of white, middle class, and sometimes, neo-liberal[68] spectatorship (explored later in this thesis). Before I outline what constitutes masochistic aesthetics, and its historical and cultural precedents, I shall look here at what is meant by "masochism".

Far from being a sign of resignation and passivity/weakness, masochism is an index of mastery and domination. But it is also the site for a radical subjectivity that exposes and mocks the patriarchal basis of power and cultural authority. In this way it is an appropriate tool for critiquing and dismantling the stratified cultural power that permits the disavowal of

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[68] Neo-liberalism is a normative political theory that asserts the supremacy of market freedom and private enterprise over state intervention and control, espouses an inherent ideological linkage between capitalism and democracy, and consistently stresses the sovereignty of the individual in determining their economic and physical health. See Steven L. Lamy, "Contemporary mainstream approaches: neo-realism and neo-liberalism," *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (2nd Edition), ed. John Baylis and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 182. Jean Grugel has emphasised the important role 'economic liberalization' has played in undermining the democratization process through siphoning power away from the state, welfare and labour organisations and into the hands of private business and multinational economic interests. Jean Grugel, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 87-90

belligerent US exceptionalism, the authority of white masculinity, and the proliferation of the myth of innocent victimhood. Freud's initial conception of masochism was as an 'aberration' that was founded on a belief that it was the 'passive' and 'reverse' form of an 'active' sadism. His early writings even explicitly state that 'invariably masochism arise(s) from a transformation of sadism'.[69] In this early and simplistic definition, masochism and sadism are presented as two sides of the same coin. However, Freud went on to vastly revise his theories, through the introduction of the idea of the beating fantasy in masochism being predicated on the pleasurable visual consumption of another's pain (in 'A Child Is Being Beaten'), to the attempted mastery of the oscillations and concealments that typify masochism in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle.'[70]

Theodor Reik, in his seminal work, *Masochism in Modern Man*, emphasised the fact that the masochistic scenario is built on spectacle and, more specifically, performance. He argues that, 'in no case of masochism can the fact be overlooked that the suffering, discomfort, humiliation, and disgrace are being shown and so to speak put on display.'[71] Reik also states that one of the most notable points regarding masochism is that it entails a large degree of 'demonstrativeness', its unconscious aim being '*quod erat demonstrandum.*'[72] This element of performance and spectacle seems crucial to masochism and hence provides us with a good linkage to visual culture, and specifically the cinematic. Reik expounds that masochism depends on numerous concealments and oppositions for it to thrive, for example, 'it shows utterances of striving for love, of guilt feelings, of weakness and submissiveness' but at the

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[69] Sigmund Freud, *The Pelican Freud Library, Volume 7: On Sexuality; three essays on the theory of sexuality and other works* transl. James Strachey ed. Angela Richards (1905: London: Pelican Books, 1979), 71

[70] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. Trans. John Reddick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003). Sigmund Freud, "'A Child Is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origins of Sexual Perversions." *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. Margaret Hanly (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 159-181

[71] Theodor Reik, *Masochism in Modern Man* (New York: Grove Press, 1941), 72

[72] Ibid., 146

same time reveals to deeper analysis, 'expressions of revenge, of rebellion, and of triumph.'[73] All of these emotions and tropes are common in dramatic textual forms, but the idea of the pleasurable spectacular consumption of pain is compelling in the context of contemporary war cinema. The performance of wounding and pain, be it physical or psychological, and the transformation of bodies into objects of violence, is central to war films, and hence the masochistic pleasures to be accessed in this context are worth investigating.

By far the most profoundly influential work on masochism within film and cultural studies is Gilles Deleuze's *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. His primary contribution was to reject the notion of any link between sadism and masochism, stating that the one inflicting the pain in a masochistic beating scene is not a sadist, and instead they are just a *component* of the masochistic scenario.[74] Also, crucially, the Deleuzian masochistic model states that power and agency is deferred and displaced onto exterior objects.[75] For Deleuze, death is associated with the figure of the 'cold, oral mother',[76] and is a condition of the formulation of masochistic subjectivity, since it signals the belittling and expulsion of paternal power. This marks the primacy of maternal power which is figured as ambivalent in that it brings both pleasure *and* pain.[77] In the most radical re-write of Freudian notions of masochism, Deleuze makes it clear that he does not believe the fantasy revolves around 'a child being beaten', but rather 'it is not a child, but a father that is being beaten'[78] and hence masochism rests on a 'double disavowal'; one that idealises the mother, and 'a disavowal of the father who is expelled from the symbolic order'.[79] Hence, once again we can see oppositions and contradictions

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[73] Ibid., 145
[74] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 42-3
[75] Ibid., 105
[76] Ibid., 55
[77] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," *Movies and Methods: Volume Two*, ed. Bill Nichols, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 606
[78] Deleuze, *Masochism*, 66
[79] Ibid., 68

developing around the fantasies attached to the beating scenario, but more radically, Deleuze's theory delineates an almost *active* or constructive form of masochism. Crucially, Deleuze discusses the aesthetic and formal literary properties of masochism (his essay after all does preface a formative work of masochistic fiction, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus In Furs*), even declaring 'there is an aestheticism in masochism.'[80] These qualities he describes, such as masochism's reliance on suspense, disavowal, and coldness, together with its contractual nature, contribute to his theory's mobilisation within the realm of film and cultural studies, since it is so concerned with the aesthetic and narrative techniques of masochism in order to build its case. Masochism also seems to be typified by depictions of abjection,[81] chaos, dissolution and fracturing. There must be a fetishizing of submission and binding, an emphasis on coldness, but most crucially, since contemporary war films are involved in offering up corporeal masculinity as a spectacle, then part of masochistic aesthetics must be masculine embodiment as spectacle.

I wish to adopt the radical Deleuzian account of masochism for three principle reasons. The first reason is due to his writing being rooted in textual analysis. This provides an excellent model for engaging with specifically textual cultural forms, and although film is obviously not the same as writing, it is nonetheless, a textual form. Secondly, his examination of the law of the father and paternal power is compelling when my subject matter emphasises the belittlement and diminishment of male corporeal and psychological power. A final reason for selecting Deleuzian masochistic subjectivity is that it is the most helpful in addressing the 'true place' of masochistic subjectivity. This is because it assists in revealing the radical

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[80] Ibid., 134

[81] Famously, Julie Kristeva declared that the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses'. It is the "dark side of the moon" when it comes to subjecticism and consists of all that is exterior and repulsive to the self, such as bodily waste and the corpse, that nonetheless is crucial in subject formation. Julie Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2

breach in subject formation that must be enacted in our negotiations of mainstream hegemonic forms of cultural and patriarchal authority. It also provides a critical tool for deconstructing and critiquing the power base of US national identity and its aesthetic and narrative embodiments in the corporealities and psychologies of US masculinity in contemporary film.

The idea of the damaged soldier and his relationship to normative subjectivity in the context of the contemporary war film is explored in Deleuzian terms by Tania Modleski. She asserts that the 'practice of war films is to show sexual domination and wartime aggression' and that there exists a fear of 'dissolution through union with women' which is 'compensated with violence and homosocial bonds.'[82] Echoing the dichotomy of the attraction and repulsion of the abject, Modleski states that soldiers possess 'a desire for and a fear of fusion or explosion'[83] and resultantly 'yearn for the paternal law that will rescue (them).'[84] It is this desire for paternal law which is so pertinent in Modleski's analysis, since it is refracted through a Deleuzian masochistic lens. Since, in Deleuze's concept of masochism, the father is expelled from the symbolic economy, but remains as a foremost point of reference, Modleski notes that 'the father is a closeted yet potent force in contemporary war films.'[85] But what Modleski misses, which is crucial in other accounts of masochism, cinema and spectatorship, is the pleasure/pain dichotomy; it is in the radicalisation of pain and its transformation to pleasure that the system of patriarchal authority is mocked and exposed and provides the most subversive challenge to normative behaviours and gender stereotypes. In the light of this challenge, I shall move on to precisely delineate what is meant by masochistic aesthetics.

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[82] Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 62
[83] Ibid., 67
[84] Ibid., 68
[85] Ibid., 70

It is observed that the historical depiction of masochism always entails 'a basic component of ecstasy; the mystical trance, the tortured and languid body exposed to blows, the exquisite agonies', in other words, 'the suspended gesture of a sacrificial moment.'[86] We therefore can at first posit masochistic aesthetics as entailing the depiction of a delayed or deferred moment of suspense before a supreme act of violence or infliction of pain. In Freud this moment is critically linked to fetishism; 'the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as fetish.'[87] What this means is that, according to Freud, the precise conditions of masochistic violence and pain are internalised as fetish, and hence the objects and scenarios depicted in the masochistic scene become sources of pleasure and excitement, and also begin to represent anxieties in the masochistic subject.

Smirnoff crucially notes that 'the masochistic "victim" must bear witness to its own victimized status.'[88] This rings true with the victimized white male body in the films under discussion in this thesis, not so much in terms of the visuality implied in this statement, but certainly in the central premise that this 'victimized' status is self-regarding and self-reflexive. Smirnoff does however go on to state that this bearing witness must be 'inscribed into his (the victim's) own flesh' – something that does not necessarily *physically* occur. Instead, we have the image of the white male body being continually cast into positions of physical horror and terror, but there is never the physical 'branding' beloved of Sacher-Masoch and Deleuze, instead it is a psychological branding that occurs, marking the mental space of the white US male body as damaged.

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[86] Victor N. Smirnoff, "The Masochistic Contract," *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 66
[87] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism." *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Vol. 21, 152-59
[88] Smirnoff, "The Masochistic Contract", 68

So far, we have the essential elements of masochistic aesthetics delineated as the performance of pain, the portrayal of a suspenseful moment before the infliction of violence, the fetishization of the accoutrements of the masochistic scenario, and a crucial self-regard in bearing witness to the victim's own victimized status. It is useful at this point to bring in Steven Shaviro's theories of masochism and film studies in order to flesh out our conception of masochistic aesthetics.

In discussing Fassbinder's *Querelle*,[89] he argues that 'we are seduced and initiated into the secret pleasures of abjection.'[90] The point is that masochism is not analogous to abjection, but, according to Shaviro, its stylistics, and the masochistic scene, makes abjection curiously pleasurable. This pleasure is due to the tactile qualities of the films. By this, what is meant is that in our visual interaction with the film, our consumption of the image and the narrative is rendered pleasurable by our intimate connection to the affective, emotive pleasures of revelling in the intimate details of the mise-en-scene, editing, and sound design. The pleasures offered up by this affective corporeal response to spine-tingling sounds, compelling images, and satisfying spatial configurations make the aesthetics of masochism gratifying, hence our 'seduction' into it.

Obviously, this is a radically passionate account of the textual and visual pleasures of cinema, and is one that is very personal to Shaviro, who describes his specific reactions to films and his revelling in their details as part of his philosophical intervention into Deleuzian masochism. However, it is still useful in examining the stylistics of contemporary war films

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[89] A differentiation is required here; *Querelle's* abjection is rooted in gay male sex, scatology, and the eroticisation of corporeal waste, whereas in the films under discussion in this thesis*,* the abjection on display is located in the destruction of male bodies, nightmare sequences, and traumatic memory.
[90] Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 197

and exploring the victim/victimiser dichotomy[91] that runs through these films. Shaviro's theory of Deleuzian masochism enables one to denaturalise and decentre white patriarchal authority and the phallic power that courses through contemporary US war films. Accordingly, we can analyse these films in terms of how they represent pain and the white male body. Rather than these white male bodies being synecdoches for the US nation, they are in fact a covering, or a mask for the true structures of power that inform US national identity, namely, the disavowal of imperial belligerence and the insistence on a victimised status. And so therefore we can add to the previously described essential elements of masochistic aesthetics, a regime of abjection, and masculine embodiment as spectacle.

To sum up then, masochistic aesthetics depends on the performance of pain, the seductive tactile qualities of the mise-en-scene of pain and suffering, suspense, self-regard of the painful masochistic scenario, abjection, and the spectacle of the male.

So how is the notion of masochistic aesthetics useful to us? Firstly, the white male in the contemporary war film sits at the centre of this concept. In his spectacular, performative and declarative status as wounded and suffering, surrounded by abject images, he is the object around which this entire aesthetic regime pivots. As such, it is important to ask why the damaged white male is so elemental to this aesthetic regime. The relevance of this question is that if contemporary war films disavow neo-imperial belligerence in the name of sustaining a victimised and innocent US national identity, then why is the white male allowed privileged access to authenticating narratives of pain and suffering? Why must he in particular be located in an aesthetic system that lauds weakness, passivity, self-endangerment, and a solipsistic

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[91] Located in the central paradox of the US being the world's sole super-power, and white masculinity being a phenomenally privileged identity, and yet these two concepts are mired in self-regarding paranoia about their alleged victimization.

dream of shattering and transmutation? This is especially pertinent since it is obvious that in many of the films under discussion in this thesis that they do not follow through on the radical promises of the masochistic subject position. Instead of promoting an ideological space free from the strictures of patriarchal power, they, in the main, feature supreme re-entrenchments and re-assertions of US military power (for example, the gun-blazing ending to *Behind Enemy Lines*). Most contemporary war films deploy masochistic aesthetics, but do not laud a masochistic subjectivity or utilise its transformative and subversive potential in order to critique or deconstruct US cultural authority and neo-imperial power. Instead, it is seemingly deployed in order to summon or hail a certain spectator position, one in which the pleasures of the immersive visual and auditory textures of the masochistic aesthetics in the films are revelled in. So another key focus is how the affective and sensational pleasures these films offer up in their radical and non-conventional masochistic aesthetics affect spectatorship of the film.

An interpellation, therefore, occurs. Louis Althusser stated that 'ideology interpellates individuals as subjects', [92] and hence, film in establishing a certain dominant or consensual viewpoint, can enthral and seduce spectators to this viewpoint by forcing them to *misrecognise* themselves in the narratives and images offered up. However, the very fact that all the film can do is offer up these images and narratives (there is no manifest total control over the effect of these images and narratives), means that ideological power is incoherent and fragmentary. Nonetheless, the films consistently offer up a certain route of focalisation, or chief point of empathic contact, this spectator position being one of white middle class liberal subjectivity. This is not to say this is the films' target demographic, but rather it is the subjectivity created in order to act as the chief focalising entry point into empathic and

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[92] Louis Althusser, *Essays in Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), 44

emotional engagement with the narrative. Whether we chose to adopt this subjectivity or not, it is there for the taking and hence it is important to examine why this particular position is offered up. Many of the central characters in the films under discussion in this thesis are white, ostensibly middle class, and are marked as intellectual, liberal, or sometimes asserted as subjectivities in plain opposition to the notions of performative corporeal hyper-masculinity embodied in the Schawrzenegger/Stallone-style action movies of the 1980s and early 1990s. For example, in Chapter One we see skinny, pale-skinned, weak characters succumbing to their traumatic and physical anguishes, a theme that continues throughout other cycles of films discussed. However, crucially, Jacob in *Jacob's Ladder* has a Master's degree, Miller in *Saving Private Ryan* is a school teacher, Swofford in *Jarhead* reads works of existentialist literature and claims he should have gone to college, bourgeois suburban normativity seems to be the chief concern in the home front depicted in *We Were Soldiers*, and so on. Time and again, our route into empathising with the action and characters is structured courtesy of focalising agents who ostensibly *are* middle class, or narrative restitution and closure is sought courtesy of asserting the pre-eminence and incomparability of white domestic suburban (and more often than not bourgeois) normativity. This position also happens to be the very same as that sought by the white male in wishing to secure an authentic and privileged access to dominant myths of innocence and victimhood. Hence, in hailing white middle class spectatorial subjectivity, these films attempt to recruit the viewer to sanctifying these prevailing myths of US national identity. Through spectatorial empathy and emotional engagement, a co-opting of the victimhood of the genuinely disempowered and marginalised occurs. Instead, white US masculinity is posited as exceptionally victimised and damaged in fictional narratives (i.e. contemporary war films), *and* courtesy of these films' interpellating strategies, this damage is crucially *felt* by the spectator position it calls into

being. Thus the entrenchment of the myth of innocent victimhood informing a dominantly white male authentic US national identity is established.

It is important to point out that what I describe as masochistic aesthetics is not a new phenomenon by any means. Numerous systems of representation and depictive styles throughout the history of visual culture attest to this.[93] Clearly, also, cinema is littered with numerous historical examples of aesthetics of pain, shattering, decay, self-endangerment, the grotesque, and making a spectacle or performance out of abjection. One need only look at the formative films of German Expressionism (such as *Nosferatu* (Friedrich Murnau, 1921) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligeri* (Robert Wiene, 1919)), the zombie cycle of horror movies by George Romero, or the earlier works of David Cronenberg (for example, *Shivers* (1975)) to see this. The historical precedent for this aesthetics is mostly rooted in corporeal horror, a transgression or violation of the human body, or the 'shocks' associated with the modern urban experience.[94] In particular, Barbara Creed maps Julie Kristeva's notions of the abject onto the horror film in order to, at first, demonstrate that these films are 'an illustration of the work of abjection'.[95] The point of this is to show that their aesthetic regimes (which includes bodily waste and putrefying flesh) in conjunction with the notions of monstrosity produced through the transgression of certain borders and categories of difference (for example, the crossing of gender roles in *Psycho* or the racial connotations associated with the man/beast dichotomy in *King Kong*) produce a simultaneous revulsion and 'pleasure in breaking the taboo on filth'.[96] Creed's notion of an aesthetics of abjection is, in a way, a precursor to my notion of masochistic aesthetics, due to the similar thematic material (a cinema of corporeal

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[93] For example, the macabre, demonstrated by Michael Wolgemut's woodcut print, *Danse Macabre* (1493), or the gothic art of the Medieval period.
[94] Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York; Columbia University Press, 2005), 16
[95] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 10
[96] Ibid., 13

horror and pain) and the concurrent notions of pleasure. However, there are crucial differences here too, since the aesthetics of abjection do not account for the privileged centrality of the white male. Also, the aesthetics of abjection almost exclusively constructs the female body as the premier object of threatening exteriority. Creed's focus is on the destabilising and transgressive effects of this regime of abjection and the depictive strategies of the 'monstrous-feminine' that inculcate this. In masochistic aesthetics, crucially, all that is exterior, or other, to the white American male (such as femininity, blackness) can be included in this aesthetic regime and may participate in narratives of self-endangerment, pain and suffering, but is crucially not allowed access to the authenticating narratives and central, hyper-visible performance of victimhood. Black, female, gay, non-US – these are all categories or subjectivities that are not allowed to function in quite the same way in relation to masochistic aesthetics and the emblematising of American suffering. In Creed's conception of the aesthetics of abjection, concepts such as excessive reproduction, mutilated or assaultive female genitalia, and menacing matriarchal power are constituted as zones where pain and pleasure combine and a spectacle is made of corporeal horror. However, in the contemporary war film, masochistic aesthetics produce a similar effect through the dominating centrality of white male pain and victimhood. As explored later in this thesis (specifically Chapter Two), if you are black, female, non-US, or possess a Latino hyphenated US identity, taking centrality in this masochistic aesthetics is figured as aberrant, non-authentic victimhood, rather than synechdochal or emblematically representative of dominant US national identity, neo-imperial power and cultural authority.

Masochistic Spectatorship and Contemporary War Films

Given the alignment of pleasures, seduction, spectacle, performance, and aestheticization outlined above, how might one conceive of a masochistic spectatorship of contemporary war films? As mentioned earlier, it is not only the ideological functions and uses of the damaged male that are under scrutiny in this thesis, but also what spectator positions are hailed by the usage of the damaged male and the masochistic aesthetics outlined above. This thesis builds towards an account of the spectatorship of contemporary war films, one that is initially and necessarily inflected with masochistic subjectivity. This is due to the oscillations of pain and pleasure, and mastery and submission. It is also due to the tactile pleasure in revelling in the textures of images of abjection and pain, and the looking on at the wounded male as spectacle. Before we can address the masochistic spectatorship of contemporary war films, and the models and trajectories this thesis will explore, a brief survey of relevant theorisations of masochistic film spectatorship is required.

Gaylyn Studlar radically altered Laura Mulvey's theory of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'[97] by proclaiming that the spectator filled a masochistic position in relation to the cinema screen. Her argument was based on the fact that the key concepts of disavowal and fetishism, for Mulvey central to the female symbolising 'lack' in the cinema, were in fact more aligned to the concept of masochism than castration anxiety or sexual difference. Instead, fetish and disavowal are linked to the child coping with the mother's departures and returns. Fetish fills in for the absent mother, not the absent phallus. As such, the spectator is in a masochistic position when implanted into the cinematic apparatus and 'must comprehend the images, but the images cannot be controlled'.[98] In this way, the spectator crucially *submits* to the power of the cinema, and since 'masochism savours suspense and distance'[99], our

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[97] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6-18
[98] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema", 613
[99] Ibid., 612

masochistic spectatorship of catastrophic images is rooted in a doubled sense of profound closeness to these images and a readily available distancing, both born out of the pleasurable circumstances of the masochistic spectator position.

A product of this closeness and distancing, as Carol J. Clover has explored, is the reiteration of frightening stories. This reiteration is a 'narrative manifestation of the syndrome of repetition compulsion', having its roots in '*unpleasure*'.[100] The crucial point behind repetition compulsion is that the possessor of the syndrome is unable to recall what started the repetitions (usually a traumatic event) in the first place, and hence the compulsion seems fully formed and normative to the subject. The introduction of this notion of a traumatic rupture potentially causing repetition compulsion recalls the formal techniques of the contemporary war film, in which notions of traumatic memory, horror, and the wish to repeat and tell old stories[101] feature prominently.

Also pertinent to Clover's argument is that it is vulnerable, helpless and powerless characters which make the protagonist (in dramas of violence and pain, such as the war film or horror movie) likeable, which she notes are all 'incidentally feminine traits.'[102] So in war films, we are asked to identify with wounded bodies, damaged psychologies and characters who exhibit traits of being victims. Masochistic spectatorship permits male identification with the damaged male body, and hence correlates the self to the scenario of victim, with all the cultural power this entails.

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[100] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1992), 213
[101] Either in the form of narrative structure, like the 'left-behind POWs' plots of many 1980s Vietnam war movies, or in the form of many films which tell the story of particular battles or wars, for example the many films which deal with the siege of Stalingrad during the Second World War
[102] Clover, 221

Returning to Studlar, she discusses the 'primal scene' which the infant must bear witness to, like 'Ulysses tied to the mast or Tantalus on whom is imposed the spectacle of parental intercourse', and therefore posits masochistic subjectivity as bound up with spectacle, desire and fantasy.[103] Studlar also confirms a theme revisited many times already; that 'masochistic desire depends on suspension to guarantee a pain/pleasure structure' and that there is a requirement to restrain desire and 'suspend consummation.'[104] She goes on to draw comparisons with the masochistic subject position and the location of the cinematic spectator, declaring that

> Like the masochist, the spectator must avoid the orgasmic release that destroys the boundaries of disavowal, takes him/her outside the limits of normal spectatorship and into the realm of the voyeur, and disrupts the magical thinking that defines the infantile use of the cinematic object.[105]

Therefore, we can see through Studlar's model of masochistic spectatorship that 'the formal structures of masochism overlap with the psychological mechanisms that are implicated in the cinematic apparatus', namely, disavowal, fetishism, fantasy, and voyeurism/scopophilia.[106] But there is more to it than this, and what is more, it specifically relates to the contemporary war film. War films depend on scenes of carnage and traumatic events for their narrative impact, they also deal with historical events, and to an extent channel historical trauma. Also, as is the case with horror films, spectators wish to constantly repeat these scenarios of trauma, carnage and violence and so there exists a certain repetition compulsion when it comes to traumatic events, and hence cinema 'makes available the pleasure of loss, suffering, and submission' (although this obviously doesn't have to just refer to war and horror films, there are still many losses and instances of suffering in melodramas, for example).[107] This repetition

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[103] Gaylyn Studlar, *In The Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 221
[104] Ibid., 27
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 178
[107] Ibid., 182

of traumatic events must mean there is a pleasure to be found in pain. So therefore, Studlar's model ultimately rejects the "passivity" of the spectator position[108], and posits a spectator which 'is simultaneously passive receiving object and active perceiving subject.'[109] So there is a duality in the doubled subjective/objective nature of the spectator, and the masochistic spectator position is therefore typified by constant oscillation between immersion and disavowal. The masochistic spectator can alternate between identifying with the cinematic diegesis, and asserting distance and separation. It is these comings and goings, these alternations, which characterise masochistic spectatorship. The question is, can this radical spectatorship be liberated from its ambivalent status, can it be freed from its reactive position of forming the flipside of normative gender stereotypes, and finally, can it be used to subvert the customary neo-imperial representational regimes which dominate Hollywood depictions of war and US foreign policy?

The answer to this lies in Shaviro's work. In keeping with Clover's model of masochistic spectatorship, Shaviro proposes an extremely radical paradigm with which to investigate the affective and sensational nature of cinema and spectatorship. It is a paradigm which will prove extremely useful when discussing contemporary war film, since it foregrounds pleasure, pain and the extreme emotional states of cinema. This is visible at the onset of his proposition, in which he advocates a 'shattering' of the self in the face of sensual gratification, rather than the simple bifurcations and splits proposed by Freudian readings of sexual pleasure. In turn, this is based in the fact he asserts that 'fearfulness is itself a thrill', and hence there exists a passionate search for 'anxiety, terror, agitation, excitation, shattering' at the core of human existence.[110] It also proposes a visceral and embodied methodology of film spectatorship, one

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[108] For example, found in the "apparatus theory" of Metz and Baudry
[109] Studlar, *In The Realm of Pleasure*, 183
[110] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 55

that is also self-consciously bound up in the economics and politics of the contemporary Western liberal subject. This is apt for my particular intervention into these films since I consistently speak of "we" throughout. The "we" here is partly composed of my own corporeal relationship to the images and narratives, and so necessarily speaks of a personal, intimate interaction with these films. However, it also speaks of the stationing of personal spectatorial engagement within the larger frameworks of the development of the *neo-liberal* subject. As stated above, many contemporary war films, and especially the latest cycle of war on terror films, hail a certain spectator position, and inculcate a white middle class subjectivity tied to notions of neo-liberalism and US exceptionalism. Hence, this "we" refers to the attempted hailing and mobilisation of this imaginary neo-liberal subject by these films.

This immediately flies in the face of the commonly held idea, especially in Marxist and early psychoanalytical film theory, that the spectator searches for self-identity and wholeness in the "better than real" scenarios presented on the cinema screen. Shaviro instead asserts that 'cinema seduces its viewers by mimetically exacerbating erotic tension', in other words, we can only stand by, looking on, in a state of tension, in 'visual fascination.'[111] Cinematic spectatorship, is therefore an infatuation with loss of control.

This reveals crucial questions regarding cinema engaged with historical traumas and masochistic spectatorship; is "trauma cinema", in its attempts to 'work through' and 'bridge the gap' in unprocessable experience, anti-masochistic spectatorship? Is the imposition of causation and narrative on experience, the 'realisation' provided by cinema, in itself an act of consummation and release of tension of precisely the form that masochistic spectatorship strives to avoid? It seems that cinema (and specifically cinema that engages with historical

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[111] Ibid., 56

trauma and images of ruination, such as the contemporary war film) attempts the implantation of control and mastery in an aesthetic and narrative scenario which depends on loss of control and fragmentation/shattering. Is contemporary war cinema, therefore a way of legislating the erotics of masochistic spectatorship, forcing them into check in order to psychologize history, US foreign policy and masculinity as depicted in mainstream Hollywood? In doing so, Hollywood casts out the radical erotics in order to impose a false sense of completion, identification, wholeness, and to offer healing.

Shaviro posits a positive and liberating model of masochistic spectatorship in order to break the grip of this tyrannical representative regime. He argues for an 'active and *affirmative* reading of the masochism of cinematic experience'[112] rather than the defensive and passive position espoused by Studlar and Silverman. This active and affirmative reading is based in the writings of Nietzsche and Leo Bersani, through whom Shaviro asserts that, as humans, we do not do the bare minimum to survive; all our passions are not simply for the purposes of defence or recuperation, the body 'goes to the limit of what it can do.'[113] When combined with the idea that the cinematic body is based in excitation and tension, this means that 'the agitated body multiplies its affects and excitations to the point of sensory overload, pushing itself to the limits: it desires its own extremity, its own transmutation.'[114]

Raz Yosef mentions that the masochist 'stands guilt on its head by making punishment into a condition that makes possible forbidden pleasure'[115], and hence it seems that it is *us* as spectators who are meant to take on this guilt. We remain safely sited in our distanced

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[112] Ibid., 58
[113] Ibid., 59
[114] Ibid.
[115] Raz Yosef, *Cannon Fodder*, 76

spectator positions, taking undoubtedly a degree of visual pleasure from the process of watching the visceral horrors of war films. In a sense, we adopt a punished, vicitimised, even assaulted subject position through bearing witness to traumatic scenes of violence and carnage, but we remain safely distanced and can disavow our implication in the cinematic happenings the more extreme they are; i.e. it bears no relation to the perceivable reality we encounter on a daily basis. So, contemporary war cinema's viewing pleasures reside in the anxieties it provokes, and these pleasures are as much reactive and status quo affirming as transgressive. The short-term affects of contemporary war film spectatorship are fluid and radical in terms of producing a dynamic sense of shattering and self-abandonment in the spectator, but long-term, in Hollywood, transformation and transgression are a rarity. For example, the visceral terrors of a film such as *Saving Private Ryan* can fix the spectator as victimized, which is hardly a radical position. In negotiating the effects of trauma, contemporary war films betray the radical political potentials of masochistic subject positions for the compelling reactive power of causation and narrative. This is an almost hysterical desire for fixed identities, something which is not easily obtainable in a war film.

So what do these safeties, pleasures, and emotional entanglements with contemporary war films mean for us as spectators? We have already seen how spectatorship of contemporary war film may be considered masochistic, and to what ideological uses this spectatorial mode may be put. This thesis, however, builds towards an analysis of the spectatorship of contemporary war films in the context of the emergent field of ethics and film studies. The trajectory that my chapters describe shows a movement from the spectator being overwhelmingly figured as masochistic, to one where the ethical considerations behind looking on at fictional depictions of US military violence is the main concern. This is not to

say that an ethical form of spectatorship *per se* is narrated into being, but rather, where spectatorship was previously conceived of as masochistic, this viewing position is now reconfigured into a form of looking on that is issued with an ethical charge or challenge. In essence, there is an accusation, or implication of collusion in images of pain and violence levelled at the film viewer, in which the ethical dynamics of masochistic spectatorship are called into question. It is precisely the functions and ideologies at work behind this implication that are most important in this thesis, since these will lead us towards answering why the damaged male is such a potent cultural force in contemporary war films.

First of all, however, I shall briefly examine what is meant by "ethics" in the context of film spectatorship. What makes spectatorship ethical, as opposed to "moral"? Ethics is not the same as morality, and emotional and sensory engagement with a film is not necessarily ethical. As Michele Aaron states, 'being moved […] marks (an) experience as moral but not ethical: involuntary emotion is the opposite of reflection and implication.'[116] Ethics can be delineated as different from morality since ethics is framed as 'interrogation, and as resistance to affective capitulation to acculturated norms'.[117] So, emotional engagement with a film via its interpellating strategies is not in itself an ethical encounter. Rather, it is only through reflexive processes of self-reflection and self-awareness in which spectators acknowledge themselves as implicated in consenting to the images and narrative consumed, that a sense of ethical encounter is manufactured. Resultantly, a film can sometimes be immoral and ethical, or unethical and moral.

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[116] Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 116
[117] Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 3

Downing and Saxton have pointed out that 'ethics designates a way of responding to the encounter between self and others, while suspending the meaning of the subject-object relation, with its implicit dynamic of dominance and subordination'.[118] So ethical spectatorship depends on much more than emotional engagement, it is an embodied response that articulates a reflexive desire to expose the power dynamics that structure our relationship to film. It is also about revealing the previously sublimated connections between the other and the self in order to turn away from representational domination, control and hierarchical modes of structuring spectatorial response and pleasure. In this respect, many critics studying film and ethics find the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas useful. Sarah Cooper, in discussing Levinas's idea of ethics, states that it is, 'a primordial relation, obligation and responsibility to others on the part of the self'.[119] So the conception of ethics deployed here, which requires communication and encounter with the other, is one in which the other is strictly identified as the defining factor in one's culpability and responsibility as a citizen possessing social agency. It is our connection to others and how we acknowledge these connections that determine our ethical responsibility for these others. Cooper goes on to delineate that 'the way in which the encounter with alterity is figured in his thinking is primarily through his notion of the *visage* (face)' and so therefore it is in 'the face-to-face encounter between self and other' that Levinas's ethics 'challenge the sovereignty of the self, which is constituted by being thrown into question by alterity'.[120] For Levinas, the relationship between self and other is key, and it is specifically within the encounter with the other that one can become thrown into a state of ontological crisis. In other words, the absolutism of the self is replaced by recognition of the other. This manoeuvre exposes the interplays of subordination, submission, dominance and control that inform social relations. Accordingly,

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary* (London: Legenda, 2006), 5
[120] Ibid.

the ethics of spectatorship in the context of contemporary war films has the ability to expose our spectatorial subordination to dominant narratives and representational regimes.

Film then depends on encounter with alterity and self-reflexivity if our spectatorship of it is to be truly ethical. As Aaron states, 'spectatorship depends upon our intersubjective alignment with the prospective suffering of others'.[121] If this is the case, then ethical spectatorship involves recognising and being held accountable to our place within the dynamics of this relationship, to critically reflect on and interrogate how we might be implicated as in some way responsible for the suffering of others.

However, as mentioned earlier, I will not be arguing that the films demand, or inculcate an ethical mode of spectatorship. Rather, a charge of unethical spectatorship is levied at the film viewer for passively looking on at, and therefore colluding in US military violence committed against the other. Therefore, I shall use the notion of the damaged male being at the centre of a masochistic aesthetics in contemporary war films to track a potential form of spectatorship for internalizing and reconfiguring this charge. The radical realm of fantasy and desire constructed outside of the strictures of patriarchy that is offered up by masochism, provides a way in which to subvert the film-viewer relationship. This is especially of use when the cultural authority embodied in US film is used as a means of implication and attempts to fix its audience within a certain discursive position (passive, receptive, voyeuristic, colluder). The excitations and visceral thrills bound up in masochistic spectatorship of the damaged male in contemporary war film also points towards how we may negotiate and expunge this charge of unethical viewing. This is because masochistic spectatorship may be able to rescue the viewer from his or her alleged passive status, and instead turn the charge of unethical film-viewing

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[121] Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 112

practice on its head. The result of this will be to examine how an ethical spectatorship of contemporary war films may in fact tighten up the structures of US neo-imperialism, white male victimhood, and dominant neo-liberal subjectivity.

Chapter Outline

In this introduction I have outlined the methodological background for investigating how contemporary American war films offer up damaged (predominantly white) males for our spectatorial consumption. This will allow the ensuing chapters to study the male body or the circumstances of his ruination as aestheticised and spectacularised on screen, and how this generates visual pleasures. It will also enable the examination of pleasures located in the identification with the damaged and assaulted male body, and with engaging with a meta-narrative of innocence and victimhood that informs US culture. The reading of the "pleasures of pain" bound up in contemporary war films requires a formulation of masochistic spectatorship, through which spectators are seduced into the satisfying consumption of suffering, a delectation in prolonged agonies, and the suspension of closure. This introduction offers up a particular corporeal model of masochistic spectatorship through which the pleasures to be found in certain aesthetic and stylistic regimes can be studied later in this thesis. Finally, questions of ethics and film studies, and the neo-liberal political context of Western society offer the ability to consider the ethical implications of spectatorial alignment with the suffering of screen others. It also offers the chance to pose questions regarding the status of the contemporary Hollywood war film in the light of the US's cultural and geopolitical neo-imperialism and the precepts of neo-liberalism and exceptionalism on which this is based.

Chapter One will principally consider the films *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1990) and *The Jacket* (John Maybury, 2005) in order to delineate and critique "masochistic aesthetics". Since the stylistic mode and the textual pleasures of the films under discussion are of importance in contemplating the structures of masochistic spectatorship inculcated, it is necessary to fully flesh out and analyse the aesthetic and narrative properties of these pleasures.

Through analysis of these two films I shall explore the nature of masochistic aesthetics in how they address the spectacle of masculine embodiment in very different ways. Their narratives also speak to a masochistic sensibility due to the repeated oscillations between knowledge and darkness, and the endless moments of suspense and deferral that structure their 'thriller'-like plots. Masochism offers the spectator radical pleasures through which to contextualise and consume these dense plots of dystopian paranoia, and also offers a route whereby the damaged subjectivity of the combat experience may be 'worked through'. The normalising power that attempts to convince us of a utopian zone free from power and domination is at times offered up in these films' depiction of 'heavenly ascent', but these moments coincide with total and permanent closure (death). So, the trajectories of the plots ultimately lead us to sites of abjection followed by a brief restitution of phallic power. Therefore, as much as the masochist position mocks, belittles and casts out paternal power, it is still retained to some degree, but merely as a fleeting textual ghost haunting the much more impressive scene of abjection that the spectator is seduced by. The seduction into this world of dissolution and fragmentation is a means by which to unsettle the masculinities posited by the film as crucial in epitomising a wounded US. I will then move on to explore how *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) may be considered a formative text in this regard and one that lays

out many of the central themes of this thesis. This includes an examination of the cultural work the film does to secure the humanitarianism and exceptionalism of US foreign policy and link this to a traumatic white male subjectivity.

The second chapter will expand on the 'white male victim' trope, especially in the context of race and US culture, and in particular, blackness. Principally, the texts under consideration will be *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996), *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004), and *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005). These films contain depictions of white male victimhood, which are complicated by depictions of blackness and trauma, with "blackpain"[122] always subservient to the commanding subjectivity of the white domestic homeland of the US.

I shall explore how a fundamentally white, privileged conception of masochistic subjectivity is not sufficient for the cultural analysis of blackness and trauma, and look specifically at how the traumatised body of Denzel Washington is constructed in these films. This will allow an investigation into how his damage is divested of any significance, with spectators being able to pleasurably consume his ruination, without wholly allowing the cultural authority of victimhood to be fully bestowed on the black male body (nor Latino bodies, or women for that matter). I shall also look at, how in assistance of this manoeuvre, white male subjectivity within the films is portrayed as almost "blank" and discharged of ideology, in order to promote an easy empathic spectatorial connection. This will assist in placing the contemporary war film in the context of the mono-cultural entrenchment of difference

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[122] Term used throughout Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008)

required for the perpetuation of the wholesale power of US cultural and geopolitical imperialism.

The third chapter will principally focus on the series of 'humanitarian' war films depicting multilateral 'peacekeeping' action in places such as the Balkan states and Somalia that emerged throughout the 1990s and post-millennial period. These principally included *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (John Moore, 2001).

It is in these films that one begins to see the germination of the concept of passive spectatorship and political/moral/physical inactivity. Many of the films contain characters openly expressing frustration at their inability to indulge in 'proper' forms of war, and hence feel contained and constrained by the watchful nature of a peacekeeping role.

Most of these films tell the story of catastrophes associated with this humanitarian role. This catastrophe is also a depiction of US forces being on the receiving end of brutality at the hands of 'the enemy'. I will argue that these films in a sense offer up fantasies of catastrophe and victimhood and that these fantasies point towards a collective, self-willed masochism structuring the linkages between visual culture, Hollywood and late-capitalist, post-industrial US power. This masochism is used in order to dramatise the oscillations between omnipotence and powerlessness that structure the deceitful nature of Hollywood film as public diplomacy (i.e. emphasising weakness/victim status in order to mask and strengthen a position of omnipotence).

This chapter will also explore the fact that these films in offering up spectacles of catastrophe, incite a 'compulsion to repeat' – i.e. a desire to consume images of disaster again and again. The desire to consume these images becomes self-perpetuating and hence propagates the reinforcement of compliant and submissive culture that permits atrocity and neo-imperial belligerence. These films also depict US humanitarianism as something innate, or inherent to the US male solder, and US society as a whole. Characters throughout the films suffer from their own compulsions to repeat by willingly entering war zones again and again for the sake of proving the exceptional and hyper-masculine dedication to global geopolitical morality endemic in the American way. This innateness to humanitarianism, in part, obfuscates the neo-imperial basis of US strategic regional interest. It also clears a path for the masochistic pleasures of oscillation, repetition, and refusal of closure to be reclaimed as elemental in the securing of a narcissistic and decadent self-obsession with victimhood. Additionally, the self-regard of the focus on the US exceptionalism inherent in the soldiers points the way to augmenting the neo-liberal subjectivity that underpins US neo-imperialism.

The fourth chapter will principally deal with films that address the so-called war on terror and depict the US-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Films studied include *Stop Loss* (Kimberly Pierce, 2008), *Redacted* (Brian De Palma, 2007), *In the Valley Of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007), and *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007).

It is in this chapter that the threads running through the previous chapters will be pulled together. This will entail examining how the "masochistic aesthetics" of Chapter One, the issues of race, gender, and blankness in Chapter Two, and the blatant projections of power and recuperation emblematised in Chapter Three all contribute to implicate a passive or

inactive contemporary spectator. I will explore the dichotomy in these films that is established by way of offering up sensational textual pleasures whereby one may consume compelling images of submission and ruination, and yet, the spectator is charged, by the film, as being a passive, collusive, voyeur. The spectator is implicated as *responsible* and culpable for the spectacles of suffering offered up. Therefore, the chapter considers the ethical dimensions of this charge of culpability and investigates as to whether masochistic spectatorship can redeem or reconfigure this alleged passivity into a politically active or resistant subjectivity. I will also perform a sustained analysis of these ethical dimensions in order to scrutinise whether ethical spectatorship is just another tool with which to tighten up the structures of neo-imperialism and US hegemonic soft power through feeding the fires of neo-liberal subjectivity.

CHAPTER ONE: DEAD WHITE GUYS; MASOCHISTIC AESTHETICS IN CONTEMPORARY WAR FILMS

The main concern of this first chapter is the concept of masochistic aesthetics; what it is and how it is deployed. This is due to what I perceive as a dominant visual and narrative style pervading contemporary war cinema across many sub-genres. Whether this can be attributed to the stylistics of modern cinema, the technological and digital nature of the image, or is symptomatic of wider cultural forces will be discussed throughout this thesis. In the mean time however, I believe it is important to get a handle on what typifies this narrative and visual style, in order to analyse how it is deployed in the context of the various cycles of contemporary war films analysed in this thesis. The chapter will also begin to examine how the centralised and privileged pain of the white male subject may begin to be deconstructed in the context of race, in order to 'clear a path' for the following chapter. In order to unravel this concept I shall examine key scenes from two films I find important in this regard; *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lynne, 1990) and *The Jacket* (John Maybury, 2005). The reasons for focussing principally on these two films I shall outline now.

Both films have very similar plots based around 'the dreams of a dying character'; a narrative device deployed by many texts recently[123] and both share a similar visual fascination with macabre imagery, brutally disturbing aesthetic regimes, and seemingly random, cut-up

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[123] Amborse Bierce's short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", in US culture at least (it goes back to classical poetry as a minimum), is given the progenitor attributions for this device. It has had a notable affect on US visual culture, spawning numerous adaptations, including a *Twilight Zone* episode based on the story, and having a marked influence on a varied spectrum of films from Harold A. Harvey's cult midnight *danse macabre* movie, *Carnival of Souls* (1962) to the recent mediocre anti-choice Uma Thurman vehicle, *The Life Before Her Eyes* (Vadim Perelman, 2009)

narration. There is, however, one crucial difference; they both address very different wars. *Jacob's Ladder*'s wartime action is set in 1971 in Vietnam, whereas *The Jacket* addresses the Gulf War in Iraq and Kuwait in 1990-91. This is not necessarily problematic, since it is the narrative and aesthetic regimes deployed in the films that I am principally interested in, the fact that we have two films within the time-scope of this project that have very similar plots and visuals is enough. Both the films are also concerned with medical experiments in some way, and indeed most of the popular critical material (internet discussion forums, websites, press reviews) around *Jacob's Ladder* in particular concentrates on the film's engagement with the discourse of medical experiment conspiracy stories that abounded in regard to the Vietnam war. However, for the purpose of my argument, this discourse does not seem to be very relevant. The medical experiment conspiracy theory discourses are more or less a red herring, and although the films are interesting for their referencing of 1970s style paranoid dystopia thriller plots (e.g. *Klute, The Parallax View*), it is the foregrounding of the white male as victim and adopting the centralised and privileged position of pain and suffering in these texts. An intriguing component of this discourse is that we are confronted with the idea of the US government being the reason for the exposure and centralisation of white male anguish, since it is they who are responsible for these medical experiments that induce psychological distress in the male subjects depicted.

Another crucial reason for focussing on *Jacob's Ladder* is due to the film being at the outer limits, or "front line" if you will, of the temporal scope of this thesis. It represents a first in terms of its visual style and movement beyond the tropes and codes of 1980s Vietnam films such as *Platoon* and *Casualties of War*. Hence, it establishes a pattern for subsequent films. This is not to say they were directly influenced by it, but rather that *Jacob's Ladder* represents

the "first wave" of films examining specific post-Reagan cultural anxieties to do with US foreign policy and geopolitical power. Secondly, in the case of *The Jacket*, it simply is the case that it offers up similar thematic and stylistic concerns to *Jacob's Ladder*, and in a sense, presents a post-9/11 re-write of this film (although it says practically nothing new in this regard). Another point worth mentioning is that these two films are also interesting for their artistically "indiewood"[124] status. John Maybury and Adrian Lyne are both directors renowned for their embroilment in elements of both mainstream and art cinema, the production of both films involved both independent and Hollywood money, and distribution and marketing was modest by mainstream blockbuster standards, but far beyond standard "indie" fare. In these respects, the films occupy, to borrow a phrase from the popular literature of the 1920s and 1930s, "middle-brow"[125] culture. It is often these sorts of films that, contrastingly, appeal to liberal bourgeois audiences for their textual sophistication, and yet (seemingly invisibly to these audiences) work to shore up conservative status quo-affirming ideologies.

Jacob's Ladder: **The primacy of aestheticised US white male victimhood and the imperilment of the US homeland**

Jacob's Ladder is marked by a non-linear, fragmented, and chaotic narrative. Throughout the film, to use Kaplan's phrase, 'images erupt into cinematic space', [126] and through a combination of optical effects, editing, and the story being split into three distinct, yet equally

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[124] This refers to the zone in-between mainstream Hollywood and independent cinema that is responsible for films featuring textual and narrative sophistication, and that may be considered 'challenging' or 'unconventional'. There is also an institutional basis for this form of film-making, since many films emerge from studios that are subsidiaries of major corporations (for example, Fox Searchlight Pictures and Warner Independent Pictures). Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 4

[125] A pejorative and elitist term that implied populist texts with the outward appearance of textual sophistication, but definitely not in the same league as "high brow" literature (what we would now call 'modernist').

[126] E. Anne Kaplan, "Melodrama, cinema, and trauma." *Screen* 42.2 (2001), 201-205

plausible diegetic realms, we have a film that plays with notions of the communicability of narrative truth and the nature of traumatic memory. Indeed, the film is constructed as such that one *feels* to be inside the mind of the eponymous Jacob, experiencing all the horrors and disorientations of his palpably traumatic experience. As spectators we are drawn to invest in one component of the film's narrative strategy, only for this component to be revealed as a masquerade for the true trajectory of events. Initially, the spectator is led to believe that the film consists of two levels of narration – the first being flashbacks to Vietnam in 1971, where the main protagonist was stationed during that conflict, and the second being the 'present day' (an unspecified date in the 1970s) in which Jacob is experiencing a process of mental destabilisation and physical turmoil as a result of his persecution by the hallucinations, flashbacks and visions which he believes are a product of his traumatic experiences in Vietnam. In the final shocking revelation of the film occurring in the very last scene, we learn that Jacob has died on the operating table in a field hospital in Vietnam. As a result of this, it is clear that what the audience perceived to be flashbacks, were in fact equivalent to 'current events' and what we once perceived as the 'present day' is merely a product of Jacob's fractured, broken, and dying body and mind.

This 'dreams of a dying man' device is used as a tool with which to explore the psychological realm of the assaulted and victimised US soldier in Vietnam, contextualised by 'modern day' New York. The 'nightmare' of combat experience, is therefore brought palpably into the homeland, casting this homeland as assaulted and brutalised too. Therefore, the film constructs a link between the damaged (and mostly white male) corporeality and psychology of US foreign policy and the wreckage of contemporary US inner city urban space. This point can be ably demonstrated by one of the opening scenes of the film.

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The film opens with numerous long shots of the red sky over the Vietnam jungle with military helicopters (the iconic 'Huey' so archetypal of many Hollywood Vietnam films, documentaries and newsreels) silhouetted against the sky hovering about amongst some fine mist. Through a series of cuts and mixes between various shots of the helicopters and a slow, almost ground level pan across the weary, bedraggled soldiers on the ground a sense of the melancholy is invoked – a sense that is reinforced by the despondent, minor key, slow piano line on the soundtrack. The mist, the red sky, the non-diegetic music, and the graceful movements of the helicopters lend the scene an almost ethereal quality, in the manner of a visual lament. This quality is then fractured by the arrival of on duty soldiers from helicopters barking instructions and assuming combative positions. A caption locates the scene temporally and spatially, 'Mekong Delta 6 Oct 1971.'

Not long after this the soldiers are depicted eating their rations, whereupon events take a peculiar and chaotic turn. In the midst of barked warnings regarding approaching enemy fire, a couple of soldiers stand up and shift around looking decidedly ill and anxious, one, clutching his head and in a slight panic proclaims 'something's wrong' (referring to himself), another spews a mysterious white liquid from his mouth. There follows a battle sequence, in which the chaos of the moment is conveyed through rapid editing, jump cuts, whip pans, explosions, and numerous cut-aways to lingering shots of a soldier, sitting still and frightened in the midst of all the volatile action. This is inter-laced with shots of injured soldiers being dragged across the ground, guts, raw bone and sinew all mingling with the dirt and earth. These shots in particular bear comparison with the later film, *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), which features a similarly fraught sequence in which enemy soldiers emerge out of the mist,

like ghostly video-game characters endlessly spawning. The wild, mobile camera randomly tracks in towards desperate incidents of hand-to-hand combat, and we intimately see shells explode with the resulting effects of limbs being torn off, gore and blood splatter. The surreal and macabre nature of the sequence heightens its immersive and emotionally engaging qualities, but equally creates an uneasy sense of distance and artifice, perfectly encapsulating the notions of abjection and masochistic aesthetics that course through contemporary war films. Returning to *Jacob's Ladder*, in a few shots, our eponymous protagonist, Jacob, is picked out, searching through the undergrowth, panicked, rifle in hand. The final shot of this sequence is a hand held rapid tracking shot towards him, conveying he has been ambushed and bayoneted by someone unseen. Jacob then 'wakes up' with a jolt to find himself riding a subway train in New York.

It is critical in this opening sequence that the 'enemy' are kept unseen. This functions on the level of the plot by withholding vital information that ensures the 'surprise' factor when the film's moment of grand revelation occurs later. But on other levels it is also remarkable. Firstly, it once again demonstrates that the 'enemy' in Hollywood film, whoever it is, are deprived of subjectivity, only US soldiers are accorded this narrative power. And secondly, it ensures that US subjectivity maintains its tyrannical grip on self-representation. The numerous explicit and gratuitous shots of bodily wounds underline that it is the American male body that must be seen to be wounded and be valorised through this wounding. However, crucially, this wounding is more or less straight away withdrawn from our view to be replaced by the coherent and palpably unwounded body of Jacob, half asleep on the subway. Hence, images of the white male body in pain are swiftly replaced with the decayed working class urbanity of Jacob in his postal worker's uniform on the subway. The fact that

more or less the rest of the film is a paean to Jacob's fractured psychological state shows that not only must the white male American body be withdrawn from scenarios of corporeal pain, but it is also the only body that is allowed subjectivity in regard to trauma and disturbed psychology – it is a permitted, and perhaps encouraged, representational pathology. This succeeds in foregrounding white male American suffering and posits this cultural group as victimised and embattled.

The victimised and brutalised status of the US soldier is connected to the US homeland. This is in part achieved by the cut to Jacob sitting on the subway, but it is fortified by subsequent scenes in which we see Jacob alighting from the train and his experiences henceforth. From the decrepit innards of a New York subway train, he is disgorged into the squalid environment of a seemingly abandoned station. In a particularly suspenseful sequence, Jacob attempts to cross from one silent platform to the other through descending on to the railway line amongst the dirty water, decaying bricks and the rats.[127] In the process he is nearly run over by a passing subway train emitting an ethereal glow and seemingly occupied by numerous grotesquely shaped faces, shadowed or silhouetted to various degrees and pressed against the glass windows. Before Jacob leaves the train and steps out onto the platform he awakens from his apparent Vietnam flashback and dons his spectacles. The camera then performs an eye-line match by framing an advert on the train reading 'HELL... That's what life can be doing drugs' with the word 'HELL' being in a substantially larger font and in red. The implication is that Jacob has been cast out into a metaphorical and physical underworld, one which is dilapidated and poisonous and populated by haunting, grotesque figures that contest the

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[127] In Carrol Fry , Robert Craig , Ken Jurkiewicz, "Three viewers viewing: A viewer-response symposium on *Jacob's Ladder*" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26.3 (1998), 220-235 it is claimed that this image bears comparison to the crossing of the river Styx, and in a sense activates an association with the urban environment and the refusal of life. I claim later on there is a much subtler means of encoding the mythical or doctrinal into contemporary urbanity, a means bound up in the processes of filmic narrative production, rather than the cumbersome metaphor provided in this particular scene.

construction of the 'reality' of both the diegetic filmic text and the representational world of the characters.

There clearly seems to be an effort here to explicitly link the traumatic psychology of the US soldier with the dilapidated and abject urban spaces of the American city. The poisoned mind of the white American male must be foregrounded and privileged, and it is of such importance that this damaged psychology must be rendered extremely 'public' through it infesting the diegetic construction of urban space, and it is of such scale and prominence that it cannot help but overflow into the metropolis. So in allowing this representation of US male trauma, the film threefold reinforces some central tenets of US cultural authority; that firstly, US suffering must be privileged in representation, secondly, the pain of the white male body must strictly be a psychological one, and that thirdly, personal psychological trauma must be projected onto the US homeland in order for the US to fortify its (bogus) self-image of victimhood. That this is all achieved through the dilapidated urban spaces of New York is all the more interesting, this being the most populous city in the US and the financial centre of the nation, and by extension, the western world. The aesthetic infestation of urbanity with traumatic memory links the victimised and embattled status of the US male soldier with the US homeland, but also privileges the representation of the US urban metropolis as embattled and victimised, with its marginal decaying spaces, and it being the locus of Jacob's 'demonic visions.'[128]

The Jacket: "Passive" spectatorship and the visual pleasures of trauma

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[128] Which are merely products of his traumatic memory

A similar effect is achieved in *The Jacket* (John Maybury. 2005). This too is structured around the central conceit of 'the dreams of a dying man', except this time the traumatically invaded homeland is Vermont in winter. The film follows the life of Gulf War veteran, Jack Starks. Starks is shot in the head by an Iraqi child whilst on duty (an important point that will be returned to later). The medical staff initially pronounce him dead, only to discover that he is still alive (barely). Suffering amnesia, Starks eventually returns to his home state of Vermont. Whilst hitch-hiking, he encounters a young girl called Jackie and her mother by the road side. Jack fixes the engine of their van in order to help them, and gives his dog tags to Jackie. Later he is picked up by a lone man, who when stopped by the police initiates a gunfight and shoots the police officer. In the course of the gunfight, Jack gets shot a second time. In the throes of high anxiety caused by his trauma and amnesia, he is accused of murdering the police officer and is accordingly sent to a mental institution. He finds himself in the hands of the staff of a psychiatric hospital who determine that Jack is the ideal recipient for a controversial and secret new course of therapy, referred to as 'the jacket.' This involves Jack being pumped full of drugs, straight-jacketed and shoved in the body drawer of a morgue in the basement of the building. In his drug-addled, claustrophobic and hallucinatory state he 'travels to the future' (meant to be the year 2007) where he meets a grown up Jackie and finds out that he has only four days to live. Through his experiences in 'the jacket' Jack endeavours to find out how and why he died. However, there are many textual clues[129] which subtly suggest that all the events

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[129] Some of the clues are: Towards the commencement of the film Jack declares, 'I was twenty seven years old the first time I died' (referring to the two times he is shot and the incident which leads to his 'real' final death). Could it be that this first time was also the only time? Immediately before Jack is seen walking down the highway in Vermont there is a hallucinatory scene in which Jack registers his environment when being taken away from the battlefield. One of the images that occurs is of an army jeep on fire with its door ripped off. The driver's side door on the van belonging to Jackie's mother on the roadside in Vermont is coloured in red primer paint, as if the door has been replaced. This could be a coincidence of production design, but equally could distinguish and demarcate the fact that Jack is experiencing hallucinatory dreams which are rooted in his traumatic combat experience.

of the film, much like *Jacob's Ladder*, are merely the dreams of a dying man – the point of

Jack's death being when he was shot by the Iraqi child.

And so, in *The Jacket*, we have a similar scenario to *Jacob's Ladder* in which the traumatised subjectivity of the US male soldier invades the US homeland and his traumatic memory becomes writ large upon the landscape. But it is not merely a case of victimised masculinity proclaiming its representational prominence and lending this prominence to the geographical space of the nation state; the two films offer up a similar form of masculinity for cinematic consumption. Both Jacob and Jack are *very* far removed from both the highly muscled, hyper-masculine male bodies of many Hollywood war films, and they both even do not fall into the class of the 'subtler tyranny of the highly toned male torso,'[130] both having gaunt frames and pale skin, Jacob being a spectacle-wearer with a thatch of floppy fair hair, and Jack having a neatly gelled and feathered haircut. So what these two films provide us with is emblems for traumatised masculinity that are *meant* to function as synecdoches for the bogus self-proclaimed victimised and embattled status of US subjectivity who are essentially the most 'normal' male bodies that contemporary film will allow. Pamela Church Gibson has commented on the cultural tensions in contemporary consumption and spectatorship regarding the male body – specifically between the 'ephebic male' and the 'highly muscled man.' Jack and Jacob embody these tensions. Their bodies announce the hysterical nature of the young male in the context of contemporary consumption and spectatorship.[131] This allows for a certain degree of empathy with these characters' 'everyman' credentials, and also emphasises the completeness of the US's self-image of victimisation. In other words, it is not just the

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[130] Pamela Church Gibson, "Queer Looks, Male Gazes, Taut Torsos and Designer Labels: Contemporary Cinema, Consumption and Masculinity," *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* ed. Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 177
[131] Ibid., 176-186

highly-muscled, glistening male bodies of soldiers and action heroes that experience brutalisation, it is 'normal' skinny, bespectacled, floppy haired people like *you* too. If you are a young white male spectator, then we are apparently all victims, we are all folded into these films' discursive regimes of victimhood and solipsistic persecution.

However, there is one major difference between the manner in which the horrors of the war are brought home in *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder*. For starters, we are not located in an urban metropolis, most of the action takes place in a rural psychiatric hospital and its environs. As mentioned before, Jack is singled out as being the ideal recipient for a controversial course of treatment referred to as 'the jacket'. The experience of 'the jacket' is cinematically rendered by showing extreme close ups of Jack's face and eyes in the claustrophobic darkness of the body drawer. Images are superimposed onto one another, most of which are rapid cutting diegetic battle scenes treated to look like they have been filmed using a night vision camera. The use of sound adds to the layered confusion by using bursts of white noise, the sound of Jack weeping, and fragments of speech from earlier memories. Logical narrative is eschewed in favour of a form of chaotic montage which communicates the random and intrusive nature of memory. Subjectivity, therefore, loses its narrative restrictions and becomes cinematically represented through flashbacks, randomness, and superimpositions.

Jack is essentially the ultimate submissive and passive spectator, forced to bear witness to the images and sounds his damaged psychology projects into view for us. This configuration of the submissive and bound spectator finds some degree of comparison in Gaylyn Studlar's Deleuze-influenced conception of masochistic spectatorship. One of Studlar's central

statements is that 'the spectator must comprehend the images, but the images cannot be controlled'.[132] This is partly analogous to the apparatus of 'the jacket' – a procedure which Jack eventually manages to control and hence he demonstrates his 'narcissistic omnipotence'. The configurations of submission, dominance and control act in an almost fetishistic capacity, and indeed the camera does fetishize the portrayal of submission and binding in the film. There are numerous stylized close ups of buckles being tightened, straps being fastened, and needles caressing the surface of the skin. This, when combined with the claustrophobic extreme close ups of Jack's face and his eyes – so much so that his iris becomes a frame for the cinematic performance of his memories – all shows that fetishism is a clear component of 'the jacket' apparatus, and hence arguably, provides a metaphor for spectatorship of the film. Jack becomes a metaphorical model of spectatorship, with 'the jacket' symbolising the point where the aesthetics of masochism in the cinematic subject (the binding, the self-willed combination of pleasure (imagining Jackie in 2007) and pain (the morgue), the displacement of the 'superego' (Dr. Becker)) become conflated with the conditions of cinematic visual and narrative pleasure in the spectator.

Masochistic fantasies, the submissive male body as spectacle, and the masking of US imperialism

This leads me on to one of the central aims of this chapter, which is to expand upon the notions of 'masochistic aesthetics' mentioned in the introduction. As Deleuze observed, 'there is an aestheticism in masochism.'[133] The primary elements of this aestheticism he identified as reliance on suspense, disavowal, and most critically, *coldness*. Although the primary definition is of an *emotional* coldness, there are clear references to a physical coldness too. In

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[132] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," *Movies and Methods Volume II: An Anthology,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 613
[133] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, 134

The Jacket, we have the winter setting of Vermont for the majority of the film. All exterior scenes are carpeted in snow and ice, there is also a blue/green tinge to the filmstock, most clearly emphasised in scenes located in the psychiatric hospital, where skin colours appear various shades of grey and green, matching the colour schematics of the production design. Coldness is also encapsulated in the performance of the actors; for example, Adrien Brody, who plays Jack, delivers certain lines in a stuttering, hoarse and hushed voice, as if experiencing hypothermic conditions. His delivery of the line 'we h-haunt you' is most notable in this regard for its drawn out breathless iciness. As we shall see later, the major sources of emotional coldness in *The Jacket* are women, either in the figure of the abused and downtrodden Jackie, or in the figure of Jean, Jackie's mother, who exhibits the frostiest of defensive and prickly attitudes throughout the limited scenes depicting her. Also, in *Jacob's Ladder*, numerous characters are marked by an emotional coldness, specifically the characters who compose Jacob's dying dreams; from the surgeon in the 'gurney sequence' explored below, who blankly asserts to Jacob "you're dead", to many other peripheral characters who stare blankly and frostily at him throughout the New York metropolis, and his mugging at the hands of a beggar dressed up as Santa Claus.

In *Jacob's Ladder* emotional coldness is pervasive, but this coldness also is reliant on the principles of abjection for its conveyance. The film is perhaps one long extended delve into a nightmarish realm of abjection, with the numerous demonic, deathly and debris-laden images one is subjected to. Masochistic aesthetics abound in the film, with the grotesque and the macabre playing key roles in establishing the visual regime, the suspension and deferral of pain and consummation playing vital roles in the narrative and stylistic realm, and the spectacle of bodily horror, waste, and decay being consistently offered up for consumption.

There is one scene in particular which is useful in this context; Jacob, in the midst of one of his more troubling visions, imagines himself strapped to a gurney being wheeled through a disgusting hospital basement. The scene consists of momentary shots, some objective, but many subjective and meant to approximate Jacob's point of view from the gurney. Whilst he is being wheeled through this nightmare we see horribly mis-formed human bodies, a crushed child's bicycle (a reminder of Jacob's child's death), and other mysterious and demonic shapes shifting around in the shadows, glimpsed from through bars, gaps in the metal grate ceiling and at the extremities of vision. At the conclusion of this nightmarish journey through the hospital basement, there is an extended sequence in which Jacob is strapped to an operating table in a dank, tiled and badly lit room, surrounded by masked and gloved surgeons, doctors and nurses. The camera and sound editing relish in the auditory and visual processes of leather straps sliding through buckles, and there are some close ups of a precise metal frame around Jacob's head that is accurately adjusted with a series of screws to fit his cranium. The effect of this sequence is to affirm the random and chaotic montage of traumatic memory as a locus of abjection and to crucially insert the white male subject into this same locus. In his 'dreams of a dying man' status, Jacob exists in a liminal zone between life and death, and so is teetering on the brink of collapse into complete abjection. The gurney scene, for all its disturbing and nightmarish connotations, is nonetheless, visually fascinating in all its gruesome surrealism, and the camera and sound editing fetishizes and revels in compelling details such as the one wheel of the gurney being off kilter and spinning hopelessly around, the precise metallic instruments, the sound of the wheels clicking over the tiles floor, and the impressive optics of the searing overhead white lights creating dazzling patterns in the camera lens. And so the abject nightmarish products of traumatic memory are, in a perverse way,

presented as desirable in their aesthetically and aurally pleasing state. Abjection threatens to engulf subjectivity, but this is coded as a good thing by the film's aesthetic and aural regime – the spectator is seduced into a world of abjection and dissolution. This could represent a radical breach of subjectivity and a challenge to dominant patriarchal culture, but really the film is essentially inviting spectators to join our central white male character in revelling in the nightmare of crisis and dissolution; the film drags us into a zone of solipsistic horror, in which traumatic memory is constituted as non-normative bodies occupying marginal, dilapidated spaces. We are tethered to Jacob's self-pitying, self-reflexive subjectivity, and hence that which is 'unclean' and threatens to engulf normative subjectivity is reconstituted as indices of the privileged site of US white male traumatic memory.

Accompanying this abjection and masochistic aesthetics is a sense of horrific, macabre spectacle in which the spectator is drawn into the intrigued contemplation of the bizarre, repulsive images presented. According to Steven Shaviro, spectacle involves 'suspension and deferral of desire' and so 'serves the purpose of seduction', which in turn can lead to 'humiliating and (secretly desirable) self-abandonment.'[134] In which case, spectacle becomes equated with the quest by masculinity to seek out degradation and 'weakness', itself quite a common trope in war films, especially when soldiers or veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are presented as weak, or mad. This latter state of madness is usually equated to a form of self-abandonment as subjectivity is eroded and alternative states of representation are evoked. Crucially though, in Shaviro's conception of spectacle and masochistic aesthetics, this 'weakness' means that 'normative masculinity is deprivileged and denaturalised; it is displayed as a reactive, mimetic consolidation of spectacle.'[135] In other

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[134] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinema Body*, 197
[135] Ibid.

words, normative hegemonic masculinity which we see embodied in war films through the hard male body and the military-industrial complex, is the reaction, the defence, the system which tries to legislate against the fragmentary and blurred nature of the masochistic cinematic body. Our natural inclination is towards weakness, humiliation and self-abandonment, and it is the attempt to impose coherence and wholeness which is the aberration, not the other way round. In turn, we should accept these states of unfixity and embrace the positions of degradation and self-abandonment the cinema presents to us. So therefore, the masochism 'is not an internalization of oppression', rather it is the case that the masochistic cinematic body shows that there is in fact nothing there to internalise; the utopian idea that there can exist a space free from power and domination is in itself 'an insidious manifestation of internalising power.'[136]

Another element of the aesthetics of both films is chaos. This is an element of the trauma cinema stylistics that populate the films. In both *Jacob's Ladder* and *The Jacket*, the very narratives are teetering on the brink of chaos for large sections of the plot. There are moments in both films where even the most attentive first-time spectator would have difficulty deciphering events and dialogue. The narratives of both films are non-linear and non-chronological, and also spatially disparate. Also, at the micro-level of editing, both films feature scenes in which the chaos of battle or traumatic memory is conveyed through multi-layering of images, rapid cuts, jump cuts, whip pans, and sound editing that creates a hallucinatory, incomprehensible montage of noise. Specifically in *The Jacket*, as mentioned above, the actual experience of Jack being confined in the experimental 'jacket' procedure invokes a chaotic montage of images and sounds. This is in a way analogous to Jacob being strapped helpless to the hospital gurney, in that in both scenarios we have men who are in the

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[136] Ibid., 196

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midst of agonising deaths, dreaming or fantasising about being bound and submissive in the abject, dilapidated basements of medical buildings. The fact that this is a twisted fantasy or desire shows that this is self-willed, and hence there is something compellingly masochistic about these scenarios. In Deleuze's re-writing of Freud, he argued that masochistic fantasy revolved around the 'cold oral mother', who provided an alternative source of psychosexual authority to the father.[137] According to Studlar, disavowal and fetishism are two common components of both masochism and cinematic spectatorial pleasure.[138] Through the fetishizing of the submissive body and the deployment of a scenario which recalls the basic apparatus of cinematic spectatorship, it could be interpreted that the film is endorsing the belittling and expulsion of patriarchal power. However, as is the case with the hospital gurney sequence from *Jacob's Ladder*, it seems that the audience is being sold a masochistic fantasy that can mask the imperial belligerence of US power and cultural authority. Jack's traumatised status coupled with his designation as 'war veteran' means that he occupies the privileged status of both victim and victimiser. This means that the radical potential offered up by the expulsion of phallic power in favour of the disavowal and dissolution of masochism, is somewhat compromised by this expulsion coming at the hands of the embodiment of mainstream, indoctrinated, unquestioning, murderous contemporary masculinity – the soldier. Crisis and suffering become fore-grounded and fetishized by the camera; visual pleasure is located in self-willed pain.

The positioning of the male body as submissive and bound, together with the aestheticised accoutrements of acquiescence embodied in the intimate shots of buckles, frames, straps etc suggests a certain theatricality and performance to the scope of masochistic male subjectivity

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[137] Pointed out by Nick Mansfield in *Masochism: The Art of Power* (London: Praeger, 1997), 70
[138] Studlar, "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema", 613

expressed as white male victimization. As David Savran has stated, 'the spectacle of the male body is a perilous and anxiety-producing commodity, all too easily coded as homoerotic.'[139] However, this specifically refers to the context of the 'hard' Reaganite spectacular hyper-masculinities of 1980s action films such as *First Blood Part Two*, *Commando*, and the like. *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder* both offer up gentler, subtler codes of masculinity for consumption, suggesting that the processes of deferral and disavowal that accompany the eroticisation of the male body in Hollywood cinema may not apply here. In this respect, when Jeffords states that 'the chief mechanism in mainstream cinema for deferring eroticism in the heterosexual male body is through establishing that body as an object of violence, so that erotic desire can be displaced as sadomasochism'[140], the same processes cannot be said to be occurring outside of the context of the hard, hyper-masculinity of 1980s Hollywood. Instead, the male body is established as a site or object of violence, not in order to permit or legislate for the eroticisation of that body, but instead with the sole purpose of permitting identification with this body as victimized and assaulted. Violence and pain are not the deferral, they are the spectacle themselves. These bodies become legible, become theatrically and performatively embodied through their very status as afflicted and damaged. The eroticisation occurs, arguably, in the very process of this performativity, through our seduction into the realm of abjection via the aestheticised tactile and affective pleasures invoked by the mise-en-scene of submission and corporeal decrepitude offered up for visual consumption. Accordingly, in this aestheticisation of submission, this erotics of the bound male, a disavowal of complicity occurs; our identification with the victimised and assaulted male body makes clear our own masochistic subjectivity as spectators, and hence presents a refutation of our agency in constructing the masochistic scenario. Our (disavowed) culpability in ceding control to

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[139] David Savran, *Taking it Like a Man*, 203
[140] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 13

economies of white male self-image of victim is secured by this process, and hence the power and agency by which US patriarchal authority maybe reconfigured and reconstructed becomes endorsed by Western spectatorial subjectivity.

Another contemporary war film that exploits the tortured male body is *We Were Soldiers*, which examines the Vietnam war, a topic not addressed by mainstream Hollywood for many years. The film stars Mel Gibson, and so therefore, its dependency on the afflicted and damaged white male body could be said to be signalled from the outset. Jeffrey A. Brown states that a key component of Gibson's star persona is the 'stoic resistance to the torture and/ or physical pain to which his characters are subjected in almost every movie.'[141] He also explains that torture scenes allow 'the majority of men in the audience to contemplate the male bodies on the screen without questioning their heterosexuality.'[142] In *We Were Soldiers*, Gibson plays Lt. Col. Hal Moore, who commands First Battalion of the Seventh Calvary regiment, First Division (an elite, helicopter-propelled military unit), which, and much is made of this throughout the film, was also General Custer's unit. Moore is depicted as a complex and multi-faceted character. He is shown as courageous and ruthless on the battlefield, a tactical and strategic mastermind, and a willing recipient of corporeal pain in the name of his country and his unit. In addition, he is shown as a caring, tender, and slightly sentimental family man, an intellectual powerhouse (attested to by his Harvard degree in International Relations), and in his spare time, a thoughtful consumer of historical texts and sources. Therefore, once again, we see the hailing of a white male middle class subjectivity, courtesy of Moore's domestic depiction and contextualization, permitting spectators empathy with the authentic narratives of innocent victimhood bound up in this subjectivity.

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[141] Jeffrey A. Brown, 'The Tortures of Mel Gibson: Masochism and the Sexy Male Body', *Men and Masculinities*, 5:2 (2002), 125

[142] Ibid., 129

We Were Soldiers carefully establishes the US male body as the exceptional site of pain and suffering. Despite attempting to present a bilateral view of battlefield violence and warring subjectivities, the damage and pain of the US soldiers is in many ways rendered superior, more delectable, and, crucially, aesthetically compelling. A case in point is the film's central battle sequence in which the US resort to calling in napalm strikes, which injure their own troops as collateral damage. A particularly intriguing moment depicts a soldier with hideously burned legs being wrenched from the battlefield, in the course of which, the flesh slips from his leg bones, a mess of sticky, charred meat. The moment is accompanied with his agonizing screams, pictured in close-up, and once he reaches the relative safety of a Medevac helicopter, there is a long close-up shot of his sweaty, blood-stained, agonized face as he grimaces and moans in anguish. Therefore, we are compelled to regard US male corporeal ruination and the hysterical experience of its own mutilation. There are no equivalent moments for the Vietnamese soldiers, and even in the character of Moore, we have, as Marilyn Young has observed, a commander who is 'everywhere in the midst of the battle, barely protected and always in danger',[143] in marked contrast to the Vietnamese commanding officer who directs the action from a secret bunker.

Hence, the damaged US male body is presented as a product of a moral and humanitarian military force (i.e. not engaged in perfidious battlefield tactics such as networks of underground tunnels and bunkers), and in its numerous depictions of extended corporeal pain (such as the napalm strike sequence) offers a consolation of the white US male victim as hero. In other words, the broken and abused white male body is used as an object with which to redeem the perceived failures and emasculating disenfranchisements of the Vietnam era

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[143] Marilyn Young, "In the Combat Zone", 321

and reinvest the male body with a superiority or exceptionalism. In proximity with the tortured star persona of Mel Gibson, the damaged white male body is marked as 'undeniably masculine'[144], but also, crucially undeniably obtainable. This is because, as mentioned above, it is presented as tantalizing, compelling, delectable – from the intriguing tactility of the burnt and mutilated body, to the white middle class subjectivity interpellated by Moore's characterization, an attempt is made by the film's ideological process to offer narratives of victimhood as viable spectator positions in relationship to tales of violent US neo-imperialism.

Masochistic narrative: Film endings, US imperialism as paternity, and the triumph of patriarchy

Masochism is typified by deferral and suspense, a continual oscillation between presence and absence, omnipotence and powerlessness, and hence the masochist is seemingly held forever on the cusp of closure, enduring and enjoying this 'not quite' or 'nearly there' position. Hence one would expect masochistic narratives to embody elements of this subject position, to be antipathetic to closure and to be typified by continual inter-subjective oscillations of power, denial and refusal. To an extent, this is true: the chaotic nature of both narratives of *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder* combined with their grand moments of revelation of crucial knowledge (they are dead or dying, and the diegetic realm is an illusion), mean that on first viewing one is subjected to endless deferrals of knowledge. Also, the numerous red herrings and 'Macguffins' offered up by both films as 'explanations' for their respective plots, mean that there is a continual oscillation between a sense of mastery and befuddlement when viewing the films. However, there is one crucial element by which the concept of a

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[144] Brown, "The Tortures of Mel Gibson", 140

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'masochistic narrative' in the context of these films is thrown into doubt, in that they both possess coherent moments of closure at their endings in which resolution and re-establishment of equilibrium is achieved. In *Jacob's Ladder*, Jacob is depicted reunited with his dead son in the afterlife, ascending a staircase in his family apartment into the searing white light of heaven. In *The Jacket*, once Jack has achieved his inner quest to heal the matriarchal bond between the grown Jackie and her mother, he and Jackie are depicted driving off together in her car, as the screen fades to white and 'We Have All The Time In The World' plays on the soundtrack. Far from seeing a mocking and belittling of patriarchal power and paternity, we instead witness the suturing effects of endings that confirm hetero-normativity (the old movie cliché of 'riding off into the sunset' in a car), and the law of the father (invoked by ascension to heaven). This is the triumph of patriarchy.

It is plain then that these two films exhibit masochistic aesthetics, but do not follow up on this by delivering a radical refutation of phallic power in their conclusions, and are instead content to concur with the dominant fiction in offering us a narrative in which male crisis is centralised and privileged. It seems that there is the possibility that the dissolution and fragmentation we are seduced into could compromise or unsettle the male bodies posited in the films as being crucial in epitomising a wounded US. However, it is still white bodies that gain the privilege of moving into the searing white light of utopian space. The central white male is at peace, whereas all other bodies and subjectivities and others (especially 'enemies') are left broken, abused and discarded in abject spaces littered throughout the rest of the films.

One crucial body that is left as 'litter' is that of the Iraqi child that shoots Jack in *The Jacket*. The film starts with a pastiche of the green-tinted and low quality night-vision video footage

of bombing raids, and rapid, long distance panning shots of military aircraft unleashing their deadly payloads. We then cut to the ground war, the Iraqi desert at night. Our protagonist, Jack Starks, reaches out in a parental and concerned manner to a young Iraqi child. In a shocking reverse shot we see the boy suddenly draw a gun and shoot our protagonist in the head at close range.

There are clearly many ways to read this, but the *paternal* nature of Jack's approach to the child, plus the violent means by which this fatherly attitude is repudiated seems to be symbolic of the USA's perceived paternalism in the field of international relations. The shooting of the US marine, who embodies the US nation-state, at once figures paternalism as damaging to the body of 'fatherly' America, and also condescendingly constructs the Middle Eastern nation as lacking maturity – being the other to the USA's central, normative and unchallenged position as the father.

As such, this is not only an assault on US masculinity, but US political and military authority too. This all serves to lend strength to notions of US masculinity, since the emphasis is on the troubled psychological realm of the male combat soldier. The male is central in the representative practices, and his psychology is afforded the privileged position of being explicated by the aesthetics and narrative of the film. All eyes are on the traumatised male and a male experience of the battlefield.[145] There is also a reinforcement of US masculinity since the film in depicting the Iraqi child soldier[146] manages to racially other, infantilise, and cast into doubt the moral integrity of 'the enemy'. To be shot by a child soldier appears to be

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[145] John Newsinger has stated that 'all war films are tales of masculinity' in '"Do You Walk The Walk?" Aspects of Masculinity in Some Vietnam War Films," *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies, and Men*, ed. Pat Kirkham and Janet Thurim (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), 126

[146] It is clear that the film uses the notion of the child soldier for ideological purposes since there were no recorded US Marine fatalities due to children during the Gulf War – this is not based on a factual event or any firm understanding of the military realities of the Gulf War in 1991.

outside of the normative arenas and technologies of a US idea of combat and engagement. The implicit reaction is meant to be 'what sort of nation would deploy child soldiers – it is underhand, duplicitous etc.' and clearly reflects the 'feminizing' of the 'enemy' as outlined by Susan Linville, who has declared that the 'West has persistently coded the East as feminine, inferior, fecund, and treacherous.'[147] This is the paradigm against which depictions of the 'enemy' are constructed, although clearly the child soldier is also used as a symbol of monstrosity or evil in other movies and cultural texts such as *Rules of Engagement* (William Friedkin, 2000).

Cynthia Weber has stated that Hollywood mediates US foreign policy according to a 'World War II formula for understanding and rehabilitating an enemy' by stressing the enemy's 'hypermasculine/hypersexual' qualities.[148] This stressing of hypermasculinity or hypersexuality is necessary in order to enact a crucial 'emasculation' so that the enemy's 'moral maturation is possible at the knee of a fatherly America'.[149] I would say that this is true, but it seems that this process has already been enacted in the context of *The Jacket* – quite obviously the boy who fires his gun at Jack is anything but hyper-masculine or hyper-sexual. The implication here is that Iraq's 'moral maturation' is already on its way, except having been emasculated and de-sexualised, 'fatherly America' becomes its victim.

The child soldier is problematic and represents a rupture in categories of gendered national difference at the heart of the film. As Lina Khatib has noted, 'Orientalist notions of the Arab world are invested with ideas of [...] violent, yet succumbing, males.'[150] She goes on to state

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[147] Susan Linville, "'The *Mother* Of All Battles': *Courage Under Fire* and the Gender-Integrated Military." *Cinema Journal,* 39.2 (2000), 114

[148] Weber, *Imagining America at* War, 12-13

[149] Ibid.

[150] Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (London: I.B Tauris, 2006), 63

that historically the gendered imagination of colonizers and colonized figured this as a virgin/whore dichotomy. However, in recent years with US self-image transformed into the '"new man" who symbolizes America's position as the world's 'saviour', the conflict depicted in Hollywood films between the US and Arab nations is one of conflicting masculinities.[151] The image of the child soldier at once unsettles the gendering of Arab nations, and instead establishes an account of nationhood forged through corporeal development and the familial. However, in as much as this creates a breach in gender difference and conceptions of nationhood, this scene still entails the demonization of the Arab world. No matter what the radical potential of this wholesale violent rejection of US paternalism and exceptionalism may be, it is still the case that the majority of the film privileges and centralises the US soldier's pain, guilt and trauma. The Iraqi child, who in Jack's dream world is represented by a boy named Babek, who is mute and has severe learning difficulties, is denied a coherent subjectivity throughout the film, his dream world equivalent being denied language and any palpable presence.

In the context of this, it seems that there is an ideological operation entailed here that casts US masculinity (in the shape of the soft, 'new man' bodies of Jack and Jacob) as weak, victimised, oppressed, self-torturing and traumatised. The purpose of this, it seems, is to draw attention away from the construction of gendered identity (as symbolic of, or an embodiment of, national identity) in the 'othered' enemy depicted in these films. It is usually the colonized, the oppressed, the invaded who are depicted as 'succumbing', and in a sense being psycho-sexually 'feminised' through the infiltration of boundaries inherent in colonial domination. Therefore, this depiction of US masculinity, in a sense, colonizes the position of the colonized and denies the oppressed their place as victims. Instead, this enormously

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[151] Ibid., 64

privileged function gets handed over to US male soldiers. Why is this? Apart from drawing attention away from the neo-imperial violence of US foreign policy, it shows that white corporeal pain can only be depicted if accompanied by a complex diegetic framing device that relies on us investing in the images and narrative being embodiments of traumatic memory. The privileged white body must continue to embody a distinct version of US national identity, and so therefore it can only be permitted to be depicted as abused if it is a product of psychological violence. As Khatib states, 'the weakness of the Arab male is ultimately established by the physical victory of the American male.'[152] To which I would add that traumatic memory is another means by which 'others' can be excluded from a mainstream narrative of shoring up US national identity. It is a means of exclusion and delegating the performance of corporeal shattering onto 'other' bodies, in the case of the Iraqi child, the shattering being his transformation into Babek, and the obliteration of any potential subjectivity. Therefore, trauma, rather than being about a breach in memory and subjectivity, basically provides US Hollywood characters with a crucial specificity. This can be utilised in order to enable a universalising account of US power and the disavowal of its scheme of neo-imperial conquest and violence.

This requires masochistic aesthetics since it is in this visual regime that this shattering occurs and it is the Iraqi child that is the cause of Jack's (and ergo American) traumatised psychology. Therefore, the other of the Arab male – that which threatens the undoing of US hegemonic 'hard' masculinity through its seductive, succumbing, compliant image – becomes the violent destroyer of US 'new man' masculinity. It is the refusal of this 'new man' concept of masculinity to perish that is the hub for all the oscillations between denial/closure and power/powerlessness that structure the aesthetics and narrative of the film. Ironically, the

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[152] Ibid., 65

masochistic orgy of shattering and dissolution engendered by traumatic memory results in a more coherent subjectivity for US white male victimhood than could ever be hoped for from the 'othered' and infantilised Arab male, who in turn embodies Iraqi national identity. The masochistic aesthetics are therefore one vast internalisation and reconfiguration of a corporeal shattering intending to reject US patriarchal and military power, which instead results in the enfeeblement of Arab identity and the bolstering of the bogus US self-image of victimhood.

The "new man", the enchantment of masochistic aesthetics, and the empathic entanglements of white male victimhood

I now wish to discuss some points leading on from this sense of failed patriarchy that runs through *The Jacket.* This failure of patriarchy translates into the deployment of numerous internalised female 'others' onto which the film displaces and projects anxieties regarding guilt and the privileged and centralised category of victimhood occupied by Jack. The film consistently emphasises the depravity or weakness of paternal power: the characters of Jackie and Babek are both depicted without a father and Jack is aggressively warned away from displaying any paternal affection towards Jackie. In the shooting of the paternalistic Jack by the Iraqi child, we have the portrayal of a father being 'beaten.'[153] The character of Dr. Becker is the only subject who is explicitly referred to as a 'father figure', however, since in this reading of the film he is merely a component of Jack's psychological realm, he, as instigator of 'the jacket' procedure, represents a curiously self-abasing element of patriarchal authority. In contrast to these failed configurations of patriarchy, we have the figure of Jean (Jackie's mother) who, as mentioned previously, seems to embody Deleuze's 'cold oral mother' in her emotional iciness and drug-addled, pale-skinned repulsiveness. We also have Jackie herself.

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[153] Deleuze figures one of the crucial elements of masochism as being the scenario of 'a father being beaten' in Deleuze, 60.

The character of Jack Starks experiences a wild oscillation between scenarios of punishment, debasement and torment at the hands of paternal and maternal forms of authority. Most obviously, there is 'the jacket' which is instigated by the "father figure" Dr. Becker. The hallucinatory scenarios involving Jackie and Jean are another level of self-torment, since the 'cold oral mother' of Jean is presented as paranoid and belligerent, verbally abusing Jack. These oscillations confirm Jack's subjectivity as inherently masochistic. But to what ends? The white US male body is depicted as suffering at the hands of paternal and maternal forces of authority, and yet, despite the failed patriarchy trope running through the film, it is the matriarchal bonds that are diagnosed as in need of repair. Hence, Jack attempts to fix (in his own mind, of course) the broken familial bond between Jackie and Jean and correct the notably female doctor's assessment and diagnosis of Babek's mental health.

The internalised female others who populate the film are therefore presented as much more worthy of restoration, the intimation being that in the film's symbolic economy, distressing, violent, corrupted patriarchy is either beyond transformation or perfectly acceptable. The effect of this is to divest the hegemonic hard masculinity of US nationhood of any accountability when it comes to the masochistic basis of the privileged and centralised position of victimhood and self-abasement occupied by American self-image. Instead, this gets projected onto the 'cold oral mother' of Jean or the depressed, junkie bohemia of Jackie, and crucially it is these internalised female others that are held accountable for the emotional and psychological self-flagellations that constitute this victim position. Since in the arena of war and national identity 'gender is one of the most powerful tools by which nations define themselves and others'[154], these internalised female 'others' allow Jack, and hence US national identity, to displace guilt, anxiety, crisis, and trauma on to a maternal or female form.

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[154] Khatib, 101-102

The female form becomes a repository for the displaced guilt of the 'new man' soldier, and by extension, the male body of US national identity. The effect is to exculpate US white masculinity for any culpability in the imperial violence of US foreign policy. The 'new man' of American military power seems to be an invention in order to fuel the shedding of this culpability; as Susan Jeffords has stated, 'audiences are to admire their emotional commitments and the ingenuity of their sacrifices' rather than their 'hard bodies.'[155] A lack of hard bodies means a lack of alignment with a hard or brutal foreign policy; the bodies no longer carry the same symbolism and threat, and hence the 'new man' soldier forms part of the discourse of public diplomacy that aims to disconnect US masculinity from any culpability in neo-imperial violence, and hence the US can continue in its neo-imperial projects unabated.

The Jacket and *Jacob's Ladder* make this victimised position of self-abasing, psychologically disturbed military masculinity strangely alluring and compelling. Studlar has stated that there is the risk of 'glamorizing pain, renunciation, and death' in relation to masochistic subjectivity.[156] Although I would hesitate to say that either film glamorises the masochistic position, there is nonetheless a certain tactility and clinical coldness to both films' depictions of fetishized submission and binding scenarios and through depicting abject, marginal spaces of suffering. In particular, in the gurney sequence in *Jacob's Ladder* and in 'the jacket' sequences in *The Jacket*, we witness a very similar regime of the camera's obsession with the finer details of corporeal control and restriction, together with a lingering exaltation of the palpable textures of the materials of submission; leather, metal buckles, metal screws and the surgical precision governing the scenarios. In addition, *The Jacket* achieves this through its

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[155] Susan Jeffords, "Can Masculinity Be Terminated?", 259
[156] Studlar, "Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity in *Letter From An Unknown Woman*," *Cinema Journal* 33.3 (1994), 51

projection of culpability onto female 'others' and its rich aesthetics of chaotic traumatic memory. *Jacob's Ladder* also possesses these rich aesthetics, but also offers to seduce the spectator into a realm of abjection and dissolution. It is in this seduction that not quite the glamorisation of pain but certainly a rejoicing in the aesthetics of pain occurs. Both of these films' endings also achieve another sort of glamorisation through deploying sentimental melodramatic scenarios of restoring the equilibrium of patriarchal authority through recourse to hetero-normative discourse, or the visual language of monotheistic religion. They are both 'happy endings' that, in a sense, are a 'reward' for the disavowal of the power games that lead to US masculinity occupying a position of victimisation. In *The Jacket*, the whole film is spent searching for a rejoinder to the bullet to the head that rejects US paternalism, and finds this rejoinder in normalising the rejection of the law of the father inherent in masochism through eventually seeking out one of the basic clichés of cinematic grammar – the 'drive off into the sunset'. Hetero-normative discourse is used to sanction the primacy of US self-image as victim. As is also the case with *Jacob's Ladder*, the US-based plots that form the majority of both stories means that this victim status extends into the 'homeland' too. Therefore, this is also a means by which to replicate and multiply this self-image as victim. This is due to the need to violently reassert US hegemony after a serious challenge to US exceptionalism in the shape of a violent rejection of paternalism, and thus confirms the Western stereotype/mental image of the Arab as gendered national identity; he is meant to be 'violent, yet succumbing.'[157]

Returning to *Jacob's Ladder,* as the film progresses it becomes apparent that during some of Jacob's 'dreams' he has separated from his wife and family, and is living with a woman called Jezebel. It also becomes apparent that the reason for Jacob's death is that he was killed by

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[157] Khatib, 63

being bayoneted by one of the soldiers in his platoon. We learn[158] that the soldiers have been fed infinitesimal doses of a particularly potent form of LSD called 'the ladder' which instead of providing a hallucinatory experience supplies 'a fast trip straight down the ladder […] to the primal fear' so that the soldiers may 'tap into (their) anger'. The motivation for this is presented as a means of increasing infantry kill ratios and so in a sense inadvertently narrates certain anxieties regarding American masculinity and its politics through the military embodiment of its belligerent foreign policies. Instead of targeting this new found aggression at 'the enemy', the troops savagely ripped each other apart.

Therefore the self-abasement that structures the film has its plot-based or narratological antecedence in the impact 'the ladder' had on the troops in Vietnam. Since it caused the troops to all turn on each other and frantically and savagely attack each other, it could be said that on a collective level, the platoon was displaying an extreme masochistic tendency. If this is the case then the implication is that collective American combative masculinity, as defined in terms of traumatic memory, is masochistic. Studlar declared that a feature of masochism is that 'the secret mastery and manipulation […] ends in a psychological triumph often paid for with physical self-annihilation'[159] In this sense, the self-annihilation experienced by the soldiers can not be said to be self-inflicted, since it was a product of collective, state-willed violence. The private psychologies of the soldiers, especially Jacob, become conflated with the public psychology and consciousness of the Vietnam War as the masochistic tendency is implanted via the use of the psychotropic drug, 'the ladder'. The ultimate 'triumph' of the masochistic structure – the achievement of death – is complicated and reconfigured by the

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[158] This is what is diegetically presented to us. The film is ambiguous as to whether this medical experiment narrative is a genuine explanation for Jacob's platoon's demise, since this element of the plot is conveyed to us while we are immersed in Jacob's dying dreams. Nonetheless, this narrative is present and is pushed as a credible framing device for comprehending the film, since the film closes with a text caption regarding the use of medical experiments in Vietnam.

[159] Gaylyn Studlar, "Masochistic Performance and Female Subjectivity", 51

conditions of masochism's inception. Self annihilation is achieved, but this is only willed by the soldiers since their brain chemistry has been altered by 'the ladder'. The implication here is that US foreign policy has introduced an increased element of masochism into contemporary American masculinity.

What is the purpose of this? Why have a scenario whereby US government forces are responsible for the collective self-abandonment and mortal self-flagellation enacted by US troops? The obvious answer is that it is a clumsy metaphor for the state demanding allegiance and sacrifice, in a re-writing of the classic 'lions led by donkeys' line, and on a slightly more symbolic level, it narrates how the Vietnam war, as a feature of US foreign policy, was responsible for the psychological and corporeal ruination of many American lives. However, what is specific about this image is that it is *self*-destruction occurring, and in the context of a quest for chemically induced *hyper-masculinity*. The metaphor is announcing that the cultural authority of US hegemony (represented by the government) in its quest to make Americans subscribe to the ideals of over-sized musculature, power, dominance, control, and the militarization of urbanity, has led to the Americans destroying themselves and ripping each other apart. The film, aptly given its 1990 release date, is an attempt to say 'good riddance' to 1980s ideals of the 'hard bodies' of US neo-imperialism. This casting out of the hard body of Reaganite foreign policy and cultural authority is, however, performed at the expense of manoeuvring the white male once again into a centralised and privileged position of suffering and pain; it's not merely enough to reject this hard body, it must be proclaimed that 'we suffered under this' along the way. Our identification with, and pleasurable engagement with the submissive and bound male body in these films is therefore rendered even more problematic. We are not just empathically entangled with white male victimhood, but its

cultural politics too. In adopting the subjectivity of white male victimhood, we not only reproduce the co-opting of marginalised otherness, and the colonising influences of white ethnocentrism, but we also share in the narcissism and self-regard of implementing the rejection of hyper-masculinity and the hard, palpable corporeal, political and cultural machinery of 1980s patriarchal power. This anti-masculinist discourse is rendered obscene by its simultaneous empathic alignment with the white male as victim. The hammer blows of 1980s US imperialism in the form of Reaganite hard bodies are replaced by subtler collusive forces of cultural subscription to the performative posturings of white male masochistic economies and the anti-social "turn to the self" embodied in the white male victim trope.

Conclusions: Radical pleasures, conformist powers; the uses of masochism in contemporary war films

War films depend a great deal on spectacle, either in the form of the hard male bodies deployed in their matrices, or in the form of violence, brutality and military hardware. As we have seen with Smirnoff's definition of masochistic stylistics, the spectacle of a central scene where the suspenseful moment before violence is depicted, is key. In both *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder* these scenes occur frequently and entail a fetishising of the props of control, submission and clinical precision. Virtually all of Jacob's 'visions' of demons and hellish happenings start at a soft, slow pace in calm surroundings and eventually erupt into violence and degradation. These range from the calm authority of the doctor in the gurney sequence, who eventually deigns to stick a rather barbaric looking needle into Jacob's forehead, upon which we see blood gushing out, to a sequence in which Jacob has a vision of Jezebel turning into a grotesque demon whilst dancing at a house party, and to probably the most disturbing occurrence which happens in a deleted scene in which whilst recuperating from the effects of

an 'antidote' to 'the ladder', Jacob, lying in bed sees the ceiling above him soak through with blood and a horrific demon bursts through attempting to attack him. The effect of this 'calm before the storm' narrative structure is to present that which precedes the violence to be meditated on, to be visually and aurally basked in as rare moments when one experiences respite from the onslaught of violent and horrific images. Hence, the content of these 'calm' sequences become worthy of aestheticising, and hence the tactility and palpability of the films' victimised, anguished dreamscapes become rendered with more importance and emphasis.

I know wish to turn my attention to *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) in order to conclude this chapter. *Ryan* encapsulates many of the major strands running through this chapter and also points towards the trajectories and ideological workings through that occur in subsequent chapters. Principally I am drawn to this film at this juncture due to the 'calm before the storm' narrative structure mentioned above. *Ryan* makes great use of this since its initially slow-paced and elegiac opening gives way to a horrific depiction of American soldiers landing at Omaha Beach on 6 June 1944. There are also numerous other junctures, such as the carnage of battle giving way to delicate close-ups of raindrops falling on grass and leaves, and an almost dream-like, incantatory sequence when troops rest at a church over-night before moving on to more horrors the next morning. The narrative structure of *Ryan* fits with the masochistic aesthetics of other films under discussion in this chapter. Another way in which the film tallies with this chapter's account of masochistic aesthetics is through the opening battle sequence. Through this, the spectator is drawn into the textual pleasures of corporeal ruination and the suffering of others through means of camera-work, editing, sound design, use of film-stock, and post-production CGI and colour correction. The film

spectacularises and offers up for frenzied consumption, male damage and the devastation of the male body. Looking forward to subsequent chapters, through the character of Captain Miller and the narrative process of Corporal Upham's "blooding"[160], we experience 'the late 1990s tendency to make humanitarianism central to any rationale for war'[161]. Also, in the closing emotivity of the (older) Ryan's proclamation of "Have I led a good life?", we have a direct implication addressed to the audience regarding the "goodness" and ethical integrity of "our" lives.

In *Saving Private Ryan*, then, we are intensely and viscerally drawn into emotive engagement with the film in both its stylistic presentation, and in our empathic alignment with the character of Captain Miller. We share the formal effects of his traumatized status (for example, the sound dimming in response to the proximity of a shell exploding nearby, and we are treated to a face-on close-up of a private screaming (noiselessly due to aforementioned traumatic sensory deprivation) "what now sir!!" as if he is asking *us*) and hence we are focalised through Miller. What this means is white male trauma is privileged in the narrative regime, it is Miller's (shaky) subjectivity around which the film is structured, and with the later revelations regarding his "normal" employment as a school teacher, and his desire for domestic suburban normativity, he is marked out as a white "everyman" through which the ordinariness[162] (banality perhaps?) of US involvement in global conflict can be asserted. Miller is therefore offered up as an object whereby spectators can revel in an empathic alignment with this damaged status, his commanding and organising subjectivity, and the normativity of his essential "goodness". This is on top of the undoubted degree of feeling

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[160] His cowardly standing by whilst a fellow soldier is knifed to death by the German "Steamboat Willie" character, and then his subsequent uncompassionate execution of this character near the film's culmination.
[161] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 96
[162] An ordinariness that is also narrated through the star persona of Tom Hanks. As Westwell puts it, his 'physical awkwardness, reticence, good natured intelligence' (97)

"assaulted" or even "damaged" by the textual practices and narrative and aesthetic impact of the film's opening and depiction of violence. As such, *Saving Private Ryan* confirms that spectatorial investment in damaged males can be legitamised through covering over the radical and transformative masochism inherent in this scenario with the inherent humanitarianism of the American global project; the damage and ruination is a side-effect of the desire to cast oneself into the arena of combat for the sake of fighting a "just war". As Westwell observes, in the closing moments of the film, Miller 'becomes paradigmatic of America's self-image in the contemporary period: a benevolent, caring altruistic force waging war only reluctantly and for humanitarian reasons'.[163]

In a time period (i.e. the late 1990s) when the US was engaged in numerous "humanitarian" missions (e.g. involvement in NATO air-strikes in Kosovo, air-strikes in Iraq, missile attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan, and troop engagements in Zaire, Liberia, and Albania), the reasons for emphasising US geopolitical compassion are obvious. In order to lend contemporary engagements moral justification, they must be culturally manoeuvred into being contextualised by an "it was ever thus" narrative of kind-hearted US foreign policy. As such, *Saving Private Ryan* (admittedly unknowingly) does crucial groundwork in charting the discursive operations of the films that were to usher in the post-9/11 era, by figuring the expansionist interests of US power as inherently benevolent and intrinsically tied to the moral exceptionalism of US society, government, and domesticity. These issues of humanitarianism and the exceptionalism of US national identity will be explored at length in subsequent chapters.

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[163] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 97

The ending of *Ryan* returns to the scene of the film's opening, the "modern day" Ryan crouched in front of Captain Miller's war grave in Normandy, surrounded by three generations of his family. He asks, almost in response to Miller's instruction to him in the previous (historical) scene that he should "earn" his survival, "have I led a good life?" The line exploits an old concern of popular culture, the idea of a life well-lived, full of "experiences" and richly rewarding.[164] As such, this universalising precept has the potential to create widespread empathic connections with spectators. In addition, in the previous scene in which we witness Miller futilely firing his pistol at a Panzer, barely conscious in the last moments before his death, we experience sadness at the pathetic vulnerability of his position. The emotivity and pathos of the scene ensnares the spectator into empathic engagement with Miller. This is then quickly displaced onto the sadness and pathos of Ryan's graveside existential crisis. Accordingly, spectators are allowed a doubled moment of emotional "indulgence" (for want of a better word); we can empathise with Miller's victim status, his damage, ruination, and expulsion from the text, and then recuperate this expulsion through latching on to Ryan's survivor guilt and existential pain.

It is at this juncture that a crucial separation occurs; as mentioned above, behind Ryan's question of "have I led a good life" lurks something mean and terrible, the question of the "goodness" of our own lives. First let me address the initial question. Within the diegesis of the film, when Ryan tearfully articulates this, his family offer consoling touches, emotional support, and verbal reinforcements of their love and care. *Ryan* therefore offers up Ryan's "good life" for empathic alignment; as spectators we ride the trajectory of extracting textual

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[164] For example, *Gladiator's* "what we do in life echoes in eternity", or *Fight Club's* fetishizing of the rejection of consumer culture, and men starting to "truly live" through their marginal, violent lifestyles.

pleasures from the stylistics of Spielberg's Capa-inflected imagistic traumatic violence,[165] the emotive pleasures of Miller's plain domestic ordinariness, and the gratifying pathos of Miller's defiant death, into an alignment with Ryan's simultaneous existential guilt, *and* his accentuation as "good". *Ryan* therefore offers up inter-subjective luxuries whereby we can pleasurably consume the psychologically (Miller), physically (Miller again), and emotionally (Ryan) damaged male. The effect is to continuously reassert the primacy of emotional and moral compassion, and innate moral integrity as markers of US national identity, and our pleasurable entanglement with these narratives help to reinforce this version of US national identity. Any radical transformative masochism that may lie behind these passions of un-pleasure is disavowed as a stoic sublimation to the needs of US compassionate military engagement.

The concealed yet lurking question of our own spectatorial goodness is compelling, since it is in this moment that the film fixes its audience as implicated in an ethical encounter with the narrative. Similar to the ethical throwing down of the gauntlet to audiences in war on terror films (which will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Four), it is almost as if *Ryan* is challenging us to find something good in our lives in the face of the supreme humanitarian sacrifice of history's only "just war". In answering this question we must look back to the film, and clearly in the shape of Ryan, seemingly, from all the information given to us, it is enough to be patriarch of a hetero-normative family in order to have lived a "good" life. The implication is surely that this is the yardstick by which to measure our own lives, one that confirms the deepest difference-entrenching aspects of US national identity; the compulsoriness of hetero-normativity, suburban affluence, and white domesticity. It also

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[165] Famously, the visual style of the Omaha Beach landing sequence in *Ryan* was inspired by Robert Capa's blurry (due to a laboratory processing error) and kinetic black and white photographs of the actual landings.

implies that to be "good" is to remember and bear the burden of ethical reflection (most exceptionally through a liberal consciousness) for evermore, since the narrative of *Ryan* is framed by Ryan's positioning in the "present".

This obsessing over questions of goodness also entrenches the primacy of neo-liberal subjectivity; it signals a fixation with the contemporary US subject, a solipsism and self-fascination that elides and destroys any potential ethical encounter with alterity, or acknowledgment of difference. According to Donald Pease, US cultural hegemony is not just down to economic, military and geographical factors, but also due to cultural forces, such as mass entertainment, the media, and discourses which crucially entrench 'categories of nationality, race, geography, history, ethnicity, and gender'.[166] In addition, John Carlos Rowe has noted that 'US imperialism since Vietnam has worked steadily to "import" the world and to render global differences aspects of the US nation – in short, to internalize and "hypernationalize" transnational issues'. As such, Hollywood and mass visual culture, assist in entrenching US neo-imperial power through abolishing heterogeneity.[167]

Therefore, *Ryan* attempts to inculcate reflexivity and critical reflection through the questions of our own moral worth, but ends up reinforcing the self-obsession of the contemporary Western subject entrenched and revered by Hollywood. The reflexivity and reflection does not induce encounter with the other, merely interrogation of the self, and the sovereignty of that self is rendered exceptional and supreme through confirmation of the correctness and "goodness" of familial white domestic hetero-normativity. This self-congratulation and

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[166] Donald Pease, "New Perspectives on U. S. Culture and Imperialism," *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 22
[167] John Carlos Rowe, "Culture, US Imperialism, and Globalization." *American Literary History* 16.4 (2004), 576

reinforcement of self-same dominion serves the colonising and expansionist logics of US neo-imperialism, and hence in existentially and *pleasurably* luxuriating in questions of our own "goodness" we fortify the elisions of otherness and alterity that inform US cultural and geopolitical hegemony.

In a strange way, Ryan's emotional desolation figures him as part of the discursive territory of the "new man" of post-Reagan popular culture mentioned above. The "new" man's turn inwards to addressing the self is emblematic of a neo-liberal ideology, focussed on individual responsibility and agency and a turning away from political, cultural and social agency. It is a selfish subjectivity, which although on the surface promotes an admirable loyalty to the family, on the whole sanctifies the protection and maintenance of the domestic sphere as critically reliant on the man's anointing and fortifying touch. This patriarchal account of the domestic allied to a solipsistic account of male subjectivity stresses the neo-liberal make up of the "new" man, and sets up the subsequent almost obsessive documentation of the US male as victimised throughout 1990s US culture and beyond. In the films insistent refrain of "where's Ryan?!" we are tellingly seeking to locate the premier emotive trope for the emblematising of the damaged white US male, and fixing him as a narratively desired object, one that represents the white ethno-centricity of Hollywood's projections of war, and the primacy of the white, "liberal" gaze in fixing the certainty of this object.

Tellingly, in the opening scenes of *Ryan*, a man who is either meant to be Ryan's son or son-in-law, follows as part of the family party walking through the Normandy graves. He walks calmly but purposefully, occasionally pausing to take photographs of the graveyard and his family, his camera very obviously top-of-the-range and a symbol of suburban affluence. From

the commencement of the film then, bourgeois male subjectivity, the organising and capturing gaze of male suburban affluence is not exactly privileged, but certainly figured as detached, gentle, and precise. It is curiously this position that one ultimately adopts when viewing the film; an uncritical, removed gaze allied to white domesticity, that nonetheless is emotionally entwined with the narrative events, and is ultimately symbolic of the decadence of exploring the "goodness" of "innate" US humanitarianism reflected through the lens (literally, considering his SLR camera) of compulsory domesticity and the familial. So when Ryan demands, "Tell me I'm a good man", the only possible response is "of course you are, you're an *American white straight male*."

CHAPTER TWO: BLANKNESS AND BLACKNESS: RACE AND TRAUMA IN HOLLYWOOD'S GULF WAR

This chapter will explore linkages between race and traumatised masculinity in contemporary war films. In the last chapter, the concept of the white male as victim in contemporary US culture was raised, and this was shown to be a self-deceiving construction that masks over the imperial belligerence on which the US nation is predicated. It is how this white male victim trope is raced that is of principle concern in this chapter. The reason for this is partly in response to the phenomenon Sara Ahmed has described as whiteness being 'only invisible for those who inhabit it'[168], and secondly due to the 'symbolic disempowerment' that victimhood offers whiteness so that it can negotiate 'its position within the field of identity politics.'[169]

In addition, this chapter will specifically examine how non-white and non-male characters are offered up as damaged in contemporary war films and how this damage is treated as different to central and unimpeachably authentic white male victimhood. Contemporary war films may provide narratives of inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and display liberal politics, but insofar as the US self-image as victim and the authenticating power this bestows is concerned, only white masculinity will suffice. As a result, attempts to posit non-white and non-male bodies as damaged leads to this damage being figured as aberrant, non-authentic, and consequently marginal to the formation of US national identity. These marginal, non-authentic subjectivities, are therefore examined to uncover their precise function within the context of contemporary war films, damaged white masculinity and the masochistic aesthetics the damaged male is sited in. As we shall see, seemingly, their function is to assert the mono-

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[168] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2004), 157
[169] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 12

cultural primacy of US cultural authority by incorporating non-white and non-male subjectivities within the discourse of damage, but then specifically excluding them from constructing US national identity.

Whiteness and the primacy of US white male victimhood

What is meant by the 'invisibility' of whiteness; what exactly does this mean? As mentioned in the Introduction, Richard Dyer has stated that 'whites are everywhere in representation'[170]. This omnipresent and invasive capacity goes towards suggesting that whiteness possesses a cultural stranglehold in Western culture. Dyer goes on to state that the white male insists he is 'not of a certain race [...] just the human race' and this 'equation between white and human secures a position of power.'[171] In other words, whiteness assumes a centralised, dominant position through disavowing any racial construction of its own identity, and indeed, it only becomes 'raced' when contrasted to other ethnic identities. In the main, whiteness only comes into being when, for example, it must be distinguished from blackness. What this means is whiteness is predominantly invisible, it does not signify or create any cultural meanings without its contextualising binary polarities of other races. It is whiteness's own centralised, dominant position that means it can get away with this invisibility, since it is an *assumed norm*, a culturally constructed fixed point that designates non-white ethnic identities as 'other', and hence denied the privileged centralised and dominant position of whiteness. As Ahmed states, it is important to realise that this invisibility is only perceptible from *within* whiteness, and therefore it is important to adopt methodologies and critical perspectives that move beyond this orthodoxy and can assist in dismantling the ethnic construction of the white

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[170] Richard Dyer, *White* (London:Routledge, 1997), 3
[171] Ibid.

male victim trope in contemporary war films. As also mentioned in the Introduction, 'whiteness has to be read critically, rather than simply assumed as a fact of life.'[172]

Ahmed's call for a radical racially-conscious methodology brings us to the second idea mentioned above; that of whiteness interacting with identity politics. As, once again, covered in the Introduction, it is in this context that Sally Robinson identifies a narrative of 'white decline' which has emerged post 1960s in which the alleged disenfranchisement of the white man has symbolized a 'decline of the American way.'[173] Attributing to the dominant class of white hetero-normativity in American culture the status of 'victim' becomes a means of re-centring white male power. Consequently, white masculinity may reclaim cultural authority in the wake of progressive identity politics through asserting its victim status. The principle method for doing this is through display of the wounded body of the white male, and the centralising of the performance of his crisis.

So therefore, the omnipresent image of the wounded or traumatised male body in contemporary war film is a part of this cultural project of asserting the victim status of white masculinity, and hence securing the centralisation of whiteness and the marginalisation of others. But, on the textual evidence of war films throughout the 1990s and 2000s, is any of this true? In addressing this question, we immediately run into difficulty courtesy of three films starring Denzel Washington; *Glory* (Edward Zwick, 1990), *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004). How can there be a convincing case for espousing the centralisation of white pain and suffering in contemporary war films, when the leading male in at least two of these films is black (*Glory*

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[172] Alice Bardan, '"Welcome to Dreamland': The realist impulse in Pawel Pawlikoski's *Last Resort,"* *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film,* 6.1 (2008), 52
[173] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men,* 2

is not really built on Washington's star presence)? This question can be answered by turning to how whiteness is constructed in contemporary war films as being analogous to empathic "everyman" figureheads with "blank" subjectivities.

By "blank" I am not referring to the post-modern blankness that has been documented in many 1990s cultural artefacts, for example, in the novel *American Psycho*, or the films *Clerks* and *Slacker*. These 'blank fictions' have been interpreted as 'the reflexive gestures of a society torn by millennial angst', as presenting an 'atomised, nihilistic worldview',[174] and as speaking 'in the commodified language of (their) own period.'[175] In the contemporary war film, there may be vestiges of these cultural formations, but primarily, the 'blankness' seems to stem from the 'all surface, no depth' cultural mode of these films in their emphasis on visual style and in placing themselves at the heart of the ubiquitous 'MTV shot fragment' editing techniques. The blankness also stems from contemporary war films' positing of characters that are accorded an "everyman" status for spectatorial consumption. So this is not the same blankness we see in, for example, *American Psycho* or Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991). This particular blankness, rather than an attempt to foreground the superficial nature and the ephemera of popular culture, is a blankness that can be typified as an attempted nullification of race, class and gender, and therefore an attempted move towards mono-culturalism. Ironically however, this appeal to mono-culturalism, this erasure of race, class and gender can be mobilized in order to recruit spectators to another ideological reserve, one of resisting the pro-war media consensus.

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[174] James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 3
[175] Ibid., 7

The notion of a mono-cultural US is nothing to do with the representative practices of institutions such as Hollywood film, and instead refers to the discursive systems which prop up its cultural authority. In other words, it is less applicable to *what* Hollywood depicts and more to do with the master-framework (i.e. white masculinity) through which this representation is enacted. As such, further delineation of this notion of a mono-cultural US is required here. Donald Pease states that the initial 'invasive settlement of the Americas' (by white Europeans), and the consequent global spread of US power is aided by 'cultural technologies'.[176] That is to say, the consolidation of US cultural hegemony is not just down to economic, military and geographical factors, but also due to cultural forces, such as mass entertainment, the media, and discourses which entrench 'categories of nationality, race, geography, history, ethnicity, and gender'.[177] Thus Pease goes on to state that 'US imperialism is best understood as a complex and interdependent relationship with hegemonic as well as counterhegemonic modalities of coercion and resistance'.[178] US cultural authority is then rationalised as not just a function or a logic pertaining to the extending reach of global capitalism, military power, and political organization, but is also deeply rooted in modes of knowledge, and the dissemination and legislation of these modes. The cultural elements of US power therefore help in shaping and controlling the discursive practices and systems that form these modalities of coercion and resistance.

Crucially, the effect of this is the submergence of cultural heterogeneity and an 'internal colonization' when it comes to relations with developing and post-communist nations.[179] Accordingly, John Carlos Rowe has noted that 'US imperialism since Vietnam has worked

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[176] Pease, 22
[177] Ibid., 23
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

steadily to "import" the world and to render global differences aspects of the US nation – in short, to internalize and "hypernationalize" transnational issues'.[180] As such, the 'cultural technologies', which includes Hollywood and mass visual culture, assist in entrenching US imperial power through abolishing heterogeneity and specificity, and in the specific case of war films, make all US foreign policy inflected geopolitical encounters as reflections or iterations of US national anxieties. The effect of this is to erase the other from the scene of US political and geographical expansionism, to the detriment of heterogeneity. Hollywood war films therefore perform some of the work of US imperialism in their elision of the other, by privileging US national concern.

Returning to my analysis of Denzel Washington, it should now be clear that I am not attempting via convoluted means to claim Denzel Washington is 'white', and therefore fits the 'white male victim' trope. Instead, the depiction of his pain and suffering seen in these films, and in particular, *Courage Under Fire* and *The Manchurian Candidate*, offers a chance to critique the master-framework by which otherness and difference is communicated in US culture. In turn this allows a deconstructing of the white male victim trope as normalising and perpetuating the structures of mono-cultural US power. It also fulfils the function of turning our attention back onto marginalised and excluded identities and demographies with which to critique the compulsory mono-culturalism that feeds the US self-image of victim. These films depict a diegetic shrouding of Washington's blackness, to the effect of narrationally eliding racial difference. But this, I will demonstrate below, merely drives the legibility of whiteness even further underground. This reinforces its hegemonic power and grip on centrality in representational strategies and bolsters the cultural authority of white ethnocentricity.

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[180] John Carlos Rowe, "Culture, US Imperialism, and Globalization." *American Literary History* 16.4 (2004), 576

In most respects whiteness is constructed as being dependent on a culturally and mythically produced 'everyman' status, contrarily representing all things, and nothing, to all people. In numerous contemporary war films, this 'everyman' status is conferred upon the central male lead. Now, this could be due to the economics of Hollywood movies demanding an empathic figurehead for varied audiences to project their fantasies and emotional investments on to, or equally due to the subject matter of war demanding a certain 'blankness' and 'normality' to the 'ordinary *men*' who fight these wars. But at certain points, this everyman identity becomes inflected with ethnicity and race, and hence is equally a product of categories of difference and the constructed centrality of invisible whiteness.

In the Sam Mendes film *Jarhead* (2005), we encounter the protagonist, Swofford, who is driven to the point of near insanity by the soul destroying boredom of the Iraqi desert, and goes berserk due to the lack of combat action. Swofford is presented to the spectator as an intelligent and coherent central protagonist, one who initially is portrayed in as 'normal' a light as possible. For example, his antipathy towards the Marine Corps is exemplified when he snaps when being abused and humiliated at the hands of his sadistic Drill Sergeant. Declaring in response to how he ended up in the army he shouts, 'I got lost on the way to college, sir!' Additionally, Swofford is portrayed as a little removed from the rest of the soldiers, in a similar manner to the way in which the Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) character in *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986) is established. Swofford comes from the suburbs, his father served in Vietnam, and he proudly declares his genealogy to be 'English'. One of the army administrators says when he assigns him to a platoon, 'maybe you can elevate these sons of bitches'. Swofford is also shown to be *a reader*, consuming existentialist works such as

Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. Although he socialises on an equal footing with the other soldiers, there is a clear intimation here that in Swofford's antipathy, level of education, and background he is at once distinct but also embodies 'normative' white straight masculinity. Right down to his 'English' and hence white imperial ancestry, Swofford is established as a form of everyman, a position which is reinforced by the montage of scenes displaying his formative experiences.

A series of shots depicts in turn Swofford's parents 'conceiving' our protagonist, Swofford's sister in a mental hospital, 'making muffins with Mom', 'breakfast conversations with Dad', Swofford as a boy 'taking a dump' whilst reading a comic book about the Vietnam War, Swofford 'thinking about going to college', and Swofford 'studying' (having sex) with his girlfriend after school. The first four of these shots are 'closeted' from the spectator – we are given a momentary, fragmentary glimpse of the vignette and then literally a door closes on the shot. These first four shots also happen to depict troubling memories which Swofford can not publicly confront. The first two, are troubling scenes in themselves since Swofford can not bear the thought of his parents having sex, and the second depicts the emotional pain of familial psychological problems. The shot of 'making muffins with Mom' strongly emphasises the mother, who is depicted in the kitchen crying her eyes out, and the shot of the 'breakfast conversation with Dad' shows the father sitting at the kitchen table in stony and inscrutable silence. These two shots obviously narrate an emotional crisis at the heart of the Swofford household – the intimation being this is the product of Swofford's sister's mental instability and the father's experience in Vietnam. The remaining three shots display experiences which are fairly typical for contemporary teenagers not just in the USA, but in the

'Western' world in general (childhood obsession with comics/magazines, formative sexual experiences, thinking about the future).

These scenes successfully construct Swofford as both 'everyman' given his typical formative experiences, and as troubled, or possessing "baggage". However, as mentioned previously, this baggage is closeted from us; we are allowed a furtive, tantalising glimpse and nothing more. It is Swofford's perceived plainness which is reinforced and re-emphasised on numerous occasions. This is cemented by his discourse on the term 'jarhead' which refers to the high and tight haircut worn by the Marines. Swofford reasons that by implication the Marine's head is an empty vessel – military identity is founded on lack, as is his white straight and 'normative' masculinity. There is the potential for the spectator to misrecognise themselves at the hands of this plainness, and hence an unnatural or false identification is enforced.[181] There is a danger here that the spectator's empathies can all too easily be caught up in the representation of male subjectivity, without fully appreciating how this subjectivity is constructed and how the deployment of this plainness to induce identification is part of the cultural machinery which perpetuates male cultural authority through rendering it 'blank' and seemingly discharged of ideology – Swofford's race and gender are centralised, invisible and yet invested with a compelling patriarchal power. The Gulf War itself even confirms this contradictory state of presence/absence when it comes to white men – during their training the men 'fire at nothing' and 'navigate imaginary minefields' – the war is hollow / blank – and therefore US military power reproduces the conditions upon which white masculinity perpetuates its power.

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[181] The blankness of the protagonist enables spectatorial empathy, through sheer dint of the lack of specificity and the universality narrated in his introduction as a character.

Jarhead, therefore, hails a certain spectator position. By this I do not mean that the film attracts a particular demographic, or that necessarily the audience becomes that demographic through watching the film. Rather, the point of focalisation is cast in a particular way in order to privilege or naturalise a certain point of view and socio-cultural position. In *Jarhead*, like many contemporary war films, a middle class, white, domesticated and suburban subjectivity is invoked as our point of entry into the narrative. Hence, it is this position or identity that becomes the *de facto* interpretive lens through which spectatorship of the film is meant to be refracted.

Gulf war films, blackpain and the damaged male

Is this same blankness offered up in *Courage Under Fire* and *The Manchurian Candidate*? In *Courage Under Fire*, Denzel Washington plays a character called Major Serling, a veteran of the Gulf War who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and is assigned to investigate an incident from the (now historical) Gulf War involving a Medevac helicopter's crew. One of the central components of Swofford's identity is present in this film: Serling definitely has 'issues' and 'emotional baggage', being depicted as not communicating with his family, drinking heavily, and suffering from flashbacks, all due to his PTSD. He is also depicted as the rational force of enlightenment and reason, through his adoption of position of investigator, astutely and analytically assembling evidence and using his vast military experience to deduce the meanings and relevance of the various subtleties of witness testimonies. Additionally, in the film, as Guy Westwell has pointed out, the military are 'blind to race'[182], and so there is a deliberate eschewing of any vocalised engagement with the

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[182] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 4-5

politics of ethnic and racial identities. The fact that Serling's race is never made into an issue, although fitting well with Edward Zwick's popular press reputation as a "progressive" film-maker, attempting to render blackness in the film invisible is a curious manoeuvre (and is something Zwick does to an even more troubling extent in *Blood Diamond*). In not drawing attention to blackness, the whiteness of hegemonic masculinity can also be elided and becomes the defining norm against which all other constructions of cultural power and authority are articulated.

Additionally, this conscious diegetic invisibility of blackness offers up for consumption by liberal white audiences a progressive fantasy of US governmental and military power. It flatters bourgeois (assumed to be) white spectators, for blackness is only invisible in this way from a white liberal perspective (i.e. from without), whilst reinforcing difference through further rendering illegible whiteness. So, liberal bourgeois audiences are interpellated through this film appealing to a fantasy of society shorn of racial difference. This is an offensive manoeuvre that circumvents and sublimates the racism and domination of the US's mono-culturalism discussed above.

So there are clearly differences between the presentation of the 'white' everyman of Swofford and the 'black' everyman of Serling. It is also interesting to note that the markers of Serling's traumatic emotional baggage, and hence his 'everyman' status, can also be means by which to demonise and stereotype black masculinity through parody or satirical attack. The heavy drinking can symbolise moral retrogression and weakness, and the lack of communication

with his family can point to a parental and familial irresponsibility. Hence there is a danger of reconfirming the negative stereotypes of ethnic portrayal in depicting trauma and blackness in this particular context.

The incoherency of its depiction and figuring in popular culture means that extended study of the relationship between trauma and blackness, plus its relationship to dominant patriarchal white culture, must be conducted. Debra Walker King has declared that 'some witnesses of black bodies in pain are consumed by a voyeuristic desire for visual confirmation of white subjectivity and superiority'[183] and so there are clearly questions regarding the spectatorship of traumatised black characters. Although King specifically delineates this concept as being about black *bodies* in pain, it is clear that in these films we are experiencing a reversal of the phenomenon described in the previous chapter whereby the only permitted representation of white pain is pain rooted in the psychological. The corporeality espoused by King is still relevant here though, since this casts characters such as Serling as both strangely incorporated into the dominant mode of the victimised, but also as a specific sufferer of what King dubs 'blackpain'.[184] These characters therefore exist on the cusp of what King delineates as 'those whose US citizenship and power within the white nation are legitimate and those for whom this is not the case.'[185] Characters such as Serling exist on the liminal threshold between embodying the dominant, patriarchal orthodoxy of US neo-imperial power through military associations, and being thoroughly excluded from this dominant and centralised position through the depiction of suffering and pain. Crucially for this chapter, and its analysis of the

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[183] Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 62
[184] Used throughout King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain*. I shall use this term throughout this chapter too, in order to distinguish that pain and blackness entwined forms a potent and contentious cultural object.
[185] Ibid., 63

damaged male, black masculinity is not permitted access to a legitimate US citizenship and power when it is emblematised as damaged. Instead, the damage of the black male is a marker of exclusion and marginalisation, shoring up white power and domination through emphasising the voyeuristic pleasures of looking on at blackpain.

What does this reveal to us? Most importantly, it shows how the evasion of blackness and whiteness both work towards a common goal; that of masking the centrality and dominance of white patriarchy and marginalising blackness into a position whereby it must (once again) bear the burdens of US power. This is quite a far reaching claim, but in *Courage Under Fire* it seems that this is precisely the moral and narrative trajectory that occurs. In a potentially racist re-write of reactionary ideas which have plagued the US for centuries, the film depicts a black man literally having to 'bear the emotional burden' of his actions on the battlefield and so bare the brunt of the products of US militarism and the interests of the white patriarchal economy it serves and protects. Other traumatised characters are allowed the release of death or escape into oblivion, but Serling must continue with his guilt and sadness – even his facing up to the family of the man he killed in friendly fire (the cause of his trauma) does not seem to relieve his sense of depression.

King also observes that in texts depicting war and race, even though there is some kind of symbolic power exchange in these texts (from white men to black men) or some kind of accommodation towards racial unity, 'the status quo remains unchanged, although challenged, while progress towards the goals of power exchange, patriarchal authority, and inclusion is

suggested but never fully achieved.'[186] This concept is appropriate for further delving into the depiction of blackness and trauma in *Courage Under Fire*. The plot, which will be explained in greater detail below, concerns Major Serling attempting to excavate the narrative of a white female helicopter pilot's death during an apparently botched Medevac operation. In this case, the attempted shift of power is not one of personal, political power (which is what King identifies as symbolically occurring, or at least nearly occurring, in films such as *Glory* and *Men of Honor*), but that of *narrative power*. The uncovering of the "true story" of this white female officer's (called Walden) plight is one that masks over and seemingly takes precedence over Serling's own personal narrative of redemption. He cannot simply embark on his own healing process, it must be courtesy of siphoning off some of the narrative power attained through excavating Walden's story (Serling is assigned the job of investigating the events of the Medevac operation). Hence, racial hierarchies are re-entrenched with blackpain being subservient to the primacy of white death and white memory, whilst the white domestic (explained below) is secured as the central defining feature of US nationhood.[187]

Of course, this is not to say that Walden stands in for white masculinity in this film. Far from it, white femininity, much like black masculinity, is not allowed access to the crucial authenticating narratives of damage and victimhood that inform normative US national identity. Instead, she is totally evacuated from the text courtesy of her death and her literally being narrated into being through retrospective testimony. As we shall see below, the film

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[186] Ibid., 73

[187] As explored in Monica Pearl, "The City of Brotherly Love: Sex, Race, and AIDS in *Philadelphia*" in *EnterText* 2:3 (2003), 57-75. 7 June 2010 <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/4042/entertext2.3/pearl.pdf>: It is of note that Washington portrayed Miller in the 1993 Jonathan Demme film, *Philadelphia* (a film that also clumsily and self-consciously offers up progressive fantasies and "liberal" catharsis). In this film, similarly to in *Courage Under Fire*, Washington's redemption (his acceptance of Becket's (Tom Hanks) homosexuality) is only permitted if subordinated to the narrational and emotive agency of the dying white body of Tom Hanks. Black redemption is subservient to white pain and death.

anxiously searches for (and fails to find) an object to displace authentic and non-aberrant pain and damage on to, and instead merely succeeds in depoliticising and desubjectifying the innocent victimhood of US national identity. The film would rather have its white female lead die and its black male lead marginalised in US culture by his disabused status than have them adopt the full legitimising power of (normally white male-inflected) innocent victimhood.

A similar manoeuvre occurs in the film *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), which although depicts the Pacific arena of combat in World War II, is rooted in a comparable concern with racial difference and the construction of US national identity through sublimation and assimilation of all that is other to the white male. It also shows that it is not just specifically blackness that is not permitted access to the legitimising power of innocent victimhood, and neither is it the white/black polarity of racial difference that is fraught with anxieties regarding the over-assertion of liberal inclusiveness (such as the disingenuous attempted concealment of racial difference in *Courage Under Fire*). The film opens with numerous gorgeous long shots of the scorched red pillars of rock and desert that constitutes Monument Valley in Arizona (the home of the Navajo depicted in the film). This then cuts to a slow motion close-up shot of a very young Navajo child being held up in the air against the background of a brilliant blue sky, and crucially, the American flag fluttering in the breeze. The shots are accompanied with an emotive, calm, slow string soundtrack. This succeeds in sentimentalising the depiction of the Navajo, but also, importantly, the film asserts from the very beginning the Americanness of the Navajo. They are literally born under the flag of the US, and the peaceful, warm security of family life depicted in these shots coalesces around this flag as a marker or synecdoche of US national identity. We therefore see the resolution

and amalgamation of the Navajo people into the dominant mono-culturalism of the US, sublimating their difference in the name of claiming for them a national identity representative of the people who dispossessed and colonised their land and slaughtered their ancestors.

In fact, the film goes to great lengths to castigate any characters exhibiting prejudice towards the code talking Navajo Privates (named Yahzee and Whitehorse) we follow throughout the film. A character called Henderson is rebuked for expressing surprise at their appearance ("Expect them to wear war paint?"), and another character who taunts Yahzee by angrily asserting he looks like a "Nip" and physically confronting him, is roundly scorned and censured by the other men of the unit for his actions. Through exposition too, the Navajo are subsumed into the dominant normativity of a monolithic, difference eliding, US national identity, Yahzee declaring at one point, "This is my war too […] my land, my people". However, much as in *Courage Under Fire*, as we shall see below, this promotion of tolerance and this laissez faire attitude to racial difference is insincere and dishonest. A key point of the film occurs when Yahzee's unit come under friendly fire, courtesy of some vociferous, prolonged, and inaccurate shelling. In the course of the attack, Yahzee's radio is destroyed. Yahzee, in conjunction with our main protagonist, Sergeant Joe Enders (Nicholas Cage), come up with the idea of infiltrating the Japanese gun emplacements and bunkers in order to commandeer a radio and call off the friendly fire. In order to do this, Yahzee asserts that he can pass for Japanese, confirming an earlier enunciated prejudice against him, and should approach the Japanese emplacements with Enders as his "prisoner". The men of the unit strip a dead Japanese soldier of his uniform, clothe Yahzee in it, smear his face with dirt, teach him a couple of words of Japanese and dispatch him on his mission with Enders. So, the film castigates skin-deep racial demonization, but then one of its main plot-points revolves around

the successful visual fulfilment of this demonization. There is an all too easy slippage between Navajo and Japanese ethnic identity, demonstrating that all non-white racial difference is ultimately defined by its non-white-ness. This is further demonstrated by the contrast between what we might consider to be two the dual protagonists of the film – Enders and Yahzee. Enders (who is white) is depicted as a tough, battle-hardened "good fucking marine" who "doesn't give a shit" about medals, but who is traumatically haunted by abject memories of the rest of his unit perishing on the Solomon Islands, and in the course of battle has suffered substantial damage to his ear, affecting his balance and hearing. Yahzee, on the other hand, is fresh from his radio and code-talking training, keeps a photograph of his wife and child in his helmet, but possesses an uncomplicated, but wise personality.[188] We witness the damage and ruination of both characters, but the depiction of this wildly differs. The apotheosis of Enders' damage occurs roughly two thirds of the way through the film, in which in the midst of battle, the camera starts relentlessly and quickly circling his sweat-saturated face whilst flashbacks from his traumatic experiences in the Solomon Islands fade in and out around him. So although he is told that his primary mission in the film is to "protect the code" (Enders' job is essentially to bodyguard Yahzee and kill him if there is the possibility he will be captured), the film is more interested in protecting the centrality and importance of damaged white male psychology. Yahzee's pain becomes apparent when he realises the truth of Enders' responsibilities when he is on the verge of executing him. However, instead of the anguish, sorrow, fear, and so on, belonging to Yahzee, it is all about Enders' feelings of guilt and shame. Enders' remorse and self-reproach is emphasised whilst Yahzee is depicted at a slight emotional distance, portrayed through the eyes of Enders as a seething, demonic, vengeful creature bent on destroying Enders in retaliation. We see numerous shots of Yahzee,

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[188] Curiously, one thing binds them together: they both suffered physical abuse at the hands of the Catholic church in their younger years.

seemingly from Enders' perspective in which he maintains a tacit anger, sneering, with narrow eyes and deep breaths, indicating his pent up fury and desire for reprisal. Therefore, white male damage is central, exceptional, and emotionally engaging, whereas non-white damage must not be depicted as authentic, or emotionally accessible. This shows the film's deceitful and obviating nature since it occurs in tandem with the film's enunciated and narrative concern with castigating racial prejudice and assimilating racial difference into the mono-culturalism of dominant white US subjectivity.

Courage Under Fire: **The silencing of black trauma**

As already established, in *Courage Under Fire* we are presented with the character of Major Serling, a former tank commander, suffering from the outward symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, who is ordered to investigate the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor to a female Medevac helicopter pilot, Karen Walden (Meg Ryan). It transpires in the course of his investigations that Walden was faced with the prospect of a mutiny from her troops when their helicopter is shot down and they are forced to spend the night out in the open fending off encroaching Iraqi soldiers. Major Serling interviews most of the helicopter crew during his investigation, and in one way or another, all of the crew are emotionally destabilised by their experiences 'that night in the desert.' The medic, Ilario (Matt Damon), goes AWOL after being interviewed by Serling – who later finds him at one of his childhood places of refuge where it is revealed Ilario is a heroin addict in addition to being a chain smoker; chemical dependencies brought about by his traumatic recollections of Iraq. Another member of the crew, Altameyer (Seth Gilliam), is terminally ill in hospital, self-medicating his trauma with prescribed morphine in order to abolish his memories of 'the fire' that consumes him. A further crew member, Monfriez (Lou Diamond Phillips), who we eventually find out

instigated the idea of mutiny, cracks under the burden of guilt and Serling's investigation and commits suicide through driving his sports car headlong into an oncoming train.

Academic criticism of this film has either examined the construction of gender roles and the coding of Iraq and the Iraqi soldiers as 'feminized',[189] or argued that Walden's narrative is 'effaced' and that she is allowed 'no subjective point of view' and her story is only told courtesy of an 'ensemble of troubled and traumatised male relationships.'[190] Indeed, since the events of the botched Medevac operation are narrated by the surviving soldiers, then her story is only communicated, via the use of flashbacks, vicariously and through the mediating effects of strictly male only testimony. Susan Linville argues directly that the depiction of Serling's trauma diverts us away from memorialising the political and cultural significance of 'Walden's demise.'[191] However, I wish to take up a view that is oppositional to this. As outlined above, it is my belief that quite the opposite occurs in this film, and that it is rather white death, white memory, and the white domestic that diverts us away from the depiction of "blackpain".

The primary reasons for this position are rooted in the way the film ends. We are presented with two parallel and inter-cut scenes of 'closure', the first being the award ceremony for Walden's posthumous Medal of Honor in the White House Rose Garden, and the second being Serling visiting the parents, in their colonial Virginia home, of the soldier (named Boylar) whose death he caused. Being inter-cut, the two scenes share their incidental soundtrack, containing swelling strings and pile-on-the-gravitas-and-sentimentality horns.

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[189] Susan Linville, "'The *Mother* Of All Battles': *Courage Under Fire* and the Gender-Integrated Military." *Cinema Journal,* 39.2 (2000), 100-120
[190] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 107
[191] Susan Linville, 110

Accordingly, we are presented with two scenes which move inexorably towards triumph and emotional and narrative catharsis. In the first instance, the medal ceremony focuses on Walden's daughter, who is receiving the medal on behalf of her mother. This is a self-consciously mawkish move on the film's part, and no secret is made in the narrative amongst the army staff who discuss this, of the emotional manipulation involved. Walden's daughter is depicted with a tearful face, receiving her mother's medal whilst concurrently a tearful Serling narrates the story of Boylar's death at his hands.

Susan Linville briefly touches on the issues I wish to explore here, yet as mentioned previously her general argument does not tally with mine (that whiteness masquerades black trauma). She states that this scene shows a black man being 'forgiven by a wealthy white Virginia man for past misdeeds, as the two talk in the latter's white-columned plantation-style home' and that this accordingly points towards 'the subsumption of the memory and trauma of the Civil War.'[192] Whilst Linville's argument subsequently explores the process of 'desexualisation' that occurs to the character of Serling, and how this mobilises a form of safe distance between black masculinity and white femininity in the film, I wish to examine how this historically referential aesthetic in the film points towards the wider representation of blackpain and its sublimation and marginalisation in the text.

Since we have already identified one scene which raises the spectre of the Civil War and slavery, I shall specifically examine another scene which seems to perform the same function. In the opening scenes of the film, plus in numerous flashbacks peppering the remainder, Serling's experiences on the front line in the tank battle that killed Boylar and rendered him at the mercy of his PTSD is depicted. This scene is portrayed through fast-paced editing and

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[192] Linville, 112

mobile camera positions embodying confusion. There are numerous instances of fast mobile panning between characters in the claustrophobic enclaves of the interior of Serling's tank, combined with wider shots of the desert at night, infused with the same sense of confusion and disorientation. The explosions of high calibre gun fire, the glow of visual display units, and the interior lights of the tanks, all lend the scene a colour scheme that flashes between the red/orange of fiery destruction and combat and the blue/green of the desert night. Combined with the ferociously paced edits between shots of the male body in various configurations around screens and controls, sweating and panting, the scene is claustrophobic and crucible-like. Ed Guerrero, in the context of discussing the film version of *Beloved*, states that 'the violent horror of slavery is revealed in "re-memory", in a series of flame-lit, nightmarish flashbacks of hangings, whippings, and bizarre mutilations that continue to haunt and scar the psyches, the narrative present, and the bodies of the films' black cast.'[193] I am not claiming here that there is a direct correlation between the tank battle sequence and the traumatic flashbacks of slavery, but I feel it is safe to say that *Courage Under Fire's* depiction of traumatic flashbacks in the context of black masculinity is hellish, fiery and concerned with corporeal burden. Its mise-en-scene, make-up and lighting regime aestheticises the suffering black body, and so we are aware of this version of damaged masculinity as being very acutely raced.

Therefore, we are arriving at a conception of the black soldier in contemporary war film as being figured in similar aesthetic and narrative terms to the disabused black body in US culture through similar configurations of bodily pain, subservience, and bearing the scars of white patriarchal authority. Outward signs of pain (through corporeal pain or the wounds of

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[193] Ed Guerrero, "Black Violence as Cinema: From Cheap Thrills to Historical Agonies," *Violence and American Cinema,* ed. J. David Slocum (London: Routledge, 2001), 257

traumatic memory) become signs of submission and domination at the hands of white ethnic identity. Hence, the death of Walden and even to an extent the other characters in the film, are part of the promulgation and elevation of the privilege of white death over blackpain. Whiteness must be memorialised and sentimentalised and rationalised into a coherent narrative, whereas blackness must continue to bear the burden of US imperialism and patriarchal power. This idea of bearing the burden is even specifically vocalised in one of the lines of dialogue. Boylar's father says to Serling in response to his begging for forgiveness that his emotional pain and guilt is "a burden you're going to have to put down sometime." Although this line gives Serling the emotional and cathartic release he has been searching for to enable him to move on through his traumatic memory, it nonetheless confirms the power dynamics of whiteness and blackness in the narrative. Serling must be anointed with the ability for self-forgiveness by white middle class subjectivity.[194]

Returning to the idea that whiteness and blackness are mutually informative and defining (but far from a level playing field), I shall examine a key contrast or conflict that typifies these definitions in *Courage Under Fire* and then use this example to explore why this is relevant to the primacy of victimhood in US culture.

"Innocence" and imperialism: White death and the casting out of colonial pain

One of the key conflicts in *Courage Under Fire* is that between Serling and Monfriez, the instigator of the mutiny that indirectly led to Walden's death during the Medevac operation. In his aural testimony and his physical presence, Monfriez is depicted as tough, hardened,

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[194] He also "learns his lesson" offensively courtesy of a "negro spiritual" instruction to "Lay down your burden", further emphasising the inherent racism and stereotyping that inflects the imperial power dynamics of the scene.

resistant, all the things a disciplined and robust soldier should be. He also, crucially, possesses a hyphenated, Latino identity. However, we eventually learn that he acted like a "coward" during the botched operation, believing they should abort their mission and leave wounded members of the crew behind. In one of the final flashbacks he is depicted spluttering pleas to retreat to safer ground, awkwardly and anxiously expressing his fear through an exaggerated combative attitude, and apprehensively twitching and glancing around for moral and physical support. The breach between his outward appearance and his depiction during testimonial flashback narrates an almost hysterical masculinity. This hysteria is often what male crisis is predicated on. As Sally Robinson has remarked, 'male hysteria itself becomes both subject of and subject to […] repression in the discourse of liberation.'[195] His corporeality and psychology becomes a site of repression: of his traumatic memory, of his complicity in Walden's death, and of his 'weak' ("cowardly") and damaged masculinity. This weakness and damage would normally figure widely as an embodiment of US national identity, at once projecting an image of strength and dominance but furiously self-obsessed with an inner turmoil of crisis and devastation. However, seemingly due to his ethnic coding, this tension between outer strength and inner reflection on crisis is presented as hysterical and destructive to precepts and markers of US national identity. Rather than the US seemingly having it both ways in looking strong *and* being damaged, in the case of the Latino soldier, these two competing forces become unmanageable and pose a threat to the legitimacy of the prevailing (white) US self-image of victimhood.

Monfriez's hysterical masculinity can be examined by reference to one scene in particular. It is an encounter between Monfriez and Serling which occurs in the locker room of a boxing

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[195] Sally Robinson, "'Emotional Constipation' and the power of damned masculinity," *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture,* ed. Peter Lehman (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 137

gymnasium. Monfriez is stripped down to his underpants and jockstrap; tight, hardened musculature glistening with oil whilst he binds his hands with tape ready to begin his training. He is therefore corporeally defined as an object of sexual desire and an embodiment of the hyper-masculinity that typifies contemporary US culture. This also, rather crudely, provides a literal display of his skin, as if to confirm this outward marker of his ethnicity as vital in constructing his identity. Of course, his hardened musculature is primarily deployed to emphasize his 'hard' masculinity, and is therefore a fervent and almost hysterical over-assertion of his strength and robustness. However, this image is not with us for long, since the culmination of this scene is Monfriez's violent and melodramatic suicide, and even the manner of this suicide confirms this hysterical over-assertion of hard masculinity.

Serling presses Monfriez for more information regarding his testimony, which leads them to drive together in Monfriez's coupe sports car. After a series of more provocative cross-examinations, Monfriez snaps and holds a gun to Serling's head. He rambles on, an emotional mess, about his imagined boxing nickname, Johnny "Night Train" Monfriez, and his love for "big, tough, iron" trains, before ordering Serling out of his car. He promptly drives off road and onto some train tracks and then drives at full pelt towards an oncoming "big, tough" freight train, his car exploding in an incredulity-provoking ball of flame.

The most crucial aspect of this scene and its depiction of traumatised hard masculinity is the fact that Monfriez's excessive hyper-masculinity is combined with a monomania regarding signifiers of blue collar industrial America. These denote a kind of pre-lapsarian vision of the industrial basis of the US economy, and hence its global hegemony. The fact that "big, tough, iron" trains, and a noir-ish invocation of a lost hard-boiled world of professional boxing

consume Monfriez's fantasies suggests a fascination with ideas of innocence (i.e. the world of Monfriez's fantasies) lost. As mentioned before, this idea of innocence-lost is a primary structure in US culture, with incidents such as Pearl Harbor, the Vietnam war, the Watergate scandal, shootings, 9/11, and the New Orleans floods, confirming there is consistently a sense in the US of the country suffering some form of 'unprovoked attack'[196] that turns its citizens into victims and innocents who have had their purity sullied. As covered in the Introduction, 'this investment in reaffirming innocence not only functions to mask US imperialist policies, and the history of the United States as an active history of empire, but also obscures the degree to which violent conflict has been a fundamental aspect of US society.'[197] So in Monfriez we have an embodiment of the hysterical relationship between fantasy, memory and innocence that informs this national self-deception and elision described by Sturken. It is crucially in the material markers of US economic dominance, its literal position as a "big, tough" powerhouse, that this self-deception and elision lies. The fact that Monfriez's self-annihilation is marked by the destruction of his sports car, a basic signifier of the economic and geographic freedom of the road that is so fetishized in US culture, perhaps shows that the elided 'violent conflict' invoked by Sturken cannot be repressed indefinitely. The global capitalism and post-industrialism invoked by Monfriez's consumerist accoutrements (his sports car, leather jacket, gym-toned and salon-styled body) is exterminated by the tough iron trains of a very specifically industrial, blue collar fantasy of the past.

Accordingly, Latino masculinity is portrayed as damaged, hysterical, and performative (for example, the display of his toned musculature, and the melodramatic narration of his masculinist boxing fantasies). It is crucially also figured as self-destructive and suicidal. Most

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[196] Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 16
[197] Ibid.

importantly though, the destruction of his sports car marks Latino masculinity as endangering the aforementioned global capitalism and post-industrialism on which US power is predicated. We therefore have a literal image of Latino masculinity essentially being shown as not up to the task of bearing the force of damage and victimhood. The fact that this suicidal hysterical masculinity is located in proximity to fantasies of innocence, consumerism and industrialism, despite showing the dangers of eliding the violence and pain by which US society is typified, also encourages solipsism and insists upon a loco-subjective account of the self in US culture. Self-absorption and the configurations of 'innocent bystander' and 'passive victim' this entails, triumphs over historical awareness and global contexts of US power and primacy. That the point around which this coalesces is the body of a Latino soldier makes the film's treatment of race within a matrix of so-called liberal politics all the more disturbing. Latino masculinity is not only portrayed as not up to the task of carrying a victimised account of US national identity, but the weight of self-pity and self-absorption is shifted onto it as well. Thus, the weakness or damage of the Latino male is portrayed as aberrant, unstable, and founded on the collapsing of competing forces of spectacular hegemonic masculinity and hysterical crisis. It is therefore marginal to the dominant and normative construction of hegemonic US national identity and only fortifies US cultural authority through its specific exclusion from *white* narratives of innocent victimhood. Monfriez is permitted access to hystericising psychological traumas and victimised subjectivity, but its aberrant nature demonstrates he is internalised and colonised by US cultural hegemony and refused access to authenticating narratives of victimhood and innocence.

I began this section by asserting that whiteness and blackness are mutually definitive and co-dependent for the construction of each other's cultural meanings in white US society. The

analysis of Monfriez in this sequence shows how the Latino male body is fractiously allied to consumerism, innocence and questions of eliding imperial violence and domination. Throughout most of this, Serling, although a cajoling and intense interlocutor on Monfriez's testimony, is on the whole a passive spectator. He can only stand by as he drives head-on towards the train, or flexes his muscles in the gym changing room. It seems that in this case *any* death (let alone white death) is fixed as superior, in representative and narrative terms, to blackpain. Monfriez's memory is also fixed as seemingly superior, since it is Monfriez's fantasies and psychological torments that are not worked through and left maniacally unresolved to the point of suicide. It is almost as if Latino traumatic memory is so painful, so engulfing, that it must culminate in a frenzy of gasoline drenched destruction, whereas blackpain and traumatic memory, although permitted its frenzied flashbacks, must culminate in a solemn, deferential attitude to white domesticity in the shape of Boylar's parents' home. This reinforces the point that the film goes to great lengths to specifically exclude black masculinity from signifying as truly innocent and victimised and therefore a legitimate constructive force in maintaining and underpinning US national identity.

Courage Under Fire works to erase racial and sexual difference in the field of warfare, but, precisely through its heavy handedness and pseudo-self-consciousness, ends up securing the dominance and cultural authority of whiteness and patriarchy. Part of this can be attributable to the use of black central characters, since, as bell hooks has pointed out, black leads in movies are 'acceptable' when they are 'not threatening to change the system' and are 'working hard to uphold the values of the existing social structure […] the underlying assumption is that he commits to this because he worships, admires, and loves white patriarchal power.'[198] So, according to hooks, empathy with characters such as Serling,

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[198] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992), 102

amongst what are (assumed to be) predominantly white, young male audiences, lies in the fact that they are apparently seduced into an arena that fortifies white patriarchal power. Hence blackness is configured as servicing white patriarchy and being subservient to dominant US cultural authority and exceptionalism.

The hysterical innocent fantasies of Monfriez's traumatic memory must in a sense be cast out in order to assert the primacy of a white normative memory of sentimentality that can be memorialised and domesticated in the form of Walden as mother and melodramatic hero. Monfriez's and Walden's subjectivity is defined by Serling's investigative, perceiving characterisation. Mutually, Serling is defined in the terms of dominant white military identity, his positioning in opposition to a hysterical and aberrant damaged (yet performative) Latino masculinity, and the white femininity of Walden. His blackness is rendered invisible, with Serling only coming into being in the context of excavating the archives of white traumatic memory, and his existence as a traumatised and damaged man contingent on guilt at (Boylar's) white death.

Clearly, *Courage Under Fire* works to refuse black and Latino masculinity access to authenticating narratives of innocence and victimhood. It also marginalises white femininity through its representative and narrational practices, but the memorialisation of white female death is still asserted as pre-eminent in the face of damaged black masculinity. The character of Ilario emerges as crucial within this complex matrix of marginalisations. He, crucially, is a white male. Ilario also is presented as the orientating point for narrative truth, since he relates the definitive version of events to Serling, revealing Monfriez's cowardice, Walden's bravery, and so on. This is an important combination since this stresses the white male in the narrative

as the central, factual, organising power within the symbolic economy of the film. White masculinity is the pivot around which the plot arcs and swings, and is invested with gravitas and uncontested meaning. Ilario is also crucially depicted as a morphine addict, an affliction developed in the aftermath of his traumatic experiences in the Gulf. He is portrayed by an extremely (and deliberately) gaunt-looking Matt Damon. Hence, his damage is writ large on the surface of his body, his emaciation conveying his trauma, damage, and weakness. Also, much like in *Jacob's Ladder*, and *The Jacket*, Matt Damon's skinny presence, fair hair, youthful looks, nervous performance, and slight musculature means he is far removed from the hyper-masculinity typical of the hard bodies of action films. So, similarly to these films, the audience becomes aligned, in terms of focalisation, with a character who is white, male, damaged, and does not physically embody hegemonic hyper-masculinity. We become aligned with him since he is asserted as the source of narrative truth, and also due to the emotivity involved in him displaying the guilt and shame he feels for his previous silences and disavowals regarding the correct course of events in the Iraqi desert. The damaged white male therefore becomes the mediating force between black masculinity and white femininity, permitting both to flirt with the authenticating power of damage and victimhood, but ensuring both are subject to the organising power of the dominant fiction of white male US national identity.

In this context it is interesting that both Ilario's and Serling's guilt resides in the production or witnessing of white death, rather than presumably the vast numbers of Iraqi soldiers killed in the same battles. The deaths of Walden and Boylar haunt the text, whilst the destruction by fire and mortar of what must be hundreds of Iraqi soldiers becomes merely a pyrotechnic and pyromaniac backdrop for a narrative of traumatized American masculinity. If, as Sally

Robinson has claimed, 'white masculinity can most convincingly represent itself as victimized through displaying a wounded body'[199], then it is equally possible that this can be achieved through displaying a wounded mind. So therefore, in order to process the violence on which the American military operation in Iraq depended, and come to terms with the belligerent foreign policy on which US power is predicated, the destruction of innumerable Iraqi soldiers must form a technological spectacle of suffering, both in terms of the audio-visual complex of cinema and the high grade weaponry used to destroy their bodies. Conversely, the emotional trauma of American male soldiers must be prioritized and afforded narrative agency. The Iraqis are portrayed as unsympathetic props, cannon fodder for the gazing eyes of the passive, innocent bystanders who disavow their complicity in US international and cultural violence and oppression. In direct opposition to this, the Americans all have back stories, dialogue, feelings, and desires. It is through these basic cinematic methods that the construction of the American male as victim as opposed to victimizer is given primacy. White death and white memory not only consumes and marginalises blackpain, but also colonial pain and the subjective and embodied representation of Arab and Iraqi identity.

It is in this context of Arab identity (and the oppositional, but mutually defining relationship between blackness and whiteness) that I wish to further explore constructions of white patriarchal authority as victimised and innocent. For this purpose I will turn to three other Hollywood films that examine the Gulf War; *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005), *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004), and *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999). The first two films explore a central US character's (traumatic) memory of the war, whilst the third,

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[199] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men*, 20

although ending in a diegetic realm after the war, is firmly rooted in the 'present' of the conflict.

Three Kings: Reverse colonisation and the spectacle of otherness

Three Kings offers up aestheticised otherness and through a sense of the politics it attempts to mobilise, it also offers up a narcissistic sense of self-admonishment for spectators. The film is essentially a post-modern update of *Kelly's Heroes* in which, after the Gulf War has been declared over, a group of renegade US soldiers embark on a plan to hunt down and appropriate stolen Kuwaiti gold bullion. In *Three Kings*, encounter with the other (whether this is enemy soldiers or Iraqi civilians) is mediated in peculiar ways. For instance, the film opens with a soldier named Barlow (Mark Wahlberg) staring down the long range sights of his rifle at an Iraqi soldier who is pathetically gesturing towards surrender on top of an earth bunker. Barlow proceeds to, in a curiously blank (not quite emotionally detached, but certainly non-plussed), resigned and confused manner, shoot him. This opening scene fixes the primacy of US subjectivity, as most Hollywood war films do, and distances and objectifies 'the enemy'. However, later in the film we are presented with a more coherent and tangible encounter with the Iraqi people. The group of US soldiers discover the stolen gold bullion hidden in travel bags in a bunker in an obscure village. Also in the bunker they discover that numerous civilians are being held prisoner. The US soldiers order the Iraqi soldiers guarding the bunker to help carry out the gold bullion into a waiting commandeered van, and also to release the civilian prisoners. The tension of the scene gets ratcheted up a few notches when, in attempting to make contact with her imprisoned husband, an Iraqi woman is

held back, grabbed by the arm and then shot in the head with a revolver at point blank range by one of the Iraqi soldiers. This particular sequence is highly stylised, with quick jump cuts being performed, a curious low angle camera shot being deployed and the actual scene of the shooting being shot in slow motion. The shape of the Iraqi soldier's body, arm stretched out to one side holding the revolver, bathed in brilliant sunshine, together with the slow motion trajectory of the Iraqi woman's body as it arcs to the floor, in a way aestheticises Arabic death as a system of motifs and visual configurations. But also, since the woman's small child and husband run over to her prostrate corpse, and we see them crying and hugging each other in grief and shock at the barbarity, we become privy to Iraqi subjectivity and pain. The father/husband's imprisoned status is also notable; his hands are bound and he literally has the cruel object of slavery, the bit, between his teeth. This puts him in a dominated and subjected position of pain and constriction, and also marks him as not only voiceless, but pathetically animalistic, only able to vocalise in grunts and incomprehensible wails. The effect of this is to offset the tenderness with which he puts his bound hands around his daughter and comforts her whilst they grieve over the women's body. We are invited to empathise with the bound and dehumanised Iraqi body and therefore the film at once appeals to a self-image of victimhood *and* to the aestheticising and disembodying of the destruction of the Arabic other.

This position of bound and submissive Iraqi subjectivity is reversed later on the film when Barlow is captured by Iraqi soldiers. He is bound to a chair and electric wire is wound around his face and the back of his neck, and then interrogated and lectured by an intensely philosophical and brooding Iraqi, who asks him in a calm, soft voice various questions about the morality of the US military ('do you care about the children?') and the absurdities and subtle contradictions upon which US popular vernacular culture rests ('What is the problem

with Michael Jackson? […] A black man make his skin white and his hair straight […] Your sick fucking country make the black man hurt himself just like you hurt the Arabs and the children over here'). The fact that the scene presents the tortured and submissive white body for consumption is a compelling point and shall be examined further.

Further on in the scene after some slightly hilariously hapless and bumbling looks between two Iraqis manning a box of electric wires and connections, electrical current is pumped through the wires encircling Barlow. Upon which the shot switches to a close up of his face grimacing and distorting in pain, the sweat, dirt and shadows of the poorly lit scene emphasising the creases and folds in his skin as his face contorts and exaggerates his submissive and dominated subjectivity. At this moment the film's and the spectator's empathies are curiously bifurcated, at once compelled to identify with white pain and subjection to domination, but also to identify with the eloquent and philosophical Iraqi (who goes unnamed in the scene, but, according to the credits is called Captain Said) who expounds that 'you (meaning the Americans) bombed my family home […] my wife is crushed by big fucking block of concrete…' to which Barlow responds with genuine revulsion, 'that's horrible!' Slightly taken aback, Captain Said, continues 'that's not even the most horrible bit […] my son was killed in his bed…' We then get a brief flashback of a small child in a wooden cot which is then obliterated by falling blocks of mortar from the ceiling. Barlow mentions that he has a young daughter, to which Captain Said states, 'Can you think how it would feel inside your heart if *I* bombed your daughter?' Upon which we are presented with a cutaway to an imagined scene, Barlow's wife talking on the phone in the kitchen of the family home, holding their young baby daughter, when the wall behind her explodes in a huge blanket of fire. The shots throughout the interrogation sequence stay either as close ups on the

seated Barlow (filmed from a high angle) or on the standing Captain Said (filmed from a low angle), and so in terms of the mise-en-scene, the implied subjectivity is split between Iraq and the US. But it is the blank face of Captain Said compared to the tearful, emotional face of Barlow that points us towards what this sequence achieves. It is clearly not enough within the symbolic economy of the film for the Iraqi character to narrate a story of personal familial pain and grief, and it is even not enough to then show a brief graphic and lurid flashback to the cause of this pain and grief. The deal must be sealed with transference from Iraqi subjectivity being the victim of neo-imperial violence to a fabrication of embattled and assaulted US domestic subjectivity. Crucially, much like the real memories of Captain Said's grief and pain, the victimised and assaulted imagined US subjectivity must be located in heterosexual familial domestic space, and carry with it traumatic fantasies of the destruction of this space. This imagined subjectivity betrays anxieties regarding reverse colonisation, that an Arabic or Oriental enemy may invade, conquer, or destroy the US homeland. The film therefore permits spectatorial empathy for the colonized and cudgelled Iraqi people, but also permits a revelling in fantasies of homeland apocalypse; the victim position of the colonized being commandeered by US subjectivity, via use of the white domestic, for aesthetic and emotional effect.

The torture scene climaxes with Barlow softly insisting that the US liberated Kuwait and invaded parts of Iraq in order to aid 'stability' in the region. Unimpressed, Captain Said rushes towards him and in a flurry of hands on flesh, opens Barlow's mouth and shoves a CD case between his teeth, stating, 'This is your fucking stability, my main man.' He is then handed a pot containing some crude oil, which he then attempts to pour down Barlow's throat; we see the dark viscous fluid glooping in slow waves over the CD case and into and

around his mouth and face. We also see the look of terror in Barlow's eyes, when the scene suddenly cuts away to parallel action elsewhere.

It is clear here that the dynamics of the scene have swiftly changed. No longer are we subjected to fantasies of US domestic apocalypse and anxieties of reverse colonisation, but compelled to empathise with the white US soldier, submissive, bound and dehumanised by oral assault. In fact, this demand of our empathies echoes the position of the Iraqi father/husband depicted when our band of outlaw soldiers (led by Archie Bates, played by George Clooney) first discover the gold bullion. The scene therefore marks the point where white US masculinity and Iraqi masculinity collide, and in this collision we experience the supplanting of victimised Iraqi subjectivity by a white US subjectivity that is assaulted by twin signifiers of western material wealth and power; the disposable technologies of entertainment (the CD) and the oil that drives the entire economy of global capitalism. Through being compelled to ingest these items, Barlow is located in a position which grossly parodies the act of consumption, force-fed material goods and bound into a position whereby resistance to the dominating forces that drive this consumption is futile. In a sense, this echoes the position of 'cultural masochism' espoused by David Savran, which postulates that masochism is a valid response to the domination and alienation attendant with global capitalism.[200] However, within the economy of the film, this scene's real function seems to be to perpetuate anxieties of reverse colonisation. In other words, this is only *in part* a satirical parody of western consumption gone haywire, it is also a nightmare vision of a berserk Arab identity that will vengefully assault white US masculinity (and hence US power and authority) using profane symbols of western decadence and power. This serves to bolster the

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[200] David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 209-10

US false self-image as victim twofold; firstly by introducing an enhanced anxiety of reverse colonisation, and secondly by depicting the tools of this colonisation as being familiar everyday objects. The threat is crucially culturally internal and located within the aforementioned white domestic.

However, we must also account for the presentation of black US masculinity in *Three Kings*, embodied in the Chief Elgin (Ice Cube) character. Lila Kitaeff complains of this character's depiction that it 'reinforces stereotypical and liberal discourses of blackness' especially since he 'comes from Detroit […] and he uses ungrammatical street slang' and 'is also presented as possessing greater athletic abilities than his white counterparts.' [201] This final point I feel is pushing it a little bit; Ice Cube is hardly renowned for this athletic "frame", shall we say, and there is a scene early in the film in which whilst the soldiers are throwing footballs from the back of a Humvee, an argument erupts over whether 'blacks make better receivers than quarterbacks.' This proposition is vehemently opposed by Elgin but nonetheless shows that blackness and athleticism, although depicted as being to some extent part of the same stereotypical discourse, are by no means mutually exclusive.

That said, Kitaeff does latch on to a notable element of Elgin's portrayal, that he 'seems untouchable because of his spiritual nature, and in the film he is the only US character that is not shot, killed, or tortured.' This invincibility is accompanied with a solid dependability and comforting presence. For example, when Conrad is shot and dies from his injuries and Barlow is upset, Elgin physically and stoically consoles him. His steady-going dependability is partly a product of his construction as working class (due to his previous baggage handling job at the

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[201] Lila Kitaeff, "*Three Kings*: neo-colonial Arab representation," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 46 (2003), 14 Mar. 2008 <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc46.2003/kitaeff.threeKings/>

airport), but also assists in lending him a certain detached mystery and romanticism, which, allied with his 'spiritual nature' can contribute to a discourse whereby the African-American is typified by 'mystical rather than logical means of living.'[202] This is not to say that the character of Elgin is irrational and hopelessly indebted to his spirituality (at numerous points he presents practical solutions to problems or views situations with a crystal clear moral straightforwardness), but clearly, Elgin is at once incorporated into the subjectivity of mainstream US colonizing identity, but also suggestively positioned as partly 'other', and hence sharing some subjectivity with other non-white characters in the film. However, the fact that, as mentioned previously, he is never wounded or tortured, denies blackness any access to the configurations of pain, submission, domination, and victimhood available in the film to all other subjectivities. Instead, he functions as the 'rock' for all the other soldiers and civilians, and in a sense, 'bears the burden' of emotional and physical pain as products of US neo-imperialist violence and domination. So Michael Jackson is invoked as a corporeally amorphous indictment of the capacity of US exceptionalism to wreak havoc on regimes of personal identity and visual representation, and Elgin is used to demonstrate that blackness must 'bear the burden' and is not permitted access to narratives of victimhood. Blackpain is elided and disavowed as part of the project of US neo-imperialism. Accordingly, Elgin can only mediate between the various subjectivities of US national identity presented in the film, and even then his mediation is narrational only, and possesses no *cultural* or *political* agency.

Three Kings places a lot of emphasis on its aesthetic and narrative strategies. Gun battles are highly stylized, with one notable example being depicted in slow-motion and discharged of any sense of frenetic violence. There are brief, intimate cutaways to the violence wreaked on bodies, and there is a persistent use of post-production and in-camera colouring and light

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[202] Kitaeff

effects in order to render the film aesthetically compelling. The film even opens (on DVD copies anyway) with a caption drawing attention to these techniques, presumably so spectators do not incorrectly think there is something wrong with their TV/DVD player. The persistence of this aestheticising regime, plus the supplanting of the spectatorial encounter with the other with empathy for victimised white male US subjectivity, and fantasies of reverse colonisation, all divert encounter with the other towards a system of self-regard in which the primacy of the white US male and US cultural authority is confirmed. As we shall also see in the discussion of *Jarhead* below, emotional spectatorial connection to victimised white US male subjectivity is of paramount importance in securing this diversion from encounter with the other.

Jarhead: **Hysterical masculinity, blankness, and reflexivity**

One of the most important scenes in *Jarhead* occurs towards the end of the film. The central character, Swofford and his colleague, Troy, are both dispatched on a sniper mission to take out the occupants of an Iraqi military aerial control tower. We are shown their secretive, stealthy scrambling and shuffling amongst sandstone bunkers and bombed out concrete buildings in order to achieve a good position from which to achieve their objective. Once they set up position, and examine the scene through a cracked and dusty window, we are treated to a telescopic view of the control tower, a single member of the Iraqi military faintly picked out in the distance. What this initially achieves is to ensure that the 'other' is kept at a physical and aesthetic distance; the emotional investment is with Swofford and Troy and the completion of their objective. We see extreme close-ups of Swofford accurately and precisely adjusting the controls of his telescopic sights, delicately fingering the trigger of his rifle, and gently nestling into a calm and secure firing position. These lingering, detailed shots tend to

fetishize the technological intimacy of the sniper, at the expense of granting the 'other' any subjectivity. Instead, we become bound up in the tactility and aesthetics of the technology of US military violence. Having confirmed their permission to fire on the target, Major Lincoln (who is black – an observation that will become relevant below) suddenly bustles in on the scene, declaring, "What the fuck frequency are you on? We got air. I'm calling it in." This provokes complete incredulity in Troy, who descends into an apoplectic frenzy of tearful emotions, attempting to grab the Major's communications unit, sobbing "What difference does it make…it's just one shot!" The message in this particular exchange is clear: US military masculinity cannot perform its basic function of killing, and is supplanted by the high-tech performance of domination and apocalypse, a point reinforced by the Major's declaration that you should, "Watch this. It will blow your fucking minds."

However, there is more going on in this scene. Firstly, the supplanting of corporeal hyper-masculinity by abstract, high-tech weaponry is not merely just about US subjectivity. Secondly, the stylistics of the scene can tell us more about the discourse the film is connecting with. Both of these points can be addressed through reference to how the film uses inter-textuality in this sequence. Swofford peers through the dusty and cracked window to examine the scene of destruction which will come any second thanks to the ordered air-strike. His face occupies half of the frame and we can faintly see the control tower and surrounding bunker complexes reflected in the glass. The air-strike comes in, and we see, still in the same shot, courtesy of the reflections, waves of explosive fire move across the frame from left to right. The visual dynamics of this explosion recall the catastrophic napalm strike that opens *Apocalypse Now* in its movement and colour. So, there is a clear sense of warfare as spectacle in both the Major's comments, and also in the visual quotation from war films of the past.

This brief moment of inter-textuality is imprinted on Swofford's face, courtesy of the reflections in the glass, and so US white masculinity becomes both subject and object of this spectacular gaze; both watching the destruction, and having this destruction imprinted upon him, as a ghostly ethereal echo of what is immediately around him, and also culturally mediated through pastiche/quotation. In this sense, US white masculinity is further moved into a false victim position. In other words, he is presented as a victim of the alienating effects of modern warfare on masculinity, and a victim of warfare as an imagistic spectacle of neo-imperial domination. This second point is the more disingenuous, it being US technology and domination that is projected onto his visage; we don't see the bombs from below, only from the side, mediated through the victimised, self-regarding, self-obsessed image of white US masculinity.

As an aside to these points, it is worth pointing out that after the Major bursts in, a garden chair is unfolded for him, on which he promptly sits down, declaring, "Bad knees. College football." Although, this is a line and a concept that is clearly rendered comedically, it is nonetheless somewhat revealing. Firstly, it confirms an earlier mentioned stereotype of blackness regarding the black body being emphasised through athleticism. Secondly, it also curiously domesticises the scene since the spectacle of apocalypse, of neo-imperial domination, is rendered almost cosy, intimate or familiar. This invocation of domesticity operates differently to that mentioned in *Three Kings* above, and is not used in order to negotiate racist anxieties of reverse colonisation, but is part of a pervading domestication of the act of witnessing death at a distance. The emotional and mediated space between the Major and the air-strike equates to the lack of ethical culpability in viewing mediated images

of destruction, and perhaps assists in an easing the erasure of the 'other' from the symbolic, moral and narrative economy of the film.

In a scene towards the end of the film, the war has been declared over, and the marines are wildly and animalistically celebrating in a hollow in the desert at night. Fires burn, liquor is consumed and the thumping hip hop soundtrack of Public Enemy's 'Fight The Power' (ironically enough[203]) booms over the scene. Realising that not one of the main characters has effectively fired a shot in anger, the marines spontaneously start to fire their rifles up in the air, in a celebratory, orgasmic fashion. The scene is ultimately just an ostentatious display of existential phallic power. Weapon technology and the male body are conflated and fetishized in this moment and the power of both is rendered futile. They are firing at nothing. Their physical strength and prowess is for nothing. They are celebrating nothing.

In one iconic moment, Jamie Foxx is framed firing his automatic rifle into the air, cigar in mouth, muscles clenched tight. For a brief moment, he glances down somewhat admiringly at his own biceps. Military power is emphasising its own futility and uselessness through firing into the air at nothing, but at the same time, caught in its own moment of supreme narcissism and self-congratulation. Self-reflexive posturing is seemingly all US masculinity has to offer; there is no alterity, there is no 'other', just endless self-consumption as spectacle. In a way, the fact that this final iconic image is of Jamie Foxx, shows that this self-consumption is allied to blackness, and therefore the abuse of neo-imperial power and commandeering of victim positions enacted throughout the film are projected and displaced onto a narcissistic, black

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[203] 'Fight The Power' with its insistent refrain of 'fight the powers that be' and proclamations such as 'Elvis never meant shit to me […] most of my heroes aint appeared on no stamp' is a wholesale rejection of white pop culture imagery, and hence radically critiques the inherent racism of US vernacular culture. The fact that this is misappropriated and reconfigured by the Marines in a sense erases blackness as a politically articulate force, and hence contributes to the film's lack of substantial narrative engagement with neo-imperial domination.

athletic corporeality; confirming racist stereotypes and absolving white US masculinity of ethical culpability and complicity in its racialised political and cultural domination and oppression.

In *Jarhead*, Swofford's closing proclamation of 'we are all still in the desert' aptly accentuates the blankness and superficiality of contemporary warfare and our spectatorial relationship to it, but this incorporates us into a regime of white male victimhood, or disempowerment. We become emotionally and empathically aligned to the erosion of classic male soldiering depicted in the film (machines performing the warring functions of male bodies), and hence get caught up in pining for a 'lost' classical version of hegemonic masculinity, but we are also offered up a thoroughly non-specific sense of ennui and melancholy in which to wallow. This appeal to audience dejection permits a spectatorial regime of emotivity to flourish, and it is this emotivity which prevents self-reflection on how we consume contemporary war films. Rather than self-reflection and an interrogative process of examining the social and cultural systems that legislate for and against our consumption of catastrophe and trauma, we are offered an irresistible opportunity to brood. This position is lent extra credence and cultural power by going hand in hand with taking on the mantle of a self-image of disenfranchised masculinity, with all it entailing agency gained through cashing in on identity politics and co-opting marginalised otherness.

<u>Conclusions: Masochism, resistance, and liberal Hollywood fantasies</u>

So, we have seen in three Hollywood Gulf war films how in various guises, spectatorial encounter with violence and catastrophe is evoked, but it is always tempered with emotivity, sentimentality, the cultural authority of victimhood, or liberal fantasies. It is this last point that is the most important since it offers up a critique to Hollywood cinema, especially Hollywood projects that style themselves as 'progressive' or 'enlightened' or are attempting to ideologically assert the erasure of categories of difference based along boundaries of gender, race, class, sexuality, and the like. The sentimentality and catharsis offered up in the ending of *Courage Under Fire* functions to assert the primacy of white death and the memorialising of the white domestic over blackpain and black masculinity. This is despite a "radical" message of racialised and gendered inclusivity. In turn, the 'blankness' or superficiality of aesthetics and narrative tone conveyed in *Three Kings* and *Jarhead*, is completely at odds with their ideological regimes which depend on emotional connection: in *Three Kings* to the white domestic homeland, and in *Jarhead* to melancholic self-pity at male disenfranchisement. In all cases, the spectator is impelled to empathise with a traumatised, assaulted, or victimised male subjectivity, and hence emotional connection becomes not a case of the potential for ethical encounter, but rather about subjection to the narrative agency and cultural authority of white male victimhood.

The question remains of how all this relates to a masochistic construction of US subjectivity and how this masochism is used (or rejected, in the case of Debra Walker King's conception of blackpain) in the context of race and the 'other.' Firstly, I shall examine the aestheticising of pain and submission to be found in these films and then examine how these aesthetics link race and trauma. All films under discussion, once again, position the damaged male at the

centre of a masochistic aesthetics in that they all share fetishized and detailed scenes of suspense and submission, make a spectacle of male suffering, and offer up stylistic regimes of abjection, waste, and corporeal horror.. In *Three Kings* this is most prominently the torture scene, featuring Barlow and the enigmatic Captain Said, the stylised aesthetics of the battle sequences, intimate shots of damaged internal organs, and the hyper-colour-saturated film-stock. In *Jarhead* it is the 'permission denied' sniper shot sequence, numerous curious and compelling surreal dream sequences, and Swofford's hallucinatory encounter with a horse in the oil-drenched deserts of Iraq whilst the skyline burns around him. In *Courage Under Fire* we are presented with numerous scenarios of emotional, psychological, and physical self-flagellation, the hysterical yet spectacular and performative masculinity of Monfriez, and the abject corporeal horror of the friendly fire sequences.

An example from another Gulf war film can be brought in here. Jonathan Demme's *The Manchurian Candidate* is, of course, a re-make of the 1962 cold war thriller classic. This time, rather than the assassination attempt on the US presidential candidate being a communist plot, it is the product of the shadowy multinational company, 'Manchurian Global', attempting to dominate global capitalism through political control of the USA. Rather than the mind control experiments that lead to the iconic assassination sequence being conducted on soldiers in Korea, this time round it is conducted on soldiers in the Gulf War. The 'brain-washing' sequences in *The Manchurian Candidate* play a major part in delineating and promoting the masochistic aesthetics of contemporary war films, and rendering them as part of a system of recuperation. In these sequences we see the soldiers held captive in a secure facility, heavily drugged and forced to watch on an enormous screen an animated

depiction of the falsified events. We also see the soldiers learning a verbal account of the battle by rote, and being subjected to live role-plays to flesh out the physical details of their memories. There is also one scene in particular in which one of the soldiers is urged to strangle and shoot another soldier. It is in these scenes that we therefore see a rather clumsy and self-conscious metaphor for Western spectatorship of catastrophe and disaster, in which we passively accept the flow of images before our eyes and are inculcated with the stories and narratives the mainstream media wish to propagate. This also seems to suggest that we are also collectively self-destructive and that we produce damage to ourselves through wallowing in this passivity. So, by these sequences using masochistic aesthetics as an instrument of recuperation, what is meant is that this is not just a shoring up of the cultural authority of white male victimhood. Masochistic aesthetics are also crucially used to retrieve the spectator from questioning the spurious ethics which structure the film/viewer relationship when presented with a satirical narrative of war media spectatorship. What this means is that the film allows audience self-reflection on the politics of media presentation of warfare through the brainwashing sequences acting as metaphors for spectatorial consumption of war. However, the masochistic aesthetics that structure these sequences shore up and emphasise the primacy of the damaged male, and hence self-reflection transforms into immersion into the visual pleasures of torture, submission, and corporeal shattering.

A further example of the recuperative methodology of masochistic aesthetics is the 'operation' sequence from *The Manchurian Candidate* (which to some extent recalls the culmination of the 'gurney sequence' from *Jacob's Ladder*). Much like *Jacob's* Ladder, the sequence features intimate, detailed camera shots which focus on precise medical instruments,

and show extreme close ups of latex-gloved hands making minute adjustments to screws, rods and frames that are part of the binding machinery holding a patient in place. There is also neurological intrusion in both sequences, with *Jacob's Ladder* featuring a horrific and shocking moment of corporeal invasion courtesy of a massive needle being stuck into Jacob's forehead, whilst *The Manchurian Candidate* features a much more 'medical' procedure involving the precise implantation of a 'chip' in Shaw's brain. From this textual evidence it is clear that *The Manchurian Candidate* is offering up similar visual pleasures to *Jacob's Ladder*, albeit in a different way. Whereas in *Jacob's Ladder* the emphasis is very particularly on *pain*, in *The Manchurian Candidate*, it is very much on, not exactly pleasure, but definitely a lack of pain, or a lack of any particular emotions for that matter. Rather than depraved abject fantasies of binding and submission, we are offered up pleasurable fantasies, a point reinforced by the fact that Shaw's mind controlled state is conveyed to us by the lighting of the scene being raised to almost bleaching levels of whiteness, depicting a state of heightened awareness and a strange sense of blank pleasure, as a dreamy smile forms on Shaw's lips.

However, what critically delineates all of the sequences mentioned earlier is the matter of suspense and deferred action. In the previous chapter it was noted that the historical depiction of masochism always entails 'a basic component of ecstasy; the mystical trance, the tortured and languid body exposed to blows, the exquisite agonies […] the suspended gesture of sacrificial moment.'[204] This is not *literally* in evidence in these films, but we have their close correlatives in deferred moments of suspense before a supreme act of violence or infliction of

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[204] Victor N. Smirnoff, "The Masochistic Contract," *Essential Papers on Masochism*, ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 66

pain. In *Three Kings* this is the torture sequence, in *The Manchurian Candidate* it is the flashbacks to the brain-washing events, and in *Jarhead,* it is the sniper sequence.

These are all extremely aestheticised and stylised sequences, and it is to this end that Gaylyn Studlar's theories of the masochistic aesthetic are useful here. Studlar, who, as mentioned in the introduction, uses Gilles Deleuze and Jean Laplanche to construct her methodology, proposes that 'masochistic desire depends on separation to guarantee a pain/pleasure structure.'[205] What this means is that within the psycho-sexual structure of the masochist, there is a need to control desire and 'suspend consummation,'[206] that is, 'avoid the orgasmic release that destroys the boundaries of disavowal.'[207] Studlar goes on to expound that in the case of masochistic subjectivity and cinema, 'the repetition of traumatic events […] makes available the pleasure of loss, suffering, and submission.'[208] So, the fact that these films confront us with fetishizied, detailed and tactile scenarios of deferred release, binding, submission, torture, delayed agonies, and culminate in apocalyptic destruction, death, or a 'bursting out', physical, emotional or otherwise, shows that fantasies of traumatic suffering are available for spectatorial consumption.

However, there is one crucial point here: in all these films there is also a clumsy, or non-existent attempt to make contact with the 'other', to come face-to-face with the 'enemy' and create ethical connections, marking white western complicity in and culpability for the

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[205] Gaylyn Studlar, *In The Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 27
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid., 182

violence of US neo-imperialism. This is largely achieved through distancing, disavowal or plain erasure of the 'enemy', which is presented to us as a visual side-effect of the mediated and abstracted nature of modern warfare. It is this same distancing and separation which is a large component of the oscillating identifications which structure these films. For example, in *Three Kings*, during the torture sequence, we are compelled first to empathise with Barlow in his bound and submissive position, then with Captain Said with his personal tale of US-inflicted grief, and then back to Barlow again as he imagines his wife and baby being blown to smithereens, and has crude oil shoved down his neck. Following what Studlar remarks about such oscillations in identification,[209] these fluctuations in affinity prevent spectators from ever investing *too much* in the screen images. Affinities swing this way and that way in a web of refusals, closures, and disavowals in order that the spectator should not completely surrender to the radical masochistic pleasures of the text. So even when a radical potential for movement beyond distancing, othering, and erasure of divergent identities presents itself, it can be safely refused. Much like in the air-strike scene in *Jarhead*, we can securely domesticate the scene with garden furniture, physically and emotionally distance ourselves through technologies of visual culture (cinema *and* the telescopic sights and binoculars depicted in the film), but still sensationally invest in fantasies of embattled and 'victimised' white masculinity courtesy of Swofford and Troy.

Later in this thesis, this sense of inter-subjectivity, encounter with the other, and the flagging of spectatorial culpability in looking on at images of war will be framed in terms of the *ethics* of such connections and accusations. However, it must be importantly noted, as outlined in the Introduction, that the development of an ethical account of contemporary war film

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[209] Ibid., 192

spectatorship only flourishes in the context of the later 'war on terror' cycle of films and has its most obvious antecedents in the 'humanitarian' cycle, also addressed in this thesis. Up to this point, the masochistic aesthetics of the contemporary war film hails a masochistic spectatorship that engenders the primacy of the damaged male, and as mentioned above, provides a reactionary, consolidatory position with which to resist radical dissolution into the abject regimes of true masochistic pleasure. Instead, the visual pleasures and sensations provided by the masochistic aesthetics of the contemporary war film make available fantasies of white male victimhood. This victimhood can be simultaneously revelled in and disavowed by casting it onto the marginal black bodies and aberrant possessors of damaged subjectivity that populate these films.

How does this relate to blackness, race, and the 'other'? In the first instance, the wounding of blackpain is conceived in terms that stress submission, flagellation and to an extent, self-harm. In *Courage Under Fire*, Serling's personal trauma is visually and narratologically articulated through his lack of connection with the domestic realm, his flashbacks to the tank battle, and his alcoholism. He tortures *himself* for the friendly fire incident that led to the death of Boylar, and is tearful and self-effacing to the point of servile and submissive in the face of the colonial domesticity of the Boylar family home. In *The Manchurian Candidate*, Marco (Denzel Washington) is consumed by his nightmarish dreams of shooting a fellow soldier during the brain-washing programme, self-medicates with over-the-counter pain killers, slices open his own body in pursuit of an 'implant', and voluntarily submits himself to electro-shock therapy in order to recover his distorted and buried memories.

Traumatic memory is therefore figured as analogous to a wounded body, and a wounded black body at that. This corporeality of traumatic memory, allied to blackness, is one that exists beyond the realms of narrative comprehension and symbolic references, and so must be delved into and apprehended via violence and pain. This body must be probed, sliced, burnt, pummelled etc in order to yield its meaning, and so a central tenet of US society is manufactured; that the black body of 'othered' citizenry must 'bear the burden' of US neo-imperialist violence and oppression. The scars of submission and domination are written on the black body, but are made available as pleasurable fantasies, presumably to a dominant white subjectivity or spectator position.

This implies that the precepts of masochism that frame damaged masculinity may in this case need augmenting in order to accommodate the different cultural meanings attached to submission and pain in black US culture. Instead of pain being figured as an object to internalise and reconfigure as pleasure through recourse to fetish and fantasy, the corporeal process of *resisting* and *transforming* pain becomes central. There is significant political and cultural capital in depicting black characters as being 'resistant' to their trauma or pain. Debra Walker King comments, in the context of discussing the 'battle royal' passage from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, that 'the most effective way to emerge whole from moments of torture is to absorb its pain into the deepest levels […] where its effects are curtailed and contained "to the point of explosion."'[210] What this demonstrates is that blackness must find a way to internalise and reconfigure pain and violence as inflicted on the black body, and for this reconfiguration to not go down the route of submission, but rather to take on the energy of that pain and violence, to resist it, and be transformed. The fact that this must occur "to the

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[210] Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain*, 65

point of explosion" shows that an almost reciprocal potential for violence and apocalypse is engendered by this resistance, and internalisation of pain becomes a combative weapon for transforming structures of race and patriarchal power. Therefore, in contemporary war films, there is the potential for violence inflicted on the black body to be used as a radical tool to 'withstand extreme pain' and to use this pain to black subjectivity's 'advantage.'[211]

In contemporary war films there is no working through of blackpain and trauma, just a compulsion to be resistant and stand strong against it. Instead black subjectivity must be assaulted by traumatic memory and remain stoic. We hardly ever see the 'explosions' identified above as being an intrinsic part of this dynamic. Instead, the visuality of black trauma confirms the spectatorial voyeurism at work in this dynamic, which in turn can entrench the superiority of white subjectivity. King also identifies that films depicting race and war (and race war) often show transference of patriarchal power (often between father and son, or symbolic fathers and sons), however, there is none of this symbolic power transference in the films under discussion in this chapter. This could be partly to do with the fact that masochistic subjectivity mocks and belittles patriarchal power, and so any transference of this nature would ultimately be meaningless. However, the masochism available in these films is for the most part aesthetic, offering oscillations between pain and pleasure, whilst revelling in a position of bound and submissive subjectivity. This does not correlate with the strategies of resistance to pain and violence articulated by King, and so it is more probable that transference of patriarchal power does not occur because the exceptionalism on which US neo-imperialism is predicated will not allow it. White pain and death allows fantasies of submission and victimhood that bolster US cultural authority, whilst

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[211] Ibid., 89

blackpain and death offers curtailed resistant strategies which 'bear the burden' and absolve white subjectivity of any culpability or complicity in constructing the racism, violence and oppression on which US neo-imperialism is predicated.

CHAPTER THREE: NEO-IMPERIALISM AND MASOCHISTIC SUBJECTIVITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY "HUMANITARIAN" WAR FILMS.

The sub-set of contemporary war films under scrutiny in this chapter are the so called 'humanitarian' war films that show the US engaged in multi-lateral peace-keeping operations, aid missions, and projects to assist in maintaining civilian order in various non-US locations. Guy Westwell has commented that these films depict US foreign policy engagements according to 'the moral certainties of the 1990s World War II combat movie in which brave and moral American soldiers respond to a severe and overwhelming threat from a perfidious and immoral enemy.'[212] In contrast, Weber comments that these films showcase a generation of soldiers who 'understand that their familial, national, and international moral inheritance is rooted in the fractured morality of the post-Vietnam era, not the foundational morality of WWII.'[213]

Westwell is specifically discussing the narrative and diegetic operations of the films, whereas Weber is addressing the depictive and representational strategies deployed by the films. So for example, to take *Behind Enemy Lines* (which will be discussed at greater length below), Weber is describing the numerous times US military characters declare reflexively that 'things are different now' and war simply isn't a matter of 'punching a Nazi in the face'; an attempt to add shades of grey to the US self-image of military morality and culpability. However, Westwell's point addresses the fact that despite this self-awareness demonstrated by characters, the film still depends on WWII antecedents for its narrative power by

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[212] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 107
[213] Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War*, 55

showcasing a definitive contrast between 'good' and 'evil' and depicting the total technological and strategic domination of the 'enemy' by an exceptional and aggressive US.

It will be useful here to reiterate, as mentioned in the Introduction, that one of the assumptions utilised throughout this chapter and this thesis is that the US is a neo-imperial power, and that this neo-imperialism is rooted in exceptionalism. Accordingly, mainstream US cultural productions are to a degree complicit in upholding and maintaining this expansionist ethic. Hence, this chapter will explore how Hollywood's humanitarian films perform some of the cultural work of US neo-imperialism and exceptionalism, with the express aim, seemingly, of hysterically asserting (through the melodramatic and stylistic excesses of contemporary Hollywood film) the "just" and "compassionate" nature of US geopolitical-military engagement in overseas territories. This is performed in tandem with asserting the US white male soldiering body as hopelessly and tragically doomed to eternally repeat and return to the battlefield. The repeating and returning nature of the US soldier is seen to be his default setting, and is therefore an inherent component of US humanitarianism, exemplifying American compassion and self-disregard in the name of liberty and freedom. The male military body is (masochistically) re-cast into battle in the name of benevolent US neo-imperialism, at once confirming its humanitarian assertions, and also obviating its obfuscating qualities. The radical corporeality of the ruined or dishevelled male body draws attention away from the neo-imperial and geopolitically hegemonic power that fuels US exceptionalism. Accordingly, the military male body is shown as victim of inherent benevolent neo-imperialism rather than the agent of deregulated market capitalism and reactionary globalization.

In Chapter One I defined masochistic aesthetics as entailing a performance of the masochistic contract, the portrayal of a suspenseful moment before the infliction of violence, the fetishization of the accoutrements of the masochistic scenario, and, referring to the white US male, a crucial self-regard in bearing witness to one's own "victimized" status. This was further fleshed out by adding that it also included the asserting of masculine embodiment as spectacle, and for the spectator to be seduced into the pleasures of abjection. This initial definition was in the context of exploring the radical visuality of *Jacob's Ladder* and *The Jacket*, so therefore one must be careful with expanding this definition to cover extremely mainstream Hollywood productions. However, much of this definition can be applied to both *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Black Hawk Down*, most notably in their seductive abilities (through the pleasures of the male body, and intimate and affective mise-en-scene and sound design), their spectacles of male pain and, and their insistence on portraying a self-willed desire for the traumatically repeating perpetual agonies of the battlefield experience. In these two films' use of elements of masochistic aesthetics, they betray a project of enchantment, presenting the spectator with a pleasurable means of binding themselves to the oscillating matrices of power and fragmentation, pain and enjoyment presented in the films. Hence analogies can be drawn between the "tragic" perpetually-returning military masculinity and the spectatorial satisfaction to be found in endlessly revisiting the cultural (and represented) sites of violent neo-imperial domination.

The male body as spectacle: sensation, aesthetics, violence and technology

An insistent and pervasive theme throughout war films is the idea of the male body as spectacle. There is nothing specific about war films in this, since it is a common occurrence in action films of any genre. However, the representative strategies deployed in contemporary

war films point us towards a certain visual and narrative regime by which male spectacle is posited as at once obviating the neo-imperialist basis of US foreign policy and depicting the white male as victimised. This dialogical depiction of the white male serves as a potent cultural narrative by which to seduce spectators into the sensational and phenomenological realm of tactility which populates contemporary war films.

As explored in the Introduction, Steve Neale, in his seminal essay, discussed the prospect that the male body as spectacle was in a sense 'feminised.'[214] However, although initially useful for indicating that representation of the male body in cinema is complicated by how questions of gender and sexuality are constructed by this representation, this account is not quite adequate for the purposes of this chapter. The male body being offered up as spectacle equating to being 'feminised' doesn't seem to hold true, mainly because this is overly reliant on Mulvey's concept of the 'sadistic' gaze of an idealised male spectator.[215] There are clearly many scenarios where the male body can be offered up as spectacle without this entailing a feminisation of the male subject. As Paul Smith puts it, 'instances of the erotic display of the male body are rife in contemporary film and media production' and these instances do not necessarily mean that there is any reinforcement of 'conventional treatment of the female body.'[216] It is more the case that schemes of depiction have been codified and disseminated throughout media practice in order to eroticise the male body for purposes that do not necessarily entail 'feminisation.'

Staying with Paul Smith, it is far more useful in the context of contemporary war films to discuss male spectacle within the realm of visual pleasures located in violence, eroticization,

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[214] Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle," *Screen* 24.6 (1983), 2-17
[215] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975), 6-18
[216] Paul Smith, *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 158

destruction, and regeneration. Smith quotes from Paul Willemen discussing the Western genre: 'the viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes, or more abstractly history.' [217] Smith adds that 'this pleasure can readily be turned to an eroticization of the male presence and the masculine body, and it is always followed up […] by the destruction of that body. That is, the heroic man is always physically beaten, injured, and brought to breaking point.'[218] So clearly in Smith's conception of the male body as spectacle, a vital component of this spectacle is the destruction or damaging of this body, its near corporeal ruination, that is redeemed and repudiated by the film's close. Despite the fact that this analysis is rooted predominantly in the Western genre, since the idea of the 'heroic man' is one that is not contained by any one particular genre, this analysis can be universalised to encompass more diverse forms of action film that are not necessarily contingent on the tropes, themes and iconography of the Western. As we shall come to see later, the damaged male is mostly redeemed by a process of corporeal and cultural resurrection, in other words a desire to masochistically drive the self back into the very physical scenarios that caused their ruination in the first place.

Crucially there is also a world of sensation that informs male spectacle, that is, the sensorial pleasures in watching the male simply exist. This latter point finds its rough correlation in the world of tactile details and intimate aesthetic pleasures that structure elements of many of the films under analysis in this thesis. The sensational diegetic realm of, for example, the camera lingering over Swofford's delicate and precise adjustments to his rifle sights shows the male body merely 'existing' and being situated in a tactile world of heightened sensation. Swofford

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[217] Paul Willemen, "Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male." *Framework* 15-17 (1981), 16
[218] Paul Smith, 158

in *Jarhead* is a good example here, since for the majority of the film all we do is really just watch him 'exist', there being fairly little action or plot to speak of. So at numerous junctures we simply take pleasure in visually consuming this existence, whether this is through admiring his over-developed muscular physique through his tight army t-shirt, or through observing his slow, deliberate movements through the desert on patrol. Either way, through blatant sexualisation of his body image, or through seducing us into a realm of tactile sensory experience, a sense of emotional engagement is provoked, one that is intended to furnish the spectator with a pleasure of patriarchal fortification (through looking on at the powerful presence of the male body). Smith refers to this emotional engagement as an 'eroticization'. Clearly, this does not literally occur in all contemporary war films, since not all stress the physicality of the male body, or offer up the male body as an erotic spectacle. Therefore, it is important to consider whether Smith's trajectory of eroticization is entirely appropriate for the cycle of films under discussion.

In answering this, there is a case to assert that in stressing emotional engagement and sensorial pleasures, the films can also be identified as dealing in a spectatorial system of erotics. However, are these erotics necessarily a product of the spectacle of the male body? As Susan Jeffords identifies, it is the technology of war that offers up the most compelling and immediate spectacles in Hollywood war film, and that technology is the 'deferred body'.[219] What Jeffords, in the context of discussing Vietnam war films and literature, means by this is that the spectacle of technology in Hollywood war films offers up a chance to redeem and recuperate the fragmented male body; 'the body is reunified through technology as aesthetic.'[220] As Jeffords expounds in her analysis of Rambo in *First Blood Part Two*, it is the

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[219] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 11
[220] Ibid., 10

occupation, and movement through screen space, of Rambo's body that is the most visually compelling element of the film, and it is this body's framing as a form of technology that augments its spectacular impact. She continues to declare, after Neale[221], that any eroticism in (male) spectators consuming the male body as pure spectacle is deferred or sublimated through 'establishing that body as an object of violence.'[222] Accordingly, the erotic nature of the male body as spectacle is disavowed through depicting its ruination and dismantlement. Jefford's (and Neale's) analysis is assumptive, since it supposes that these erotics *need* to be disavowed. As Smith points out, there is a pleasure in watching male bodies occupy screen space regardless of the gender of the spectator. The question should more accurately be framed as, how is the military male body as spectacle deployed? I will argue in this chapter that the male body as an object of violence (and as an object that desires to repeat the fragmentations and excitations of battle) is deployed as spectacle not in order to disavow the erotics of looking on at the male body, but in order to stress the sensorial and affective nature of viewing these bodies. This in turn immerses the spectator in a tactile realm of interactive empathy with the film images (or a reactive homosexual panic) which results in stressing spectatorial empathy or revulsion rather than reflexivity and interrogation.

However, Smith identifies that there is a second stage to this eroticization; that of the 'unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated […] and restored through violent brutality.'[223] This trajectory occurs in the aforementioned 'humanitarian' war films of the late 1990s and early 2000s. I shall initially take one example of this type of film in order to flesh out these ideas, namely *Behind Enemy Lines* (John Moore, 2001).

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[221] Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle", 2-17
[222] Jeffords, *Remasculinization*, 13
[223] Paul Smith, *Clint Eastwood*, 156

Behind Enemy Lines: **spectacles of genocide, the damaged male, and the disavowal of US neo-imperialism**

This film is about Burnett (Owen Wilson) a renegade and disillusioned navy fighter jet navigator based on an NATO aircraft carrier in the Baltic Sea at the height of the civil war which tore apart the former Yugoslavia. During a routine surveillance mission, Burnett encourages his pilot to stray off course into a nearby 'no-fly zone'. They subsequently and unknowingly stumble across a breakaway faction of Bosnian-Serb renegade military men and the site of a mass grave for the victims of Serb-induced genocide. Burnett's jet is shot down by the rebel forces and whilst his pilot is callously executed by the Serbs, Burnett escapes to the mountains and thus begins his ordeal 'behind enemy lines.' The rest of the film depicts his attempts to make radio contact with his commanding officers and arrange his extraction from his inhospitable surroundings whilst pursued by the rebel forces, and one particularly potent militia man named as Sasha. Meanwhile, political wrangling between his gruff and belligerent American commander, Reigart (Gene Hackman) and his NATO superior, means that Burnett's rescue is constantly delayed, as events are pulled continuously between 'decisive' action on the part of the Americans, and the delicate political negotiations and 'inactive' deference to international law embodied by the markedly 'European' NATO command.

So what of 'eroticization' of the male body? It seems as if throughout *Behind Enemy Lines,* deliberate attempts are made to conceal US male skin from view: Burnett is clothed in his all encompassing cockpit attire for most of the film, and other characters are clothed in baggy, layered clothing, or large overcoats. However, on Smith's terms, we do not need to see muscular torsos and bulging, glistening biceps in order for eroticization to occur. Sexualisation of the male body is not the same as eroticization. Instead, we must examine the

spectatorial pleasures in regarding the male 'exist' in screen space, look at how the heroic male body is presented as an object of violence, and observe the radical excitations and exhilarations that accompany the action sequences the male body plays a central role in. There are definite pleasures located in the film in simply watching Burnett and the crew on the aircraft carrier 'exist'. We see them slouched around in various poses in the ship's canteen, wandering aimlessly down corridors, standing in front of superiors receiving briefings, and specifically in the body of Owen Wilson,[224] we have a delectable lingering visual fascination with the manner in which he occupies space in the frame. Also, in Burnett's ordeal conveyed in the film, there is a constant sense of his body subjected to violence, being battered, abused and flung around, usually through his own volition. There is also a constant sense of exhilarative motion through the narrative of escape and evasion offered up by the film.

However, there is an alternative source of spectacle in *Behind Enemy Lines,* namely, technology. Prior to the launch of Burnett's jet, the camera tracks and cranes around the new F-18 'Super Hornet' plane which he will use.[225] The lighting and film stock emphasises the clean lines, sharp blue/grey colour of the plane, and its priapic appearance, to the effect of communicating an image of dominance and systematic intelligence. Loudly and solely soundtracking this visual sequence, we have Feeder's song, 'Buck Rogers' ('I've got a brand new car / Looks like a Jaguar / It's got leather seats / It's got a CD player'). So in this one extraordinary sequence, US military hardware and power is equated with luxury consumer

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[224] There are also naturally pleasures in the "heart-throb" status of the stars of these films and the recurrence and familiarity of certain stars in certain roles. This latter point does not apply so readily to Wilson though, due to his more longstanding casting in comic roles and films.

[225] Incidentally, these planes were never deployed in the Balkans conflict, and weren't used by the US Navy until after this war. This raises certain questions regarding the ideological purpose of including purposefully anachronistic technology, and certainly indicates that this movie can in part be seen as a US Navy recruitment attempt to seduce spectators. For a discussion of the contrasts between this film and military-historical reality see Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "The Frustrations of Geopolitics and the Pleasures of War: *Behind Enemy Lines* and American Geopolitical Culture." *Geopolitics* 10.2 (2005), 356-377

goods, and also allied to notions which emphasise the linkage between the abstract systems of contemporary technology and domination. The film, in the manner of the opening of *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), attempts to equate US military power with high-tech consumer culture, and hence render the excessive and ridiculously priapic technology on display as familiar and recognisable. But, what this sequence shows us is that this process of equation is one which inadvertently reveals some compelling linkages between US military power, spectacle and the male body.

Therefore, a spectacularisation and commodification of the technological exceptionalism on which US military power is predicated occurs. In this spectacle, the masculinity of the 'heroic man' is diminished and compromised by the supremacy of weapon technology. This emphasises that US power is in some ways dependent on spectacle and the pleasurable consumption of that spectacle in order to make it appealing to the homeland and domestic citizens. So when it comes to those which the US figures as 'enemy', the spectacle must be destructive, apocalyptic and frightening (as evidenced by references to 'shock and awe' tactics in the run up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and through Naomi Klein's concept of the 'shock doctrine'[226]), but for the purposes of serving as public diplomacy, the US domestic image of US power is the spectacle of technology. This technology comforts through being rendered familiar and contextualised by references to commodified luxury consumer culture, and also through emphasising the fact that the male body has seemingly vacated the spaces of war, and 'harm' is only a matter of circuits and metal panels, not flesh and blood.

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[226] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin, 2007) asserts that governments utilise "shocks" (such as military action, natural disasters, government coups, and the like) in order to covertly push through far sweeping neo-liberal reforms that siphon power towards private corporations and disempower citizens. The "shocks" serve as a distraction that reduce the opportunity to resist or protest changes that impinge on citizens' civil rights.

This serves to secure US military power as an index of the white domestic, that is to say, the white hetero-normative and familial domesticity asserted as the primal and melodramatic locus of spectatorial empathy explored in the previous chapter. Rather than the male body being posited as a spectacular site of power, it is marginalised and concealed from view. It is this marginalisation and concealment that occurs in *Behind Enemy Lines* during the shift to the second stage in the narrative arc described by Smith, which makes it a compelling case study. This second stage in the trajectory is the destruction or mutilation of the male body. It does not have to be literal, but clearly the male hero must embark on travails that entail a rigorous assault to the corporeal and psychological realms, and the effects of this assault must be rendered highly visible and easily consumable for audiences.

The majority of *Behind Enemy Lines* consists of this destructive 'ordeal' element of the narrative trajectory of the heroic male, since we remain with Burnett and his continual flight from the renegade Serbian forces who are tracking him and his attempts to arrange his extraction with NATO command. There is in particular one scene which occurs approximately at the half way point of the film. Burnett is being pursued by the rebel forces, through a wooded area in the mountains. Rapid cutting, whip pans, and shaky hand-held camera work communicate the urgency of Burnett's predicament and the anxious proximity of the rebels. Meanwhile, on the US NATO aircraft carrier, the technical crew have managed to hack into the video stream of a satellite, and manipulate it so it will produce heat sensitive moving images of Burnett in astonishing clarity and close distance. During this sequence, the technology used in order to locate and provide live images of Burnett is strongly emphasised through special effects shots, graphics and editing techniques. For example, a computer generated sequence gives the impression of a camera rapidly 'flowing' through the circuit

boards inside a computer; graphical representations of cyberspace 'noise' are conveyed to us when a link to the satellite images is first established, and the sequence is edited in such a way as to emphasise the importance of the technological contribution to the location and visualisation of Burnett's predicament.

Burnett, in the course of his escape, literally stumbles into a mass grave. In order to evade capture, he conceals himself by pulling one of the dead bodies over his, and sinking partially into the mud. Viewed on the satellite link, which can only transmit heat sensitive images, we go from seeing an outline of Burnett's searing white body running through the forest, to what is apparently an image of him prostrate before the group of rebels, who have stopped at the side of the mass grave in confusion. To the technical crew and officers on the aircraft carrier, it looks like Burnett has been shot dead by the rebels. Therefore, technology enables the visibility of the US military body, but also engenders a *mis-reading* of it. The performance and spectacle associated with technology does not always strictly correlate with the male body (in this case we have misapprehension instead); the wonder is in the technological achievement of the image, rather than what it depicts. The irony is that the hyper-real technology of the satellite images obscures reality; NATO can not perceive the mass grave, only the prostrate body of Burnett and his pursuers, neither can they make sense of the image, since there are numerous baffled conversations surrounding what they perceive. The fact is, what they are witnessing, but the technology elides, is a site of trauma, pain and violence, and therefore genocide is omitted from the spectacle/performance trope and distinguishes the value of the US body above all else.

The heat seeking camera evacuates the trauma of the scene in favour of the warm body of US militarism. The US military male body therefore, becomes a digital blemish filling in a vacated space left by death and trauma. The visual cultural logic promoted by this sequence perhaps literalises the importance of perception to the acceptance of US militarism in contemporary culture. Spectacle, performance, technology, and the obscured, yet legible male body all contribute to the idea of *deferral* and *suspense* which typifies the masochistic basis of US cultural authority. The body is deferred through the abstract white shapes which symbolise the image from a heat sensitive camera, and the potential erotics of the male body in combat is elided and deferred onto a compellingly pleasurable depiction of the technology; the camera sumptuously pans and tracks over various elements of the aircraft carrier's monitors, interfaces, and systems. Also, Burnett's capture and/or rescue is deferred once again, due to the confusion engendered by the scene, which in turn leads to narrative suspense. The aesthetics and narrative principles of this sequence emphasise the fact that technology, spectacle and performance all contribute to legitimising US militarism and enforcing its structure of looking *and* its conception of the male military body as a compelling and pleasurable object for visual consumption.

Smith though, argues that the deferral and suspense of masochism can only work if 'it is in the end undone.'[227] Smith's argument is that masochism is a way of having it both ways; one can temporarily not have to submit to phallic law, but neither completely break from it. In other words, 'male masochism is a kind of laboratory for experimenting with those meanings to which ultimately we accede.'[228] Since masochism is about the deferral and suspense of closure and the pleasures which emerge from this sustained position on the cusp of release,

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[227] Smith, *Clint Eastwood*, 166
[228] Ibid.

Smith reasons that this can only be pleasurable, and hence masochistic, if eventual release and closure is attained. Indeed, it is a basic function of the masochistic trajectory that closure is merely suspended and temporarily deferred, not denied outright. Therefore, masochism, in Smith's formulation, is *conservative*, in that 'the "perverse pleasures" of action movies can therefore be seen as actually being pleasures of reinforcing phallic law.'[229]

Accordingly, this account of masochism posits the idea that it is not something radical and substantively mocking and belittling of phallic law, but rather that it performs these functions and then permits obedience to this law anyway. So, in Smith's account, films which contain masochistic aesthetics and narrative offer up fantasies of liberation from the norms of gender and sexuality-defined notions of power, but offer no permanent escape route from these notions of power, preferring a chaotic realm of stylistic and narratological dissonance and dissolution. In Chapter One I stated that *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder* contain ''happy endings' that, in a sense, are a 'reward' for the disavowal of the power games that lead to US masculinity occupying a position of victimisation.' In addition to making the pleasures of masochistic subjectivity seductive through glamourising and centralising the depiction of white male victimhood, contemporary Hollywood war films permit the pleasures of freedom from the strictures of phallic law only in exchange for the eventual cementing and reinforcement of the hard body of hyper-masculinised US neo-imperialism and cultural authority. The primacy of the US white male as victim is asserted by utilising the pleasures of masochistic aesthetics and narrative, which is in turn sanctioned by a late in the day turn to patriarchal authority and the centrality of hetero-normative discourse.

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[229] Ibid., 167

In Smith's standard trajectory of the heroic male, the ruination of the body is followed finally by regeneration through violence, and hence the restitution of patriarchal authority. In Chapter One I demonstrated that *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder* both cemented and reinforced patriarchal authority through their endings depicting the restitution of hetero-normative discourse, or the visual language of monotheistic religion. In *Behind Enemy Lines*, the restitution of patriarchal authority embodied in US military power is a little less subtle. In this film we have possibly one of the most over-the-top moments of re-assertive closure ever seen in a war film. Burnett, after a long series of tumults and anxious occurrences, eventually locates the site where his seat from the fighter jet, which contains a homing beacon and the drive containing the photographic images of the mass grave, landed. It is a wild and exposed spot, on a shelf-like plateau in the mountains, trees on one side, a sheer cliff on the other, and in-between, a frozen lake and a massive statue of the Madonna. His seat is embedded in the frozen lake and covered in snow, much like the remainder of the surrounding landscape. Burnett gets to his seat and after much fumbling in the cold and frustrated "goddams!" he re-activates the homing beacon and begins to attempt to extract the drive containing the images of the mass grave. At this point, Sasha is nearly upon him, scrutinizing his position at the edge of the woods through the telescopic lens of his sniper rifle. When Burnett is alerted to Sasha's presence, he cunningly lures him out into the open and bursts out under a covering of snow repeatedly firing his handgun at him, delivers a (meant to be) satisfying punch to his face and finally furiously stabs him in the chest with a lit flare. The filming and editing of the sequence inculcates feelings of release and vengeance, with Sasha receiving the ferocity of personal and nationalistic violence through Burnett avenging the death of his pilot buddy, and through the self-reliant heroic US male slaying the 'bogey-man' of the dissident and perfidious renegade.

Immediately after Sasha is slain, the mysterious General figure with a full complement of tanks, rocket launchers, mortars, machine guns and foot soldiers come crashing through the trees and focus their fire on Burnett. At almost the exact same moment, two US marine helicopter gun-ships rise up above the level of the cliffs on the other side of the plateau and begin to mercilessly pound the insurgents with high calibre rounds from monstrously intimidating automatic weapons, with a few missiles thrown into the bargain as well. In the *immense* amount of fire that is exchanged between the two sides, the insurgents are shown to be blasted to pieces, hurled around, and generally obliterated, whereas there is a single shot of a handful of bullets glancing the side of one of the US marine helicopters. In the midst of this roaring maelstrom of bullets and fire, Burnett finds the time and space between the lethal rounds whizzing around in the air to run back to his seat, extract the image drive, before running back to the cliff edge and spectacularly leaping from it in order to catch hold of the waiting rope-man dangling from the belly of one of the helicopters. All of this is rendered with a musical accompaniment of swelling strings and brass, sealing a bombastic and robust sense of military heroism.

It is perfectly obvious that this entire scene is meant to convey the restitution of US military power and the obliteration of the other, but the one thing that is compelling about it is the ideological strategies deployed in order to justify this ending. The main motivational point behind Burnett returning to the crash site is partially to service his own need to be extracted from enemy territory and re-activate the homing beacon, but also in order to ensure that the evidence of the genocide he has witnessed first hand is reported. Indeed, this is the basic structure of most of the anxieties and narrative tensions throughout the film. The mysterious General figure anxiously speaks to one of his soldiers declaring that, 'he (meaning Burnett)

must be found. They saw everything,' meaning of course, that their reconnaissance mission has photographed evidence of genocide. It is only when Burnett is just about to escape onto the US marine helicopters that we are provided with a very brief flashback to an image of Burnett crawling around in the sludge of the mass grave surrounded by heads and arms poking out of the soil. This provides him with the impetus to run back and collect the drive from his seat. When Burnett is back on board the US marine helicopter in the scene described above, he hands the image drive to Reigart declaring forcefully 'this is why they killed Stackhouse.'[230]

It seems that the film is attempting to posit a narrative that shows not only regeneration through violence, but also proposes that this violence is a necessary and appropriate response to the horrors of genocide and are accordingly apt in the Manichean world of Hollywood militarism. In other words, it seems to be saying that since these people are responsible for slaying innocent civilians, they must be punished severely. I find it problematic in Smith's conception of the trajectory of the heroic male that this is the concluding stage of this trajectory. I feel it is true that Hollywood war films offer up the pleasures of dissolution, fragmentation and all that goes in hand with the victimised position of brutalisation that occurs in the masochistic scenario. I also feel it is true that these pleasures are legitimised and legislated by closure that insists on the restoration of phallic law and that this is sometimes achieved through violent means. However, how does one account for all the discrepancies and subtleties on which the trajectories of masochism I am attempting to critique in this thesis depend? For example, compare the 'soft', dream-like fantasy endings of *Courage Under Fire*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *The Jacket* and so forth, to the 'hard' palpable realities of the ending of

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[230] The name of the pilot with whom Burnett was shot down

Behind Enemy Lines.[231] It clearly seems that these so called 'humanitarian' films are operating in a different political and cultural context and accordingly require different suturing techniques and strategies for recuperating the excesses and radical profligacy of the masochistic subject position. The films discussed in chapters one and two, on the whole do not require 'regeneration by violence' in order to provide closure. The re-assertion of the primacy of the male body of US power is achieved in the first instance through centralising that body in representation and insisting on its pained and afflicted corporeality, and secondly through *narratologically* restoring phallic law. So for example in *Jacob's Ladder* or *Courage Under Fire*, although one is privy to scenes of combat and violence, patriarchal authority is restored through narrative disclosure rather than the spectacle and performance of military domination.

So clearly two questions emerge here; in what ways is *Behind Enemy Lines* so different, and secondly, why? Clearly one major difference is the film's dealing with humanitarian issues. Cynthia Weber has pointed out that both this film, along with *Black Hawk Down*, which will be discussed below, use genocide as their moral justification for humanitarian intervention.[232] In the case of *Black Hawk Down*, it is an oft-quoted exchange between US General Garrison and an arms-dealer called Mr Atto early in the film that sets in stone the film's moral orientation: Mr Atto, challenging US neo-imperialism, states 'I think you should not have come here. This is civil war. This is our war, not yours.' To which Garrison responds '300,000 dead and counting. That's not a war, Mr Atto. That's genocide.' In *Behind Enemy*

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[231] And for that matter, the crucial revelatory scene in *Rules of Engagement* (William Friedkin, 2000) in which the slaying of local protestors is shown to be legitimised by their concealed weapons. Similar turnabouts and restitutions occur in films such as *Tears of the Sun* (Antoine Fuqua, 2003) too.
[232] Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War*, 68

Lines, we obviously have Burnett stumbling into a mass grave and frantically attempting to retrieve the photographic evidence of this grave from his ejected seat.

So genocide, in part due to its unimpeachable status as a source of moral outrage in the field of international relations, is used as a reason for US military presence in troubled geopolitical space. It is also a convenient disguise for US neo-imperial interest in these regions, and so these humanitarian films do little more than assist in smoothing over ideological and cultural dissent regarding the US's presence. Michael Rogin has asserted that US foreign policy is dependent on spectacle to ensure that the public is programmed to forget or disavow the belligerent and violent basis of US militarism.[233] This spectacle is one of both awesome violent power and the technological achievement of this power, and the male body. Both form images by which to captivate and seduce spectators and so the depictive regimes of the body and the technology of war are equally as significant in their ability to recruit spectators to a standard script of US cultural authority. This occurs through being drawn into an intimate aesthetic realm, made to revel in these aesthetics, and then whilst occupying this space, gently nursed away from the spectacular horrors of violent domination.

Behind Enemy Lines is highly dependent on spectacle (as are most war films, admittedly), as mentioned above in the analysis of the climactic cliff top rescue, the fighter jet, and Owen Wilson's star persona and body. However, in these specific cases, the spectacle is being utilised very specifically in order to mask over what Rogin refers to as the 'crimes of the postmodern American empire',[234] that is, the subjugation and occupation of unstable

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[233] Michael Rogin, ""Make my day!" Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics," *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 499-534

[234] Ibid., 499

territories through superior military technological power and the embedding of an organising and controlling regime of US militarism under the guise of 'peacekeeping forces'. Yet, these spectacles, instead of rendering the violence of US imperialism as immediate and unquestionably culpable in the death and decay offered up, preclude a form of forgetting. Even in the central scenes in which we see Burnett stumbling into the mass grave, where there is naturally a spectatorial physical discomfort associated with the images, the actual narrative agency is focussed on Burnett being pursued, there is no tension or plot movement in this revelatory moment, only the tension of whether Burnett will be captured. And so *Behind Enemy Lines* offers up images of traumatic catastrophes, but narrationally keeps us firmly aligned with a white US ethno-centric patriarchal perspective. Accordingly, the horror is not at the abject scene of death and decay, but at Burnett's positioning within that scene. The white US male body therefore is assigned its own exceptional value and is positioned as the premier point of mediation for interpreting and channelling the abject and horrific experiences of humanitarian disasters. In locating Burnett in the sludge and decay of the mass grave, the film effectively shows us that the only way these catastrophes can be contextualised and bloom into existence in the sphere of contemporary western visual culture is courtesy of the centrality of a white US male perspective. What is even more offensive is that the film then uses "documentary" evidence of genocide as a self-righteous and pious point of moral superiority, and yet does nothing to delve into the history, culture or potential narratives of those slain. All we see are brief, washed out, grainy flashback-style images of women and children being hounded from a bus. This merely serves to aestheticise cultural collective pain and commodify it for visual consumption by spectators caroused into disavowing neo-imperial violence.

I have explained above the fact that there is something seductive about the films under discussion, that there are sumptuous and beguiling elements to the aesthetic and aural regimes of these films. A shared characteristic of the films discussed in chapters one and two was their scenes that emphasised the tactile and sensual world that betrayed an intimate fascination with aestheticising and glamourising a masochistic corporeality (for example, the 'gurney sequence' in *Jacob's Ladder*, and the scene in *The Manchurian Candidate* in which Raymond's neural implant is examined). This tactile intimacy is definitely present in *Behind Enemy Lines*, yet it is more to do with surfaces and technology. Regarding surfaces, in the absence of male skin and muscles, the costumes of the pilots and the renegades are fetishized; in the immediate aftermath of the ejection sequence the editing emphasises the multiple utilities attached to the pilot uniform as the camera passes over buckles, harnesses, holsters and belts and the sound design and enhanced volume post-production foley work emphasises the metallic clips and swoosh of material as Burnett and Stackhouse extricate themselves from their parachutes. In terms of technology, the ejection sequence can be used again in that when they are initially fired out of the cockpit of the fighter jet we see extreme close up and rapidly edited shots (courtesy of CGI animation) of the controlled explosions to sever the cockpit lid from the remainder of the aircraft, and we see a CGI sweep through the scorching and sparking of circuit-boards and systems as the ejection process kicks in, all rendered in high and intimate detail. A world of intimate tactility is evoked, but it is not the same world evoked by other films in chapters one and two. It is a world where the male body is concealed and technology is promoted to the position of spectacle.

Technology as spectacle is also not something new in terms of critiques of US culture, as found in Susan Jeffords's analysis of Vietnam war films.[235] However, in the case of the

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[235] Jeffords, *Remasculinization*, 1-15

humanitarian cycle of films, part of the immersive processes of the sensational realm of war film entails the white male body being concealed and deferred in favour of the spectacle of technology. We therefore have a multi-layering of the victim scenario; the white male can be subjected to all the agonies and torments of his assaulted and pursued position, and additionally be subjected to a marginalisation and belittlement in the face of the omniscience and domineering power of modern warfare technology. This technology is then folded back into the aesthetic realm of white masculinity's victimhood through evoking the world of tactile intimacy associated with the pleasures of abjection and masochism. What I mean by this is that film asserts technology as a source of aesthetic pleasure, but also uses it as a means of communicating the marginalisation of the male body in warfare, which in turn becomes a source for the pleasures of abjection and masochistic enjoyment associated with this victimised and belittled status.

This brings us onto the more complex question of why? Why conceal the male body and displace spectacle and tactility onto technology? The first possibility is that the male body cannot cope with being assigned radical pleasures it cannot contain: in displacing spectacle onto technological forms, there is the implication that the male body is not a suitable receptacle for demonstrative and performative modes of subjectivity. Immediately this does not seem correct, since although the visual fascination and stylistic innovations are connected to the technological realm, this does not mean it is totally at the expense of the male form. What we are specifically dealing with here is a displacement of spectacle away from the male body and all that it contains and displays: muscle, veins, sweat, blood stains, disgusting wounds, and the hard corporeality of US exceptionalism. So more accurately the question is why cannot male skin contain the fleeting radical pleasures of deferral and suspense posited

throughout the film? The answer to this lies in how the film deploys traumatic memory and genocide as a narrative structuring device.

As mentioned before, it is a 'humanitarian' impulse to document the mass grave Burnett stumbles across that is seen as the prime motivational force behind the plot. In the scene discussed above in which Burnett stumbles into the mass grave, the spectator is presented with numerous instances of encounter. The first of which is the literal encounter with the dead bodies in the mud. Burnett is filmed in a high speed tracking shot running across a clearing in a wood, and also in a static wide angled front-on shot in order to locate him spatially as moving rapidly, yet still trapped in the wilds of the mountain forests. Suddenly, in the front-on shot, Burnett loses his footing and falls from view. The camera cuts and locates him in close up prostrate in the mud; he lifts his head and there is a slow camera push outwards that reveals he has fallen into a vast muddy pit and is surrounded by muddied, bloodied corpses. In the 'walls' of the (quite) shallow pit, we can see mud-drenched, almost blue, arms and half-faces protruding, conveying that the mass grave extends way beyond the confines of the shot. Burnett recoils in horror. These few shots are naturally a little disturbing and provide an immediate and raw encounter with the abject realm of the corpse and the grave. So, on a basic level, these shots offer us a literal encounter with death and, if you will, the spectacle of genocide; the visual short hand for mass-murder, the undignified grave.

There is also another encounter experienced here. From seemingly no-one's perspective in particular there are a few shots inserted into a linked sequence in which we see low level, slightly slow motion shots, tinted in a curious blue/silver colour scheme that depict who are obviously meant to be the victims of said genocide being hounded off a bus by militia men

and forced to gather by the road side. The sound editing conveys panic and confusion by muting the volume at random intervals and deploying reverb and echo effects. These are also sound effects associated with dream sequences or memory, and so in a sense, linked to the images and their stylistics, we have a brief diegetic insert depicting traumatic memory. The only problem is that it is never clear whose memory this is supposed to be.[236] There are no formal techniques linking these shots to a particular character, and so, one has to surmise that these shots exist purely for our visual consumption and are objective and not tethered to one subjectivity in particular. It is this sequence that can perhaps help us understand why the radical pleasures of the contemporary war film are displaced onto technology. In an obvious way, a film featuring genocide would be considered tasteless[237] if it featured heroic men flexing muscles and dripping sweat, but this film features tongue in cheek equations of multi-million dollar fighter jets with luxury consumer goods, which could be considered equally tasteless. The point then is, that displacement of spectacle onto technology allows US military power to remain 'masculinized', to remain dominant and powerful and exceptional, but also permits the depiction of the sordid after-effects of ethnic mass-murder. The effect is to consolidate US power (as represented by the heroic male and the visual spectacle of technology) and accommodate the victimised subjectivity of the heroic male by dumping him into a discursive system whereby he becomes part of the visual regime and iconography of traumatic memory, one from which he emerges invigorated. It is also the point in the plot that impels him on a trajectory towards the resolution of the narrative, and hence demonstrates the oscillations between crisis and dissolution (the wet, slimy mud and decaying corpses), and closure and fixity (narrative resolution and US military power).

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[236] A point that can *technically* explained by the fact the sequence is culled from spare footage from the 1998 film *Savior* (Predrag Antonijevic, 1998), and so therefore, diegetically, is nothing to do with the shoot for *Behind Enemy Lines*. "Trivia for *Savior*," 16 Jun. 2010 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120070/trivia>
[237] Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) wittily pushes the envelope in this regard

The displacements, including the transference from "real" diegetic time to the representation of historical memory (the inserted objective genocide sequence), also act to universalise what is on display. Rather than this being a personal diegetic account of encounter with historical trauma and a specific narrative of re-masculinizing, recuperative power, it becomes accessible as a narrative graspable by diverse demographics. The film's scattergun empathic pleas for spectatorial identification, which are manufactured courtesy of its universalising tendency, point towards an attempt to harness a consensual subjectivity of film spectators who are acculturated to the film's political and cultural message. The effect of this is to maximise audience empathy with white US male subjectivity in which difference is highlighted and all that is marginal to white US male subjectivity is cast as other and subordinated to the film's universalising imperial project.

As similarly discussed earlier, dumping Burnett into the gross putrefaction of a mass grave in a sense allows him to hijack the emotional and traumatic impact of mass murder. The heroic US male is the one who experiences the horror of contact with the casualties of genocide and it is *his* revulsion, mild trauma, and horrific circumstances (of having to hide beneath a putrefying corpse) that are emphasised. So the aesthetics of deferral that typifies the CGI whip pans through circuit boards and depict the intimate and highly detailed technological excesses of modern warfare exists in order to point away from the 'same old' ideological manoeuvring that posits the heroic US male as victim, and a victim that consumes and magnifies all other claims to victimised subjectivity as merely functions, or components, of his own morbidly weighty self-reflexivity. We therefore see 'radical' and frenetic (and almost berserk) visual

styles being deployed in order to mask an essentially conservative and repressive ideology of regeneration through violence.

As a result of this, new masculinities must be posited to enable the continuation of the US neo-imperial project of exceptionalism. Hence, Owen Wilson's casting as Burnett introduces a kind of everyman 'guy next door' easy-going persona into the role. Wilson's background as principally a comic actor and his, let's say, "non-classical" good looks further adds to the impression of an unconventional leading man. The Reaganite hard bodies of *First Blood* and *The Terminator* and the "new" man of 1990s action films are cast aside in contemporary Hollywood war films in favour of a new corporeality and persona, one which narrates a new image of masculinity and US power, but in fact conceals a very different one. This masculinity is in a sense regressive, since it is informed by the soft power and subtle tyrannies of the 'new man' of the 1990s, concerned with his 'internal' self and his domestic equilibrium.[238] The "new" man's turn inwards to addressing the self is emblematic of a neo-liberal (explored further below) ideology, focussed on individual responsibility and agency and a turning away from political, cultural and social agency.

The "new" masculinity of the humanitarian war films is one rooted in the determined self taking on the burdens of upholding American ideas of justice and freedom by fervently and intrinsically desiring to enter and re-enter war zones, and thus redeeming or recuperating US masculinity as a concept representative of US morality. Humanitarian action is framed as necessary and an intrinsic moral impulse of US military power, since the question of genocide and protecting the 'others' of the nation states being occupied provide the narrational agency

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[238] Susan Jefford, "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Ava Collins, Jim Collins, and Hilary Radner (London: Routledge, 1993), 208

of the US characters, wheareas organisations such as the UN and NATO, and international partners are depicted as uncooperative, reluctant, and obstructive. But this humanitarian morality is one that is not rooted in genuine compassion for the other, it is one rooted in the selfish, self-regarding precepts of US subjectivity. It is a 'self-interested'[239] morality in every sense of the word. At once we have the self-interest of the US in wishing to secure strategic regional access and control of the Middle East and its environs, then there is also the self-interest in promoting an image of humanitarianism as good public diplomacy, and there is also the crucial self-interest of the US male (who stands as a synecdoche for the nation). This final point of the self-interested male echoes the self-regard for a victim's own status in the masochistic scenario, but also inhabits an ideological realm of the neo-liberal. Successful military subjectivity is essentialised as contingent on expressing the individuated and self-regarding nature of male identity. The inwards look of the contemporary US militarized male betrays an obsession with his own assaulted and embattled (and hence, arguably, victimised) status, and a solipsistic fixation on his self-construction as a servant of moral humanitarianism.

Hence, despite the film depicting genocide and deploying narrative strategies by which to produce feelings of vengeance and loathing against the perpetrators of this genocide in the audience (the mass grave, the perfidious characterisations of the renegade militia men, the stylised flashback sequence), there is no ethical regime behind this depiction. There is no attempt to forge any genuine sense of emotional engagement with the other, beyond the melodramatic modes of shock (the corpses in the mud) and sentimental emotivity (the children and families in the flashback sequence). All the while, these sequences are structured in relationship to Burnett's pain, damage, and psychological affliction, or are motivated by

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[239] Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War*, 88

vengeful justifications for US humanitarian action. Hence, there is no opportunity or licence given for spectators to reflect on their relationships to the images of pain and suffering offered up. Instead, the scrutiny is directed towards the self's feelings of being damaged and assaulted, rather than at the suffering of the other. This inwards look is offered up as the structuring logic by which spectators should read their own interaction with contemporary US foreign policy; to see themselves as part of a project of humanitarian certainty predicated on exceptionalist ideology. This project, however, is one that dominates and sublimates the other, rather than encouraging empathic contact and a sense of alterity.

Black Hawk Down: **Humanitarianism, exceptionalism, and US male subjectivity**

Another film that goes a long way to obliterating alterity and championing the incomparability of the spurious construct of the US project of humanitarianism is *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001). This film has been described as being typified by 'the ordeal of pain and endurance characterizing an atmosphere of continuous combat'[240]

Klien asserts that the film is accented by the 'hyper-reality' of its 'message' and that this 'encourages a visceral audience experience and enables audience emotions to override rational evaluation of events and decisions.'[241] Although this is an excellent point that summarises neatly the workings of sensational and affective Hollywood films, I feel that the point has been missed here slightly. The film is based on a true story, but makes no claims to be definitive, and although it uses documentary stylistics and regimes of representation (e.g.

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[240] Frank Joseph Wetta and Martin A. Novelli, "'Now a major motion picture': War films and Hollywood's new patriotism." *Journal of Military History* 67.3 (2003), 861-882
[241] Stephen A. Klien, "Public character and the simulacrum: The construction of the soldier patriot and citizen agency in *Black Hawk Down.*" *Critical Studies in Communication* 22.5 (2005), 432-433

mobile camera, informal framing) it is most definitely not supposed to be a factual piece of film-making. Hence, 'rational evaluation' is out the window. This is a Hollywood war film and so therefore it depends on the visceral, the emotional, the sensational for its narrative and spectatorial impact. The point is to investigate in which ways the visceral takes us, not to see it as a tool of obfuscation in itself.

Many critics have inferred that the hyper-reality of the manner in which combat and violence is depicted in *Black Hawk Down* lends itself to confusion and a total emphasis of spectacle over narrative. Whilst admittedly this is true to a certain extent, the basic facts of the US military position in the narrative are always totally clear. In a sense it does not matter about the specific minutiae of scenes, and so complaints about the confusing nature of the film narrative and form belie a desire for mastery over the narrative that is plainly not possible. This is not to say that spectacle in itself is an acceptable substitute for narrative comprehension, but some licence must be afforded the film-maker if the terms of the text include a rigorous engagement with the visual and the visceral. We must therefore examine the specifics of this visuality and viscerality, rather than complaining about its shrouding nature.

A couple of initial points are useful here. Firstly, regarding the eponymous Black Hawk helicopters, they clearly form part of the hyper-real spectacle, but they are also, in some ways, hard to read or decode, as visual images. The bleached out colour scheme and grainy film-stock (a post-production digital effect in some scenes) effaces much of the detailing of the helicopters, whilst the mobile camera work, low angle subjective camera shots, and the constant manoeuvrings of the helicopters in the sky all contribute to us never really seeing a

Black Hawk held up as a visually spectacular object. Instead, the impression one gleans is of the technology of battle being dark, menacing, and brutish; the helicopters whirl over head, the frame rate slightly over-cranked to slow down the whirling movements of the blades. They are far from graceful or elegant and depict a pragmatic, intimidating projection of US military visuality. They also contribute to one of the more impressive visual call signs of the film and that is the whirlwinds of orange/yellow dust that swirl ferociously around characters on the ground obscuring the surrounding streets and firmly locating the soldiers at the centre of this physical and metaphorical storm. The mobile camera work during these instances also contributes to the sense of a howling void in the violent landscape of the Mogadishu streets, projecting a simplistic metaphor of apocalyptic and catastrophic isolation, one which, perhaps intentionally contributes towards an obscured geography of the combat space. The effect of this is to, in some part, heighten the predicament of the soldiers on the ground and also intensify their 'victim' position; they are assaulted and mutilated by the Somali rebels, but also assaulted by the howling storm of the violent urban landscape they are located in, one which is metaphorically created by their own military technology, the Black Hawks.

A second point is a similar one to that made about *Behind Enemy Lines*; that there is an emphasis on the aural and tactile realm of experience and sensation regarding certain objects and sequences. For example, in terms of sound, there is the swish of the helicopter blades and motors, the clinking of metal created by the soldiers' harnesses and their guns, the various registers of sounds created by gunfire, the showery metallic sounds made by spent rounds spilling onto the floor, the crumbling of stone walls as they are fired on, to name but a few. This contributes towards the aforementioned sense of pleasurable sensation which is one of the techniques by which the spectator is seduced into the engagement with the text on a

superficial affective level. The realm of sensation offered up by these films forms a gratifying connection to their aural and visual textures, and hence is a zone whereby pleasure can be regulated and controlled in order to direct the spectator away from the far more radical pleasures that may be held in contiguous sequences.

For example, in the midst of the initial stages of the battle on the streets when the soldiers are beginning to become hemmed in, a particular soldier (named Othic) is given a subjective point of view camera shot in which we share his high angle, medium close up perspective on a bloody human hand that has been sheared off in an explosion, bone and flesh trailing from the wrist. Bizarrely, there is still a watch attached to the wrist; the camera shot loses its subjectivity as we see Othic curiously pick up the severed hand and place it in his bag. Immediately afterwards a soldier called McKnight walks over to where another soldier lies on the floor, his legs blown clean off and just a mess of organs and flesh beneath his torso. The corporeal shattering and dissolution evoked by these few shots serves to integrate bodily mutilation into the regime of hyper-real spectacle that typifies the majority of the film. These scenes are, in a sense, brief snapshots that afford the spectator access to the curiously illicit realm of the pleasure of looking on at bodily ruination and graphic violence. The horrific nature of the imagery, combined with the lingering, slow pacing of the shots, plus the intriguing details of the wristwatch and the odd glimmer of blank fascination that plays about Othic's face all contributes to heightening the secretive pleasure of our engagement with these images.

So *Black Hawk Down* awakens problematic and bizarre pleasures of looking on at corporeal dissolution. However, the sensorial experience of consuming these images is no different to

the visual and aural tactility evoked in more standard depictions of warfare and violence which formulate the majority of the film. Therefore, tactility and affective sensorial pleasure are a means of regulating the radical, unacknowledged pleasures of watching the US male undone, and it is necessarily the humanitarian subject matter of these films that gives rise to this regulating ability. I shall return to the specific theme of bodily representation later, but for now I wish to keep attention focussed on how US masculinity is depicted in the film.

Black Hawk Down seems to be presenting us with a now familiar script of masculinity, one which is inter-subjective, conceals the male body, and emphasises the performative nature of technology. But, in terms of Smith's description of the process whereby spectators consume the standard narrative of the heroic male, there is a distinct lack of eroticization of the body and spatial dynamics of the soldier. Instead, what are obsessed over are the inter-subjective homo-social bonds between the soldiers and their unique sense of ill-treatment in the arena of combat.

In one particular scene, a convoy of HumVees are seen rumbling down the back streets of Mogadishu. We are treated to a US soldier-centred perspective; low angle, hand-held shots from within the HumVees communicate the cramped, hot and hostile conditions, whilst we see fragmentary, blurred images of Somali rebels moving through the dusty streets through the windows and firing on the convoy. The expression one of the drivers wears is of weary incredulity, in a 'for god's sake just let us do our job' kind of way. So in this construction of the adverse conditions in the convoy, and the emotional attitude to their subjection to gunfire, there is a definite sense of this 'not being fair', and that the Americans are being inequitably treated. This is the emotional investment we are sold, despite the automatic high calibre

rounds of machine gun fire that are pumped into the crowds of Somali rebels perched on rooftops and under canopies by the Black Hawk helicopters showing that US military weapon power grossly outstrips that of the civilian forces. Although this is one small example of this sense of 'ill-treatment', it seemingly pervades the whole film. When the first Black Hawk is shot from the sky we are treated to an extended minute-long high anxiety depiction of its chaotic last moments in the air, close ups of the sweat-drenched, fearful faces of the soldiers on board, and when it finally and dramatically impacts with the ground, the view changes to the reconnaissance overview camera from higher up in the air which the commanding officers can see back at the base. The languid blue colour scheme to the image combined with the hazy, abstracting image contributes to a sense of ghostly elegy to the fallen whilst all other diegetic and non-diegetic sound falls away, and we hear the eponymous crackling declaration over the radio, 'we've got a Black Hawk down.' The film seems to pause for a beat at this point, as if we should be taking in the enormity of what has just happened. Again, a sense of unwarranted ill-treatment pervades the scene, as the commanding officers, and in particular Major Garrison, adopt stoic yet pained expressions at what is unfurling before them.

We are introduced to this message of unjust treatment in order to prove the actions of the US forces as just and therefore inherently American. US power must be asserted as reactive and appropriate, or fair, as opposed to its commonly identified genuine nature as pre-emptive and disproportionate. Hence, our sensorial and emotional engagement with the film is regulated by the explicitly humanitarian and just response to the circumstances in Somalia, whether this be in the initial expositions of the film aimed at "Mr Atto" (and surrogately at us, the audience), or through the depiction of ill-treatment of US forces. We are permitted sublimated access to the frenzy of excitation enacted by witnessing US corporeal shattering, but also let

off any need to interrogate these pleasures by having them recuperated and reconfigured for the purposes of shoring up the idea of a just and humanitarian America.

It is noteworthy that Garrison is played by Sam Shepard, an actor whom David Savran has identified as embodying notions of the white male as victim in his work. Concentrating on Shepard as a playwright, Savran asserts that his plays produce 'a tough male subject who proves his toughness by subjugating and battering his (feminized) other.'[242] In other words, theatrically, Shepard is associated with a particular form of masculinity that can indulge itself in the pleasures related to the arena of pain and domination, but disavow any attempts to categorise these radical pleasures as symptomatic of 'feminization' or de-masculinization. Violence is therefore a central formative aspect of subjectivity, and this violence is directed at a self that is shattered into numerous constituent parts. The verification of masculinity comes with identifying the rogue and dissident elements of that subjectivity that do not conform to the standard script of hegemonic masculinity and furiously eviscerating them. So there is a double disavowal operating here. First there is a disavowal of that which is aberrant, and secondly of the radical subversions of gender hierarchies that the self-flagellation entails. Analysing Shepard as more of a media star, Savran declares that his star status is also predicated on a form of 'deferred masculinity' that 'produces a sense of profound anxiety and is connected both discursively and behaviourally to violence.'[243] In this sense, Savran locates Shepard as being a screen body fraught with tensions and absences. Quoting an interview with Shepard, we see the genesis of this perception: 'there's some hidden, deeply rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority […] and always, continually having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent.'[244]

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[242] David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man*, 190
[243] Ibid., 178
[244] Ibid.

As Savran points out, Shepard emphasises the 'performative' nature of US white masculinity, but we can also clearly see that violence is framed as something that is in some ways inevitable or pre-programmed in the US male psyche, and that it is the result of repressions and sublimations. There is also the word 'inferiority' screaming out for attention; a word that is applicable to the sense of 'ill-treatment' and 'grievance' mentioned above. In short, the white US male figures himself as coming up short of the normative hegemonic standard of masculinity and must therefore crucially 'act out' (read; perform) a violent and abstract idea of this masculinity.

These ideas, I feel, can be easily carried over into analysis of *Black Hawk Down*. The fact that Shepard is the overseeing commanding officer in this film makes it all the more compelling. He is the all seeing eye, the locus of objectivity and omniscience, it is around his organising subjectivity that the whole battle depends, and yet the visual regime he is inculcated in reveals nothing more that abstracted, blue-tinged and hazy images of the vague outlines of streets, and the blurry grey bulks of downed helicopters. In this way, his rugged 'cowboy' image of toughness is immediately connected to a sense of inferiority and impotence, and the location for this inferiority is the visual regime on which his power depends. Shepard enacts fantasies of victimised white US masculinity through his positioning as simultaneous omniscient master, and being disempowered by the limitations of his visual economy. He is the tough, leathery, cowboy-like commander, and yet he is distanced, abstracted, defined by absence and incapacity. This seems to act as a metaphor for the depiction of US masculinity and hence US power in the film; presence and absence mingling within the bodies, interactions, and visual stylistics presented to us.

One particular moment in the film highlights this. Michael Durant (Ron Eldard), the pilot of one of the downed Black Hawks manages to escape from the crash site and hides sitting behind a nearby wall as we hear the local civilians rush to the site bent on violence and retribution. We see Durant from a low angle in semi darkness, shafts of light streaming through the brickwork pattern in the wall behind him, pondering a picture of his wife and child. There are a couple of shot-reverse shots of his bodily position and his hand tenderly holding the photograph. The pace of the editing noticeably slows at this point, and the camera work is more restrained, with less sudden, chaotic movements. Then suddenly a man comes for him, and swings a rifle butt at him, cracking him on the head. The occurrence is swift and the impact rendered in brutal close up. Durant keels over to his side and the frame rate moves to slightly slow motion, as he fumbles around on the floor for the photograph of his wife and child he has dropped as a result of the blow to the head. More people surround him and we see their feet trampling over his hands and the photograph as he struggles on the ground, groggy with concussion. Then two gunmen enter the scene, fire off a couple of rounds to quieten the crowd, and declare that Aideed wants the prisoner alive.

In this scene we are obviously manoeuvred into a position of empathy with Durant since we see his nostalgic and tender longing for the domestic and the familial. But then immediately after we also share in his violent assault; we reel from the blow as if it has fallen on our head. In a sense, there is a doubled victimisation here; the establishing of Durant as the victim of the Somali 'hordes', and also in the blow to the head and the trampled photograph, white domesticity is placed in a position of inferiority or at least overwhelmed by the violent force of the 'other.' Much in the same way that films in the previous chapters constructed aberrant

threats to the white domestic, the realm of soldiering and white masculinity and its unique grievances are envisioned as linked to a sense of the embattlement and the attempted demolition of white suburban America. Simon Dalby has declared that 'the "war on terror" and the remilitarization of political anxiety in the aftermath of September 11th in the West, is both facilitated and challenged by representations of geopolitical danger and the supposed necessity for warriors to fight wars in distant lands.'[245] And so we see that in compositing a threat to the white domestic through affiliating it to victimised white masculinity that the spatial separations between 'warriors' and homeland, are just that, spatial. Anxieties in the male subject and in the representation of a victimised masculinity are reflected in the embattled depiction of the 'homeland', one that must be secured, and political anxieties alleviated by violence enacted on these 'distant lands'. The US male's acting out of violent fantasies of a 'deferred masculinity' can only work in this context if the distanced and othered spatiality of this violence is emphasised (hence the howling dust storms and incomprehensible networks of streets) and the radical pleasures of the victimised subject position are projected onto the 'homeland'. As such, the film, like *Behind Enemy Lines*, is strictly unethical in its deceitful deployment of emotional connections and engagements in order to deliver its ideological message. It elevates and stresses humanitarian action and moral concern for civilians and the promotion of democracy, yet the other is distanced and objectified, with the majority of our empathies lying with white male US victimized or assaulted subjectivity. Not only is it the white US male who is figured as the central and privileged possessor of damage, but this damage and ruination is projected onto the US homeland, enhancing the viewer's ability to empathise with, and hence render authentic and take on this victimhood. This at once disavows the US male's complicity in radical pleasure, but also ensures that reflexive

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[245] Simon Dalby, "Warrior geopolitics: *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down* and *The Kingdom of Heaven.*" *Political Geography* 27 (2008), 439-40

emotional self-flagellation is assigned to white America, and hence feeds the fire of an artificial US self-image of victim.

The significance of this is made all the more striking by *Black Hawk Down's* role as a humanitarian war film attempting to project an image of a just, protective, almost patriarchal (in the fatherly sense of the term) America. The threat to the white domestic and the geopolitical danger emerges from the black, African mob. Blackness, "savagery" and (apparently) unjustifiable violence are all deployed as markers of the US's need to assert itself as humanitarian. This manoeuvre succeeds in annihilating empathic depiction of the other and hence emphasising difference. An entrenchment of racial categories occurs that succeeds in augmenting the white ethnocentricism of US male goodness and simultaneously labels savagery and its genocidal associations as rooted in a marginal, black otherness; barbarism begins abroad.

The basis to these categorizations is never critiqued. The sensorial pleasures of the film are regulated by the dominant humanitarian US narrative, and the diegetic concerns of the text ensure consistent empathy with US suffering, coding Somalis as aggressors and agitators rather than the victims of the globalized capitalist imperialism of the developed world. As Andreas Behnke has pointed out, much of the characterisation in *Black Hawk Down* is 'subjective', with characterisation being 'somewhat clichéd.' [246] But crucially, and as Behnke states, 'what drives the film's narrative is […] the fate of these individuals, rather than the progress of the battle.'[247] So in a sense, the film is about the manufacturing of subjectivity,

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[246] Andreas Behnke, "The re-enchantment of war in popular culture." *Journal of International Studies*, 34.3 (2006), 938
[247] Ibid., 940

rather than exposition of military tactics and strategic aims. So what subjectivity is manufactured for the US soldiers in this film?

As Klien explains, 'the soldier patriot worldview defined by "Leave No Man Behind" is of primary moral importance. The ideal soldier is motivated solely by his dogged determination to complete his mission and look out for the welfare of his fellow soldier.'[248] This doctrine of "leave no man behind" betrays a totalising commitment to one's (male) comrades and hence points towards a sense of homo-sociality in the film. This is depicted as vital in securing an inherent personal empathic contract with the spectator by which the actions and relationships of soldiers are the primary points by which warfare is assessed, rather than policy or strategy. As Klien states in regard to the ending of *Black Hawk Down*, 'much of the mission was botched, and they barely escaped with their lives, but they are heroes nonetheless.'[249]

In this manner, the soldier is therefore constructed to emphasise the manner in which he exists in a network of bonds and contact points between other soldiers. He is a nodal point in a complex system of both formal and informal social organisations. As Simon Dalby points out, this formulation of soldiering 'reverts to classic discussions of soldiers whose only loyalty in a crisis is to each other.' Dalby also notes that it is this same code that is 'ironically the key to the scale of the violence that happened in Mogadishu in October 1993.'[250] All the decisions made are depicted as entrenchments of this warrior code, and hence what is deemed honourable and moral (such as the second Black Hawk wishing to attempt a solo mission to secure the first Black Hawk's crash site) in effect, exacerbates the assaulted and embattled position the soldiers find themselves in. Narratologically then, the actions of the film have the

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[248] Stephen A. Klien, 436
[249] Ibid.
[250] Simon Dalby, 447-48

effect of deepening the crises and anxieties produced by the situation, and there is something compellingly masochistic about the image of the soldier adhering to a code that will only make things worse for him and everyone else.[251] There is therefore, in the manner depicted here, a selflessness, or even self-destructiveness to the "warrior code" and of self-assertion as humanitarian. This can also be seen in the endings to both films in which we see a newly fledged commitment to US militarism in the bodies of the main characters. Burnett in *Behind Enemy Lines* uses the humanitarian project of US militarism as the driving force behind him withdrawing his resignation, and in *Black Hawk Down* we witness characters willingly hurling themselves back into the heat of battle, as if a commitment to US military violence is something innate and ingrained. The US soldier is presented as doomed (or maybe honoured?) to continually and compulsively repeat, to eternally return; they are traumatic and masochistic forces.

The morality that secures public empathy and erases all policy and strategic considerations from the narrative is the same morality that is injurious to the male bodies that represent this morality. Securing audience support for these soldiering subjects deploys the same ethical and empathic processes of narrative that ensure the destruction and ruination of these same subjects. Therefore a doubled pleasure of witnessing the violence and chaos of *Black Hawk Down* occurs. There is the pleasure of the moral code that secures empathy and reassures the spectator that the edifice of US cultural authority is safe, and the pleasure of the male bodies

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[251] Numerous critics, including Dalby (2008) and Klien (2005) cited above have commented on how *Saving Private Ryan* is a crucial film in setting out the groundwork for this logic of war being all about men fighting for each other. *Saving Private Ryan* is criticised for its portrayal of WWII and the Normandy beach landings as being a question of a classical male warrior code, which in turn cements US militarism as founded on extreme male solidarity and due to the 'just war' associations of WWII, any other film which depicts male relations in this manner cannot help but be associated with the ideological goodness of WWII. This probably explains why *Black Hawk Down* borrows a few of the tropes from *Saving Private Ryan*; the solider gone deaf from gunfire, the 'newbie', the mobile, documentary-style camera work, and the fact that Tom Sizemore plays basically what amounts to the same character in both films!

that exemplify this moral code being mutilated and shattered. Therefore, there is the potential for oscillation between these two states of pleasure and pain, dictating a masochistic structure for audience engagement with the dominant discourse the film is attempting to disseminate. The soldier's subjectivity is fetishized and offered up as visual spectacle to consume in place of the concealed male body. Therefore, the mythical masculinity of warrior codes acts as a carapace around the concealed pleasures of the hyper-real spectacle of combat and fantasies of white male victimhood grafted onto homeland political anxieties.

Conclusions: Humanitarian war films, black bodies, and US "spectatorial re-armament"

Throughout *Black Hawk Down*, the Somalis are referred to by the US soldiers as "skinnies", a sick joke based around their impoverished appearance due to famine and civil war. The prevalent interaction we have with Somali bodies is as a massed shouting, animalistic mob, our predominant view point being via shaky hand held camera work showing momentary glimpses of faces contorted in rage, baying for blood, and arms and legs furiously whipping across the frame. We also see the cunning and perfidiousness of Somali warriors as they sneak around back streets, hide from the Black Hawks and unleash low-tech, but deadly assaults on the helicopters. There are only two Somali characters who are anointed with any kind of individuated subjectivity; an arms dealer called Mr Atto and Aideed himself. However, it is the massed un-individuated bodies that I wish to examine here. Marilyn Young has stated that the visual representation of these Somali bodies owes a lot to 'stereotypical muscled boys in the hood.'[252] In which case, *Black Hawk Down* in its visual logic, can be seen to posit a US-centric racialised and cinematised view of urban geographies in the context of white male victimhood and US geopolitics. The white male as victim depends on the construction of a cinematic register and framework by which to measure its embattled

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[252] Marilyn Young, "In the combat zone." *Radical History Review,* 85 (2003), 253-64

subjectivity and must drain the symbolic and ideological resources of the truly marginalised and disenfranchised in order to make sovereign claims to grievance and dispossession. The crises and anxieties in white male subjectivity are narrated courtesy of the cinematic precepts of the threatening and aberrant internal (to the US) 'other'; the young black athletic male.

The gangs of stripped to the waist, muscled, slender-torsoed men, glistening with sweat, flit across the screen, presented as fragmentary bodies and images. So we literally are dealing with an *image* of these 'stereotypical muscled boys in the hood' and so most of the relevant analysis for hood films and masculinity cannot really be applied here.[253] What is more compelling is how these scenes convey to us the manner in which Hollywood depicts, or probably more accurately, *performs* 'Africa'.[254] Guy Westwell has commented that 'like the Bosnian countryside in *Behind Enemy Lines*, Mogadishu is constructed as chaotic and threatening' and continues to state that 'the unsafe space of the city is a space in which atrocities happen and a space that America must take control of and civilise.'[255] Here we have a connection to *Behind Enemy Lines* that permits us to examine both films in terms of their depiction of US humanitarianism as neo-imperialism and how this may be linked to the tactile realm of sensation evoked by our cinematic bodies.

In *Behind Enemy Lines* the mountainous terrain is shown as hostile and unforgiving, and in one particular scene, Burnett is depicted balanced precariously on a rocky outcrop at the summit of an extremely precipitous mountain in an attempt to obtain a radio signal. The

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[253] Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993). Manthia Diawara, ed. *Black American Cinema: Aesthetics and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[254] I say "perform", since there seems to be little attempt to engage with individuated subjectivities and so we are logically dealing with a superficial depiction routed in surfaces and the performative nature of cinematic representation.

[255] Guy Westwell, *War Cinema*, 106

mountainous terrain therefore obscures communications and forces our protagonist into precarious scenarios. This obscuring and chaotic nature is emphasised by the camera movements around Burnett that spatially locate him. The camera incessantly revolves around him in wide shots, evidently filmed from a helicopter. This at once gives a sense of the vast expanse of space Burnett finds himself in, and also narrates his own perilous condition, hemmed in by enemy forces and the terrain. The constant use of dark colours and low contrasts in scenes set in forests, mountains and on the dirt roads that inform Burnett's experience 'behind enemy lines', anoints the landscape with a certain brooding malevolence.

In *Black Hawk Down*, as Westwell points out, Mogadishu is depicted as 'chaotic and threatening', however I do not believe that this is due to the depiction of the urban environment itself. Simon Dalby refers to the 'bizarrely impenetrable landscape of Mogadishu' that is 'rendered all the more surreal when they finally escape to the sports stadium which houses the UN forces'.[256] I'm not so sure there is anything 'bizarre' or impenetrable about the way Mogadishu is represented in the film, it just seems to me like any other city; consisting of crowded networks of streets and narrow passageways, with buildings lining them. Of course there is the unique architecture and vernacular style of housing particular to the region, but this hardly renders it 'bizarre'. Instead, it is how the populace is depicted en masse, when contextualised in these streets, which makes the depiction 'chaotic and threatening'. As Carter and McCormack have declared, 'Somalis are depicted as a barbarous and tribal undifferentiated mass' so that 'through familiar filmic tropes (menacing looks, sparse dialogue, 'dark' accompanying music)' they 'become spectres of an evil otherness.'[257] The depiction of the Somalis as 'barbarous' and as a violent horde, plus the

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[256] Simon Dalby, "Warrior Geopolitics", 449
[257] Sean Carter and Derek P. McCormack, "Film, geopolitics and the affective logics of intervention." *Political Geography,* 25.2 (2005), 228-245

depiction of how they utilise the space of the city (for example, the mid-shot cut-aways we get to small factions of Somali militia running through small alleyways and under roof terraces and porches in order to find vantage points from which to launch mortars and RPGs) has a twofold effect. Firstly, it constructs the space and its inhabitants as threatening to a privileged US white ethno-centric military perspective, and secondly it justifies the dissociating and abstracting techniques utilised by long range warfare, and so establishes the visual economy inscribed in General Garrison's spectatorial monitoring of the operations as morally correct. In this sense, the way Hollywood 'does' Africa in the context of the contemporary war film is a similar process to how Hollywood 'does' genocide in *Behind Enemy Lines*. 'Africa', and specifically the stereotypical image of the 'failed state' in Africa, can only be mediated through a white US male ethno-centric perspective, and with this mediated experience being informed purely by brief aesthetic and aural presentations (an angry mob gathering in a street, the babble of voices, a man operating a rocket launcher). As a result, there is no narratological investment here, or attempts to incorporate a Somali subjectivity. The mediating presence of the US soldiers serves to obviate any claims to narrative power by those who are occupied and dominated, and also turns attention to the victimhood of the white US male, in turn belittling colonised people's claims to oppression and persecution. The white US male shields the spectator from ethical culpability in the processes of demonising the 'other' and violent domination that encapsulate the US's neo-imperial projects.

In this case, and similarly to above, this dialogical relationship has its mirror in the manner in which the film (and others such as *Behind Enemy Lines*) use imperial spectacles in order to simultaneously reinforce and disavow the dominating violent power on which US exceptionalism is predicated. Rogin declares that 'American imperial spectacles display and

forget four enabling myths that the culture can no longer unproblematically embrace.' Two of

these are the most relevant here and are as follows; 'redemption through violence, intensified

in the mass technologies of entertainment and war' and 'the belief in individual agency'.[258]

The first of these obviously refers to the oft-referred to trope of regeneration through violence,

and hence articulates that part of the spectacle of contemporary US imperialism entails the

maintenance and transmission of this trope, in order to secure the white and patriarchal basis

of US power. It is a trope that shamelessly references the 'wild west' and in doing so,

enunciates a cultural and physical power rooted in subjugation and enslavement of the 'other'.

As Rogin points out, 'white men show how tough they are by resubordinating and sacrificing

their race and gender others.'[259] The erasure of US imperialism from the signifying practices

of these texts disavows not only this imperialism, but everything it stands for and is based in,

and accordingly all seems to be geared towards the restoration, or refurbishment of a white

ethno-centric privilege that becomes threatened and imperilled in moments of collision with

racial (and gendered) others. This refurbishment is achieved by re-privileging and re-

centralising a white US patriarchal narrative perspective and also by 'the ability to represent

things as alien, subversive, dirty, or sick' which 'has been pivotal to the articulation of danger

in the American experience.'[260]

The desire presented by the characters in the films' endings to heroically relive, re-enter, and

in essence repeat the violence of battle stands in for a form of *spectatorial re-armament* that

briefs us, as an audience, in how to tense up and prepare ourselves for rushing back headlong

into the implied brutality of acceptance of US military violence. It is our acculturation into a

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[258] Michael Rogin, "'Make My Day'", 519
[259] Ibid.
[260] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 3

narrative system of eternal return and repetition. In which case, is spectatorial masochism a pleasure that acts as an analgesic against the pain of neo-imperial violence? Or is it a method of resisting neo-imperial violence? By holding off the excitations of culmination, by drawing attention to the interplays of dominance and submission embodied in the oscillations between mastery and subordination, can we reject normative patriarchal power and embrace the crisis and unfixity of a cultural realm beyond the certainties of US cultural authority?

As Shaviro has stated, the cinema is a 'technology for oxymoronically intensifying corporeal sensation, for affecting and transforming the body'.[261] As we see in the humanitarian war films, the tactile and affective pleasures of US neo-imperial violence, corporeal ruination, marginalized blackness, and selflessness/selfishness of the warrior code are all de-problemmatized and licensed to us as accessible and uncomplicated features of our cinematic corporeal sensations. This licensing is part of the public diplomacy of US neo-imperialism, covering over the illicit and dubious pleasures with the structuring logic of an image of a just and fatherly America.

All this leads to a critical disjuncture; the US soldier is presented as hopelessly and tragically possessed with the compulsion to masochistically repeat and return to the site of his physical imperilment, in a sense, prolonging his frenzy. Yet, our spectatorial internalisation of the pleasures of pain do not seem to be governed initially by a masochistic economy. Certainly it does not seem to be the case that we are led on this trajectory by the films' narratives since there are no ambiguous endings or rejections of closure. Neither do the films seem to be structured around the oscillations in omniscient and powerless subjectivity. *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Black Hawk Down* both share scenes in which digital imagery provides intimate

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[261] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 266

access to, and obfuscation of, battlefield events, but these do not seem to be the structuring logics of these films' visual and narrative regimes. Instead, it is through the implied threats to the white domestic realm that a sense of masochistic pleasure unfurls as our spectatorial investment in these films. We desire scenes of suffering and destruction, but are also queasily intoxicated with the idea of the destruction of the (or rather, our) homeland. The omniscience of our Western, economically liberal spectatorial subjectivity is compromised by the danger posed to the personalised locus of this subjectivity, the domestic realm. Since this danger is also a geopolitical one, it resonates beyond the boundaries of the film text, and in a sense, makes demands of our corporeally affective excitations, closure and fixity being deferred until this peril can be removed. Masochistic spectatorial encounter with these films is therefore revealing of a political struggle between the radical pleasures of the film text, revealing the licentiousness and decadence of self-destruction, and the reactive, consolidating, regulatory forces that are deployed to mask these radical pleasures. This is either in the form of the project of just and humanitarian America, or through mounting an ideological challenge to the primacy and sovereignty of the Western neo-liberal subject secured in the (white) domestic realm.

As such, through this sense of danger to the homeland, the white domestic becomes part of the representative regimes and ideological functions of the violent spectacles of US neo-imperialism. As referenced above, the images of white hetero-normative domesticity that flicker momentarily throughout both films, establish not only a point of empathy to Western audiences with these characters, but also have the effect of incorporating this white hetero-normative domestic realm into the symbolic economy of US foreign policy. Hence, literally the home is integrated with the violence and hostility of US military operations to the extent

that 'the home has been defined as a primary territory of defence'.[262] This also links back to another of the specifically mentioned 'enabling myths' identified by Rogin; that of the question of securing an 'individual agency.'[263] The territorialization and demarcation of the domestic realm as a space to be defended[264] speaks of a sense of personal culpability for domestic and familial security; it is not your government that will defend you and protect you, instead, you stand alone. American power is located in racial and political demonology; the subordination and extermination of the racial other and the reassertion of a 'Copernican' white ethno-centricity in the face of racial others[265], and as such, the neo-liberalism implied in 'individual agency' assists in conveying the political amnesia required by spectacles of US neo-imperialism. The pre-eminence of individual agency over social coherence and community is partly what drives the territorialisation and privatization of the domestic realm, and so the home becomes a metonym for the neo-liberal ideology that drives US foreign policy. As a result, the racial and political demonology that drives US power informs American exceptionalism in both its geopolitical and domestic contexts. As Marita Sturken has observed that the home is 'a key site of national security'[266], we can also see that it is a key site also for engendering a sense of white hetero-normative victimhood through constructing domestic space as imperilled and moving this space into the representational regimes of US military violence. As David Campbell has asserted, the 'boundaries of a state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy'[267], and in Hollywood's humanitarian war films, this identity is white ethno-centric, patriarchal, and one that willingly conflates the geopolitical with the domestic in order to inculcate a false US self-

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[262] Ibid.
[263] Rogin, 510
[264] An idea that is admittedly not new, but has instead been heightened to extreme levels since September 11 2001.
[265] Michael Rogin, 510
[266] Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 40-41
[267] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 3

image of victimhood. This allows the pleasures associated with pain and the pleasures affiliated with the tactile corporeality of the aesthetic realm of sensation the films depict to be enjoyed. The fact that the films stress 'individual agency' is key in focussing spectators on the self, on *their* bodies, sensations, boundaries, and interactions. It promotes a pathology of self-reflexivity in which the spectator becomes endlessly bound to the strictures of a fetishising aesthetic regime of sensation, one that manufactures visual and aural pleasures in war films. These pleasures then form the foundations for the solipsistic tendencies of the film spectator, in turn activating a cinematically mediated self-obsession that disavows and obscures the complexities of uncritically asserting the US as just and humanitarian, rather than pre-emptive and imperial.

Finally, we can see that white victimised masculinity is deployed in order to mask, or detract from the fact that US neo-imperial power has culturally re-armed and transformed itself into the typical Western vigilante; one who attempts to invoke 'regeneration through violence' and then crucially moves on. Both films end with departures and essentially depict US militarism vacating the geopolitical spaces it has exercised its power in. The effect of this is to emphasise the spatial dimensions of conflict as crucial in securing a distancing and marginalising of the infliction of violence on others. As much as this is marginalised in the texts, white male victimhood is promoted from an anxious pathology of deferred and absent masculinity to the defining logic of the US self-image. This transformative and culturally conservative masculinity allows the perpetuation of the dominant fiction of mono-culturalism, which in turn sanctifies the US citizenry to subscribe to an ideology of exceptionalism predicated on the erasure of difference. The humanitarian war films allow the spectator to submit to the

pleasures of pain and disavow the painful effects of US mono-cultural neo-imperialism on others.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GUILT ZONE; LOOKING ON AT

HOLLYWOOD'S WAR ON TERROR[268]

So far in this thesis, we have encountered four major themes or lines of analysis in discussing the contemporary war film: the surface pleasures of these film texts; the primacy of the "white" homeland; the obviation of blackness; and the deployment of what I have dubbed 'masochistic aesthetics'. In this final chapter I wish to look at the spectatorial implications of watching fictionalised accounts of catastrophe and trauma. In doing so, I shall specifically engage with films that address the so-called 'war on terror'. This cycle of films I refer to throughout this chapter as Hollywood's war on terror, or war on terror films. This label describes American films that feature engagement with the occupation of, and battles being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and coalition forces since 2001. It includes a wide range of films in terms of proclaimed political perspective, for example, the feeble liberal hand-wringing of *Lions for Lambs* and the ultra-conservative racist blood-lust fantasies of *The Kingdom*. There is also a multiplicity of cinematic styles incorporated in this sub-genre from the classical cross-cutting and parallel editing of *Lions for Lambs*, to the various modes of pastiche, faux-*cinéma vérité*, and realism in *Redacted*. All the films under discussion are united in their focus on inactivity and passivity; either through it being embodied in characters in the film, or through an explicit and implicit accusation levelled at Western spectators of being culpable collaborators in the political apathy and disengagement that led to the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.[269] The consequences of this charge will be explored in depth later in this chapter, but it is astonishing how in successive films, blame seems to be

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[268] Portions of this chapter appear in Mark Straw, "The guilt zone: Trauma, masochism and the ethics of spectatorship in Brian De Palma's *Redacted* (2007)", *Continuum*, 24: 1 (2010), 91-105

[269] An outrageous manoeuvre considering the size of public and media protest and dissent, especially in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. As mentioned in the main body of the text, the reasons for this will be explored later in this chapter.

laid at the door of the spectator. So the uniting aspects of this sub-genre are the thematic concerns, geographical setting, and, since, as of writing, troops still occupy Iraq and Afghanistan, its emergent and developing nature.

The primary reasons for engaging with this cycle of films are twofold. First, that obviously they offer an account of the missions and engagements that have typified US foreign policy for nearly ten years now. Second, as mentioned above, they are all more or less united in their focus on the notion of inactivity and passivity, that is, they either contain characters that stand by and do nothing, or implicate contemporary Western consumers of mass media as standing by and doing nothing, or in some instances, contain both these characters *and* carry a spectatorial implication. So, there is clearly a major difference or shift being charted here. Whereas in films such as those belonging to the humanitarian cycle, in which the viewer is seduced into the pleasures of spectacular violent domination, but not held accountable for this viewer position (and instead is offered the cultural framework whereby he or she may disavow and circumvent any ethical charges of complicity), in war on terror films, there is a crucial accusation of culpability. The spectator is accused of responsibility for what they are watching. So a specific transformation in the film-spectator relationship is chronicled in this chapter in which the masochistic pleasures of contemporary war film spectatorship are reconfigured for the purposes of a deep scrutiny of the ethical responsibility tied up with these pleasures.

A further line of enquiry might involve looking at these films as artefacts of a post-9/11 age and demarcating how they represent a break from the depiction of war before the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. Cynthia Weber states that in the immediate

aftermath of 9/11, 'who Americans were as citizens and what America was as a national and international space was not only in flux […] but in crisis.'[270] Despite this and the fact that the US and New York City had been 'destabilized as concepts',[271] the post 9/11 period is marked by the desire to memorialize and work through the central traumatic disturbance to US subjectivity embodied in this event.[272] Allied with this is a sense of soul-searching regarding the construction of US subjectivity, that is to say, the post-9/11 moment is typified as a quest for what it means to be an American. As Weber points out, two duelling trajectories emerge in response to this in cultural texts, one emphasising the US as 'moral', the other as desiring 'vengeance'.[273] It is clear that the 'war on terror' films belong to this context, but they also to some extent offer up a continuum in that they pick up and drive forward a project initiated in the 1990s to stress the exceptionalism of US male pain and exploit apocalyptic themes to do with paranoia and the embattlement of masculinity. This is not to privilege a pre and post-9/11 cultural continuity, but rather to stress the developmental and evolving nature of the issues which surround the moral justification for war, and our ethical relationship to its cultural textual presence.

In an attempt to get an initial handle on these issues and questions, I wish to examine the impact of these films' stylistics on the spectator, and how one is drawn into what I shall refer to as 'ethical spectatorial encounters' with the films. By this I mean moments when one becomes acutely aware of the filmic nature of one's audio-visual immersion, and as such create moments of unsettling self-awareness that cause one to question the appropriateness of

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[270] Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War*, 4
[271] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 3
[272] For example, as documented in the final chapter of Kaplan's *Trauma Culture*, Janet Walker's *Trauma Cinema*, and Sturken's *Tourists of History*
[273] Weber, 5

one's spectatorial position. In other words, one is incorporated into a regime of self-questioning focussed on whether one *ought* to be watching what is occurring on screen.

Ethics and Spectatorship

The shift of film-viewer relationship from consuming the pleasures of contemporary war films to being impelled to actively reflect on the meanings of these pleasures is a crucial one and entails an augmentation of my methodology. Whereas previously, the aesthetics and narratives of contemporary war films offered up means by which to simultaneously revel in and disavow the violence of US neo-imperialism and the centrality of white male victimhood, now these same aesthetics and narratives are supplemented with an accusation of ethical disingenuousness. In other words, we are instructed, courtesy of the films' diegetic realms, that we, as on-looking, Western consumers of global media are accountable for the development and sustenance of US neo-imperial power. This is a strict ethical charge levied at the film audience and is unique to the war on terror cycle of films. Accordingly, we must examine how to incorporate an ethical account of spectatorship into the masochistic spectatorship engendered by the contemporary war film.

As mentioned in the Introduction, ethics is not the same as morality, and engagement with a film, especially of an emotional or sensory nature, is not necessarily ethical. As Michele Aaron states, 'being moved […] marks (an) experience as moral but not ethical: involuntary emotion is the opposite of reflection and implication.'[274] Ethical spectatorship therefore is not defined by emotive pleas to a spectator's morality, but is founded in generating a sense of self-awareness, and a degree of responsibility for our active role in looking on at, as is the

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[274] Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 116

case in so many films (and in visual culture in general), the suffering of others. This of course means that a film can sometimes be immoral and ethical, or unethical and moral; the former depicting scenarios with an almost sociopathic blankness in regard to character motivation and narrative progression, and yet make the spectator reflect critically on their relationship to these depictions. Examples of these might include the films that follow the Dogme 95 manifesto.[275] In the latter case of unethical yet moral films, many of the films under discussion in the earlier chapters of this thesis would easily fall under this umbrella; a film such as *Behind Enemy Lines* moralises pompously on the 'goodness' of vigilante action when covert genocide is uncovered, and yet provokes no interrogation of our spectatorial pleasure of witnessing a pleasing, suturing narrative of aggressive retribution and violent culmination. Our spectatorial desires for violent revenge, although 'admirably' fulfilled by the film, are never questioned, so feeling and emotion trumps all and circumvents the need for critical reflexivity.

Another crucial element of ethical spectatorship is encounter with the other. As, once again, mentioned in the Introduction, Downing and Saxton have pointed out that 'ethics designates a way of responding to the encounter between self and others, while suspending the meaning of the subject-object relation, with its implicit dynamic of dominance and subordination'.[276] Ethical spectatorship is therefore a means of acknowledging that to look on at images of suffering is a form of domination. We therefore need to reflect critically on our relationships to images of pain and violence in order to mitigate against this objectifying and conquering gaze. In ethical spectatorship, the notion of alterity is deployed to highlight the fact that it is concerned with making contact with the other and forming enunciative and communicative

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[275] For example, *The Idiots* (Lars Von Trier, 1998) and *The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) are analysed in terms of ethical spectatorship in Aaron, 98-108

[276] Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 3

connections with subjects outside of the self. It is a socialising manoeuvre intended to deconstruct any illusory notions regarding the sovereignty or omnipotence of the self as a spectator. This in turn offers up a critique of the power relations that exist between the subject and object, or spectator and image, and hence encourages self-awareness of looking on, transforming spectators (partially at least) into partakers.

So we can see that the theorisation of ethical spectatorship is useful here, but how does this fit with the precepts of masochistic spectatorship outlined and explored throughout the rest of this thesis? There are three main points here. Firstly, as we shall see, masochism assists in negotiating the emotional engagement necessary for ethical encounter. In foregrounding the excitations and the visceral experience of cinema, masochism enables emotional and sensory submersion. Hence, it can play an important role in calling attention to the pleasures which previously served to mask from us our responsibility for looking on at scenes of suffering, forcing a confrontation with, and exploration of, these pleasures. Secondly, since masochistic spectatorship involves a passion for the loss of control so typical of the submissive experience, our emotional engagement with the film is essentially in a state of disarray. This chaos and unfixity is presented as part and parcel of our ethical encounter with film, since we are inculcated with both the unconscious, random, destructive forces of shame and guilt, but also specifically charged as consciously responsible for the unreflective consumption of images of war. The chaos and destruction of the masochistic spectator position is therefore one which can be deployed to frame and resolve this dichotomy between profligate and unsystematic pleasures, and the sense-making, interpretative manoeuvres required in order to internally reflect on one's relationship to images of war and suffering. Thirdly and finally, masochistic spectatorship can be deployed in order to mitigate against any potential self-

indulgence wrapped up in the position of ethical and reflexive film-viewer. The self-flagellations of the masochistic scenario may be reconfigured. This means that rather than spectators bemoaning their consensual participation in a spectatorship lacking in concern for the other, these flagellations instead can be destructively turned on the secret pleasures of consuming images of suffering.

If it is predominantly the case that contemporary war films and more specifically war on terror films are moral but unethical, and they use notions of alterity as means by which to perpetuate the dominant fiction of white male US cultural authority, then why apply concepts of ethical encounter to Hollywood films? The answer lies in another question; *how* are these encounters of value, what is their use, and ultimately, why must Hollywood *attempt* to produce ethically implicated and culpable spectators?

For the purposes of considering the ethical implications of looking on at catastrophe, violence and suffering, we are analysing a process of interrogation rather than a distinct set of "moral" codes or rules. As Cooper explains, 'the catalyst for this process is a primordial encounter with alterity which disturbs our solitary enjoyment of the world, our illusory position of omnipotence and sovereignty'.[277]

 In the first instance I shall examine a scene from *Jarhead*. Although it does not address the war on terror directly, being made in 2005, through certain brief references scattered throughout the film it is clear that it is speaking to the current campaign in Iraq. As discussed

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[277] Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema? Ethics and French Documentary* (London: Legenda, 2006), 5. Cooper's specific textual remit is avant-garde film and specifically French documentary cinema. This is somewhat removed from mainstream Hollywood war film, however her theorisation of ethical culpability is more universal than the textual specificity of genre, in that it can cope with the hybridisations and trans-nationalisations that typify the visual style and cultural circumstances of mainstream US cinema post-9/11.

in Chapter Two, the film contains 'quotations from the cinematic language of "classic" war films' and a certain 'relentless inter-textuality' in its deployment of pop culture references. One scene in particular that demonstrates this was not brought into the discussion in Chapter Two, but I wish to bring it to the fore now.

The marines have returned to the USA in the wake of the success of operations 'Desert Storm' and 'Desert Shield'. They, in an extremely small-scale, and slightly ridiculous form of home-coming, are travelling along a suburban street by bus, laughing with each other, heckling young women on the street, and squabbling after a can of beer is thrown in their direction. The scene all adds up to a pretty standard depiction of male camaraderie, that is, until a Vietnam war veteran manages to hop onto the bus. Aesthetically speaking, he is the movie stereotype of the Vietnam veteran. His mind is addled like he has gone too far on an acid trip, his hair greasy, long and unkempt, with a dirty beard, scarred, reddened and pock-marked facial skin, and dressed in dirty and crumpled combat fatigues. He stumbles around the bus, shaking hands with the marines, issuing forth "Hooahs", and enthusiastically praising their efforts in the Gulf. However, the shots of the marines sat on the bus betray a deep unease and discomfort at his bursting in on the scene. They react with little enthusiasm to his congratulations, and after a few seconds, the veteran's energy dissipates, he looks into the middle distance, words trailing off mid-sentence, before gently and consensually being invited to take a seat, which he does, looking confused and distraught. There then follows a few more shots of the marines, mostly now sat in uncomfortable and tense silence, before the scene moves on.

The narrative intention of this scene is obvious since it shows that the marines have achieved something the veterans of Vietnam could never have claim to, and that is a coherent, tangible "win" for the US. As such, the scene conveys a contrast between the damage and dispossession of the Vietnam generation and the re-masculinized but still deeply haunted present generation. However, this encounter also raises numerous questions of both the narrative, and *us* as film spectators. As mentioned before, *Jarhead* is ripe with visual quotations from other war movies, from the shot that apes the *Apocalypse Now* opening napalm explosion, to the use of footage from the very same film. There is something about the way these visual quotations are rendered since they are in a sense, beautifully and delicately mounted, with uses of slow motion, sympathetic lighting and cinematography. But crucially, there is something disturbing about this awkward quotation of a veteran that is literally thrust before us, with him even entering the bus in the manner of someone pushed from the wings onto a stage. It is in a way, a visual and narrative rupture, a moment of crisis in the film's narrative, aesthetic strategies and stylistics. This moment of rupture then specifically invites a moment of ethical spectatorial encounter with the film, it no longer becomes a case of 'why is this image being presented to me?' but a case of 'why is this image so uncomfortable, so unsettling, and yet I continue to watch?'

Catherine Wheatley, in her discussion of the cinema of Michael Haneke, observes that his films extra-diegetically raise questions of 'complicity, responsibility, and guilt' which are viewed as analogous to the 'acts of film-going and film-viewing'.[278] In other words, the films, narratively speaking, engage with the morality of guilt and complicity and use this moral engagement as not only a metaphorical consideration of these self-same issues when it comes

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[278] Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's cinema: the ethics of the image* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), 4

to a spectator viewing a film, but also as a direct mode of implication to the spectator, a form of cinematic ethical call-to-arms. The source of this is that his films are 'formally reflexive – they reflect on their own construction'[279]. It is precisely this fascination with the apparatus of constructing a cinematic piece of work and drawing attention to the artifice and deceits upon which cinematic modes of representation are predicated (for example, continuity editing, the limitations and movement of the frame, post-production sound editing, and so on) that induce this reflexive mode. In turn, this 'aesthetic reflexivity is conducive to the spectator's moral reflexivity'.[280] Here, as noted in the Introduction, seemingly, Wheatley conflates morality and ethics. To this purpose, I will note a correction here. I do not believe that the aesthetic reflexivity of a film will ever cause a self-interrogation of one's codes and values, but what it can provoke is, through highlighting the constructed nature of the film text, a self-consciousness of the act of looking on. This is a purely ethical engagement, since it depends on a spectatorial self-regard and scrutiny, one that exposes the sovereignty of the viewing subject to critical attention. Through interrogating and drawing attention to the formal techniques of cinema, the spectator cannot help but notice the constructed nature of the filmic text, hence ruining any reality effect/suspension of disbelief. This brings the spectator directly into conflict with questions such as 'how are we complicit with the apparatus? What are the moral consequences of this?'[281]

In Wheatley's discussion of the film *Caché/Hidden* (Michael Haneke, 2005),[282] she states that the ethical questions asked of the spectator in Haneke's films are a result of 'engaging the scopophilic drive (through the use of generic convention) and then frustrating or rupturing

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[279] Ibid., 5

[280] Ibid.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Which is a relevant analysis to extrapolate from, since the film mediates on trauma, imperialism, and extreme images of death, all the while almost cajoling the spectator to dare to find something pleasurable in this narrative.

that drive (through modernist techniques)'. It is at this point of collision, as she continues, that the 'spectator becomes aware of themselves as complicit in the cinematic spectacle'.[283] In this case, we can see certain similarities to the scene from *Jarhead* above. The scopophilic drive is engaged through the classical narrative form deployed in the film, but a form of rupture or crisis occurs when this drive is disrupted by the Vietnam veteran and the discomfort his presence and intrusion presents us with. Obviously, Haneke's films invoke this effect in more extreme manners (such as the seemingly eternal lingering static wide shot of Majid's suicide in *Hidden*), but we have here a useful tool that can be used to analyse how contemporary films regarding the war on terror aim to pitch their moral encampments and to critique their interpellating strategies.

As Wheatley accurately states, the self-awareness that results from the unpleasurable emotions provoked by these sudden 'ruptures' or moments of aesthetic reflexivity, leads to a sense of shame or guilt. If war on terror films levy accusations of inactivity and passivity at Western vernacular visual culture, and as a consequence inculcate feelings of guilt and shame, and induce a profound sense of unpleasure to do with the spectatorial position of viewing atrocity, then this is in need of close investigation as to the reasons why and the political and cultural motivations behind it. As such, this chapter will examine how war on terror films depict violence and atrocity and critique their attempts to implicate the spectator in a consistent regime of passivity and inaction.

A point returned to throughout this thesis is the tactile, affective aesthetic and auditory realm of the films under discussion. So far, this has been couched in terms of this realm rendering

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[283] Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's cinema*, 153

certain narrative positions appealing and suturing (such as in the case of the humanitarian war films), or to point out the tensions between aesthetic style and narrative content that permit access to the unlicensed pleasures of masochistic subjectivity (such as in middle-brow, semi-arthouse films like *The Jacket* and *Jacob's Ladder*). However, in this chapter I shall examine this realm of tactility and sensation in the light of how it functions as, in tandem with the masochism structuring the contemporary war film, formulating part of the ethical call-to-arms these films induce.

Lions for Lambs and spectatorial passivity

First I shall examine a film that was described by Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* as, quite aptly, given my argument here, 'pure fence-sitting liberal agony', namely, *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007).[284] The film features three interwoven narratives depicting an interview between a veteran journalist (Janine Roth, played by Meryl Streep) and a US Senator, Jasper Irving (Tom Cruise), with foreign policy responsibilities, a discussion between an idealistic university professor and one of his students, and the harrowing experiences of two US marines stranded in the hostile environment of the Afghan mountains with Al-Qaida troops closing in on them. Stewart describes this particular form of grandiose cross-cutting editing as 'a geopolitics of montage',[285] which certainly rings true: the editing relies on creating a juxtaposition between the various scenarios on display, and serves to underline the political and geographical tensions between these spaces.

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[284] Peter Bradshaw, "Lions for Lambs," *The Guardian* 09 Nov. 2007, 06 Jul. 2010
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2007/nov/09/thriller.tomcruise>
[285] Garrett Stewart, "Digital Fatigue: Imaging War in Recent American Film," *Film Quarterly* 62.4 (2009), 47

Stewart places contemporary war films within a trend of 'digitally mediated narratives'.[286] As Valantin has argued, the Gulf War (and by implication, all successive US military engagements) is hard to negotiate cinematically due to the political and ideological basis on which it was fought – 'to compensate the crisis of the American strategic system's hegemony in the Middle East'.[287] Furthermore, other critics have pointed out that the narrative thrust of modern warfare no longer fits the institutional mode of representation established by the codes of classical cinema. The problems of conveying audio-visually the war on terror is symptomatically demonstrated in the reliance on layered narration and obscure/obscuring aesthetic and editing practice. As Stewart proclaims, 'battle fatigue has grown stylistic, afflicting the picturing as well as its scene.'[288] Therefore, films addressing the war on terror can be seen to be struggling to negotiate the space between the traditional/classical war film and the 'new plots of surveillance paranoia', and therefore necessarily are seemingly concerned with issues of the ethics of watching and the accounts of inactivity/passivity which accompany this.[289] Stewart also argues that it is possibly due to the fact that we are still in the midst of all the violence and hence have no idea regarding the end-game and form of 'closure' that we will see in Iraq and Afghanistan, that contributes to the lack of narrative clarity, of a 'clear ethical and political perspective.'[290] If this is true, then it is crucial to examine what precise ethical perspectives are conjured by contemporary American engagements with the war on terror in film.

Since we are immersed in the midst of the violence temporally, and also in terms of exposure through the readily available nature of amateur video, documentary, and soldier-filmed

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[286] Stewart, "Digital Fatigue", 45
[287] Jean Valantin, *Hollywood, The Pentagon, and Washington: The Movies and National Security from World War II to the Present Day* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 41
[288] Stewart, "Digital Fatigue", 45
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid., 48

digicam/mobile phone camera footage, Stewart argues that we are contextualised by a 'relentless instantaneous videography' of war, which contemporary war films stylistically attempt to ape. The war on terror films, in their emphasis on disparate narrative threads, invoking of multiple media formats, and focus on proliferating streams of data from which one may glean different elements of the 'plot', mean that, in a sense, spectators are delivered to an unprecedented level of omniscience. This omniscience is at the same time, tempered with a level of powerlessness too. Whilst the spectator may be privy to a multiplicity of data streams from which to glean plot details (such as the competing parallel narratives of *Redacted* or the various digital and non-digital strands to the narrative of *In The Valley of Elah*), the spectator is still the object of these narrative forms. He or she has no active control over this data, beyond the basic neuro-functions of narrative comprehension. This in itself echoes the condition Susannah Radstone describes whereby one is caught (in a curiously masochistic spectator scenario, explored below) oscillating between omniscience and powerlessness when one watches films engaged in historical trauma.[291] War on terror films, especially ones which feature digital mediation, seem to show both a masochistic aesthetics, and a masochistic spectatorship, both of which are bound up with a dialectic of powerlessness/omniscience and the 'relentless videography' of contemporary visual culture. As we shall see below, masochistic spectatorship, in its suspenseful, anticipatory, contractual, and affective nature, can be a form of ethical spectatorship. One that promotes not only the importance of the 'look' when it comes to looking on, but also the 'feel' when it comes to making sense of one's emotional engagement and sense of responsibility for what is occurring on screen.

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[291] Susannah Radstone, "Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film, and Memory" *Memory and Methodology,* ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000)

The theme of surveillance, omniscience and powerlessness is a key element of the plot of *Lions for Lambs*. The film centres on three distinct but implausibly interwoven narratives, but the strand that concerns the two US marines called Finch and Rodriguez who are stranded in the hostile environment of the Afghan mountains surrounded by Al-Qaida troops, will be my first port of call.

The point behind the military operation Finch and Rodriguez are engaged in is to "gain the high ground" in order to better observe enemy movements. This particular narrative strand features a scene in which the marines are flying over the mountains at night in a bitterly hostile snowstorm in a helicopter reconnoitring the high territory to find a spot to land. The scene is accompanied with all the usual visual style accoutrements of shaky handheld camera-work, numerous quick-cutting close ups of the marines' faces shouting barely audible comments above the roar of the helicopter engines and the iconography of techno-warfare (night vision goggles, heads up displays etc). Unmanned drones have supposedly given the marines a detailed reconnaissance of the area, and when one of the soldiers notices an anti-aircraft gun placement on the mountain-side, his concerns are dismissed courtesy of the drone-derived information. Inevitably, the gun placement fires on the helicopter, chaos breaks loose on board, and in the midst of the screaming engines, smoke and disarray, Rodriguez loses his footing and falls out of the open hatch of the helicopter, plummets on to the mountainside, alive having seriously broken his leg in the fall. In a moment of sheer incredulity, in order to look out for his buddy, Finch flings himself out of the helicopter after him, somehow avoiding comparable injuries in the process.

There are two things that strike me about this scene. Firstly, since the helicopter has been fired on and the mission has sustained casualties and it is perfectly evident the high ground is in no way the marines' for the taking, the operation is now a failure. Could this be seen as a warning that attempting to seize an omniscient, all inclusive view point is impossible, or at least damaging and destructive within the symbolic economy of the film? Can this be carried forward as a warning to the contemporary mode of spectatorship which in a sense attempts to demand this form of omniscience? Certainly it is the case that the soldiers in the film fail to *see* the reality of the gun placements on the mountainside, and this failure is attributed to the mediating digital technologies of war; the unmanned drones, and the fact that most of the soldiers are more preoccupied with fiddling with their night-vision heads up displays incorporated into their helmets than actually observe their environment. So firstly we have the failure to gain omniscience, and then secondly we have the unavoidable masochistic connotations of Finch flinging himself into the wilderness in an act of pure self-abatement. He extinguishes the self in the name of his buddy, and hence the scene foregrounds the masochistic aesthetics that frame the representation of the damaged male. In the implications regarding the dangers of omniscience, these masochistic aesthetics are allied to a refusal of fixity and coherency embodied in the technological mastery of the "high ground".

In the combined image of the helicopter being shot at and Finch throwing himself into the void we have a collision between the failure of omniscience and the fitful embrace of powerlessness, but in a manner that masochistically masters this powerlessness. Finch, much like other suicidal anti-heroes in films of this type (for example Monfriez in *Courage Under Fire*), crucially takes control. He therefore seems to embody or literalise the spectator position implied in contemporary vernacular visual culture. This involves oscillating between

omniscience and powerlessness, forever wresting and ceding control, to which the only solution is to hurl oneself into the frozen wastes of self-extinction and become the object of the gaze. Finch and Rodriguez become objects through the fact that after their unorthodox helicopter egress, their position on the mountainside is monitored courtesy of satellite and drone video footage by the military commanders and officers back at their base. In scenes reminiscent of *Behind Enemy Lines*, the commanders look on, bark instructions about a swift emergency rescue, and ultimately watch helplessly as Finch and Rodriguez are gunned down by Al-Qaida forces. In the mean-time, smart bombs target the enemy troops, but as Stewart points out, once the ammunition has run out and the bombs stop falling, 'the doomed soldiers must at last face the enemy gunmen across real rather than mediated space'.[292]

The manner in which they 'face the enemy gunmen' is also interesting. They take their deaths standing up, with Rodriguez declaring "not like this, not lying down […] help me up!" So leaning on each other, half frozen, with no ammo, they deliberately invite themselves to be ripped to shreds by gun fire by pointing their unloaded guns at the enemy to provoke shooting. They, as David Savran might say, 'take it like a man', and hence this scene is revealing in the way in which it conflates Americanness, masculinity, masochism and self-negation. As Savran suggests, the phrase, 'take it like a man' seems to 'tacitly acknowledge that masculinity is a function of […] the act of being subjected, abused, even tortured'.[293] Hence, this invitation to self-destruction foregrounds the self-willed desire for pain and corporeal dissolution that typifies war on terror films and the masochistic dynamics of our spectatorial encounter with these films. The self-destruction also functions as means by which to assert phallic authority, the robust standing up having connotations of one last attempt at

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[292] Garrett Stewart, "Digital Fatigue", 50
[293] David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man*, 38

denying their own impotence. When the Al-Qaida troops open fire, the sound of the bullets is muted and replaced with a mournful string soundtrack. In a conceit of editing, the strobing effect of the gunfire is used to intersperse the scene with flashbacks of Finch and Rodriguez at college, and the satellite and drone video footage flares into a brilliant white. So having established the masochistic basis to the protracted scenario of debasement and pain the marines enact, its conclusion attempts to deflect from any threat to their masculinity through analogising their self-negation to manliness as a function of memory and mediated imagery. Their victimhood is stretched out over narrative time and incorporated into the aesthetic regime of the new technologies of war. They are at once eulogised as victims of US foreign policy, but also as victims of the culture of watching, mediation and 'digital fatigue' that typifies contemporary visual culture.

The implication here is that we as spectators are being included in this condemnation of contemporary visual culture. This is obviously one of the more clunky points the film makes in its over-long passages of bulky dialogue. Professor Stephen Malley (Robert Redford) declares in a hilariously melodramatic moment that "Rome is burning! […] The problem's with us. All of us who do nothing. We just fiddle." In his excruciating office hour with his underachieving student (Todd Hayes, played by Andrew Garfield), he challenges him to re-engage with the world and do something to make a difference. A similar problem confronts Janine Roth, since Senator Irving disparages modern journalists as 'windsocks', passive and pliant. Yet this provokes moral doubt regarding whether Roth should swallow whole Irving's talk of winning the war through this new military strategy. In the end it appears her ethics took a pummelling since we see Todd Hayes, in the final scene of the film, watching entertainment news on a massive flat-screen television with his housemates, the story

regarding the new military strategy appearing verbatim on the rolling ticker tape at the bottom of the screen.

Aside from the obvious ironies of attempting to impel an already pretty sedentary audience – whether they are in a multiplex or at home having ordered the film through their digital television package – into more than just "fiddling", there are severe problems with this condemnation of passive spectatorship. The film lectures its audience on the importance of action and making a difference, making appeals to leftist political idealism, and yet it locates the spectator in a position of pleasurable, suspenseful, masochistic self-abandonment. The first problem is with the closing scene described above: the plot is not totally resolved, and the film leaves us hanging. We are left in a suspenseful state of irresolution and hence there seems to be a wilful effort to place the spectator in a liminal position, never achieving closure, forever on the cusp of revelation. The second problem is the manner in which the film constructs its aesthetic regime, especially in the narrative concerning Finch and Rodriguez. Janine Roth comments at one point when Senator Irving promises her news network exclusive access to "the infra-red and gun camera images", that "Great, those are our most popular downloads", obviously intended as a rather blatant comment on the sedentary, passive nature of contemporary television spectatorship of the technology of war and its transference into screened multimedia entertainment. However, in the Finch and Rodriguez strand, this is exactly the kind of aesthetic we are treated to, since we experience the grainy satellite and drone video night vision imagery. We also experience the frenzied experiences of the two soldiers on the ground, courtesy of rapid cutting, shaky hand held camera work, and a focal position that aligns the spectator with the soldiers' experiences – the enemy are always in the distant shadows of the icy rocks and obscured by snow storms. These scenes construct for us

the sort of imagery Streep comments as being 'our most popular downloads', and so the film castigates a moribund spectatorial interest in US forces' video images of war, and yet all too readily supplies scenes which visually replicate major sources of this spectatorial interest. Therefore, the film's visuals push the spectator into a position of emotional engagement, one that is manifested in the tension of resolving this chaotic and (slightly) harrowing scene, and also in the tactile and fluid nature of the filmic text. The audio and visual strategies cajole the spectator into an encounter with the stated moral concern of the film, that of looking on, but make the act of looking on a pleasure that is rooted in unpleasure. In other words, inactive and passive spectatorship is indicted as ruinous for contemporary democracy and for fostering unchecked neo-imperial US foreign policy, but the film uses narrative and stylistic techniques in order to encourage the spectator to remain glued to the screen, thus sustaining this inactive and passive state. It then, through its dialogue and use of digital mediation and the instantaneous videography that surrounds the war on terror, condemns this self-same state of political and moral inertia.

The effect is also to analogise the spectator position with one of victimhood, as we are manipulated into a position of empathy, once more, with the US soldiers, since the enemy possesses no subjectivity or coherent identity beyond muffled foreign accents through the snow storm and vague blurred shadowy figures on the satellite video screen. Just as in *Jarhead* where the audience is offered a white, middle-class, male point of entry into the film, the same occurs in *Lions for Lambs*. The war on terror films, similarly to other cycles of contemporary war films, hails a white middle-class spectator position, courtesy of the chief focalisers we are offered, and the organising power of their subjectivities in disseminating and legislating narrative data. In other words, the perspective we ride along side with in the film is

consistently at the mercy of this ideological and socio-cultural position, courtesy of the middle-class student, the University professor, the journalist, the Senator, and the college-attending soldiers. It is unsurprising therefore that the soldier characters who are racially other to the grand organising perspective of white middle-class subjectivity are evacuated from the text and vocally disparaged by other characters in the film.

Lions for Lambs interpellates this spectator position for the purposes of securing the central normativity of this perspective. This interpellation would usually function to mask spectatorial complicity, but this masking is jettisoned through direct narrative address to the audience mediated through characters we are supposed to empathise or align our sympathies with. In the majority of films explored in this chapter, it is regimes of emotivity and appeals to liberal morality that cover over these films' objectification of the other and entrenchment of detached difference. As such, the hailing of the middle-class, liberal spectator position is crucial in *forcing* an emotional engagement necessary for ethical encounter. This we can conceive of as paving the way for our sensibilities, assumptions, and comforting disavowals to be willingly shattered and ruptured. In turn, this masochistically forces us into a position of ethical encounter and makes us self-aware as complicit spectators, looking on with (until now) no sense of responsibility for what we perceive.

The vague, open-ended nature of the film's aforementioned close, only serves to feed this too. As observed above, we see Todd Hayes and other college students sitting on a sofa watching vacuous entertainment news on an enormous flat screen television. They make the occasional mediocre, amused remark to each other about the celebrity gossip being presented on screen. Most of this is filmed using shots at a skewed angle to the people sitting on the sofa and is

inter-cut with straight on close-up shots of the television. This visual regime is then slightly disturbed when Todd notices the scrolling piece of news uncovered by Janine Roth sliding past at the bottom of the screen. The camera pushes in on the news ticker-tape at the bottom of the TV screen, and switches to shots which show Todd front on, each successively pushed in a little closer, him wearing a concerned, unsettled expression. The aesthetic strategies here clearly link Todd's sudden realisation of his inactive and vacuous spectatorial position with his subjectivity. This is a mini-rupture, in a way, in the same manner as the Vietnam veteran bursting on to the bus in *Jarhead*. However, with it arriving at the very conclusion of the film, there is no real definite culmination or closure to the narrative, we are left hanging on. There is no suggestion as to how to break out of this spectatorial passivity, just a lingering set of shots conveying the inactivity and vacuity of white US domestic vernacular visual culture. The spectator can not seek closure in the film's narrative, so he or she must find it elsewhere. So why not seek this closure in glossing over the ethical encounter attempted with these images, and instead deriving satisfaction from the solipsism of the position of the 'concerned' and 'thoughtful' spectator? This position is one that can indulgently acknowledge the ruinous regimes of passivity bound up in contemporary mass media visual culture, and then disavow its affects through feeling the pain and victimhood of this scenario.

In The Valley of Elah, male trauma, the war on terror, and the 'liberal' spectator

In The Valley of Elah takes digital mediation, US male victimhood, and spectatorship to another level. The film's title is a reference to the story of David and Goliath, the eponymous valley being the land that separates the massed armies of the Philistines and the Israelites. Accordingly, it seems as if the US is figured as David fighting a 'monster', and that the US is

the courageous, small underdog. As such, the US casts itself in a position of victimhood.[294] The film concerns Sgt Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) attempting to piece together the mysterious circumstances of the murder of his son (Mike, nicknamed Doc) and the subsequent burning of his body. Mike had recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq and had been out drinking with his army buddies. Deerfield clandestinely steals Mike's mobile phone and hands it to a friend with the technology to recover the corrupted media files saved on it. The unravelling of the mystery of what these audio-visual documents depict runs hand in hand with the unravelling of the exact circumstances of Mike's murder, and although the two strands are not intrinsically linked, they are presented as corroborating, or complimentary narratives.

Digital imagery seems to be the chief concern of an otherwise quite classical piece of cinema: the majority of *film* (as opposed to the *digital* audio-visual files on Mike's phone) shots are near to still, with little handheld work, and most panning and tracking shots being slowly executed. Despite this considered, formal filmic style, from the very first few frames we can see the interest, obsession even, in digital imagery. The familiar CGI Warner Brothers logo slithers into the darkened space of the frame, but we see reflected in the metallic border to the logo, bursts of visual white noise (akin to a detuned TV), and crackles of static, giving the impression that the studio logo is infected with the distorted and corrupted digital imagery that plagues the film. It is an interesting image with which to commence the film, and seems to imply a certain linkage between the global business of multinational entertainment

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[294] The film sets up the meaning of the title by having Sgt. Deerfield read a bedtime story to a child. Deerfield tempers his narration of the David and Goliath story by explaining 'that's how we fight monsters.. lure them in.' It is relevant also that this position is narrated into place in the context of an old man telling a child a bedtime story. Both characters fill in for each others absences, the child having no father figure, and Deerfield having lost a son. Paternity and masculinity coalesce around the subject of US military victimhood.

industries such as Warner Bros, and the democratic, handheld forms of populace-derived media.

The first genuine images of the film are a brief scene from a corrupted video file that depicts some random panning over some Iraqi children on a dusty street. The credits and this scene are accompanied with snatches of disconnected and seemingly random speech that have an almost incantatory or hallucinatory effect. These include crackling and desperately harrowing sounding voices declaring "Let's go, Mike, now!", "What are you doin'?!", and "Get back in the vehicle!" There is also a lone weak and croaky voice pleading, groping in the dark almost, repeating "Dad..? Dad..?" The former snatches of speech are obviously in the context of military operations in Iraq, given the visual information, but the latter portion of speech is much more ambiguous and forms its own miniature mystery within the film. The poignant and disembodied pleas for the father continue throughout the film and always accompany Deerfield's scenes. It turns out that these bits of speech are Deerfield's memories of the last telephone conversation he had with his son, Mike, and hence they haunt the film. We are gathered into the private world of Deerfield's grief and traumatic memory, one which is essentially auditory. It is implied through this technique of disembodied voices accompanying his scenes when he is depicted on the cusp of sleep or waking, that not only is he haunted by the memories of this last telephone conversation, but that we should experience this too. Hence, we as spectators are drawn into sharing a position of traumatised subjectivity (in the sense of our experience of this auditory technique) with Deerfield, one we can of course disavow.

We are, as spectators, impelled into the position of being witnesses, in the first instance to testify to Deerfield's emotional trauma, and in the second instance to the gruesome narrative that unfolds courtesy of the audio-visual files on Mike's phone. Towards the conclusion of the film, all the corrupted imagery and 'dirty' media fades away for us to be recounted with a narrative account of what the files were attempting to convey. It becomes clear that Mike and his fellow squad members had captured an enemy soldier and were transporting him with them in the back of their armoured vehicle. The enemy soldier has serious open wounds, to which Mike's response is to stick his fingers into one of these wounds declaring "Where does it hurt? Right there?" The enemy soldier's response is understandably a series of blood-curdling screams conveying the physical pain and distress this is causing him. We therefore bear witness to torture by US forces and the narrative enunciation of this torture. However, it is more accurately a *false witness* position. Karen J. Hall uses Robert Jay Lifton's conception of the 'false witness' in order to examine the 'transmission of the ideology of militarized imperialism into the bodies and emotions of individual subjects'.[295] The idea behind this concept is that 'melodramatic representation of losses [should] inflame consumer patriotism'[296] and hence when it comes to the depiction of war and traumatic images, specifically images which depict the destruction of American life, in popular visual culture, spectators should react to these images with feelings of vengeance and restitution for the damage caused. This is a 'false' form, since bearing witness is meant to allow the traumatized victim to '*work through*' their psychological pain and damage, whereas the form of witnessing evoked here compels the spectator to be 'primed for a vengeful *acting out*'.[297] In this case it is not the physical destruction of American life we witness (apart from the off

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[295] Karen J. Hall, "False Witness: Combat Entertainment and Citizen Training in the United States," *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture,* ed. Francis Guerin and Roger Hallas (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 99

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid., 100

screen destruction of Mike), it is the psychological and emotional destruction we witness from Mike's grieving mother, to the soldiers bound by traumatic neuroses to an utterly blank persona initiated by the harsh, pressurised conditions of the war in Iraq.

However, if this is truly a 'false' form, where is the sense of a vengeful acting out? Naturally this depends on one's take on the war on terror, which is hard to second guess, but it can come from two sources; the torturing of the Iraqi, or the charred corpse of Mike Deerfield. The former requires little explanation aside from the obvious that if one identified with Mike's friend's proclamation that regarding Iraq, "they should just nuke it and watch it all turn back to dust", then revelling in a scene in which an Iraqi soldier experiences extended unnecessary physical pain and torture would fulfil one's desire for a vengeful acting out. The latter involves a subversion of the concept of the false witness, in that rather than the vengeful acting out being directed at the 'enemy', it is now directed *inwardly* towards the US military, a position that emerges courtesy of anti-war, anti-militarization sentiments. The question then is how does the image of Mike's charred corpse entail a vengeful acting out?

The answer to this lies in whether there is any degree of pleasure in seeing Mike's body? The film is certainly populated with numerous images of burned bodies, usually courtesy of the corrupted videos on Mike's mobile phone. These images arguably do not invoke a turning away, but rather underline a certain fascination with the conflagrated human body. It is curious the manner in which the camera lingers over these images, inviting the spectator to observe, recoil in disgust, then keep watching, transfixed. The images crackle and jump, decay and return to wholeness, they also are characterised by the 'blocky' pixilation of low definition digital images, light sources rendered a brilliant white and areas of darkness just a

fuzz of black and grey. Through this squall of corruption and distortion one can faintly pick out the vague manoeuvres of Mike when he tortures the Iraqi soldier, and hear the desperate screams of protestation from the victim, the blank inquiring voice of the perpetrator, and the collusive, dead-eyed laughter of the onlookers.

Similarly, we, as an audience, remain safely located in our distanced spectator positions, taking undoubtedly a degree of visual pleasure from the process of watching the visceral horrors of these degraded images. We also take pleasures from feeling ethically troubled and entangled with the film and are positioned in relationship to what Weber has identified as the competing trajectories of 'morality' and 'vengeance' in post-9/11 cultural discourse.[298] In a sense, we adopt a punished, victimised, even assaulted subject position through bearing witness to traumatic scenes of violence and carnage, but we remain safely distanced and can disavow our implication in the cinematic happenings the more extreme they are; i.e. it bears no relation to the perceivable reality we encounter on a daily basis. So, war cinema's viewing pleasures reside in the anxieties it provokes, and these pleasures are as much reactive and status quo affirming as transgressive. The difference being in this case, that the distancing and disavowal is contaminated by the emphasis on aping the style and format of the 'relentless videography' characteristic of the war on terror.

So the aesthetics of these digital images that form such a large focus of these films activates a masochistic aesthetics. The hallucinatory qualities of the haunting pleas for the father, the abjection of Mike's burned and dismembered body, the steady dishevelment through grief of Sgt. Deerfield, all assist in the conveyance of these masochistic aesthetics. But it is especially the audio-visual files that create and sustain this aesthetics, purely through their chaotic

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[298] Weber, 5

stylistic regime and illustration of torture. Their corruption and opaqueness signals complex layers of reveal and masquerade, and epitomises the ebbing and flowing of visual mastery that characterise the masochistic scenario. We also have aligned with this the concept of the false witness and the vengeful acting out that accompanies this cultural phenomenon. In fact, it could even be argued that this self-vengeance is taken to its natural conclusion by the ultimate revelation that Mike was in fact killed by his fellow unit members, who then butchered his body and burnt it in the dusty wastes at the side of a rural road. It appears to be a simple case of liberal crowd-pleasing in providing an image of the self-consuming and internally destructive military enacting vigilante justice by proxy on behalf of the audience baying for revenge at the despicable behaviour of the US military.

However, it is not as simple as this vengeful desire simply turning itself inwards against the US nation. The visual pleasures of the tactility of the corrupted digital images and the narrative pleasures associated with the revelation of Mike's complicity in torture, plus the numerous scorched corpses that litter the film all point towards a fascination with the abject, and hence posits one of the key components of masochistic aesthetics at the centre of the visual pleasures of the film. Accordingly US white male victimhood is similarly pervasive and the whole structure of the film appears set up to privilege the infectious, culturally polluting, and terrifying effects of the traumatic experiences of the US soldiers in Iraq. The film offers us the personal narratives and subjectivities of numerous US soldier characters, and leaves us with the frank, dead-eyed confession by Corporal Penning in which he dispenses the truth regarding Mike's murder offering little emotion beyond whimsical chuckles and a calm but incredulous reaction to a question posed regarding why the unit members visited a chicken joint immediately after murdering Mike ("We were starving"). The

impression one leaves this scene with (plus numerous others featuring dead-eyed, exhausted sounding conversations with the unit members) is the sheer strain of fighting the war which is wreaking its mental toll on the men, and so in the downbeat, fatigued reverie the film conjures up, one is evidently supposed to feel some degree of empathy towards these soldiers. This is not endorsed by the key focalisers of the film (Deerfield and Sanders) through making their *lack* of empathy apparent, but neither is there any direct condemnation or criticism. The empathy is engendered through Penning being allowed to occupy centre stage and become the fulcrum around which narrative comprehension of events revolves. So rather than simply depicting an image of vigilantism as a mirror to the position of the false witness, the literally self-destructive, self-harming military and our multi-directional empathies are used as a means to work through this position of liberal revenge.

In the Valley of Elah attempts to work through the affective pain of the war on terror for domestic spectators and soldiers alike, and in doing so, it demands that the narrative revelation, audience empathies with traumatised masculinity, plus its goading of liberal desires for revenge, all be seen as acts of "consummation", or, releases of tension. It seems that the film is attempting the implantation of control and mastery in an aesthetic and narrative scenario which depends on loss of control and fragmentation/shattering. Is Hollywood's war on terror, therefore, a way of managing the dissolution and crisis all too apparent in white US male victimhood and the violent effects of US neo-imperialism? Hollywood war films insist on a frenzied, almost berserk emotional attachment to their chaotic, haunting, ambiguous and scatter-gun narrative styles and aesthetic strategies. This emotional attachment achieved through an embodied and affective sense of narrative and aesthetic/auditory immersion (through the thriller-style plot, and the intricacies of the digital

technologies, and the haunting, fragmentary vocal pleas for the father) imposes a false sense of completion, identification, wholeness, and offers healing of sorts.

The digital images provide us with what Wheatley has described as a degree of 'aesthetic reflexivity'[299] in that in their degraded but artificial status they alert us to the fact that the film is a constructed artefact. We become aware through the attempts to render these corrupted media files a degree of authenticity, through the sound and images, skipping and decomposing, that they have been 'faked'; there is nothing genuine about them. This leads to a similar sense of self-awareness regarding the whole film, that this too is dependent on numerous stylistic techniques and technologies in order to render it palpable and real. So what affect does this have on us as spectators when the film is reflexively signalling its constructed and artificial status and yet imploring us to believe in the authenticity of the digital images and the narrative plausibility of its classical film style? Questions regarding the collision of 'real' and 'fictional' (or 'digital' and 'classical' modes of film/image-making) images of suffering will be explored below, since it is in the film *Redacted* that one is brought face to face with a radical breach in narrative and aesthetic style in order to mount an ethical challenge to the contemporary spectator.

Redacted and the safeties of reflexivity

Redacted (Brian De Palma, 2007) was perhaps one of the most polarizing films of recent years. The film won a 'Silver Lion' ('best director') award at the Venice Film Festival, and yet those who have actually seen the film remain a privileged few, since it has been denied general release in most regions of the world and was for a comparatively long time

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[299] Wheatley, 5

unavailable on Region 2 DVD. Roger Ebert proclaimed the film to be 'a ferocious argument against the engagement in Iraq',[300] whereas Desson Thomson, writing in the *Washington Post*, criticized the film for its implication of the audience and US society, declaring that this is the 'same old Brian enjoying the peeping, bringing us into the guilt zone, then saying shame on all of us'.[301]

Redacted is concerned with a fictional take on a factual event, the Al-Mahmudiyah killings of 12 March 2006. In real life, this involved the gang rape and murder of a young Iraqi girl named Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi, and the subsequent murder of her parents and sister. In the film, one of the characters seeks to expose the behaviour of his fellow soldiers in the hope of bringing the perpetrators of this heinous crime to justice. In this respect, the film is essentially a re-write of Brian De Palma's 1989 film, *Casualties of War*, which describes the kidnap, rape and murder of a young Vietnamese girl by a squad of American soldiers, and the attempts of one of the squad members to resist the violence and degradation meted out to the girl. Marita Sturken has commented that the problem with *Casualties of War* is that its 'real focus is the rift in morality among the Americans and their own victimization'.[302] It could also be argued that this same problem pervades *Redacted*, since, as we shall see, the majority of the narrative investment is in the tensions, arguments, disputes and social interplay between

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[300] Roger Ebert, rev. of *Redacted*, 16 Nov. 2007, 04 Jul. 2010 <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071115/REVIEWS/711150303/1023>

[301] Desson Thomson, rev. of *Redacted*, *Washington Post*, 16 Nov. 2007, 03 Jul. 2007 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/15/AR2007111502452.html>
It might reasonably be asked who or what is the 'same old Brian'? If we look at his directorial career we see it is hallmarked by numerous films that explore the act of watching and the passive state that goes hand in hand with this act: his early 1980s films such as *Blow Out* (1981) all contain themes of voyeurism, whilst other films display an engagement with the idea of watching and its relationship to power and powerlessness. For example, Tony Montana's paranoid surveillance of the security cameras around his mansion via a bank of video monitors in *Scarface* (1983) and the helpless situation of the protagonist in *Casualties of War* (1989). In particular it is this last film, *Casualties of War*, which bears the most similarities to *Redacted*, since they are both war films with comparable thematic concerns. This is not to suddenly privilege an auteurist account of war on terror cinema, but rather to relay the context for the film's critical reception.

[302] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 106

the American soldiers. The effect of this is to temper the account of Iraqi victimhood with a disproportionate focus on American suffering.

Returning to Desson Thomson's comments regarding *Redacted*, it is intriguing that the concept of 'peeping' is incited, especially considering spectatorial engagement with the film and how the film goes about constructing the various subjectivities populating its narrative and audience reception. To this end, *Redacted* sites spectators in an implicated, 'guilty' position of inactivity in relationship to film images of death and suffering and points out the ethical complexities of consuming what are ostensibly images of bodily and psychological trauma.

As already mentioned, *Redacted* is concerned with fictionally inscribing the Al- Mahmudiyah killings of 12 March 2006. Five US Army soldiers from the 502nd Infantry Regiment were charged in relation to this brutal incident. On 11 July 2006, the Mujahideen Shura Council released graphic video footage of their proclaimed retaliation for this incident: the bodies of two soldiers kidnapped from the same unit as the accused. Four of the five soldiers were convicted of the crimes through courts-martial and were sentenced to between 27 months and 110 years' imprisonment as punishment. The fifth soldier accused had left the army by the time the crimes were discovered and was therefore tried in a federal court. He was convicted in May 2009 and was sentenced to life without parole in September 2009.

The reason for giving the above sketch of the real-life events is not to invoke a comparison between events in the film and factual occurrences but rather to give background to the critical reception of the film and the manner in which it is consumed as a media product. The

film consists of pastiches of numerous media/visual sources which include a soldier's video diary, a professional documentary made by a French production team, 'ATV' (meant to signify Al-Jazeera) journalist reports, video footage of US Army psychological evaluations, Islamic extremist Internet sites with embedded video, a video blog from a soldier's wife, and video on a 'YouTube'-style website. However, since the film depends on rapidly shifting styles and aesthetics, and on numerous disparate media forms in order to convey its narrative, this has an effect on the manner in which the text is consumed. The effect of using contrasting and eclectic media styles in order to produce a text should pose a challenge to authoritative coherent discourse and narration. However, since the different visual styles are all imitations, and are all under the supervision of the assembling eye of De Palma, coherence is maintained. We are provided with the illusion of actively culling the narrative from a multiplicity of sources, when in fact we are manipulated into this position through the 'fictional documentary' style. However, it must be emphasized that this auteurist account of *Redacted* is not a definitive component of my framework. The intention is to demonstrate that the complex issues of subjectivity, victimhood, trauma, ethics and masculinity that haunt this film are in some part accountable to the manner in which the film is presented as an audio-visual document. Therefore, to refer back to Thomson's opinions regarding *Redacted*, it seems that we are quite deliberately manipulated into a position of guilt and shame. In fact, this seems to be the very *sine qua non* of the film, in that passivity and inaction are dramatized as being as destructive as the hegemony and tyranny of US military aggression and belligerence. The locus of this inaction is presented as the mode of post-modern, virtualized and abstracted spectatorship which is dominant in US culture. The protocol of 'watching', whether this be through rolling news channels, websites like 'YouTube', Hollywood war films, or military

strategy video games, is bound up with a spectatorial desire to repeat feelings of guilt, pain, and self-beratement.

The narrative of *Redacted* is initially focalized through the character of a Private named Angel Salazar who incessantly films army life in Iraq with his digital video camera. His initial justification for this is that he hopes to get into film school; the army will be paying his college fees post-service. He also explicitly and self-consciously declares that he is making a 'war film' with 'no logical narrative'. Obviously, these comments have to be sited within the context of *Redacted* as a work of (partial) fiction, and the product of a Hollywood director. The character of Salazar is in some ways used to signal De Palma's intent. The director mentioned in an interview with Simon Hattenstone in *The Guardian*: 'When you have a terrible crime, you want to know how these boys were brought to do this, and that's what the movie shows.'[303] Therefore, the Private embodies a distinct authorial voice in the film. Since he is marked out as 'the film-maker' we have a screened body onto which we can project our emotional investment in our spectatorial relationship to the film image. Also, in order to aid identifications and empathize with this 'film-maker' character, his 'everyman' credentials must be promoted (much in the same way Swofford in *Jarhead* is presented to us as a convincing 'everyman' for emotional investment). To this end, he barely exists as a unique character in the film. Occasionally, he turns his video camera on himself to address the audience, but rarely says anything of note beyond a few clichéd platitudes, and is unable to provide witty retorts to the ribbing he receives from his buddies – during one of his close-up face-to-camera shots, someone brandishing a squeaky toy rubber duck makes it 'kiss' his face, and someone wafts a toothbrush in front of his mouth. This blank persona seems to be

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[303] Simon Hattenstone, "No one wants to know" in *The Guardian*, 8 March 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/mar/08/features.iraqandthemedia accessed 09 March 2008

designed to enable a multitude of identifications and draw the spectator into empathizing with his subject position. He is also, like Monfriez in *Courage Under Fire*, possessed of a hyphenated US ethnicity, being clearly Latino-American. As pointed out in Chapter Two, non-white characters are not permitted access to the authenticating power of innocent victimhood that holds such cultural weight in the US. So the focalising processes of the film are ultimately disingenuous since we are encouraged to empathise with Salazar's blank subjectivity, but at the expense of his marginalisation from a dominant and central position of culturally meaningful victimhood. We shall see how Salazar's position of 'film-maker' and focalising agent/spectator par excellence is ruinous and in turn implicates the passive mode of spectatorship and the inert nature of contemporary Western society. This indirect critique reflects on the atrocities of the Iraq War and their role in sustaining and reinforcing US hegemony. In a way, this passive spectatorship is implicated as a means by which US strategic aims are secured and the occupation and exploitation of Iraq are legitimized.

More crucially, Salazar is represented as totally *embodying* this passive and inert mode. Hence, his centralised role breaks the tyranny of white male representation, but at the cost of passivity and inaction being displaced onto him, and by implication, this submission is figured as an index of his ethnicity. In other words, we are only permitted to empathise with him due to his subsequent ruination and violent casting out from his centralised, focalising position. This has the two-fold effect of tethering spectatorship of the film to a position associated with the aberrant victimhood and crisis of the Latino soldier, and inversely, permitting the disavowal of complicity in passivity and inaction by displacing it onto the Latino soldier who has illegitimately hijacked a central, normative representative role.

Further, the proximity of pleasure and pain and questions of male subjectivity are raised within the plot of the film. In response to the above-mentioned complaints regarding the soldiers and their 'stop loss' status, the black duty sergeant, Sergeant Sweet (his race is relevant to one of my later arguments) screams that they all need to accept their position and 'stand the fuck up and be a fucking man about it!' He also impels them to 'drive on with a fucking hard on!' Manliness, the erect penis, and robustness are all conflated in these proclamations. The soldiers are supposed to embrace their subjection to military authority, and accept their 'sitting duck' position of extreme vulnerability manning the checkpoint. This subjection is accompanied with sexual arousal (which is "spent" on the night of the rape), which in a way 'proves' their robust 'impenetrable' manhood. As is the case in Michael Haneke's films, the narrative concerns of the film are reflected in the audience interaction with the text. Equivalence and comparison is evoked between the diegetic world and the extra-diegetic circumstances of consuming the spectacles of suffering and pain offered up. In this specific case, masochistic reconfiguration of pain and suffering is asserted as a means to negotiate the discomforts of US neo-imperial occupation, and through this reconfiguration an excessive, excitable version of masculinity is attained. As we shall see later on, strategies of resistance to dominant readings and interpretations of these films is vital, but in this case, the narrative recuperates this resistance into forming the essence of hegemonic masculinity.

The central rape scene around which the whole film pivots is as appallingly gruesome as one might expect. It is played out in night vision, courtesy of Salazar's video camera, so we are being asked to view a scene of suffering and pain courtesy of sexual assault that is doubly mediated; firstly through the aesthetic regime of the night-vision camera, and secondly through the objectifying, blank dispassionate gaze of the Salazar character. It is in this central

scene then, that Salazar's role as embodying passivity and inaction is made clear. The strategies juts described permit us visual access to this abhorrent scene, and these, in a way, licence our looking on. However, there are tensions here; the night vision counter-intuitively serves to expose the horrific intensity of the crime. It does not distance the spectator, but rather draws one in, purely through dint of the blurry, pixellated, digital images and the distorted and sharp green/black/white colour scheme. The impenetrable but oddly stark nature of the images provides visual intrigue and produces a fascination with the texture of the images, a desire to decipher the sometimes oblique nature of the imagery, and also creates a state of transfixed horror, courtesy of the immediacy and austerity of the visual text. This recalls the masochistic aesthetics explored in the corrupted digital video pervading *In The Valley Of Elah*. This may be augmented by reference to 'haptic images'.[304] Stadler discusses the use of haptic images in films in which ethical reflexivity and a sense of alterity is sought through the use of emotional connection. These are images that do not represent or embody distinct objects, but instead offer up abstract yet pleasurable patterns and shapes for our delectation, images where there is 'little sense of depth, and a tactile perception of texture overwhelms and takes precedence over form'.[305] These images invite a tactile, affective spectatorial relationship to the film through their pleasing, emotive forms and their fascinating intimate occupation of cinematic space. Although I am not claiming that the images generated by the night-vision aesthetics are totally devoid of reference to real life objects, the other-worldliness of the skewed colour scheme and the visual obfuscation caused by the digital image processing involved in night-vision technology means that there is a certain aesthetically pleasing element to consuming these images. This stands in contrast to the desire to decipher the images and construct meanings from this abstracted other-worldliness. So, the

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[304] Jane Stadler, *Pulling Focus: Intersubjective Experience, Narrative Film, and Ethics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2008), 157
[305] Ibid.

aesthetic reflexivity so vital to ethical spectatorial encounter is invoked at many levels in the film. Firstly, through the aping of numerous disparate visual styles of global mass media, secondly through aesthetic regimes that demand close attention and call into action our interpretative and meaning-making skills (the night-vision camera), and thirdly through drawing spectators into an affective, tactile relationship with these images in order to expose the illicit and unacknowledged textual pleasures in visually consuming suffering. The haptic nature of the night-vision imagery is helpful in drawing out the masochistic connotations behind interacting with these images and the aesthetic regime they invoke. The images are also, in a way, rendered even more illicit by virtue of being night-vision, implying this is a form of unauthorised looking that unearths and brings into focus that which would otherwise be hidden and privatised and equates the war with the illicit, making the "rape of Iraq" literal. This, of course, affects our spectatorial encounter with the images through adding an extra bite to the visceral thrill at looking at images that reveal, in a sense, too much.

There are four soldiers in attendance during the rape sequence. One is Salazar, the other three are called McCoy, Rush, and Flake, the latter two being the main perpetrators. This is vital since it sets up the transferences and displacements of empathy and viewing position invoked by this scene. Flake subdues the rest of the girl's family through violent force as Rush commences the horrible act, bending her over and lifting up her dress whilst the girl cries and protests. McCoy, who is superior in rank to the other soldiers, objects in strong terms, but McCoy has a gun put to his head and he, along with Salazar, is bullied and threatened into leaving the house under the pretence of going on 'faggot watch' outside. The manner in which they are bullied and threatened is by questioning where their 'balls' are. Once again, male sexuality, pleasure and domination become conflated, and a lack of adherence to this

aggressive sadistic regime is equated to homosexuality. 'Watching' seems not only to be analogous to inaction but also to a deprival of normative hegemonic masculinity. Once outside, McCoy explodes with rage at Salazar, staring directly into the camera, his rage intensified by the night vision colouring, the pupils of his eyes burning a brilliant white, transforming his face into an alien, predatory snarl. He spills his invective in an undeviating fashion, proclaiming Salazar to be no better than 'a fucking jackal ripping pieces of meat off a fucking carcass' for not trying to interfere and object. It is at this moment we have an explicit condemnation emerging from the film's discourse of a regime of passive, inactive spectatorship witnessing atrocities, and spectatorship is likened to corporeal dissolution and an explicitly 'homosexual' position.

So the scene contains numerous character view-points and numerous points of entry for spectators. There is our literal point-of-view determined by Salazar's video camera, McCoy's position of moral anger, the assaulted position of the Iraqi girl and her family, and the assaultive subject position of the Flake and Rush. In McCoy's assertion of supreme moral disgust outlined above we clearly see a transfer of audience empathy from riding along with Salazar's subjective camera to approving of McCoy's violent critique. The scene is therefore crucial from a narrative perspective in that it charts the exact moment that Salazar's aberrant claim to narrative centrality and innocent victimhood is jettisoned and replaced by a condemnatory (and self-loathing) white middle-class subjectivity. From this point on, Salazar's traumatic grief and guilt is figured as destructive and noxious, whereas McCoy's traumatic descent is privileged and centralised.

We shall stay with the character of Salazar in order to expand on how exactly his trauma is conveyed as deviant in contrast to McCoy's. Salazar is vehemently identified with inactive spectatorship. One of the film's scenes is a video recording of Salazar's psychological evaluation. It shows him grappling with some of the outward and inward signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He has developed certain nervous tics and he describes vividly his recurring nightmares involving 'her burnt body', which he swiftly corrects to 'his'. It is clear from this moment that what has traumatized him is the guilt he feels through not intervening, just watching and filming the rape and the brutal violence meted out to the girl and her family. Echoing real life, the soldiers burn the girl's body after the rape and murder. However, Salazar claims that what is really troubling him (no one has disclosed the military brutality at this point) is the dramatic and sudden death of their Sergeant Sweet (an event that occurs earlier in the film; he is blown to bits by an improvised explosive device). We therefore witness a sudden transformation in the character of Salazar; he goes from being the possessor of an assaultive, almost sadistic, gaze in the form of his prying 'documentary' video camera, to a position of weakness and victimhood, to a troubled and a traumatic neurosis. He fiercely proclaims at one point that he is deeply troubled by the concept of 'people watching and doing fuck-all', an intense self-criticism, but, like McCoy's 'jackal' comment, it is seemingly levelled at the audience in order to include us within the film's economy of guilt and implication.

Since, as already highlighted, audience empathies (at least up until just before this point) are meant to align with Salazar, it seems that his narrative trajectory is meant to suggest or symbolise the moral trajectory of looking on at scenes of suffering. The movement described from passively looking on, to victimhood, and to trauma, guilt and shame is a supreme act of

altericide, a casting out of the 'other' and a denial of the coherent subjectivity of the genuine victims of US military violence, the Iraqi people. When, through the strategies to elicit empathy in the film, the same trajectory is implied for spectators, then we can see that the film attempts to manoeuvre us into a position of culpability and responsibility through directly addressing our passive looking on, but licences and regulates this sense of responsibility by stressing the 'victim' position of those who passively look on.

Even in this 'victim' position, Salazar is able to disavow and suspend his guilt, at least in enunciative terms (he never admits the deeper concerns he possesses), by linguistically covering it over with the dismembered black body of Sergeant Sweet. Blackness and the nightmare of dissolution disguise his guilt. The disassembled US black body is used to cover over guilt, pain and self-recrimination. By the same token, cinematic spectators can suspend their own guilt and sense of responsibility through casting out the 'other' constituted from victims of neo-imperial violence, and covering it over with an 'internal other', the brutalised US black male body. It also fatally seals Salazar's victimhood and trauma as aberrant since his illegitimate position of suffering becomes further displaced onto blackness.

So what does *Redacted* offer us in its ending? In the final scenes of the film, the character of McCoy is depicted, back home, in a bar, with a jacket and open neck shirt, in the company of his wife, family, and friends. The scene is captured by his father filming his homecoming party on a video camera. His smart-casual style, manner of speech, conversation (plus his earlier earnest interactions with various characters including his own father), his name (Lawyer), mark him distinctly as middle-class. This is notable since, as we shall see, and as

previously observed in regard to *Lions for Lambs*, *Jarhead*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and other such films, it assists in inculcating a certain dominant subject position when viewing the film.

In response to a request that he tells some 'war stories', he breaks down, and visibly upset and shaken, he laments straight into the lens of the camera that 'I have these snapshots in my brain that are burnt in there forever, and I don't know what I am gonna do about them.' This stands in marked contrast to what Sturken has described as the 'irretrievability'[306] of historical images. In McCoy's case it is indelibility, perpetuity, and helplessness which mark his traumatic memory. He is the ultimate victim, unable to control his punishment and pain, and yet the forced and unbearably emotionally constipated veneer of 'celebration' which is lent to the proceedings in the bar by his father's insistence on a round of applause and cheers for his son, seems to lend a masquerade of pleasure to the scenario. It is in this scene that the ascendancy of white pain and victimhood is asserted and a white middle class subjectivity is emphasised. We literally go face-to-face with an image of suffering white masculinity, one that is further contextualised by markers of suburban and domestic affluent normativity (the smart-casual clothes, the stylish surroundings of the bar). It is the pain and guilt of the white male we are directly and finally confronted with.

The finality of our confrontation with the damaged white male is accompanied by the film leaving us with characters abandoned in melancholic, unresolved states, which offer the spectator no re-entry into the dominant fiction. We are left in the margins, suffering and miserable; Salazar is dead in the wake of his PTSD, McCoy is left crying and staring blankly into the video camera, Flake and Rush left facing investigation by the military police. The film refuses closure and healing. We have no idea regarding the fates of many of the

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[306] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 23

characters, and no attempt is made to 'explain' or 'work through' the effects of US militarism. There is no reconstruction of male subjectivity either; the emotional masochism and damage depicted in the film through Salazar's PTSD and McCoy's melancholic state in the wake of the rape is not healed. Accompanying this emotional destruction is also corporeal destruction, since Salazar is decapitated, and Sweet is blown to pieces. Although, arguably McCoy's position is one that can be recuperated since it depends on spectatorial empathy, it seems that De Palma is being careful not to leave any chance of the restitution of patriarchal military subjectivity.

That this refusal of closure and healing is deliberate on De Palma's part is signalled by a brief, but significant scene towards the end of the film. Via a pastiche of a 'YouTube'- style website, we see a video clip of a female teenager ranting directly into the camera. She is the female voice of protest in this film and articulates a violent revenge on the patriarchal abuses of power embodied and popularized in Hollywood war films. She mocks and blames Vietnam movies in particular for mythologizing loose cannon violence ('let's torch the whole fuckin' village!' she sarcastically proclaims in a faux grunt snarl) and for perpetuating the notion that 'We are the über-race! Sieg Heil, motherfucker!' This is De Palma acknowledging his own role in constructing these mythologies of US exceptionalism and providing 'closure' and 'healing' through his Hollywood Vietnam War effort, *Casualties of War* (1989). This self-reflexive process is significant since it sees De Palma shifting his authorial subjectivity onto the body of this protesting woman, and with her nose ring, tattoo, and poster of Che Guevara it implies De Palma's correlation with the iconography of contemporary left-wing political culture. If this is the case, then De Palma is carefully acknowledging his film as a 'rant' and a riposte to the glamorization and valorization of American exceptionalism and the physical

horror of combat. As mentioned above, Marita Sturken has commented that the problem with *Casualties of War* is that its 'real focus is the rift in morality among the Americans and their own victimization',[307] and this idea of concentrating on the 'rift in morality' and the Americans' victimization infuses *Redacted*. There is a rift in the unit and a rift in the film's aesthetics and narrative due to the numerous enunciative subject positions adopted. Also, the victim status of the soldiers is emphasized by the final scene depicting McCoy's emotional breakdown, and our emotional attachment to Salazar and his subsequent mental and corporeal ruination. Scenes where we 'see the bombs from below', i.e. witness Iraqi victimhood, are sometimes refracted through the subjectivity of US militarism; the rape scene is conveyed through Salazar's passive video gaze and McCoy's seeming greater concern is with Salazar's inactivity than with the rape itself. The moments when Iraqi victimhood is not refracted through US military subjectivity are courtesy of the 'ATV' sequences. In one of these, featuring the rape victim's father being interviewed, his words and feelings are enunciated and translated clearly. However, despite the *narrative* finality of our enforced confrontation with damaged white male subjectivity, there is not a total elision of the other in *Redacted*. The final sequence of the film, entitled 'Collateral damage, actual photographs from the Iraq War', radically interrupts our concluding face-to-face with the damaged white male, and, as we shall see, forcibly reconfigures our masochistic revelling in the pleasures of pain and guilt into an ethical confrontation with the film.

After we leave McCoy staring blankly and grimly into the video camera, we are greeted with the aforementioned title, which is followed by a montage of still images of the death and destruction of Iraqi people. The photographs themselves are horrific, featuring images of bodies severely wounded by bullets and bombs, numerous corpses, and the remains of Abeer

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[307] Ibid., 106

Qasim Hamza al-Janabi. Libby Saxton specifically addresses the question of ethics of witnessing suffering. She states that 'dominant modes of reportage shirk the ethical work of investigating how the viewer's privileges are connected to, or, in certain cases, predicated upon, the suffering of the person seen'.[308] From this, we can see that in mass media journalism there is no attempt to critically reflect on images of non-Western 'others' presented to Western audiences as objects to be consumed. In fact, this critical reflection is obviated or discouraged through 'fostering a narcissistic pity which masquerades as altruism.'[309] The main ethical point that is raised in all of the films discussed in this chapter is one of condemnation of inactivity and passivity, but rather than this ringing out as an ethical call to arms in order to mobilise dissent, protest, demonstrations etc, it is actually not a form of ethical encounter or moral invocation at all; it is a direct plea to the vanity of liberal elitist ideology, which can then quietly and solemnly reflect on its own consent and culpability ("oh yes I agree, it's our fault for standing by whilst US imperialism runs amok") and hence become the centre of ethical and moral scrutiny. It is a supreme act of solipsistic self-obsession, to invoke inauthentic (and by this I mean moral, but unethical) encounter with the 'other', but only to use it as an excuse to masochistically beat yourself up about your own brand of weak, ineffectual political engagement, or bemoan your lack of political and cultural leverage. The narratives permit spectators to revel in fantasies of middle class ineptitude and weakness, courtesy of the white middle class subjectivity hailed by the majority of these films. This in part due to the hailing, or interpellating of a white middle class subjectivity, since it means that the film is essentially calling on the spectator to misrecognise him or herself in the narrative of innocent victimhood offered up. This means the spectator is potentially obliged to feel that it is "people like me" who are damaged, victimised and traumatised. Hence the

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[308] Libby Saxton, "Ethics, Spectatorship and the spectacle of suffering," *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters,* ed. Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 67
[309] Ibid.

potential ideological power of these films is increased by legitimising audience reflection on their own damage and victimhood – they are permitted to feel *like* the white US soldier, *like* the articulate, guilt-drenched officer, *like* the intellectual outside observer, since this is the dominant ideological subjectivity evoked.

In the course of shining a light on this, a placation any sense of guilt or culpability occurs. In other words, all that needs to be done by spectators (and specifically the white middle class liberal spectator that is called into existence through the interpellating strategies deployed, and the films' chief focalising techniques) is for them to feel bad about inactivity and passivity, and for this mode of looking on to be highlighted. Feeling bad is their 'bit', the equivalent of crying in order to 'acquit ourselves of our part in the production of and indulgence in the pain of others'.[310] Spectators, courtesy of the illusion of emotional empathic engagement and the vanity of their guilt, can disavow and cast aside their culpability, it having been spectatorially and narratively worked through and resolved. These are the inherent "safeties" of reflexivity referred to in the sub-heading of this section. Saxton does however warn against claiming equivalence between 'atrocities on television news' and 'pain simulated by consenting actors in a film', but does stipulate that these two arenas may 'illuminate each other's ethical stakes'.[311] This is precisely the sort of intervention that will be useful in investigating the spectatorial affects of *Redacted* and specifically the ferocious breach in narrative and stylistics that occurs when the fault line demarcating the 'collateral damage' sequence arrives.

War on terror films, ethics, and the masochism of "liberal" spectatorship

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[310] Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 116
[311] Libby Saxton, "Spectacle of Suffering", 67

We can see that war on terror films indulge a self-regarding sense of guilt and shame rather than create genuine ethical reflexivity. This is despite their seemingly hysterical need to assert the role the film-viewer plays in consenting to and licensing images of the suffering of the other in contemporary visual culture. This "safe" element to ethical reflexivity also explains the preponderance of tonally downbeat endings in war on terror films since it seems to fit with the phenomenon of 'slacktivism' has been outlined and critiqued in the popular press and academic circles.[312] This tendency, in contemporary Western culture, describes endorsing political causes, mostly online, but involving little active, politically engaged effort. In a similar vein, in engaging with serious, downbeat, and 'worthy' films about the 'war on terror', we as Western (sometimes) liberal, democratic spectators are wholly culpable in our collusion with the privatised media networks that dominate mainstream entertainment and news reporting. Yet, we can disavow this collusion by culturally investing in 'worthy' cultural productions, since they provide the emotional and ethical catharsis in order to make ourselves feel better. These actions contribute to a self-delusional status of political engagement, where we *believe* we are resistant and anti-authoritarian, when in reality we are tools, agents of the dominant fiction of globalised media and entertainment; we buy the lie in order to believe it.

The downbeat endings are also an efficient means by which to limit any interrogation of US imperialist foreign policy objectives. They inculcate emotions of despair and hopelessness (something along the lines of, "You see?! The US is *damned*!") and by doing so, and on focussing on the damaging effects of US war-mongering on its own special and unique populace, it circumvents the need to critically examine its effects on the 'other' (i.e. the

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[312] For example, Evgeny Morozov, "The brave new world of slacktivism," *Foreign Policy: Net Effect*, May 19, 2009, 9 June 2010.
<http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the_brave_new_world_of_slacktivism>. Morozov defines slacktivism as 'feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact'.

'enemy' or 'occupied peoples'). So, in other words, it encapsulates the self-indulgences of US exceptionalism (through concentrating on depicting US pain) *and* the self-indulgences of the Western liberal subject through satisfying a deep seated need for representational presence and formidableness, so spectators too can say "yes, we are damaged too, we are victims of US war-mongering and malevolent foreign policy." A good example of this attitude comes from Kimberly Pierce during the 'Making Of' special feature that accompanies the DVD release of *Stop Loss*. She declares that part of the reason for making the film was to illustrate how Americans have been deceived or duped into believing in the war on terror, how 'we have been "stop-lossed" too'.

There is then a spectatorial masochism at work here. Indeed, masochism and trauma contain numerous commonalities. They are both characterized by repetition compulsion, oscillation between mastery and submission, and a spectatorial scene of pain. Susannah Radstone discusses this sense of repetition and engagement with various national myths of memory in an essay on trauma and cinema, which specifically refers to one of the more aesthetically post-modern texts of 1990s film, *Forrest Gump*. Although her methodology is grounded in Laplanchian psychoanalysis and trauma studies, the points she makes are helpful in critiquing the cultural position of the contemporary film spectator when one is manoeuvred into an encounter with the 'irreducible alterity'[313] of the other. Radstone theorizes the spectatorship involved in looking on at catastrophe and suffering as involving the spectator being 'caught between an initial "looking away" and the beginnings of remembrance'.[314] In other words, in contemporary Western culture, a convergence exists of 'fantasies of innocent victimhood with

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[313] Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema*, 5
[314] Susannah Radstone, "Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film, and Memory" *Memory and Methodology,* ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 99

fantasies of omnipotence',[315] and the viewer of films which attempt to make contact with traumatic historical narratives (in the case of *Forrest Gump*, Vietnam, but clearly in these war on terror films it is more recent conflicts) is caught oscillating between fantasies of omnipotence and powerlessness. This doubleness drives spectatorship of films engaging with historical trauma. It is this doubleness revolving around suspense and disavowal that also characterizes the masochistic contract, according to Gilles Deleuze.[316] Steven Shaviro asserts that 'the masochist seeks not to reach a final consummation, but to hold it off, to prolong the frenzy, for as long as possible' and that 'visual fascination is a direct consequence of this masochistic heightening'.[317] The fact that the films under discussion in this chapter do not feature definitive endings and never achieve a sense of culmination or explosive excitation shows this holding off of consummation since the spectator never experiences the release of closure and fixity. Secondly, the only spectatorial frenzy is that which is associated with being empathically aligned with traumatised characters in the film, or through scenes which communicate extreme, depraved violence, usually mediated through digital, abstracted aesthetics. The films, therefore encourage a spectator position in which the passivity, pain, and unease of the spectator is intensified. The pleasures of pain bound up in the deferral of closure, the embodied delectation of textual and aesthetic pain and suffering, and empathic alignment with traumatic neuroses, contribute to the necessary emotional engagement with film necessary for ethical encounter.

Above, I quoted Sarah Cooper on Levinas's concept of ethics, where she proclaimed that our 'encounter with alterity […] disturbs our solitary enjoyment of the world, our illusory position

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[315] Ibid., 101
[316] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, 134
[317] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 56

of omnipotence and sovereignty'.[318] So in our constant oscillations between omnipotence and powerlessness, we not only echo the central constructs of masochistic spectatorship, but also correlate with the lived experience of ethical encounter with alterity. Shattering our sovereignty, or illusory power, chimes with the precepts of Shaviro's model of embodied spectatorship since it confirms the normalcy of dissolution, chaos and self-abandonment. However, Shaviro writes of a collapse of patriarchal fixity in terms of affective consumption of the filmic text, whereas ethical encounter is about recognising that this collapse of fixity of the self is a mimetic function of comprehending alterity. In some ways, therefore, ethical encounter possesses a certain kind of selfishness in that our solipsism is exposed in our sudden recognition of the other, and our initial reaction is not one of contact and bridging boundaries, but one of enacting a reflexive crisis in the supreme self-centred power of our own mediation of lived reality and the film text. Simply put, ethical encounter with the other precludes masochistic spectatorship. Contact with the other provokes a crisis in the fixity and coherence of the self, threatening our illusory sovereignty. In the war on terror films, this crisis is heightened and exaggerated in order to stress the damage performed on the central privileged white male subject in his encounter with the other. This damage is then luxuriated in, securing the ascendancy of the white male victim and the marginalisation of his racial and gender others.

However, it must be clearly stated that *Redacted* seems to run in opposition to this general tendency, and so is a compelling case study in how to move beyond the safeties and recuperations possible in ethical and masochistic spectatorship. This is down to the sudden breach that occurs in the narrative process of film when *authentic* images of catastrophe and pain are included in its visual regime, by way of the 'Collateral damage' montage. Saxton

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[318] Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema*, 3

asserts that 'cinema and videography can constitute sites of resistance to the altericidal practices and numbing 'unreality-effect' of mainstream media'.[319] In other words, just as Aaron states that spectatorial engagement with war films and CNN reports lie at points on the same 'continuum of spectatorship', we must recognise that 'real' and 'unreal' spectacles of suffering can form critiques of each other.[320] In Saxton's discussion of films that contain both 'real' and 'unreal' spectacles of suffering (and so are relevant to *Redacted*, and impact on the other films discussed through their 'faking' of vernacular digital images and the style of global mass media) she states that more often than not, no attempt is made to integrate genuine or authentic images of suffering and pain into the narrative, and that this 'promotes reflective responses by enlisting us in acts of decoding and sense making'.[321] In other words, the 'Collateral damage' sequence, in its very de-contextualisation, impels us to examine the reasons for its placement in the film. This collision of the styles of news media and narrative film complicates our spectatorial encounter with the film and opens up a space to question our ethics of looking on at this film. Therefore, I shall now examine how *Redacted* may be offered up as divergent from the default settings of contemporary war films, and may even suggest a methodology for successfully resisting the privileging of white male victimhood.

It is clear in *Redacted* that there is an associative reason for including the 'collateral damage' images, in that, this is a film about the Iraq war, and these are genuine images from that war showing the violent effects of US neo-imperial aggression. However, their sudden appearance at the conclusion of the film is both shocking for what they contain and for the contrast achieved with the narrative element of the film preceding. A montage effect is achieved across the macro-level of editing, with the site of meaning production being the 'fault line'

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[319] Ibid.
[320] Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 122
[321] Ibid., 71

between the narrative section of the film, and the slide show of images that constitutes the 'collateral damage' section. The 'real' or 'authentic' nature of the images draws further attention to the narrative and stylistic strategies of the main body of the film and almost renders obscene the techniques deployed in reconstructing and 'faking' the various media sources which constitute the filmic text. In this sense, the film engages your emotional empathies and manipulates you into an alignment with the haunted, victimised US male subjectivities on display, and then submits you to a supreme moment of aesthetic reflexivity. As Saxton asserts, 'we are held account not only as witnesses to 'real' brutality but also to consenting viewers of pain staged for our entertainment'.[322]

In which case, there could be something problematic with *Redacted*, namely, that in occurring at the conclusion of the film, the 'collateral damage' sequence in seeking to undo and critique the spectatorial position inculcated by the film, actually reinforces it. The film contains ethical self-questions regarding the position of the film-maker, through projecting authorial presence, using pastiches of media forms, and critiquing cinematic history. However, the 'collateral damage' sequence troubles this ethic. This is because despite the multifarious media forms imitated, photo-journalism holds a different power, due to its reliance on still images, and the lack of complementary sensory information, such as sound. Aaron suggests, in discussing Susan Sontag's writings on photographs of atrocity,[323] that emotive reactions to images of atrocity and suffering disavow our potential responsibility for those images. Our externally displayed emotions and our emotive reactions are 'our bit' in the economy of spectatorship and visual culture; in a sense, we relinquish ethical investment by shedding tears.[324] By the same notion, the same sense of narcissistic altruism in the worthiness of watching anti-

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[322] Ibid., 74
[323] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004)
[324] Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship*, 117

authoritarian films is also the spectator's 'bit'. The emotional engagement and tactile intimacy of the film text that is supposed to draw us into ethical encounter with the other become merely the tools whereby one can emotionally invest in the film and then cast aside any culpability constructing and maintaining the spectacles of suffering contained within.

Redacted is perhaps unique in that rather than attempting to foster ethical spectatorial encounter through establishing a dialectic out of the 'impulse to turn away and the film's refusal to reveal all',[325] it very consciously almost reveals *too much*. The photographic images present the death of the non-Western 'other' in palpable and stark terms, it is a direct and literal encounter with pain and suffering. However, is it really the case that we are compelled to keep watching this montage of suffering because of the state of self-awareness invoked by the aesthetic reflexivity of these images, or because of their lack of narrative context one is forced to contemplate on the meanings created in the colliding of fictional and non-fictional images? In the end, despite the revulsion, the tears, the ethical awareness of culpability and responsibility, *we keep watching*.

The reason for this consistent, prolonged spectatorial engagement is to do with the pleasures of guilt and pain, in other words, our masochistic subjection to the film. As mentioned above, masochistic spectatorship assists with the emotional engagement necessary for ethical encounter through requiring a visceral and corporeal scenario of film-viewing. It forces immediate confrontation with the extremities of desire, pain, and empathic emotion, all through a highly sensational and affective medium that taps into the sensory nature of the body. Through masochistic spectatorship we experience a 'passion for loss of control'[326] and

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[325] Brian Bergen-Aurand, "Film/ethics." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7.4 (2009), 467
[326] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 56

hence are more readily manoeuvred into direct ethical spectatorial encounter and ready to accept the charges of culpability and guilt associated with this scenario. This is not to say we revel in or take pleasure from the actual guilt or shame. Rather, through a willingness to accept passivity and dissolution as part of film-watching, when power-sustaining fantasies of control are cast out by moments of aesthetic reflexivity, we can more readily accept a shift in perspective. This perspective shift is from an outward perception of suffering to an inward reflection on the interpellating strategies of film that sustained the pleasure of this perception. The result of this is to turn the excitations and visceral pleasures of masochistic spectatorship in on themselves into lambasting and disassembling the cultural processes whereby the suffering 'other' is objectified and marginalised in mainstream Western cinema. We accept this ethical challenge and acknowledge our culpability in maintaining and preserving the power of these images. Instead of licensing them as acceptable through watching and doing nothing, or more accurately, feeling something, then doing nothing, we should feel, internalise, then turn the radically destructive and dangerous potential of these pleasures towards the devastation of our self-indulgent enjoyment of these films and our 'narcissistic altruism'. Therefore, our spectatorial position is defined by our internal resistance to the illicit pleasures and excitations we have comfortably subscribed to and then been critically jolted into self-awareness of the true nature of these pleasures by the aesthetic reflexivity and narrative techniques of the films under discussion.

Contemporary spectatorship of war films, thrillers, horror films, melodramas and the like may be typified by a masochistic relationship to image and narrative, but the embodied cinematic affects of this mode of spectatorship are ultimately thrown into crisis by moments of ethical spectatorial encounter. Ethical calls to arms invoke guilt and shame at having consented to the

abject pleasures of witnessing suffering, and revelling in the aesthetic values and narrative content of such spectacles. Therefore, cinematic strategies that call to attention the process of watching a film, or take the viewer into a reflexive zone away from immersion in the narrative, to an extent, interrupt the states of crisis and unfixity the spectator finds oneself in whislt consuming radical visual pleasures of pain and violence. In short, to highlight a film's constructed nature is to disturb masochistic spectatorship of that film. This is precisely what ethical reflexivity entails. Ethical reflexivity encourages a departure from the excitations, culminations and embodied pleasures of watching films, and in a sense, sublimates the transgressive in favour of fixity and coherency.

This is not a complete casting out of masochistic spectatorship though, more a re-configuring of it. The reconfiguration occurs through a shift in our relationship to the illicit pleasures of looking on at suffering and violence. Instead of taking pleasure in these images because they release us from the charade and artifice of the solidity and fixity of patriarchal power, we acknowledge the part that pleasure plays in licensing and masking our complicity in the suffering of the 'other'. We can also acknowledge that as privileged, Western consumers of spectacles of suffering, there is a 'decadence' to this position. In other words, through critical reflection on our relationship to spectacles of suffering, we can call attention to the deceitful disavowal of pleasure that occurs in manufacturing ethical spectatorship.

What this means is that despite the spectator potentially empathising with the white male victims in war on terror films, we can deny that we are empathising for the purposes of taking on and acting out our own versions of this victimhood. This can be achieved through basically pointing at damaged characters and internally whispering "no, it is *their* pain, confusion,

trauma, not mine". This disavowal allows the pleasures of chaos and pain in cinematic and spectatorship to continue. The alternative however, is to use the reconfigured masochistic spectatorship outlined here in order to navigate the unexplored, unanchored, un-defined realm of ethical and moral responsibility that lies beyond disavowal. The pleasures of pain and guilt become a question of profound moral engagement rather than simply the tactile and textual sensations of the cinematic body. As Steven Shaviro states, 'change can take place only at the strange and ambiguous boundary between inside and outside, between complicity and resistance.'[327]

As such, masochism is essential to ethical spectatorship. The pleasure of pain and the illicit, unacknowledged sensory excitations of film watching are necessary ingredients for the self-consciousness of ethical encounter. In this context, masochism transforms from being a potential source of conservative, recuperative agency, whereby the US self-image as victim is internalised and reconfigured, to a potent weapon against the altericidal practices of dominant Hollywood and US visual culture's representational regimes. To be bound to a scene of suffering, oscillating between closure and deferral, mastery and submission, exposes the dynamics of subordination and domination that typify Hollywood's depiction of the other and segregation of the spectator from radical, transformative narratives. It also ensures that reflexivity does not descend into narcissistic solipsism; the frenzy of the holding off of consummation means that the spectator is always drawn to look *outwards* to where the source of this consummation lies, inevitably in the alterity offered up in these ethical encounters. *Redacted* delivers precisely this through its 'Collateral damage' montage by swiftly turning our empathy with the damaged white male into ethical reflection on images of suffering and violence. It is a blunt, but admirable contrast, one that contains no disavowals, no silences, no

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[327] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 57

gaps, just unadulterated confrontation with dominated other, in the form of his or her disabused and shattered body.

Conclusions: War on terror films and neo-liberal spectatorship

Finally, returning to the raft of moral but unethical films discussed in this chapter, I believe it is not enough to point out the superficiality and clumsiness of war on terror films' accusations and imprecations of passive spectatorial guilt in the wake of US neo-imperial strategic violence. Why specifically do these films go to such lengths to point the finger at us, the audience? The simple answer is neo-liberalism.

As mentioned in the Introduction, neo-liberalism is a normative political theory that commits to the primacy of the state, the capitalist market, and the status quo.[328] It asserts the supremacy of market freedom and private enterprise over state intervention and control, espouses an inherent ideological linkage between capitalism and democracy, and consistently stresses the sovereignty of the individual in determining their economic and physical health. It is this last point that is the most relevant here. Neo-liberalism asserts a rampant individualism and sublimates cultural, environmental, or societal factors in determining social mobility. Instead, it privileges an account of individual agency, where, for example, poverty becomes a question of "not working hard", rather than economic climate, poor state provision of education, or privatization and out-sourcing of welfare resources.

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[328] Steven L. Lamy, "Contemporary mainstream approaches: neo-realism and neo-liberalism" *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (2ⁿᵈ Edition), ed. John Baylis and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 182

So, with the accusatory fingers of Hollywood pointing at war on terror film audiences, we see a manifestation of this neo-liberal ideology. This is because we see no cultural or social exploration or interrogation of the passive production of public consent for the war on terror, but rather an assignment of guilt and responsibility to the individuated contemporary western spectator. In addition, reflection on this guilt and responsibility by the spectator reinforces this individualism, since an internalised self-regard is privileged. Scrutiny of the self prevails over scrutiny of the political and social conditions that engendered the exceptionalism of the white US male victim. Ethical culpability and reflexive interrogation of one's relationship to images of suffering and catastrophe are reconfigured as expressions of the neo-liberal subject's de-socialised and de-cultured agency. Critical reflection, ethical encounter and irreducible alterity is all bypassed in favour of stressing the individual's liability. This is no longer about interaction with the other calling into question the self's sovereignty, or critiquing difference through the lens of reflexivity, this is about bolstering this sovereignty, this omnipotent agency, swelling the self-importance of individual responsibility to the exclusion of the state, the social, and the cultural.

The superficial impression of ethical encounter some of the war on terror films invokes stops short of interrogation and critical reflexivity. Accordingly, the exceptionalism and neo-liberalism on which US foreign policy has been based becomes both the political effect of blaming the individuated responsibility of contemporary western spectators, and also its motivating factor. This means that the doctrine of 'pre-emptive war', 'resource capture' and stabilising 'interventions' (all essentially euphemisms for neo-imperialistic violence and occupation) that defines current US foreign policy is bolstered by reinforcing the neo-liberal precepts of individual responsibility. Our recruitment to this politics is disguised by draping it

in the veils of liberal moral hand-wringing for standing by whilst war was consented to, and then leaving all the films with ambiguous doleful endings. Since we have been furnished with the political agency by which to assert our neo-liberal sense of sovereignty, in the light of these doleful endings is (once one is acculturated to the neo-liberal concepts seeded in these films), the only logical conclusion can be that a robust and belligerent foreign policy is the only way out of this "ethical" and political mire. In accepting our charges of being passive spectators to catastrophe and suffering, we accept that we are individually responsible, and hence are already a long way towards accepting a neo-liberal account of subjectivity and personal and social agency. The implied trajectory, especially in *Lions for Lambs* in which enlisting is presented as a supreme moral (but not ethical) interrogation of one's political stance on US international relations, and in *In The Valley of Elah* in which the closing image is of the US flag hung upside down as a "distress signal", is that rescue and recuperation can be achieved through military strength and engagement with US exceptionalism uncritically, on its own terms. In *Redacted*, with its commitment to depicting multifarious media formats, narrative perspectives, and its jolting concluding photo-journalistic montage, we are always assured of a point of contact by which one is made self-aware as the spectator of a film. The film may contain a blatant direct address to the audience which condemns spectatorial passivity, and may also ultimately stress the primacy of white male victimhood, but it is the only narrative film that has come out of US cinema that asks serious questions of our relationship to images of catastrophe and suffering, and is the only one that attempts de-familiarisation techniques that do not chime with the conventionally avant garde techniques of cinematic depiction that dominate representation these days (e.g. shaky hand-held camera work, rapid editing, compulsive meaningless alterations in film-stock, contrast, colouring, and montage sound effects). As such it is the only film that drags spectators into the 'guilt zone'

but persists in enacting encounter with alterity and questioning the sovereignty of the viewing subject through unconventional narrative and stylistic techniques.

This is why it is now more important than ever that our relationship to images of suffering and catastrophe, whether they be real or fictional, ethical or unethical, authentic or inauthentic, is critiqued. The precepts of economic liberalization, privatization, and deregulation that define neo-liberalism are perilous to democracy. Ethical masochistic spectatorship can go some way to resisting the privatization and colonisation of individuated liberal subjectivity by these precepts and can contribute to a rejection of self-regarding "responsibility", and assert the primacy of our responsibility to the other. In privileging "ethical" self-regard over genuine contact with, and responsibility for, the other, we are not only drenched in the blood of the other, but also in the blood spilt in the name of the neo-imperial and violent project of US foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

All the films in this thesis deploy complex strategies but induce simple and readily accessible pleasures in order to mask, disavow or displace the operations of US neo-imperialism. This thesis has therefore narrated the development of these strategies over the last twenty years in Hollywood's engagement with contemporary conflicts. The two basic principles of a compelling aesthetics of masochism, and the primacy and spectacularisation of white US male victimhood are common throughout most of these films. Hence, these two principles are the twin cornerstones from which the strategies of disavowal are built.

We have seen in these analyses that the white male as victim, especially when these white males are embodiments of the post-1980s "new man", is offered up as an object of spectatorial empathy. This, when allied to the compelling aesthetics of masochism deployed in films such as *The Jacket* and *The Manchurian Candidate*, serves to mask the imperialist and exceptionalist precepts on which US national identity and cultural authority is predicated. In other films, such as *Courage Under Fire*, constructions of US culture as "innocent" are deployed in order to fuel this masking. The use of "blank" everyman characters assist in attracting audience empathy, since these characters become ciphers onto which can be projected spectator fantasies, desires, emotional linkages.

The contemporary war film offers up fantasies of imperilled male psychologies and then projects these traumatic (or "weak"/"victimised") states into the white domestic and suburban space of the US. Accordingly this enables identification with the damaged male, and all his attendant narratives of dispossession, innocence, and victimhood, and then doubles and

reinforces this identification by threatening the sanctity and security of the US homeland. US geopolitical and strategic expansionism in distant regions and the violence and imperialism this entails, is internalised and figured as invasive and endangering of domestic space. This domestic space is always characterised as white, hetero-normative, and patriarchal. Black masculinity and black male psychological pain is made subordinate to the glorification of white male pain and death in these films. The effect of this is to re-write the colonial racism that shaped formative white US subjectivity as a difference-eliding project for shoring up contemporary US neo-imperialism.

Another strategy for doubling and reinforcing identification with the damaged white male body is through figuring the male as almost "hysterical", such as in *Jarhead*, in which we witness the disenfranchisement of the soldier from his basic function as a dispenser and object of violence. Additionally, the figuring of the US soldier as representative of the "humanitarian" project of US foreign policy, renders him as compulsively repeating and re-enacting desires to insert his body into war-zones, stressing this moral "goodness" as innate and essentially American. The effect of this is to align the masochistic pleasures of pain inherent in military subjectivity with recuperative forces of "spectatorial re-armament", where we are distracted from the radical potential of these pleasures, and instead directed towards figuring this repetition compulsion as part of a moral project of compassionate foreign policy. These strategies provide opportunities to empathise with, and crucially adopt, the spectatorial subjectivity of the damaged or victimised white male, to the effect of masking the effects of US imperialism on the other, that is, the colonised people.

More recent films, such as *Redacted, In the Valley of Elah*, and *Lions for Lambs*, attempt to address the questions of spectatorial passivity and culpability that surround the question of our vernacular engagement with global media, and mass visual culture in the context of war. However, this attempted critique of spectatorial culpability, and the scenario of looking on at the suffering of others, in itself becomes a technique by which to circumvent the issues of cultural and geopolitical imperialism that underpin representation of the damaged male in contemporary war films. When regimes of emotivity and the familiarity of Hollywood is involved, then any reflexivity present in the film merely provokes an acknowledgment or awareness of the spectatorial position of looking on. Accordingly, "liberal" spectatorship exists in a decadent scenario, able to recognise its destructive and accountable position, but without facing up to the questions of alterity and the turn away from the sovereignty of the self that true ethical spectatorship should entail. It is a narcissistic and ostentatious halfway house between complicity and culpability and can ironically feed the white male victim trope through spectators adopting a "victimised" subjectivity whereby they "feel" the palpable effects of the burden of their accountability. This ends up affirming the "turn to the self" inherent in neo-liberal subjectivity, to the detriment of the social world of contact with the other and alterity bound up in our *true* accountability to the representation and production of suffering in visual culture. The "safeties" of a "liberal" halfway house of reflexivity can work through any culpability we may possess through the ostentation and vanity bound up in our guilt, and the regimes of emotivity embodied in our engagement with the film narratives.

The Hurt Locker: You don't have to be a victim to watch this film. But it helps

The Hurt Locker (Katherine Bigelow, 2009) won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2010. For all the reasons outlined in this thesis, it should not be surprising that this film

triumphed. This is because it depicts the ingrained nature of war in the bodies and psychologies of the soldiers, offers up visceral masochistic pleasures located in the "will it/won't it explode" tensions of bomb disposal, and furthermore portrays the US soldier as a moral or humanitarian force. The camera locates us within the physical space of the bomb disposal suit and resultantly the spectator shares his or her point of view and sense of claustrophobic danger with the US soldier. We are stylistically stationed in an immediate encounter with the anxieties, tensions, and ruination that define contemporary US white male subjectivity. In other words, the masochistic aesthetics of contemporary war films, in a way, reach their apotheosis in the breathless, dank confines of the bomb disposal suit, and our placement within this scenario is the ultimate implication of our victimhood, imperilment and masochistic subjectivity as spectators of this war, shared with the US soldier.

Marilyn Young has stated that in *The Hurt Locker* 'Americans are the targets of bombs rather than the ones who drop the bombs' and that the film depicts 'the Iraqi enemy' as 'inhuman' through 'rigging the tortured bodies of boys with explosives or locking a possibly unwilling man into a suicide bomb vest.'[329] The superior morality of the Americans is stressed, with, as mentioned previously, this morality not being born of ethical accountability, but an inherent, almost tragic desire to re-enter and re-enact, to sublimate the body to the machinery of US imperialism. This design for living is encapsulated in the lingering words "war is a drug" that are emphasised in the film's epigraph.

The success of Bigelow's film is also partly the culmination of the in-between, trans-national, multi-lateral nature of contemporary cinema, and continues in a trend of "middlebrow" or

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[329] Marilyn Young, "*The Hurt Locker*: War as a Video Game." *Perspectives on History*. 19 Nov. 2009, 10 Jun. 2010 <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2009/0911/0911fil2.cfm>

"indiewood" films succeeding at the Academy Awards (for example, *American Beauty* in 1999, *Crash* in 2005, and *No Country for Old Men* in 2007), where textual sophistication masks narrative and ideological recuperation and conservatism. Hence, it could be the case that this success is part of a broader trend of cinematic tendencies beyond the politics of victimised subjectivity and the attempted re-positioning of American national identity as "moral" or "humanitarian". The aesthetic, industrial and cultural arenas of film spectatorship and the self-consciousness of the consumption of film all play a part too.

Sergeant James is the compelling central character in *The Hurt Locker*. He assumes command of a bomb disposal unit after the former Sergeant of the unit is killed in action. James is depicted as a maverick, and is even described, face-to-face by one of his commanding officers as a "cowboy". His southern accent, working class coding (he is described as a "redneck" by another character), and the desert setting of the film lend this "cowboy" label connotations of the frontier. The film therefore posits James as embodying the "wild west" and therefore, Westwards expansion, and the conquest and dominium of geographical space and the other. However, this colonial agency is masked courtesy of his characterisation and the mythologizing power of his brand of masculinity (regeneration through violence embodied in the questing, self-reliant man).

His characterisation and masculinity is presented and reinforced through numerous bomb disposal scenes in which pointedly James casts off his protective gear, recklessly ambles back to the scene of an unexploded bomb, or ignores communications with his team. An example of this is a tense scene in which he attempts to defuse a car bomb in an urban street. His team cover the surrounding streets and overlooking balconies with their weapons, and radio James

with increasingly urgent messages urging him to abandon the disarming operation, fearing for the unit's safety. However, James is presented as completely oblivious to the threat of both their "sitting duck" position, and the complexity and danger posed by the heavily booby-trapped car bomb. He, in contrast, seems more concerned with unlocking the puzzle posed by the car bomb as if it is an elaborate technical game. His manner of going about the disposal process is also presented as slightly comical, or blasé, since he tosses wires, machine components, and tools ridiculously about, all the while muttering light-heartedly to himself. Apart from his unconventional vocational processes, he is also militarily depicted as non-conformist, purposefully slipping out of his base at night to perform an illicit, but personal operation.

It is this last action that reinforces the casting of the US as moral and humanitarian. This is a position that is already inculcated by the focussing on the bomb disposal unit as agents of preventing harm and assisting in protecting civilians. James forms a bond of sorts with a young boy who hawks bootleg pornographic DVDs at the market stall outside the military base. The Sergeant is touched by the boy's effrontery and enthusiasm, and plays an impromptu game of football with him. The boy subsequently disappears, and James, in the course of a further bomb disposal mission encounters, in a dilapidated, bombed out building, what looks like the boy's corpse laid out on a table, skin covered in large stitched wounds, his body stuffed with explosives. James recoils in horror and is clearly traumatised and deeply affected by this scene. This "body-bomb" throws him into crisis due to the sheer physical repulsiveness of this abject object presented to him, but also, it is made clear that his emotional connection with the boy reinforces his horror. Hence, James's personal concern is centralised and highlighted. We witness his trauma and visceral disgust, and then we are

drawn into his emotive desire for vengeance and restitution, since we follow him in his illicit movements through the urban streets at night attempting to track down the boy's family and home, in black clothes, gun in hand. James then embodies humanitarian concern and vengeful morality refracted through the lens of US emotional damage and visceral sickness.

The film offers up a parable of recuperated and disingenuous ethical encounter. It is only through emotional connection to an innocent yet defiled body (both in the sense of his mutilation, and his association with bootleg adult DVDs) that US humanitarianism becomes specifically linked to the other of the occupied peoples. This fleeting connection inculcated by the emotivity of the child victim, and James's subjective tethering to him, is used as a reason for justifying vengeful vigilante action, justifying his maverick status and sanctifying the moral supremacy of individualism and unchecked dissident violence. This serves in turn to endorse the portrayal of US neo-imperialism as a moral, humanitarian force that rides the cultural power and agency of the deep mythological associations it possesses with vigilante action, regeneration through violence, and the frontier.

The film's conclusion reinforces these associations by fortifying further associations with the white US male as victim. Towards the end of the film, James is depicted back home with his partner and child, and there are a few momentary, celebratory scenes which convey a certain serenity to domestic life. However, this is quickly troubled. James is also portrayed as distracted and uncomfortable and distanced from familial normality. In one disquieting yet strangely comical scene, in the course of supermarket shopping, James is instructed to choose some breakfast cereal. There then follows a static low angle, long shot which frames James standing bemused in the aisle, faced with a wall of various shapes and colours of cereal boxes

on the shelves. The message is very clear; James is not suited to domesticity and the familial and is alienated by conventional consumerism. Accordingly, the last scene of the film is a brief shot following James in his military gear, pack on back, walking purposefully towards a transporter plane, about to begin a new tour of duty. The message here is equally as clear; James is "addicted to war", and desires a seemingly endless repetition of the experience of war, wishing to recast himself into danger zones and scenarios of peril and ruination. The white US male as victim (emotionally in terms of his experiences in Iraq, and socially in terms of his alienation from domestic and consumerist normativity) is figured as a masochistic individual, this masochism entailing a desire to repeat and re-enact. This is not courtesy of trauma or as a symptom of damage, rather, trauma is reclaimed as a force that impels an inherent morality and humanitarianism, one that is tethered to notions of innocence and victimhood.

The Hurt Locker, therefore, seems to be a distillation of the major themes and tropes addressed in this thesis, apart from in two respects: it refuses to issue the ethical call to arms typical of other war on terror films, and does not specifically offer up a middle class, liberal subjectivity as a focalising point of entry into the film. Instead, courtesy of the "redneck cowboy" characterisation of James, US neo-imperialism is recuperated and reconfigured as a basic function of foundational myths of US masculine identity, such as regeneration through violence and vigilante action. The masochistic visceral pleasures of riding along with James and his ebullient self-endangerment, plus being allowed access to his traumatic crisis, signals an emotional engagement that reinforces white male victimhood rather than provoking ethical reflection. *The Hurt Locker*, therefore, signifies a breaking out into new territory whereby the emotional pain and rugged individualism intersect at the white working class male subject,

with his subsequent victimhood figured as authentic and possessing cultural agency. The film therefore effects a full circle when it comes to narratives of the white male victim through promoting not only James's emotional damage, but showcasing him as socially and culturally disenfranchised and alienated. It therefore offers up empathy through linking his disconnection with contemporary consumerism to an absurd scene (his cereal box bewilderment) we can mis-recognise ourselves in. The implication is that we as spectators adopt a similar position of alienation from late-capitalist consumerism, and in our bewildered recoiling from this we may cast ourselves as disenfranchised, damaged, and therefore also in need of the repeated pleasures of (a deceitfully labelled) humanitarian war. That *The Hurt Locker* won the Best Picture Academy Award, somehow shows that the public and critical appetite to consume and take on white male narratives of disabuse, self-endangerment and crisis, has been publicly applauded, and ceremonially sanctified.

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