

***Black Hawk Down* and the Silences of Ridley Scott's "Realism"**

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A telling moment occurs in the film *Black Hawk Down* (Bruckheimer & Scott, 2001)¹ when the "reliable" Shawn Nelson is literally struck deaf by the gunfire of his partner. Nelson can no longer hear his fellow American soldiers, their gunfire, or the screams of his dying enemies. Prior to losing his hearing, Nelson puts in a mouth protector, explaining that on his last mission, he almost bit off his tongue. Thus, Nelson ensures that he will be able to speak of any evil he hears, but, alas, he becomes deaf. Nelson's predicament somewhat parallels that of the audience of Ridley Scott's technically masterful film. Exposed to the depiction of an intense battle and immersed in a realistic rendering, one can hear only the immediacy of battle. Its deeper political implications have been silenced.

A saying laments that some can "See no evil; hear no evil." Where deafness falls, it becomes the role of art education to counter the silence and invoke the visual. In contrast, *Black Hawk Down* invokes a kind of deafness. The film is a triumph in the realistic portrayal of battle; however that triumph contributes to the film's problematic nature as an ideological text. Given the popularity of the film, art and art education need to unpack and explore the relationship between the film's realism and its ideological function.

Today, art education concerns itself with the broad mandate of "visual culture." "media," television, popular music, advertising, and, of course, film comprise an important part of visual culture and thereby are increasingly of concern to art education.

In the current period of conflict and global uncertainty, war films become important media texts for study and teaching in art education, both for what they say about war, nationalism, and the Other, and, especially for their silencing of these issues. "Analysis" is an important strand in art education, especially in its concern to identify the function of media art in society because such art serves to legitimate ideological positions, which, in turn, legitimate interest positions. This paper offers some "ways in" to discuss one media text, the film *Black Hawk Down*, with students, by focusing on the film's social function, especially the silencing character of that function. *Black Hawk Down* is a realistic war picture depicting the experiences of US soldiers downed in a hostile section of Mogadishu in October 1993, but this film's very realism and focus on the soldiers' experiences enable the film to function as a hegemonic text, silencing voices critical of the US's real political and economic interest in its purportedly "humanitarian" Somali involvement.

Black Hawk Down

Black Hawk Down is about a group of vastly outnumbered American soldiers fending off an attack from hostile Somalis. The film is based upon actual events. In an introductory intertitle, we are told that, in Somalia in 1992, many years of clan warfare are causing "famine on a biblical scale," in which "300,000 civilians die of starvation." Mohamed Farrah Aidid is the most powerful warlord and rules the capital, Mogadishu. Aidid seizes international food shipments and uses hunger as a weapon. Consequently, 20,000 U.S. Marines are sent to Somalia to ensure the delivery of food and the restoration of order. In April 1993, after the Marines withdraw, Aidid "declares war on the remaining UN peacekeepers." The following June, Aidid's militia slaughters 24 Pakistani soldiers and begins targeting Americans. US Delta Force, Army Rangers and the 160th SOAR are sent to Mogadishu in August to remove Aidid and restore order. The main action begins

six weeks into the three-week mission, as Washington grows impatient. The US forces who enter Aidid's secured part of the city to capture some of his high-ranking associates meet strong resistance from the militia and, it appears, most of the citizens of Mogadishu. Two helicopters are shot down, and the American troops caught in hostile territory must hold off the enemy until they can escape the following morning.

After the intertitle rendering of the back-story, the narrative continues. Hungry people storm a food shipment delivery, but Aidid's militia kills the civilians and claims the food for Aidid. (US forces witness this violence from a helicopter and request of their operational commanders that the observing forces be permitted to intervene but are told that such an action is outside the scope of their UN mission mandate.) US forces capture an important arms supplier of Aidid's. The US commanders plan a raid to capture several of Aidid's top officials. Several of the central characters of the story are introduced: the idealistic Eversmann, the experienced "Hoot," the former clerk Grimes, the uptight Captain Steele, the fatherly General Garrison, and the weathered but sardonic Lt. Colonel McKnight. The plan for the mission is to enter an Aidid stronghold, secure a parameter, capture some officials, and return to base. The estimated time to complete the mission is 30 minutes. US forces fly and drive into the hostile territory and capture and begin to load their prisoners. The plan goes awry when a soldier falls from a helicopter, placing an injured man on the ground. Soon a chopper is downed, and then another. Slowly, the soldiers gather at the second crash site with many wounded among them. Night falls, and US helicopters provide air support by firing upon militia surrounding the crash site. Come morning, with the assistance of a Pakistani armored division, the US forces escape to the safe zone of the Pakistani stadium. Some soldiers head back out for others remaining behind. In a closing intertitle sequence, we learn that "During the raid

over 1000 Somalis died and 19 American soldiers lost their lives" (Bruckheimer, & Scott, 2001) and that after Aidid is eventually killed, Garrison retires immediately.

The film is based upon the book *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* by Mark Bowden (1999). This is a journalistic account of the events, the longest continuous firefight for American forces since Vietnam. Bowden employed a variety of sources from interviews, army records, and audio and videotapes to recount the story.

Criticism of the film characterizes it as excelling at surface realism, but not depth. Strick (2002) applauds (Ridley) Scott's direction, technical skill, and use of cinematography, but criticizes the film's bias and argues that Scott makes little effort to explain the fierceness of the Somalis, characterizing them as fanatical. Jacobson (2002) contends that *Black Hawk Down* both serves to rehabilitate the U.S. military in the post-Vietnam era and to depict America's confusion about its global role, especially in the early years after the Cold War. Coatney (2002) claims the film is not a "hoard of savages" movie like *Zulu* (1964) or *Dark of the Sun* (1968) (AKA *The Mercenaries*). Coatney sees it as a tribute to the courage and devotion of US forces and notes that the Department of Defense's Office of Public Affairs praised the film for its historical accuracy. Coatney acknowledges that the movie leaves uncertainties about why the Mogadishu battle happened and if it could happen again in face of US unilateralism and even arrogance. Coatney describes Somalia as a mini-Vietnam because the US overestimated the effect of its technology and power in face of indigenous pride and defiance, and was confused about its mission. Showalter (2002) argues that the Somalis are treated with respect in the film, as warriors not targets, and as better allies than enemies.

The Somali Crisis

Somalia has a thousands-year-old history. Somalia was known to Egyptians, and Somalis met with Chinese merchants in the tenth and fourteenth centuries. The Somalis' land was known to Greek merchants and medieval Arab traders. By the 1700s, Somalis had developed toward their present way of life, based upon pastoral nomadism and Islam (Library of Congress, 2003).

In colonial times from around 1891 to 1960, the Somali people were divided into five mini-Somalilands: British (in the north-central region); French (in the east and southeast); Italian (in the south); Ethiopian Somaliland (the Ogaden); and, what eventually became known as Kenya's Northern Frontier District (NFD). The Italian and British Somalilands were combined into the Somali Republic in 1960. From that time until 1969, the Republic underwent territorial disputes with Ethiopia and Kenya, but regularly elected governments. Public displeasure ensued after rigged elections in 1969, and consequently, Major General Mahammad Siad Barre took power in a bloodless coup on October 21, 1969. Siad Barre ran an oppressive military dictatorship for the following 21 years, playing off clan against clan in bloody conflict (Library of Congress, 2003).

The regime ended 1991 as the Somali state collapsed and was replaced by armed clan militias fighting for control (Library of Congress, 2003). After the Somali Republic collapsed, Somaliland withdrew from the Union with Somalia (Somaliland Mission, 2000). Somaliland has been comparatively stable in the south but has not been recognized by foreign governments. In 1993, the UN enacted a two-year humanitarian drive mainly in the south, but when, after much difficulty, the international body left in 1995, Somalia was still in disarray (Yahoo! Inc., 2002).

Jimmy Carter's Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program monitored events during the UN troop presence in Somalia. Carter

urged the UN to limit its operations to a humanitarian focus rather than to try to impose law and order. General Mohamed Farah Aidid wrote to Carter, asking him to mediate Aidid's conflict with the UN peacekeeping forces. Carter declined the request but communicated to UN officials Aidid's request to have an independent commission to investigate the Mogadishu events. Carter endorsed the idea of the commission. In October 1993, Carter urged the release of a downed helicopter pilot, Michael Durant, who was being held as Aidid's hostage. Durant was eventually released a week later (Carter Center, The, 2002).

The events on which *Black Hawk Down* is based occurred in the October 3, 1993 battle in Mogadishu between the U.S. Army's Rangers and Delta Force, and Somali men, women and children, whose armaments included automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades. The US mission started out as an effort to capture some of Aidid's associates and turned into a 17-hour firefight (PBS Online, & WGBH/Frontline, 1998).

Political Context of the Film's Release

The context of *Black Hawk Down*'s release found the film fitting well with and benefiting from the political mood of the time, which strongly advocated support for US President Bush, activities of American troops, and support for war as a litmus test for patriotism. *Black Hawk Down* premiered December 18, 2001 and had limited release on December 28, 2001 in Los Angeles and New York for Oscar consideration. The film was widely released in the US, Canada, and the UK on January 18, 2002 (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2003b).

Black Hawk Down's wide-release came two days shy of the one-year anniversary of Bush's inauguration as president and was one of the first big war movies of the Bush era. Like the war films of the preceding Republican administrations of Reagan and Bush Sr., such as of the *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* series, which are reactionary,

politically noxious pieces positioned as redemptive myths in America's post-Vietnam spiritual "recovery," *Black Hawk Down* glorifies American soldiers. As well, the film criticizes the Clinton policy that got the troops into Somalia and then the edict that brought them out again.

The picture opened to generally lavish praise. It was nominated for Academy Awards for director, cinematography, sound, and editing. It eventually won Oscars for both for sound and editing. The trailer was in wide exhibition leading up to January 18. Three things were noteworthy about the advertisement. It featured the song "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" by Bob Dylan, and it indicated that the film was directed by Ridley Scott and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer. Given that the movie features a song by the artist who arguably defined the ethos of 60s protest with "The Times They Are A-Changin'," it surely seemed before its release to be an anti-war picture. Moreover, if Scott was at the helm, *Black Hawk Down* was a quality film. What did not match, however, was the presence of Bruckheimer, who, while he has produced some interesting films,² generally produces loud, reactionary, and unreflective spectacles.³ Bruckheimer has also produced the patriotic, "realist" war television show *Profiles from the Front Line* (2003).

In January 2001, the US was in the midst of a military conflict: in the post-9/11 "War on Terror," the US had been bombing Afghanistan since October 8, 2001, and American forces had been there on the ground since at least November, working with members of the Northern Alliance to topple the Taliban regime for harboring *Al Quaida*. Some people spoke against the war, but their voices were generally shouted down by predominantly favorable war coverage in the media. George W. Bush was riding very high in polled job-approval ratings for his handling of the post 9/11 crises and his identification and execution of the "War on Terror."

After America's defeat in Vietnam, military strategists gave new meaning to the idea of "the war at home." They now believe that 1960s protest combined with news coverage of the Vietnam War to destabilize

political support for it and contribute to the US withdrawal. As result, public opinion is carefully managed in contemporary wars by allowing the media only highly structured and favorable "access" to conflicts. Correlated with this management of opinion, the post-9/11 "war on terror" engendered the emergence of a type of patriotism in which support for the President, the troops, and the "War on Terror" became crucial.

Ridley Scott's Aesthetic

Ridley Scott's film aesthetic in general tends toward gritty and realistic representation of violent conflicts. Scott has directed some of the most influential Hollywood films of the past 25 years, including *Alien* (1979) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991). He has also directed perhaps the most discussed (at least in Academia) Hollywood film of that period, *Blade Runner* (1982). In addition, Scott had directed, at the time of *Black Hawk Down*'s release, *The Duellists* (1977), *Legend* (1985), *Someone to Watch Over Me* (1987), *Black Rain* (1989), *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), *White Squall* (1996), *G.I. Jane* (1997), *Gladiator* (2000), and *Hannibal* (2001). He has also directed many television commercials, including the famous "1984" commercial, which introduced the Apple Macintosh during 1984 Super Bowl halftime (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2003a).

Scott is known for interesting portrayals of women. *Alien* (1979) featured the strong, independent, and apparently childless Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in a life or death battle with a newly born but lethal alien, suggesting an anxiety about motherhood, with a cat (an obvious trope for female sexuality) often nearby, seemingly to provide terrifying shock-effects, jumping out just when the audience expects the alien. *Thelma and Louise* (1991) depicts two women (Gena Davis and Susan Sarandon), who are abused and misunderstood by men and then fight back and become outlaws fleeing the police. *G.I. Jane* (1997) is about a woman (Demi Moore) who enters the brutal and demanding Navy Seal training program to struggle against chauvinism from her

colleagues, crawling through the mud all the way up to those at the highest levels of political power. Moore shaves her head, develops hard muscles, and comes to embody the warrior ethos.

Scott's films are also powerfully visual. Leonard Maltin wrote that Scott's "artistic signature is an elaborate visual style, developed through years of experience as set designer and director of TV commercials. Scott studied art and film at the Royal College of Art in London before landing work as a set designer for the BBC" (Internet Movie Database, Inc., 2003a).

From early on in his career, Scott developed an aesthetic of grime, sweat, and dirtiness. *Alien* developed the idea that working in outer space could be dirty and sweaty, unlike work in the antiseptic portrayals of 1950s and 60s science fiction films and even their antithesis, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Particularly in the famous garbage compactor scene, George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) showed that the interior of a spacecraft could be dirty. However, *Alien* significantly advanced the suggestion that working on a spacecraft is dirty and sweaty, dark, dank, cramped, messy, and uncomfortable. Similarly, *Blade Runner* depicts a futuristic Los Angeles as a chaotic assemblage of advertising, traffic, rain, and darkness.

Scott is in slightly different territory in *Black Hawk Down* from that in which he usually treads. Unlike most of his other films, *Black Hawk Down* not only has no strong female character, but it has no major female characters. However, the closing credit sequence reveals that Scott dedicated the picture to his mother, who had passed away in 2001.

Otherwise, *Black Hawk Down* very much keeps with Scott's practice of the gritty, vivid representation of violence. The opening historical/back-story exposition sequences are presented by using a sort of blue filter, which distinguishes them from the film's main action. To present it, Scott uses a grainy, bleached-out mise-en-scène, which

suggests the heat, discomfort, and "foreign-ness" of the setting for the US personnel. Scott also applies techniques by which flying lumps of dirt and debris can be visually articulated as bullets fly and the battle ensues. Action scenes also eschew smooth dolly movements in favor of shaky, hand-held camera perspectives. These techniques situate the viewer as though amidst the action. A perspective of predictable stability and distance is eliminated to create a sense of battlefield realism.

Of course, hand-held camera techniques are not new, for Hollywood directors have been borrowing them from their European colleagues for some time. Such methods were even used with great success in the early 1980s television series *Hill Street Blues*. Moreover, Stephen Spielberg developed the kind of battlefield aesthetic employed in *Black Hawk Down* in his 1999 *Saving Private Ryan*. However, Scott updates the vision. The subtitle of Mark Bowden's book, which formed the basis of *Black Hawk Down* is "A Story of Modern War." Scott's contribution both with and to these techniques is to bring them to a more modern context than *Ryan's* closing days of World War II.

Black Hawk Down's realism extends beyond the form of the aesthetic to its content, the images Scott shows. Viewing the film is a palpable, visceral experience. We see blood, partly severed thumbs, a dismembered hand with the watch still on the wrist, rocket-propelled grenades rushing toward the viewers' point of view, and dirt, sweat, and smoke.

As the soldiers fly in helicopters toward Mogadishu to undertake their mission, they fly through thick, black smoke. We are told that its visually impenetrable billows are from burning tires, set ablaze to warn the militia of the troops' approach. The choppers enter the spewing discharge and can see nothing except the immediacy of their predicament. This scene is realistic to be sure, but it also says something about one function of the realism: that of being a mechanism of

diversion from the historical and political dimension of the situation. The realist aesthetic of the film reflects its rhetorical position concerning the experiences of the soldiers on the front line. The assumption is that to the men in the field, in the heat of combat and full exercise of courage, politics is irrelevant, and this film is to portray these men and their experiences.

This point becomes explicit in a conversation between Matt Eversmann (played by Josh Hartnett) and Norm 'Hoot' Gibson (played by Eric Bana). This important exchange, bearing the heavy weight of authorial sanction, occurs near the beginning of the film, before the US forces enter Mogadishu for their mission:

Eversmann: "You don't think we should be here."

Hoot: "You know what I think? It don't really matter what I think. Once that first bullet goes by your head, politics and all that shit just goes right out the window." (Bruckheimer & Scott, 2001) *Ostensibly, Black Hawk Down is not concerned with that which "goes out the window."*

A Silence

The tagline for Scott's 1979 *Alien* is "In space no one can hear you scream," which suggests something of the silencing of the Somali screams in *Black Hawk Down*. At the end of *Black Hawk Down*, white text on a black background laments: "During the raid over 1000 Somalis died and 19 American soldiers lost their lives" (Bruckheimer, & Scott, 2001). Clearly, something is not being said in these numbers, a ratio of 50:1. To the 19 US soldiers who died, the battle called for the ultimate sacrifice. However, an important aspect nuance of the conflict is not shown after the US forces fly through the black smoke into battle. When the smoke clears and the fatality outcome is 50:1, the courageous battle shown on screen is, in fact, revealed to have been a slaughter. However, the fact of the US slaughter of the Somalis is not articulated through

the American perspective of Scott's realism. The black smoke of Mogadishu gets into our eyes.

Moreover, in *Black Hawk Down*, more than just the smoke of burning tires is blindingly black. The predominantly white US personnel have their names emblazoned on their helmets. Although the US military no longer employs that practice, the American soldiers in the film have clear identities. The Somalis, in contrast, are nameless and indistinguishably faceless—a sea of hostile blackness. In terms of identity and individual humanity, the Somalis' characterization is similar to the pungent smoke through which the US soldiers fly: both blind us to the realities of the battle.

We see the US soldiers fighting practically the entire population, which is armed with rocks, hand guns, automatic weapons, vehicle-mounted machine guns, grenade launchers and rockets. Less attention is paid to the US's armored personnel carriers, helicopters, and satellite surveillance and communication systems, commanded by a central operations center.

Colonial Wars

Black Hawk Down depicts a Western power with great resources and highly sophisticated technology and weaponry fighting a vastly out-numbering African force. This element renders *Black Hawk Down* similar to accounts of 19th- and early 20th- century colonial wars. D.R. Headrick's⁴ *Tools of Empire* (1981) argues that European technology helped create the conditions for subsequent colonial domination. *Tools* reinterprets the "new imperialism" and shows that an important element of 19th-century European conquests in Asia and Africa was technological advances. These advances, such as steam-powered river gunboats, quinine prophylaxis, rapid-firing rifles, steamships, submarine cables, and railroads, gave Europeans power over both non-European peoples and natural obstacles (Headrick, 1981). The book also provides accounts of colonial wars in Africa, in which the colonial

power's military technology was responsible for the slaughter of the African people, whose pain was silenced.

So confident were European statesmen in the ability of their forces to overcome African resistance, that in the 1870s and 80s, the statesmen "drew lines on maps of the continent to indicate where their future conquests would lie (117). General Wolseley, with 6,500 men "armed with rifles, Gatling guns, and 7-pounder field artillery" (117), defeated the Ashanti kingdoms in 1873-74. Similarly, the French, using a 1400-man French force armed with Gras-Kropatcheks, defeated the Senegalese ruler Mahmadou Lamine, whose forces were armed with spears, Dane guns, and poisoned arrows.

In the 1890s, European forces become even more overwhelmingly powerful with the addition of Maxim guns and quick-firing light artillery to their arsenal, weapons that turned "battles into massacres or routs" (117). In 1891, a French unit of 300 men used 25,000 rounds of ammunition in two-and-a-half hours to defeat the entire Fon army near Porto Novo. In 1897, a force of 32 Europeans and 507 Africans with the Royal Niger Company used cannons, Maxim guns, and Snider rifles to defeat the Nupe Emirate of Sokoto's 31,000-man army.

In Chad, in 1899, 320 French forces, many of which were Senalgesse *tirailleurs*, conquered the reportedly fierce Sudanese slave-raider Rabah's 12,000 men and 2,500 guns. 27 British officers, 730 troops, and 400 porters defeated the Caliphate of Sokoto in 1903, and, in 1908, 389 French soldiers beat the 10,000-man army of Wadai.

Headrick writes, "Perhaps the most famous of all colonial campaigns—at least in the English-speaking world—was General Kitchener's conquest of the Sudan in 1898" (117-118). Kitchener defeated the Sudanese Dervishes, whom the British believed "[w]ere skilled but fanatical warriors" (118), and was armed with the most advanced weaponry, including breechloading and repeating rifles, Maxim guns, field artillery, and six river gunboats shooting high-explosive shells.

Sir Winston Churchill participated in the battle and wrote an account in *The River War: an Account of the Reconquest on the Sudan* (1933). His comments and the battle's casualty figures reveal the colonial mindset:

Thus ended the battle of Omdurman—the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians. Within the space of five hours the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a modern European power had been destroyed and dispersed, with hardly any difficulty, comparatively small risk, and insignificant loss to the victors (cited in Headrick, 1981, 118-119)

The casualty figures, after a scant 5 hours, were 20 Britons with 20 Egyptian allies and 11,000 Dervish dead, so that the latter outnumbered the colonial dead 275 to 1. On average throughout the battle, the British force, with its technology, killed about 36 Dervishes every minute, one Dervish killed about every 2 seconds. That was quite a "signal triumph," indeed.

Two Levels of Silence

The realism depicting the US forces' experiences in the Mogadishu battle of *Black Hawk Down* draws the viewer in close enough to hear loudly and clearly the experiences of the front-line US soldiers but simultaneously silences the broader political dimensions of the battle. This silencing establishes the film as a hegemonic text.

The political silence of *Black Hawk Down* operates on two levels. First, the film is silent at the level of the politics of the US mission in Somalia, and, second, at the broader hegemonic level, of the fact that the political dimension of the mission is silent. A main argument of the film is that for the brave men on the front line, politics are irrelevant. Their courage and honor are unaltered by the politics of the conflict, so the film invokes a separation between the men's courage and politics.

This essay takes advantage of that separation and discusses the politics without commenting upon the men's honor.

The real politics of the US involvement in Somalia is that it protects US interests. At the manifest level, the mission is framed as a humanitarian effort to save the Somali people from the genocidal caprice of the warlords. The film does not discuss why Somalia is in this situation or address why Somalia is poor and unstable or indicate that it is so because of its history of colonial domination. The humanitarian mission helps the immediate concerns of the people, yes. However, the mission also stabilizes the global system of Capital, which is the contemporary version of the previous colonial system, which has kept Somali in a position of subordination and vulnerability. The mission attempts to create a firewall around Somalia to contain the breakdown of administrative order. The mission attempts to manage the crisis and prevent it from spreading and destabilizing the system of global Capital, which has exacerbated if not caused the Somali crisis. The United States is the historically unparalleled and contemporarily unchallenged prime beneficiary of the contemporary system of global Capital. A mission that maintains the stability of that system maintains the interest position of the United States.

The second level of the film's political silence is at the level of intellectual hegemony. To some in these times of contemporary global Capital, in this post cold-war era, there appears no overt ideological clash. To these observers, "freedom" has won out over communist tyranny, and free markets with attending liberal democratic institutions of support are being spread around the world with evangelical fervor. Where this proselytizing is resisted, most obviously today in the Islamic world, the clash is characterized as being between forces for and against modernization, or between reason and fanaticism, or, in the speeches by the US president, between good and evil. The dominant ideology of the contemporary global world is characterized by Slavoj Zizek (1999)

as being "post-political." According to this ideology, no great political obstacles remain to the Good. All that does remain is the detail of Enlightening a few "dark" (in more ways than one) corners of the world to the "benefits" of modern markets and liberalism. Once that goal is achieved, the result will be the merry functioning of the calculus of opportunity, competition, and prosperity.

In today's so-called post-political world, politics themselves are rendered as an extinct entity. All that remains is the "common sense" of free markets and liberal democracy. However, to render "politics" as an obsolete category says less about their obsolescence than about the particular political view being silently privileged. When one perspective is so "accepted" that it cannot be questioned, and opposition is almost impossible to articulate, then that perspective enjoys hegemony.

The fact that the political dimension of *Black Hawk Down* is so silent, that it is layered behind the film's realism, the humanitarianism of the mission, and the valor of the US soldiers, that it is so "irrelevant" as to be nearly blasphemous to articulate, reveals that hegemony is at play. Moreover, if the political dimension were truly irrelevant, its articulation would not be a blasphemy against the troops; it would more likely provoke only an indifferent reaction. The politics of *Black Hawk Down*, especially when shrouded by the realistically depicted valor of the soldiers, is a hot button, suggesting that something very explosive and even dangerous does not wish to be revealed: the real interest of the US to preserve the system that facilitates its dominant position over peoples such as the Somalis.

Conclusion: Educational Implications and Suggestions

Black Hawk Down employs a realistic aesthetic to depict US soldiers and their helicopters that were shot down in Mogadishu in October 1993. The film's realism and focus upon "apolitical" battle experiences

function to hegemonically conceal US's real interest in stabilizing global Capital behind its ostensibly humanitarian mission in Somali. *Black Hawk Down* is based upon actual events of October, 1993 and has been hailed for its realism but decried for a lack of historical depth, especially concerning Somalia's history of colonial rule and subsequent internal war. The film was released in the early time of Bush II's America and fit well with the mood of the post-9/11 "War on Terror." This paper has discussed the film, the book upon which it was based, and some critical reaction. Ridley Scott has a history of presenting violence realistically, and *Black Hawk Down*'s very realism and the purported focus on the US soldiers' front-line experiences provide the means to silence the devastation of the Somalis during the conflict. This type of silencing has a significant history going back to depictions of 19th-century colonial wars between Western powers and African nations. In addition, *Black Hawk Down*'s configuration of focus and style silences the US's real interests in its Somali mission. There are the *facts* of the silencing. The *fact* of the silencing, the fact that articulation the US interest positions is silenced, points to its hegemony.

These findings suggest a number of educational implications and suggestions for working with war films. Some implications and suggestions are particularly germane to art and media learning contexts, but many are relevant in whatever subjects one may discuss a film such as *Black Hawk Down*, such as Language Arts and Social Studies. War films tell stories set in context of historical events—wars. It has been said that "War is the extension of politics." War necessarily has a political dimension, which gives the lie to "post-political" conceits, and that political dimension must be unpacked when working with texts such as these. In the art education context, an important question becomes, "How does the aesthetic of this piece support the work's purported rhetorical position as well as the silences inherent in that position?" Ten questions follow to consider in planning teaching around war films:

1. Why are war films made?
2. What is the history of the war depicted?
3. Is the film based upon another source, such as a book or magazine article?
4. What is the political dimension of critical reaction to the film?
5. What is the political context of the film's release?
6. What is the film's stated rhetorical position?
6. What is the aesthetic of the artist and film?
7. How do the film's aesthetic and stated rhetorical positions conjoin and support each other?
8. Are there historical precedents for this type of conjoining?
9. What are the facts of the silences of this conjoining?
10. What is the meta-silence; what does the fact of the above silencing reveal concerning a broader political level; what does it say about what is going on in the world?

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the following quoted passage comes from Bruckheimer & Scott, 2001.

² Such films include *American Gigolo* (1980), *Thief* (1981), and *Cat People* (1982).

³ This list takes account of *Top Gun* (1986), *The Rock* (1996), *Con Air* (1997), *Armageddon* (1998), *Gone in 60 Seconds* (2000), and *Pearl Harbor* (2001).

⁴ D.R. Headrick is an historian who looks at relationships between technology and imperialism. He is a professor of Social Science and History at Roosevelt University. His books include *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (1981), *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (1988), *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (1991), and *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (2000).

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