ABSTRACT

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	Henrike Lehnguth, Doctor of Philosophy, 2011
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This dissertation analyzes fiction film representations of the "global war on terror" under special consideration of the ways in which visual representations have mediated the space that novelist J. M. Coetzee so aptly called the "dark chamber" and that I, building on Coetzee, term the **dark chamber of terror** where, away from bare view, ethical norms, and the regulatory structures of the law, the state and rivaling non-state powers like the al-Qaeda organization exert unchecked control and (lethal) violence over the bodies of those whom they perceive as 'problem' or 'enemy' subjects. I approach the visual representations of the dark chamber of terror in fiction film with an argument that they engage in different types of what I term **visioning practices** that each emerge out of a different relationship between the actual violent event that took place and its initial visual mediation in nonfictional terms. I differentiate between *en-visioning practices*, where fictional images fill the visual void left by the absence of actual recorded images from the dark chamber; *re-*

visioning practices, where fictional images rewrite actual visual recordings of the dark chamber from an oppositional standpoint that strives to undermine the original narratives and meanings; and *dis-visioning practices*, an ambivalent form of re-visioning, where fictional images engage the dark chamber and prior visual representations of the dark chamber but negate their full implication. By way of these visioning practices I present a systematic approach to the study of fictional representations in relation to the "global war on terror" and unpack narrative and visual patterns that arise across different film texts. I argue that among recurring visual and narrative patterns are gender representations that associate men with heroically defiant actions in the public arena and women with passive suffering in the domestic space. They also involve storylines that tie heroics and suffering almost unequivocally to the Unites States and its people. Together these and other narrative patterns construct the representational scope of the space that stands at the center of what terror partially encapsulates in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

INTO THE DARK CHAMBER OF TERROR: "THE WAR ON TERROR" IN
VISUAL CULTURE

By

Henrike Lehnguth

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
Professor Nancy Struna, Chair
Professor Caroline Eades
Professor Mary Sies
Professor Madeline Zilfi
Professor Peter Beicken

Foreword

May 1, 2011: As I am finalizing this dissertation I learn that today, the day that I have

come more or less to an end with the project (at least in its dissertation form) that

Osama bin Laden is said to have been killed. In the light of his death and the topic at

hand, I would like to begin with the last stances of a poem by Palestinian-American

poet Suheir Hammad, whose words, to me, represent an ethical stand in the face of

the ugliness that is the dark chamber of terror:

> affirm life.
> affirm life.
> we got to carry each other now.
> you are either with life, or against it.
> affirm life.
>
> - Suheir Hammad, "First Writing Since," 2001

Acknowledgements

Where to begin, when I am indebted to so many encounters with people, books, and ideas that long precede the specificities of this project but have, nevertheless, been vital to its realization? While this project would never have been conceived without the people that I met during my Berlin years, I would like to first acknowledge my dissertation committee members, without whom the project could not have been realized. I would like to especially thank the chair of my committee, Nancy Struna, for her steadfast support over the years that I have been at Maryland. I would also like to thank Caroline Eades, Mary Sies, Madeline Zilfi, and Peter Beicken for their time, advice, and ideas, especially Caroline Eades for keeping tabs on me and offering feedback from afar. Aside from my committee members, I would like to acknowledge friends and fellow graduate students, who have supported me. Special thanks to Anna Bedford, Rob Chester, Amy Corbin, Amber Nelson, Manon Perry for their feedback on my writing and to Wesam al-Sultan for his help with the Arabic. Thank you also to my "pals" at Grad Hills, Daniel Williams, Brian K, and Vivianne Salgado – you made life livable in the moments, when I wondered why I chose to live here of all places. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Dorothee and Gerold Lehnguth, who have shown undying support over the years. I could not wish for better parents. Thank you also to my brother, Cornelius Lehnguth, whose personal journey has been, in many ways, quite similar to mine.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Is it possible in the early twenty-first century," cultural studies scholars

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright ask in their introduction to a volume on visual

culture, "to distinguish between social realities and the media forms that represent

them?" Much of our lives and current understandings of the world depend on visual

technologies, when citicams monitor "suspicious behavior," satellites navigate

military operations, and ultrasound devices map and regulate human bodies. These

technologies build on a legacy of assumptions about seeing as a privileged mode for

knowing and images as indexical windows to a world as is, frequently from

perspectives that go far beyond those available to the naked human eye. This visual

turn, as some scholars describe it, constitutes a central feature of postmodernity.[1]

Yet images are not unequivocally anchored in reality. As film scholar Joshua

Hirsch observes, "images have come to stand less and less for some other reality, and

become more and more their own reality-simulacra: signifiers without referent." This

is not to say that images have no bearing on physical reality. Rather, the visual turn

has restructured our social worlds in ways that social reality is increasingly

compartmentalized into a "series of mediated events" or spectacles and, with the use

of social networking sites such as Facebook, a series of self-authored mini-events that

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[1] For quote, see Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1. In their book Sturken and Cartwright dedicate an entire chapter to seeing and scientific seeing (p. 347-387). For more on film as entertainment converging with film as evidentiary document, see Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), 30. For early work on seeing in more general terms, view John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1973). With respects to the "visual turn" and its relationship to postmodernity, see Margaret Dikovitskay, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual After The Cultural Turn* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005), 47. According to art historian Dikovitskay, the notion of the "visual turn" first arose out of art historian W.J.T. Mitchell's idea of the "pictorial turn." For the relationship between postmodernity and visual culture, see also Jean Baudrillard, see *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

are shared with "friends" in the virtual public. The developments that stand behind Sturken and Cartwright's provocative question, in short, position visual culture at the very center of twenty-first century life and thereby speak to its significance to scholarly inquiry.[2]

This project investigates visual culture with a focus on moving photographic images, that is to say film and to a lesser degree television and video productions, with the assumption that film is particularly potent in its persuasive powers. As film scholar Jennifer Barker outlines in her phenomenological study of film spectatorship, film moves all our senses (not merely vision). "Watching a film [especially in the cinema]," Barker explains, "we are certainly not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* it, either. We exist and move and feel in that space of contact, where our surfaces mingle and our musculatures entangle." Her insights build on earlier inquiries into film and embodied spectatorship, among them Linda Williams' seminal essay on "body genres," where Williams focuses on pornography, horror, and melodrama as genres that are designed to stir physical reactions in spectators (arousal, tension, and tears respectively). Following Williams and others, Barker speaks to how film extends its realities to our fully-rounded embodied selves and becomes part of a sensory and emotionally engaged experience that informs political choices and social

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[2] For quote on "reality-simulacra," see Joshua Hirsch, *After Image: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 143. Hirsch builds on Fredric Jameson's insights, who understands postmodernity as a feature of late capitalism. Hirsch's reference to the "reality-simulacra" moreover clearly evokes Baudrillard's writings on the simulacra and hyperreality (see above). For Jameson, see *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). The increasing compartmentalization of life into (mini)spectacles is, for instance, addressed by film scholar Joel Black in *The Reality Effect*, 16-17.

interaction far beyond the confines of entertainment. For these reasons film is of

particular relevance to visual culture and constitutes the basis for this dissertation.[3]

Beyond Barker and Williams' important insights on embodied spectatorship,

the relevance of *fiction* film is manifested in what film scholar Joel Black describes as

its capability to "give reality to fictions and fantasies by producing a vivid, graphic

semblance of truthfulness." Technological advances, such as the rise of digital media,

have rendered this "vivid, graphic semblance of truthfulness" indistinguishable from

film as documentary evidence even to the trained eye.[4] By no means a novice to film

technology, film director Wim Wenders, for instance, describes in an interview how

he first mistook the 9/11 attacks for a computer animation and did so for a

"significant span of time."[5] As this and many other examples attest, the boundaries

between fiction and fact in film (to put it simplistically) can and have been

unrecognizably blurred exactly in a time where visual culture increasingly permeates

everyday life. These developments render suspect any dismissal of fiction films as

mere entertainment and encourage us instead to consider all images in their

relationship to power.

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[3] Jennifer Barker, *Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 12. Barker's arguments build on earlier scholarly insights, such as those of Vivianne Sobchack and Linda Williams. For Sobchack, see *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). For Williams, see Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 2-13. For the connection between the cinematic experience as memory, see Alison Landsberg, who introduces with "prosthetic memory" a type of memory that is positioned between personal and cultural memory. As Landsberg observes, prosthetic memory "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past," where "the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live." Landsberg identifies prosthetic memory as a product of mass-media and what Barker presents as embodied spectatorship. See Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in The Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia Press, 2004), 2.

[4] Joel Black, *Reality Effect*, 9

[5] My translation. Michael Althen, "Ein Gespräch mit Wim Wenders," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* September 24, 2001: 49. I return to Wenders' point in Chapter Two.

To elaborate, images constitute and are constitutive of power, when they create particular knowledge about the world through aesthetic choices, narrative emplotments, and selective framings – devices that work in correspondence with larger societal discourses. With the rise of visual media, political power is increasingly constructed through what sociologists Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore term "ocular regimes," where much human experience is "systematically ignored, erased, unseen, or missing," while other experience is visible, seen, even "exposed" or "overexposed." Although Casper and Moore do not explicitly mention this idea, different "ocular regimes" coexist and compete over the same subject matter. Americanist Rob Kroes' questions about the rift between American and European attitudes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are telling in this context. "Do we watch different television programs? Do we see different photographs in the press? Or do we read them differently?" he asks, thereby implicitly pointing to diverging ocular regimes and discourses on the same political issue. Kroes' questions are, of course, not only relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but applicable to other political subject matters, including the "global war on terror," which will be the focus of this dissertation (more on that below).[6]

The notion of "ocular regimes" foregrounds structures and patterns. Not autonomous events and their (lack of) representation, but the systematic and recurring (lack of) images and narratives create a body of knowledge around subject matters, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the "war on terror;" literary scholar

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[6] Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore, *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 14 & 79. See also Rob Kroes, *Photographic Memories: Private Pictures, Public Images, and American History* (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2007), 179.

Edward Said's notion of citational practices that recycle particular tropes, questions, and assumptions within a given field of study or on a given political issue is useful in this context.[7] It is these systematic citational practices that create an archive of culturally-shared images. Fiction films, while not mentioned in Casper and Moore's inquiry into the "politics of visibility," contribute to these regulatory mechanisms, when they follow similar patterns of visibility, erasure, and exposure to create value around and familiarity with select identities and political issues.

It is for these reasons that my dissertation analyzes fiction films as a potent site where the "global war on terror" or, as political scientist Zillah Eisenstein so aptly referred to it, the "war of/on terror," is negotiated.[8] I focus on the "war on terror," which for the purposes of my dissertation begins on September 11, 2001, when the term was not coined, yet, firstly for the rather mundane reasons that it arguably presents the single most important political investment during the Bush years and continues to significantly define Obama-era politics, albeit under the new name of "overseas contingency operations."[9] The historical framework of this

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[7] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979). Said explores the idea of citationality especially in the second chapter of his book. He also refers more succinctly to the idea in *On Orientalism*, Media Education Foundation, 1998.

[8] Zillah Eisenstein's concept of a "war of/on terror" implicates the United States in the "war on terror" not only as a party that is terrified but as one that terrorizes, which, as the research in this dissertation illustrates, is an adequate assessment, to say the least. In fact, by using the pronoun "of" before the pronoun "on," the notion of a "war of terror" takes precedent and overrides the "war on terror." It is this meaning of the "war of/on terror" that this dissertation subscribes to, even if, for stylistic reasons, it does not consistently utilize the term "war of/on terror" but sticks to the familiar formula of a "war on terror." See Eisenstein, "Sexual Humiliation, Gender Confusion and the Horror at Abu Ghraib," *Women's Human Rights Net*, July 2004, http://www.iiav.nl/ezines/web/WHRnet/2004/July.PDF (accessed November 30, 2009).

[9] For the turn from the "Global War on Terror" to the "Overseas Contingency Operation," see, for instance Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, "'Global War On Terror' Is Given New Name," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2009, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/24/AR2009032402818.html?wprss=rss_politics/administration (accessed July 17, 2010). For more on the "war on terror" and its de facto continuation during the Obama Administration, see Dana Priest and William M. Arkin on the growth of the U.S. security apparatus during the Bush years, which they reported on over an entire week in July 2010. See, Priest and Arkin,

dissertation reflects the emergence of the "global war on terror" as a political

paradigm and includes the flight 93 passenger revolt within the term because many,

including conservatives like Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania and first

secretary of the newly instituted Department of Homeland Security, conceived of the

passenger revolt as "the first battle in the war against terror."[10]

Although the focus of this dissertation mirrors the historical framework that

the "global war on terror" initiates and operates within, it is not my intent to imply

that the September 11 attacks introduced "terror" to the world and prompted the

United States to *respond*. Rather the acts committed against the United States need to

be understood as part of larger historical processes, including the legacies of

interventionist U.S. politics in the Middle East, the rise of political Islam since the

1980s, and severe economic inequities in the shadow of United States and world

capitalism, especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which still

presented a counterbalance and alternative to U.S. power.[11]

"A Hidden World, Beyond Control, *Washington Post*, July 19, 2010,
http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/ (accessed August 30, 2010). Their reporting coincided by days only with the leak of censored documents on *Wikileaks*, which implicate the Obama Administration in multiple illegal "war" operations, such as target killings. See, *wikileaks,* http://wardiary.wikileaks.org/ (accessed August 30, 2010). On this subject, see also "Afghanistan War Logs," *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/the-war-logs (accessed August 30, 2010). Lastly, see "The Afghanistan Protocol," *Der Spiegel*, July 25, 2010, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,708314,00.html (accessed August, 2010).

[10] Tom Ridge made a statement to this effect, for instance, in a commemorative speech at the first anniversary of the attacks. For citation, see Andrew Buncombe, "September 11 Remembered: Tears, Flags, and Doves of Peace at Site of 'First Battle In the War Against Terror,'" *The Independent*, September 12, 2002: 3. (Lexis Nexis) Others who conceived of the passenger revolt in similar terms include Paul Greengrass, the film director of *United 93*, which I discuss at length in Chapter Two. For reference on Greengrass, see supplemental material on *United 93* DVD – *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2006.

[11] For literature on U.S. interventionist politics and economics in the Middle East, see historian Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints And America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005). See historian Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Lastly, see veteran journalist Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: the Conquest of the Middle*

Apart from its political centrality to U.S. politics in the last ten years, the "global war on terror" is the focus of this dissertation because it is symptomatic of an unprecedented convergence of violent conflict, visual media, and mass communication. This convergence arises from the fact that the "war on terror" is the first large-scale digital war, where the internet, cell phone cameras, and wireless connections have altered the premises and realities of military engagement.[12] Convergence implies that the images that are circulated via mass media sites increasingly *partake* in violent conflict as quasi-*agents*.

For example, during the 2001 attacks, the images did not "merely" document the destruction of the tallest twin buildings in the world and with that the loss of thousands of lives. Rather "[t]he terrorists," as Wim Wenders suggests, "copied images that we know from disaster films and video games."[13] The images, in other words, also actively struck against the ideological fabric of the United States, when, unlike in disaster films, where supreme U.S. smarts and skills rescue the country, if not the planet, no hero stepped in to turn events around – at least not in the spectacular ways that Hollywood lets us believe.

Images likewise took center stage in the Iraq war, the premise of which rested, after all, on a satellite picture of alleged "weapons of mass destruction." Support for

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East (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). For literature on the rise of political Islam, see François Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). See also, Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State: From Christian Militias to al-Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008). For more on the discourse of Islam and the "West," see Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, eds. *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003. For more on the history of "terror" and "terrorism" in politics, see Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, eds. *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[12] For a reference on the "war on terror" as the first digital war, see Donald Matheson and Stuart Allan, *Digital War Reporting* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2009).

[13] My translation. Michael Althen, "Ein Gespräch mit Wim Wenders," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* September 24, 2001: 49.

the war was later severely challenged by another set of images – the photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. In the meantime al-Qaeda has fueled the "war on terror" with its own visual media productions, which range from Osama bin Laden's video statements to the screenings of decapitations of hostages. In all these examples images actively participate in the execution of power in the form of violence. I elaborate on power and violence in the section on *Conceptual and Theoretical Investments* below.[14]

Yet, I am not concerned with just any images that have come to define the "war on terror" but those that illuminate the acts that stand at the very heart of terror. These acts are housed in what I term the **dark chamber of terror**. I take the trope of the "dark chamber" from South African novelist J. M. Coetzee, who coined the phrase in reference to a space, where "insulated from moral and physical restraint, one human being is free to exercise his imagination to the limits of the performance of vileness upon the body of another." While Coetzee uses the term exclusively to discuss state transgressions, this project expands his definition to also refer to a space

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[14] For a reference on "weapons of mass destruction," see Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations, which was printed as "A Policy of Evasion and Deception" in the *Washington Post*, February 5, 2003, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/transcripts/powelltext_020503.html (accessed October 2, 2010). Roughly two-and-a-half years later Powell referred to his speech as the "lowest point in my life." See "Former Aide: Powell WMD Speech 'Lowest Point In My Life," *CNN*, August 23, 2005, http://articles.cnn.com/2005-08-19/world/powell.un_1_colin-powell-lawrence-wilkerson-wmd-intelligence?_s=PM:WORLD (accessed October 2, 2010). That the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal severely challenged U.S. credibility is, for instance, encapsulated the title to a *Time Magazine* article by Tony Karon, which reads "How the Prison Scandal Sabotages the U.S. in Iraq," *Time Magazine*, May 4, 2004, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,632967,00.html (accessed October 2, 2010). For more on media by militant Islamist groups, see Akil N. Awan, "Virtual Jihadist Media: Function, Legitimacy and Radicalizing Efficacy," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2007): 389-408. I should also note in the context of "al-Qaeda" and "Osama bin Laden" that I choose these particular ways of writing, since they correspond most widely with the transcriptions that U.S. American media have used and are therefore most familiar to my readers. I do so, well-aware that other forms of transcriptions, like "al-Qaida" and "Usama" would already better correspond with the academic traditions of Arabic transcription into Latin letters. I, in other words, here choose reader recognition over academic convention.

where non-state actors, like the al-Qaeda organization, exert (lethal) violence on human bodies. In the context of this dissertation the dark chamber thus signifies a space where away from bare (unmediated) view, ethical norms, and the regulatory structures of the law, the state and non-state actors like the al-Qaeda organization exert unchecked control and (lethal) violence over the bodies of those whom they perceive as 'problem' or 'enemy' subjects.[15]

Coetzee speaks of a dark chamber. Building on Coetzee, this project not only employs his notion of a dark chamber, however, but coins the notion of a dark chamber of terror. Before I unpack the terms of the dark chamber of terror, I will first make explicit my understanding of **terror** as a concept. Terror is an ambiguous term that simultaneously refers to "a state of intense fear," on the one hand, and the "one that inspires fear" and "violent and destructive acts," on the other hand.[16] It conceptually unites the force that terrorizes with the recipient who is terrified. To further complicate the already ambiguous term, the "intense fear" that terror speaks to is not mundane. Rather, as cultural theorist Terry Eagleton observes, "[t]error begins as a religious idea" and its affinity to religion continues to bear relevance for our contemporary understanding of the term. To Eagleton terror marks the encounter with the "deeply ambivalent powers" that define religion – "powers which both enrapture and annihilate." Eagleton grounds his notion of religion as "deeply ambivalent powers" on the Latin term *sacer*, which paradoxically refers to the sacred and the

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[15] J. M. Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1986, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/12/books/coetzee-chamber.html# (accessed October 21, 2009). I came upon Coetzee through Nathan Gorelick, who briefly uses Coetzee's notion in the context of the "war on terror." See Gorelick, "Imagining Extraordinary Renditions: Terror, Torture and the Possibility of an Excessive Ethics in Literature," Theory & Event vol. 11, no. 2 (2008).

[16] The Merriam-Webster Online dictionary defines terror as "a state of intense fear" as well as "one that inspires fear" and "violent and destructive acts." Available at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terror (accessed October 22, 2008).

cursed at once. Outside the religious paradigm, terror, as Eagleton has it, encapsulates a profoundly felt existential encounter with what has been alternatively described as the sublime, the Real, or the Other, in the face of which the grand narratives, symbolic orders, and fixed meanings of life dissolve; potentially with oneself in the midst.

By speaking of a dark chamber of **terror** I conceive of the events that unfold in the dark chamber in direct correlation to their ability to terrorize and terrify a vast number of people beyond those human beings and bodies that are directly subjected to the events. The terror of the dark chamber thrives on its existence outside of the legal, ethical, and visual frameworks that otherwise structure everyday life. The acts that are housed in the dark chamber of terror place a challenge to the social order and its seeming reliability and routine, when they transgress any ethical and legal basis. By existing away from bare (unmediated) view, these acts usually fall through the registers of the ocular regimes that organize our social world. Much of what occurs in the dark chamber of terror remains, in other words, unseen and, in a time and place where seeing has come to increasingly equate knowing, with that, unknown – a terrifying prospect, when the unknown evades any certainty about the fabrics of the dark chamber of terror, its realities and ramifications. It is for these reasons that I expand Coetzee's notion of the dark chamber to one of a dark chamber of terror, where world-destroying powers are assembled, bundled, and ultimately unleashed.

It is important to note in this context that terror, as I conceive of the term, transcends representation. The reflections of literary scholar Marianne Hirsch illustrate what I mean. In her essay "I Took Pictures" Hirsch recalls, how, in the

aftermath of the 2001 attacks on the United States, she felt compelled to take pictures of her home city New York. Yet, after developing her pictures, she describes herself as being "frustrated at how little is visible on them. Everything everyone experienced and felt – the gravity, the enormity, the loss, the smell of smoke, the energy of the cleanup activity – none of this can be shown." The life-changing dimensions that the 2001 attacks carried for many New Yorkers thus evade the mode of photography to an extent.[17] The challenge that life-destroying events place on the idea of representation and represent-ability that Hirsch addresses are, of course, not unique to the September 11 attacks and the war on terror but have been widely discussed in literature on the Holocaust, among other subjects.[18]

Yet, while Hirsch and others remind us of the limits of representation, where representations can only ever approximate but never fully own terror, representations, nevertheless, carry value in their attempt to overcome the unknown and construct meaning around unspeakable acts. As part of his argument Coetzee for his part, for instance, points to the importance of fiction-writing as a tool to reckon with the dark

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[17] See Marianne Hirsch, "I Took Pictures: September 2001 and Beyond," in *Trauma At Home: After 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 69-86 (77).

[18] There is a wealth of literature that discusses issues of representation and represent-ability in reference to the Holocaust, much of which stands in one way or another in conversation with Theodor Adorno's seminal proclamation that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." For select key works on the subject, see Theodor Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Rolf Livingstone et. al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Saul Friedländer, ed. *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Berel Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art Within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Andreas Huyssen, "Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age," in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ernst van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal (Hanover/ London: University Press of New England, 1999). For more specific discussions of issues of representation of the Holocaust and film, see Joshua Hirsch, *After Image: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004); and Janet Walker: *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

chamber of terror and bring it to light. Fiction films, which are the subject of my analysis in this dissertation, are likewise equipped to not only imagine the dark chamber of terror, if in visual terms, but to accommodate and rewrite nonfictional images as part of their narrative. In an age where the visual has advanced to a significantly powerful mode, fiction film representations thus, in particular, bear consideration, when they participate in constructing reality through their engagements with nonfictional visions and their own sets of visual and narrative propositions.

So while there are limitations to representation, this dissertation is, nevertheless, concerned with the ways in which fiction films engage the dark chamber of terror and with the ideological work that informs their representations.[19] To this effect, each chapter introduces a different set of what I term ***visioning practices*** that describes a different type of filmic engagement with the dark chamber of terror. The *visioning practices* that I outline in the framework of this dissertation include the following three sets of practices:[20]

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[19] To clarify, I use the term "ideological work" and "discursive formations" interchangeably, even if the first carries a Marxist and the second a post-structuralist connotation. As I discuss under *Conceptual and Theoretical Investments*, my project draws on works from both camps, even if it is ultimately grounded more explicitly within post-structuralist frameworks of discourse and power.

[20] What I term visioning practices builds on earlier scholarship in media studies. I am especially indebted to Stuart Hall's model of "encoding" and "decoding," where he theorizes viewer positions that emerge between the encoding (producing) and decoding (receiving) of meaning in media texts. In Hall's model, the first viewer position is the "dominant-hegemonic position," where viewers adopt the encoded messages from a given media text unquestioningly and in accordance with the dominant cultural ideologies of a given society. The second one is the "negotiated position," where viewers negotiate the meanings of a given media text and selectively adapt some and oppose other encoded messages, yet, without challenging the dominant cultural ideologies as such. The third and last position that Hall outlines is the "oppositional" one, where viewers reject the encoded message and its ideological implications. Although this project does not theorize viewer positions like Hall, his model has helped me to distinguish between the different sets of *visioning practices* that underlie my project. My model is moreover informed by José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, even if my notion of *dis-visioning practices* do not carry the same radically liberatory political implications as Muñoz's idea of "disidentification" does. See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, 2nd edition (New York: New York University Press, 2006) 51-61. See also José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

- *En-visioning practices*, where fictional images fill the visual void left by the absence of actual recorded images from the dark chamber of terror.

- *Re-visioning practices*, where fictional images rewrite actual visual recordings of the dark chamber of terror from an oppositional standpoint that strives to undermine the original narratives and meanings.

- *Dis-visioning practices*, which encompass a form of ambivalent re-visioning, where fictional (and other) images engage the dark chamber of terror and prior visual representations of the dark chamber but negate their full implication.

In their distinct ways, each set of practices illuminates another angle of a research that is guided by the following question:

- **How do the films and videos visually represent the dark chamber?** What themes, tropes, and issues does the respective visual text highlight in its representation of the dark chamber? What identities are privileged, what identities are subordinate? What human qualities are assigned to different characters as representatives of specific identities? How do mise-en-scène and montage figure into the representation of particular identities, themes, tropes, and issues? How do the scenes of the dark chamber relate (if applicable) to the larger film text with respect to style and content?

- **How does the representation of the dark chamber in a given film or video compare with alternate representations of the same or thematically affiliated dark chambers in visual and written texts?** What themes, tropes, issues, and identities emerge across different texts about the same or thematically affiliated events? Which of the themes, tropes, issues, and identities that emerge are based

on some form of evidence? What are noticeable representational absences in individual films and videos?

- **What do the representations of the dark chamber say about power, power claims, and power relationships?** How do different representations of the dark chamber appeal to authorship and claims of authority? What counter-discourses or alternative powers emerge from alternate representations? What political agendas do specific filmic choices serve?

- **What narratives do the representations of the dark chamber offer about the United States as an imagined national community?** What counter-stories are left untold with respect to these narratives?

Conceptual and Theoretical Investments

This section discusses power, violence, and visual representation as key concepts that guide my inquiry under consideration of the relevant literature.

Power

Power is one notion that figures prominently in this dissertation. As sociologist John Scott suggests, "[i]n its most general sense, power is the production of causal effects. It is 'the bringing about of consequences.'" Scott differentiates between what he terms "mainstream" and "second stream" research on power, where the former defines power in terms of interactions and relationships between rationally thinking agents, to which sovereign power serves as a prime example, while the later understands power as a force that is diffused through institutions and discourse. Scott identifies Max Weber as a founding figure to the "mainstream" model, with Weber

defining power as "every chance in a social relationship to impose one's own will even against resistance, no matter the chance." Although Weber complicates his own notion of power with his writings on authority and domination, where he points with allusions to tradition and bureaucracy to forms of power that are not exclusively bound to individual actors, power has been more widely re-thought in what Scott identifies as "second stream" research on power. The writings of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault, whom Scott presents as key figures of the "second stream," all usefully broaden the notion of power beyond the narrow confines of coercion to which the "mainstream" approach lends itself with its focus on individual actors and their imposition of will.[21]

Gramsci, for his part, complicates power with the concept of "hegemony," where power is not merely exercised through coercion but consent. Consent implies that members of subordinate classes comply with bourgeois interests as their own. Gramsci reminds us that consent is not independently willed but produced through social institutions that represent bourgeois interests as well as cultural life and norms that reflect bourgeois aspirations. In Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, the term and its logics always also encompasses resistance in the forms of working class protest to the ruling class where protest is ultimately absorbed within the hegemonic structures of power.[22]

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[21] John Scott presents an overview of power as a concept with reference to the relevant literature. See John Scott, *Power* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2001), 1. See also Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, *1* (Tübingen: Halbband, 1980), 28 (my translation). See also "Max Weber," http://www.sociosite.net/topics/weber.php (accessed October 2, 2010). The websites offers a wealth of links and resources on Weber's writings. Given that I discuss Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault more elaborately in this section, I reference their writings separately below.
[22] Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Education," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 300-322. See also the extensive definition of "hegemony" in the glossary of key terms in the same volume.

Louis Althusser elaborates on Gramsci and power with his analysis of "state apparatuses," which he defines as the "force of repressive execution and intervention 'in the interests of the ruling classes.'" Althusser distinguishes between the "repressive state apparatuses" of government-affiliated bodies, such as the military and police force, on the one hand, and the "ideological state apparatuses" of social institutions, including those frequently thought to operate independently from the state, such as education, religion, the arts (including film), and the family, on the other hand. His notion of repressive and ideological state apparatuses directly corresponds with what Gramsci identifies as coercive and consent-building factors in hegemony.

Althusser's model of power contends that the ruling class sustains power relations through the ideological work that social institutions like education, engage in, when their ideologies "hail" individuals to become subjects with attributes and desires that correspond with their pre-set social positioning as members of a particular class; and, as one may add, members of a particular race, gender, sexuality, religion, and so forth. Ideologies "hail" persons early on, as Althusser contends, when even "[b]efore its birth, the child is …always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived." His nod to the womb foreshadows philosopher Judith Butler's later argument about discourse and gender subjectivity, where, according to Butler, discourse precedes biological and material reality.[23] In the context of my work,

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[23] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, transl. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm (accessed October 2, 2010).

Gramsci and Althusser's model of power draws attention to how institutions, including the media and Hollywood industry, engage in ideological work that directly speaks to an exercise in power.

Enter Michel Foucault, who examines power less as a state or class exercise than a force that is disbursed throughout an entire social body, which is not to say that it is equally disbursed. Foucault departs from Gramsci and Althusser's preoccupations with the state and state ideologies. He is, in fact, critical of ideology as a term, which he perceives, "[as] always stand[ing] in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth" and as "in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, etc." His own work instead investigates what he calls the "new technologies of power" that emerge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where bodies and attitudes of individuals are increasingly in "the eye of power" and shaped through the disciplinary measures that the "truth effects" of specific discursive formations produce.[24]

According to Foucault, power is, in other words, exerted through discourse and the knowledge and practices that discourse produces. Foucault refers to discourse in three distinct ways, when discourse sometimes encompasses "the general domain

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[24] My discussion of Foucault draws predominantly from "Truth and Power" and "The Eye of Power," both of which are interviews with Foucault, printed in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, transl. by Colin Gordon et. al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109-133 (118 & 119), 146-165 (159). The discussion is also informed by his writings on sexuality in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*, transl. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Furthermore, the discussion is informed by his writings on discipline and punishment in *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Given Foucault's critique of the term ideology, I should clarify that my use of the term in this dissertation is not to be understood as a counterbalance to an idea of objectively determinable truths but should be read as being synonymous with what Jean-François Lyotard called "metanarratives" and what Foucault may identify as a cluster of particularly powerful discourses. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Régis Durand (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

of all statements, sometimes an individualized group of statements, and sometimes a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements."[25] In the context of my dissertation discourse as "statements" also includes images. Foucault's purposefully broad definition of discourse contains the transition from statements to practice that he attempts to foreground and thereby posits discourse in a primary role, where discourse is not the product but productive of material reality. As a productive force power, as Foucault reminds us, goes beyond "repression" and "wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception[s]" of the term.[26]

While my thinking on power builds on all the writings that I have discussed, I view Foucault's formulation of power as especially relevant for my purposes, precisely because he presents a differentiating model of power, where power is not confined by the state and state-affiliated institutions but just as much exercised through mundane speech acts and everyday practices.

Violence

I understand violence as a closely related concept to power that speaks to those restrictive and repressive sides that Foucault attempts to escape with his expansive definition of power. If power at its broadest refers to the "production of causal effects," violence at its broadest refers to the production of effects that harm, hinder, or limit. Violence thus includes the "physical[ly], psychological[ly] or even sociological[ly]…harmful actions…against individuals, groups, states, animals, property, and nature," that film scholar David Slocum evokes in his definition, where "the *threat* of harm or injury can often be as disturbing as the act itself." Yet it goes

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[25] Michel Foucault as cited in Sara Mills, *Discourse*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge: 2004), 6.
[26] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 119.

beyond harm, as film scholar Marco Abel reminds us, when "ontologically speaking violences are everywhere and inescapable."[27] In the context of this project violence thus signifies a more widespread restrictive and repressive force that is directly affiliated with power.

It is likely the broadness of the term that prompts philosopher Slavoj Žižek to differentiate between two types of violence – "subjective violence" on the one hand, and "objective violence" on the other hand. According to Žižek, "subjective violence" refers to violence performed by individual actors and identifiable groups, where violence is "directly visible" through "obvious signals," including "crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict." "Objective violence" encompasses instead more abstract forms of "symbolic" and "systemic" violence, where the former refers to statements, gestures, and images and the later to the effects of larger social, political, economic, and cultural processes. Žižek's distinction is useful, even if the subjectivities of individual actors, on the one hand, and systemic developments, on the other hand, are themselves, as Foucault and Butler remind us, products of the "symbolic" that is discourse.[28]

Although violence is, indeed, everywhere, even if in different guise, I cannot escape addressing the central role that violence takes in U.S. culture – be it individual, systemic, or symbolic. Violent crime in the United States as a form of

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[27] I already referenced the first quote on power as deriving from John Scott (see above). For Slocum quote, see J. David Slocum, "Introduction: Violence and American Cinema: Notes for an Investigation," in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 2. For Abel quote, see Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, And Critique after Representation* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), xiii.
[28] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 1-2. Although Žižek's mentioning of terror as "subjective violence" clearly takes the *acts* of terror as a reference point, his notion of terror as "subjective violence" is, of course, complicated by the term's multi-faceted and ambiguous qualities that I have discussed earlier in this introduction.

individualized violence disproportionally exceeds that of other industrialized

countries, which has prompted comparisons between the United States and the far

more impoverished Latin America, even war zones.[29] The number of incarcerated

men and women in the United States in relation to the country's overall population far

exceeds that of all other industrialized countries. One factor in this imbalance is the

draconian criminal code in the United States, a form of structural violence where

persons, who are disproportionately of African American and Latino/a background,

are incarcerated two or three times as long for the same crime, more than often

nonviolent offenses, as they would be elsewhere. As part of the penal code, the

United States reserves the right to kill its own citizens and other culprits through

capital punishment, which two-thirds of all countries worldwide have abolished.[30] In

the meantime the U.S. war expenditure is roughly half of the entire world war

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[29] For statistics on the disproportionate crime rate in the United States compared to other industrialized countries, see the statistical resource website, nationmaster.com, which, basing its findings on the eighth United Nations survey on crime trends (2002), reports 16,000 murders for the United States (about 290 million people), roughly 1,200 for the United Kingdom (about 59 million people), 1,051 for France (about 60 million people) and 914 for Germany (about 80 million people), 494 for Spain (about 39 million people), 523 for Canada (about 31 million people), and 637 for Japan (about 127 million people). Per capita the United States, in short, books 2.7 times as many murders as the United Kingdom, 3.1 times as many murders as in France, 4.8 times as many murders as in Germany, 4.4 times as many murders as in Spain, 3.6 times as many murders as in Canada, and 12.3 times as many murders as in Japan. For crime statistics, see Nationmaster, "Crime Statistics: Murders (Most Recent by Country," http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/cri_mur-crime-murders (accessed August 15, 2010). For population per country, see Population Statistics, http://www.populstat.info/ (accessed August 15, 2010). For the comparison between the United States and Latin America, see Richard Hofstadter, cited in Martin Rubin's "The Grayness of Darkness," in *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, ed. Christopher Sharrett (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 41-64 (55). For a comparison with war zones, see Hubert Wetzel's commentary on the recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions on loosening gun laws. Wetzel, "Lebensgefährlicher Richterspruch," *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 29, 2010, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/oberstes-us-gericht-urteil-zum-waffenbesitz-lebensgefaehrlicher-richterspruch-1.967377 (accessed August 15, 2010).

[30] On the disproportionate numbers of persons imprisoned in the United States, many of them of African and Latino background, and the draconian penal code, see "Rough Justice," *The Economist*, July 22, 2010, http://www.economist.com/node/16640389 (accessed October 2, 2010). On the death penalty, see *Amnesty International*, http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty/death-sentences-and-executions-in-2009 (October 2, 2009). Two-thirds of all countries worldwide have abolished the death penalty. The United States, in contrast, ranks fifth in executions after China, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Aside from St. Kitts and Nevis, which executed one person in 2008, the United States is the *only* country in the Americas to have executed prisoners, since 2003.

expenditure. Since World War II U.S. global interventionist politics have costs millions of non-American lives, many, if not most of them civilians. Interventionist efforts in particular are repeatedly wrapped in rhetoric around helping, assisting, and liberating others, which constitutes in its negation of actual political agendas and responsibility a form of symbolic violence that Hollywood films, among many other cultural products, participate in. In the context of my project it is, indeed, vital to remember that the films that are the subject of my analysis not "merely" represent events but more than often partake in exercising symbolic violence, when they attribute greatest value to American persons, things, perspectives, and interests.[31]

With these reference points in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars have furthered a discourse about the United States and violence where they pinpoint to violence as a marker of U.S. national identity. Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg speaks in her work, for instance, of an American "proclivity for violence" that she views as a manifestation of an "instability of Americans' national sense of self." According to Smith-Rosenberg, "[t]o fear and dehumanize alien Others" and "to ruthlessly hunt them down" is not only "truly American" but provides the sought-for national cohesion. Historian Richard Slotkin argues similarly in an earlier study on the myth of the frontier, where he suggests that U.S. national identity depends on periodic "regeneration through violence." While both works certainly demonstrate a need for reckoning with violence in reference to U.S. national identity formations,

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[31] For statistics on U.S. war expenditure, see "World Military Spending," *Global Issues*, http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending#InContextUSMilitarySpendingVersusRestoftheWorld (accessed October 2, 2010. According to the source, the United States spends 46.5 percent of the world war budget. For an examination of U.S. war rhetoric, see Joanne Esch, "Legitimizing the "War on Terror:" Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric," *Political Psychology*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2010): 357-391 (358).

they also come with considerable shortcomings, when they present a rather homogenous picture of the United States and its people, where all Americans seem to be similarly positioned in social terms. Their homogenous notion of identity ultimately casts doubt about the generalizability of violence and U.S. national identity, at least, when it is presented in the form of a somewhat a-historical grand narrative.[32]

Violence also bears consideration in reference to gender and gender relations, which centrally inform many of the dynamics that I discuss in this dissertation. The correlation between gender and violence is, for instance, exhibited through crime statistics, where men are disproportionately the ones to commit violent crime. Men are responsible for roughly eighty-five percent of murders in the United States, ninety percent of violent assaults, ninety-five percent of domestic violence, and ninety percent of child sexual abuse. Men are also disproportionately the ones who fight in combat in the name of the nation. These tendencies suggest that violence cannot be viewed as separate from gender formations around notions of masculinity.[33] I address these correlations between violence and masculinity specifically because my analysis in this dissertation revolves around the "war on terror" and, with that, largely a war of

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[32] For Smith-Rosenberg, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), x, 1-2. See also, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 2d ed. (New York and London: Verso, 1991), 6. Lastly, see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 10-16.
[33] The statistics are cited in *Tough Guise*, which features a lecture by anti-violence educator Jackson Katz. Although the film was made in the 1990s, social change in gender relations has not been so drastic as to suggest that these statistics are no longer reflective of general trends in the United States. See *Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity*, dir. Sut Jhally, Media Education Foundation, 1999.

men fighting men, whose plots, strategies and policies are conjured up by men, partially on the accounts of their investments in particular ideas of masculinity.[34]

These gendered aspects to the "war on terror" also illustrate how violence, gender, and nation coincide. Gender tropes imagine that men venture into the dangerous public sphere to fight in accord with their proclaimed masculinity, while women or rather wives, mothers, and daughters await their return to the privacy of their supposedly apolitical homes. As "boundary markers" of the national project, as Anne McClintock suggests in a related context, women are elevated to an abstract ideal of purity and innocence and the cause, for which men commit violence. Yet in flesh and blood women remain suspect, when any real or imagined transgression on the part of women all too easily jeopardizes the national fictions around conflict and war. Relevant to this notion of flesh and blood women and their supposed transgressions is my earlier reference to rape as a weapon of war (see footnote 34). Rape can become a weapon of war precisely because women take roles as "boundary

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[34] For more on how gender and gendered discourses helped to frame 9/11 and the war on terror, see, for instance, J. Ann Tickner, "Feminist Perspectives on 9/11," *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 3 (2002): 333-350; and Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy In Post-9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007). On a note of clarification, I would like to also explain that when I write that men fight men, I am specifically referring to combat situations. While there are women in the U.S. military, men still clearly outnumber them. Only fifteen percent of military personnel are women. In higher ranks, women only occupy about five percent of all positions. According to Pentagon regulations, women may not be assigned to ground combat units. See Rachel Swarns, "A Step Up For Women In the U.S. Military," *New York Times*, June 30, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/30/world/americas/30iht-army.1.14093138.html (accessed April 21, 2011); Michele Norris, "All Things Considered: Roles For Women In the U.S. Army Expand," *NPR*, October 1, 2007, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14869648 (accessed April 21, 2011). My reference to combat situations is not to suggest that women are in any way less affected or victimized by war, especially given that during war (as during peacetimes) women are far more likely to become the targets of sexual violence. In war times rape has, indeed, been repeatedly used as a "weapon of war" where sexual violence is used to not "only" destroy women but, through their status and affiliation, entire communities. So while sexual violence complicates the notion of men fighting men among many other factors, I, nevertheless, see value in pointing to the particular role men play as soldiers and decision-makers in the context of the war on terror. For literature on rape as a weapon of war, see, for instance, Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, "Becoming Abject: Rape As a Weapon of War," *Body and Society*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2005): 111-128.

markers" where their rape may not only signify the failure of men in a woman's family, tribe, or nation to protect her but, under most perfidious circumstances, also comes to signify her "transgression," for which she may be blamed, if not ostracized and killed.[35]

So far I have predominantly discussed what Žižek identifies as "systemic violence." Yet given that this project focuses overwhelmingly on film representations, I now turn my inquiry to the image and, with that, the "symbolic" realm that Žižek presents in his classification of violence. Hollywood screen violence has prompted a significant body of scholarship, including several anthologies on violence and film. Most articles in these collections treat violence as a self-evident term to discuss fictional images that screen bodily assault, mutilation and death in explicit fashion. As film scholar Marco Abel suggests, "the existing body of scholarship on violent images tends to assume that it already knows what an (violent) image is and how it works." This tendency is, for instance, exemplified in *Screening Violence*, where, in the introduction to the volume, film scholar Stephen Prince describes the rise of what he terms "ultraviolence" in film but never fully discloses what "ultraviolence" is and how it substantively differs from other instances of film violence. He mentions the Hays Production Code and the restrictions that it placed on filmmaking practices through the censorship of any explicit display of murder and gun handling, among other things, but fails to explain why more explicit imagery necessarily relays greater

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[35] See Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in Future Heaven:' Gender, Race, and Nationalism," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89-112 (104). See also Klaus Theweleit's study on the interplay of gender, war, and nation in the context of fascism. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, transl. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For reference on rape as a weapon of war, see Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen.

violence. He asserts that Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) is the "most explicitly violent film that had yet been made" but does not mention in what ways the film, which was produced after the Hays Code disintegrated, supposedly engages in a higher order of violence than works, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which was made, while the Hays Code was still intact and arguably instrumental in dismantling it. He also cites social science studies on media effects, many of which work along the lines of his argumentation, when they similarly assume that a violent image is self-evident, as a result of which images are periodically blamed for their allegedly negative social influence. In the aftermath of the 1998 Columbine High School shooting films like *The Basketball Diaries* and *The Matrix* were, for instance, held at fault on account of their allegedly violent representation.[36]

Yet representation is at the crux of what Abel views as a "potential conceptual error" involving studies on film violence. To Abel, image violence is not a matter of representation but affect, where images are not violent on account of what they screen but on account of the effects they produce. Abel reminds us, in other words, that

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[36] For quote, see Abel, x. For anthologies, see Christopher Sharrett, ed. *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1999). Several essays in this volume bridge film history and representations with larger myths around U.S. national identity. See also, Steven Jay Schneider, ed. *New Hollywood Violence* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004). This volume largely focuses on the film text and its techniques in representing violence. Furthermore, see Stephen Prince, *Screening Violence* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000). This volume combines research into film style with socio-psychological research on the effects of media. Prince discusses "ultraviolence" in the context of an introductory chapter to the volume. For quote, see Prince, 9. Also see David Slocum, ed. *Violence and American Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Slocum's edition focuses on genre and cultural studies research but also provides a historical grounding. Consider also, Greg Smith, ""Studies Show": How to Understand Media Violence/Effects Research," in *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 71-87. Smith explains some of the assumptions and fallacies that underlie quantitative violence/effect research. For a reference of the above-mentioned films and the alleged role they played in the high school shooting, see Andy and Lana Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999), starring Keanu Reeves, and Scott Kalvert's *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), starring Leonardo di Caprio, see Geoff Pevere, "Time To Look For Real Links Between Media and Violence Shooting Prompts Usual Fingerpointing," *The Toronto Star*, April 23, 1999. (Lexis Nexis). And last but not least, for more on the Hays Production Code, see Wheeler Winston Dixon & Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *A Short History Of Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 131 & 277

images exert violence and that the violence they exert stands in no direct relationship to what they represent. As a consequence, "the questions we ask of violent images," as Abel suggests, cannot be "what they mean and whether they are justified but *how* they configure our ability to respond to, and do things with, them." For the context of my own work, Abel's insights remind us that while this dissertation speaks of a "dark chamber of terror," no narratives, representations, and tropes unequivocally equate to a specific form of violence. [37]

I conclude my inquiry into violence with a note on terrorism and terrorism studies, which, given the focus of this dissertation, bears consideration as part of a discussion on violence. As political scientist Lee Jarvis outlines in his overview of the field, a significant portion of terrorism scholarship follows antiquated essentialist notions of terrorism as a generally definable object of study that are marked by a perpetual search for the "right definition." This scholarship usually identifies a-historical typologies that outline different kinds of terrorisms and "terrorist personalities." To date many leading contributors to the field continue to be government-affiliated and presume in their policy-driven research, as political scientist Mihalis Halkides already argued in the 1990s, that the "terrorist is always the other."[38]

This self-evidentiary approach to terrorism has also also found its way back into film studies. After "ultraviolence" Stephen Prince has moved to terrorism with his latest book, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism*, where he

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[37] Abel, viii and 187.
[38] Lee Jarvis, "The Spaces and Faces of Critical Terrorism Studies," *Security Dialogue* vol. 40, no. 1 (2009): 5-27. Also see, Mihalis Halkides, "How Not to Study Terrorism," *Peace Review* vol. 7, no. 3/4 (1995): 253-260 (254).

delineates a historical trajectory of terrorism that is strangely disconnected from

larger U.S. domestic and foreign policy considerations. To this effect Prince, for

instance, writes that

> Islamist terror has its roots in the 1930s and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, an
> organization formed in 1928 in opposition to the British military occupation
> of Egypt, but by the 1970s it was a growing force in several of the region's
> repressive states (Egypt as well as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan). It began to
> focus its animus on America in the wake of the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan,
> and in 1996 and again in 1998 Osama bin Laden declared jihad on the United
> States because of its military presence in Saudi Arabia….

The paragraph not only overlooks the long history of U.S. foreign policy and

presence in the Middle East, but Prince's language frames the United States as a

bystander upon whom violence happens. He later talks of how "[r]ecent events

established a kind of cognitive priming for the culture, establishing "terrorism" as a

label and a prism" without ever mentioning the political initiative and motivation

behind using terrorism as a label. And finally, at least as far as my discussion goes, he

suggests that "[w]hile Arabic characters [Arab characters?] traditionally have

furnished convenient villains for Hollywood…it is also true that the film [*Executive*

Decision (1996)] was drawing on contemporary events and sensing where a new

generation of terrorists was likely to be found," after which he quotes the

conservative *Middle East Quarterly* contributor Daniel Mandel, who asserts that

"There are simply no Jewish versions of Usama bin Ladin." But even if that were the

case, given that violence is not limited to individual actors but structural and symbolic

repression and harm, Mandel's comment is misplaced, when bin Laden commits one

type of violence, while forty-three years of dispossession and military occupation in

Palestine (counting the years since 1967) and a decade of sanctions on Iraq, not to

mention capitalist exploits, commit a different, yet frequently more lethal and sustained, type of violence.[39]

Terrorism studies has partially evolved, firstly with what Jarvis terms the "first face of critical terrorism studies," which levels non-state and state violence as equal subjects for inquiry but continues to deploy terrorism as an objective field of study, and secondly with a postmodern turn in the field, where terrorism is no longer understood as inherent to the act or motivation itself but as a discursive subject. Only this second phase of "critical terrorism studies," as Jarvis illustrates, successfully challenges "normative *and* analytical limitations" and moves fully beyond unproductive essentialisms.[40] Scholarship, such as Noam Chomsky's, falls under the first phase of what Jarvis terms critical terrorism studies, while research along the lines of Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* represents the second phase.[41] It is this second phase of critical terrorism studies that corresponds with Abel's non-essentialist approach to violence that I see my project aligned with.

Visual Representation

Thus far I have explored violence as a subcategory of power. Yet another concept that is closely affiliated with power is representation. While my dissertation exclusively considers visual representation, I here include a few notes on the concept of representation at large. Representation presupposes that human beings rely on words, gestures, and images (the *signifier*) that arbitrarily refer to ideas or concepts

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[39] Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film In the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 28, 29, 33, 53.

[40] Jarvis, 20.

[41] Among Chomsky's books on terrorism are, for instance, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002). For Puar, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism In Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

(the *signifier*) to make meaning of the world. In this framework knowledge is produced through and represented in discourse, which cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines as "a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide[s] ways of talking about" a particular theme. Since knowledge is contingent upon discourse, Hall contends that "nothing which is meaning exists *outside discourse*," which is not to say that there is no material world outside of discourse but that this world is unknowable to us without *being represented* in discourse. As I outlined above, the encounter with inconceivable reality, that is to say forces that are left unrepresented and unrepresentable, provokes terror and carries life-destroying potential (see my above discussion on terror). As a concept, representation correlates with power, when power and power relations manifest themselves through the meanings that systems of representation such as language (discourse) and images create and circulate to explain the complexities of the world and our realities within it.[42]

In cultural analysis, including film analysis, representation, as theorized by Hall, avoids the pitfalls of what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam elsewhere refer to as the "stereotype-and-distortions" approach, which assumes that representation stands in a "reflective" relationship to reality and that the degree of accuracy between both is measurable. The "corrective" impulse of the stereotype-and-distortions school is likely spurred by the fact that film bears an ontological relationship with reality, where someone and something was before the camera to be filmed, and by its ability to create an unparalleled semblance of reality through its "unique combination of

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[42] For Hall and his quotes see Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 6. See also, *Stuart Hall: Representation and the Media*, featuring Stuart Hall, Media Education Foundation, 1997.

movement and time." However, given that there is no unfiltered perspective on reality against which film representations could be compared the issue in film analysis, as Shohat and Stam suggest, is ultimately "less one of fidelity to a preexisting truth or reality than one of a specific orchestration of ideological discourses and communitarian perspectives."[43]

One exemplary study on representation that resonates with my study is Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism.* According to Said, Orientalism defines an institutionalized body of knowledge about the "Orient" that coincided with European colonial projects in the past and services U.S. and British, if not other, interventionist agendas in the present. Orientalist representations of the "Orient" refer to the region with an allure to danger and taunt, as Said shows, where harems and jinnies concur with gullible, yet violent and cunning "Oriental" men [read: Arabs and Muslims]. In spite of relevant criticisms of Said's work, his findings persuasively illustrate how "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience." [44]

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[43] For quote on the "stereotype-and-distortions" approach, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 214. For their quote on film analysis as less an issue of "fidelity to a preexisting truth," see 180. For quote on film and reality, see Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello, "Introduction," *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, eds. Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xiv-xxvi (xv). Nagib and Mello build on the insights of André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, Christian Metz and others.
[44] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1, 2, 38 & 39. Said has spurred significant criticism. Middle East historian Maxime Rodinson points, for instance, to the disconnect between Said's argument that Orientalism and imperialism are linked, when Said also makes claims that there are continuities between 19th century and classical texts that long preceded modern western imperialism. Middle East historian Albert Hourani, on a different note, outlines how Said mostly overlooks German Orientalism, when German scholars have prominently shaped the field. Hourani's concern has been shared by Bernard Lewis. The criticisms of Lewis and Hourani point to Said's somewhat selective use of history. Said does not engage the Ottoman Empire, although Ottoman advances to Vienna in 1529 and 1683, for one, directly bear on representations of the "Orient," as Germanist Nina Berman suggests in her book. On yet a different note, Said has been criticized for his "too determining and univocal a notion of discourse," as postcolonial theorist Robert Young puts it, which has encouraged some scholars to revise and update Said's framework. With *Rethinking Orientalism* cultural theorist Reina Lewis offers, for instance, a more dynamic and diversifying approach to Orientalism, when she argues that "the

As one of the most influential theoretical texts of the late 20th century

Orientalism has guided many subsequent inquiries, including those into film and

television representations of Arabs and Muslims. Among the early works are Jack

Shaheen's *The TV Arab*, which he meticulously followed up on with *Reel Bad Arabs:*

How Hollywood Vilifies a People and *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After*

9/11. Although these volumes all suffer from the methodological shortcomings that

Shohat and Stam are critical of, when Shaheen suggests that film and television

images represent stereotypes *not reality* with the presumption that reality can be

accurately assessed and represented, the sheer abundance of materials that he

reviewed (over 1,000 films) for his books is humbling and lends his arguments about

the vilification of Arabs significant credibility.[45] More recent works along these lines

West was never the sole arbiter and owner of meanings about the Orient" and that "Orientalism was a discourse framed by the responses, adaptations and contestations of those whom it constructed as its objects." Lewis also introduces gender as a relevant category to the Orientalism debate, which is also central to sociologist Meyda Yeğenoğlu's *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism.* One key argument in *Colonial Fantasies* is that, like race and class, gender and sexuality are not supplemental to Orientalism but that Orientalism is always constituted by and constitutive of gender and sexuality. For the reception of Said's *Orientalism*, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism," In: *Orientalism: A Reader,* ed. A.L. Macfie (New York: New York University Press, 2000). See Nina Berman, *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne: Zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900* (Stuttgart: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1997). Also see Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2005). View Robert Young building on Homi Bhabha in *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publisher Inc., 2001), 392. See Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 1-2. And, finally, see Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71-72.

[45] In *The TV Arab* Shaheen advocates what he describes as "balanced," "evenhanded and thoughtful [television] programs" that work against common "misconceptions;" "misconceptions" not resulting from "malicious intent but willful ignorance." See Jack Shaheen, *The TV Arab* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984), 22, 83, 41, 117. In his later two volumes, he classifies the films through key words, including "villains," "sheikhs," "Palestinians," "Egyptians," "maidens," "cameos," "worst list," and, more recently, "Arab-as-victim." See *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001). And *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2008). Other works along these lines, include Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983); Laurence Michalak, "Cruel and Unusual: Negative Images of

include the research of Evelyn Alsultany, who argues that post-9/11 mainstream

media have deployed strategies to improve images involving Arab and Muslim

Americans. The use of "patriotic Arab and Muslim Americans" in television and film

is but one of eight strategies that she outlines.[46] While my own work does not take the

representation of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab and Muslim Americans but

representations of the "war on terror" as its organizing principle, much of what I

discuss in the chapters that follow integrates analysis of representations of Arab and

Muslim characters within my larger framework of *visioning practices.*

 The images of Arab and Muslims in film and television raise important

questions about the ethics of representation and spectatorship. I am especially

concerned with the ethics of spectatorship or, as Abel puts it, "response-ability" in the

face of media violence, given that this project involves analysis of representations of

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Arabs in American Popular Culture," American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1984; and Linda Fuller, "Hollywood Holding Us Hostage: Or, Why are Terrorists in the Movies Middle Easterners?" In: *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception,* ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

[46] Evelyn Alsultany, "Patriotic Investments in Victimhood, Vengeance, and Violence," Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association, The Renaissance Hotel, Washington, D.C., November 5, 2009. See also Alsultany, "The Changing Profile of Race in the United States: Media Representations and Racialization of Arab- and Muslim-Americans post-9/11," Diss. Stanford University, 2005. Other newer film scholarship includes Tim Jon Semmerling's *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*, where he offers a range of close readings of select films, including *The Exorcist*, as part of a discourse on "evil" Arabs. In spite of several intriguing points, Semmerling's analysis repeats some of Shaheen's methodological mishaps. See Tim Jon Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006). Yet other scholars, like Americanist Melani McAlister, have embedded film analysis within the frameworks of a larger cultural history. In *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, McAlister investigates how Americans have negotiated ideas about national identity and belonging through political and cultural "encounters" with the Middle East by way of news, film, exhibitions and so forth. As part of her analysis she reads John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* (1977), an early film about Arabs as terrorists, not only in the light of the deadly hostage crisis at the 1972 Munich Olympics, but explains the choices to cast an Israeli lead character as part of a larger post-Vietnam War phenomenon, where Americans looked to Israeli military might after the military defeat in Vietnam. Her film analysis is exemplary in depth. See Melani McAlister, "The Good Fight," *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945,* second edition, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

actual body horror.[47] A useful reference point for the deliberation on ethics

constitutes, in my view, the work of media scholar Sue Tait. With an analysis of the

Ogrish.com website, which housed among other footage the first two al-Qaeda

decapitation videos (of Daniel Pearl in 2002 and Michael Berg in 2004), Tait

complicates the spectatorship of body horror, which has been conventionally framed,

as Tait argues, in terms of either pornography or witnessing. Spectatorship as

pornography or "death porn" carries implications that spectators watch death and

dismemberment for (sexual) pleasure, while spectatorship as witnessing, suggests that

spectators empathize with the victim with the outcome that they will, as Tait argues,

ultimately ascribe to pacifism.

In contrast to these two framings, Tait speaks of "a range of spectatorship

positions" vis-à-vis body horror and subsequently outlines four. These include: "an

amoral gaze, whereby the suffering subject becomes a source of stimulation and

pleasure; a vulnerable gaze, where viewers experience harm from graphic imagery; an

entitled gaze, where viewers frame their looking through anti-censorship discourses;

and a responsive gaze, whereby looking is a precedent to action." Her analysis

accounts for the complexities around the spectatorship of body horror, where

watching body horror does not carry any *one* particular meaning or speaks to *one*

particular personal disposition.

Tait develops her spectator positions from an analysis of the comments that

viewers left on the Ogrish.com website. One may, however, also consider a case

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[47] Marco Abel likens ethics to what he terms response-ability. In his view violent images prompt
questions around ethics in the form of response-ability, not judgment. He explores this notion with a
discussion of Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," where DeLillo avoids ascribing specific
meaning to the 2001 attacks. See Abel, xiii.

where the viewer refuses to watch (and comment). Like seeing, not seeing or the refusal to watch carries ethical implications, when not seeing does not automatically equate with an innocuous position, as is sometimes presumed. In connection with the al-Qaeda slaughter video of the Daniel Pearl murder, public intellectual Susan Sontag, for instance, suggested that

> [n]obody could have learned from the debate [about the video] that the video had other footage [than the beheading], a montage of stock accusations…, that is was a political diatribe and ended with dire threats and a list of specific demands – all of which might suggest that it was worth suffering through (if you could bear it) to confront better the particular viciousness and intransigence of the forces that murdered Pearl. It is easier to think of the enemy as just a savage who kills, then holds up the head of his prey for all to see.

If not seeing may be easier – in the sense that it may simplify what we know about the Other and better agree with our comfort – it is not unequivocally the soundest political or ethical position, as Sontag implies, when not seeing becomes not knowing and not knowing constitutes a rather dangerous platform for political debate and action. While my aim here is not to advocate watching body horror but to complicate simplistic notions of not seeing as an innocuous position, I would, nevertheless, suggest that, considering the significance of visual media to the war on terror, there is, indeed, a need for media scholarship on images of body horror, especially when mainstream film and television shows have already taken to entertaining the subject matter within their own frames of references (see Chapter Three).[48]

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[48] Sue Tait, "Pornographies of Violence? Internet Spectatorship on Body Horror," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2008): 91-111 (94, 100, 101). See also Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003) 69-70.

Methodologies:
Close Reading Practices and Discourse Analysis

I begin this section with a brief note on my selection of the films. Each

dissertation chapter not only details a different set of *visioning practices* but speaks to

a different relationship between the violent event and its media image. *En-visioning*

practices emerge from a relationship between violent event and media image, where

al-Qaeda executed the event (the 9/11 attacks) but the (United States and other)

mainstream media outlets created and circulated the first news image. At the base of

re-visioning practices is a relationship, where al-Qaeda executed the event *and*

created the only nonfictional image (of the murder of hostages). *Dis-visioning*

practices underlie a relationship, where the United States executed the event (torture)

and U.S. culprits created and circulated the first nonfictional images. In their sum the

chapters offer a systematic approach to studying fiction films and their relationship to

actual events that have come to define the "war on terror." As an Americanist I give

priority to U.S.-produced films (Hollywood), which is not to imply that a study of

other films about the war on terror, especially Arab-language films, would not

fruitfully complement my work.[49]

The topical choices in this dissertation on the "war on terror" range from 9/11

and al-Qaeda hostage murders to U.S. torture and the Iraq war. They do not aim to

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[49] My focus is not to suggest that an Arab-centric perspective with an investigation of Arab media and film in the light of the "war on terror," as one example, would not usefully complicate the *visioning practices* that the films subject to my dissertation put forth. Unfortunately, such analysis goes beyond the scope of this dissertation and requires greater fluency in Arabic than I currently have. Edward Said reminds us with his stark criticism of Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Judith Miller, who repeatedly covered the Middle East for over twenty years up to her retirement from the *New York Times* in 2005 and who published books like *God Has Ninety-Nine Names* and *Saddam Hussein And the Crisis in the Gulf*, that, while common in the United States, the lack of language skills, in Miller's case of Arabic and Farsi, would make her "woefully unqualified" with respects to most other regions in the world. His critique is well-taken. For Said's criticism of Miller, see *Covering Islam: How the Media And the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, revised edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), xxxvi.

comprehensively represent the "war on terror" but to highlight a diverse set of key incidents that have shaped understanding of the "war" over the years. I start my inquiry with film representations of the September 2001 attacks, which mark the beginning of the "war on terror." To date only two major Hollywood productions thematize the 2001 attacks as their centerpiece, Paul Greengrass' *United 93* (2006) and Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006), and thereby fill visual voids with images and narrative. Yet only one of them, *United 93*, imagines a dark chamber of terror – the airplane cabin – where a direct physical encounter between al-Qaeda militants and passengers unfolds in accord with the definition that I have adopted from Coetzee. In Chapter Two I read Greengrass' film alongside Peter Markle's television production *Flight 93* (2006), which represents the only other fiction film on the hijacking.[50]

In Chapter Three I draw on the first two al-Qaeda slaughter videos as a base for my discussion. I choose the first two videos because they initiate a new type of terror that later becomes more commonplace. For the selection of fiction films I previewed all major Hollywood productions that are set in the Middle East or thematize the Iraq war. Of the films that I previewed, I discuss all productions that imagine al-Qaeda hostage scenarios in conjunction with al-Qaeda filmmaking practices with the exception of Brian de Palma's *Redacted* (2007). I disregard *Redacted* in this chapter because its engagement with al-Qaeda cannot be understood

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[50] For films, see *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2006; *World Trade Center*, dir. Oliver Stone, Paramount Pictures, 2006; *Flight 93*, dir. Peter Markle, A & E, 2006. The two films that are the subject of my discussion in this chapter, *United 93* and *Flight 93*, carry similar titles. In order to help readers better distinguish between the two works, I use the underscore as an additional visual marker to differentiate between the two films.

as *re-visioning practices*, as I will briefly illuminate as part of my conclusion in Chapter Five.[51]

In Chapter Four I shift gears and discuss U.S. transgressions in the "war on terror." In preparation for this task I previewed films that thematize U.S. torture and were made during the "war on terror." I also researched the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal in scholarly debates and art productions (including Fernando Botero's *Abu Ghraib* paintings). I pick Robert de Niro's Cold War drama *The Good Shepherd* (2006) as an example of a more subtle form of *dis-visioning*, not only for its visual alignment with the "war on terror" iconography but its plot, which revolves around the rise of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and, with that, the government body that has been directly implicated in torture in the war on terror. I complement my discussion of representations of torture with an analysis of Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007), which is the only Hollywood production that features U.S. torture as its centerpiece.[52]

Fiction films constitute the central texts that this dissertation explores. For this reason I subject each film to a careful analysis. Before I detail the steps that involve this process, I would like to suggest, however, that analysis of culture and cultural texts, including this one, always also rely on contextual knowledge that eludes the systematic and procedural allure that is characteristic of methodologies. I am, in other

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[51] The film that I discuss in Chapter Three include: *A Mighty Heart*, dir. Michael Winterbottom, Paramount Vantage, 2007; *Body of Lies*, dir. Ridley Scott, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008; *The Kingdom*, dir. Peter Berg, Universal Pictures, 2007; and *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak*, dirs. Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk, Pana Films, 2006. I am not discussing Brian de Palma's *Redacted* until the Chapter Five. See *Redacted*, dir. Brian de Palma, Magnolia Pictures, 2007.

[52] For films, see *The Good Shepherd*, dir. Robert de Niro, Universal Pictures, 2006; *Rendition*, dir. Gavin Hood, New Line Cinema, 2007.

words, speaking of contextual knowledge that evades the so-to-speak methodic qualities in methodologies.

These dynamics are, for instance, exemplified through what cultural geographer Gillian Rose calls the development of a "good eye" in visual analysis. For a "good eye" in her case in painting, Rose contends, "you need a lot of knowledge about particular painters, about the kinds of painting they did, about the sorts of visual imagery they were looking at and being inspired by."[53] Akin to the "good eye" in painting, a "good eye" in film studies builds on knowledge about particular directors and genres, film history, theory and conventions, and so forth. With a cultural studies approach to film, where filmic representations and discourses are examined in conjunction with larger social processes, contextual knowledge encompasses virtually any information about a given culture. What I seek to illustrate with the example of the "good eye" is that an ideal "good eye" is, on the one hand, unattainable, while contextual knowledge involves, on the other hand, incidental or arbitrary elements. The methodic in methodologies notwithstanding, cultural interpretations, in short, always carry "unwarranted surplus knowledge" – the methodological wild card so-to-speak.

Yet despite these constraints or surpluses I will now attempt to make my approach to the visual materials explicit. The first two clusters of research questions around how different films and videos represent the dark chamber and compare in

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[53] See Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 34.

their representation lend themselves to close reading as a method. To this effect I first

examine the overall narrative of each visual text with a standard set of questions:[54]

- What happens in the film or video?
- How are story elements arranged or, to quote Hayden White, "emplotted?"
- What is the conflict? Or, in the case of Hollywood films, what are the two points of conflict?
- What are key themes in the film?
- What are key patterns, repetitions, motifs of significance?
- How are characters represented? What social identities do different characters represent and why? What characteristics are ascribed to different characters? What do mise-en-scène, montage, and sound infer about different characters?
- How does the film or video explain character motivation?
- Who narrates the story? Whose point-of-view does the film privilege?
- And cumulatively, what does the film or video propose?

Of the dark chamber of terror, the following questions can be asked:

- Where in the plot does the dark chamber emerge and under what circumstances? How does the scene(s) of the dark chamber relate to other scenes in the film in visual and narrative terms?
- How does the representation of the dark chamber relate to key themes, patterns, motifs in the film?
- What characters are featured in the dark chamber? What is their relationship? How are they characterized in the context of the dark chamber? Are there continuities and/or significant differences to their characterization before and after the scene(s)?
- Whose perspective does the film represent in the scene(s) that involve the dark chamber?
  After these preliminary questions about the narrative, I subsequently analyze key

scenes, such as those involving the representation of the dark chamber under closer

consideration of the visual components that the film scenes are made of. Questions

involve mise-en-scène, camerawork, montage, and sound, including:

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[54] I developed these questions under consideration of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: an Introduction*, 8th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008). I also drew on "Strategies For Critical Analysis of Texts," a handout developed by Janet Staiger for "Violence and U.S. Cinema," a course of hers, taught in Film Studies at the University of Texas in Austin in spring 2000, which I attended.

- How are the key scenes represented in terms of mise-en-scène (setting, props, costume, lighting, and acting)? What does the film or video propose through its choices in mise-en-scène?
- How are key scenes in the film or video framed? How do camera distance and angle figure into the framing with what effect? How does the composition of key frames in the film or video correspond with the narrative? Where do different frames and their composition position the spectator? How does the camera move with what effect?
- What associative meanings do the choices in mise-en-scène and framing appeal to? How do these associative meanings relate to larger discourses (more on that below, when I discuss discourse analysis)?
- What types of relations does the montage establish between different shots? What meanings emerge through these relations? What type of conventional editing, such as continuity editing, does the film or video use? What is the editing pace? When does the film use point-of-view shots for what purpose?
- What type of diegetic and nondiegetic sound does the film or video use? Does the film use moments of silence for what effect? How do sound and image correspond with each other? Are there contradictions in their correspondence?[55]

Together these questions serve as tools for a close reading technique that reveals in what ways ideology enters the works of art (film). All of them are geared towards determining the effects and meanings of particular narrative and stylistic choices. Given that several chapters consider more than just one visual text, the questions also help me to flesh out significant absences in individual works as well as patterns and repetitions across them. They, in other words, serve as a starting point for the cross- and intertextual examinations that define discourse analysis.

If discourse refers to "a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images, and practices, which provide[s] ways of talking about" a particular theme, discourse analysis makes the structures of thought and their underlying power relationships visible, when it is

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[55] I should clarify that throughout this dissertation I employ a definition of mise-en-scène, where mise-en-scène refers to the elements that film shares with stage theatre, that is to say elements, such as, setting, props, lighting, acting, and costumes. Although in film these elements are always mediated through the perspective of the camera and, with that, a particular angle and distance that creates a particular frame composition, I consider cinematography separately, especially in Chapter Two, where I discuss the effects that the interplay of mise-en-scène, on the one hand, and montage and cinematography, on the other hand, carry with them. For the purposes of this dissertation, mise-en-scène thus, for the most part, describes *what* viewers see in a given frame rather than *how* they see. I build my understanding of mise-en-scène on the works of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, among others. For reference, see *Film Art*.

concerned with "some kind of authoritative account," where a thing is thought in one

preferred way that is more than often construed as "normal" or "natural."[56] In this

project discourse analysis thus takes the meanings and propositions that emerge in

individual films and asks:

- In what other texts of the widest possible range do meanings and propositions arise that are similar to those in the films? What is the relationship between these other texts and the films?
- What contextual information do the film texts build on?
- To what political, economic, and social developments do the meanings and propositions in the films speak to? With what linguistic innovations do the meanings and propositions coincide? What linguistic innovations do the meanings and propositions propagate? ("Enemy combatant" marks such a linguistic innovation.)
- What narrative tropes do the meanings and propositions service? How do these narrative tropes, for instance, tropes on gender and the nation, coincide or differ from those used in other historical periods?
- What histories and accounts are invisible, what histories and accounts are hypervisible in terms of the meanings and propositions that the texts evoke?

Discourse analysis in terms of this project signifies that I read the films alongside a

wide range of sources that include newspaper articles, government documents,

auto/biographies, novels, and documentary and fiction films beyond the primary

texts. This process of *reading and looking widely* enables me to identify propositions

and meanings in the films and videos as expressions of larger socio-political positions

and practices.

Contribution to the Field

In the section on *Conceptual and Theoretical Investments* I present power as a

meta-concept that encapsulates violence and operates through visual representation.

Questions around power drive the research of this project, when I read the *en-*, *re-*,

and *dis-visioning practices* that the films engage in as a quest for authorship and

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[56] For definition of discourse, see Hall, *Representation*, 6. For other quotes, see Rose, 136 & 142.

authority over events and their meanings. I suggest that the ways in which this project

relates fiction films to power, when it unpacks the ideological workings of individual

images and narratives, make it significant. A key contribution of this dissertation is

thus a systematic "thick description" of the visual dimensions of the "war."[57]

I expand existing research, when I do not "merely" focus on nonfictional news

images *or* fiction film, like most other projects, but pinpoint to the slippages and

continuities between different types of visual texts. I, in other words, draw on a range

of visual texts that stand in *distinct* ontological relationships to reality. Some films

that are the subject of my discussion, such as Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007) and

Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007), relate only indirectly and abstractly to actual events

– through the issues they explore, the discourses they deploy, and occasional

historical references. Other films, such as Paul Greengrass' *United 93* (2006) and

Michael Winterbottom's *A Mighty Heart* (2007) bear a closer relationship to reality,

when they are based on actual events, that is to say specific written accounts of actual

events. By drawing on diverse materials, I address the ideological work they perform

across the "blurred boundaries" between fiction and nonfiction.[58]

Yet "blurred boundaries" are not a blank check for "anything goes." Rather I

present a framework that offers a systematic approach to the "war on terror" and, with

that, a roadmap for future research on the subject. As I have detailed in my

Methodologies section, each dissertation chapter not only presents a different set of

visioning practices but builds on a different relationship between the violent event

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[57] I borrow and adapt the term "thick description" from Cliffort Geertz. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[58] I take the notion of "blurred boundaries" from Bill Nichols. See Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

and its media image. In their sum the chapters encompass several relationships between event and image that are relevant to an analysis of the "war on terror" from an American Studies perspective. I view this systematic approach to the "war on terror" as another valuable contribution to the field.

As I have illustrated, this dissertation contributes to the fields of American and Film Studies through conceptual and methodological means. Yet it also paves new grounds for research with its discussions of films like *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak* and the al-Qaeda productions, which to date have spurred little, if any, scholarly resonance. To clarify, several of the texts that I present in this dissertation have not yet been the subject of scholarly research. The dissertation thus also introduces new pathways for future research – pathways that reflect my commitment to a more global approach to American and Film Studies, where events, texts, and meanings are recognized as always already crossing national borders, conflicting, and converging.

Outlining the Chapters

Each of the four chapters of this dissertation explores another angle of engagement with the dark chamber of terror through what I term *visioning practices*. Chapter Two explores Paul Greengrass' *United 93* in conjunction with Peter Markle's made-for-television film *Flight 93* to address what I term *en-visioning practices*, where fictional images fill the visual void that the absence of actual recorded images from the ill-fated flight left. The dark chamber of terror here refers to the airborne aircraft cabin, whose inescapability speaks to its centrality to the 2001 events, where persons, who experienced the full horror of the attacks, did not survive. With the focus on how the United States and its Others are imagined, I outline what narratives

Greengrass' film deploys alongside and in tension with other stories about Flight 93 to unpack the ideological work that the film performs overwhelmingly in the absence of firm evidence.

Chapter Three is base to a relationship between image and event, where al-Qaeda both executed the event *and* created the image. I am specifically referring to al-Qaeda hostage murders that the organization filmed and disseminated over the internet. Several films like Michael Winterbottom's *A Mighty Heart* (2007), Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies* (2008) and Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007) engage al-Qaeda slaughter videos, al-Qaeda filmmaking practices, and al-Qaeda's visual control with a corrective impulse that I term *re-visioning practice*, which serves to subvert the narratives and meanings that the extremists put forth. The dark chamber of terror refers in this chapter to the space where the encounter between al-Qaeda and its hostages takes place.

Chapter Four underlies a relationship between image and event, where the United States government executed the event and state-affiliated citizens created the image. In this chapter I, in other words, explore the visual ramifications around U.S. torture under consideration of Robert de Niro's *The Good Shepherd* (2006) and Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007). Both visual sites engage in what I term *dis-visioning practices*, a form of ambivalent re-visioning of the knowledge that was brought forth by the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal in 2004. To put it differently, both visual sites acknowledge U.S. complicity in torture, yet simultaneously negate the full implications of U.S. torture. The dark chamber of terror refers in this chapter to the space, where the CIA and its affiliates torture political prisoners.

In Chapter Five I recap key findings from my three case studies, yet also trouble the image-discourse-power nexus that underlies the three sets of *visioning practices*. In a brief commentary on Brian de Palma's Iraq war drama *Redacted* (2007), I illustrate that the film destabilizes the seamless relationship between image and event that defines the other *visioning practices*, when it creates a patchwork aesthetics that emulate "embedded" war footage, soldier "home videos," and al-Qaeda slaughter videos, among others.

Chapter Two: En-visioning the Hijacking of Flight 93

On September 11, 2001, American Airlines flight 11 hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46:40 in the morning. Major television networks, including *CNN*, *NBC*, *ABC*, and *CBS*, interrupted their regular morning programs to report the incident with live footage from lower Manhattan. With their news cameras up and running, they would film the collision of a second plane with the South Tower at 9:03:11. At 9:58:59 they would record the disintegration of the South Tower and later capture the collapse of the North Tower at 10:28:25. Live television coverage of the attacks and the destruction of the world's tallest twin buildings mark the "planes operation" as an uncharacteristically visual event that spectators around the world followed in real time.[59]

Although the 2001 events are marked by a hyper-visibility that accelerated over the weeks to come, when networks repeatedly screened the same set of images of the assault on and collapse of the buildings, the attacks are also defined by significant visual voids of what occurred on the airplanes and in the buildings. No visual records exist of the spaces of entrapment, from which no witnesses emerged alive, when (completely) *being inside the event* meant to perish within the event. What we do know about the *inside* of these spaces rests exclusively on fragmented audio records, such as cockpit transcribers, and some families' and friends' personal

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[59] For more on the uncharacteristically visual aspects of the event, see, for instance, Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 170-175. For television coverage of the 9/11 attacks, see Internet Archive, "Television Archives: A Library of World Perspectives Concerning September 11th, 2001," http://www.archive.org/details/sept_11_tv_archive (accessed March 4, 2011). Also see *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004). For reference to the "planes operation," see *9/11 Commission Report*, 153.

recollections of what they discussed with their ill-fated loved-ones on cell and air-

phones.[60]

In the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, these spaces of entrapment have been

visually accounted for in the realm of fiction film. Films like the Hollywood

production *United 93* and the made-for-television movie *Flight 93*, both of which are

the subject of my analysis in this chapter, engage in what I call *en-visioning practices*,

where they fill the voids left by the absence of actual visual records with fictional

images.[61] I am especially concerned with the spaces of entrapment, where the violent

encounter between al-Qaeda militants, passengers, and crew members was set, that is

to say the airborne cabins rather than the office spaces in the World Trade Center that

were located above the floors, where the planes hit the building. I refer to these

airborne cabins as the 9/11 dark chamber of terror or simply the dark chamber. When

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[60] I take the notion that being inside the event means to perish within the event from psychiatrist Dori Laub, who suggests as much in the context of the Holocaust. I believe that the notion can be applied to the experience of the September 11 attacks, where the full experience of the attacks would be an experience of no escape. Laub is cited in the introduction of Cathy Caruth's *Explorations of Memory*. See Cathy Caruth, ed, *Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 195), 7. As a second point of clarification, I would like to note that the hyper-visibility of the events, if partial at best, was interpreted by several scholars as an evidence of trauma, when a common first response to trauma is compulsive repetition rather than proper remembrance. For more on 9/11, repetition, and trauma, see, for instance, Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 26-32. As a final point of clarification, I would like to reiterate that our knowledge from inside the event rests exclusively on fragmented audio records and personal memory. In a footnote the *9/11 Commission Report*, for instance, states that they "have relied mainly on the record of *FBI interviews with the people who received calls*. The FBI interviews were conducted while memories were still fresh and were less likely to have been affected by reading the accounts of others or hearing stories in the media." [my emphasis] For quote, see *9/11 Commission Report*, 456. What the Report does not mention is that even "fresh memory" is quite unreliable, in flux, and subject to manipulation. According to psychologists Neil Brewer and Nathan Weber, "memory fallibility has been amply illustrated in laboratory and field studies of eyewitness identification performance and in the high profile DNA exoneration cases…." For quote, see Brewer and Weber, "Eyewitness Confidence and Latency: Indices of Memory Processes Not Just Markers of Accuracy," *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, vol. 22 (2008): 827-840 (827).

[61] For films, see *United 93*, dir. Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures, 2006; *Flight 93*, dir. Peter Markle, A & E, 2006. The two films that are the subject of my discussion in this chapter, *United 93* and *Flight 93*, carry similar titles. In order to help readers to better distinguish between the two works, I use the underscore as an additional visual marker to differentiate between the two films. I should also clarify that *Flight 93* will always only refer to the made-for-television film, while Flight 93 (without italics and underscore) describes the larger narrative and mythology around the ill-fated flight.

films engage in what I call *en-visioning practices*, they illuminate the dark chamber and ascribe (visual) certainty and meaning in the process.

As a term, *en-visioning* assumes that films do not reflect but engender visions. It draws attention to how particular narrative elements, emplotments, and styles (mise-en-scène, camerawork, editing, and sound) are purposefully chosen to construct knowledge that corresponds with larger societal discourses about the attacks. It highlights the leap that films like *United 93* and *Flight 93* take, when they adapt fragmented audio records and witness testimony to produce *conclusive visual narratives* about largely unknowable historical events. It presumes that the re/production of knowledge constitutes an exercise of power.

In what follows I compare the *en-visioning practices* of the two films with an argument that the films participate in crafting particular knowledge about the hijacking of Flight 93, when they offer set visual narratives of events that have otherwise not been visually represented. As I delineate how the two films *en-vision* the events in accord with the larger mythology that emerged in the aftermath of the attacks, I not only point to significant similarities between the two works but differences that trouble any suggestions of coherence and conclusiveness about the events.

I take the term "mythology" to describe a body of myths or stories that are "familiar, acceptable, reassuring to their host culture" and "profoundly implicated in the definition and maintenance of commonsense reality."[62] The mythology of Flight 93 refers to the multiple and conflicting stories that emerged around the only plane

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[62] For quotes, see Roger Silverstone, "Television Myth and Culture," in *Media, Myths, and Narratives*, edited by James W. Carey (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 23 & 37.

that did not reach al-Qaeda's target destination – presumably the U.S. Capitol or White House – but crashed in rural Pennsylvania after passengers and crew members attempted to overpower the militants and regain control of the aircraft. It is these multiple and conflicting stories that *Flight 93* and *United 93* had to reckon with during film production. And it is these multiple and conflicting stories that the two films contribute to with their respective visions of the events onboard of the ill-fated flight.

The mythology that emerged around Flight 93 prior to the two films were made has been centrally defined by a notion of American heroics that partially fed off the idea of the "citizen-soldier" who sacrifices (mostly) *his* life for the larger good of the national community. Literary scholar Elaine Scarry, author of the widely acclaimed *The Body in Pain*, is one of several people who have interpreted the passenger revolt as a conscious sacrifice to the nation rather than a struggle for personal survival. The idea that the passengers consciously sacrificed their lives in order to spare others is not substantiated from the little that is known from the cockpit transcriber and telephone calls with relatives and friends.[63]

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[63] See Elaine Scarry, "Who Defended the Country," *Who Defended the Country?*, ed. Joshua Cohen Joel Rogers (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 25. The documentary film *The Flight That Fought Back* also repeatedly frames the story in accord with the idea of the citizen-soldier, for instance, when it states in voice-over (read by Kiefer Sutherland, best known for his role as Jack Bauer in Fox's *24*): "And by risking and losing their own lives, they saved the lives of countless others." In the documentary, the widow of passenger Thomas Burnett, Deena Burnett, moreover, draws parallels to the Civil War battle at Gettysburg, where, according to Deena Burnett, soldiers pinned notes to their wives and loved-ones on trees, well-aware that they would not return. By telling the story and suggesting that it had deeply resonated with her husband, Deena Burnett also appeals to the idea of the citizen-soldiers. Others, like Liz Glick, the widow of passenger Jeremy Glick, however, expressed doubt about this particular framing. Liz Glick, for instance, says in the documentary: "So what is fuelling them? Uhm, I don't think it's a desire to save the White House and be bigger than life. I think it's them looking inside themselves and taking something smaller – and Jeremy wanted to be home for dinner, you know, he wanted to hold his baby daughter." Ultimately, the documentary thus also attests to the inconsistencies that mark the mythology around Flight 93 (more on that in this chapter). For references, see *The Fight That Fought Back*, dir. Bruce Goodison, Discovery Channel, 2005. For

Reports on the passenger revolt that entered the public domain in the

aftermath of the attacks quickly came to focus on four male passengers as the heroes

of the fight against the hijackers.[64] Not only were the four men among the twelve

passengers who would *have* a personalized Flight 93 story because they spoke with

relatives, friends, and strangers on the ground, who could later publicly testify to their

contribution, but the four men – Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Thomas Burnett, and

Jeremy Glick – also shared characteristics that predisposed them to posthumous

heroization. All four men were white, male professionals in their thirties, and, as

such, occupied a social position that widely operates as a default for how American

identity is imagined and represented. The men also shared physical attributes that

would have enabled them to engage in the physical struggle that they are presumed to

have engaged in with the hijackers. Their tall, athletic built featured in news outlets as

part of their lionization as heroes.[65] Lastly, the men or rather three of the four men

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comparative purposes, see the *9/11 Commission Report*. According to the *Report*, "the hijackers remained at the controls but must have judged that the passengers were only seconds from overcoming them." As far as the *Report* is concerned, whatever the motivation of the passengers, they did clearly not crash the plane (purposefully or not). (*9/11 Commission Report*, 14.) The cockpits transcriber, which voice-recorded the last thirty minutes in the cockpit, moreover, picked up the voice of one passenger, shouting "In the cockpit, if we don't, we'll die," which again undercuts the idea that passengers were engaged in the struggle to sacrifice their lives for the nation. For cockpit transcript, see "United Airlines Flight Cockpit Tape Transcript," *MSNBC.com*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12286423/ns/us_news-security/ (accessed April 21, 2011).

[64] For stylistic reasons, unless otherwise noted, the term passenger refers to all passengers plus the crew and minus the hijackers.

[65] For profiles of the four passengers, see special edition of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 28, 2001, http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20011028flt93mainstoryp7.asp (accessed April 24, 2011). The website includes a list of the names of all passengers and crew (excluding the perpetrators) and links out to individual portraits for each one of them. For more in depth information on specific passengers, see Jere Longman, *Among the Heroes: United Flight 93 and the Passengers and Crew Who Fought Back* (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002); Lisa Beamer with Ken Abraham, *Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002); Lisa D. Jefferson and Felicia Middlebrooks, *Called: "Hello, My Name is Mrs. Jefferson. I understand Your Plane Is Being Hijacked..."* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2006); and Jon Barrett, *Hero of Flight 93: Mark Bingham* (Los Angeles: Advocate Books, 2002). For more on the lionization of the four passengers in physical terms, see, for instance, the very first article that the *New York Times* published on the fight back, where they describe Mark Bingham as "a 6-foot-5 former rugby player who this

shared similar domestic arrangements. All three were married men with young children, two of them with stay-at home wives. These arrangements aid their plausibility as heroes, when they correspond with widespread cultural expectations in the United States that place particular value on romantic love, heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family.[66]

The one man who did not share these domestic arrangements, Mark Bingham, was gay. Why Bingham nevertheless became a key figure to represent America in the face of the September 11 attacks is alluded to by gender scholar Jasbir Puar who argues that "some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them." Bingham, a former rugby player, who supported Senator John McCain's run for presidency in 2000, performed a masculinity and politics that did not challenge the "heterosexual nationalist formations" that Puar addresses in her book. According to his mother Alice Hoglan, Bingham was "proud of being gay, just as he was proud of being a Republican, and proud of playing rugby, and proud of his friends." By equating his pride in his sexuality with his pride in playing rugby (among others),

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summer ran with the bulls in Pamplona," Jeremy Glick as "a muscular 6-foot-4 water sportsman," and Tom Burnett as "a 6-1 former high school football player." They do not mention Todd Beamer who also fit the profile and became crucial to the Flight 93 narrative after he was credited for the words "let's roll;" words that posthumously circulated widely and found its way onto mugs and t-shirts, into music (a Neil-Young song is called "Let's Roll"), into sports (the 2002 Florida State sports slogan was "Let's Roll"), and the 2002 State of the Union Address, where Bush described "let's roll" as "a new ethic and a new creed" for America. For *New York Times* article, see Jodi Wilgoren and Edward Wong, "On Doomed Flight Passengers Vowed To Perish Fighting," *The New York Times* Sept. 13, 2001: A1 & A 21. For more on "let's roll," see George Vecsey, "'Let's Roll' Demeans Real Heroes," *New York Times* Aug. 20, 2002: D1. Also see "Sprachgeschichten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* Apr. 12, 2002: 10. For the 2002 Presidential State of the Union Address, see George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," January 29, 2002, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2002_presidential_documents&docid=pd04fe02_txt-11.pdf (accessed December 7, 2010).
[66] See, for instance, John Caughey, *Negotiating Cultures and Identities* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 15.

Hoglan depoliticizes the cultural and economic investments that sexual and gender

norms carry and the (sometimes lethal) repercussions that gender and sexual

"outlaws," to quote transgender activist Kate Bornstein, face. Bingham himself is said

to have been critical of "real effeminate gays," which represents his political view in

alliance with heteronormative assumptions about masculinity and makes him

somewhat inconspicuous alongside family men like Beamer, Burnett and Glick. [67]

    I now turn my discussion to the made-for-television film *Flight 93* with an

argument that the film engages the preexisting mythology in its representation of the

dark chamber of terror and does so with a heightened melodramatic sensibility.[68] I

base my understanding of melodrama on the scholarship of political scientist

Elisabeth Anker, who defines melodrama as a mode that involves six features,

including a) "dramatic polarizations of good and evil;" b) triadic character

arrangements involving "a ruthless villain, a suffering victim, and a heroic savior;" c)

thematic preoccupations with "innocence and moral purity;" d) "plot devices of

grandiose events, unprovoked actions, hyperbolic language and spectacles of

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[67] For quote on homosexual subjects being complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 4. For quote by Mark Bingham's mother Alice Hoglan, see Evelyn Nieves, "Passenger on Jet: Gay Hero or Hero Who Was Gay?" *The New York Times,* January 16, 2002: A12. For reference to gender and sexual "outlaws," see Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994). For reference to "real effeminate gays," see Jon Barrett, 110/111.

[68] *Flight 93* was screened on A & E television in January 2006. With the film A&E "scored the largest audience in its 22-year history [5.9 million viewers]." For reference, see Denise Martin, "'Flight' Lands an A&E Record," *Daily Variety*, February 1, 2006: 1. (Lexis Nexis). The film was also positively reviewed in newspapers like the *New York Times*, where television critic Alessandra Stanley wrote in conclusion that ""Flight 93" is gripping from the very first scene -- a United Airlines pilot putting on his uniform while his wife sleeps -- then builds tension like any Hollywood thriller. But this is not "Flightplan" or "Red Eye" or "24." It's the real thing, and all the more chilling for depicting how real, ordinary people lived their final moments and prepared for their deaths." As my discussion over the course of this chapter illustrates, I take issue with Stanley's contention that *Flight 93*, unlike the fictional airplane films *Flightplan* or *Red Eye*, is "the real thing." For reference, see Alessandra Stanley, "On a Doomed 9/11 Flight, Heroes Are Humans, Too," *The New York Times*, January 30, 2006: 1. (Lexis Nexis)

suffering;" e) "cycles of pathos and action that energize the spectator, creating a roller coaster of empathic pain and vicarious thrills;" and f) thematic connections to "contemporary social conflict with a familiar form."[69] In what follows I use the notions of "a ruthless villain, a suffering victim, and a heroic savior" as an entry point into my discussion of the film's *en-visioning practices* that underlie its representation of the 9/11 dark chamber of terror.

The role of the ruthless villain is occupied by the 9/11 hijackers, most visibly by lead hijacker Ziad Jarrah. While we can assume that the intended (American) audience of the film is likely to bring interpretative frameworks to *Flight 93* that would read Jarrah as a villain, no matter how he is represented, the film does not risk any ambiguity, when it itself encodes Jarrah as evil. For the purpose of my analysis I understand evil as a *disinterested* force that "inflicts suffering on others against their will," "without regards for their human worth," and for the sole purpose of inflicting suffering. By calling evil a disinterested force I employ a definition of evil that is marked by apathy towards the Other – be the Other a living being, the material surrounding, or the symbolic order –, where evil correlates with "moral autism, unadulterated selfishness," on the one hand, but also displays a certain disconcern about itself and its own existence. My definition of evil attends to an "experience of dread" as a seed of evil and understands evil action as an "attempt to evacuate this experience by inflicting it on others," in what cultural critic Terry Eagleton describes

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[69] See Elisabeth Anker, "The Venomous Eye: Melodrama and the Making of National Identity and State Power" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007), 13-19. Anker builds on prior scholarship, including film scholar Linda Williams' influential "Melodrama Revisited," where Williams presents a similar set of features to define melodrama as a mode. For comparative purposes, see Williams, "Melodrama Revisited," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Lastly, for a general overview on melodrama and film studies, see John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2004).

as a form of "transcendence gone awry." Evil, as I employ the term, goes, in other

words, beyond action. It is "a condition of being," as Eagleton suggests, "as well as a

quality of behavior." I have briefly unpacked these complexities around the definition

of evil because more than often evil simply serves as a cop-out term to discredit

others and their perhaps undesirable behaviors and actions.[70]

The film evokes a notion of evil in relation to Jarrah (played by Domenic

Rains), when his performance in several scenes relays a disinterest that corresponds

with the definition of evil that I just illustrated. His encounter with purser Deborah

Welsh (played by Wanda Cannon) immediately before and during the takeover is

telling in this context. After Jarrah and his comrades have tied "jihadist bandanas"

around their heads, Jarrah presses the service button with the intent to lure the flight

attendant to his seat in order to "jump her" with a knife and initiate the takeover. Yet

before he jumps up to grab Welsh's neck, he momentarily gazes at her in silence, as

she looks at his bandana in puzzlement and asks **"Can I get something for you?."** The

two medium close-ups of Jarrah's face that capture his gaze before the assault are

long enough takes to transform what could otherwise be interpreted as a casual look

into a blank stare that shows no sign of spite, rage, fear, nervousness, or any other

emotion (see Illustration 2a). The lack of affect that Jarrah displays in the scene relays

utter apathy to the flight attendant and his own pending death. The scene corresponds

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[70] For a definition of evil as a force that "inflicts suffering on others against their will," "without regards for their human worth," see Lars Svendsen, *The Philosophy of Evil* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2010), 84. Svendsen does not sufficiently distinguish between evil and other harmful and wrong action, as is, for instance, attempted by philosopher Adam Morton, who differentiates between evil and wrongdoing. See Adam Morton, *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 9-18. The notions of "moral autism, unadulterated selfishness," "experience of dread" and the "attempt to evacuate this experience" are taken from Fred Alford, *What Evil Means to Us* (Ithaca, NY: Connell University Press, 1997), 3 & 23. For Eagleton quotes, see Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 65 & 152.

with an earlier depiction, where the passengers (including the hijackers) are served

breakfast, during which Jarrah not only exerts another penetrating look onto Welsh

but pensively slices his breakfast croissant with the implication that he is quite able to

stomach food, despite his pending death. Unlike professional soldiers, who, as war

reporter Chris Hedges reminds us, "in the moments before real battles weep, vomit,

and write last letters home," Jarrah remains unfazed by the pending suicide mission.[71]

These and other scenes in the film construct the lead hijacker as someone with a

deep-seeded disinterest in life itself, whereby he comes to embody evil at a

fundamental level that exceeds "mere" wrongdoing.[72] His association with evil in the

film establishes him as the arch-villain of the narrative.

In melodrama the role of the villain is complemented by the roles of the hero

and the victim. Elizabeth Anker reminds us that the roles of hero and victim typically

correspond with conventional gender assumptions, where the hero (like the villain) is

likely to be male, while the victim is often female. This is the case in <u>*Flight 93*</u>, where

women occupy the role of the victim, whether or not they are onboard of the flight (in

the dark chamber of terror) or on the ground, while the male passengers figure as

heroic saviors. The film presents men as heroic saviors, when they are exclusively the

ones who plan and execute the fight back. Most prominently among the men are

Beamer (played by Brennan Elliott), Bingham (played by Ty Olsson), Burnett (played

by Jeffrey Nordling), and Glick (played by Colin Glazer), whose stories emerge as

central ones in the film, not only because they centrally participate in the fight back

but because their phone calls with relatives, friends, and strangers drive a film

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[71] For reference about professional soldiers, see Chris Hedges, *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 38.
[72] The notion that evil and "mere" wrongdoing differ goes back to Adam Morton, *On Evil*, 9-18.

narrative that largely progresses through the cross-cuts between callers in the cabin and their counterparts on the ground.

Unlike the men, women only figure once during the planning stage, when the passengers vote on whether or not to "fight back," as they are said to have done according to one Flight 93 passenger.[73] The inclusion of women in this particular moment offers an image of the revolt as a democratically conceived act that stands in alignment with the foundational democratic principles that passengers and crew were said to be defending as "citizen-soldiers." After women have given their visible consent to overpower the hijackers, they largely disappear from the screen, especially during the physical attack on the hijackers, which the film mediates exclusively through images of men. The film's portrayal of passenger Elizabeth Wainio (played by Laura Mennell), who figures more prominently in the narrative, when she is among six callers, who talk to relatives, friends, and strangers, on the ground, is telling in this context. In several scenes the film depicts Wainio in crosscuts with her stepmother Esther Heyman (played by Gwynyth Walsh), as they talk on the phone. Wainio ends her phone call with Heyman with the words "[e]veryone's getting ready to, to go to the cockpit. I love you, good-bye." Yet the last image of her is not her running to the cockpit but her and another female passenger, Lauren Grandcolas (played by Jacqueline Ann Steuart), comforting each other with embraces. While all of the passengers are victims of al-Qaeda, *Flight 93* thus clearly channels notions around victimization through conventional gender tropes, where male passengers take

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[73] For speculations on the passenger/crew vote, see *9/11 Commission Report*, 13. News media also reported widely on the vote, for instance, *CNN*. See *CNN* article "'America is grateful' to Flight 93 heroes: A 'wave of courage' during doomed assault on hijackers," *CNN* September 11, 2002, http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/09/11/ar911.memorial.pennsylvania/index.html (accessed August 1, 2008).

on roles as heroes and engage in active planning and resistance, while women figure as passive victims. The film thereby relays a highly gendered representation of the workings of the dark chamber of terror, where the hijackers readily assault women like Welsh but are themselves only physically challenged by other men.

Yet the events in the cabin are not the only ones that align men with heroism and women with victimhood. The scenes from the ground that feature those who receive phone calls from Flight 93 likewise play into these gender dynamics. Although some passengers spoke to men on the ground, the film only shows women on the phones with ill-fated passengers.[74] The film makes a conscious choice to present only women in conversation with passengers, as a scene with flight attendant CeeCee Lyles (played by "not credited") illustrates. Although the scene shows Lyles talking to her husband on the ground, the camera stays with her and does not cut to his side of the conversation.

The film (visually) erases the phone calls with men on the ground because the position on the ground corresponds with traditional notions of femininity. Although safe, the position on the ground is also the most helpless one, when those who talk to Flight 93 passengers can only advise, comfort, and pray but, unlike the passengers in the dark chamber of terror, cannot do anything more tangible to change the course of events, for instance, physically fight. It is a position, where all one can offer is emotional and spiritual support, which correlates with human attributes that have

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[74] The passengers who talked to male family members and friends on the ground include Sandra Bradshaw, who talked to her husband Phil Bradshaw (a pilot himself), Marion Britton, who talked to her longtime friend Fred Fiumano, and Joseph de Luca, who spoke with his father. For references, see Jane Pauley, "Dateline: No Greater Love," *NBC*, September 11, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14789502/ns/dateline_nbc/ (accessed April 24, 2011); also see the aforementioned special report in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 28, 2001, http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20011028flt93mainstoryp7.asp (accessed April 24, 2011).

been widely encoded as feminine. By erasing men from the helpless positions on the ground, *Flight 93* again aligns with the traditional notions around gender that are the base to melodrama and its investment in male heroism and female victimization. In some cases the film pushes notions around male heroism onboard of the flight and female victimization on the ground to extremes, for instance, when, in a conversation between Jeremy Glick and his wife Liz (played by April Telek), she sobs hysterically, while he sheds no tears as he consoles her, although his life is the one in jeopardy.[75]

In melodramatic narratives female victimization, moreover, typically coincides with notions of innocence and moral purity. Elisabeth Anker suggests in this context that "[m]elodramatic narratives center around a core of innocence and moral purity" and "fuse these two different notions…through the experience of suffering."[76] Liz Glick's just mentioned performance in *Flight 93* is, under these considerations, not only an example of how the film pushes the gender divide between heroes and victims, but illustrates one of the many ways in which the film appeals to innocence and virtue through female suffering. The scene relies heavily on tropes of family life and domesticity, which have a recurring presence in the film precisely because they are widely prefigured as locales of innocence and virtue, where love, not politics, supposedly rules.

While the body of the film text in *Flight 93* focuses on scenes, where, as in the case with Liz Glick, the domestic idyll and, with that, the prospect of innocence and

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[75] The differences between actor Colin Glazer's performance as Jeremy Glick in *Flight 93* and Peter Hermann's performance as Glick in *United 93* are strikingly different in terms of their emotionality. In *Flight 93* Glick's proclaims "I can't believe this is happening to me" in a somewhat distant and wooden fashion, while Glick utters the same word in *United 93*, as he tries unsuccessfully to control his tears. Actor Peter Hermann's performance is not only more convincing but necessary in a film that does not intercut with the ground in order to create emotional momentum.
[76] Anker, 16.

virtue are jeopardized by the dark chamber of terror, melodramas typically open and end in innocence, as film scholar Linda Williams reminds us, which is to say, that the challenge that the villain poses over the course of the narrative is redeemed through the courageous acts of the hero and the virtuous suffering of the victim.[77] In accord with these melodramatic conventions *Flight 93* opens with a scene that evokes idyllic family life. In its opening scene officer Leroy Homer (played by Biski Gugushe) gets ready for the day. As he leaves his home, he kisses his sleeping wife and baby boy goodbye. Both, the wife (played by Kirsten Alter), who is vulnerable in her sleep, and the baby, who is defenseless in his state of being, appeal to innocence.

In one of its last scenes, the film fulfills the promise of the melodramatic story arc and returns to the family as a locus of innocence, when it shows how the aggrieved mothers and wives are comforted in the midst of their extended families. By this point in the film the villain has challenged innocence through the attacks on the nation, the hero has redeemed innocence by partially frustrating the villain's plan, and the mothers and wives (the victims) have demonstrated their moral purity through suffering. So while the story returns to notions of innocence, it is an innocence that is marked by virtuous suffering in the light of the events that occur in the dark chamber of terror; and the film visually suggests as much, when it represents some of the wives with their infant children. The image of Liz Glick feeding her baby daughter as she is surrounded by supportive family members (see Illustration 2b) evokes Christian icons of Mary and baby Jesus and, with that, an almost unpaired reference to innocence and moral purity that is strongly connected to notions of suffering, especially from a Roman Catholic-inflected purview, where the image of Mary and

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[77] See Linda Williams as cited in Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*, 93-94.

baby Jesus frequently coincides with images of the Pietà, the suffering Mary (Mater

Dolorosa), who holds her dead son's body in her arms.

I have illustrated how *Flight 93* employs melodrama as a primary mode to tell

the story of Flight 93, when it propagates a polarizing worldview, where politics are

reduced to heroes, villains, and victims, and where the United States is imagined as a

force on the side of the good and innocent. Given that the melodramatic mode is a

central mode of expression in American cinema, if not American culture, the film

participates in framing the events in ways that are "familiar, acceptable, reassuring to

their host culture" not only by way of a content that pairs American suffering with

exceptional heroics but by way of form (melodrama).[78] The knowledge that *Flight 93*

constructs about the dark chamber of terror coincides with the larger mythology and a

political climate that left little room for more nuanced engagements with the events,

their cause, and their meaning.

Like *Flight 93 United 93* had to reckon with the existing mythology.[79] For

Beamer, Bingham, Burnett, and Glick, who became so central to the mythology, this

reckoning means that while the four men for the most part blend into the larger crowd

in the film's representation of the dark chamber of terror, just as director Paul

Greengrass intended (more on that below), Burnett (played by Christian Clemson) is

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[78] For reference about melodrama as the central mode of expression in American cinema, see Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*. For reference about melodrama as a central mode of cultural expression in the United States, see Anker, "The Venomous Eye."

[79] The making of *United 93* was viewed as a somewhat risky project, given that it was unclear whether Americans would "be ready" to watch the first explicit 9/11 film at the movies. Given these constraints, the budget for the film was kept comparatively low at $15 million dollars. Although no blockbuster hit, the film did better than expected in at the movie theaters, when it grossed $11.6 million dollar during its opening weekend in the United States and $31.5 million dollars by July 2006. Paul Greengrass was nominated for best director in the 2007 Academy Awards. See Gabriel Snyder and Adam Dawtrey, "'United' States Case," *Daily Variety*, April 25, 2006: 1. (Lexis Nexis); and Gabriel Snyder, "'United' Flies After All," *Daily Variety*, May 1, 2006: 1. (Lexis Nexis); and, for more on the business statistics, see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0475276/business (accessed April 25, 2011).

still identifiable as the one who initiates the passenger revolt, when he is the first passenger to notice that the plane is turning after the hijacking, the first *passenger* to call the ground, the first to learn that the flight is, as he tells Mark Bingham, "a suicide mission," and the first to urgently suggest they fight back. The film also pairs Burnett in two scenes with prime antagonist Ziad Jarrah (played by Khalid Abdalla). As to foreshadow the events to come, Burnett takes a seat next to Jarrah in the waiting hall at Newark Airport. Both meet again in the final scene, when Burnett wrestles Jarrah for the control of the plane. Bingham (played by Cheyenne Jackson) and Glick (played by Peter Hermann) also figure prominently, when they strategize with Burnett at the rear of the plane, and when they each kill one of the hijackers with the support of other men, as the revolt proceeds with Glick at the forefront. And Beamer (played by David Alan Basche) not only participates in the revolt alongside other passengers but also mentions the words that came to uniquely encapsulate the passenger revolt – "let's roll."

Yet, although Beamer, Bingham, Burnett, and Glick are identifiable in the film, the film renders their and other passengers' individual identities and contributions secondary to the idea of a collective struggle. Director Paul Greengrass, as he himself reports, understood the story of Flight 93 less as "the story of a few individuals" than a "collective experience involving *all* of those passengers and crew."[80] [my emphasis] Not only does *United 93* work towards constructing the events as a collective experience, when no passenger is introduced by name, but it employs filmic techniques that construct the passengers as a collective without rendering them faceless and indistinguishable in the process. The technique that

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[80] For quote of Paul Greengrass, see director comments on the *United 93* DVD.

United 93 employs toward constructing the passengers and their experience as a collective mediates a highly specific mise-en-scène through the cursory perspectives that constantly moving cameras and rapid edits enable. In what follows I discuss the technique with an argument that it not only participates in crafting a mythology along the lines of the larger mythology around Flight 93, as <u>Flight 93</u> does, but that *United 93* emulates the structure that myth is based on (more on that in a moment). I suggest that by emulating the structure of myth, the film paves the way for a spectator identification that is not aligned with a *particular* set of characters but the passenger *experience* itself. The spectator identification that the film enables turns the vision of *United 93* into a particularly persuasive one.

I base my argument that the film emulates the structure of myth on the work of cultural critic Roland Barthes, who describes myth as a "type of speech" and "mode of signification."[81] While myth is commonly understood as stories that are "familiar, acceptable, reassuring to their host culture," which is the definition that I have thus far deployed in this chapter, Barthes draws on semiotics to illustrate how any story, event, or image can be appropriated as a vehicle for myth. At the base of semiotics is the idea of the sign, which constitutes the smallest unit of meaning in language and other systems of representation. The sign, usually a word, gesture, or image, consists of two parts, a signifier and a signified, where the signifier speaks to the level of *how* meaning is expressed, while the signified speaks to the level of *what* meaning is expressed (see also discussion on "representation" in Chapter One). These two parts of the sign "are *only* distinguishable at the analytical level; in practice they

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[81] See Roland Barthes's essay "Myth Today" that was published as part of his *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972,) 109.

are always integrated into each other."[82] [my emphasis] While signs make for

complex meaning in all forms of speech, myth differs from other forms of speech,

when "it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it." Myth, in

other words, appropriates an already existing sign as its signifier in a second-order

process of signification. As the first-order sign turns signifier, it loses its *specific*

meaning and becomes mere form, that is to say a vehicle for mythical meaning that is

based on nebulous, fickle, and tendentious knowledge. However, the first-order sign

that turns signifier is never completely emptied of its original meaning, when it is

precisely its original meaning that roots the mythical meaning in some form of reality.

Rather, myth is in constant flux between the specificity of the first-order meaning and

the tendentiousness of the second-order meaning. According to Barthes, it is in fact

"this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which

defines myth."[83] As I will illustrate, *United 93* engages in a constant game of hide-

and-seek between the specificity of a first-order meaning and the tendentiousness of a

second-order meaning.

 United 93 establishes specificity through its mise-en-scène, of which acting is

one component. Throughout the film actors engage in small, yet *specific* tasks, such

as eating an apple, while reading a magazine. The specificity that underlies these

performances rests on purposeful acting practices, where every word and movement

that an actor engages in is in line with his or her character's smaller and larger

objectives. While all realist film acting practices are ideally rooted in specific

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[82] See Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 74.

[83] For reference on myth as being constructed from a "semiological chain which existed before it," see Barthes, 114. For reference to the constant game of hide-and-seek, see Barthes, 118.

objectives that are subtly suggested, not obviously indicated to the viewer, *United 93*

actively fostered purposeful acting through casting choices and its mode of

production. The film draws heavily on lay actors, who previously worked as pilots,

flight attendants, ATC and military personnel, to fill exactly these roles and bring

specificity through their deep sense of familiarity and routine with the tasks at hand.

Besides casting choices, *United 93* relied on actor improvisation during the

production, where actors were asked to stay in character and perform their roles for

longer stretches of time. Although uncharacteristic for Hollywood films, which rarely

shoot scenes as long takes, let alone in chronological order, improvisation inspires

specificity in acting, when its flow of actions and reactions is grounded in the

moment and partially unforeseeable given circumstances. The strain of staying in

character for significant periods of time add to the specificity in acting, when the

situation that the actor experiences in character is emotionally and physically

exhausting enough to raise his or her own stakes in acting and reacting to the given

circumstances. The ways that *United 93* went about casting and the production

process, in other words, enabled acting practices that were grounded in specific, goal-

oriented actions that good acting, for the lack of a better word, demands.[84]

In accord with other carefully designed elements of mise-en-scène, the acting

practices lend characters distinguishable qualities that identify them as specific

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[84] For references on acting practices, including terminology, such as "indicating" and "given circumstances" in acting, see Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Sonia Moore, *The Stanislaski System* (London: Penguin, 1960); Edward Dwight Easty, *On Method Acting* (New York: Ivy Book, 1981), 14-15. For more on the production of *United 93*, see Oliver Burkeman, "The Day They Hijacked America," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2006: 3; Adam Dawtry, "'United 93" Takes Flight From UK Via Working Title," May 1-7, 2006: 9; Mark Brown, "Paul Greengrass," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2007: 17; and an interview with Gavin Smith, *Film Comment*, May –June 2006: 25-28. Paul Greengrass also talks briefly about the filming process during an interview with the *Guardian*, which was conducted on May 31, 2006 and is available as an audio-file at http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/audio/2006/may/31/paul.greengrass (accessed March 6, 2011).

passengers, even if the film does not introduce them by name. In one shot in the film we, for instance, see two older white men, who are in conversation about hiking trails. One of the two holds a map of Yosemite Park. Through the map and their conversation the two men are identifiable as passengers William Cashman, a sixty-year-old iron worker from New York, and his friend Patrick "Joe" Driscoll, a seventy-year-old retired software developer, both of whom were on their way to California for a hiking trip. Props like the map complement the acting practices as part of a carefully designed mise-en-scène that establishes these and other characters as *specific passengers* in the film (see Illustration 2c).

Yet the specificity that arises with the mise-en-scène is partially undermined by the film's camerawork and montage. The shot of Cashman (played by Richard Bekins) and Driscoll (played by Michael J. Reynolds) and their map is again illustrative in this context. Following an image of flight attendant Sandra Bradshaw (played by Trish Gates), the shot begins with a close-up of a map that is held by a hand. Still unidentified, the hand speaks to a tendency in the film to forfeit establishing shots that would give viewers an overview of the space and the characters within the frame. Once the map and the hand are in focus, the camera only momentarily dwells on them as a close-up before it tilts up and rests on the upper bodies and faces of the two friends as a medium close-up. The camera stays, in other words, not long enough on the map and hand to allow for more than a cursory glimpse onto the scene. The composition of this particular shot is, in fact, arranged in a manner that the hand partially blocks the letters on the cover of the map, which

introduces obstacles to our unfettered access to story information.[85] Once the camera tilts from the image of the hand and the map to that of the two friends' faces and upper bodies, the duration of the shot is as fleeting as before. The film only briefly dwells on the medium close-up of the two friends, before it cuts away to the Northeast Air Defense Command Center (NORAD).

The stylistic elements that I have just outlined are not only at play in the shot of the two men with the map but define the film at large. Overall the film is driven by persistent camera movements and made up of shots of short duration, fragmented and blocked shots, and only few establishing shots. Together these stylistic elements allow for only a cursory and partial glimpse at characters and their spatial relations. While the cursory and partial glimpse produces a spontaneous feel that encodes the film as realist, it also partially undercuts the specificity that the film establishes through the mise-en-scène, when a cursory and partial viewing position is necessarily a tendentious one.[86] Counter to the mise-en-scène, which identifies the passengers as specific individuals, camerawork and montage construct a perspective onto the mise-en-scène, in which individual passengers blend into a collective that transcends their individual identities and contributions.

The interplay between camerawork and montage, on the one hand, and mise-en-scène, on the other hand, is what ultimately elevates the film narrative to myth. I have illustrated how our access to story information about the passengers oscillates

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[85] On a comparative note, I should mention that the aesthetics that *United 93* employs differ decisively from the one in *Flight 93*, where, in one scene before boarding, the camera insistently rests on the book title *What to Expect When You're Expecting* in order to establish in rather obvious ways that Lauren Grandcolas was pregnant.

[86] The tendentiousness is heightened by the film's use of sound, which complements the camerawork and montage, when viewers move as quickly in and out of conversations, as they move in and out of images.

between the specific knowledge that is conveyed through the mise-en-scène and tendentious knowledge that is conveyed through camerawork and montage. Given that the perspective of the camera is the default perspective, through which the mise-en-scène is mediated, it is safe to say that the cursory glimpse that blends passengers into a collective unit is the primary mode through which viewers see and know the passengers in *United 93*. The cursory glimpse onto the passengers renders their individual identities and contributions secondary to the idea of the collective struggle that the film constructs through a perspective that only ever so fleetingly dwells on individual passengers. The story becomes thereby less one of *particular* individuals than the struggle of an *everyman* that the viewer is encouraged to take on for her- or himself.

To elaborate, by way of the techniques that *United 93* employs, it fosters identification with the passenger experience that turns viewers into virtual passenger on their own accord, where they come to share the burden of the *everyman* onboard of the flight. It is the sensation that the mother of the actual Flight 93 passenger Linda Gronlund describes after watching Greengrass' film, when she states that she felt that she was *with* her ill-fated daughter (rather than, through alignment, *becoming* her daughter or any other passenger). By emulating the structure of myth the film multiplies the cinematic experience that film scholar Jennifer Barker describes as follows: "we are…not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* it, either." To put it in the terms of Barker, I suggest that the structure of *United 93* lends itself to a particularly deep connection between the film's and the viewer's "skins."[87]

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[87] For Barker quote, see Jennifer Barker, *Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 12 & 23. Beyond Barker, I also draw on the notions of

So far I have suggested that *United 93* represents the events that unfold in the dark chamber of terror primarily as a collective experience that viewers come to participate in. While the film renders individual identities and contributions secondary to the idea of the collective struggle, individual characters are still traceable to *specific* persons. Under the consideration of this traceability, I would like to now suggest that *United 93* does not represent just any near-death experience, where ordinary men (and to a lesser degree women) rise heroically to the occasion, but that the *everyman* in the film text that the viewer co-inhabits is unequivocally American. That the *everyman* in the film text is unequivocally American is most visibly established through the ways in which the film deals with two of the actual passengers, who, aside from the hijackers, were not American citizens but visiting from outside of the United States.

The film inconspicuously absorbs Japanese citizen Toshiya Kuge (played by Masato Kamo) within the American collective, when he remains in the background

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viewer alignment and allegiance that film scholar Murray Smith addresses in connection with questions around viewer identification. According to Smith, alignment is at work, whenever we receive information about a given character. Film employs a range of techniques to align viewers with the trials and tribulations of a character. These include a) spatial attachments, where some characters receive more screen time than others, and/or are featured in a greater range of situations, and/or are shown through more intimate close-ups; b) point-of-view shots, where the film presents its reality through the eyes of some but not other characters; and c) subjective access, where the film gives insights into the thought process, emotional state, or dream space of some but not other characters. Aside from alignment, allegiance factors into the processes of viewer identification, when viewers are more likely to identify with characters that closest approximate their values, beliefs, and desires. Within a given film text viewers will, in other words, be more likely to ally with the character that is morally most preferable to them. For reference on viewer alignment and allegiance, see Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); see also Greg Smith, "How Do We Identify with Characters?" in *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 35-51. In the context of viewer identification, I should also mention Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," where Mulvey draws on psychoanalytical concepts to theorizes viewer identification and points to the gendered underpinnings of the ways in which films position the spectator. For reference, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44. For references about the viewing experience that the mother of Linda Gronlund reported, after watching *United 93*, see the *United 93* DVD supplementary materials.

during the planning stage of the passenger revolt and the fight back but is briefly

featured in individualized framings during boarding and breakfast prior to the

hijacking. Unlike Kuge, German citizen Christian Adams (played by Erich Redman)

is not as inconspicuous but advances to what the British *Guardian* described as "the

story's fall guy." The representation of Adams in the film is not based on historical

evidence but purely the product of Greengrass' "artistic license."[88]

Although the actual thirty-seven year-old businessman arguably fit within the

"hero profile" that the mythology established with Beamer, Bingham, Burnett, and

Glick, *United 93* presents Adams as an Other, against which the *everyman* can be

measured. As a white, middle class, young and athletic man, who, according to the

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "worked hard to stay in good physical shape and enjoyed

playing and watching volleyball and basketball games," Adams resembled the four

men, who became so central to the Flight 93 narrative. As a married man with two

children, he also aligned with the cultural expectations that place particular value on

romantic love, heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family (see above). And lastly,

as someone who received a marketing degree from the University of California at

Davis, he was clearly fluent enough in English and U.S. culture to blend right in with

all other passengers.[89]

Despite these significant overlaps with the "hero profile," however, *United 93*

establishes Adams as an obstacle to the collective struggle. At first Adams counsels

his fellow passengers to comply with the hijackers and "just do what they want." He

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[88] Xan Brooks, "United 93 'Surrender Monkey' Defends Role in Film," *The Guardian,* June 7, 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/jun/07/news.xanbrooks (accessed September 5, 2008.)

[89] For portrait on Christian Adams, see *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 28, 2001, http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20011028flt93adamsbiop8.asp (accessed April 24, 2011); see also "Christian Adams," *Lebensmittel Zeitung*, September 21, 2001: 107 (Lexis Nexis).

even references the 1977 hijacking of the "Landshut" Lufthansa plane, where Palestinian allies of the militant West German Red Army Faction (RAF) attempted to press the West German government into releasing key members of the RAF from prison. His notion that "[it's the same as] Mogadishu here. They will ask for money. They will ask for [an] answer, they will let us go," where he refers to the 1977 hijacking, positions Adams in an anachronistic expert role, where his understanding of what is occurring is stuck within the frameworks from the 1960s and 1970s, where leftist militants engaged in hijackings not as part of self-destructive suicide missions but to take hostages as pawns for prisoner exchanges and other political demands. He is, in other words, positioned inside a discourse best articulated by Bush Administration then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who he infamously stated: "You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't….I think that's old Europe."[90] In *United 93* Adams represents this questionable idea of "Old Europe" by taking on the role of an expert, while being dangerously misinformed.

Yet, it is after the film has moved to its final phase and passengers start preparing for the fight back that Adams' Otherness fully emerges, when he suddenly jumps out of his seat and starts screaming "Ich bin Deutscher, ich bin kein Amerikaner, ich bin Deutscher" (I am a German, I am not an American, I am a German). Adams here bargains for his life at the potential cost of the lives of his fellow passengers, when he appeals to the hijackers with his difference to the identity that he presumes to be their target. As *United 93* has us believe without *any* evidence to the effect, the only "Old European" character in the film is a treacherous coward.

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[90] Donald Rumsfeld made this statement on January 22, 2003. See "Outrage at 'Old Europe' Remarks" *BBC News World Edition* Thursday, January 23, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm

Adams, in short, works as a counterpoint to the *everyman* in order to establish the collective struggle in national terms and frame the passenger revolt in the dark chamber of terror as an unequivocally American experience.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this chapter by suggesting that *United 93* and <u>*Flight 93*</u> both *en-vision* the dark chamber of terror in accord with the larger mythology that emerged in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, when they both represent the largely unknowable events through images of ordinary men (and to a lesser degree women) who rise to the challenge and fight back. They engage in ideological work that frames the story of Flight 93 through notions of American heroics and suffering but fail to place the events in a larger historical context of U.S. interventionism and global capitalism. While I am not suggesting that the films *must* consider these historical contexts, I am pointing to how their failure to do so shapes the ideological positioning of their respective visions.

At the same time, however, the two films also trouble any suggestions of coherence and conclusiveness about the dark chamber of terror, once we read the two visual texts against each other. <u>*Flight 93*</u> presents the story of Flight 93 in melodramatic terms that fundamentally depend on clearly identifiable villains, victims, and heroes. *United 93*, although not completely devoid of melodramatic moments, renders the individuality of *specific* characters secondary to the idea of the events as a collective experience and, through this process, emulates the structure of myth and facilitates an identification process, where viewers align with the passenger experience as quasi-passengers on their own accord. The preoccupation with the

collective experience in *United 93* troubles the course that <u>*Flight 93*</u> takes with its focus on a select number of passengers, who emerge with identifiable identities from an otherwise faceless crowd. It points to the artificiality that underlies the excessive use of melodrama in the television production. Conversely, <u>*Flight 93*</u> draws our attention to the artificiality that underlies our seamless identification with the collective experience in *United 93*. While *United 93* initially crosscuts between scenes from the cabin, different air-traffic control centers, and the military, it remains exclusively in the claustrophobic space of the airborne cabin, after the passengers learn that the hijacking is a "suicide mission." At this point, at the latest, viewers become passengers on their own accord, as they are *with* all passengers and their struggle rather than being aligned with any specific *one*. Read against <u>*Flight 93*</u>, where viewers are more clearly aligned with specific characters onboard and the ground, and where, unlike in *United 93*, the film includes scenes that follow the crash of Flight 93, the excessive identification process that *United 93* encourages, when it emulates the structure of myth, is troubled. When read against each other, the two films thus not only point to a persistence of the mythology around Flight 93 but the lack of coherence and conclusiveness that ultimately stands at the heart of the dark chamber of terror and thereby events that are and remain largely unknowable.

Chapter Three: Re-visioning Al-Qaeda Slaughter Videos and Filmmaking Practices

"We must get our message across to the masses of the nation and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement. This is an independent battle that we must launch side by side with the military battle." Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda, 2001

"I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma." Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda, 2005[91]

The quotes, taken from Osama bin Laden's lieutenant, al-Qaeda's second man Ayman al-Zawahiri, illustrate the organization's awareness about the significance of media and public relations to achieve political goals in an age where the internet enables rapid communication with others around the world and speedy dissemination of a range of materials, including visual documents.[92] In this "race for hearts and minds" al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups rely predominantly on internet websites, forums, and blogs that serve as venues for news, social networking, training manuals, and propaganda. Several of these internet outlets feature videos such as of the teachings of Osama bin Laden and instructional "how-to" videos for bomb-building.

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[91] For al-Zawahiri quotes, see Akil N. Awan, "Virtual Jihadist Media: Function, Legitimacy, and Radicalizing Efficacy," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2007): 389-408 (389); and "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi," GlobalSecurity.org, http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm (accessed May 1, 2010). Also, see David Ensor, "Al Qaeda Letter Called 'Chilling," *CNN*, October 12, 2005, http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/10/11/alqaeda.letter/ (accessed May 1, 2010). Interestingly, al-Zawahiri's notion of a "race for the hearts and minds" match the Bush Administration's verbiage almost verbatim. For comparison, see the subcommittee of the House of Representatives, for instance, held a hearing on "Iraq: Winning Hearts and Minds" on June 15, 2004. See http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_house_hearings&docid=f:96993.pdf (accessed May 2, 2010).

[92] After the death of Osama bin Laden Ayman al-Zawahiri is now said to have replaced him as al-Qaeda's number one. For reference, see "Ayman al-Zawahiri Named New Al-Qaeda Chief," *CBS News*, June 16, 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/06/16/501364/main20071483.shtml (accessed June 19, 2011).

A controversial fraction among the total jihadist media output involves so-called

slaughter videos, where al-Qaeda decapitates hostages in front of the camera.[93]

Al-Qaeda slaughter videos first emerged after the kidnapping and killing of

Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in January 2002.[94] Against what film

scholar Joel Black describes as "a virtual ban on visual records of death, and

especially violent death" in the United States and elsewhere, these so-called slaughter

videos not "merely" screen violent death as the outcome of a past deed, as

mainstream media outlets occasionally do, but break taboos that regulate the display

and circulation of such visual records by depicting actual murder, dismemberment

and dying in process.[95]

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[93] Political scientist Akil N. Awan identifies news, social networking, training manuals, and propaganda as the four main functions that drive jihadist media communication. (Awan, "Virtual Jihadist Media," 396-397.) I should also clarify that I follow Awan's use of "jihadist" to mean "[t]he specter of a retrograde, puritanical, and belligerent ideology." (Awan, 389) The term "jihadist" should not be conflated with the term "jihad" ("struggle") and its multiple meanings in the context of Islam and Islamic history. The controversy surrounding slaughter video was felt even within the al-Qaeda organization, as al-Zawahiri's 2005 correspondence with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, personally deemed responsible for several slaughter productions, indicates. In the letter al-Zawahiri warns al-Zarqawi that their success rely on their widespread support among everyday Muslims, who were repelled by the executions of hostages. In al-Zawahiri's words (from Arabic), "Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable - also- are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages." (See GlobalSecurity.org, "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi," http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm (accessed May 1, 2010)

[94] For a list of al-Qaeda-related beheadings (as well as others) in the "war on terror," see Lisa J. Campbell, "The Use of Beheadings by Fundamentalist Islam," *Global Crime*, vol. 7, no. 3-4 (August-November 2006): 583-614. I should mention that whereas Campbell's list provides an overview over recent beheadings, I find her article otherwise highly troubling for her careless approach to history. First of all, she attempts to ground the beheadings in the teachings of the Qur'an and Islamic history by cherry-picking quotes from the Qur'an and Islamic history that seemingly befit her argument. I doubt that her background as a U.S. military intelligence officer qualifies her to speak to the intricacies of the history of Qur'anic interpretations and the highly complex history of Islam. Secondly, she, thereafter, conveniently establishes a link to other histories of beheadings, starring what could be described as a historical arch-villain, namely the Nazis, when there are no causal and plausible connections between contemporary jihadist violence and the Nazis. Thirdly, her gesture to a supposed historical grounding of the notion of "beheadings in fundamentalist Islam" conveniently overlooks the actual social, political, and economic processes that have contributed to the rise of radical movements, such as militant Islam, likely because an actual look at these processes would put U.S. global dominance and military exploits at the center of the analysis.

[95] For quote, see Joel Black, "Real(ist) Horror: From Execution Videos to Snuff Films," In: *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, edited by Xavier Mendik and Steven

Engagements with al-Qaeda slaughter videos and filmmaking practices have found their way into a range of fiction film and television productions. One of the more unlikely examples that I will now briefly showcase as part of my introduction to the topic of *re-visioning* in this chapter derives from a 2005 episode from the *Showtime* television series *Weeds*.[96] Set in the affluent California town of Agrestic, the overarching story about a "soccer mom" turned drug dealer that frequently bears on parody through its ironic tone and absurdist plotlines is an unsuspected venue for any reference to al-Qaeda. The episode, nevertheless, includes a scene, where ten-year-old Shane (played by Alexander Gould), grappling with his father's recent death, surprises his mother Nancy (played by Mary-Louise Parker), the series' lead

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Jay Schneider (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002) 64 (63-75). See also Vivianne Sobchack, who discusses the representational taboos surrounding death in the context of the challenges that death plays to the idea of the subject. She points more generally to the visual taboos that surround transformational states of the human body, including birth, death, excretion, sexual union, with an argument that they undermine the "unity and security of the subject." For reference, see Vivianne Sobchack, "Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary," In: *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 232. Yet, it should be also be noted in this context that the taboo that surrounds the visual representation of death and dying in nonfictional documents is counterbalanced by spectacular representations of death and dying in the realms of U.S. fiction film as well as U.S. television, much of which revolves around (deadly) violent crime – ranging from television series, such as *NBC*'s *Law and Order*, to magazine programs, such as *NBC*'s *Dateline*. The consumption of violence and murder is deemed legitimate as long as violence and murder tales are embedded within a moralist narrative that frightens, disgusts, and startles spectators to ultimately see to a climatic release and a deserved punishment for the transgressor(s). Films that do not follow this pattern, like John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986) and, although less prominent in the United States, Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997), are perceived as extremely disturbing precisely because murder is not presented as a spectacular event, and spectators are deprived of climatic release. For three years the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) denied *Henry* an "R" rating, when much more graphically violent slasher films, like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th* serial productions faced no such problems. What these politics describe, especially in an age where the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction increasingly blur, is a rather schizophrenic approach to representations of death and dying, where viewers are led on to revel in death and dying in the case of fiction, while any nonfictional representation remains taboo. For more on *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* and the MPAA ratings, see Hal Hinson, "Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1990, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/henryportraitofaserialkillernrhinson_a0a96b.htm (accessed May 15, 2010); also see Roger Ebert, "Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 14, 1990, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19900914/REVIEWS/9140301/1023 (accessed May 15, 2010).

[96] "Dead in the Nethers" (Season 1, Episode 6), *Weeds*, dir. Arlene Sanford, Showtime, September 12, 2005.

character, with a video. The video is a record of his "playing terrorist," as Shane himself refers to the action (see Illustration 3a).

"Playing terrorist" in the episode encompasses tangible props such as a paper bag hood and toy sword, both of which simulate the ski-masks and weaponry that have come to be associated with Islamist militants. It also involves rhetoric about "American dogs" and "infidels" that Shane effortlessly spits out, after he has tied-up his unimpressed play date. In the end it is, however, not the props and rhetoric but the practice of visually recording a decapitation that perfect the terrorist play. Through editing and with the help of a doll's head, Shane crafts a visual artifact, where he seemingly beheads his "infidel" playmate.

The *Weeds* episode attests to the far reach of this form of al-Qaeda terror, which, as the series suggests, haunts even the consciousness of children and finds entry into what has been traditionally framed as the most sheltered space in American life, namely the wealthy suburban home, where, in the television show, Shane films his terrorist play. Beyond these diegetic implications, the episode moreover speaks to the far reach of al-Qaeda terror through the mere existence of such a scene in an American television show that is, unlike Fox's *24*, otherwise not concerned with terrorism as a subject matter. Its effortless references to slaughter videos assume that viewers are familiar enough with the al-Qaeda hostage murders to make sense of Shane's terrorist play.

What is most important about the scene within the context of this chapter, however, is that it performs a revisionary task, when it alludes to actual al-Qaeda slaughter videos in connection to child's play and replaces their terror with comical

undertones. Shane's video, for instance, concludes with him taking off his paper bag hood, smiling and saying "Hi, mom." The discrepancy between his terrorist posture, on the one hand, and his need for parental approval, on the other hand, is one example of parody, whereby the series subverts the terror that al-Qaeda has spread by means of visual media.

The *Weeds* episode is indicative of a larger revisionary project, where al-Qaeda slaughter videos are re-worked by means of fiction film and television. I call this type of visual engagement *re-visioning practices*. Unlike *en-visioning practices*, the notion of *re-visioning* involves a dark chamber that has been visually represented before by way of nonfictional visual records. *Re-visioning* speaks to a process, where fiction films rewrite these visual records from an oppositional standpoint that strives to undermine the original narratives and meanings. As I will illustrate in the two sections to come, *re-visioning* can involve a more literal process, where existent al-Qaeda videos are (partially) featured as film remakes that subtly undermine the original narrative and meaning. I explore one such engagement in Section One, where I analyze Michael Winterbottom's film *A Mighty Heart* (2007), which details journalist Daniel Pearl's disappearance from his wife Mariane Pearl's perspective and includes a partial reenactment of the al-Qaeda slaughter video that the organization released after Pearl's death.

Re-visioning practices can also involve a more general engagement with al-Qaeda's visual and narrative output, as I will illustrate in Section Two, where I investigate with Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies* (2008) and Peter Berg's *The Kingdom* (2007) two action film engagements with al-Qaeda filmmaking and surveillance

practices with a special focus on the encounter between hostages and al-Qaeda and the rescue narratives that the two films deploy. By way of my analysis of more literal and more general revisionary engagements with al-Qaeda filmmaking practices and video output, I suggest that *re-visioning practices* serve to reclaim authorship and with that retroactive agency over al-Qaeda abductions, their meaning, and political consequences.

Section One: Rewriting the Murder of Daniel Pearl

Al-Qaeda slaughter videos first emerged after the kidnapping and killing of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in January 2002. For years Pearl had been covering the Middle East for the *Journal*. By October 2000 he had been promoted to South Asia Bureau Chief with responsibilities to cover Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and India. He and his wife Mariane, a journalist herself, initially moved to Mumbai, India, but relocated to Pakistan a day after the attacks on the United States in 2001, in order to "ask the big questions," as Mariane Pearl puts it, namely, "Who was responsible for the attacks? Who financed them? Who protected the terrorists?"[97] In January 2002 Pearl's investigations took pregnant Mariane and him to Karachi, where Pearl was to meet Sheikh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, "shoe bomber" Richard Reid's spiritual father.[98] On January 23, 2002, Pearl did not return home from his interview arrangements with Gilani. Over the next five weeks a

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[97] For information on Daniel Pearl and quote, see Mariane Pearl with Sarah Crichton, *A Mighty Heart The Inside Story of the Al Qaeda Kidnapping of Danny Pearl* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 45 & 47.

[98] British citizen Richard Reid became known as the "shoe bomber" in the United States after he attempted to bomb a Paris to Miami American Airlines flight on December 22, 2001, in a suicide mission. Reid was overpowered by passengers and crew and taken custody in the United States. Only three months after the September 11 attacks the incident showed that al-Qaeda stayed committed to a militant and lethal course of action against the United States, which had in the meantime started its offensive against Afghanistan. See Michael Elliott, "The Shoe Bomber's World," *Time Magazine*, February 16, 2002, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,203478,00.html (accessed April 24, 2011).

closely knit investigative team that included Pakistani police, the FBI, and U.S. Consulate as well as Mariane and fellow journalists worked together in efforts to locate Pearl alive – without avail. On February 21, 2002, twenty days after the day, on which Pearl was likely murdered, the investigative team received a video that documents Pearl's violent death by decapitation.[99]

Before I turn to Michael Winterbottom's film *A Mighty Heart* and discuss its *re-visioning practices*, I will briefly analyze the narrative and visual parameters of the al-Qaeda video that depicts the murder of Daniel Pearl because the video serves as a baseline to the revisionary task that Winterbottom's film undergoes. A majority of the three and a half minute long slaughter video features Pearl making a statement. I reference the statement in its entirety, so that I can refer back to bits and pieces in my subsequent discussion. The complete statement (in English with Arabic subtitles) reads as follows:

> My name is Daniel Pearl. I am a Jewish American from 3545 Belemia Canyon Road in Encino, Califonia, U.S.A. I come from, on my father's side, a family of Zionists. My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish. My family follows Judaism. We've made numerous family visits to Israel. In the town of Bnai Brak in Israel there is a street called Chaim Pearl Street, which is named after my great-grandfather, who is one of the founders of the town. Not knowing anything about my situation, not being able to communicate with anybody, and, uh, only now do I think about that some of the people in

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[99] The video was later made available on Ogrish.com, a website that was founded in 2001 and hosted in the United States. Ogrish.com was later sold to LiveLeak.com. Media scholar Sue Tait writes of Ogrish that "Ogrish became a repository of graphic media during the Iraq war. The site's profile was raised when it hosted the video of Daniel Pearl's beheading in 2002, and Nick Berg's beheading in 2004. Prior to the sale of the site Ogrish archived 19 beheading videos, each of which had been downloaded several million times. The Nick Berg video had been downloaded over 15 million times. When an event such as a beheading occurred, the site received up to 60,000 hits an hour, with average site traffic up to 200,000 hits per day." The Pearl video is available at http://www.ogrish.tv/play.php?vid=182 (accessed April 24, 2011). For reference, see Sue Tait, "*Pornographies of Violence? Internet Spectatorship of Body Horror*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 25. no.1 (March 2008): 91-111 (92). For more on reception on the death of Daniel Pearl and the reception of the video, see David Allen Grindstaff and Kevin Michael DeLuca, "The Corpus of Daniel Pearl," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 21, no. 4 (December 2004): 305-324.

Guantánamo Bay must be in a similar situation, uhm, and I come to realize that this is the sort of, uh, uhm, problems that Americans are gonna have anywhere in the world now. We can't be secure, we can't walk around free, uhm, as long as our government policies are continuing and we allow them to continue. We Americans cannot continue to bear the consequences of our government actions, such as the unconditional support given to the state of Israel, twenty-four uses of veto power to justify massacres of children, and the support for the dictatorial regimes in the Arab and Muslim world. And also the continued American military presence in Afghanistan.

Pearl is the only speaking person in the video, which is rather uncommon in the light of later slaughter videos that advance the militant as their central messenger.[100] Unlike later productions that screen the militant or rather entire execution commandos of disguised militants in their full stature for longer takes, the Pearl video features the militant in partial body shots of a set of arms and contours of an upper body and face. Unlike later productions, the Pearl video, in other words, predominantly speaks through Pearl, his statement, and his body to get its messages across.

Daniel Pearl's central position in the video is visually reinforced, when the video opens with a medium close-up of Pearl's face and upper body against an otherwise blackened out screen. By "blackened out" I am not referring to a black background against which Pearl was filmed but black paint that was applied to the lens of the camera to render everything and everyone in the frame invisible but Pearl. Although the "blackened out" screen is disorienting in effect, when the black paint obliterates any spatial identifiers that would place the image of Pearl in space, it also

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[100] The militant features as central messenger in later slaughter video productions from Iraq that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is held responsible for, including the video that depicts the murder of Nicholas Berg (discussed in more detail below). The militant also features as central messenger in American television and film productions that engage in *re-visioning practices*, including the aforementioned *Weeds* episode.

asserts Pearl's centrality in the video, when his image stands out in a sea of blackness in the midst of the frame.

Yet only for seconds in the beginning of the video is Pearl featured alone in the sea of blackness. As he begins to speak, a circularly shaped still image pops up to the left to his silhouette, while the rest of the frame remains black. It is the photograph of an injured, possibly dead, infant (see Illustration 3b). Pearl continues to speak. After he identifies his California address, the image of the baby disappears, while another rectangular photograph of two blood-soaked dead bodies – one, if not both of them, children – emerges to the right of his silhouette. Other photographic images of dead and mourning persons, many of them identifiable as Muslims, appear around Pearl. Aside from placing Pearl in a central position, the "blackened out" screen thus also functions as an amateur alternative to more sophisticated blue or green screen technology that enables a seamless assemblage of different (moving) images in one frame.[101] By way of this amateur technology, the video links Pearl and what he supposedly represents (more on that in a moment) to the suffering and death of Muslims.

Occasionally the video cuts completely away from Pearl in order to feature news footage, which the producers were apparently not able to integrate into the same frame that shows Pearl and the photographs. Each cut from or to Daniel Pearl is emphatically highlighted with the sound of a bomb explosion or gunfire. Pearl's words, "My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish," are, for instance,

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[101] I refer to this technique as "amateur technique," when amateur qualities of the video are particularly noteworthy, once Pearl is no longer featured in an eye-level but high-angle shot. In these instances his body shape no longer adequately match the static black paint that contour the edges of his body so that parts of his face, for instance, his nose, occasionally disappear behind the solid black paint on the lens.

followed briefly by footage from the Gaza Strip, depicting Jamal al-Durah and his twelve-year old son Mohammed in crossfire, after the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) in 2000. The image of the Palestinian father trying to unsuccessfully shield his scared son from fatal gunfire went around the world as a testimony of the violence of the Israeli occupation.[102] In contrast to the images of Pearl and the photographs, which are always set against the partially obscured (black) background, the news footage fills the entire frame.

The photographs, news footage, and Pearl's statement work together to establish Pearl as a representative of *one* collapsed Jewish, Israeli, and American identity and encode this collapsed identity as the source of Muslim suffering and death. News footage like that of Jamal and Mohammed al-Durah seeks to implicate Pearl and the collapsed identity that he supposed represents in the violence that the state of Israel has exercised over Palestinians. News footage of American military engagements in Afghanistan in the video works similarly in that it seeks to connect Pearl and his identity to the violence that the United States has exercised over Afghanistan. The video attributes particular significance to Jewish identity, when its title refers to Pearl as "Daniel Pearl, the Jew" (in Arabic), as if his religious identity were a part of his name. As such, the practice bears similarities to practices in Nazi Germany, where all Jews were forced to take on "Israel" (for men) and "Sarah" (for

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[102] In the years since, details about the incident, including Israeli involvement, have been occasionally questioned. The German television documentary, *Drei Kugeln und ein totes Kind* argues, for instance, that Mohammed al-Dura was killed by Palestinian snipers, referencing, among other things, the type of munition and post-mortem examinations of the body. According to Israeli journalist Tom Segev, the documentary offers, however, ultimately no new insides or conclusive proves that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was not behind the killing. See Esther Schapira, "Drei Kugeln und ein totes Kind," *ARD*, March 18, 2002, 21:45. Also see Tom Segev, "Who Killed Mohammed al-Dura," *Haaretz*, March 22, 2002. And lastly, see Tobias Kaufmann, "Drei Kugeln und ein totes Kind," *Kölner Stadtanzeiger*, October 25, 2006, 4.

women) as their middle name. So while the video collapses Jewish-, Israeli-, and American-ness, it also presents Jewish-ness as the catch-all construct for all three identities that it places at the heart of Muslim suffering and death.[103]

I have discussed nearly all aspects of the visual and narrative parameters of the Pearl video that are relevant to adequately address *re-visioning practices* in *A Mighty Heart*. The only item left to be mentioned is that the video belongs within the category of slaughter videos for a reason. It belongs within the category because it includes footage of Pearl's (presumably) dead (or heavily injured) body and, later, freezes the frame on an image of his decapitated head, while text (in English) scrolls over the screen.[104] I should mention in this context that, unlike in later productions, the initial physical assault on the hostage (Pearl) is not shown, which has led to

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[103] The collapse that the slaughter video performs, when it meshes Jewish, Israeli, and American-ness, works as a flipside to the racialized identity cluster that gained particular prominence in the United States in the direct aftermath of the September 11 attacks. I am speaking of the identity cluster that collapsed "Arab," "Muslim," and "Middle Eastern" into one conflated construct to signify terrorism. See Leti Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," in *September 11 In History: A Watershed Moment?*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 147-162.

[104] The text that scrolls over the screen forwards the demands (in English) to a) "immediate[ly] release all U.S. held prisoners in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba," to b) "return Pakistani prisoners to Pakistan," to c) "immediate[ly] end U.S. presence in Pakistan," and to d) to "deliver F-16 fighter jets that Pakistan has paid for and never received." The video ends with the threat that "We asure [sic] Americans that they shall never be safe on the Muslim land of Pakistan. And if our demands are not met, this scene shall be repeated again and again." The video identifies the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistan Sovereignty (NMRPS), not al-Qaeda, as the group responsible for the killing of journalist Daniel Pearl. While the group claiming responsibility for the killing in the slaughter video is a group called the NMRPS, there is not only evidence that parts of the Pakistani government, namely the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), may have been implicated in the events, but that "three Yemeni men" were directly involved in the kidnapping and murder – men, who are less likely part of a national (Pakistani) movement than an international jihadist network (al-Qaeda). In fact, it is now believed that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed himself may have been Daniel Pearl's actual killer. It is for these reasons that I identify the Pearl video as an al-Qaeda production. For references on the involvement of these different groups and players, see Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* (London: Duckworth & Co., 2004). Lévy specifically investigates the connection between the Inter-Services Intelligence, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda – a connection that became a hot news subject again in 2010, when Wikileaks released several top secrets documents. For reference on the involvement of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, see, for instance, "Al-Qaida Suspect 'Confesses" To Killing Pearl," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/mar/15/alqaida.terrorism (accessed on April 13, 2011)

speculations that the camera may have been jammed.[105] Instead the film cuts directly

from Pearl and his last words to his (half) dead body, which is indicative of a

sensibility that puts less emphasis on snuff realism, as later productions will, than the

special effects that are created in post-production, such as montage and the stitching

together of images through the amateur black screen effects that I described above.[106]

During the assault on Pearl's body, the video suspends all sound, which is not the

case in later productions.

     I now turn to *A Mighty Heart* with a focus on the *re-visioning practices* that

the 2007 film undergoes with an argument that they are part of a larger revisionary

project to re-claim authorship and authority over the dark chamber of terror and its

meanings. While I will later draw comparisons between the actual al-Qaeda video and

the reenactments that are part of Winterbottom's film, I would like to first address

how the film situates the video in the film plot with an argument that the film denies

the slaughter video any role and purpose as an *evidentiary document*. By doing so the

film takes a first step to subvert al-Qaeda's claim to authority over events that the

extremists alone visually recorded and thereby in some form and shape visually

attested to.[107]

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[105] See Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?*, 43.

[106] In the broadest sense snuff refers to films that document the actual death of a real-life person. In a more narrow sense, snuff refers to films that stage the actual murder of a real-life person on screen for profit or films that stage a sexual murder of a real-life person on screen for profit. Given these parameters, snuff aesthetics are marked by a realism that avoids "special effects" and edits. For definition on snuff, see *Urban Dictionary*, http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=snuff (accessed April 24, 2011). For more on snuff aesthetics, see Joel Black, "Real(ist) Horror: From Execution Videos to Snuff Films," 63-75. For more on film realism, see Greg Smith, "What Is Realism, Really?" *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13-34.

[107] See *A Mighty Heart*, dir. Michael Winterbottom, Paramount Vantage, 2007. Although critically quite well received, *A Mighty Heart* did poorly at the box office, when it just barely covered its expenditure of $16 million dollars by grossing $9 million within and $9 million outside of the United States. Even the high-profile cast of Angelina Jolie as Mariane Pearl did nothing to change its failure at the box office; a failure that the film shares with many other films that take the war on terror as their

A *Mighty Heart* stages the video twice. It first stages the video in a scene, where the investigative team (minus Mariane and her friend Asra) first watches the video. This particular scene excludes any direct audiovisual reference to the video content. Rather it transmits the video content through the faces and reactions of the investigators and U.S. Consulate personnel (all of them men). The scene is compiled of close-ups that rotate between the faces of "Captain" from the counterterrorism unit of the Pakistani Criminal Investigation Department (CID) (played by Irrfan Khan), *Wall Street Journal* editor John Bussey (played by Dennis O'Hare), and U.S. Consulate security officer Randall Bennett (played by Will Patton), and U.S. Consul John Bauman (played by William Hoyland) among others, as the men stare at the off-screen video in silence. The men's uninterrupted focus and reserve build tension that is only released, when the camera finally rests on FBI agent John Skelton (played by Demetri Goritsas), who, clearly in shock and almost in tears, breathes heavily and says "Oh, my God." In this first reference to the al-Qaeda video in the film, *A Mighty Heart* thus uses the images of the stunned, stern, teary-eyed faces of the male investigators in replacement of any direct audiovisual reference to the slaughter.[108]

A *Mighty Heart* stages the video for a second time in a scene, where Mariane Pearl has returned to her home city Paris a widow and emotionally faces the realities

topic. For business statistics, see imdb.com website at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0829459/business (accessed April 25, 2011.) For more on the failure of films that take the war on terror as their topic, see Anne Thompson, "The Wages of War," *Variety*, April 21-April 27, 2008: 8. (Lexis Nexis).

[108] The ways in which the image in *A Mighty Heart* mediates body horror works similarly to a recent nonfictional photograph that circulated after the killing of Osama bin Laden. In the photograph the image of bin Laden was substituted with an image of President Obama and his close circle of White House staff and security advisors, as they were watching the operation unfold via a satellite image that was placed outside of the frame of the photograph. For photograph, see Anne Kornblut, "White House Situation Room Lavished With Attention Following Bin Laden Raid," *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-situation-room-lavished-with-attention-following-bin-laden-raid/2011/05/12/AFzgfU1G_story.html (accessed May 13, 2011).

of her husband's death. The scene crosscuts between images of pregnant Mariane (played by Angelina Jolie), as she lies alone on a king-size bed in her apartment and stares at the ceiling, and the film's al-Qaeda video remake (see Illustration 3c). It is framed by a voice-over narration, where Mariane recalls the gruesome details of her husband's murder ("they found Danny's body cut into ten pieces") but also asserts his "undefeated" spirit. Paired with her voice-over narration, the crosscuts between Mariane and the video remake clarify that she is not watching the al-Qaeda video but that the video remake functions as a representation of the horrors that Mariane psychologically recalls in order to work through them.[109] The video remake operates, in other words, purely on a symbolic level that depicts Mariane's inner state.

The two scenes that I have described provide the only visual references to the slaughter video. The first scene stages the video off-screen, as the investigative team watches in disbelief and horror. The second scene stages the video remake not as a material object in the world that Mariane inhabits but as an abstract representation of the horrors that she faces internally. In both cases the video is not given any role as an *evidentiary* document but stripped of its legitimacy to fully represent, whereby the film challenges al-Qaeda's claim to authorship and authority over the events.

Yet *A Mighty Heart* uses additional strategies that change the al-Qaeda video's original intent and meaning. I already alluded to the fact that both of the

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[109] The notion that Mariane is working through the events in psychological terms in the scene is reinforced by a text passage from her memoir, on which the film is based. In her memoir, Mariane writes that: "There is something I must do before the baby is born. I have to face what Danny faced. I have to confront the truth, because it is like an enemy: If you turn your face from it, then you are crushed by it. On May 25, two days before the baby is due, I take the phone off the hook, lie down alone, and imagine everything that happened to Danny. That doesn't take a great act of imagination; by this point I have a lot of details. But I force myself to see it all – when they blindfolded him, when they took out the knife, how long they interviewed him before they started killing him. And I make myself think about what Danny thought, and to know when he was most afraid." See Mariane Pearl, *A Mighty Heart*, 218/219.

scenes place emphasis on the emotional response to the abduction and murder of Daniel Pearl. As I will now briefly illustrate, the film frames the kidnapping and killing of Pearl through a narrative of personal loss, which constitutes yet another way in which the film over-writes and overrides the set of meanings that the al-Qaeda video otherwise propagates.

The film prefaces its crosscuts between Mariane and the al-Qaeda video remake with several shots of Mariane that encapsulate her profound lonesomeness and grief. These include a medium long shot of Mariane, as she is seated on her bed and looks out of the window. With her back turned to the camera and her face only partially visible as a reflection on the mirror on the wall, the composition of the image evokes profound lonesomeness, when through her body posture, she is set apart from the spectator. Other more intimate shots depicting grief follow with several close-ups, among them one, where Mariane slowly closes and opens her eyes, as she faces the camera and breathes heavily, and another, where her head is tilted as she sobs uncontrollably. In sharp contrast to the actual al-Qaeda video, these shots embed the kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl in a narrative of personal loss.

At the base of the narrative of personal loss is a turn to emotionality, which is particularly significant as a subversive technique against al-Qaeda authorship, when slaughter videos stage the disposal of human life against the conventions that regulate the display of violent death in what could be described a psychopathic mode, where murder is naturalized through an emotionless lens and narrative structure. Slaughter videos do not simply display murder and dying in explicit ways but through an impassive and nonchalant perspective, as if decapitating a person were just another

everyday activity. In *A Mighty Heart* Mariane mourns visibly just as FBI agent John

Skelton and others are visibly shaken by the video content that depicts Pearl's dead

body. And they mourn a *specific* person rather than the symbolic identities that al-

Qaeda ascribed to Pearl. Together these emotional reactions counter the psychopathic

mode that is inscribed within al-Qaeda's visual text, when they present responses that

are culturally coded as appropriate and normal.

What is left for my discussion in terms of *re-visioning practices* is the al-

Qaeda video remake itself. The film features the remake in two parts that are

separated by a shot of Mariane, as she lies on the king size bed. In what follows I

compare the video remake with the actual al-Qaeda video with an argument that the

video remake substantially appropriates al-Qaeda iconography in terms of mise-en-

scène, camerawork, and montage, yet introduces subtle differences that replace al-

Qaeda's original propositions and associations with new meanings that subvert the

video's original message. The revisionary project that the film engages in, when it

rewrites the al-Qaeda video from the inside out, is, in other words, rather

inconspicuous in a context, where inconspicuousness may ultimately be more

effective than obviousness and didacticism.

The video remake recreates the iconography of the actual slaughter video,

when it approximates the "amateur black screen technology" of the actual slaughter

video by featuring Pearl (played by Dan Futterman) in close-ups against a dark blue

blanket that covers the back wall. A slightly bluish coloring of the film stock gestures,

like the dark blue blanket, to the black screen aesthetic of the al-Qaeda production.

The bluish coloring evokes the bluish tint of film stock during the silent era, where

blue conventionally (and here quite appropriately) represented the darkness of the night. Yet, the bluish coloring also carries an otherworldly quality that seems to reckon with the death of Pearl, when it tints his surroundings in blue, while it leaves his face eerily pale. Aside from accommodating some of the effects of the "black screen technology" that the slaughter production used, the bluish coloring thus also introduces new meanings and associations in connection with the abduction and murder of Daniel Pearl, when it ascribes to Pearl a ghostly (haunting) presence of someone, whose death lingers in our memory. Beneath the similarities of the bluish coloring in the remake and the "black screen technology" in the al-Qaeda video thus lie significant *re-visioning practices.*

Beyond the bluish coloring, the video remake also recreates the iconography of the al-Qaeda production, when it copies the camera positions from the original text (see Illustrations 3b & 3c). Like in the al-Qaeda production, the remake features Pearl in a frontal close-up, when he first states his name. And, like in the al-Qaeda production, his head is slightly tilted to the side, when he talks about his and his parents' religious identity. The similarities between the remake and the original text render the revisions less obvious, including one, where in the remake the camera briefly dwells on Pearl's face in a moment, where the actual video cuts right away. The remake briefly dwells on Pearl's face, right after he says: "In the town of Bnei Brak in Israel there is a street called Chaim Pearl Street, which is named after my great-grandfather, who was one of the founders of the town." His statement directly follows a shot of Mariane on the bed, as she says in voice-over "I know he was *undefeated* because of the next thing he says [which is "In the town of Bnei

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Brak….].” For one, the slightly longer take corresponds with Mariane's words, when the camera rests on Pearl's tranquil face, as to emphasize Pearl's spiritual triumph in ways that the hasty cut in the original text does clearly not. Pearl enacts the undefeated spirit that Mariane describes. Yet, by way of the slightly longer take, the film also attributes greater significance to Pearl's own words, which speak of his great-grandfather's place in Israeli history and implicitly ascribe legitimacy to Jewish settlements in the Palestine under British mandate. The slightly longer take thus also replaces the notion of Jewish identity as a disposable identity, which underlies the original text, with one of flourishing Jewish life. By only slightly changing the original text, the remake, in short, introduces significant new meanings and associations.

Yet *A Mighty Heart* does more to rewrite the meanings and associations that the al-Qaeda video establishes in connection with Jewish identity, when it features not only a partial but an *edited* version of the Pearl statement. In the slaughter production Pearl says: “My name is Daniel Pearl. I am Jewish American from 3545 Belemia Canyon Road, Mecino, Califonia, U.S.A. I come from, on my father's side, a family of Zionists. My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish.” In the remake Pearl, instead, seamlessly states: “My name is Daniel Pearl. My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish.” Aside from the California address, the quote cuts the reference to Zionism. The erasure of Zionism arguably attests to the controversies that surround the idea of Zionism, even among moderate voices in the West, where many associate the term with neo-colonial practices that justify Jewish settlements on Palestinian territory. By erasing Zionism, the remake completely

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disassociates Pearl from any symbolic reference to the oppression of Arabs and Muslims in Palestine and elsewhere. Given that the remake does not incorporate still photographs and news footage, as the original text does, Pearl, as *A Mighty Heart* sets him up, can only be read as a victim of a brutal murder and not a symbolic representative of the source of Muslim suffering and death, as the al-Qaeda video attempts to do. Beneath the editing of lines thus again lie significant *re-visioning practices.*

In conclusion, by way of several specific techniques *A Mighty Heart* engages in *re-visioning practices* that ultimately undermine al-Qaeda's intent and, with that, al-Qaeda's authorship and authority over the dark chamber of terror. Although the film cannot undo the crime against Daniel Pearl (and others), it contributes to how the crime is understood, commemorated and politicized. By rendering particular narratives (visual and otherwise) absent and others present, the film ultimately strives to actively counter the very prospect that Michael Ignatieff provocatively called "The Terrorist as Auteur."[110]

Al-Qaeda Filmmaking and Slaughter Videos in Hollywood Action Films

Daniel Pearl is murdered in front of the camera in 2002. For a while the incident appears to be a singular event. For the remainder of the year the war in Afghanistan continues with NATO support. In February 2003 Secretary of State Colin Powell alleges in front of the U.N. Assembly that U.S. "satellite photos…indicate that banned materials have recently been moved from a number of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction facilities." As March 2003 rolls around, the United

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[110] Michael Ignatieff, "The Terrorist As Auteur," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/14/movies/14TERROR.html (accessed April 24, 2011).

States and coalition forces invade Iraq without the backing of international law. By the end of the year over *twelve thousand* Iraqi civilians are dead (as well as 482 U.S. soldiers). On April 4, 2004, the U.S. military seals access to and from the city of Fallujah. *Democracy Now!* later speaks of a "massacre in Fallujah." On April 28, 2004, the CBS television program *60 Minutes II* breaks the news of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison facilities.[111]

It is in 2004 that al-Qaeda slaughter videos return with a vengeance. During the siege of Fallujah in the spring of 2004 independent contractor Nicholas Berg disappears from the streets of Baghdad. Berg ventured to Iraq in December 2003 in order to repair communication antennas on his own accord. On March 24, 2004, he was arrested by the Iraqi police for reasons unknown and later transferred to the U.S. military. He was held in custody for thirteen days until six days after his scheduled flight home, at which time he was released (on April 6th) into what his father Michael Berg describes as "a completely different place" than Iraq had been prior to his arrest. Berg disappears three days later and is held captive by al-Qaeda for a month. Once the Abu Ghraib prison torture becomes public knowledge, Berg is killed. His dismembered body surfaces in the outskirts of the Iraqi capital on May 8th. Three days later al-Qaeda posts a video of its execution-style murder of Berg on the internet.[112]

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[111] For statement by Colin Powell, see "Transcript of Powell's U.N. Presentation," *CNN*, February 5, 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript.03/index.html (accessed July 30, 2010). For the number of casualties, see "U.S. Casualties in Iraq," *GlobalSecurity.Org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm (accessed July 30, 2010). Also see, *Iraq Body Count*, http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/ (accessed July 30, 2010). For quote on Fallujah, see "Massacre in Fallujah: Over 600 Dead, 1,000 Injured, 60,000 Refugees," *Democracy Now!*, April 12, 2004, http://www.democracynow.org/2004/4/12/massacre_in_fallujah_over_600_dead (accessed July 30, 2010). For more information on the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal, see Chapter Four.

[112] For references on the kidnapping and murder of Nicholas Berg, see Sewell Chan, "FBI Visited Berg 3 Times in Iraqi Jail," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 2004: A 21. See Michael Berg, "A Father's Day

The murder of Nicholas Berg is met with outrage, including among Islamist groups that the United States customarily classifies as "terrorist" (alongside al-Qaeda). Both, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas, publicly speak out against the crime. Hezbollah issues a statement "condemn[ing] this grisly act which has caused great harm to Islam and to Muslims by this group which falsely claims to belong to the religion of mercy, compassion and genuine human values." Similarly, London's Hamas representative, Osama Hamdan, voices his dismay by saying: "I condemn this brutal act and sympathize with the family of the slain American man."[113]

Yet after the murder of Nicholas Berg slaughter video productions become more commonplace. On June 22, 2004, South Korean citizen Kim Sun-il is kidnapped and killed in front of the camera. In August a Bulgarian and Turkish citizen undergo the same fate. Mid-September al-Qaeda abducts two American and one British engineer. The decapitation murders of all three men, Eugene Armstrong (on September 20), Jack Hensley (on September 21), and Kenneth Bigley (on October 7), are taped and posted on the internet. By July 2007 fifty-four foreigners have been kidnapped and murdered in Iraq. Several of these murders are filmed.[114]

Message: Both Parties Have Betrayed America," *Counterpunch*, June 10/11, 2006. And see Amy Goodman's interview with Michael Berg, "Father of Beheaded Iraq Hostage Blames Bush Administration For Son's Death," *Democracy Now!* August 24, 2004. For the slaughter video that screened the murder of Nicholas Berg, see http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=2f30af0d52 (accessed April 24, 2011).

[113] For references on Hezbollah and Hamas reaction to the murder of Nicholas Berg, see Hussein Dakroub, "Beheading Condemned By Hamas and Hizbollah," *The Independent*, May 14, 2004, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/beheading-condemned-by-hamas-and-hizbollah-563351.html (accessed May 9, 2010).

[114] For references on kidnappings, see Campbell, "Use of Beheadings;" for number of kidnappings, see Kate Connolly, John Hooper, and Julian Borger, "Germany May End Ransom Payments for Kidnapped Victims," *The Guardian*, July 31, 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jul/31/germany.johnhooper (accessed July 31, 2010).

Spurred by the legal vacuum in war-torn Iraq, these incidents are linked to a more general rise in kidnappings for financial and/or political gain. To the different groups involved, some without political motivations, kidnappings frequently prove effective, when several governments, including the (non-coalition) German and (coalition) Italian governments, pay large sums for the release of their citizens, while others, like the Philippine government, meet demands to withdraw military troops from Iraq. About half of all abducted foreigners have been released, while the fate of roughly one third remains unknown.[115]

With the recorded murder of Nicholas Berg al-Qaeda initiates signature *aesthetics* that differ decisively from the visual arrangements in the Pearl video. Aesthetics, as I conceive of the term, describe a *systematic way* of looking at, attributing value to, and portraying the world.[116] I am, in other words, referring to patterns, recurring themes and tropes that go beyond any specific *singular* video-event. Although the aesthetics are largely the product of just *one* militant faction under the auspices of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, next to Khalid Sheikh yet another high-ranking al-Qaeda leader directly implicated in the murder of hostages, they have come to define al-Qaeda's dark chamber of terror at large.

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[115] The Italian government is, for instance, said to have paid six million Euros for the release of reporter Guiliana Sgrena. For more information, see Irene Peroni, "Italy's Ransom Dilemma," *BBC News*, March 7, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4325481.stm (accessed July 31, 2010). The German government is, for instance, said to have paid five million US dollars for the release of archeologist Susanne Osthoff. For more information, see Tony Paterson, "Germany Paid Ransom to Free Hostage in Iraq," *The Independent*, January 24, 2006, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-paid-ransom-to-free-hostage-in-iraq-524335.html (accessed July 31, 2010). See also "Manila Begins Iraq Troop Pullout," *CNN*, July 14, 2004, http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/07/13/philippines.hostage/ (accessed July 31, 2010). Again, for number of kidnapping, see Connolly, Hooper, Borger, "Germany May End Ransom…."
[116] As a term aesthetics derives from the Greek term *aisthetika* (matters of perception) and refers to sensuous rather than cerebral responses to the world, which still resonates in what could be described as its antonym, *anesthetic*. For more on aesthetics, see Julian Bell, "Aesthetics," *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, retrieved April 24, 2011 from http://www.oxfordartonline.com.

The aesthetics that the Berg video institutes are largely defined by one particular image, namely a full shot featuring five militants, who, dressed in black and disguised by kufiyas or ski-masks, stand side by side against a white wall facing the camera (see Illustration 3d). (Subsequent videos also repeatedly feature black flags with religious (Islamic) epigraphs in the background.)[117] To their feet, seated on a rubber mattress, is their shackled hostage, Nicholas Berg, who, dressed in "Guantánamo" orange, remains largely impassive. Four out of the five-minute-and-thirty-seven-second long video present this particular composition as a long-take, as the militant in the middle, presumably Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, reads a statement, in which he appeals to fellow Muslims to rise to arms in the defense of Islam and warns George Bush, his "cowardly lackey" Pervez Musharraf, and the "mothers and wives of American soldiers" that death and mourning will be ahead. As a four-minute-long take the image dominates the video through duration, especially since there is little change in composition. Apart from occasional moves, for instance, when a gun slides off one of the militants' shoulders, the group arrangement of militants and hostage remains static. The take thereby bears strong resemblance with a still photograph.

Beyond the group arrangement that captures the stillness before the storm of the deadly assault the execution aesthetics are moreover defined by images of dismembered hostage bodies, where the decapitated head is paraded in front of the camera, which is already the case in the 2002 production. What the Berg video, however, newly institutes, is a way of presenting the dismembered body in a final shot, where the decapitated head is placed on top of the torso. Subsequent videos,

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[117] The slaughter videos involving the murders of engineer Jack Hensley and translator Kim Sun-il both feature black flags with epigraphs that are draped on the wall in the background.

such as the one involving American engineer Jack Hensley, copy this particular arrangement among many other features.[118]

Significantly, with the Berg video this image of the "pile of body" first emerges twelve days after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal became public knowledge and with that "piles of bodies" that that have come to define U.S. torture in Iraq. Whereas most fiction films avoid these aspects of the slaughter aesthetics, partially because their narratives imagine hostage rescue, there are exceptions, for instance Brian de Palma's *Redacted*, which simulates the entire slaughter aesthetics, including the parading of the decapitated head and the "pile of body."

Beyond mise-en-scène, the execution aesthetics are moreover defined by specific camerawork. The camera in the Berg video (and later productions) "merely" serves as a recording device to capture "what is already there" rather than to create new associations through montage and special effects in post-production (as is the case in the Pearl video). During the aforementioned four-minute speech, for instance, neither the camera nor its zoom or halt buttons are touched. In the entire video there are only six cuts total. The overwhelmingly static camera and limited edits, which are associated with snuff filmmaking, point, like snuff, to a preoccupation with authenticity, that is to say an investment in producing an evidentiary visual document. This purist approach to technology envisions the camera as an unfiltered nexus between al-Qaeda and a (virtual) public, for whom the militants perform with an

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[118] Jack Hensley was abducted with another American colleague, Eugene Armstrong, and a British colleague, Kenneth Bigley, in Iraq. All three men were beheaded in front of the camera – the two American men on September 20 and 21, 2004, the British citizen on October 7, 2004. For slaughter video that screened the murder of Jack Hensley, see http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=e6a8846b95&comment_order=newest_first (accessed April 24, 2011).

appeal to protocol and procedure that mimics legal process and, with that, the legitimacy of sovereign power.

In sum, the aesthetics manifest a particularly nauseating convergence of power and visibility, when actual murder, dismemberment, and dying are depicted in process against regulations around the display of (violent) death, not to mention ethics and the law. As a systematic way of looking, attributing value, and presenting the world, the aesthetics unleash a memorable terror that is larger than any singular video-event. The semblance between one video and the next fosters a substantive unease around al-Qaeda's seemingly pervasive (visual and virtual) presence, with which the organization asserts power a power that, as the video suggests, is a power over life and death.

The emergence of an aesthetics has prompted more *generic* fiction film representations that are not based on "true stories" and not only engage the slaughter video productions but al-Qaeda's gaze and filmmaking practices at large. In what follows I first analyze the gaze and filmmaking practices in two such films, *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom*, by addressing al-Qaeda's interaction with surveillance technologies in a struggle over *privileged* (*visual*) *control*.[119] Subsequently I investigate the role of the camera as a referent to a "terrorist imaginary" where material objects – like the camera – carry recognizable symbolic value as objects that

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[119] See *Body of Lies*, dir. Ridley Scott, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008; *The Kingdom*, dir. Peter Berg, Universal Pictures, 2007. *Body of Lies* was another box office failure, when it only grossed $40 million dollars, which did not cover the cost of the film at $70 million dollars. As Pamela McClintock of *Variety* suggests, *Body of Lies*, despite its star-cast of Leonardo DiCaprio and Russell Crowe, was "sacked at the weekend box office as moviegoers once again resisted Middle Eastern terrorist pics." See Pamela McClintock, "Dogs Bite Men," *Variety*, October 13, 2008: 1 (Lexis Nexis). For business statistics, see also http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758774/business (accessed April 25, 2011). *The Kingdom* faired hardly better, when it cost $70-80 million dollars in making but only grossed $47 million dollars. See http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0431197/business (accessed April 25, 2011).

impart al-Qaeda's vision and belief system.[120] I conclude my analysis with a focus on plot and explore the al-Qaeda hostage scenarios that drive both films. In both films the white male American hostage is rescued just in time, as the al-Qaeda slaughter production is underway. I take a close look at these encounters and narratives of rescue that, as I argue, are part of the larger revisionary project, where the al-Qaeda gaze and filmmaking practices that most nauseatingly define the slaughter videos are challenged.

In his analysis of recent Iraq war and spy films, Garret Stewart points to the omnipresence of surveillance and visual recording devices in the genre with an argument that plot has given way to style, where "[n]arrative agency is subsumed to technology at every level." According to Stewart, these films, including *Body of Lies*, not merely incorporate surveillance and visual (recording) devices as material objects but feature cell phone images and satellite aesthetics for a twenty-first century "look." Their lack of "stylistic distance" to news images and military footage that spectators are all too familiar with has turned the films into box-office failures, when they, as Stewart laments, fail to lend "new eyes for the unthinkable." Instead, their fantasies of visual mastery "let American imperialist logic declare itself …nakedly."[121]

While Stewart's research provides a useful context for the two films that are subject to my discussion in this section, the connection that he makes between surveillance technologies and American power does not always hold. In *The Kingdom*

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[120] My use of the term imaginary draws less on the psychoanalytical frameworks that psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and film scholar Christian Metz employ in their use of the term than a commonsense definition where the imaginary describes the symbols, values, and laws that guide, in this case, the terrorist vision.

[121] See Garrett Stewart, "Digital Fatigue: Imaging War in Recent American Film," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 45-55 (45, 47 & 50).

surveillance is exclusively defined by the al-Qaeda affiliated Abu Hamza cell. The militants orchestrate a shooting spree and bomb attacks on an American compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which bears resemblance with the actual 1996 Khobar Towers and the 2003 Riyadh bombings. Through binoculars Abu Hamza (played by Hezi Saddik) and his affiliates witness the attacks unfold. Several shots in this first actual scene in the film (after a computer-animated "history lesson") are extreme long shots that are framed in the shape of binoculars, that is to say as if the scenes were seen through binoculars. Complementary to the binoculars is a camera that visually records the deadly events for a virtual afterlife – footage later appears on the internet. As with the binoculars spectators not only see the camera but share the militants' perspective through the ocular device onto the deadly events. The binocular and camera perspective are both intercut with scenes from the ground, where panicked Americans run for their lives, and from the rooftop, from which cell leader Abu Hamza and his men watch the events unfold (with the aforementioned binoculars and camera). The scene of the attack is, in other words, largely mediated through subjective shots where the spectator position is aligned with al-Qaeda's. The scene is thereby exemplary of *privileged visual control* where al-Qaeda maintains exclusive oversight over the events. The idea of *privileged visual control* is, moreover, relayed through Abu Hamza's interaction with his grandson, as the scene unfolds. Clasping on to his grandson's chin, after the boy's gaze drifts away, Abu Hamza forcibly directs the minor's eyes onto the deadly events for jihadist instruction, even after the explosion visibly unsettles the child.

In what Stewart, following Foucault, describes as the "panoptic model" *Body of Lies*, in contrast to *The Kingdom*, entertains U.S. fantasies of omniscience, when satellite technologies map undercover agent Roger Ferris's every step in (mostly) Iraq and Jordan. It is with knowledge of the CIA's ocular safeguard that Ferris (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) voluntarily submits to al-Qaeda militants as part of a presumed prisoner exchange. As Ferris waits for the arrival of the militants alone in the midst of the Syrian desert, the film juxtaposes close-ups of his sweaty self with extreme long aerial shots of the desolate unpopulated area. Dangers of the rugged, isolated environment notwithstanding, the intercuts to the CIA control room in Langley, Virginia, where Ferris and his surroundings feature on a big screen, seemingly project remote (visual) mastery over the events to come.

However, satellite surveillance is not foolproof, and Ferris is taken hostage under the watchful eye of the CIA control room (see Illustration 3e). What the CIA sees is the "big picture" (an extreme long aerial shot) of four identical black cars approaching and circling around Ferris. In this midst of the desert the four vehicles stir up enough sand to block the view of the ground momentarily, while Ferris is dragged into one of the cars. The vehicles then disperse into four different directions. With one satellite and four pathways the CIA faces an impossible task. In spite of satellite technologies, al-Qaeda thus momentarily subverts visual control by blocking the view and successfully abducts Ferris. Although the scene is less about seeing than not seeing and thereby works complementary to the one in *The Kingdom,* it points all the same to al-Qaeda's privileged, if momentary, control over the event and its

representation. Together the two scenes illustrate how it is not only American but al-Qaeda's power that manifests itself through manipulations of the gaze.

In *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom* the camera moreover figures prominently as a referent to the interplay between visibility and power that marks al-Qaeda's "terrorist imaginary" (see Illustrations 3f and 3g). I already addressed al-Qaeda's filmmaking practices in *The Kingdom*. However, what I am now concerned with is the role of the camera during the encounters between the hostage and al-Qaeda militants, where, as I argue, the camera works as the most important prop to signify "terrorism." In *Body of Lies* a local Iraqi CIA operative, Bassam, tells Ferris before their raid on a militant safe-house: "I'm not getting my head cut off *on the internet*…if something happens shoot me." [my emphasis] As the comment suggests, Bassam does not fear death itself but the way al-Qaeda orchestrates death, a significant part of which are the practices of visually recording and virtually disseminating the execution-style murders. The comment alludes to how these recording practices magnify the offense, while they endow the camera with a special purpose. It is this central role of the camera that both fiction films gesture to, when they stage the camera in what could be described as the role of another character or "extra."

During the encounter between al-Qaeda and their hostage Ferris in *Body of Lies*, a range of shots puts the camera into the spotlight. Not only is the camera part of several group shots amidst the militants that Ferris faces but it alone fills the frame on one occasion in a frontal close-up. In three shots the events are moreover captured through the camera's own grainy digital lens, including two, where Ferris struggles

with his captors, as they tie him to a wooden board, and one, where the imminent assault on Ferris is interrupted by police gunfire. Two more shots show the camera and its window on the scene in what could be described as a doubly mediated mise-en-scène, where the recording diegetic camera and its images are in the frame of the non-diegetic Hollywood camera. The camera is also evoked rhetorically, when al-Qaeda cell leader Kareem al-Shams a.k.a. al-Saleem (Alon Aboutboul) tells Ferris: "You know what that camera is for? It's not for this. This – this [meaning their verbal exchange] is intermission. It's for what comes after this. For what comes now." Only at this point Ferris visibly fears his opponent, when he starts to sweat and, momentarily, breathe heavily. In the end the camera features, however, most prominently, when Ferris is liberated by Jordanian police under the auspices of Hani (Pasha) Salaam. After defeating the militants with gun power, Hani attends to Ferris; however not before first turning off the camera.

In *The Kingdom* the camera is also in the spotlight. While *Body of Lies* features the hostage scenario as one lengthy uninterrupted sequence, *The Kingdom* rapidly cuts between short hostage vignettes and much longer scenes of the gun-sure (largely) American rescue team. As a result, references to the camera and, importantly, a separate lamp for adequate lighting largely drown in the pace of rapid action. What remains notable, however, is that the al-Qaeda's hostage, FBI intelligence analyst Adam Leavitt (played by Jason Bateman), resists his captors most visibly, when, in a moment of distraction, he knocks over the tripod, on which the camera is set. By disempowering the camera, Leavitt halts the slaughter production that serves purpose only as a recorded act. The prominence of the camera in the two

films establishes the visual recording device as most significant "terrorist prop" in the twenty-first century, where, as I argue throughout this dissertation, violent conflict, visual media, and mass communication have converged in unprecedented ways.

Beyond the camera, the two films reference the al-Qaeda aesthetics through a range of other themes, which now brings me to the next step of my analysis, namely a more elaborate investigation of the two fictional encounters between al-Qaeda and its hostages. The films deploy what could be described as *archetypical tropes* that distinctively define the al-Qaeda aesthetics to establish similarities with the slaughter videos. In reference to actual slaughter videos they, for instance, feature white, male, U.S. Americans as captives. Both hostages, protagonist Roger Ferris and side character Adam Leavitt, are as CIA operative and FBI intelligence analyst (respectively) directly implicated in U.S. politics in the Middle East. Moreover, like in slaughter productions militants in both films disguise their heads with ski-masks or kufiyyāt and thereby not only evoke al-Qaeda extremism but a longer representational history in U.S. film, where the Palestinian headwear works to signify "Arab terrorism." While some of these fictional militants wear military gear, for instance, in *The Kingdom*, they more commonly dress in traditional Arab garb. Lastly, (visual) references to daggers, swords, and "the statement" in both films evoke the execution aesthetics. Moreover, *Body of Lies* features a black flag with religious epigraph, the look of which directly emulates several slaughter productions.

Apart from these tropes, however, the scenes of encounter between al-Qaeda and its hostages bear little resemblance to the actual execution aesthetics. Unlike *A Mighty Heart* the films do not engage the power-visibility-nexus from the inside out,

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that is to say with much similitude but key alterations. As Brian de Palma's *Redacted* attests to, the execution aesthetics are well-adaptable, even without reference to actual events, if adaptation is one's aim (see Illustrations 5b). Although de Palma "enhances" his scene of slaughter in *Redacted* cinematically with close-ups and tracking shots, mise-en-scène and montage still create an eerie illusion of the "real."[122] This is not the case in *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom*, where mise-en-scène (in *Body of Lies*) and framing and montage (in *The Kingdom*) overwhelmingly work in difference to actual slaughter productions. I explore these cinematic differences with an argument that the two films thereby create new associations around al-Qaeda and its filmmaking. Even if they do not rewrite the aesthetics from the inside out, which presupposes a less cursory and more meaningful engagement with the power-visibility-nexus of the slaughter productions, they are still part of the larger revisionary project that is the subject of this chapter.

Body of Lies complements the props that work in aesthetic agreement with the slaughter productions with a set of suggestive references that frame the encounter between al-Qaeda and Roger Ferris in *medieval allure* (see Illustration 3h and 3i). To this effect the film situates the encounter in a dungeon-like cellar that is accessible only through labyrinth-like tunnels. It is the dark and moist space that insinuates torture of the medieval kind. Aside from the dungeon, the chains that hold Ferris in place bear resemblance to a medieval torture instrument. His feet are not merely shackled to a chair but his hands are secured by metal bracelets *on* a wooden, desk-like surface. That the hands are exposed for a purpose is made achingly clear, when

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[122] Since Brian de Palma's film *Redacted* is not an example of *re-visioning practices*, I consider the film again, if briefly, as part of my conclusion in Chapter Five.

al-Qaeda cell leader Kareem al-Shams (a.k.a. al-Saleem) chooses a hammer from an assemblage of torture tools, which are neatly arranged and constitute yet another hint to pre-modern times, and smashes Ferris' finger. Shortly before his rescue Ferris is heaved on top of the surface and secured as he lies on his back, which produces greater resemblance with Hollywood's Middle Ages, for instance, Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995), than with al-Qaeda's slaughter aesthetics.[123]

With what I have outlined as *medieval allure*, *Body of Lies* falls back on Orientalist imagery and assumptions. By signifying a time long past, the dungeon and torture instruments place al-Qaeda itself in pre-modern "barbaric" times, which corresponds to a larger discourse about al-Qaeda or even Arabs and Muslims, if not postcolonial societies in general, where entities, peoples, and places supposedly lag behind in time and lack behind in "civilization." The discourse places these entities, peoples, and places outside of historical context, where violence, among many other conditions, merely and essentially *is*. These a-historical perspectives that claim history only for some entities, peoples, and places are, of course, discounted by the mere fact of history itself, as Edward Said so pointedly remarked.[124] And as any close look at history proves, al-Qaeda is not the return of the medieval repressed but a social formation that is inseparably tied to an ideological fatigue about late Cold War politics, U.S. hegemony, world capitalism and its remnants.

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[123] I mention *Braveheart* (1995) specifically not only because its portrayal of 13th century Scotland won several Oscars at the Academy Awards, including for best picture and best director, but because it includes a spectacular execution scene, where lead character William Wallace (Mel Gibson), is displayed in a similar position. See *Braveheart*, dir. Mel Gibson, Paramount Pictures, 1995.

[124] For a statement by Edward Said to this effect, see *On Orientalism*, dir. Sut Jhally, Media Education Foundation, 1998.

What the medieval allure in *Body of Lies* thus ultimately does is to rewrite the claims to authority, not to mention legitimacy and sovereignty that underlie the slaughter video productions with a range of new associations. Yet, given that many of these associations have forebears in the legacies of Orientalism, their revisionary potential is largely servicing a politics, where the irrational, perverse, brutal Other (al-Qaeda) justifies U.S. military engagement abroad but does little to explain the forces behind extremism.

If *Body of Lies* creates significant new associations through mise-en-scène, *The Kingdom* does so through montage and framing. This separate focus is not to imply that montage and framing is not important in the encounter between Ferris and al-Qaeda or that the mise-en-scène carries little meaning in *The Kingdom*, where the "dark chamber" is in a furnished living room of an apartment in a larger complex. Slaughter in the film is, in other words, to occur in the midst of family life, which attributes another kind of perversion to al-Qaeda, where the domestic space houses deadly extremist politics. This scenario also deploys a discourse about militants as purposefully embedding themselves within heavily populated areas, allegations which have occasionally served to justify disproportionate and indiscriminate bombings, including Israel's bombing of Lebanon (2006) and Gaza (2008-2009).[125] If more could be said about mise-en-scène in *The Kingdom*, I prioritize montage and framing in order to sample yet another strategy that establishes the fictional encounter

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[125] The allegations that militants were purposefully embedding themselves within heavily populated civilian areas were frequently based on little evidence. For allegations on Hizbollah and embedding in the context of the 2006 Lebanon War, see, for instance, Amy Goodman, "Israeli Ambassador Grilled on Targeting Civilians, Use of Cluster Bombs and Other War Crimes in Lebanon," *Democracy Now!* August 10, 2006, http://www.democracynow.org/2006/8/10/israeli_ambassador_grilled_on_targeting_of (accessed April 24, 2011).

between al-Qaeda and the hostage in difference to actual slaughter productions, by which the film engages, as I argue, in *re-visioning practices*.

In *The Kingdom* the scene of encounter between Adam Leavitt and al-Qaeda is marked by frantic editing. Not only is the scene itself broken into four separate segments that are featured in intercuts with the approaching rescue team, but each segment itself involves rapid cuts between a range of images, most of them close-ups, for instance, of Leavitt, gagged and scared-looking (see Illustration 3j). Together the four segments include at least fifty cuts that the film implements at a beat of seconds per frame. Complementary to the close-ups, which promote a highly restrictive view on the events in the films, the editing pace creates a scenario, where al-Qaeda is decidedly *not* in (visual) control.

To elaborate, in the Berg video, al-Zarqawi takes four minutes to read his indictments against United States politics. I already suggested that slaughter productions thereby appeal to protocol and procedure that mimics legal process. The seeming calm and patience, with which al-Zarqawi performs his act, work toward al-Qaeda's claim to the absolute (visual) control over events that I earlier described. The militants are not rushed, at least not visibly, and determine the duration of events without outside pressure.

In *The Kingdom*, in contrast, the editing pace creates a hectic mood, which establishes a "ticking-bomb" feel, typical in action films, where time is running out and timeliness is key. Together with the gunfire in the background, the editing pace constructs the militants' actions in correlation with the approaching rescue team

outside. To this effect the militant messenger is less characterized by nonchalance than a rather speedy recitation of the indictments against the United States.

The montage complements the image framing. The full group shots of actual slaughter productions are replaced by the narrow and partial perspectives of close-ups. Without substantial establishing shots the spatial arrangements are left unclear. The highly restrictive perspective gives, for instance, no visual oversight over each of the militants' concrete positions in the room and in relation to Leavitt. This technique creates a disoriented feel, common in suspense films, where the confined view obfuscates any approaching threat. It works against the full group shots in slaughter videos, where everything is revealed in nonchalant procedural manner. The technique thereby ultimately reinserts the Hollywood mode into events that the slaughter aesthetics render unremarkable.

To elaborate, film scholar Joel Black identifies "suspense, surprise and spectacle" as the key ingredients that define Hollywood fiction film and create emotional appeal, if not physical ecstasy and climax. In the absence of many first-hand experiences and alternate images, these ingredients have come to significantly define perceptions and emotional responses to the world, for instance, about death and dying. The "virtual ban on visual records of death" that I mentioned earlier does not extend to fiction film representations, where death is always a dramatic event, especially, if it involves the protagonist or well-rounded side characters. If characters do not die spectacularly, as, for instance, Bonnie and Clyde in the lengthy slow motion sequence at the end of Arthur Penn's 1967 film of the same title, they at least share their word of wisdom, as Godfrey de Ibelin does in *The Kingdom of Heaven*

(2005), or their inability to do so partially or fully impacts the plot as Kane's "rosebud" already did in Orson Welles 1941 classic. Films that do not follow this pattern, like John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* are perceived as extremely disturbing precisely because murder is not presented as a spectacular event and spectators are deprived of the supposed climatic release.[126]

Leavitt for his part is rescued in *The Kingdom* and his captors die. The restrictive perspective in the scene of his encounter with al-Qaeda works, nevertheless, with the ecstatic Hollywood mode that I just outlined and thereby against the slaughter aesthetics, which stage the actual deaths of human beings in decidedly non-dramatic fashion in what I earlier described as a psychopathic mode, where murder is naturalized through an emotionless lens and narrative structure. Through the editing pace and image framing *The Kingdom* engages in *re-visioning* practices that ultimately substitute the psychopathic mode with a sensationalist Hollywood one. One result of this substitution is that it (emotionally) legitimizes the indiscriminate American deadly force on Saudi ground that the film depicts and does little to explain the forces behind extremism. Both the mise-en-scène in *Body of Lies* and montage and framing in *The Kingdom* thus rewrite the slaughter aesthetics by drawing on tropes, themes, and techniques that long precede the twenty-first century and naturalize American power.

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[126] For reference on suspense, surprise, and spectacle, see Joel Black, "Real(ist) Horror," 65. His points partially reinforce what I already described as a schizophrenic approach to representations of death and dying, where the taboo that surrounds nonfictional representations of death and dying is counterbalanced by spectacular representations in fiction, such as the ones that I mention above. For film references, see *Bonnie and Clyde*, dir. Arthur Penn, Warner Brothers/Seven Arts, 1967; *The Kingdom of Heaven*, dir. Ridley Scott, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2005; *Citizen Kane*, dir. Orson Welles, RKO Radio Pictures, 1941; *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, dir. John McNaughton, Greycat Films, 1990. See also, earlier footnote on *Henry*.

However, the two films also differ significantly in their ideological outlook, as my discussion of the rescue narratives in either film will now further illuminate. Captivity and rescue narratives have a long tradition in the United States, even precede U.S. independence from Britain. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries they repeatedly figure in the context of U.S. political interventionism and war, where they frequently frame the United States in terms of selfless humanitarianism, even if the political measures taken by respective U.S. Administrations tell far more complicated stories. Along these lines the "war on terror's" early year(s) were, for instance, initially rendered through narratives that highlight the rescue of Afghan women from gender oppression. Rhetoric around "spreading freedom and democracy" in Iraq and "liberating the Iraqi people from his [Saddam Hussein's] tyrannical rule," which was put to work to justify the 2003 "Operation Iraqi Freedom," likewise uses the recue motif. In the context of Iraq, we may further recall the dramatic liberation of U.S. private Jessica Lynch by male U.S. soldiers. The Pentagon, as was later revealed, purposefully manipulated the story for the media, for instance, by staging the rescue as a risky operation, when "enemy forces" had, in fact, already long left the hospital premises, where Lynch was held and properly cared for. The whole notion of rescue, as it turned out, was a farce, since Iraqi hospital staff was already working on transferring Lynch back to the U.S. military.[127]

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[127] The account of Mary Rowlandson, who was held captive by Native Americans during King Philip's War (1675-1676) is one example of an early captivity narrative. For more on framings of "war on terror" as a rescue of Afghan women from gender oppression, see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounter,* 280-292. For rhetoric of liberation in the context of Iraq, see, for instance, Senator John McCain, who spoke of "liberating the Iraqi people from his tyrannical rule" in an opening statement to the Senate on October 1, 2003. His statement is available at http://mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.Speeches&ContentRecord_id=e22038f6-aa2a-4df6-b556-f3b77bcfa76a&IsPrint=true (accessed May 29, 2010). For more on the Jessica Lynch story, see John Kampfner, "The Truth About Jessica," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2003,

What these rescue narratives ultimately have in common, however, is that they all describe power relations, where the well-being of the person or people to be saved depends on the superior might of the United States. The examples of Jessica Lynch and Afghan women moreover emphasize gendered underpinnings in rescue narratives, which frequently work to assert traditional gender roles that imagine women as passive, dependent, and fragile and men as self-reliant, active, and strong. When the roles of liberator and liberated do not neatly correspond to men and women, the gendered connotations are still at play. When men are liberated by women or other men, they are, in other words, inevitably feminized in the process, when they cannot "fight like men" on their own accord. The choice to employ rescue narratives in order to undermine al-Qaeda's slaughter aesthetics in *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom* is therefore a particularly interesting one, when the liberated in both cases are male. In what follows I discuss the two rescue narratives under these special considerations of power relations and gendering.

In *The Kingdom* Adam Leavitt is rescued by his *female* colleague Janet Mayes (played by Jennifer Garner), who kills all but one militant by gunfire, while peeking down from a hole in the ceiling. The one militant she misses, pulls her down through the hole and into a physical fight. Although Leavitt manages to free himself from the gag and the tape that is tied around his wrists and ankles and assists Mayes by jumping on their opponent's back, she is ultimately the one who grabs a knife on the floors and fatally stabs their adversary. Her role as the one who sees things through is

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/may/15/iraq.usa2 (accessed May 29, 2010); Bruce Tucker and Priscilla L. Walton, "From *General's Daughter* to *Coal Miner's Daughter*: Spinning and Counter-Spinning Jessica Lynch," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2006): 311-330.

unusual in the action genre, where women are oftentimes only cast as "helpers" to incapacitated men. These men customarily recover their strength, foresight and status as protectors of women as soon as any shackles and chains are removed, which is not the case in *The Kingdom*, where "inverted" gender arrangements characterize the interactions between Leavitt and Mayes largely throughout.

For instance, during their initial drive from the airport in the beginning of the film Leavitt worries about the high speed of the car that the four FBI agents are chauffeured in. Mayes, who is seated next to Leavitt in what creates one compositional image-unit, in contrast, curtly replies that she likes the speed and, after Leavitt demands that team leader Ronald Fleury (played by Jamie Foxx) "explain to the driver I get car sick," advises him to "shut up." The scene is one of several, where Mayes performs the qualities that routinely define (male) action heroes, such as fearlessness and involvement with speed, while Leavitt exhibits characteristics that have been customarily associated with femininity, such as, anxiety and fragility (sickliness).[128] The attention that Leavitt pays to all his physical ailments – here his car sickness, later his low blood sugar – moreover stand in sharp contrast to the resilience that male action heroes customarily exhibit in spite of far more visible bloody cuts and wounds.

In the end the "inverted" gender arrangements are, however, not permanent. In her analysis of *The Kingdom*, communication scholar Michelle Aguayo rightly observes that "Throughout much of the film, Mayes appears to be out of place; the character is given very little dialogue, which consequently hinders her development

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[128] In another scene, Leavitt, for instance, asks Mayes for a lollipop, knowing that she customarily carries some with her, because the "blood sugar's a little low."

as a character."[129] What Aguayo overlooks, however, is that Mayes' silence works in

tandem with Leavitt's excessive talkativeness, frequently bordering on insult, that

prompts their Saudi contact, Colonel Faris al-Ghazi (played by Ashraf Barhom), to

demand he "wash his mouth." Not only does his chattiness predispose him to danger,

if not premature death, according to genre conventions, but exposes him as a rookie

with little international experience.[130] During their flight to Saudi Arabia, Leavitt, for

instance, asks his colleague Grant Sykes (played by Chris Cooper) to tell him about

the "kingdom." He enters Saudi Arabia moreover with a faux-pas, when his passport

is checked and includes Israeli entry stamps, that is to say stamps from a country

Saudi Arabia does not recognize, which is a mistake only a rookie would make. After

his abduction and liberation, Leavitt, however, exhibits (if only for the final scene)

more pensive qualities, for instance, on their ride to the airport. His silence speaks to

his growth into a professional. In the end the "inverted" gender arrangements

therefore assist in framing Leavitt's experience in forms of a professional "coming-

of-age," where he becomes a full member of the team.

Lastly, the "inverted" gender performance in the rescue narratives, however,

also services a sense of U.S. supremacy, where, in stark contrast to the film's

representation of Saudi Arabia, gun power and military strength coincide with gender

and race diversity. Not only is there no place for Arab women outside their home in

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[129] Michelle Aguayo, "Representations of Muslim Bodies in The Kingdom: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood," *Global Media Journal – Canadian Edition*, vol. 2, no. 2: 41-56 (50).

[130] In genres that are predominantly grounded in traditional gender roles, such as war, action, gangster, western, and police dramas, chattiness in men frequently predisposes the talkative characters to danger, including death, when it undermines notion of masculinity, where men do not display unnecessary information, let alone emotion. In the HBO television series *The Sopranos*, as one example, Ralph Cifaretto is almost killed after he makes a disparaging remark about New York boss Johnny "Sack" Sacramoni's obese wife Ginny. In *The Godfather*, as another example, Sonny Corleone dies because he wears his emotions on his sleeves, another form of "chattiness" that does not befit the ideal of stoic and reserved masculinity or *pazienza* that defines successful Italian (American) men in the film.

the film, as the representations of al-Ghazi's wife and kids and al-Qaeda leader Abu

Hamza's extended family suggests, but the Saudi authorities treat Mayes with less

respect than her male colleagues, when because of her being a woman she alone is not

invited to the residence of the Saudi prince. In interactions with her three male team

members, one of them African American, Mayes is, in contrast, an equal. In the end it

is her and Leavitt's interplay as equals in combat that defeats their adversary in spite

of his physical advantage and saves Leavitt's life. The strength of the United States,

as the film suggests, rests on equal opportunity and diversity, which as cultural

studies scholar Moustafa Bayoumi observes, also makes African American men,

including *The Kingdom*'s team leader Ronald Fleury (played by Jamie Foxx), the new

face of the American empire. With supposedly relatable histories of suffering,

African Americans present, as Bayoumi, indicates, humanity unlike "the white man,"

which conveniently hides U.S. imperialist agendas.[131] Overall, these dynamics embed

the narrative of rescue within a rather complicated ideological fabric.

In *Body of Lies* it is not the Americans with their satellite surveillance, as

Garrett Stewart implies, but the Jordanians and, with that, Arabs, who rescue CIA

agent Roger Ferris from premature death. Ferris' liberation is likewise imagined

through particular gender tropes. Throughout the film Ferris exhibits significant

agency, independence, and physical resilience, qualities that are associated with

(American) masculinity. He lures al-Qaeda leader al-Saleem momentarily out of his

anonymity, when he engages in an elaborate scheme involving a counterfeit terrorist

cell. He challenges al-Saleem rhetorically during their actual encounter and

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[131] See Moustafa Bayoumi, "The Race Is On: Muslims and Arabs in the American Imagination,"
Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), March 2010,
http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/race (accessed April 24, 2011)

physically resists, despite two smashed fingers, as five militants strap him onto the

wooden board. However, shortly before he is about to be killed, a full shot of his

body shows it motionless and a close-up of his face conveys calm, perhaps

exhaustion, perhaps resignation, as he simply looks on in a neutral expression, as the

films cuts briefly to a scene that depicts U.S. torture. He remains in this state, as the

Jordanians enter, as Hani (Pasha) Salaam (played by Mark Strong), the head of the

Jordanian secret services, approaches him, lifts his body and carries him out in what

compares to religious images of dead Jesus being carried from the cross.

Throughout this scene Hani exhibits gallantry and ease. Unlike in *The

Kingdom*, where liberation is marked by strenuous physical battle, Ridley Scott's film

presents the rescue as a smooth, understated operation. During their verbal exchange

al-Qaeda leader al-Saleem asks Ferris in puzzlement, "What do you think is

happening here, Mr. Ferris? Do you think the cavalry is coming for you?" And

indeed, not only do the liberators arrive in time but Hani, dressed in a suit not combat

gear, performs the operation with the gallant cool befitting any cavalry, which his

lieutenant's casual arrest of al-Saleem adequately matches. The stylish ease with

which the Jordanians and, with that, Arabs master the situation suggests complete

control over the events.

The gender tropes in the rescue scene portray Hani through old-fashioned, yet

powerful, allusions to gentlemen and honor, while they imagine Ferris as passive and

helpless, qualities that are frequently associated with women. Yet these tropes not

only characterize the two men but make larger points about Jordan and the United

States. If *The Kingdom* services fantasies of U.S. superiority that numerous

Hollywood films unabashedly exhibit, where Arabs only exist as foes or helpers, *Body of Lies* presents a more complicated picture, especially by way of the rescue narrative. Not only do the Jordanians save Ferris' life, when U.S. surveillance and its seemingly all-powerful might fail to track the militants, but, as it later turns out, Ferris' abduction and rescue is part of a Jordanian scheme to apprehend the al-Qaeda leader themselves. In spite of Ferris' logic that "work[ing] for the head of Jordanian Intelligence…means…work[ing] for us [that is to say, the CIA or, more broadly conceived, the United States]," it is ultimately Arabs alone, who, unlike Ferris, succeed in an elaborate scheme in their fight against al-Qaeda that not only tricks al-Saleem but the CIA. *Body of Lies* thereby deploys ultimately more ambiguous politics that mobilize Orientalist tropes, on the one hand, while they also stall U.S. fantasies of omnipotence, on the other hand.

In sum, *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom* engage the slaughter aesthetics through a range of tropes, themes, and techniques that simultaneously attest to and rewrite al-Qaeda's claims to power. Both films, as I have illustrated, foreground the camera as a tool of "terrorism," imagine the rescue narratives as a theme, and deploy mise-en-scène, montage, and framing in strong difference to slaughter productions. In what I call more *generic* fiction films that are not based on "true stories," the films carry greater liberties than biographical and historical pictures – at least on the surface. In actuality, as some of my criticism already suggested, the two films are restricted by genre expectations, which significantly stifle creative impulse and with that a greater range of complex visual engagements with al-Qaeda terror.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored fiction film engagements with al-Qaeda slaughter videos, which constitute a small, yet terrifyingly memorable fraction of the total jihadist media output. As I have argued throughout, the fiction films are part of a larger revisionary project that challenges the offense of al-Qaeda's power-visibility-nexus. *A Mighty Heart* rewrites the propositions of the Pearl video from the inside out, when the film replicates parts of the al-Qaeda production with much similitude and key alterations. *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom*, in contrast, revise the slaughter aesthetics through engagements with the gaze and filmmaking process. All films that were the subject of my discussion thereby attempt to reclaim authorship and with that retroactive agency over a dark chamber of terror that has not been left unrepresented, as in the case of the 9/11 dark chamber, but nauseatingly overexposed through al-Qaeda slaughter videos. The challenge of a dark chamber where death, dying, and dismemberment are staged for (virtual) public consumption is thus less one of mastering unrepresented terror through images and narratives, as is the case in Chapter Two, but to contain the terror that the slaughter videos in their breach of social, ethical, and legal regulations relay. As this chapter has illustrated, Hollywood films meet this challenge, when their narratives of rescue, mourning, and (spiritual) survival replace the impassive mode that the terror of al-Qaeda's dark chamber partially thrives on.

In *Body of Lies* al-Qaeda leader al-Saleem is apprehended by Jordanian forces. As the film indicates here, in the fight against al-Qaeda there are other interest groups beyond the United States such as the Jordanians. Outside of these fictional

parameters, there are likewise interest groups beyond the United States that rewrite al-Qaeda slaughter videos. One example is the Turkish film *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak*, in English *The Valley of the Wolves* (2006), the making of which preceded that of the three films that I have discussed at length in this chapter.[132]

Like *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom*, *Kurtlar Vadisi* deploys a rescue narrative, where a white, American (Christian) journalist is liberated; here by the local imam. Unlike the two Hollywood films, which imagine al-Qaeda as absolute Other, the Turkish film displays a more ambiguous scenario.[133] What the imam (played by Ghassan Massoud) encounters, when he enters the sun-lit house corresponds with the tropes that I discussed above. The film features a group of militants, including a "messenger" with a note and sword and a cameraman. At their back on the wall hangs a black flag with religious epigraph.

Unlike in the two other productions, the imam is, however, not armed with anything but his words. And so he asks [in Arabic], "What are you doing here? Whom are you imitating? Are you trying to act like the puppets who work for those oppressors?" With the questions the film offers a decidedly different perspective than its Hollywood counterparts, when it places blame on the United States as the "oppressor" and whitewashes the responsibility of others. Aside from these

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[132] *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak*, dirs. Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk, Pana Films, 2006. As of 2006, when the film was released, *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak* not only was the "most expensive film ever made in Turkey" but the highest ever grossing Turkish film. Its allegedly anti-American and anti-Semitic content drew notice in the United States, and Condoleeza Rice expressed disappointment about the film to Turkish officials during her visit to Turkey in late April, 2006. For reference, see Henrike Lehnguth, "Trans/lating the War on Terror for Turkey, in *Trans/American, Trans/Oceanic/Trans/Lation: Issues in International American Studies*, eds. Susana Araújo, João Ferreira Duarte, and Marta Pacheco Pinto (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) 335-344 (336-337).

[133] I should point out that the militants in *Kurtlar Vadisi* are not identified as al-Qaeda, as they are in *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom.* Their agenda to "behead them [Americans, Britons, and Jews] all one by one," nevertheless, befit al-Qaeda's profile.

accusations, however, the imam also challenges the al-Qaeda henchmen's belief

about the journalist's lack of innocence, when he asks them, whether they are "God to

know who is innocent and who is not?" *Kurtlar Vadisi* offers, in short, another

perspective on al-Qaeda, the context of the organization's violence, and ways of

engaging extremism. It reminds us that *re-visioning practices*, where fiction films

rewrite al-Qaeda's dark chamber of terror, go beyond the films subject to this chapter

and involve many stakeholders beyond the United States.

Chapter Four: *Dis-visioning* U.S. Torture

On April 28, 2004, the CBS television program *60 Minutes II* broke the news of

prison torture at Abu Ghraib. The program was first to document the incidents with a

small number of photographs. One of them showed a full-body frontal shot of a

hooded Iraqi prisoner standing on a box with electric wires attached to him (see

Illustration 4a). According to *60 Minutes II*, the prisoner was told that he would be

electrocuted, if he fell off the box. Another image showed full-body shots of two

soldiers, Charles Graner and Sabrina Harman, who positioned themselves behind a

human pyramid of naked and hooded Iraqi prisoners. Harman is bending over the

prisoners, while Graner stands upright with his arms crossed, giving a "thumbs up."

Both soldiers face the camera and smile.[134]

Not only did these images trigger an international outcry but they challenged

the mythology around a selfless and benevolent United States interventionism in Iraq

that U.S. newspapers and television outlets had participated in constructing. Much of

war reporting had relied on "embedded journalism," where journalists were almost

guaranteed to present stories and images along government lines, when, in exchange

for restricted access to battlefields and military action, the U.S. military reserved a

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[134] For the CBS report, see *60 Minutes II*, April, 28, 2004,
http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=614704n&tag=related;photovideo (accessed April 8, 2011).
Relevant to the Abu Ghraib torture scandal is also an article by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh,
which was published on the *New Yorker* website on April 30, 2004 and usually is credited alongside
the *60 Minutes II* report for first breaking the story. See Seymour Hersh, "Torture At Abu Ghraib,"
New Yorker, May 10, 2004, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/10/040510fa_fact (accessed
April 8, 2011). The May 10 date refers to the article's print edition, not its online edition. Hersh later
published an extended version of his investigative report as a book of the title *Chain of Command: The
Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004). For a victim's perspective on the
torture scandal, see testimony by Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, who is in all likelihood the person behind
the image of the hooded prisoner on the box. His statement is available in translation in *Torture and
Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*, ed. by Mark Danner (New York: New York
Review Books, 2004), 230.

final say on what could and could not be reported.[135] Counter to the sanitized images

that the Pentagon oversight and its censorship regulations encouraged, the prison

torture photographs from Abu Ghraib provided a knowledge about the U.S.

occupation of Iraq that was founded on an unobstructed view into the U.S. dark

chamber of terror. I use the Abu Ghraib photographs and the knowledge that they

produce as a baseline for my argument around *dis-visioning practices* (see below),

which is not to suggest that the photographs are the only visual documents that testify

to U.S. atrocities in the war but that their worldwide reach and significant afterlife in

the public sphere have contributed to advancing them to a "defining association" of

the war, as Susan Sontag has suggested.[136]

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[135] For more on the impact of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 297-302; Kari Andén-Papadopoulos, "The Abu Ghraib Torture Photographs: News, Frames, Visual Culture, and the Power of Images," *Journalism*, vol. 9, no. 1: 5-30; Dora Apel, "Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib," *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 2 (Summer, 2005): 88-100. Both Andén-Papadopoulos and Apel address the impact of the photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison scandal beyond their "mere" worldwide circulation and address to the afterlife of particular images in protest art and visual replica of Abu Ghraib sceneries on the internet. For more on "embedded journalism," see Sandra Dietrich, *Embedded Journalism: Ursprünge, Ziele, Merkmale, Probleme und Nutzen von "Embedding" am Beispiel des Irak-Krieges 2003* (Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007). As Dietrich reminds us, U.S. newspaper and television outlets relied in their reports to a greater extent on "embedded" journalists than what she terms unilateral (or independent) war reporters. Dietrich also clarifies that unilateral (independent) war reporters received no military support or protection but were, on the contrary, repeatedly the target of U.S. military assaults. The U.S. military, for instance, fired with a tank on the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad on April 8, 2003, and killed two Reuters journalists, even though the hotel was known to be a hosting many journalists. While embedded journalists were less likely to be targeted, they were also more likely to be U.S. American citizens, given that the Pentagon reserved eighty percent of its spots for embedding for its countrymen and –women. For more on how "embedding" encourages a perspective that works with state power, see Judith Butler, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag," *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London & New York: Verso, 2009).

[136] Among the presumably countless images of U.S. atrocities in the war on terror range the "Collateral Murder" video that Wikileaks published on April 5, 2010 – the incident itself took place in July 2007. Shot from an Apache helicopter gun-sight, the video shows unprovoked military engagement that left several Iraqis, including two Reuter employees, dead. For video and short description, see http://www.collateralmurder.com/ (accessed April 8, 2010). They also include more recent images of the so-dubbed "kill team" in Afghanistan, a group of soldiers that killed Afghani civilians as a "sport," while stationed in Afghanistan during what is no longer called the war on terror but overseas contingency operation. For images taken by the "kill team," see *Der Spiegel*, March 21, 2011, http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/fotostrecke-65981.html (accessed April 8, 2011). See also Chris McGreal, "US Soldiers 'Killed Afghan Civilians For Sport and Collected Fingers As Trophies," *The Guardian*, September 9, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/09/us-soldiers-afghan-

In what follows I illustrate how this "defining association" of the war on terror has been accommodated in U.S. fiction film. The two films that are the subject of my discussion, Robert de Niro's *The Good Shepherd* (2006) and Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007), are less invested in fully replicating the visual content from the Abu Ghraib photographs, as the Turkish fiction film *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak*, for instance, does, when it features scenes from the Abu Ghraib prison that directly recall the compositional arrangement of select photographs. Instead the two American films accommodate the knowledge of U.S. torture through the more ambivalent sensibilities that underlie what I term *dis-visioning practices*.[137]

Dis-visioning practices engage a dark chamber of terror that has been previously represented in the visual domain through nonfictional means. *Dis-visioning* differs from *en-visioning* in that it describes fictional engagements with a dark chamber of terror that has been previously represented through visual means, while *en-visioning practices* engage visual voids that have otherwise not been represented. *Dis-visioning* also differs from *re-visioning practices* in that it does not rewrite nonfictional recordings of the dark chamber of terror from an oppositional standpoint but ambivalently acknowledges U.S. complicity in political violence. *Dis-visioning* thus constitutes a partial *re-visioning*, where fiction films recognize U.S. involvement in torture but mitigate full legal and ethical implications, when they

civilians-fingers (accessed April 8, 2011). Lastly, I should note that I take the notion of Abu Ghraib as a "defining association" of the war on terror from public intellectual Susan Sontag. See Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2004: 26. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/23PRISONS.html (accessed online October 18, 2009).
[137] For film references, see *The Good Shepherd*, dir. Robert de Niro, Universal Pictures, 2006; *Rendition*, dir. Gavin Hood, New Line Cinema, 2007; *Kurtlar Vadisi – Irak*, dir. Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk, Pana Film, 2006. *The Good Shepherd* cost roughly $90 million dollars and grossed $60 million dollars. For business statistics, see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0343737/business (accessed April 25, 2011). *Rendition* cost roughly $27 million dollars but only grossed $9 million dollars.

continue to privilege a U.S. perspective onto the U.S. dark chamber without acknowledging the systematic ways in which the country has and continues to abuse state power.

Section One: **Dis-visioning Practices** *in Robert de Niro's* **The Good Shepherd** *(2006)*

I begin my discussion around *dis-visioning practices* with a focus on Robert de Niro's 2006 film *The Good Shepherd*.[138] *The Good Shepherd* is not set in the twenty-first century but explores the emergence of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) through the prism of lead character Edward Wilson (played by Matt Damon). With a plot that unfolds in the direct aftermath of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and involves many flashbacks to even earlier decades of the twentieth century, this Cold War drama may appear an odd choice for a dissertation whose overarching focus is on the war on terror. Yet, the film is exemplary of a form of *dis-visioning practices* where images from the war on terror haunt film and television narratives that have no *direct* bearings on the war. In what follows I analyze *The Good Shepherd* under special consideration of one scene, where CIA agent Ray Brocco (played by John Turturro) tortures a KGB operative who is suspected of foul play. I argue that the scene draws on visual tropes that are iconic to the war on terror. I suggest that by drawing on tropes from the war on terror, the film engages in a form of *dis-visioning*, when the tropes from the war on terror implicate the contemporary United States in U.S. torture, while the Cold War narrative maintains a safe distance to the events at the same time.

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[138] I would to here express my thanks to Professor Peter Beicken for first alerting me to the film.

Before I turn to my analysis of *The Good Shepherd* it is necessary that I

elaborate on the notion of iconic visual tropes from the war on terror. By iconic visual

tropes I refer to visual elements that are readily recognizable as belonging within the

visual parameters of the war on terror. I use the term iconic in the sense of

"representative symbol" and not in the sense of "likeness," as Charles Sanders Peirce

has advocated by way of his scholarly work. A recent book on iconic photography

uses the catchy title *No Caption Needed*, which is the sensibility that my use of

"iconic" encapsulates, when I point to visual tropes that have emerged as central

symbols of the war on terror and are, as such, widely identifiable without captions.[139]

Among these central symbols rank three that are especially relevant for my analysis

of *The Good Shepherd*. They include the hood and practice of hooding prisoners, the

practice of stripping prisoners of their clothes and exposing their nudity, and torture

by water in what has come to be known as "waterboarding." In what follows I will

briefly address each of the three items separately.

While U.S. military forces are likely to have hooded prisoners in past wars, it

is safe to say that no other violent conflict has brought the hood to any comparable

spotlight as the war on terror has done. The photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison

torture scandal, which, in their worldwide reach and multifaceted afterlife on murals,

posters, and in paintings, rank among the most significant "defining association[s]" of

the war, have participated in unmistakingly correlating the hood with the war on

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[139] For references on "icon" and "iconic," see Michael Shapiro, "Is an Icon Iconic?" *Language*, vol. 84, no. 4 (December 2008): 815-819; and Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture*, and *Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

terror.[140] As a visual trope the hood highlights the dehumanizing aspects of the war,

when it obscures those human features that most individualize a person (the face) and

call for empathy. The hood and practices of hooding prisoners has been widely

criticized as being "incompatible with the absolute prohibition of torture or other

cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment contained under the UN Convention against

Torture," when it stifles free airflow, disorients prisoners that have been subjected to

the hood, and prevents them from identifying abusive interrogators.[141]

Along with the hood, I would like to point to the practice of stripping

prisoners off their clothes and exposing their nudity as a second trope from the war on

terror. Nudity and sexual humiliation have been recurring themes in the photographs

from Abu Ghraib, which, among other things, show prisoners (mock) performing

fellatio on fellow male detainees.[142] Given that nudity and sexual themes evoke a

pornographic imagination that easily blurs with visual fields outside of the parameters

of the war on terror, that is to say actual pornography, the images of nudity and sexual

humiliation carry by themselves arguably a lesser iconic status than the tropes that

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[140] I take the notion of the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal as a "defining association" of the war on terror from Susan Sontag, who discusses Abu Ghraib in *Regarding the Torture of Others*, *The New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2004. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html (accessed online October 18, 2009).

[141] For quote see Amnesty International's open letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, which is dated January 7, 2002 and available at http://www.torturingdemocracy.org/documents/20020107.pdf (accessed April 9, 2011). For reference on the effects of hooding, see the February 2004 "Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the Treatment by the Coalition Forces of Prisoner of War and Other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq, During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation," http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/us/doc/icrc-prisoner-report-feb-2004.pdf (accessed April 9, 2011). For a history of U.S. torture, see Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

[142] For references on sexual humiliation at Abu Ghraib, see Zillah Eisenstein, "Sexual Humiliation, Gender Confusion and the Horror at Abu Ghraib," *Women's Human Rights Net*, July 2004, http://www.iiav.nl/ezines/web/WHRnet/2004/July.PDF (accessed April 9, 2011); Mary Ann Tetreault, "The Sexual Politics of Abu Ghraib: Hegemony, Spectacle and the Global War on Terror," *Feminist Formations*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 33-50; Sherene Razack, "How Is White Supremacy Embodied? Sexualized Racial Violence At Abu Ghraib," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2005): 341-363.

involve hooding and "waterboarding" (see below). Yet nudity and sexual humiliation are still noticeable enough as recurring themes in the war on terror to reinforce the connection to the war on terror in conjunction with other tropes.

The third and final trope that I would like to briefly discuss, "waterboarding," carries a bit of a different visual life than the two that I have already addressed. It is less the visual arena that has advanced "waterboarding" to a central trope of the war on terror than language. The term "waterboarding" only emerged in public discourse in the spring of 2004 (around the time of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal), which is not to say that the practice that stands behind "waterboarding," a form of water torture, is new. In fact, water torture was already used by the United States in the Spanish-American war of 1898. As a term "waterboarding" evokes water sports and with that sun, beach, and fun, which is not only a cruel joke on part of the U.S. tormentor but exemplary of larger efforts that the Bush Administration undertook to reorganize the legal space and symbolic order by way of inventing new (legal) terminology, such as "waterboarding," and bending existing legal concepts and interpretations, including those of torture. Rather than a particular image, it is the emergence of "waterboarding" as a newly designed term that speaks to its centrality in the imaginary of the war on terror.[143]

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[143] For more on waterboarding and the history of water torture, see William Safire, "On Language: Waterboarding," *The New York Times Magazine* March 9, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/magazine/09wwlnSafire-t.html?pagewanted=print (accessed on October 19, 2009); and Eric Weiner, "Waterboarding: A Tortured History," *NPR*, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15886834 (accessed April 9, 2011). For more on the bending of existing legal concepts and interpretations, consider assistant attorney general Jay Bybee's 2002 memorandum to attorney general Alberto Gonzalez. In the memorandum Bybee renders meaningless the concept of torture as defined by the Geneva Convention, when he suggests that torture only refer to practices that inflict "severe pain…*akin to that which accompanies serious physical injury such as death or organ failure*." [my emphasis] According to this definition, hardly anyone, no matter the treatment they received in U.S. custody, qualifies as a torture victim. The Bybee memorandum

When waterboarding is visually represented, it is almost exclusively by way of fiction film and visual records of waterboarding simulations. By waterboarding simulations I mean experiments, where persons of public interest volunteer to be waterboarded, frequently with the motivation to assess, whether waterboarding constitutes torture or, as the Bush Administration maintained, merely a form of "enhanced interrogation."[144] In spite of the overwhelming absence of actual visual documents of waterboarding in the public arena, the visual representations around waterboarding – be they fictional or based on experiments – are not arbitrary but in conversation with what top secret U.S. government reports have specified in writing. In a memorandum drafted by the Office of Legal Council, a subdivision of the U.S. Department of Justice, Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee details waterboarding as follows:

> In this procedure, the individual is bound securely to an inclined bench, which is approximately four feet by seven feet. The individual's feet are generally elevated. A cloth is placed over the forehead and eyes. Water is then applied to the cloth in a controlled manner. As this is done, the cloth is lowered until is covered both the nose and mouth. Once the cloth is saturated and completely covers the mouth and nose, air flow is slightly restricted for 20 to 40 seconds due to the presence of the cloth. This causes an increase in the

raises questions about the use of "waterboarding" and other new concepts in my text. So far I have put "waterboarding" in quotations precisely because I consider the term to be a purposeful linguistic stunt that obscures the torturous nature of the practice. For stylistic reasons, I will henceforth employ the term without quotations, even if it should always be read as if it were in quotation marks. For the memorandum, see Jay Bybee, Assistant Attorney General, "Memorandum for Alberto Gonzalez, Counsel to the President," *U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Legal Counsel*, August 1, 2002, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB127/02.08.01.pdf (accessed April 9, 2011): 46.
[144] Journalist Christopher Hitchens volunteered to be "waterboarded" and later wrote about his experience in a *Vanity Fair* article pointedly entitled "Believe Me, It's Torture." Neither he nor others who even more outspokenly championed the practice as a mere method of "enhanced interrogation," maintained their position after undergoing the experiment. The Hitchens video is available at http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/video/2008/hitchens_video200808 (accessed December 21, 2009). For the article that Hitchens wrote about his experience see "Believe Me, It's Torture," *Vanity Fair*, August 2008, http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/08/hitchens200808 (accessed December 21, 2009). Others such experiments include one with Chicago radio host Erich "Mancow" Muller, whose experiment is, as Hitchens, available as a video online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUkj9pjx3H0 (accessed December 21, 2009).

carbon dioxide level in the individual's blood. This increase in the carbon dioxide level stimulated increased effort to breathe. This effort plus the cloth produces the perception of "suffocation and incipient panic," i.e., the perception of drowning. The individual does not breathe any water into his lungs. During those 20 to 40 seconds, water is continuously applied from a height of twelve to twenty-four inches. After this period, the cloth is lifted, and the individual is allowed to breathe unimpeded for three or four full breath. The sensation of drowning is immediately relieved by the removal of the cloth. The procedure may then be repeated.[145]

While not all visual representations imagine waterboarding in compliance with all of the specificities of the Bybee memorandum – *The Good Shepherd*, for instance, does not present the KGB agent on a "waterboard" but a chair – most visual representations align enough with the memorandum, as to have advanced waterboarding not only to a central linguistic term in the war on terror but a term that has come to carry recognizable visual associations.

Thus far I have discussed three particular tropes that are central to the imaginary of the war on terror. I now turn to the torture scene in *The Good Shepherd* with an argument that the film establishes a connection to the war on terror, when it draws on these three tropes (see Illustration 4c). Not only is KGB agent Valentin Mironov (played by Mark Ivanir) stripped off his clothes during his "interrogation" with the CIA, who falsely presume him to be a double agent with a fake identity, but

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[145] See Jay Bybee, "Memorandum for John Rizzo, Acting General Council for the Central Intelligence Agency," *U.S. Department of Justice. Office of Legal Council* Aug. 1, 2002: (1-18) 3-4. The document lists "the waterboard" (not, yet, "waterboarding") among nine other methods of interrogation that the Bush Administration found acceptable. These include: "(1) attention grasp, (2)walling, (3) facial hold, (4) facial slap (insult slap), (5) cramped confinement, (6) wall standing, (7) stress positions, (8) sleep deprivation, (9) insects placed in a confinement box, and (l0) the waterboard." In the memorandum Bybee speaks of a "perception of drowning" in the context of waterboarding (see main text), which is misleading, as journalist Christopher Hitchens reminds us in the video that shows his waterboarding simulation. It is misleading because the procedure does not merely trick a person into believing that s/he is drowning but induces the process of drowning only to halt it before the torture victim dies. (For reference, see footnote on Hitchen's video above.) Similarly misleading is Bybee's assertion that the "sensation of drowning is immediately relieved by the removal of the cloth," which seems to be based entirely on speculation, especially when the relief that the torture victim experiences is short-lived, given that three or four full breaths hardly outbalance the twenty to forty seconds of yet another round of waterboarding.

he is hooded and subjected to water torture, while CIA agent Brocco repeatedly prompts him to reveal his actual name.

The three visual tropes coincide most explicitly in the scene's long shots, where Mironov and his tormentors are fully visible in the frame. In one such long shot that stages the scene slightly from the side not the front, Mironov sits naked on a chair with a hood over his head, as Brocco and his associates hold him down and pour water from a bucket onto his covered face. With his upper body upright, his thighs slightly held together, and his lower legs spread apart, Mironov's body posture evokes the body postures that some of the photographs from the Abu Ghraib scandal depict (see Illustration 4b), where, in the case of the Abu Ghraib photographs, the prisoners are, however, not seated on chairs but the backs of fellow detainees. Notable in Mironov's body posture is also the position of his arms, which Brocco's men hold in a slightly lifted and horizontally stretched out place rather than tying them to the chair, as one could expect from a standpoint of narrative logic. While the position of the arms is perhaps not entirely plausible in terms of narrative logic, it recalls the position of the arms of the hooded prisoner from the Abu Ghraib photographs and, like the image of the hooded prisoner, evokes notions of Jesus at the cross (see Illustration 4a).

By employing iconic tropes from the war on terror and choreographing the composition of the scene in ways similar to some of the photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, *The Good Shepherd* engages in a form of *dis-visioning*, when it places the realities of U.S. torture and its contemporary practices like hooding and waterboarding in the (long) gone history of the Cold War. This is not to say that the

film is not critical of U.S. torture, as lead character Edward Wilson's increasing isolation over the course of his CIA career would, for instance, suggest, but that its Cold War narrative inevitably maintains a safe distance from the contemporary human rights violations that the United States is implicated in.

In foresight of what I will be exploring in the context of Section Two I would like to conclude this section by considering two additional aspects in *The Good Shepherd*'s representation of torture. The first notable aspect is the presence of an observer. Intercut with the shots of Mironov and his tormentors are close-ups of Wilson and the KGB agent who took Mironov's identity, the actual mole, as they watch the proceedings through a glass window. The film, in fact, incorporates shots of Mironov that are filmed through the glass window as well as shots, where the image of Mironov and the image of the two observers blend into one overlapping shot (see Illustration 4c). By way of these techniques the film destabilizes the figurative wall that separates the observers from the torture scene, while it also partially distances the spectator from the realities of torture. The film implicates the observers in torture, when their image and the one of Mironov blend into one overlapping shot. At the same time, however, the glass window also maintains a divide between the observers and torture, when the observers remain behind the window for the duration of the scene and set no foot into the actual dark chamber of terror. So while the film points to the significance of the role of the observer in torture and ascertains his complicity alongside our own complicity as viewers of the film, the point-of-view shots through the glass window also construct a detached, institutional gaze onto torture that moves viewers away from its full implications. I have addressed the role

of the observer and some of the complexities that emerge in the context of observing

torture in *The Good Shepherd* because the role of the observer and the complexities

around observing torture also drive the plot in *Rendition*, the film that I discuss in

Section Two.

The second notable aspect that I would like to briefly address is the film's

appreciation of differing status between characters. Aside from all the shots that I

already mentioned in the context of the torture scene in *The Good Shepherd*, the film

also includes recurring lower-angle shots along Mironov's body onto Brocco, as he

pours water and shouts "tell me your name." While these shots are not point-of-view

shots from Mironov's perspective, whose sight is, after all, obscured by the hood,

they, nevertheless, partially align viewers with Mironov, when Brocco seemingly

towers over Mironov in an intimidating manner. Like *The Good Shepherd*, *Rendition*

is highly attentive to status, especially in the exchanges between the Arab torture

victim and an American observer, who, as I will illustrate in Section Two, both share

an affinity of alikeness. In one scene in *Rendition*, where the two men talk alone, the

status between them changes drastically, when the film initially depicts the observer

through slight high-angle shots as being of lower status but later asserts his

dominance over the torture victim. What this means for *The Good Shepherd* is that

the film employs a visual language in its representation of torture that other films,

including the war on terror drama *Rendition*, share as well. By way of a common

visual language these and other films participate in crafting a set of filmic

conventions that naturalize the ambivalent sensibilities that underlie *dis-visioning*

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practices over more radical critiques of U.S. torture and human rights violations,

where viewers would be more uncompromisingly aligned with the torture victim.

Section Two: **Dis-visioning Practices** *in Gavin Hood's* **Rendition** *(2007)*

In Section One I examined *dis-visioning practices* with a focus on image

displacements, where images from the war on terror haunt film and television

narratives that have no direct bearing on the war on terror. This section turns to a

more straightforward form of *dis-visioning* and analyzes Gavin Hood's 2007 film

Rendition. "Rendition" is shorthand for "extraordinary rendition," a CIA-program

instituted under the Clinton Administration that permits the CIA to extradite and

detain "suspects" against international law to/in secret prisons outside of the United

States.[146] The plot of the film *Rendition* revolves around "extraordinary rendition"

and takes the CIA abduction and torture of Egyptian citizen and U.S. Green Card

holder Anwar el-Ibrahimi as its centerpiece. In the film Anwar, an engineer, is

unlawfully extradited to a secret prison facility in North Africa after U.S. authorities

suspect him of assisting an Islamist group in a terrorist attack. After his arrival in

North Africa, Anwar is stripped off his clothes, interrogated, and tortured. In what

follows I take a closer look at the scenes of torture with an argument that they are

exemplary of the film's *dis-visioning practices*, which recognize U.S. involvement in

torture but mitigate its full ethical and legal implications. Yet before I explore the

ways in which the film relays the dark chamber of terror, I will first examine three of

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[146] See "Factsheet: Extraordinary Rendition," *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*, December 6, 2005, http://www.aclu.org/national-security/fact-sheet-extraordinary-rendition (accessed November 30, 2009).

the frameworks that the film offers for thinking about torture, that is to say the parameters within which the dark chamber of torture operates in the film.

One way in which the film frames torture is through a subplot that involves a suicide bombing. The suicide bombing functions as a framing device for the storyline in the film, when it is shown twice – in one of the film's opening scenes, where viewers are first introduced to the American CIA officer Douglas Freeman (played by Jake Gyllenhaal), who is stationed in "North Africa," and in one of the film's concluding scenes, where "North African" police chief Abasi Fawal (played by Yigal Naor) realizes that his missing daughter died in the attack that was directed at him.[147] By the end of the film the suicide bombing establishes a circular logic around violence, when the violence that Abasi exerts on others by means of torture catches up with him through the loss of his daughter. It is notable that the circular logic, where violence begets violence, remains confined to North Africa and its Arab characters in the film, while it spares the United States and its American characters, even if they are as implicated in torture.

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[147] My use of "North Africa" follows the film's own, when, through subtitles, the film identifies the place that Douglas is stationed in as "North Africa" rather than a specific country. In the main text I put "North Africa" in quotes because "North Africa" does not constitute a sovereign state by itself. Although it can be inferred that the torture scenes take place in Egypt, when Abasi speaks Arabic with an Egyptian accent, and when Egypt has been the closest U.S. ally in "North Africa," as the exceptionally high amounts of annual U.S. military aid (\$ 1.3 billion) attests to, the film only refers to the region rather than any specific country. While the term "North Africa" avoids implicating any specific country in torture, it, also suggests that there is little noteworthy difference between Morocco and Egypt, among other states, in spite of their strikingly different histories, including colonial histories, political aspirations, and sheer size. In fact, although the film offers some clues that the story is set in Egypt (see above), it was filmed in Morocco, which the land- and cityscapes reflect. The term "North Africa," as used in the film, as well as the production practices thus ultimately reproduce a geographic imaginary of the Arab world that is akin to the "Orient" that Edward Said discussed in *Orientalism* – a culturally uniform, pre-modern, and ahistorical landscape that harbors mystery and violence. My use of "North Africa" should be understood as operating within the context of this critique, even if, for stylistic reasons, I will henceforth not put "North Africa" in quotation marks. For more on "North Africa" and different conceptualizations of the region, see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, Michael Brett, Brian H. Warmington, "North Africa," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/418538/North-Africa (accessed on June 10, 2011).

Before the film shows the suicide bombing for a second time and introduces this circular logic around violence, however, the suicide bombing presents first and foremost the rationale for why Anwar el-Ibrahimi is extradited to the secret prison facilities in North Africa. The film hereby suggests that torture is a *re*action to a violence that another party initiated, where the transgressions of the law and against the human body that mark torture become mere causal *effects* of transgressions that were committed before by non-state actors. The logic is similar to one that uses the September 2001 attacks on the United States as a blank check for military exploits and human rights violations that the United States has since been implicated in. It is faulty not only because suicide bombings are themselves the products of particular social, economic, and political conditions but also because there is no direct causal correlation between suicide bombings and torture. The causal relationship that *Rendition* establishes between the suicide bombing and torture is therefore not only misleading but works at the expense of other important questions with respect to the film, such as what CIA officers are doing in North Africa in the first place.[148]

Yet the film not only mitigates the magnitude of U.S. human rights violations, when it presents torture in a causal correlation to terrorism but when it channels Washington's complicity in torture through the story of *one* high-ranking CIA officer by the name of Corrine Whitman (played by Meryl Streep). Corrine authorizes Anwar's extradition to North Africa, despite the fact that her lower-ranking colleague

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[148] For more on suicide bombings and their social, economic, and political conditions, see Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2006). In *Dying to Win* Pape debunks the myth that suicide bombings are linked to any particular religion. What suicide bombings have instead in common, according to Pape, is a strategic aim to "compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland." (4) Pape's argument thus addresses particular social and political conditions that give rise to suicide bombings.

Lee Mayer (played by J.K. Simmons) informs her that he "traced him [Anwar] with Interpol, Mossad, the Egyptians [and] nobody's interested." Her response to Mayer, "I'm interested," clarifies that she alone is in charge and attests to a ruthlessness that attributes greater significance to a personal hunch than intelligence from partnering agencies. Other scenes in the film indicate that Corrine carries considerable weight on Capitol Hill, when even Senator Hawkins (played by Alan Arkin), at first an outspoken critic of "extraordinary rendition," later cooperates with Corrine in order to not jeopardize his career. Senator Hawkins' questionable ethics notwithstanding, it is Corrine who emerges as the most responsible for a practice that is in actuality unthinkable without the institutional backing of agencies such as the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC), a subdivision of the U.S. Department of Justice, and legal interpretations, under which almost anyone who survived torment in U.S. custody would not constitute a torture victim (see note on Bybee memorandum above). If the focus on individual actors, rather than systems and institutions, is typical for Hollywood storytelling, one of its effects in *Rendition* is that it discounts the full structural implications of torture, which are arguably more unsettling than is individual misconduct.

I should also mention in this context that Corrine is not only a CIA officer but a *female* CIA officer. By localizing the decision-making process over "extraordinary rendition" within a woman, the film directs the blame for U.S. torture singularly at a career woman in power. This strategy mirrors the discourse of the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal, where particular blame and disgust was directed at the General-in-charge of the prison, Janis Karpinski, and Specialist Lynndie England. Karpinski was

the only higher-ranking military officer who was reprimanded for the acts committed at Abu Ghraib, although everything indicates that such treatment of prisoners was purposefully planned at the highest military and governmental levels. England, for her part, became the face of the scandal after she was identified as the soldier who dragged a naked prisoner behind her on a leash. In the coverage of the torture scandal the press highlighted England's poor Appalachian background in a move to paint her as an offspring of a region frequently constructed as backward, racist, and cruel in popular and literary narratives.[149]

In the context of the torture at Abu Ghraib political scientist Zillah Eisenstein suggests that the despicable acts committed at Abu Ghraib were not symptomatic of gender equality in cruelty but a form of "hyper-imperialist masculinity" that invests in gender and racial differentiation for domination. The particular blame that the two women were subjected to after the scandal directly speaks to this gender imbalance, where, according to Karpinski, Karpinski and England became "convenient scapegoat[s]" for a top down order that left others, such as the U.S. commander for Iraq, General Ricardo Sanchez and Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, off the

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[149] For more on Abu Ghraib, torture, and the chain of command, see Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004). See also articles by Michelle Brown and Benjamin Whitmer, who both draw connections between the conditions of confinement abroad and the prison system within the United States – Michelle Brown, ""Setting the Conditions For Abu Ghraib:" The Prison Nation Abroad," *American Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2005): 973-997; Benjamin Whitmer, ""Torture Chambers and Rape Rooms:" What Abu Ghraib Can Tell Us About the American Carceral System," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 171-194. For more on the representation of Lynndie England in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, see Bruce Tucker and Sia Triantafyllos, "Lynndie England, Abu Ghraib, and the New Imperialism" *Canadian Review of American studies* no. 38, vol. 1, 2008: 83-100; and Carol Mason, "The Hillbilly Defense: Culturally Mediating U.S. Terror At Home and Abroad," *Feminist Formations*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 39-63. The more on tropes of Appalachia, see the early literary work of Cormac McCarthy, including *Child of God* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1993) and *Outer Dark* New York, NY: Vintage, 1993).

hook.[150] *Rendition*, as I suggest, mirrors these gender dynamics that emerged in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, when it contains the decision-making power around "extraordinary rendition" in one white, female American CIA officer, Corrine Whitman, but directs no blame at the Administration and its command structure and legal maneuverings.

A third and final way (at least for my purposes) of how the film mitigates the severity of torture is by framing the discourse around torture in terms of innocence and guilt, where those who are affiliated with radical Islam are guilty by default and where only the innocent deserve to be spared from torment. At the end of the film CIA officer Douglas Freeman liberates Anwar (played by Omar Metwally) on his own accord against the orders of his superiors. Yet the liberation becomes feasible only, once Freeman concludes that Anwar must be innocent, after he (Anwar) uses the names of former Egyptian soccer players to fabricate information in a desperate act to stop his torment. While Anwar is liberated, once he is found innocent, the fate of another prisoner, a militant Islamist by the name of Omar Adnan (played by Najib Oudghiri), is less certain. Omar is initially shown as a side character in two longer scenes. Yet we do not learn what happens to him, once he is featured for a last time after his arrest by the police. In this last shot of Omar, he is naked and agonized, as he sits on the very chair in the very dungeon, where Anwar was tortured earlier. By simply dropping Omar from the narrative, the film performs disinterest in the fate of

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[150] For Eisenstein, see "Sexual Humiliation, Gender Confusion and the Horror at Abu Ghraib," *Women's Human Rights Net*, July 2004, http://www.iiav.nl/ezines/web/WHRnet/2004/July.PDF (accessed April 9, 2011). For Karpinski, listen to her interview with the *BBC* "On the Ropes" radio program, where she referred to herself a "convenient scapegoat." For reference, consult "Iraqi Abuse 'Ordered From the Top," *BBC*, June 15, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/americas/3806713.stm (accessed on December 5, 2009).

someone, whose innocence may have been compromised by his affiliation with militant Islam and intentions to harm civilians through suicide bombings. Ironically, these representational choices correlate with a sentiment Corrine Whitman relays, when she asks one of her critics earlier in the film: "What are you taking issue with – the disappearance of a particular man [Anwar el-Ibrahimi] or national security policy [that is to say "extraordinary rendition" among other measures]?" The film *Rendition* tends to the former, when it privileges the narrative around Anwar, even presents his innocence as a pretext for why Douglas Freeman and we should care about his imprisonment and torture, while it erases a more ambiguous character like Omar from the narrative. That torture is and remains a violation of human rights and international law, regardless of whether a detainee is innocent or guilty of a crime, is lost in this type of representation.

Thus far I have discussed some of the larger parameters that the film offers for thinking about torture. I have illustrated how the film correlates torture and terrorism, how it contains the command structures around torture within one CIA officer, and how it conflates torture with matters of innocence and guilt. These parameters for thinking about torture present a baseline for the *dis-visioning practices* that the film employs in its representation of the dark chamber and its key players. I should clarify that since the film narrative is set in the war on terror, my goal in this section is less one of situating the film representations within the visual parameters of the war on terror, as in Section One, than unpacking the ideological workings of the images that the film forwards about the war on terror. I would, nevertheless, like to mention that *Rendition's* representation of torture does draw on the tropes of hooding, nudity, and

waterboarding that I have outlined in Section One. Like in *The Good Shepherd*, these tropes work to visually ground *Rendition*'s fictional dark chamber within the parameters of the war on terror. Through visual means the tropes heighten the link to the war on terror that the narrative a priori establishes through its focus on "extraordinary rendition" in the twenty-first century.

Rendition imagines torture as a triadic relationship between a tormentor, observer, and victim, where North African police chief Abasi Fawal (played by Yigal Naor) figures as the interrogator-tormentor, CIA officer and U.S. citizen Douglas Freeman (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) as the observer, and Egyptian citizen Anwar el-Ibrahimi (played by Omar Metwally) as the victim. In what follows I use the representation of the three characters and their roles as a lens to discuss the *dis-visioning* of the dark chamber of terror in the film.

I begin my exploration of how the film *dis-visions* the dark chamber of terror with a focus on its representation of the two Arab characters, Anwar and Abasi. The film casts Abasi in the role as chief tormentor. The choice to cast Abasi in this role sheds light on the troublesome human rights violations in several Arab states that the United States has been frequently complicit with.[151] At the same time it burdens Arab characters with the "dirty work" that "all-American boys next door" are equally capable of, as Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and many other incidents confirm. Yet while *Rendition* has a tendency to (figuratively) outsource violence to North Africa, when North Africa figures as the place, where terrorism, torture, and Abasi are possible, I argue that the *dis-visioning practices* that involve Abasi are more sinister, when he, an Arab, violates not "simply" another Arab (Anwar), but an Arab, whom the film

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[151] See "Factsheet: Extraordinary Rendition," *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*.

largely associates with a white, middle-class U.S. American identity. What *Rendition* thus leaves us with is a role reversal, where U.S. Americans no longer torture Arabs, as in the actual war on terror, but once again, as in so many fictional stories before, figure as victims at the hands of Arabs.

Language proficiency plays a key role as a marker of difference between Anwar and Abasi. While English proficiency affiliates Anwar with the United States, it marks Abasi's foreignness. Although Abasi is fluent in English, he speaks with a heavy accent. He also occasionally uses expressions that native English-speakers are less likely to use. During the interrogation of Anwar, he, for instance, says "*my friend*, put yourself in our position." While the word choice is not wrong, it is rather uncommon, as is the somewhat abrupt imperative in "*Come*, I want to show you [Douglas] something" that he uses after the interrogation is over. Aside from these scenes, Abasi is also featured in scenes, where he speaks exclusively in Arabic, including one, where he is at home and interacts quite lovingly with his younger daughter. While his interaction with the daughter adds complexity to his character in that he is not simply a stock character who is evil incarnate, it does little to mitigate his role as a perpetrator. He remains an Arab who torments with Anwar someone that the film affiliates with the United States.

Where Abasi is a non-native English speaker, whose home life is all but detached from English, Anwar speaks English with little traces of an accent. He uses English over his (supposed) native tongue, when he speaks with his son on the phone early in the film, which suggests that he and his American wife Isabella (played by Reese Witherspoon) raise their kids mono- rather than bilingually. That Anwar

prefers English over Arabic is, however, most apparent when he switches only once to Arabic over the course of the interrogation and film. Prior to the scene he responds to Abasi in English even in those rare cases, where Abasi poses his questions in Arabic. Yet, when Anwar finally speaks in Arabic, it is to confess to a crime that he did not commit. He thus only takes on a full Arab identity, an identity that is grounded in language, once he admits to violence that he did not participate in. Violence, as this scene suggests, is directly linked to the Arab identity that he most fully expresses through language.[152]

Yet the film does not only use language proficiency to highlight differences between the two Arab men but draws on less tangible cultural idiosyncracies to associate Anwar with the United States, on the one hand, and Abasi with Arab Otherness, on the other hand. Abasi's cultural idiosyncracies become, for instance, apparent during his first meeting with Douglas. During the meeting Abasi snacks on almonds and casually reaches into the pocket of his jacket to offer his American guest a handful (see Illustration 4d). The almonds in themselves constitute an unlikely snack for an American context. Yet it is Abasi's offer of almonds that really sets him apart, when the offer is too septic and too intimate a gesture to likely occur in a comparable professional setting in the United States. While his gesture does not necessarily identify Abasi as an Arab, it marks him as an ethnic Other who deviates from the cultural norms of the United States.

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[152] We learn from the film narrative that Anwar only came to the United States at age fourteen, which would suggest that Arabic is, indeed, his native language, even if he clearly prefers English. Anwar's repeated use of English over Arabic may be a function of the actor Omar Metwally's lack of full Arabic proficiency, given that, when he finally speaks in Arabic, he speaks the language with an English accent.

Anwar for his part acts in ways that affiliate him with an American identity. He, for instance, assumes that he has legal rights after he is unlawfully detained and requests to speak to a lawyer. His request exhibits a faith in the legal system that other Arab characters, including Omar (see above), a priori lack. Their social conditioning has taught them that they have no rights in the light of state power (in most countries), a lesson that Anwar is only beginning to learn. Anwar's trust in the state puts him at odds with the experiences of fellow Arabs, while it also speaks to his privileged status in the United States, where faith in the state system is primarily a function of the white, middle class identity that he inhabits.

Anwar's affiliation with a white, middle class, American identity is highlighted by way of his association with this class. While his appearance produces a "generic white look" of someone who could be of most white ethnic backgrounds and is, as such, open to a reading of him as a white, middle class American, it is his association with his wife Isabella, on the one hand, and his interaction with Douglas, on the other hand, that cement his ties to this social class. Isabella is played by Reese Witherspoon, whose earlier acting portfolio as "legally blonde" Elle Woods and country-music icon June Carter, lend her a profile as light-hearted, good-natured, "all-American" female lead. It is these qualities that she brings to the role of pregnant Isabella, who goes on a quest to learn about her husband's whereabouts. And it is these qualities that rub off on Anwar by association. After all, he chose to marry and share his life with this "all-American" woman and settle on "all-American values," such as family and love.[153]

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[153] See John Caughey, *Negotiating Cultures and Identities* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 15.

His ties to white, middle class America are further steadied by way of how he relates to Douglas, which differs considerably from how he interacts with Abasi. Where Anwar's interactions with Abasi are driven by Abasi's questioning (and torture), his interactions with Douglas maintain a semblance of shared power, when Anwar not only subduedly responds to Douglas' questions about himself but poses his own about Douglas. During a scene, where Douglas speaks to Anwar in private (without Abasi), it is Anwar, who grills Douglas with questions, such as "why are you here?" and "do you have a family?," and later curses Douglas until Douglas starts choking him in rage.

The scene, where Douglas and Anwar talk in private also establishes a note of complicity between the two characters. In the beginning Douglas tells Anwar "just explain the phone calls" and then soft-spokenly adds "and we can all go home." Douglas, as the intonation of his comment suggests, is not set on finding Anwar guilty, as Abasi and Corrine are. Anwar's response to Douglas, "tell me what to say, I'll say it," in turn, places Douglas in the role of a confidant. Together these moments establish an affinity between Anwar and Douglas that neither of them shares with Abasi.

I have presented a range of cultural codes and affiliations that establish Anwar and Abasi in decisively different terms, even if both of them are Arab (or Egyptian) by citizenship and ethnicity. Where the film highlights Abasi's Otherness, it associates Anwar with the United States. These choices bring about a figurative role reversal from the actual war on terror, when it is no longer U.S. Americans, who torture Arabs, but an Arab, who tortures someone, who is overwhelmingly associated

with the United States. The choices are exemplary of *dis-visioning practices* that acknowledge U.S. complicity in torture, albeit with severe limitations.

I now turn my attention to Douglas, the only U.S. citizen in the "torture triad," to address another facet of *dis-visioning* in the film. I am hereby also moving to a closer examination of the visual aspects of the dark chamber of terror. I suggest that the torture scenes, three of them altogether, primarily align the spectator with Douglas' perspective and struggle as a character.[154] I propose that the alignment with Douglas speaks to *dis-visioning practices* that mitigate U.S. involvement in torture, when it privileges his perspective and struggle over those of the torture victim. To put it differently, viewer alignment with Douglas serves to privilege a perspective that is most clearly identified as U.S. American.

The first torture scene is especially relevant to aligning the spectator with Douglas and his perspective. The scene consists primarily of three types of shots that alternate as the scene progresses. These include: a medium (long) shot of Douglas, as he stands motionlessly and faces the camera (see Illustration 4e); (medium) close-ups of Anwar and Abasi, respectively, as they directly gaze at the camera (see Illustration 4f); and medium (long) shots of Anwar and Abasi together, as Abasi questions Anwar. The montage of the shots creates the illusion that we are watching the interactions between Abasi and Anwar from Douglas' point-of-view, when the image of Douglas takes turns with images that show Abasi's interrogation of Anwar, and when Abasi and Anwar seem to repeatedly gaze at Douglas (the camera) during the interrogation process. While there are exceptions to these dynamics, for instance,

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[154] For more on viewer alignment, see Chapter Two, where I briefly discuss Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

when the film zooms to a distant neutral position (a long/extreme long shot), as Abasi hits Anwar, and when the film features crosscuts between Abasi and Anwar, as the interrogation intensifies, Douglas' point-of-view still dominates the scene and establishes itself as the default position for spectator alignment.

By aligning the spectator with Douglas' perspective, the film positions the spectator in a particular relationship to the events in the dark chamber. The scene presents Douglas as a static character, who remains motionless and silent during his first encounter with Anwar. His motionlessness and silence lend themselves to a reading that Douglas is a neutral bystander with no direct bearings on the situation, which not only mitigates his but America's complicity in human rights violations. In his/her alignment with Douglas, the viewer remains likewise a bystander, who does not come to share experiences, such as being blindfolded and hooded, as Anwar is in a later scene, which a film would be perfectly capable of simulating. Instead the spectator observes Anwar's torment from the safe distance of someone, who, like Douglas, is himself not subjected to torture. Although the film narrative is generally empathetic with Anwar, alignment with Douglas' perspective distances the spectator from Anwar's suffering.

Aside from the fact that the first torture scene prioritizes Douglas' perspective onto the events, the film privileges Douglas, when it presents him as the driving force in the dark chamber of terror. Unlike Anwar and Abasi, Douglas is not stuck in a set of given circumstances or behavior patterns, but undergoes significant character development over the course of the film and the three torture scenes. A newcomer to the grim practices that define the dark chamber of terror, he remains motionless and

silent during the first encounter, a "neutral bystander," as I suggested. During the

second encounter, Douglas directs his focus on Anwar. He tells Anwar to "give him

[Abasi] an answer" and later asks Abasi to speak with Anwar in privacy. By the third

encounter Douglas directs his attention to Abasi, when he first demands that Abasi

stop the electric shocks and later sets out to disprove that torture can produce sound

intelligence. As these developments illustrate, all three encounters are driven by

Douglas, who each and every time upsets the established order in the dark chamber of

terror, when, on all three occasions, he participates in different ways. In the

meantime, Abasi remains static, when his objective to get a confession does not

change over the course of the three scenes, while Anwar remains static, when he is

stuck in the same miserable condition throughout.

Yet Douglas not merely drives the events in the dark chamber of terror, when

he is the most versatile character in the "torture triad," so-to-speak its agent of

change, but overshadows Anwar's predicament in the course of it, when the events in

the dark chamber of terror come to revolve around Douglas and his inner state rather

than Anwar. By way of Douglas' outfits, the film suggests that Douglas is

increasingly implicated in the ugliness of the dark chamber of terror. While he wears

a grey suit and light blue shirt during the first encounter, he is dressed in a grey suit

and a grey shirt during the second, and a black suit and a black shirt during the third.

At the same time Douglas is also increasingly troubled. That the events in the dark

chamber of terror weigh on his conscience is not only suggested, when he starts

abusing liquor and hookah, while he is off work, but reflected by a change in his body

posture, as he observes as Anwar is tortured. By the third torture scene (at least at the

beginning), Douglas no longer stands erect with his hands in his pocket, as he did before, but crouches against a wall on the side with his arms crossed. The posture that Douglas takes on in the third torture scene is comparatively less open and self-confident than the erect posture that he is in before. By crossing his arms, he even expresses an adversarial stance to the events and Abasi. By way of these noticeable changes in one but not the other two characters, the film advances Douglas' preoccupation with torture and its ethical implications to its central theme. Douglas' quest to see clear on torture is what the scenes in the dark chamber of terror come to revolve around. The film resolves his dilemma, when he finally fulfills the promise of his last name "Freeman" and liberates Anwar from the prison without Abasi's or Corrine's authorization.

The role that Douglas plays in the dark chamber of terror is exemplary of the film's *dis-visioning practices.* Although *Rendition* acknowledges U.S. complicity in torture, when it places Douglas in the scenes of torture, it mitigates U.S. involvement by relaying the events through Douglas' perspective, and by privileging Douglas' struggle to see clear on torture over Anwar's struggle to survive. Cast in the role of someone who is not required to lay hands on prisoners, the only U.S. citizen in the torture chamber emerges as a redeemable perpetrator, especially when he is moved to fantastical actions and liberates Anwar in the end. While the film's questions around conscience and ethics appear rather self-indulgent, when they are raised at the expense of the torture victim and his miserable state and condition, we as viewers are likely to accept the film's *(dis)vision* because we are most aligned with Douglas' point-of-view.

To conclude, this chapter has explored the notion of a U.S. dark chamber of terror with an analysis of a range of images that all participate in constructing and negotiating meaning around torture and other human rights violations that the U.S. has been implicated in. The notion of the U.S. dark chamber of terror that I advance in this chapter has, in other words, allowed me to put different nonfictional and fictional images in conversation in order to account for some aspects of the representational scope of torture and, with that, events that continue to be regularly erased from public view. As part of my analysis I have illustrated how the two films that have been the subject of my discussion engage in *dis-visioning practices*, when they either displace the subject of U.S. torture in the war on terror in (long) gone histories, as is the case in *The Good Shepherd*, or mediate the dark chamber of terror through a U.S. perspective that partially rewrites the realities of U.S. torture, as they came to be known from the Abu Ghraib photographs and other damaging (visual) accounts of U.S. human rights violations, as is the case in *Rendition*. While the representations of the two films significantly compromise notions of U.S. responsibility in torture, their *dis-visions* still further a more critical discourse on torture than many other visual engagements have done. Fox's *24* is, for instance, an example of a visual representation where U.S. torture continuously reckons as a necessary means to win the "war."

Chapter Five: Conclusion

One of the central concepts that I have developed over the course of this dissertation is the dark chamber of terror. Building on an essay by novelist J. M. Coetzee, I have forwarded a notion of a dark chamber of terror, where, away from bare (unmediated) view, ethical norms, and the regulatory structures of the law, the state and rivaling non-state powers like the al-Qaeda organization exert unchecked control and (lethal) violence over the bodies of those whom they perceive as 'problem' or 'enemy' subjects. The notion of the dark chamber of terror has allowed me to conceptually relate events that may otherwise not be discussed in conjunction with each other and has put in dialogue acts that in their pronounced transgression of legal, ethical, and visual regulations and norms represent some of the defining associations of the war at its most horrific. Over the course of this dissertation I have, in short, made an argument for the dark chamber of terror and its centrality to the war, which I expect to further develop in the future under the consideration of philosopher Giorgio Agamben's work on "the state of exception" and its "suspension of juridical order."[155]

The centrality of the dark chamber of terror to the war has lent my analysis of its representation in fiction film particular urgency. I have taken Coetzee's argument about the importance of fiction-writing as a tool to reckon with the dark chamber of terror to the visual realm with an understanding that fiction films participate more directly in a construction of knowledge that is increasingly driven by a visual culture

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[155] For reference on the "state of exception," see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For reference on Coetzee, see J. M. Coetzee, "Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1986, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/12/books/coetzee-chamber.html# (accessed October 21, 2009).

where seeing and knowing have become intrinsically linked. The aim of this project has, in other words, partially been to account for the representational scope of the dark chamber of terror in fiction film and to address the ideological workings that fiction films engage in, when they represent the dark chamber of terror through particular narratives and visual arrangements.

As part of my conclusion, I would like to therefore elaborate on some of the narrative and visual patterns that have emerged across the body of films that I have examined over the course of this dissertation. Firstly, it is noticeable that the narratives that have come to represent the dark chamber of terror in its different manifestations all (re)claim a sense of agency and, with that, mastery over the events that take place in the dark chamber of terror. I am here not referring to mastery in the fashion that I have alluded to in Chapter Two, where the fictional representation of an otherwise visually unrepresented event contains the multiple and contradictory aspects of the event in one definite representation and, as such, masters the uncertainties about the event. Rather I am describing the film narratives themselves. Although their outcomes vary, when the *United 93* passengers all die as a result of the hijacking, while fictional characters like Roger Ferris in *Body of Lies* and Adam Leavitt in *The Kingdom* survive, all narratives present characters – some based on actual people – that grapple with their situation not in impassive but courageously defiant ways that speaks to agency in the light of the unspeakable acts that mark the dark chamber of terror. The films that I have explored in Chapter Two both (re)claim agency over the acts through their respective narratives of the Flight 93 passenger revolt. The films that I discuss in Chapter Three are predominantly driven by rescue

narratives that subvert the dark chamber of terror. The exception is *A Mighty Heart*,

which works akin to the films that I have analyzed in Chapter Two, when it frames

the slaughter video that emerged after the abduction and murder of journalist Daniel

Pearl partially through a narrative of defiance and spiritual survival. In the context of

Rendition, which I discuss in Chapter Four, the (re)claiming of agency occurs not on

the part of the victim but the American observer who, over the course of the film,

comes to terms with the role that he has to play in the light of torture and, in the end,

liberates, torture victim Anwar el-Ibrahimi. By (re)claiming some form of agency for

its American characters, where the characters are not completely subdued in the light

of (lethal) violence, these narratives partially re-establish authority and authorship

over events that are otherwise defined by a sense of severe powerlessness.

As I have already indicated by alluding to *Rendition*, in most cases the films

only establish American characters in courageously defiant terms. Although Anwar

el-Ibrahimi is not a completely passive character, especially when he challenges CIA

agent Douglas Freeman in one of the torture scenes, the film, as I have argued in

Chapter Four, is primarily concerned with the development of Douglas rather than the

state of Anwar. The special attention that films attribute to their American characters

is also evident in the Flight 93 films that, in the case of *United 93*, not only erase the

possibility that the two foreign passengers (not the hijackers) significantly contributed

to the fight back but present one of them as an obstacle to the passenger revolt. *Body

of Lies* and *The Kingdom* also assure that extraordinary heroics, paired with suffering,

are predominantly reserved for their American characters, when, in both films, the

Arab sidekicks to the lead American characters die in the process of the film, possibly

to not jeopardize the narrative focus on *American* heroics and suffering.[156] *A Mighty Heart* presents the only exception to these dynamics among the films that have been the subject of my analysis, when its story predominantly revolves around Mariane Pearl, a French citizen, and her reckoning with the murder of her husband. The vision of the film is thereby more cosmopolitan and arguably better in line with the worldview that a widely-travelled journalist like Daniel Pearl would have in all likelihood called his own.

The use of tropes of heroics and suffering in the majority of the films that have been the subject to my analysis are, however, not only relevant to establish a particular national(ist) vision but also work to construct a particularly gendered vision of the war and its dark chamber of terror. I have most directly addressed these dynamics in connection with *Flight 93* and the melodramatic mode that the film employs. Yet questions of gender representation also bear consideration in films like *A Mighty Heart*, *United 93*, and *Rendition*, where women figure as victims and helpers of men, if in varying degrees, and *Body of Lies* and *The Good Shepherd*, where the love for a woman presents obstacles, even danger for men. *The Kingdom* presents an exception to this representational paradigm only in so far as Janet Mayes is an active member in a special unit of the FBI. As communication scholar Michelle Aguayo has observed, however, Mayes' voicelessness in the film places a challenge to a character development that would position her on completely equal footing with

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[156] I have not mentioned these narrative parts before. To clarify, in *Body of Lies* it is Roger Ferris' initial partner, the Iraqi Bassam (played by Oscar Isaac), who dies in a shoot-out with militants early in the story. In *The Kingdom* it is Colonel Faris al-Ghazi (played by Ashraf Barhom) who dies in the shoot-out with al-Qaeda militant that saves Adam Leavitt's life. At this point in the story, which occurs close to the end, al-Ghazi has developed a close relationship with the FBI team leader Ronald Fleury (played by Jamie Foxx) in what one could describe as a "buddy" arrangement that is common in action films.

male characters in *The Kingdom*. What these narratives thus ultimately share is a highly gendered perspective on the "war on terror," where women, many of them pregnant, dwell in domestic spaces along with their children, while their husbands, fathers, and sons not only venture into the dangerous public sphere but are almost exclusively the ones who inhabit the dark chamber of terror as perpetrators and courageously defiant victims. While these gender dynamics lend themselves to the melodramatic mode that, as I indicated in Chapter Two, pervades Hollywood film, if not American culture, they also relay the dark chamber of terror in ways that erase a large spectrum of actual experiences of women in the war, who have, after all, not been spared from the (lethal) violence that is emblematic of the dark chamber of terror.[157]

Aside from narrative patterns, the majority of the films that have been the subject to my analysis also exhibit visual similarities, when they all draw on particular visual tropes in order to anchor their representations within particular conversations and larger discourses. In Chapter Three I mention the kufiyas that al-Qaeda militants wear in a range of slaughter videos as well as in fiction films like *Body of Lies* and *The Kingdom*. In Chapter Two I comment on the "jihadist

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[157] For Michelle Aguayo's argument, see "Representations of Muslim Bodies in The Kingdom: Deconstructing Discourses in Hollywood," *Global Media Journal – Canadian Edition*, vol. 2, no. 2: 41-56 (50). For reference on the pervasiveness of the melodramatic mode in Hollywood film and American culture, see John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2004); and Elisabeth Anker, "The Venomous Eye: Melodrama and the Making of National Identity and State Power" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007), 13-19. As a matter of clarification I should also note that *Body of Lies* insinuates that the love for a woman may carry dangers, when Roger Ferris volunteers himself for a prisoner exchange with al-Qaeda under the assumption that they have abducted his love interest, a local Palestinian-Iranian nurse. Ferris would, in other words, not have gotten into the hands of al-Qaeda, if it had not been for his "soft side." *The Good Shepherd* likewise points to the dangers that the love for a woman may carry, when lead character Edward Wilson is not only forced into a gunshot wedding after a half-hearted sexual encounter with his best friend's sister but when the CIA later also prevents him from rekindling a potential relationship with the woman he loved all along, given that she would pose an obstacle to his single-minded and sober dedication to state affairs.

bandanas" that the 9/11 hijackers wear in *Flight 93* and *United 93*. Kufiyas and bandanas also figure as part of a subplot about Islamist militants in *Rendition*. Both serve as but one example of how films construct particular knowledge about the dark chamber of terror through the repeated use of props and costumes that create similarities in mise-en-scène across different film texts. By drawing on the same repertoire of images, the films participate in citational practices where kufiyas and bandanas come to almost unequivocally signify Islamist militancy and terrorism.[158]

Akin to these practices are the ones that I have discussed in Chapter Three in connection with *Body of Lies* where al-Qaeda's dark chamber of terror figures through a mise-en-scène that evokes medieval times and torture. Rather than drawing on a repertoire of iconic images, such as kufiyas and bandanas, which it also does, the film anchors its representation in a more general, yet widely available, discourse that reserves "civilization" and "progress" exclusively for the "West" and fails to recognize that al-Qaeda is not the product of a resurrected medieval Islam but modern 20th and 21st century historical developments. Like the images of kufiyas and bandanas, the appeal to *medieval allure* works to map the dark chamber of terror through ideologically-driven narratives that make sense of events in narrowly-defined, yet familiar ways.

Aside from mapping the representational scope of the dark chamber of terror, the examples of kufiyas, bandanas, and medieval scenery also point to how my analysis addresses the "blurred boundaries" between fictional and nonfictional

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[158] My reference to the films participating in citational practices draws on Edward Said's work, especially the second chapter in *Orientalism*. See Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979). He also refers more succinctly to the idea in *On Orienalism*, Media Education Foundation, 1998.

representations, when it illustrates how the meanings around kufiyas, bandanas, and other tropes emerge in an the interplay between fictional and nonfictional representation. Kufiyas and bandanas, to stick to the example, have not only been mobilized to signify militant Islam and terrorism in a range of fiction film that already precede the 2001 attacks but they have also been mobilized in similar ways in newspapers images and footage on television.[159]

The images of hooding, nudity, and waterboarding that I have discussed in connection with *The Good Shepherd* in Chapter Four serve as another potent example of these "blurred boundaries" between fictional and nonfictional representations. While kufiyas and bandanas come to repeatedly signify militant Islam and terrorism in fictional and nonfictional outlets, the tropes of hooding, nudity, and waterboarding unequivocally position the Cold War drama *The Good Shepherd* in dialogue with the "war on terror" and images of torture that are iconic to its representational scope. By unpacking the interplay between fictional and nonfictional representations in discourse this project has complicated a range of studies that fail to account for how fictional images, like their nonfictional counterparts, feed into the workings of what sociologists Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore call the "ocular regimes" that structure social reality.[160]

The mention of "ocular regimes" brings me to a final point with respect to the patterns that emerge across fiction film representations of the dark chamber of terror.

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[159] For reference of "blurred boundaries," see Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995). For more on kufiyas and banadas as tropes that have come to largely signify Islamist militancy and terrorism, see *On Orienalism*, Media Education Foundation, 1998; *Reel Bad Arabs*, Media Education Foundation, 2007; see also Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media And the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World,* revised edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).
[160] Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore, *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 14 & 79.

As my analysis has indicated in different ways, many of the films share a strong concern about visual perspective and the dynamics of seeing, not seeing, and being seen. Films like *Body of Lies*, and *The Kingdom* gesture to these visual concerns, when the narratives of both films repeatedly involve video cameras and other ocular and recording devices – binoculars in *The Kingdom* and satellite surveillance in *Body of Lies*. Films like *Rendition* and *The Good Shepherd* likewise attribute importance to vision, when they stage torture with a focus on the role of the observer and his gaze. Gazing is also significant in the context of the Flight 93 films, as I illustrated with my discussion of the imposing stare that hijacker Ziad Jarrah exhibits in *Flight 93*. While I did not mention this before, *United 93* departs from this particular portrayal of the lead hijacker, when it paints him as a reluctant leader who, in seeming ambivalence about the suicide mission, avoids eye contact with his men prior to the takeover and fails to give the agreed upon sign that would initiate the hijacking. What these narratives thus ultimately share is that they all imagine the dark chamber of terror as a space that is intrinsically immersed in and defined by practices of looking.

Yet the significance of seeing, not seeing, and being seen in connection with the dark chamber of terror not only arises through the film narratives but through the ways in which the films position the spectator. In Chapter Two I illustrated how camerawork and editing in *United 93* work to align the spectator less with a select number of passengers, as in the case in *Flight 93*, than with the collective experience of all passengers. The spectator position establishes the spectator, in other words, as a passenger of her or his own right, which carries significant implications for how the representation of the dark chamber of terror is experienced by viewers. In Chapter

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Three I have likewise taken note of the ways in which a film like *The Kingdom* places the spectator in the scenes that portray the al-Qaeda hostage situation. Unlike actual al-Qaeda slaughter videos that relay the events impassively through a static camera and full shots, *The Kingdom* promotes a highly restrictive and hectic view on the events. The spectator is, in other words, positioned in a way that allow for little oversight over the spatial arrangements and pending dangers, whereby the film subverts al-Qaeda's impassive lens with the modes of suspense and urgency that are typical for Hollywood action films. Like *The Kingdom*, *A Mighty Heart* approaches the subject of al-Qaeda slaughter videos with attention to what the spectator may or may not see. As I have noted in Chapter Three, *A Mighty Heart* relays the most horrific parts of the al-Qaeda video through the faces of the investigators who are watching the video. Over the course of the scene the video itself remains outside the filmic frame and thereby off-limits to the spectator. Unlike *A Mighty Heart*, films like *Rendition* and *The Good Shepherd*, both of which take U.S. torture as their subject matter, not only depict the assault on bodies for the spectator to see but, as I have discussed in Chapter Four, significantly align the viewer with the gaze of the observer of torture rather than the torture victim. All in all the spectator positions thus not only reiterate the significance of practices of looking in connection with the dark chamber of terror but also encourage a perspective that aligns viewers with the United States, even when Americans figure as perpetrators.

I have outlined some of the narrative patterns and visual arrangements that define the representational scope of the dark chamber of terror and constitute key findings of my project. Aside from these findings, this dissertation, however, also

makes a significant theoretical contribution to the fields of American Studies, Film and Cultural Studies, when it proposes a systematic approach to the study of the dark chamber of terror in fiction film. To this effect this dissertation has developed three types of *visioning practices* that are each premised on a different relationship between the actual violent events that occurred outside of the legal, ethical, and visual parameters that otherwise define social life and their visual representations in nonfictional media.

To be more specific, Chapter Two has conceptualized the notion of *en-visioning practices*, which arise from a relationship between the violent event and nonfictional image, where al-Qaeda executed the event (the 9/11 attacks) that remained, in many ways, visually unrepresented in nonfictional terms. In the absence of nonfictional representation films like *Flight 93* and *United 93* have participated in filling the visual voids with fictional images from the airborne cabin in accord with particular ideological investments. As my analysis of the two films has demonstrated, both films not only *en-vision* the events in line with a larger mythology about the 2001 attacks but, when read against each other, trouble the seeming coherence and conclusiveness that their respective visions construct.

By way of *re-visioning* Chapter Three has considered a practice that arises from a relationship between the nonfictional image and violent event, where al-Qaeda executed the event (the murder of hostages) *and* created the initial nonfictional image (the slaughter videos). I have analyzed *A Mighty Heart*, *Bodies of Lies*, and *The Kingdom*, all three of which take al-Qaeda hostage scenarios and slaughter productions as their subject matter. I have suggested that the three films engage in *re-*

visioning practices, where fictional images rewrite the nonfictional visual recordings of the dark chamber from an oppositional standpoint that challenges the original narratives and meanings.

In Chapter Four I have developed the notion of *dis-visioning*, a practice that emerged out of a relationship between the nonfictional image and violent event, where the United States executed the event (torture) *and* U.S. military personnel created the image. As part of my case study I have analyzed *The Good Shepherd* and *Rendition*, two films that depict American torture with an argument that they engage in *dis-visioning practices*, a form of ambivalent *re-visioning*, where fictional images depict a dark chamber that has been previously represented in the visual domain through nonfictional means. While *re-visioning practices* engage the dark chamber from an oppositional standpoint, *dis-visioning practices* take a middle ground, where they recognize U.S. involvement with torture, albeit in mitigated form.

All in all *visioning practices* make explicit the intricate relationship between fictional and nonfictional images, their association with respective historical events, as well as the ideologies that both types of images subscribe to. They unpack how fiction films lay claim to authorship and authority over events through representations that either fill visual voids or challenge prior visual engagements. And they lend a systematic approach to the analysis of fictional representations of the dark chamber of terror with the understanding that the films participate in a "politics of visibility" in connection with the "war on terror" where violent conflict, visual media, and mass communication have converged in unprecedented ways.

The films that have been the subject of my dissertation all naturalize their visions without attending to their own roles as visual media and image-makers in what could be described a reflexive stance that would de-familiarize what we see on screen. They, in other words, work within a visual paradigm, where their own visions feed rather than disrupt the "politics of visibility" of the war on terror. Yet, there are films that have challenged this visual paradigm and taken image-making itself as a subject matter. A next step in this research might therefore be to develop the notion of *a-visioning practices*, where films unsettle the relationship between the nonfictional image and violent event that *visioning practices* take as their premise.

At this point I would like to briefly gesture to what *a-visioning* may encompass by way of a brief discussion of Brian de Palma's Iraq war drama *Redacted* (2007). *Redacted* is loosely based on a factual event in Iraq that involved the rape and murder of fourteen-year old Abeer Qasim Hamza al-Janabi by U.S. soldiers, who subsequently also killed her parents and six-year old sister. While the scene of rape and murder stands at the center of a plot that is primarily concerned with the plight of U.S. soldiers in Iraq and, as Americanist Mark Straw argues, their traumatized male subjectivity, the scene of rape and murder is not the only representation of a dark chamber in the film, when, in the fictional aftermath of what came to be known as the Al-Mahmudiyah killings, the heretofore protagonist Angel Salazar (played by Izzy Diaz) becomes casualty to an al-Qaeda abduction and slaughter video production.[161]

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[161] For film reference, see *Redacted*, dir. Brian de Palma, Magnolia Pictures, 2007. For more on the actual event and the reception of Brian de Palma's controversial film, see Mark Straw, "The guilt zone: Trauma, masochism and the ethics of spectatorship in Brian De Palma's *Redacted* (2007)," *Continuum*, vol. 24, no.1 (2010): 91-105. See also, Gayle MacDonald, "Meet Hollywood's Next Heavy Hitters," *Globe and Mail*, September 1, 2007: A1. (Lexis Nexis).

Redacted uses strikingly different visual means to relay the two different dark chambers of terror (see Illustrations 5a and 5b). It suggests that the scene of rape and murder are exclusively filmed by soldier Angel Salazar's personal camera, which he, an aspiring filmmaker, as *Redacted* has it, carries with him until he is abducted by al-Qaeda. That the scene of rape and murder is filmed from his particular standpoint is made clear, when the three other soldiers, two of whom lead the raid on the Iraqi home, directly look at the camera and communicate with Salazar. In contrast to the rape and murder scene, the scene of Salazar's death is relayed through a lesser form of immediacy, where the scene does not unfold, as it is supposedly filmed, but featured as part of a news report from an Arab news organization. In the news report the anchor informs his audience that his news organization received a slaughter video (in which Salazar is killed), which the film subsequently stages as a part of the news report.

As my brief discussion of the two scenes indicates, *Redacted* mediates its Iraq war story through a range of visual aesthetics that emulate visual styles and conventions that have come to define the visual parameters of the Iraq war. These include Salazar's personal camera, fictional news anchor footage, and the fictional slaughter video that I already mentioned. Beyond its representation of the dark chamber of terror, the film also adapts styles that imitate embedded journalism, surveillance camera footage, virtual teleconferencing, jihadist websites, and U.S. military websites. The patchwork aesthetics that *Redacted* embraces, when it assembles different visual styles and conventions, ultimately make for what I tentatively call *a-visioning practices*, when, taken together, they not only remind us

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of the limitations that each representational medium and style comes with but point to the disconnect between the image and the event. The "moving images" here is, as Mark Straw suggests, "a cipher, a sign without signification" and without "authenticating experience."[162]

What a study of *a-visioning practices* would thus arguably do, is complement the *visioning practices* that I have discussed in this dissertation, when *a-visioning practices* raise doubt about the truth-effect of visual representations, deconstruct the link between the dark chamber of terror and its visual representations, and challenge the legacy of assumptions about seeing as a privileged mode for knowing. All in all, *a-visioning practices* would thus arguably introduce a dose of Brechtian de-familiarization (*Verfremdungseffekt*) into a world, where visual media, visibility, and vision have become so intertwined with power and knowledge.

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[162] Straw, 94.

Appendix: Illustrations

Illustration 2a: *Flight 93*: Ziad Jarrah

Illustration 2b: *Flight 93*: Liz Glick with the baby

Illustration 2c: *United 93*: William Cashman with the map

Illustration 3a: *Weeds*: Shane "playing terrorist"

Illustration 3b: Al-Qaeda Slaughter Video: Daniel Pearl
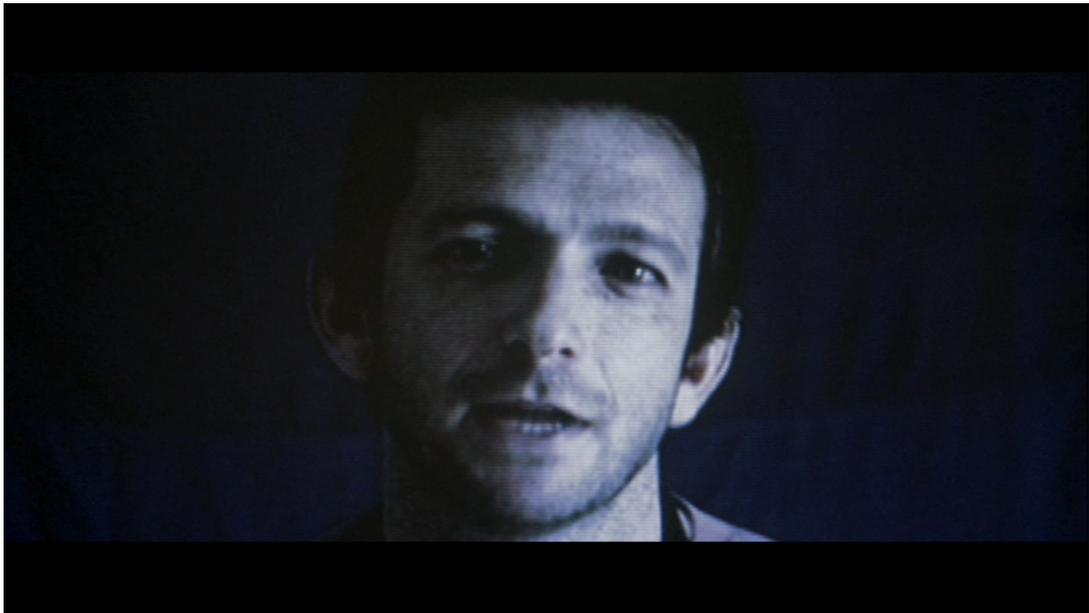
Illustration 3c: *A Mighty Heart*: Slaughter Video Remake

Illustration 3d: Al-Qaeda Slaughter Video: Nicholas Berg

Illustration 3e: *Body of Lies*: Al-Qaeda Militants Subvert the CIA Satellite View

Illustration 3f: *Body of Lies*: The Centrality of the Camera As Terrorist Prop

Illustration 3 g: *The Kingdom*: The Centrality of the Camera as Terrorist Prop

Illustration 3h: *Body of Lies*: Medieval Allure – Ferris' Hands Shakled to the Table
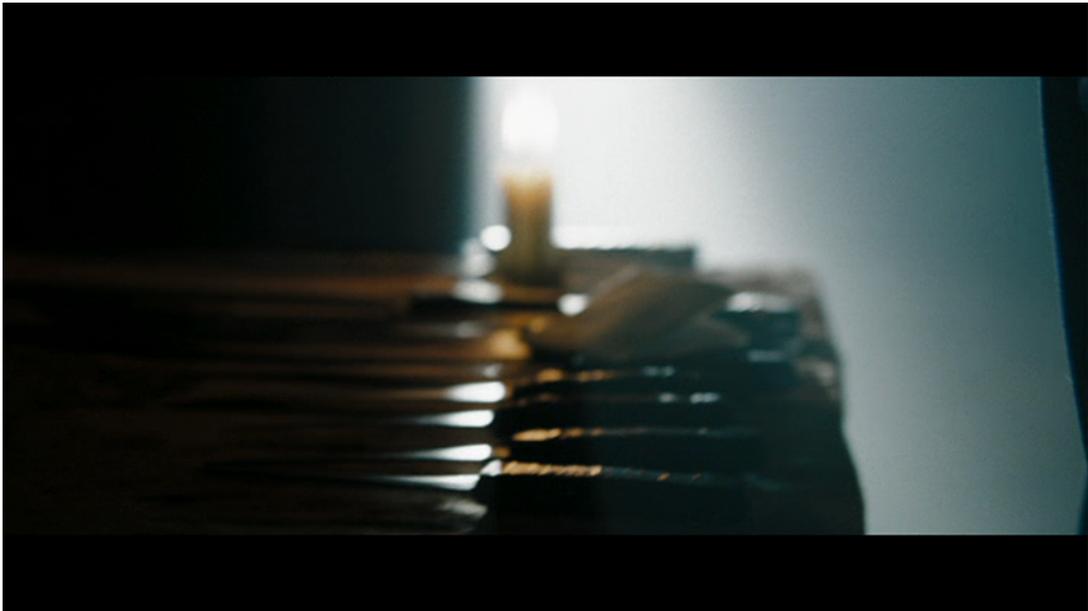
Illustration 3i: *Body of Lies*: Medieval Allure – An Assemblage of Knives

Illustration 3j: *The Kingdom*: Use of Fast-Paced Close-Ups: Here Adam Leavitt

Illustration 4a: Abu Ghraib Torture: The Hooded Prisoner On the Box

Illustration 4b: Abu Ghraib Torture: Hooded Prisoners

Illustration 4c: *The Good Shepherd*: The Torture of Valentin Mironov

Illustration 4d: *Rendition*: Abasi offers Douglas A Handful of Almonds

Illustration 4e: *Rendition*: Douglas In the First Torture Scene

Illustration 4f: *Rendition*: Abasi Looking At Douglas

Illustration 5a: *Redacted*: Salazar Films the Scene

Illustration 5b: Salazar in Slaughter Video

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