

**The Cinematic Network Society:  
Ethical Confrontations with New Proximities to Human Suffering  
in the Information Age**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the global “network society” as a social formation with ethical implications for Western subjectivity by scrutinizing how twenty first century “global network” cinema maps the network’s democratizing and exploitative possibilities. Popular discourses have long provided a terrain in which new social and geographical proximities to the other, and new ethical responsibilities, can be negotiated as changing material conditions transform everyday life. Theoretically, this study draws upon Lacan’s notion of the symbolic order, Jameson’s notion of the imaginary social totality, and Foucault’s arguably incompatible concept of the *dispositif* or “apparatus” of discourses that render the social order intelligible and modes of conduct acceptable. Cinematic depictions of the network society represent efforts to signify (symbolizations); they present viewers with the rough parameters of intangible relations (cognitive maps); and their stars’ off-screen humanitarian pursuits and on-screen responses to human suffering envision idealized ethical modes of conduct (self-government). More than promoting celebrity adoration or ideological allegiance, these films depict their central agents experiencing mastery (plenitude) *as well as* impotence (lack) in the midst of the complex networks they inhabit. Methodologically, this thesis draws upon semiological and discursive analyses of twelve post-2000 global network films; celebrity humanitarian discourses; promotional-critical discourses accompanying the reception of each film; and fieldwork at film festivals and panels in North America and the UK. The emerging “cinematic network society” these films signify in fact comprises off-screen linkages between the filmmakers, advocacy groups, and the invisible sites of trauma these interests aim to publicize. But even this liberal Hollywood movement envisions the practice of global citizenship in somewhat conservative terms: as a series of ethical *private* responses to suffering that are continuous with the neoliberal project. This contradiction is central to wider political negotiations of new ethical relations with the other in an age when everyone is connected.

**KEYWORDS:** network society; Hollywood film; cognitive mapping; historical trauma; globalization; ethics; neoliberalism; Foucault; Lacan



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Me, We  
-Muhammad Ali

## Introduction

Life isn't like in the movies. Life is much harder.

Alfredo, projectionist. *Cinema Paradiso* (1988)

The cinema is the centre of social life in Giuseppe Tornatore's internationally celebrated film *Cinema Paradiso*. Housed tellingly in a former church on the *piazza* at the heart of a small Italian village, the cinema is one of the few places all of the villagers congregate. With World War II a very recent memory, the townspeople gather at the Cinema Paradiso to debate local, regional, and national politics in post-fascist Italy, and the changing social and cultural trends shaping the world beyond their borders—images of which appear in the movies. Although the films they view are usually Italian and French, the mounting global influence of US popular culture seems poised to alter the town's entrenched codes of morality and insular, traditional way of life.

The cinematic space enables the public to assemble, like the *piazza* or the town hall (those without ticket fare are often admitted charitably) but it is naturally the indelible pictures the cinema exhibits that attract the townspeople, giving them a glimpse of everything from the dream worlds of MGM musicals to the traumas restaged in historical epics and recorded in war documentaries. These images fuel heated debates about ephemeral styles of dressing and grave historical events, alike. That is, the villagers engage in their ritualized modes of communication and practice their citizenship, including instances of civil disobedience, within and around the cinematic space, but the movies themselves introduce many of the topics of discussion, whether or not the spectators view the films intently, disapprovingly, or in

a state of romantic diversion brought on by the presence of a particularly distracting companion. Some civic leaders argue that these stories of adventure, intrigue, war, and romance, and particularly the provocative displays of affection they contain, are *too* effective at stimulating public debate and ironically threaten to disrupt community life. On the celebrated occasions when a new film arrives in the village, then, the local priest first receives a private screening and must deem the picture suitable for public consumption. The church's intervention is not merely intended to deny citizens' pleasure, but also to manage the conditions that might influence their *conduct*.

Each time the screen stars begin speaking suggestively or become affectionate, the priest rings his bell and the projectionist, Alfredo (Philippe Noiret), bookmarks the scene and edits it from the film. The priest's censorship of the films is obviously intended to shield citizens from imagery that might naturalize new and unacceptable ways of being, but it disappoints the crowds whose members cheer when the film stars appear poised to kiss and voice their frustration when the film reel abruptly cuts to the following scene. That is, the spectators, ranging from primary schoolchildren like the protagonist, Toto (Salvatore Cascio), to farmers, nuns, shopkeepers, the town drunk, and uptight civic leaders, thereby give voice to their own visions of acceptable conduct, and changing postwar class, gender, and race relations, in response to the Catholic law of the father.

Moviegoing in *Cinema Paradiso* is far from a monological communicational process in which spectators are forced into "an absorbed, identifying viewing position" (Hansen, 1993, p. 21), and addressed as mere recipients of European and US film culture. Rather, it is an expressive as much as a consumptive practice. Indeed, the cinema triangulates power between the villagers, the central political

authority (here the church), and the film narratives themselves, which, like Biblical stories, provide parables for public negotiations of the good. The censored movies, which raise a wide variety of social and political issues, may dictate the topics of public debate, but they can scarcely anticipate how viewers will receive these narratives and negotiate their relationships with the social norms, fashions, styles, and modes of individual conduct they depict. *Cinema Paradiso* thus foregrounds viewers' boisterous expressions of *dissent*, which target the church's rigid denial of their visual pleasure, as well as the movies' risqué renderings of new ways of being: secular US lifestyles, immodest Parisian fashions, and independent women, for instance, elicit public disapproval.

In fact, in the manner of a local political or religious authority figure, Alfredo the projectionist must manage and appease unruly crowds. When a group of latecomers toting their own chairs is denied entry and begins disturbing the peace in the town square, Alfredo responds ingeniously by appending a mirror to his projector, which reflects the movie onto the white façade of a building across the *piazza*. A resident of the building, startled by the incursion of light, must shut his blinds to avoid becoming part of the film himself. Toto, the young boy who has been Alfredo's apprentice in the projection room, is dazzled by what he sees, and will, in fact, grow into an esteemed film producer in the postwar world of



**Figure 1. Toto and Alfredo enjoy the outdoor cinema they have created. © 1988 Miramax Films**

opportunity. As people fill the *piazza* keen to watch the outdoor screening, the tiny town physically becomes a cinema in this celebrated scene. But, as the film makes

clear, for more than twenty years everyday life in the seaside community has been *cinematic*.

For instance, residents of all social classes communicate with one another at the cinema, civilly and sometimes crudely; many emulate the styles of dressing and behaving they see on screen—ornate hats are back in style in Paris, they learn—although they actively resist the trends they consider too risqué; two villagers from different classes (he is in the cheap floor seats, she is in the balcony) meet there, and later appear in the cinema as a couple, and then with a child; the villagers, many of them illiterate, nevertheless learn about world events and collectively bear witness to historical trauma through documentary footage of scores of Italian soldiers who froze while fighting in Russia; and although Toto cannot remember his absent father, who never returned from the war, the villagers remember him as a jovial man who, they tell Toto, resembled Clark Gable. When a list of war dead arrives in the village, and the family learns that the young man had likely been among the frozen soldiers shown in the film, Toto thus has some mnemonic means of grieving. He is able to summon his father symbolically, and let him go, when he sees a large placard for *Gone with the Wind* (1939) in which Clark Gable stands heroically.

How do these celebrated scenes relate to my examination of the cinema's contemporary engagements with the changing norms and injunctions to bear witness prompted by the rise of the global network society? What does this film tell us about the cinema's role in social life today? Do any of these romanticized but genuine possibilities for the cinema, as a hub of democratic public discourse and cultural memory, remain intact in the age of media conglomerates? Can *Cinema Paradiso's* profoundly sentimental rendering of the cinema as a harbinger of changing power relations in a postwar, media-starved Italian village tell us anything significant about

the North American moving image culture of twenty-four hour news broadcasts, embedded combat journalism, amateur video, user-generated content, and photo, video, and file sharing sites? In our wired age of accelerated commerce and transnational interdependence, does the cinema help *form* communities, which it accomplishes in the homogenous Italian village, or *atomize* them along lines of difference?

Like the arresting image of a small village converted into an open-air cinema and illuminated by the light of the projector, the contemporary public sphere has become *cinematic*. This term, as I use it, encompasses the contemporary mediascape of round-the-clock cable news, ubiquitous portable media players and ambient televisions, inescapable urban surveillance, idealized avatars (second selves) inhabiting virtual worlds, personal media portfolios, self-promotional web profiles, celebrity worship, and the theatre of everyday life epitomized by reality television in which ordinary people pursue visibility and fame. We live in a “moving image culture,” according to one of its foremost theorists, Vivian Sobchack (1990, p. 83). And in one sense, we understand a great deal about the social significance of the evolving visual media that have landed us here, given that scholars began examining photography as far back as the 1820s, film at the turn of the century, radio in the twenties, and television in the fifties. In another sense, however, we have scarcely begun to grapple with the implications of living “cinematic and electronic lives” (Sobchack, 1990, p. 83).

## Mapping Our Cinematic Lives

*Cinema Paradiso* ruminates in relevant ways on the intricate communicational processes by which cinematic discourses introduce everyone from overfed American teenagers to rural Nigerian<sup>1</sup> youth to new ways of dressing, talking, rebelling, and conducting themselves—as well as to the distant and proximate upheavals that might otherwise remain invisible to these viewers. Indeed, as the fictional viewers' dissenting voices evidence in *Cinema Paradiso*, the cinema's renderings of the social world never merely influence the moviegoing public in any crude sender-receiver manner; "encoded" messages are not simply "decoded" by viewers according to ideologically compliant or resistant perspectives (Hall, 1980). Instead, the cinema in Tornatore's film, and as I understand it here, is pedagogical in unexpected and often indirect ways; even Jameson (1981; 1988; 1994) would dispel the notion that didactic revolutionary art, for instance, had direct effects on its viewers that would have spurred them into action. Like media generally, motion pictures merely introduce viewers to a range of discourses, which might be appealing, imperialistic, unacceptable, or inspiring for less empowered citizens; spectators never simply decode these polysemantic images and words—just as they cannot take up an external, analytical position in relation to ideological structures—but rather incorporate them into the discourses of their everyday lives. Indeed, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches to visual culture concur that films

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<sup>1</sup> The Nigerian film industry has garnered international attention due to its astonishing output and distribution. Local writers and directors shoot and edit their "films" on video; the costs are low and the production schedules are tight. The films circulate widely on videotape given that a reported 90% of Nigerian households have televisions and VCRs. See *This is Nollywood* (2006), a film by Franco Sacchi, Robert Caputo, and Aimee Corrigan that documents this industry as well as its barriers: international film festivals reject their "video" submissions.

*mean* only in the social world—with its shared systems of meaning, unequal power relations, and privileged positions of enunciation.

Once they are entwined with the rhythms of everyday life, the cinematic discourses in *Cinema Paradiso* predominately challenge the privileged status of the church's injunctions to behave in disciplined ways, to control one's impulses, and to live in ways that benefit the immediate community. In the US today, of course, cinematic discourses often work in the *opposite* way, extending wider societal injunctions to behave in *liberated, individuated* ways, and to increase one's pleasure through private, consumer transactions before considering the broader community. The important point is that in both situations, although it might be more difficult to detect cinema's counter-hegemonic potential today, popular discourses *can* challenge entrenched regimes of social reproduction (Giddens and Turner, 1987). The cinema is edifying *and* liberating for the villagers, after all. And Toto, who is inspired by the wider world he sees on screen, leaves his village and escapes from its ingrained values to become a national figure of note and a philanthropist.

Today, can the cinema serve a similarly disruptive and inspiring role for US citizens? Can films that map new proximities to distant suffering motivate viewers to challenge oppressive and outdated rhythms of consumption and political apathy grounded in the ideology that American supremacy is justifiable? The challenge for all of us in industrialized democracies is not to escape from the constraints of religious dogma, that is, but to escape from the entrenched neoliberal<sup>2</sup> values of insular autonomy, uniqueness, egocentricity and self-improvement, which work to

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<sup>2</sup> By "neoliberal," I refer to the "ideology of individualism, including policies promoting privatization, consumer sovereignty, user-pays, self-reliance, and individual enterprise, as the solution to all economic and social ills" (Peters, 2001, p.125). Neoliberalism—as a political disposition and a social practice—has many additional features, of course, which the following pages address in more detail.



conceal the xenophobia, exploitative labour practices, and imperialist conquest of remaining resources that they reproduce and in many ways necessitate.

Today, when everyone is connected, many scholars focus on US cinema's exploitation of the network society's linkages, which enable less expensive production, promotion, and global distribution (Grainge, 2007; Miller et al. 2001; 2005); fewer trade barriers surely help cement its imperialist domination of foreign film markets. These scholarly perspectives are indispensable in supplying their own cognitive maps of the worldwide expansion of capital and enforcement of American interests. But US cinema is not merely dominating foreign markets, pushing out local productions, and representing the United States and its concerns to the world. Rather, these communicational flows have always worked in reverse as well. From its earliest moments, cinema was concerned with tantalizing Europeans and Americans with pictures of the exotic, the foreign, and the sensational. Just as Italian newsreels, war documentaries, and historical epics introduced images of distant suffering to the people in Alfredo's village, US movies today are capable of representing international upheavals to otherwise insulated citizens, which Americans surely are.

This process has intensified, I suggest, because in the global age US films have themselves become global: studios shoot increasingly on location, they cast international stars and ensure international release dates, and studios employ a wide

range of international directors.<sup>3</sup> European immigrants such as Louis B. Mayer, Adolph Zukor, and Samuel Goldwyn founded Hollywood by producing the most revered pictures of the early years and creating the studio system. But non-European immigrants were prevented from being as successful in Hollywood. Only since the nineties has this trend significantly changed. This internationalization is surely a function of the increasing financial importance of international markets (Boyd-Barrett, 2008). But it is also unquestionably changing the landscapes, people, and perspectives represented in the films and consumed by US viewers. These pictures, that is, may be politically pacifying “spectacles” on the one hand, as Kellner (2003) influentially noted about the “event” film *JFK* (1991) and others, but they may also be simultaneously contributing to a nascent experience of “felt internationalism” (Acland, 2003, p. 229). US cinema exploring recent historical crises, I argue here, joins an array of other media in confronting US viewers with the asymmetrical consequences of lifestyle choices and national policies, forging its own *felt* connections between distant populations in the circuitry of the global network society.

## The Purpose of this Study

Throughout the following chapters, I remain critical of US popular culture’s role in sustaining regressive fictions of American heroism, uniqueness, and essential goodness. As Kellner (2009, p. 2) suggests in *Cinema Wars*, films “transcode”

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<sup>3</sup> Columbia Pictures surprised many by hiring Ang Lee of Taiwan to direct the costume drama *Sense and Sensibility* (1995). The film was hailed as the best Jane Austen adaptation ever filmed and received seven Academy Award nominations. Lee has since been sought for “Americana” projects including the western *Ride with the Devil* (1999), the comic book blockbuster *Hulk* (2003) and the gay cowboy drama *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Mexicans, Brazilians, Germans, Japanese, and Russians are increasingly hired to direct US films today; a profound gender bias nonetheless endures.

(transform as well as encode) the social and political concerns of their historical periods, consciously and unwittingly, and these issues are often tied to crises in US masculinity and morality. In attempting to envision “imaginary solutions to real contradictions,” however, US cinema confronts domestic and global viewers with a vast spectrum of politicized narratives, ranging from counter-cultural phenomena like *Easy Rider* (1969), critical of conservative pro-war sentiments and the widespread antipathy toward “liberal” young people, to *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which celebrated a literalist-fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, against the backdrop of the “war on terror,” and seemed to persuade millions of Catholics and other Christians to take a keen interest in both the selection of a new Pope in 2005 and in the future of their faith(s) generally. Indeed, the vast majority of Hollywood films fall into the latter category given that they celebrate (often without meaning to) US hegemony and the domestic and international social and economic conditions that sustain this arrangement. As Jameson (1979) and Kellner (1995) illustrate, even the blockbuster *Jaws* (1975), which millions presumably sought out as pure escapism from the dire economic conditions of the period, unfolds as a class allegory that celebrates the endurance of the American middleclass and white male hegemony.

But cinema’s potentially *progressive* role in social life is also a key site of inquiry here. It may indeed be the case that in the age of the network society the cinema’s real and “abstract sense of simultaneous engagement permits us to think in terms of affiliation” with others whom we may never meet, but who may nevertheless become our “political community” (Acland, 2004, p. 903-904). Like the Italian villagers who collectively experience a sense of global mobility and communal belonging by visiting the cinema, many millions of people today, in stable and unstable regions of the globe, surely find in internationally circulating US movies a

range of perspectives to share, engage, challenge, and even glean for their unwitting insights into the machinations of Euro-American power. And within the United States, popular cinema may well be playing a similarly complex role in an age when American hegemony is no longer secure and the country's endeavours to maintain its wealth can scarcely be defended on ethical grounds. Based upon the corpus of films examined here, I suggest that American viewers confront much more than reflections of their own ideological dispositions when they visit the cinema. As Zaniello (2007) notes in *The Cinema of Globalization*, films addressing the "new economic order" can be detected in nearly every popular Hollywood genre, from "women's films" about downsized Wal-Mart employees forced to sleep in the store's parking lot (*Where the Heart Is*, 2000), to "network narratives" (Bordwell, 2007) about global commodities cartels (*Traffic*, 2000; *Beyond Borders*, 2003; *Syriana*, 2005; *Blood Diamond*, 2006). These films, regardless of their narrative form or genre, confront mainstream audiences with the largely unfamiliar, suppressed, and even traumatic externalities of US hegemony in the global age.

Of all the social tasks the cinema performs in *Cinema Paradiso*, I am most interested in the way it confronts the villagers with images of distant suffering and potentially poses some difficult questions about Italy's role in the war. Many of the villagers, like our protagonist and his mother, live their daily lives with questions about the recent war—a traumatic absence that haunts them due to its mysterious invisibility and unintelligibility. Building upon foundational studies of cinema, reception, and community formation (Hansen, 1993; 1996; Mayne, 1993; Stacey, 1994; Staiger, 1993; 2005), I would like to show similarly that contemporary US cinema is actively configuring the semiotics of global trauma, from armed conflicts to human trafficking networks, and making a range of international events intelligible to

millions of citizens with pressing questions about whether their lifestyles are contributing to the good.

The ideological limitations of commercially-driven popular culture constrict these depictions, of course, but make the films all the more sociologically valuable given that my goal is to gauge popular understandings of neoliberal globalization generally, and of the network society's enabling and oppressive elements specifically. US cinema anchors this investigation for three primary reasons. First, each of the twelve films comprising my corpus attempts to elicit certain politicized responses to contemporary global traumas by engaging in a type of public pedagogy. In the manner of investigative journalists, the creative workers driving these socially engaged films take it upon themselves to expose international human rights crises, repressive regimes, and often US corporate or governmental complicity. The films, that is, are concerned with the real and deploy a variety of conventions to communicate the authenticity of the events they re-stage. The films, however, are narrative films that modify but never dramatically diverge from established cinematic conventions. As a result, they provide spectators with an experience that encompasses everything from sensations of mastery and visual omnipresence, to sensations of lack, impotence, and guilt, as I will explore.

Second, the contemporary cinema of globalization I examine is culturally significant because it exploits additional psychological terrain that is arguably unique to our age of anxiety. The imperatives to govern the self operationalized through these narratives, whether they are about discipline and conduct (Foucault), control (Deleuze), mastery (Mulvey), or subversive democratization (Feenberg), derive power from the widely held public sentiments that they address—the “public feelings” that characterize divergent responses to life in the global network society (Berlant,

2000). Naturally, these feelings include the fear, anger, and xenophobia that gripped many citizens of liberal democracies in the wake of September 11, 2001. Specific affective resources were mobilized in support of US and coalition military initiatives targeting al Qaeda, the Taliban, international terrorist cells, and eventually the political regime in Iraq. These public sentiments also encompass the adjoining emotions of Western “economic guilt” (Clover, 1993) stemming from what many see as oppressive Euro-American trading policies; driven by “liberalization” and the obliteration of traditional economies in favour of those most pliable by Western interests, these economic policies fuel the metastasising global network society, but they also engender much of the rage that motivates fringe groups to commit acts of terrorism and perpetuate other global traumas.

Responding affectively to global traumas, whether these responses are characterized by fear of the other, by economic guilt, or by the will to thwart the exploitation of subjugated groups, is a defining experience of our age. Because one cannot view a photograph of human suffering, according to Susan Sontag in her influential book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), without either participating in the perpetuation of that suffering, or advocating its abolition, some scholars suggest that negotiating one’s response to trauma is a *prerequisite* for enlightened “global citizenship” (Rentschler, 2004)—a set of affectively (more than juridically) enforced practices of the self that I will examine in some detail.

The third reason why cinema provides such rich raw material for the study of networks and affective responses to suffering therefore stems from its configurations of *being* itself. Mainstream cinema is able to choreograph the Hollywood humanitarian celebrity economy in uniquely sophisticated ways, yielding indelible portraits of ideal conduct and ways of being in an age when the network *itself*

functions as the surveilling “big Other,” or “infinite ethical relation” (Butler, 2005, p. x). In our neoliberal moment, when injunctions to govern and transform the self dominate public discourses, we should scrutinize how popular representations of ideal social selfhood take form.

The “cinematic global citizen,” I suggest, encompasses a discourse of performed, governed and arguably disciplined subjectivity that serves as a site of identification for a weakened and unanchored incarnation of postmodern subjectivity. These citizens’ efforts and media presence are not insignificant. Actor Leonardo DiCaprio is currently publicizing his efforts to construct the largest ecologically sound hotel and resort on his land in the Mayan Riviera; Actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have been instrumental in rebuilding devastated New Orleans suburbs whilst residing there and employing leading architects; Jolie has purchased hundreds of acres of rainforest in Cambodia to create a wildlife preserve; Mia Farrow undertook a hunger strike last year to raise awareness around the dire conditions in Darfur, Sudan; and among hundreds of Hollywood activists, Harrison Ford and Robert Redford are notable for their longstanding chairmanships of well-funded land conservation organizations. These figures can mingle with Presidents, Prime Ministers and policymakers, but perhaps more importantly, they can command public attention and embody idealized forms of conduct, as they do on screen.

This form of public pedagogy is particularly notable given that today’s secular, consumer societies are populated with millions of citizens who unsurprisingly feel the anonymity of living amid multitudes of others and beneath the crushing communicational environment of commercial culture. The experience of being addressed as a consuming mass stimulates many to search for meaning and a repository for their energies, which are additionally pent up by the stifling and

alienating conditions created by capitalism's narrow focus on private accumulation. Although many of us express and even experience our goals as if they are rooted in self-improvement and individuated self-actualization, we are in fact more than willing to *submit* to the authority of an opinion leader or adopt the practices of a "pseudo-collective" in order to feel a semblance of agency (Gunster, 2004, p. 55). We seek membership, which offers both sameness and distinction, with the hope of experiencing the very communal relations with others that capitalist modernity ruptured and continues to strain, even in the midst of burgeoning pseudo-collectives organized commercially around community improvement, renovation projects, cultural pursuits, or fundraising.

Celebrity culture, populated by millionaire athletes, musicians, authors, directors, performing artists, and even CEOs and heads of state, offers a host of authority figures in its economy of stardom and taunts the middle classes with the notion that we join a dynamic social collective by becoming a fan. Sports supply powerful narratives that celebrate the individual discipline and close-knit community values widely understood to produce star athletes. These stories are incorporated into conceptions of the nation more broadly (Gruneau and Whitson, 1993). Because the product of Hollywood films and celebrity discourses is narrative *itself*, the cinema is unique in its choreography of individual performers' "stardoms" (read as kingdoms), which are configured by savvy agents and producers in the on-screen *and* off-screen endeavours they conjure for their celebrities. This economy of stardom provides a range of ego-ideals to those in search of aspirational figures; much like the educated, liberal viewer that my corpus of social problem films target as an audience, these performers must continually struggle to conduct themselves ethically in their everyday lives, although they do so by hosting fundraisers and



supporting private charities. The cinema, then, through its narratives of heroism, and through its cultivation of star personae as well, thus supplies alluring but questionable material for the assembly of the cognitive maps through which we can locate ourselves in relation to the social totality.

Comprising diegetic (on screen) and non-diegetic (off screen) discourses, as well as countless global production, marketing, and distribution partnerships that deserve their own study as economic networks, the cinematic network society I investigate here configures stars as ideal global citizens. As noted earlier, this incarnation of stardom is forged at the meeting point between the actual bodies of humanitarian-celebrities, who engage in real world political activity, and the fictional narratives of heroism these symbolic people navigate on screen as aid workers, diplomats, counter-terrorist operatives, and Westerners who encounter the humanity of the other. The ethical injunctions to bear witness, think globally, and consume wisely that characterize the more specific discourse of cinematic global citizenship in the end tell us less about the movies than they tell us about the neoliberal, networked present, and the emerging modes of increasingly privatized, self-regulated conduct that are poised to characterize human relations in the crowded and stratified global cities of the future.

## **Organization of this Study**

This dissertation centrally addresses three concepts: the network, global trauma, and citizenship. It attempts to bridge the fields of technology studies (Castells, Galloway, Terranova), studies of cinema as ideology (Jameson, Kellner, Mulvey), and Foucaultian studies of subjectivity in political philosophy. My arguments

are substantiated by semiological analyses of twelve “global network films”: Steven Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000); Ridley Scott’s *Black Hawk Down* (2001); Martin Campbell’s *Beyond Borders* (2003); Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu’s *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2006); Paul Haggis’s *Crash* (2004; released 2005); Terry George’s *Hotel Rwanda* (2004); Fernando Mierelles’s *The Constant Gardener* (2005); Andrew Niccol’s *Lord of War* (2005); Stephen Gaghan’s *Syriana* (2005); Edward Zwick’s *Blood Diamond* (2006); and Paul Greengrass’s *United 93* (2006). I scrutinize their promotional materials, their critical reception and recognition with Academy Awards, whose ceremonies I have archived, and their configurations of heroism and ideal conduct through their humanitarian stars’ on screen and off screen appearances, in order to contextualize these pictures as individual narratives that are also hubs of public debate.

Chapter 1 delineates the sample of films, and outlines my theoretical approach. The cinema of globalization enables insulated US citizens to see “powerless places,” whose invisibility allows for their ongoing exploitation. Cinema—now downloaded, viewed on portable devices, and consumed in sections as “clips”—thus remains a principal medium within the nascent network society. I provide synopses of my corpus of films and briefly discuss the traumas and networked relations each narrative addresses; in order to gauge the global reach of these narratives, I have also compiled data about each film’s budget, exhibition statistics, and financial performance.

The chapter then examines points of contact between the US Marxist Fredric Jameson, and French post-structuralist thinkers Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan (Dolar, 1999; Hook, 2007; 2008). For Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980a; 1980b; 1980c), power in modern societies no longer emanates solely from state apparatuses or

centralized authorities but circulates throughout the micro dynamics of social and personal life. Lacan (1977), by contrast, sees our pursuit of and subjection to power as a process—albeit an interminable one—motivated by the pleasure principle and organized around the supreme gaze of the omnipresent Other. These incompatible theories of power, however, are curiously consistent with the twin processes of individuation and homogenization that characterize life in neoliberal postmodernity (Cobley, 2002; Jameson, 1991). Concrete examples abound, including the increased “liberalization” of transnational trade and the private individual’s mobility, and the concurrent proliferation of surveillance and security measures intended to constrain this mobility by subjecting individuals and entire communities to the gaze of an all-seeing authority.

Chapter 2 surveys the most prescient research on cinema, emotional citizenship, and society, providing a very brief history of the cinema’s relationship with the US public sphere throughout the twentieth century. Consistent with many of these studies’ findings, my proposal is that cinema can be understood as a hub of civil social life in liberal democracies, hindered by the pacifying and often regressive narratives Hollywood dispenses but not solely defined by these constraints. Cinema is much more than the Frankfurt School’s pessimistic accounts envision it to be; not only were these thinkers writing at too early a stage to grasp what the cinema would become, but they were also understandably suspicious of mass culture and any technologies used to target mass sentiment. Just as trips to the cinema offered early twentieth century US immigrants “prosthetic memories” of their adopted nation’s history of slavery and bloody conflict against a backdrop of vast frontiers (Landsberg, 2004), the cinema today can, at its best, offer displaced populations and unwitting

Western hyper-consumers alike some vision of the world that exists beyond the realm of *their* local experiences—with its liberating possibilities and its traumas.

Chapter 3 provides a definition of the global network film as an outgrowth of *five* earlier film forms. The first of these is the “social problem film” of the thirties, forties, and fifties, in which protagonists struggle with issues such as prejudice, addiction, poverty, or crime; second is the “economic guilt film,” popular since the seventies, in which socially privileged citizens confront the suffering of the underclass, usually within their own country; third is the “city film” in which strangers often experience traumatic encounters in concrete landscapes; fourth is the “eco-trauma film” in which natural disasters, the effects of pollution, or menacing creatures threaten the social order; and fifth is the “contagion-carrier film” in which global human networks are mapped through the movement of a virus. As this list illustrates, these film traditions themselves evidence preoccupations with ruptures to the social order and correct responses, as well as with *relations* themselves.

In the earliest of these, the social problem film, a bourgeois white male protagonist typically confronts the “other,” an indigent, an addict, an oppressed African American, or a delinquent teen, and comes to understand his ethical relation to that person (Patton, 2007). These films envision a vast distance between the main controlling figure and the subjugated person or population s/he confronts; the work of the narrative is, of course, to bridge that distance. In the contagion-carrier film, the most recent social cinema tradition prior to the global network film, however, relations between once separate socio-economic, ethnic, regional and national populations are characterized from the start as proximate and even *entangled* and strained. These films envision an almost claustrophobic propinquity between people.

Global network films constitute an innovation in the history of cinema, but they nonetheless digest existing genres and are thus derivative as well—especially of the economic guilt films that examine disparity and vengeance. If genres are machines of difference, global network films attempt to operate within a terrain of difference, as thoughtful, humane, and edifying in relation to Hollywood’s onslaught of blockbusters, sequels, remakes, and lucrative franchises. The chapter examines how these films extend the tradition of the economic guilt film, and various other socially-minded film traditions including Spielberg’s indelible interventions and more recent developments such as the eco-trauma film and the contagion-carrier film, which maps networked global relations through the journey of a virus. From the earliest social problem film, in which people are socially segregated, to the most recent contagion film, in which people inhabit a densely populated world, these cinematic traditions are all about *proximities* and the ethical responses and modes of conduct they demand. The global network film, in which disparate actors find themselves constellated by a traumatic event or revelation, pilfers and extends these traditions even while it provides uniquely contemporary, albeit highly contradictory, ruminations on the global network society.

Chapter 4 devotes discrete attention to the seven global network films that depict the unmanageable nature of global networks. Each film renders its central agent somewhat helpless and isolated. Furthermore, each narrative fails or refuses to locate or assign guilt for the various traumas that occur. These films explore the subject’s place in the “global system,” that is, but foreground the sense of futility that their protagonists experience in the face of the oppressive labour conditions and corruption that they strain to map intelligibly (Jameson, 1988, p. 347). Although these narratives vary widely, the films depict technological (*Black Hawk Down*),

economic (*Traffic*, *Beyond Borders*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Babel*), and interpersonal (*21 Grams*, *Crash*) connectedness not as an end in itself, an inevitability with only democratizing possibilities for symmetrical transnational commerce, but as a formation that enables exploitation, anonymity, alienation, new affective proximities, and new ethical responsibilities to the other.

Chapter 5 investigates the five films that present protagonists with moderate to considerable measures of agency as individuals. Because these agents take action against unethical practices, the narratives necessarily assign guilt to malevolent nodes in the networks they explore. Although global network can dissipate accountability, *The Constant Gardener*, *Lord of War*, *Syriana*, *Blood Diamond*, and *United 93* demonstrate that corporate avarice, corrupt Western diplomats, and extreme forms of religious fundamentalism are often squarely the culprits, just as they are in traditional conspiracy narratives (Pratt, 2001). In the films examined here, Western agents and entire organizations are found to be accountable, even amid the dizzying relations characteristic of global networks. The central men in these films are *able* to intervene in limited ways to prevent suffering or thwart criminality, belying some hope for the more symmetrical relations promised by the global network society (Castells, 2001).

In Chapter 6, I deploy Mulvey's (1975) classic approach to narrative cinema, albeit in a somewhat modified and less Lacanian manifestation, to examine how the contemporary symbolic economy of US cinema may inadvertently be "gendering" impotence and the resulting guilt according to the oppressive categories of active masculinity and passive femininity. In line with poststructuralist reading practices, my inquiry sidelines the presumed intentions of the filmmakers, however admirable. In spite of the progressive narratives they intend to assemble, directors depend on

inherited conventions, which can reinscribe the sexism and racism the films aim to transcend. Gender and race figure particularly strongly in the “network of looks” these films orchestrate, and the economy of guilt they arrange (Kaplan, 1997). For analysis here, I single out Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000) (based on the British series *Traffik* 1989), the seminal “multi-plot” story of American middleclass complicity with brutal globalized drug cartels (Nystrom, 2008; Shaw, 2005); Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006), the fictional story of American tourists who spark an international media frenzy when they are “victimized” by Arabs while vacationing in Morocco; and three “Africa” films—Mierelles’s *The Constant Gardener* (2005), Niccol’s *Lord of War* (2005), and Caton-Jones’s *Shooting Dogs* (2005). The latter film is a British dramatization of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, examined here for its race and gender politics but excluded from the wider study because it was produced by the BBC and not a US studio.

In scrutinizing all of these films, feminist film theory best enables the difficult work of critiquing politically progressive films for their unconsciously regressive representations of gender, and particularly their feminization of guilt. As Mulvey (1975, p. 6) famously argued, narrative film “depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world,” inscribing her image as a “lynch pin to the system” because “it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence.” But in these narratives, the male symbolic presence or assumed potency is cast into crisis: Western men fail to protect their own families, and thus face humiliation when they are deployed to macro-level traumas such as warfare and starvation. Given that we are all ostensibly aligned with this male screen surrogate in the act or spectatorship, my proposal is that *guilt* emerges as a primary psychological response in the implied spectator, and that this guilt is displaced

“hysterically” onto images of Western women (Modleski, 1991). Impotence and inaction thus commingle in disturbing ways, as Romeo Dallaire’s (2003) military-masculine account of the Rwandan Civil War illustrates, but in less extreme and less tangible instances of violence and oppression, *how* to act ethically is often less clear.

Chapter 7 therefore considers the central question of this dissertation: how are contemporary global networks altering our ethical responsibilities to one another? In his essay “Perpetual Peace,” Kant (1795) considered this question as shipping networks began to “thicken” two centuries ago. As Kant’s inquiries and recent analyses of the ethics of globalization evidence (Appiah, 2006; Sassen 1998), our trajectory from premodern social beings, to subjects of modern power and knowledge, to objectified actors operating in the network society has inevitably modified human consciousness and our ethical relations with one another. Cinematic narratives, I propose, may be offering Americans and others a means of mapping the social totality and configuring our modes of conduct and agency within the network society. In the familiar, utopian terms of popular culture generally, the films often suggest, like Kant, that Western subjectivity can and should be ethically reconfigured to account for and eradicate the suffering of others who, by virtue of their suffering, are not being treated as selves. In the simplest sense, I ask *how* the network operates in these celluloid worlds and *what* the hero does.

Several principal figures respond defensively to the traumas they witness, for instance, and attempt to maintain their previous lifestyles of privilege. Others abandon their insular consumer lifestyles and even join forces with people of different nationalities, religions, and social classes to oppose further exploitation. Through such practices, these more sympathetic protagonists influence popular notions of what global citizenship looks like. If cinema can offer us objects of libidinal



investment (celebrities) that promote emulation and changes in conduct (to promote peace in Darfur like Mia, to reduce one's eco footprint like Leo, to donate to New Orleans's reconstruction like Brad), how might cinema be able to map otherwise unrepresentable global networks in similarly influential ways? Since Kant diagnosed the ethical implications of thickening nautical networks at the height of European imperialism, global connectedness has merited a transnational or *supranational* code of ethics to accompany these new proximities. Despite various UN declarations, however, no such code has been able to govern the conduct of the power brokers, who have "ravaged wages and ravaged bodies" in pursuit of hegemony in the global marketplace (Berlant, 2000, p. 42). And even if we could come to understand *what* the proper ethical response to specific instances of human suffering would be, another complex matter is surely *how* we would each take political action. Activism is not merely big business; activism is cinematic.

The Conclusion, devoted to the "cinematic global citizen," assesses how US popular culture envisions successful political activism, associating it with *individual* agency as a response to discourses of governmental and diplomatic impotence. Against the backdrop of the failure of US national security on September 11, 2001, and the Republican administration's failure to locate Osama Bin Laden or neutralize Al Qaeda after nearly a decade of military activity, I examine how the *privatization* of political action is valorized in the Hollywood star economy. As a way of incorporating stars' more "spontaneous" expressions of global citizenship, I discuss several celebrities' politicized speeches at two post-9/11 Academy Awards ceremonies, including the infamous 2003 Oscar night scheduled on the eve of the US-led invasion of Iraq. Humanitarian celebrities operate as cinematic global citizens by portraying revered historical figures, aid workers, politicians, and soldiers in a range

of global contexts on screen, and by engaging in volunteer work, fundraising, and humanitarian activities off screen—and the Academy Awards ceremonies problematize this distinction. Cinematic imagery and real life political activities have become confusingly entwined, comprising a key element of the cinematic *dispositif*, which, as I will argue, forms the core of the cinematic network society.

The cinematic global citizen is a potentially disruptive and politically progressive incarnation of contemporary subjectivity, not least because of the ambiguities it presents. Can committed political activists totally dismiss as spurious the actions of the US actress, famous for films in which she protects ancient ruins and indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia, who privately purchased hundreds of forested acres in Cambodia and who, in response to government inaction, sponsored a wildlife preserve there? By adopting babies from African and Asian countries, organizing fundraisers and political rallies, and even working as UN Ambassadors, many other celebrities commingle with heads of state and policymakers in a manner that has become surprisingly acceptable, in spite of a host of values- and lifestyle-based contradictions. Celebrities, for instance, have the world's largest ecological footprints due to their reliance upon private jets and their exorbitant consumer habits. Their ethical social activities, while possibly earnest on an individual level, are thus quite in line with neoliberal injunctions to respond *privately* to human suffering, often simply through altering one's shopping habits.

Such individuated forms of activism, which often promote a cultural spectacle such as a globally televised concert like Live Aid (1985, 2005) or the worldwide release of a film, risk obscuring—even while they may intend to publicize—the larger, complex, and systemic sources of poverty and political violence. In fact, these spectacles of celebrity activism often add to the momentum of “free market”

discourses that disdain state intervention and regard government initiatives as unappealing and impotent. Practicing one's citizenship privately is dangerously in vogue. The discourse of global citizenship, and cinematic global citizenship more narrowly, has emerged concurrently with our era of networked flows of people and commodities, as I will argue, because the global citizen's prescribed habits of donating privately and consuming ethically represent forms of political activism which scarcely destabilise transnational capitalist logic.

Like the Italian village in *Cinema Paradiso*, the world today has become cinematic, a theatre of economic expansion, warfare, trauma, suffering, and humanitarianism and healing in which two thirds of the population have never used a computer and the remaining third of the globe's inhabitants, it seems, all want to be famous. Our world is illuminated not by a lone movie projector, however, like the one that converted the *piazza* into a cinema, but by the energies of an increasingly connected global populace. As people around the world consume, debate, celebrate, and disdain the cinema of globalization for its progressive and reactionary messages, they may begin to find common ground in (or in opposition to) these uncanny approximations of life in the age of connection, as well as its ongoing traumas. Some might endeavour to challenge the ideological limitations of these representations. Some might join an advocacy group concerned with ecological or human rights issues. Some will simply ponder global inequalities. Many will do nothing. Others might circulate their opinions on discussion boards, or feel moved to film their own reality, and use a video-sharing website to transmit their own visions of the world to distant regions of the globe—themselves bearing witness to, even as they foster, the birth of the cinematic network society.

## Chapter 1

### Global Network Films as Symbolic Apparatuses

Everyone is connected. This metaphysical adage pervades contemporary discussions of globalization. But the specific variety of international and interpersonal connections forged by the processes of globalization are economic rather than divine. Indeed, global economic networks have been investigated for centuries in a range of cultural forms. Most prominently, imperialist adventure stories have charted the journeys of countless Westerners whose encounters with colonial natives often forced them to confront their economic entanglements with suffering populations. One might remember the remarkable moment near the conclusion of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1901) when Marlow meets the villain Kurtz's grieving fiancée in Belgium and notices her grand piano. Marlow likely recalls Kurtz's hoard of bloody elephant tusks, obtained with slave labour in the Congo, and thus with its ivory keys the piano is at once a document of civilisation and barbarism. Standing "massively in the corner," the piano's beauty is contaminated by "dark gleams on the flat surfaces," which convert it into "a sombre and polished sarcophagus" (1901, p. 118). Marlow thus confronts the death and suffering sealed within the "polished" surfaces of the commodity form, which links him, through a global network, to the traumas of the Congolese people under Belgian rule. Is Marlow's experience of the horror looming within the commodity form not inescapable in our age of transnational capitalism? As citizens of liberal democracies, do our daily confrontations with commodities, from energy resources to ephemera produced in oppressive international circumstances, not summon similar sensations of connectedness, guilt, and horror?

In today's network society, advanced information and communication networks arguably preclude our need to travel, as Marlow had to, in order to survey the world beyond our borders (Castells, 1996; 2001; 2009; Galloway, 2004; Terranova, 2004). The images and narratives these networks disseminate allow us to bear vicarious witness to the traumas of global capitalism from home (Kaplan, 2008; Rentschler, 2004). Promotional, journalistic, televisual, and cinematic discourses documenting or dramatising resource-driven and ideological conflicts, extremism, and exploited labour now confront even the most complacent consumers, enabling us ultimately to consume our own guilt. In promotional culture, images of smiling but gaunt Ethiopian and Guatemalan faces encase packages of Fair Trade coffee, reminding us of our connectedness to the other. In television journalism, we are presented with images of traumatised Afghan, Iraqi, Congolese, and Sudanese civilians nightly (Chouliaraki, 2006);<sup>4</sup> fictional television series such as Fox's terrorism drama "24" (2001-), in which torture figures prominently (Downing, 2007), ABC's "Lost" (2004-), about the US military-industrial complex, and NBC's apocalyptic "Heroes" (2006- ), in which the New York skyline is frequently obliterated, additionally depict Americans becoming embroiled in clandestine global networks. And American narrative cinema, a puzzling contributor to the global economy of signs, has conjured powerful and troubling images of life in the traumatic twenty first century.

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<sup>4</sup> Terranova (2004) notes that "in terms of the actual power to capture the passions of the global masses, the Internet is no match for the reach and power of television, which, from local and national broadcasting channels to satellite TV such as CNN and Al-Jazeera, can count on the wider accessibility of the technology (the TV set) and on the high impact of images and sounds broadcast in real time" (2004, p. 41). Television figures in my analysis for related reasons. But since Terranova's study appeared, computers have become the preferred means of viewing television programming in wealthy parts of the world, often through TV networks' websites.

## The Role of Cinema

How do twenty first century US global network films map the network society's possibilities, consequences, and traumas, and why do their depictions matter?

These cultural texts warrant attention because, historically, as technological and commercial conditions have changed, popular discourses circulated and debated in the public sphere have provided an indispensable space for the negotiation of new modes of human experience, new quests for meaning and belonging, and thus new techniques for managing our conduct under the gaze of the surveilling big Other.<sup>5</sup>

These films are additionally relevant to the process of mapping the contemporary machinations of capitalism because they envision various *types* of networks—transnational technological-communicational networks, commercial trading networks, and intersubjective *human* networks—as facets of the broader network society. The films' remind us that there are network *societies*, challenging our inherited notions of *the* network society as principally a technological and commercial formation (Castells and Henderson, 1987; Castells, 1996; 2001; Mattelart, 2000). US narrative cinema's interventions in the contemporary symbolic economy warrant attention because against the long backdrop of Hollywood's politicized history the industry continues to play a central role in rendering human rights struggles visible and intelligible. Indeed

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<sup>5</sup> The "big Other," addressed in more detail ahead, is "that before which you make yourself recognized" (Lacan, 2004 [1981], p. 51), the omnipresent governor of the Symbolic Order. Although the Other can also refer to the "unknowable neighbour" I use the term "other" throughout this study to refer to the human other, and those populations subjugated by Western epistemology and cast as the other of European civilization (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988).

global network cinema extends the tradition of the “social problem film” of the thirties, forties, and fifties (Roffman and Purdy, 1981).<sup>6</sup>

These twelve films are concerned not with alcoholism, delinquency, or big city crime, however, but with the traumas of life in the age of globalization, including intensifying conflicts over dwindling resources, polarizing economic conditions, US militarism, terrorist threats, human rights violations, and the suffering wrought by the exploitation of migrant labour, pharmaceutical interventions in Africa, international drug cartels, transnational weapons cartels, blood diamond cartels, and Arab-American oil cartels. As Castells and Henderson (1987, p. 7) noted early on in their ruminations on the network society, “The new territorial dynamics...tend to be organized around the contradiction between placeless power and powerless places.” By visually mapping distant suffering for the Western gaze in progressive, regressive, and ambiguous ways, post-2000 global network cinema, with its commerce in sentimentality and its paradoxical fixation on the hardships of life in powerless places, illustrates that the new connections enabled by transnational networks beget new ethical injunctions for empowered actors in the West to respond to the trauma of the other.

If the externalities of the new economic order are the focus of this study, one might wonder why international cinema produced in oppressed regions such as Iran, Palestine, Burma, Sudan, rural China, and Afghanistan are not the primary focus. Although these narratives would surely offer indelible imagery of social problems

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<sup>6</sup> African American actress Hattie McDaniel won the 1939 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role (albeit as Mammy, the archetypal black maid) in Victor Fleming’s *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Her victory surprised and even angered many in the US and in liberal Hollywood given the strict segregation laws active during this period. In Chapter 5, I briefly examine how the “race” films *A Gentleman’s Agreement* (1941), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) envisioned changing white male conduct during the civil rights movement.

unfamiliar to many of us in the West, my study examines US representations of the world (and of *itself* in the world) with the aforementioned goal of contextualizing how popular discourses envision the Western subject's changing responsibilities in an interconnected world. How international cinema confronts this implied middleclass viewer is another compelling question entirely. US studio productions merit analysis because they uniquely explore the concerns of our age, and are often framed by the ideological dispositions of their privileged creators and financiers. In the landscape of globalized film production, in which Hong Kong, Toronto, Vancouver, and Wellington, for instance, have surprisingly emerged as major hubs, my focus requires justification.

First, the films I examine dramatize and interrogate—like the imperialist fiction written from Western perspectives that informs them—how suffering can proliferate as transnational trading networks metastasise. That is, they overwhelmingly present the perspective of Western liberal humanism, and elicit guilt or outrage in viewers who are assumed to share this disposition; importantly, these are often studios' "prestige" pictures and are envisaged to appeal to a specific American population known in the contemporary vernacular as "liberal elite" or red state audiences. As with news media, popular media forms often reinforce the ideological dispositions of the viewers or readers who seek them out. Scholars should thus be wary of reading the films as *exposés* of distant suffering that confront conservative US communities whose ideological footings would likely lead them to avoid such narratives, and to reject their "liberal" characterizations of American hegemony.

Second, global network films are a somewhat unique formation within mainstream popular cinema. Their thematic concerns with exploitation and social problems are scarcely new, as I discuss later, but their *formal features* are notable.



To varying degrees, they rely on a relatively new multi-plot grammar (Nystrom, 2008; Schantz, 2008) characterized by depictions of seemingly discrete narrative strands. Of course, US cinema cannot be credited with this innovative narrative strategy, which arose in European cinema (Krzysztof Kieslowski's famed trilogy *Red, White, and Blue*, 1993-1994) and Asian cinema (Zhang Yimou's "coincidence" films, *To Live*, 1994, *Riding Alone*, 2005) in unique ways. The original British miniseries *Traffik* (1989), which informs each of the twelve films addressed here, presents an exemplary multi-plot narrative: an Afghan farmer is threatened by his creditors and turns to opium farming; a German socialite works to maintain her social standing by trafficking the Afghan shipments to Western Europe and the UK; and in London, a politician and his wife cope with their daughter's heroine addiction. The only connective tissue is, of course, the drugs themselves—or, in considering the machinations of the network society more broadly, we might be tempted to say that it is *capital* itself. Although not all of the network films here involve multiple plots in this way, multi-plot grammar is adept at cognitively mapping the intertwining lives enrolled in these networks.

And third, although Asian and European productions can increasingly afford major stars, US cinema deserves analysis because it maintains a unique ability to choreograph the Hollywood humanitarian-star economy in exceptionally sophisticated ways. This configuration of the private citizen acting discretely to combat a social problem is not unique however. In fact, "in our neoliberal, individualizing times," when the "psychological imperative to improve and transform the self...dominates popular culture," paying attention to the construction of ideal social selfhood in the cinema and other popular discourses is crucial (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008, p. 235).

## **Delineating the Sample**

The twelve films examined here were selected from a diverse assortment of US films released in North America since 2000. But are these films “representative” of social, cultural, or technological trends? And if so, what do they represent? First, I would like to make clear that no sample of films from this period would be able to offer a wholly “representative” illustration of the global network society as it is popularly envisioned and understood. Even if every film produced during this period were included, results would only become more confusing and contradictory (examined in Chapter 4) and interpretations of individual elements would introduce additional ambiguities. In the present study of twelve films, the findings indeed vary, although I assert several overarching conclusions about these films’ reverence for insular, private, individual action, often configured around celebrity, a celebration of the individual which is ideologically consistent with neoliberal politics and discourses more broadly. In their variety, these films exemplify the multifarious nature of Hollywood’s optimistic, foreboding, ambivalent and bewildered engagements with the complexities of conducting oneself as a privileged Westerner in an age of technological connectedness and increasingly visible global traumas (Kaplan, 2008). Although the sample could have included dozens of films, some compelling texts simply had to be culled from the final selection in order to ensure that each picture could receive substantive individual analysis.

## **Documentary**

Given my focus, why not address documentaries, which routinely attend to social problems? Whereas documentaries initially figured in this analysis, their

distinct origins as “anthropological” inquiries, and their parallel history outside of popular culture ruled them out (Barnouw, 1993; Bruzzi, 2000; Ellis and McLane, 2005; Nichols, 1992). Indeed, early versions of this study considered the ways in which documentaries such as Marcel Ophuls’s World War II film *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969) and the director’s Nazi war criminal film *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie* (1987) were influential—even within the United States where the first film was nominated and the second won an Academy Award—in framing complex political issues in order to “moralize spectators” in specific ways. As I viewed these 4 hour films repeatedly, I realized that what compelled me about them was their assembly of seemingly countless *perspectives* on the *same events*, and indeed on a central, irrefutable trauma. How could these talking heads have such wildly different perspectives on the same events?

This was a communicational problem, of course, but also an epistemological one. Particularly in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, Ophuls illustrates how the same event—the horrifying abduction of Jews from a small French town—can be understood in staggeringly incompatible ways, depending upon the social class of the “witness.” The more I traversed this film, the subject of a directed reading course, the more I realized that it was this multi-perspectival formation that fascinated me. Although many villagers turned a blind eye to the suffering of their neighbours, no one could see the whole picture if they tried, and those in positions of privilege were almost oblivious to the organized political violence destroying the countryside. Like trauma itself, the 1940-44 German Occupation of France, that is, supplied an “unrepresentable” web of complexity that defied individuals’ attempts to map it cognitively (Jameson, 1988, p. 348). It is unsurprising, then, that my earlier

investigations of such seminal documentaries led me toward the present analysis of films that endeavor to map similarly complex processes.

War documentaries surely have a complex relationship with Hollywood fiction films (documentaries are often remade as narrative films; Hollywood filmmakers such as George Stevens were employed by the US Army to film the liberation of camps such as Dachau) but scholars must be wary about making any claims about their “influence”; social problem fiction films and historical epics such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) arose prior to activist documentaries, after all. Still, formal innovations in postwar documentary left their mark upon the jarring aesthetics of the “New Waves” in France and the US during the sixties. The *Cinema Verite* documentary movement in Europe, and the Direct Cinema movement in North America were both aided by portable sound technology and smaller cameras that enabled filmmakers to navigate city streets (*Chronicle of a Summer*, 1960), crowds (*Woodstock*, 1969) and door-to-door sales in suburbia (*Salesman*, 1968). In narrative cinema production, the steadycam enabled the photographer to walk among crowds and between actors using a body harness that stabilized the image. Although such advancements are technological and cannot be attributed to documentary, the purpose of the steadycam—to produce more intimate, mobile, dynamic scenes—mirrors the aim of all great social documentaries. Had documentaries figured in my analysis, it would have become a *comparative* study, however, and detailing their distinct history would divert attention from the network films in question.

In addition, social justice or human rights documentaries are produced in such numbers each year in the Americas that a study of just *one* social issue rendered in non-fiction film—the introduction of genetically modified crops, for instance—could

sustain an entire dissertation. Although I cannot address them here, documentaries are present in this study by virtue of their absence. Various recent documentaries directly concerned with global networks have framed many of the debates around neoliberal globalization in compelling terms. The Oscar-nominated film *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004) examines the extraction of Tanzania's fish stocks (predatory species introduced by the British) by Eastern European air freight companies that deliver the fish to Western Europe and return to the African country with different cargo: assault weapons; *Our Daily Bread* (2005) and *Food, Inc.* (2009) are devastating exposés of commercial food cartels, which dehumanize food workers just as they brutalize livestock and land; *Black Coffee* (2005) and *Black Gold* (2005) present multi-plot vignettes about those involved in the coffee trade, from Costa Rican farmers to Seattle millionaires; *The Price of Sugar* (2007) concerns the cane sugar trade and US sanctions against poor Caribbean nations in order to promote the use of corn syrup; *King Corn* (2008) follows an acre of Iowa corn through a network of government subsidy programs aimed at producing the cheapest possible food supply—beef and corn syrup—which become hamburgers and soft drinks, also known as “fast food.” Viewing these films helped me see that the network is not merely a principal formation of our age, but a mechanism of fascination and widespread investigation. Indeed, popular and documentary films are not the only media forms attempting to chart the intricacies of clandestine connections.

## **Television**

Television, such as the aforementioned “Lost” and “Heroes,” has used tested and innovative generic formats to grapple with the challenges of the age of connection. In the ambitious police drama “The Shield” (2002-2008), the white male

protagonist takes bribes and moves drugs around the Los Angeles suburb he oversees because he recognizes the futility of fighting suppliers who capitalize on the porous post-NAFTA borders. Justifying his actions according to the logic of the supply network—someone will always step in along the supply chain—he becomes corrupt, and a murderer himself. In the sophisticated series “The Wire” (2002-2008), the police in Baltimore (the violent crime capital of the US) find that their activities are inextricable from those of the criminal cartels they surveil. The entire second season is devoted to the failure of border security in the US. In particular, the security mechanisms intended to secure major shipping ports seem to defy everyone’s control. Port workers take their bribes and turn a blind eye to the global networks of exchange they serve.

Given that Americans are watching television for more hours per day than ever before (Nielsen, 2009), why not address television in this study? Chiefly, even overtly multi-plot terrorism series such as “24” (2001- ), television about globalization and human rights abuses such as “Human Cargo” (2004), and miniseries like “Over There” (2005), about the US invasion of Iraq, are marked by *distinct formal strategies* and vastly different temporal and spatial arenas of *reception* (Livingstone, 1990). Although I examine television very briefly in a wider discussion of Foucault, the privatization of responsibility, and self-improvement programs, television is itself a vast terrain beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Television is becoming more “cinematic,” owing to a range of factors including the efforts of titans such as Sheila Nevins at Home Box Office (HBO), technological innovations that enable glossier productions resembling films, transnational tax incentives and other free trade policies that allow series to be shot on location rather than sets, and ratings regimes that enable comparable exhibitions of sexuality and

violence. Still, television remains television, distinct from cinema, primarily because of its everyday modes of reception, and its consumption in states of distraction or even in public spaces (McCarthy, 2001). Film, to be clear, *is* rapidly changing amid the forces of the emerging cinematic network society, populated by more amateur filmmakers, more producers with lower budgets, online production diaries, studio communications with fans, and clip and file sharing capabilities. But the Internet, much more than commercial television, has motivated these changes in the movies and their production, distribution, and reception.

## **Delimiting the Corpus**

Limited, then, to post-2000 US cinema, and to popular cinema concerned with the network society more narrowly, the task of delimiting the corpus remained challenging. The following criteria helped narrow the sample from hundreds of films, to scores, to these twelve. First, the films must have been exhibited widely in US cinemas; many productions that languish following their film festival premieres are purchased by television networks or DVD distributors and exhibited in those media. Having their films go “straight to DVD” or “straight to cable” is a loathsome possibility for nearly every filmmaker, except those at Disney whose home video division is unusually profitable. Unsuccessful films such as Irwin Winkler’s *Home of the Brave* (2006), an ensemble narrative about US soldiers adjusting to their injuries after their tours in Iraq, and Marco Kreuzpaintner’s *Trade* (2007), about Mexican-American human trafficking, met this fate and were thus eliminated.

Second, the films had to engage their subjects in predominately *direct* ways rather than offering ambiguous *allegorical* narratives in which a sequence of events

“stands in” for other events not depicted. Paul Thomas Anderson’s Best Picture nominee *There Will Be Blood* (2007) dramatized a mineral and oil prospector’s voracious quest for wealth and power at the turn of the twentieth century, and his eventual ruin. However, enthused viewers and the critical establishment received the film as a story about US corporations,’ and one US President’s, bloody pursuit of oil in the Middle East and thus the violence that underpins US hegemony (Travers, 2008). While this film is allegorically interesting, it is not included here.

Similarly, Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005) dramatizes the murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics by Palestinian militants in the opening minutes, but spends nearly two subsequent hours scrutinizing Mossad’s (and implicitly the CIA’s) years of ensuing revenge; indeed *Vengeance* (1985) by George Jonas was the literary source. *Munich* is primarily an allegorical condemnation of post-9/11 US, UK, and Israeli initiatives, and a rhetorically successful one on some accounts, but its indirect mode of addressing the war on terror puts it beyond the scope of this analysis. Spielberg’s challenge to the cyclical nature of the war on Islamic fundamentalism offended many in the US and Israel, forcing the director to append a “Preface” to his film, which he delivers personally. My discussion of this development appears in the concluding section on cinematic global citizenship. And due to Spielberg’s towering status, his corpus receives attention in Chapter 3. Beyond being direct depictions, and not allegorical investigations of history, the films included here had to possess an additional set of traits.

Third, then, the films had to satisfy the following criteria in their fixations on a central trauma and a network of people constellated by that event and process. Specifically, the films had to present:



A narrative depicting a human network or cartel central to or resulting from neoliberal globalization.

A narrative composed of a three-part plot:

first, a naïve protagonist's sense of isolation is ruptured by an event that unearths the connections fostered by the network society;

second, s/he investigates and unearths a complex set of global relations in which s/he is implicated;

third, s/he responds ethically, violently, or in a more nuanced way, either to maintain his or her privileges, or to oppose further exploitation, becoming a global citizen.

Fourth, this sample was influenced by the participation of certain production personnel and symbolic humanitarian celebrities. The same creative agents (actors, writers, directors, producers) are behind *several* of these productions, and they thus constitute their own cinematic production network. Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu, for instance, directed *Amores Perros* (2000), which was eliminated because it is not a US film, and *21 Grams* (2003), and *Babel* (2006), the latter two for major American studios. Guillermo Arriaga wrote *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams*, and *Babel*. Brad Pitt appears in *Babel* and produced the story of Daniel Pearl's murder by Islamic militants, *A Mighty Heart* (2007), starring Angelina Jolie, and a documentary about refugees fleeing Islamic aggression, *God Grew Tired of US: The Story of Lost Boys of Sudan* (2006). Jolie herself also stars in *Beyond Borders* (2003) as a UN volunteer and is widely known for work as a UN Spokesperson, her private advocacy in Cambodia, and her adoptions of African and Asian children. Writer Stephen Gaghan wrote the drug cartel film *Traffic* (2000) and wrote and directed the big oil film *Syriana* (2005). Stephen Mirrione edited the multi-plot narratives *Traffic*, *21*

*Grams*, and *Babel*. Steven Soderbergh directed *Traffic* and produced *Syriana*, on top of exploring the network narrative playfully in *Oceans 11*, *12*, and *13* (2001, 2004, 2007) in which an ensemble of thieves co-ordinate a heist in parallel stories. Actor Don Cheadle appears in *Traffic*, *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), and *Crash* (2004; released 2005), and he produced *Crash* as well as a documentary about Sudan, *Darfur Now* (2006), which details his own plight to publicize the violence and reconcile his celebrity and privilege with distant suffering. Fellow human rights activist and *Syriana* star George Clooney supports Cheadle in several scenes. Clooney co-wrote and directed *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), a pointed allegorical critique of the mass media's collusion with pro-war discourses leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq; Clooney's subject, however, was Edward R. Murrow who spoke boldly against McCarthy's assault on free speech, rather than media personalities active today, and thus this celebrated allegorical film is not included here.

And fifth, beyond the network already constituted by these leading figures in Hollywood, film studios arrange for worldwide celebrity appearances at AIDS and anti-poverty fundraisers, for instance (many at the Cannes Film Festival each May), and disseminate promotional discourses and imagery that together forge semantic linkages between the people, select social issues, and the films in which these are entwined. In the coming chapters, I examine promotional discourses in some detail, when they are relevant. As a feature of each of the following film synopses, however, I have included the film's "brand." Like nearly every product available in the marketplace and promoted in the mass media, films now circulate with brands or as brands, exhibited on movie marquees (in lieu of the standard movable letters), clothing, and posters. These brands, I suggest, reference one another in their remarkably *similar fonts*, which are "distressed," scuffed and faded, seemingly to

denote the gritty subject matter of the films. The filmmakers, or at least the marketers, thus attempt *themselves* to constitute this assortment of films as a connected *group* of films by producing strikingly similar promotional material. The following three posters evidence this intertextual marketing; *Crash* and *Babel* reference the noted ensemble poster from *Traffic*.

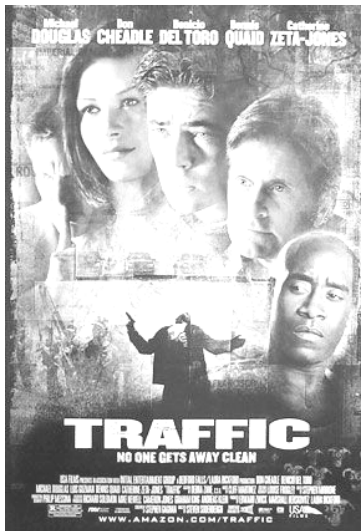


Figure 2. Poster for *Traffic* © 2000 USA Films



Figure 3. Poster for *Crash* © 2004 Bob Yari Productions



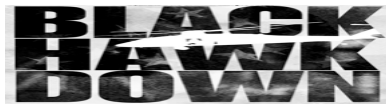
Figure 4. Poster for *Babel* © 2006 Paramount Pictures

# TRAFFIC

Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000)<sup>7</sup> is a trend-setting global network film whose influence has resounded throughout the past decade. Mapping disparate nodes and human agents caught in the underground network society of the global drug trade, *Traffic*'s "network narrative," or multi-plot structure has been reproduced in numerous films including *Syriana* (2005), by the same production team, and *Babel* (2006), which employed the same film editor. *Traffic* is based upon Simon Moore's lauded UK miniseries "Traffik" (1989) which linked Pakistani opium farmers, German drug traffickers, and UK drug users. The US version charts drugs supply routes from the labs of Colombia, South America to the private schools of Columbus, Ohio. Curiously, the film never depicts the South American site of production, confining its focus to the US-Mexican border. During his first visit to the border, Drug Czar Robert Wakefield (Michael Douglas) unearths the menacing aspects of a world in which capital, bodies, and information flow freely between nations. Confronting the violence of these cartels, Wakefield is also traumatized at home by the discovery that his Harvard-bound daughter has developed an addiction to heroine, supported through prostitution. Finding himself in the midst of a transnational network, Robert's ethical response to these distant and domestic traumas has ramifications for international diplomatic and juridical relations, his political future, and the survival of his family.

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<sup>7</sup> *Traffic*, produced for \$48,000,000 by the independent studio USA Films, was a financial and critical success. Domestically, it grossed \$124,115,725 (59.8% of its total) earning an additional \$83,400,000 (40.2%) internationally—significant given its theatrical release on only 1755 screens. Typical "blockbusters" show on 3000 or more. *Traffic* received five Academy Award nominations and won four awards: Director, Writer (Stephen Gaghan), Supporting Actor (Benicio del Toro), and Editor (Stephen Mirrione) losing Best Picture to *Gladiator* (2000).



Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001)<sup>8</sup> dramatizes the tragic historical events encircling a US military operation in Somalia in October, 1993. As part of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, US Rangers and Delta Forces were dispatched to apprehend Somali tribal leader Mohamed Farrah Aidid's top lieutenants, and expected to extract their targets quickly. Orchestrated by video from a remote base, the mission was as postmodern as its Hollywood recreation (Klien, 2005): a General (Sam Shepard) views the mission through images relayed from circling surveillance helicopters; pilots and crew view the mission from high above; and ground soldiers dropped into the combat zone experience the operation's intensity directly. When a Somali rocket attack sends a Black Hawk helicopter into the streets of Mogadishu, enraged militants surround the stranded crew. This US intervention instigated a gun battle that was purportedly the most significant since the army's invasion of Vietnam (Bowden, 1999). But it was the new look and feel of "modern war" that gripped critics and the public; this was virtual warfare co-ordinated by a centralized network, resembling a video game. But despite plans for a "surgical" extraction, control eludes the General. The soldiers, linked by a cellular network and transmitting video to superiors, also struggle to co-ordinate themselves as a decentralized network; remote co-ordination cannot prevent US casualties.

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<sup>8</sup> Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer for Columbia Pictures for \$90,000,000, *Black Hawk Down* grossed \$108,638,745 (62.8%) domestically and another \$64,350,906 (37.2%) abroad. Reportedly rushed into cinemas following the Sept. 11 attacks (Lowenstein, 2005), the film showed on 3143 screens and won Academy Awards for Editing and Sound; nominations for director Ridley Scott and cinematographer Slawomir Idziak surprised many in the industry.



*Beyond Borders* (2003)<sup>9</sup> dramatizes the intertwining lives of two Western aid workers against a backdrop of African refugee camps, and conflict zones in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, deploying the conventions of the melodrama. When Sarah (Angelina Jolie) attends a black-tie fundraiser in London, Nick (Clive Owen), a doctor, disturbs the civilized event by introducing an orphaned African child in an appeal for donations. Already frustrated with her idle life of privilege, Sarah is repulsed by the supposedly humanitarian establishment's indifference to Nick's plea; someone even throws a banana at the child, a common racist practice in England typically targeting black football players in soccer stadiums. Leaving her marriage of convenience, Sarah joins Nick as he channels money and medicine to desperate regions. Witnessing Western apathy toward international refugees first hand, Sarah begins working for the UN as a spokesperson (as Jolie now does). But she also discovers some of the less savoury aspects of foreign aid networks. Nick is equal parts physician and businessman, enmeshed in networks beyond his control. He brokers deals with militants, serves weapons cartels, and emerges as a frightening thrill-seeker. Dissipated across decentralized networks, Western capital funds questionable practices, and maintains conflict in addition to combating it.

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<sup>9</sup> Directed by Martin Campbell, known for his recent *James Bond* instalments, *Beyond Borders* was a financial failure for Paramount. Its domestic earnings of \$4,430,101 (37.8%) and international receipts of \$7,274,901 (62.2%) left its total earnings well below its \$35,000,000 budget. Given its star power and wide release on 1798 screens, the film surprised analysts by being one of the poorest performers of 2003.



Inarritu's first US film, *21 Grams* (2003)<sup>10</sup>, concerns the aftermath of a road accident that kills a young father and his two daughters, leaving a traumatized widow, Cristina (Naomi Watts). While the apparently Mexican-American driver, Jack (Benicio del Toro), flees from the scene and anxiously awaits his day of judgement, Cristina's husband's heart is transplanted into a mathematics professor, Paul (Sean Penn), extending his life. Naturally, as the conventions of the network narrative often necessitate, these three people—now linked by trauma and recovery—will themselves collide. Paul, having implausibly learned whose heart he has received, begins a relationship with the unwitting Cristina whose loss has enabled his recovery. Cristina, meanwhile, cannot quell her desire to see the drunk driver punished. Paul and Cristina decide to abduct Jack in an effort to assign him the penance the justice system did not and to rebalance the order of their worlds. Jack's fundamentalist Christianity is interestingly juxtaposed with the professor's faith in the mathematical probabilities connecting human lives. The film's title refers to the amount of weight a human being purportedly loses at death; is it the weight of the human soul? *21 Grams* suggests that the global age, with its entwined transnational populations, empowered and exploited groups, and imperatives to make moral decisions, offers many opportunities to lose one's soul by exploiting the other.

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<sup>10</sup> Focus Features, the independent arm of Universal Studios, produced *21 Grams* for \$20,000,000. Domestically, the film earned only \$16,290,47 (a meagre 27.0% of its total), poor considering its stars, two Academy Award nominations for Naomi Watts and Benicio del Toro (he won for *Traffic*), and marketing campaign. \$44,137,363 or 73.0% of its receipts came from international exhibition, common for Inarritu's films, which include *Babel* and *Amores Perros*.



Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)<sup>11</sup> also examines a human network connecting Rwandan, Belgian, American, Canadian, and UN bureaucracies and business interests leading up to the 1994 Rwandan Civil War. The film celebrates the actions of several disciplined individuals in the midst of murderous chaos. When UN convoys arrive but remove only white residents, Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), a Rwandan hotel manager, decides to harbour more than a thousand Tutsi refugees in his complex. Placing his own family in peril, Rusesabagina ensures these citizens' survival; following the events, many in the press compared him with Oskar Schindler. Romeo Dallaire's memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003) introduced many in the West to the scale of the genocide; Peter Raymont's (2004) eponymous documentary, Roger Spotiswoode's (2007) feature, Raoul Peck's television film *Sometimes in April* (2005), and Michael Caton-Jones's film *Shooting Dogs* (2005) provided subsequent depictions. *Hotel Rwanda* has been the most commercially successful film about these events, distinguished by its nuanced recreation of historical footage of systematic killing; a cameraman (Joaquin Phoenix) shoots the pictures but struggles to get them exhibited in the international media. Similarly, Paul's frantic calls to executives in a Belgian boardroom yield little assistance. The protagonist, media workers, and even a UN General (Nick Nolte) stationed at the hotel discover that global networks can connect as well as isolate individual agents, concealing relations of power and dissipating accountability.

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<sup>11</sup> *Hotel Rwanda*'s domestic earnings totalled \$23,530,892 (69.4% of its take) while international receipts added only \$10,351,351. Its widest release was on 824 screens. Cheadle, a well-known activist, was nominated for an Academy Award along with co-star Sophie Okonedo and the writers Terry George and Keir Pearson, vastly increasing the film's global visibility.





Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004; released 2005)<sup>12</sup> maps a human network through a series of traumatic collisions and assaults in Los Angeles, the world's most multi-racial "global city." When district attorney Rick (Brendan Frasier) and his wife Jean (Sandra Bullock) are robbed by two young black men (Chris Bridges and Larenz Tate), Jean's prejudices surface whilst Rick's public image depends on a racially sensitive response to his family's victimization. The thieves meditate on the extent to which the social order has victimized them and thus justified their criminality. One thief's brother is Graham (Don Cheadle again, also a producer of the film), a detective whose own racist outbursts stem from his anxiety over his brother's criminality and their mother's drug addiction. Flanagan (William Fichtner) connects Rick and Graham by encouraging Graham to ignore an instance of racist police corruption. Officer Ryan (Matt Dillon) engages in his own form of corruption by targeting black citizens unfairly, and ultimately molesting Christine (Thandie Newton) during a traffic stop. Christine's SUV is ultimately stolen by the same two car thieves, although her husband (Terrence Howard) thwarts the attempt. Each self-interested actor in the network justifies his or her behaviour by arguing that it has little impact; everyone is isolated in LA. When Rick, Jean, Graham, Christine, and Ryan discover their proximity to the other, and a human trafficking cartel is unearthed, they see how their actions are connected and perpetuate their own and the other's suffering.

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<sup>12</sup> Produced independently by the Bob Yari Group for just \$7,500,000, and shot in the director's house and on an old set for the series "Columbo," *Crash* earned \$54,580,300 domestically (55.5%) and \$43,829,761 (44.5%) internationally. The film famously won Best Picture over *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), as well as editing and writing awards, and has generated heated popular and scholarly debate about race in the US (Orbe and Kinefuchi, 2008).



In *The Constant Gardener* (2005)<sup>13</sup>, Brazilian director Fernando Mierelles's first US film (co-produced with UK partners), London human rights activist Tessa Quayle's (Rachel Weisz) abduction while spearheading NGO initiatives in Kenya motivates her new husband Justin's (Ralph Fiennes) tireless investigation of local corruption and UK diplomatic complicity. When Tessa's body is discovered in a secluded region of the country, members of the British High Commission stationed there and in London orchestrate a conspiracy, suggesting that Tessa was concealing an affair with the Kenyan doctor (Hubert Koundé) accompanying her. In fact, Tessa's murder results from the connections she alone had unearthed between a European pharmaceutical consortium testing dangerous drugs on rural Kenyans and the UK commissioners in Justin's own office who had been sanctioning the practice for massive payouts. The network of capital is triangulated between the UK, Germany, and Kenya where unsuspecting young mothers receive deadly injections during hospital visits whilst European researchers gather medical data and manipulate it in the hopes of proving the safety of a new billion dollar drug. Author John Le Carre has claimed that he based the source book upon contemporary pharmaceutical testing practices in Africa, which are much worse than those dramatized here (Caine, 2005).

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<sup>13</sup> Produced by Focus Features (Universal) for \$25,000,000, *The Constant Gardener* earned \$33,579,797 (40.7%) domestically, and \$48,886,873 (59.3%) abroad, evidencing its international appeal. The film received Academy Award nominations for Claire Simpson's editing, Jeffrey Caine's screenplay, Alberto Iglesias's score, and actress Rachel Weisz won.



Andrew Niccol's *Lord of War* (2005)<sup>14</sup> examines the ethical dilemmas of Russian-American arms dealer Yuri Orlov (Nicolas Cage), an opportunist who acquires an abundance of weapons following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. "Warlords" in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Somalia, and other countries in Africa were among the highest bidders. As Orlov begins to enjoy a socialite's lifestyle in Manhattan, he must rationalize his perpetuation of various historical traumas. The film's noted opening montage positions the gaze of the camera inside a bullet as it is constructed in a factory, packaged, shipped between dealers, sold cheaply in Africa, loaded into a rifle, and fired into the body of a young boy. As fifteen years elapse, demand for weapons weathers every recession; some region is always in turmoil, and our protagonist reflects upon how he is uncannily similar to legitimate Western political regimes, which labour to keep such regions unstable and thus profitable trading partners. The tested cat-and-mouse narrative that plays out between Orlov and Interpol agent Jack Valentine (Ethan Hawke) softens and distracts from the film's sobering examination of arms cartels as a thriving feature of the post-USSR global network society. Commercial globalization favours Orlov. The "liberties" offered by the borderless neoliberal network society benefit the business executive (even legalizing some of Orlov's transactions) no matter what he or she sells.

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<sup>14</sup> Produced independently for an estimated \$42,000,000, *Lord of War* earned only \$24,149,632 domestically despite showing on 2814 screens and featuring the financially reliable Cage. \$48,467,436 in additional earnings (66.7%) were international, a possible reflection of US audiences' comparative resistance to the film. The film "divided critics and moviegoers, not so much for its subject matter as its refusal to fit neatly into a genre pigeonhole...a strategy that sadly backfired at the box office" (Papamichael, 2006: n.p.).

## SYRIANA

In Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005)<sup>15</sup>, which like *Black Hawk Down*, *Hotel Rwanda*, and *The Constant Gardener* is based upon historical events, a CIA spy, Bob Barnes (George Clooney), becomes concerned when those directing his organization order the assassination of a sympathetic Arab heir to an oil empire. The young leader declares his intention to end decades of poverty by sharing the oil wealth with the citizens of his unnamed nation. US oil conglomerate Killen, having just bribed officials for drilling rights, is unhappy with the prospect of diminished returns and pressures both governments to ensure that a more compliant heir assumes power. Previously an unquestioning operative, specializing in car bombings and other dirty work, Barnes undergoes the typical journey of a naïve Western protagonist confronted by the human suffering his imperialist government and his own activities inflict. A disillusioned commodities trader (Matt Damon), stationed in Geneva, and a Washington lawyer (Jeffrey Wright) also attempt to assist the Arab heir indirectly, but no amount of effort can thwart the CIA's seemingly omnipotent ability to issue an air strike on the young heir using satellites. In this "big oil" network, Western efforts to keep the Arab citizens poor and the region in turmoil triumph; but they also create aimless populations of young, unemployed Arab men—the type recruited to kill Americans as part of the *jihad* or holy war on the West.

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<sup>15</sup> Warner Bros. produced *Syriana* for \$50,000,000. Domestically it earned \$50,824,620 (54.1%) amid a polarized critical and popular response; both groups found its plot needlessly labyrinthine. International viewers were more sympathetic and likely interested in this surprisingly critical and unpatriotic film. It earned an additional \$43,150,000 abroad, accounting for nearly half (45.9%) of its receipts. Gaghan's script was nominated for an Academy Award (he won for *Traffic*) somewhat controversially in the Original Screenplay category, despite being based upon Baer's book, and George Clooney won for his supporting role.



Iñárritu's second US film *Babel* (2006)<sup>16</sup> examines a victimized US couple, as *21 Grams* did, and foregrounds the post-9/11 political landscape. Grieving the loss of their child and thus already traumatized at home, Susan (Cate Blanchett) and Richard (Brad Pitt) venture to Morocco in a Paul Bowles-inspired attempt to heal by going into the amorphous terrain of the desert. While unhappily gazing out the window of the tour bus, Susan is mysteriously struck with a bullet. Far from a hospital, the Moroccan guide deposits the entire group of Western tourists in a remote village. *Babel*, of course, is about our collective failure to understand one another; Richard yells in English at the bewildered locals and even angers his fellow US tourists who are resolutely unhelpful and wish to leave. Similarly callous US embassy officials interpret the shooting as an act of terrorism and prevent Moroccan agencies from assisting the couple. Two local boys, we learn, fired the rifle from a great distance as part of a wager. In the age of 24-hour news, the traumatic event becomes an international incident; a human network forms, enrolling the Japanese owner of the rifle, the US couple's Mexican nanny, and ruthless Moroccan police. As the global network society enables a serious but simple accident to metastasize into a deadly politicized frenzy, our "God's view" perspective of these interconnections only underscores a sense of spectatorial *impotence* consistent with post-9/11 US discourses of vulnerability and helplessness.

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<sup>16</sup> *Babel* was released and promoted by Paramount's independent division Vantage for Academy Award consideration following its Best Director win at Cannes. The film's expansion onto 1251 screens, however, was dubbed "near-disastrous" in *Film Comment* (Smith and Wilson, 2007: 50). Poor domestic earnings of \$34,302,837 were offset by \$101,027,345 in international receipts (74.7%). Americans were ostensibly tired of seeing themselves victimized and after becoming aware of *Babel's* plot, some argue, viewers stayed away (Schwartzbaum, 2006).



Ed Zwick's *Blood Diamond* (2006)<sup>17</sup> examines atrocities in Sierra Leone, focusing on the source of the capital that is converted into weaponry. The movement of diamonds throughout the transnational gem trading network operates with secrecy; each actor profits and further mediates the relationship between the multinational vendor and the impoverished diamond miner. By following one unusual diamond, the film maps a network in which everyone is connected and simultaneously alienated and isolated from any understanding of the larger scheme. After many lives are lost, we learn that the DeBeers-like company wants merely to store the diamond and perpetuate the myth that the stones are rare. Danny (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a South African mercenary who brokers a deal with a diamond miner and refugee named Solomon (Djimon Hounsou) who wants to locate his wife (Jassie Vandy). Both Danny and Solomon undergo the "hero's journey" here; in regressive and even racist scenes, Solomon learns to become a violent savage in order to protect his family whilst Danny undergoes a climactic ethical rebirth and becomes more "civilised"; he surrenders the diamond and serves as a whistle blower for US journalist Maddy (Jennifer Connelly). Given the film's attention to transnational flows, Danny significantly makes his final, redemptive statements by satellite phone to Maddy, at a meeting with activists in London, whilst he lies dying amid the chaos of Sierra Leone's civil war.

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<sup>17</sup> *Blood Diamond* was a surprisingly poor performer domestically (\$57,377,916) considering its star power and marketing campaign. Produced for \$100,000,000 the film earned \$114,029,263 internationally (66.5% of its take). Zwick's meandering film earned five unexpected Academy Award nominations, including two for the principal actors, subsequently becoming an example of popular action cinema "with a message."



Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006)<sup>18</sup> recreates the frantic activities on board the doomed flight from Newark to San Francisco on September 11, 2001. Only thirty-three passengers were aboard when four Saudi Arabian hijackers took control of the plane in the air shortly after a delayed departure. UK director Greengrass, noted for his docu-drama approach honed in his lauded film *Bloody Sunday* (2002), uses camera wobble and unknown actors to conjure an edgy semblance of *verite*. With the exception of a “God’s view” shot of New York from high above (Žižek, 2006), the film uses the conventions of documentary realism successfully; it reproduces the ineffaceable television imagery from New York and Washington but offers viewers a hyperreal tour through one component of September 11 marked by the absence of visual documentation. The contribution of the film to post-9/11 culture lies in its rigorous attention to the networks of communication enabling the planning and partial thwarting of the terrorist mission. Cellular phones enable passengers to learn about the larger terrorist plan and thus rebel. But despite being in constant contact, neither civilians, hijackers, nor air traffic controllers are privy to enough information or context to co-ordinate their complex tasks and achieve their goals. Even the aviation director, Ben Sliney, who plays himself, is shown making routine decisions and assuming that a small private plane likely accounts for anomalous flight paths. The real “God’s view” here belongs to the viewer who must witness the communication breakdown.

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<sup>18</sup> *United 93* was a difficult film to market. Ultimately, Universal opted for “talking head” previews in which Greengrass explained his intentions in a way that addressed expected criticisms. Made for just \$15,000,000 the film earned only \$31,483,450 domestically despite showing on 1871 screens. Internationally it earned \$44,802,646 (58.7% of its total). The film received surprise Academy Award nominations for Direction and Editing, a cautious sign of support.

If these films and their adjoining discourses are worthy sites of analysis, the question becomes: which methods of discourse analysis are most apt for the task of making sense of them? A mainstay in film scholarship, and cultural analysis more broadly, Jacques Lacan's (1977) post-Freudian notion of the "symbolic order," examined below, is indispensable to my investigation of how staged scenarios, filmed imagery, and celebrity bodies offer viewers a means of navigating the contemporary geopolitical order. Fredric Jameson's (1988; 1992) similar notion of the "imaginary social totality" also supplies theoretical grounding because in a typically Marxist fashion Jameson politicizes Lacan's psychological questions, as Louis Althusser (1970) had done, to examine how individuals "cognitively map" the social order and (mis)recognize themselves within it. In order to complicate these films' status as affirmations of the dominant ideology, or as contained critiques of capitalism's contradictions, I want to suggest that these discourses can be looked at awry by bearing in mind the theorizations of power and "autonomous" self-government in the later work of Michel Foucault (1980a; 1980b; 1980c). The cinematic machine can be understood to constitute an apparatus (in the psychological sense, Metz, 1975; Mulvey, 1975) and in the Foucaultian sense, as a *dispositif* of discourses that render certain truth claims, social practices, and disciplined ways of being knowable and acceptable (Hook, 2007). These films, I argue, make claims about how to conduct ourselves in the networked age of "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2009). At this point I would like to posit some tentative intersections between psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Foucaultian theories of power.



## Theoretical Orientation

### Cinema and the Symbolic Order (Lacan)

For Lacan (1949; 1977; 2004), humans enter into the symbolic order, the realm of signification and communication, following the “imaginary stage” of early childhood (6-18 months). The imaginary stage is so-named because infants experience an imaginary union with their mothers, which imbues them with a sensation of plenitude that they can only glimpse once it is gone. Because the infant experiences total union with the mother, it has no sense of its separateness and unity as a subject, no image of others *as* others (ie., separate beings) and thus it requires no symbols with which to communicate intersubjectively. The “mirror stage” changes everything because it introduces the infant to its own *specular* self. For Lacan, as Wegenstein (2006, p. 26) points out, “the only way we can perceive our bodily selves is through a deceptive image that is framed by somebody’s else’s gaze...or by the frame of a screen of interface of some kind (mirror, computer interface, television screen etc.).” In the mirror stage, *looking* is central to the production of one’s identity. As Lacan (1949, 2) asserts, “We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*” that signals “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he [sic] *assumes an image*.” Lynch (2008, p. 211) notes that “at this point in its development, an infant[‘s] ... experience of its own body is still a fragmented and inchoate collection of sensations” and it is “a jubilant moment” in which “the infant recognizes its own image in a mirror (or another object, like its mother)...and fixes its gaze upon this image.” The image of the body produces a recognition of bodily unity, and thus an “I” that has a social identity, as well as a *misrecognition* of the reflected image as though it were *actually* one’s self.

This misrecognition underpins the mirror stage's enduring relevance in film studies and visual studies more broadly. Viewers of film, photography, and realist visual art with human forms identify with screen surrogates, particularly active male (or male coded) positions of power because these positions offer the most pleasure/power within the patriarchal symbolic economy; few viewers, for instance, would find their ego-ideals satisfied by adopting the position of the "damsel in distress" when the entire assembly of symbols works in the service of her active male rescuer's journey. Appealing as the image's appearance of wholeness and phallic power may be, even to the infant gazing into the mirror for the first time, the recognition of sameness is illusory and causes a "split" in the subject. According to Campbell (2004, p. 100): "The ego misrecognizes the other in its specular reflections, perceiving the other as identical to itself...and with that misrecognition comes a refusal of difference....The identificatory object functions not as an Other but as an imaginary counterpart, an other that the self imagines to reflect it." The subject, once initiated, must henceforth operate within the symbolic order, a realm in which the subject's identity must be negotiated through attempts to signify. The "subject in language" must learn to wield words and symbols in order to fulfill its basic desires; when the infant cries out, its mother will appear with a blanket or bottle. The subject in fact learns that the successful manipulation of language or symbols within the symbolic order ensures its potency in attempting to fulfill its desires. For Lacan, to signify successfully is therefore to wield the "phallus," which is nothing anatomical.

Hollywood's ability to manipulate symbols with transnational reach affords its hegemonic ideologies formidable power, but the true promise of plenitude offered by the cinema and theorized by classical feminist film theory is the *spectator's*

experience of “visual pleasure.” Some theorists see this spectatorial pleasure to be the result of adults “regressing” to more infantile states while at the cinema (Modleski, 1991; Wood, 1989). In viewing an on-screen body that is not oneself, but which one can misrecognize as oneself or as an ideal self, the spectator can experience temporary moments of phallic power. As in the mirror stage, these moments produce or stabilize the viewing subject’s status as a coherent being. The split between the viewing subject and the viewed objects is intensified by the fact that on-screen bodies typically navigate controlled environments (sets) under the control of directors (the camera’s gaze) whilst adorned according to hegemonic cultural codes: men are agents of action who direct their own gazes and thus repel ours, women are ornamented passive objects connoting “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 9), and people of colour or non-normative sexuality are sidelined and often configured as receptacles of various forms of blame and anxiety (Modleski, 1991). This Lacanian theoretical model of cinema retains its currency because conditions continue to be patriarchal, but voluminous theoretical work has challenged this reductive view of narrative cinema as a pleasure centre and producer of subjectivity. My inquiry extends this challenge to classical feminist film theory. One of my questions in this study, of course, is whether narrative cinema can produce *displeasure* (for want of a better term) and thus alternative forms of subjectivity resulting from disruptive, confounding, and even politicizing images of globalization and its impacts.

Cinematic imagery of “powerless places” being exploited by powerful social actors, that is, may have a potentially defetishizing and progressive (rather than regressive) role to play in the global symbolic economy, especially in unearthing, envisioning, and exposing the relations of production behind our cherished

commodities. Still, as commodities themselves, these films can also be understood to *extend* the process of fetishization by supplying small doses of the real, in fictionalised form, all the better to isolate the real and to contain political action (Kellner, 2005; Žižek, 2008a). In Baudrillard's (1983) foreboding estimation, technologically mediated simulations of reality do not, in fact, confront viewers with its challenges and its traumas, but supply a reality supplement, a "hyperreal" reality that erodes the distinction between the real world and its representations. Cinema in particular continues to be associated with the menacing possibilities of hyperreality, as Hollywood imagery replaces historical imagery of World Wars for instance. And it has been associated historically with offering only ephemeral thrills (Gunning, 1999), with the pacification of the labour force (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002 [1947]), and with the fantasmatic configuration of signifiers, which are abstracted from their historical context and rearranged with the principal effect of supplying visual pleasure as a semblance of phallic plenitude. Phallic power may be sought as a *virtual* experience in the cinema, but it is in the social world that we all wish to wield some influence, if only over our ability to pursue our desires. A prerequisite for such power, according to Lacan, is acknowledgment by the big Other.

What is the big Other? As Lacan (1993 [1981], p. 51; italics mine) defines this concept in *The Psychoses, Book III*, the big Other "is not purely and simply the reality in front of you...The Other is beyond that reality. In true speech the Other is *that before which you make yourself recognized*." In the simplest sense, we all behave as if the Other is watching; our actions thus mirror those we assume the Other's desire demands of us. "In spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly *virtual*," according to Žižek (2006, p. 10), because "it exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*." The big Other is the intangible

medium of symbolic registration, the force by which we expect to be acknowledged when we dress up, appear at public events, conform to social and moral codes, publish our ideas, and practice good manners. And yet the big Other is also with us at home and therefore presents several paradoxes.

It is “simultaneously ‘inside’ and ‘outside’” the subject; it is both an “embodiment of the social substance and yet also the site of the unconscious” (Hook, 2008, p. 52). Like rules, which are external, but only come into being meaningfully when subjects obey them, the Other is equally inside and outside of the subject and its desires. As Lacan (1993 [1981, p. 51) suggests, the big Other primarily functions by governing the rules of *signification* because “once you have entered the play of symbols” and thus announced yourself in the presence of the big Other, “you are always forced to act according to a rule.” The Other, that is, grants power in its recognition of our activities and our selves, and thus it wields power over our endeavours. Even though the Other stipulates the rules within which our desires operate and through which we struggle to express ourselves and to signify, we need not envision the Other as a *monolith*.

Because of these paradoxes, that is, I would like to suggest that it is possible, with some qualifications, to reconcile Foucault’s view that power operates as biopower at the *micro* level of individual experience with Lacan’s belief that power emanates from the big Other, which in the *macro* sense bears witness to our most pivotal transactions with others, and to the minutiae of our routines (Dolar, 1999). Both Foucault’s and Lacan’s conceptions of power and the Other, respectively, are consistent in certain ways with Althusser’s (1970) theory that subjects in modern societies are “interpellated” into roughly predetermined social roles. “Ideological state apparatuses” comprise an assortment of mechanisms that promote the pursuit

of health, the growth of families, the rightness of peace over protest, and even the stabilizing role of religion. Crucially, we experience these roles as if we had fashioned them individually, and we thus have intimate relationships with our statuses as “good citizens” or “good workers,” but only in relation to power (for Foucault) or the big Other (for Lacan).

The big Other need not be envisioned as a *centralized* authority, such as the state or the law. The big Other may be a totalizing system, but as Lacan and Althusser make clear, its presence operates at the *micro* level of self-government because individuals must each acknowledge it, and we all experience it uniquely. As Dolar (1999, p. 88) suggests, “Foucault’s... dispersed micro-relations eventually converge in a much more massive presence of the Other than psychoanalysis would ever dream.” Similarly, Hook (2007, p. 59), who respects the uniqueness of Foucault’s theorization of power, suggests that even for Foucault “power works only if and as long as we assume the Other.” In the contemporary media landscape that includes hidden camera and reality television programs, affordable do-it-yourself digital production technologies, the “broadcast yourself” ethos of Web 2.0 (user-generated content), and “guerrilla” film shoots (covert location shooting without the permission of the public or the authorities), it is safe to say that we assume the Other is watching. Many of the cinematic narratives explore this sensation, although I do not conduct traditionally Lacanian analyses of them. Rather, in the concluding section, I examine how various *celebrities* use the annual Academy Awards ceremonies to protest or support militarism, express patriotism, and generally perform their ethics under the surveillance of the Other.

## Mapping the Social Totality (Jameson)

The demands of the Other, which are really our own desires for acknowledgement and acceptance, influence our modes of fulfilling our desires as well as our very conceptions of the social order we navigate. In fact, as Jameson (1992) suggests, “the individual’s representation of his or her social world” is forged through encounters with *symbolic* or *allegorical* depictions of it; these representations enable his or her “successful negotiation” of the relationship between “the personal and the social” (McCabe, 1992, p. xiv). Does this description of the individual’s recognition of itself in the world not sound consistent with Lacan’s account of the mirror stage, and the recognition of the big Other more broadly? As widely circulated depictions of arguably unrepresentable processes, these cinematic texts provide one such map, adept at charting geopolitical fears and, for my purposes, realities. For Jameson (1988, p. 347), the cinema in particular can enable individuals to “cognitively map” their environments and to understand their unique positions in the “social totality.” Indeed, representing the less tangible features of the social totality is “exactly what the ‘cognitive map’ is called upon to do in the narrower framework of daily life” (Jameson, 1991, p. 51). Cognitive mapping is thus the “situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (Jameson, 1988, p. 348). This widely cited definition emphasizes the dual nature of the process: the field of culture surely introduces empowered and disempowered individuals to facets of the social totality (allowing rural villagers to contemplate global politics, for instance) but it is also a representation *on the part of*

*the individual* to that totality, a means through which oppressed groups, for instance, achieve “representation” in the public sphere.

Cognitive mapping is a concept that informs my inquiry because it is more than a hermeneutic method of reading culture; rather, it is a theory of meaning making more generally. It straddles the worlds of large-scale cultural production and individual interpretation. Although this study addresses the “viewer” theoretically rather than empirically, the theory of cognitive mapping enables me to address the pleasurable, tense, and negotiated relationships between film images and spectatorial subject positions. As viewers motivated by the unrealizable goal of firmly locating our place amid the social totality (and the symbolic order), we aim to transcend the “gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience” (Jameson, 1988, p. 350).

Self-location, I propose, is only part of the picture, at least when it comes to assessing popular political cinema. Jameson (1988, p. 353) himself asserts that our ability to locate ourselves amid an unrepresentable, imaginary “global social totality”—as though orienting ourselves in a strange city—is merely the precursor to new modes political action. Like city maps, cognitive maps enable us to situate ourselves. But we orient ourselves in order that we might take *action*, by coordinating our activities around a given objective, or in response to a given injunction or authority, however amorphous. Cognitive maps enable the less empowered classes to coordinate themselves in specific ways as a political constellation. And although Jameson is critical of the “shadowy and mythical Foucault entity called ‘power’” (Jameson, 1988, p. 349), his reference to the French thinker, I would argue, evidences a certain *proximity* between his conception of the



cognitive map, on the one hand, and the Foucaultian notion of the *dispositif* or “apparatus” on the other, rather than their incompatibility (Foucault, 1977; 1980a). As apt as Jameson’s “spatial analysis of culture” is for the present study, Foucault’s notion of the apparatus also informs my approach because cinema and its adjoining discourses constitute *dispositifs*: “expressive combinatory machines which make words, things, and subjectivities intelligible” (Cote, 2007, p. 9-10). More than functioning as a map, the cinematic *dispositif* governs the conditions in which certain modes of conduct take shape. If the mirror stage tells us *that* we are, and the cognitive map tells us *where* we are, the *dispositif* tells us what we should *do*.

### **From Cognitive Mapping to the Cinematic *Dispositif* (Foucault)**

If films are maps comprising a “geopolitical aesthetic” (Jameson, 1988; 1994), or enable viewers to map intangible relations, they are also necessarily guides for action. Maps, after all, enable a sense of place but in the service of the reader’s navigation of that space. Given their explicit concerns with moral agency and individual conduct, these pictures (and their promotional and critical discourses) can be understood to function discursively as *dispositifs* that make confounding political realities intelligible (Hook, 2007).<sup>19</sup> Like the cinematic maps themselves, these discursive machines unsurprisingly stabilize hegemonic concepts, norms, and conditions in the solutions—that thus the pleasures—they offer to readers and viewers. Out of this discursive matrix, I suggest, emerges a particular vision of

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<sup>19</sup> Only Kessler (2004) has previously addressed the cinema as a *dispositif* in Foucault’s sense rather than the strict psychoanalytical sense employed in the field of “apparatus film theory” throughout the seventies (Metz, 1990; Mulvey, 1975). For Kessler, the cinematic apparatus comprises: “1) a material technology producing conditions that help shape 2) a certain viewing position that is based upon unconscious desires to which corresponds 3) an institutionalised film form” such as the Hollywood social problem film (Kessler, 2004, p. 61).

neoliberal global citizenship for our time, one that champions a) the ethical re-evaluation of one's place in the global network society, b) individual discipline and insular "self-reliance," and c) the "privatization" of one's emotional responses to trauma in two senses (Berlant, 2000). First, political energies that could be channelled into public advocacy are routinely rendered *domestic* in these discourses; popular discourses instruct us to domesticate our grief, to take care of our families first, to improve our homes and health, to quarantine political solutions within the realm of domestic experience (Andersen, 1995). Second, we face injunctions to privatize our responses to trauma in the *financial* sense; popular discourses champion discrete, private donations (often to corporations) as expressions of our citizenship, supplanting our arguably instinctive tendency to congregate *en mass* to demand structural changes.

Emerging from the furnace of dominant American ideology, given their relations of production at major US institutions, global network films and their promotional discourses comprise a cinematic *dispositif* not because of their proximity to the real, but because they can serve as a communicative grounds on which we can "see and speak of things intelligibly" (Cote, 2007, p. 10). Cinema can be understood as limited, lacking, and even infuriating in its articulations of distant suffering, but through its own global circulation as a commodity it can nonetheless centralise these traumas at the heart of American (and global) popular culture and its discussions, enabling even the most ignorant among us to begin the work of making sense of our networked relationships with migrant oil workers, child labourers, and Islamic militants. As millions of Internet discussion board postings exemplify, the films themselves are merely one ingredient amid the reverent, indifferent, or highly

oppositional discursive aftershocks that characterise discussions of the global issues they raise.

The films, as discursive formations circulating among many others, merely contribute to a platform on which truthfulness, the real, and the workings of power can be conceptualised and negotiated. In this sense, the simplified renderings of complex issues supplied by these narratives might stimulate rather than foreclose viewers' hermeneutic responses to the complex questions they raise. And the ideal forms of individual conduct and discipline they celebrate, transmitted through celebrity bodies (Collins, 2008; Hayward, 2008), is surely wielding some influence over what the "Western subject" is expected to be in an age of such formidable disparity and economic guilt. Of course, there is no such "subject" but an array of subject positions.

The government of subjectivity continues to be scrutinised through Foucaultian lenses because of the philosopher's assertion, consistent with poststructuralist analyses more broadly, "that individual human subjectivity does not contain a priori transcendental conditions" but is rather "constituted by socio-historical conditions producing perceptions of the world and enabling judgements about reality" (Datta, 2008, p. 287). As Chow-White (2006) illustrates in his Foucaultian discourse analysis of the "semantic networks" connecting Western male tourists and Southeast Asian sex workers, vastly unequal subject positions can be carved out and normalized by discursive formations, as much as they are by economic inequity; racist terminology and master-servant relationships are naturalized in these physical and virtual sites of commerce. Because these positions are created, and certain unsavoury modes of conduct are rendered passable in this context, we can conclude that the arrival of the network society as a means of organising commerce, communication, and

bodies “does not necessarily make for a more democratic formation” (Chow-White, 2006, p. 889). Even as rich and poor people in the North and South find themselves connected economically and culturally through supposedly “horizontal” networks of exchange (Castells, 2001, p. 2), “domination can and does exist and persist” (Chow-White, 2006, p. 889). In short, abhorrent as well as ethical or “globally aware” modes of conduct can be normalized in the cinema and the other discourses that surround us.

For my purposes here, our very awareness of this power imbalance is the prime governor of the middleclass male subject’s conduct and “temperament” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 87; Miller, 1993). The sense of connectedness elicited by these films can be read as an affective means of confronting North Americans (and US citizens more narrowly) with the global reverberations of our lifestyles. Although Foucault devoted little attention to questions of representation generally, he emphasised that discourses as representations (of criminals in the penal system, of sex in Catholic societies, of sanity in the discourse of psychiatry) were imbued with power and could thus stabilize status quo relations *or* produce resistant subject positions and positive forms of action. The global network film, in my analysis, is therefore neither a facile reflection of contemporary anxieties on the one hand, or a celebration of neoliberal globalization on the other, but can be investigated as a *dispositif* due to its ability—like cinema generally—to produce certain subject positions (Metz, 1975; Mulvey, 1975; 1989; Žižek, 2008). In other words, while Lacan endeavoured to show that subjects are produced and governed, above all, by their unconscious *desires*, including their desire to signify their presence and potency within the symbolic order, and Jameson reminds us that subjects positions can be created by ideology and taken up in its mystifying terrain since we most often

experience ideological structures as natural, Foucault, rejecting Marxist tenets, attempted to illustrate that subject positions are produced by *power* exerted on our bodies and minds, and that these positions are taken up in relation to reigning regimes of knowledge that discipline us harshly or gently cajole us to monitor our own conduct.

As political economic analyses of global communication attest, the ability of several dominant media institutions to configure the semiotics of global trauma and the real, along with embodiments of “correct,” disciplined behaviour, imbues them with an obvious degree of power. That is, discursive formations invested with sufficient power shape ideas into constellations of social consensus, such that they become *epistemes*—units of historically contingent intelligibility accepted as true and correct, if only temporarily. Foucault’s linkages between the *dispositif* and the increasingly decentralised affective functioning of power in liberal democracies also facilitate my examination of micro-level questions of affect, conduct, and the practice of privatized “emotional citizenship” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008).

## Chapter 2

### Historical Background: Cinema and Social Issues

#### Cinema, Emotion, and Citizenship

For Berlant (1997; 2000) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2008), “emotional citizenship” is oxymoronic in its juxtaposition of traditionally private and public practices: “emotions” pervade the private, domestic sphere whilst “citizens” in the liberal tradition take action in the public sphere. Protests cannot be staged in one’s home but in the streets. Of course, this division is an ideological construction rooted in exclusionary politics and the devaluation of emotion as unwelcome within Habermas’s “rational” realm of debate. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2008, p. 158) argues, “When we think about what makes good citizens” we often “fail to appreciate the emotional life of politics” and we “also fail to account for the appeal of forms of politics that fall outside liberal conceptions.” Indeed,

Acts of citizenship do not arise solely from rational, detached observation, but from a set of strong emotions, including disgust, anger, love, hate and a sense of injustice. (Wahl-Jorgenson, 2008, p. 158)

Just as emotions are the very fabric of social movements and public practices of citizenship alike, the private realm of the home (not quite so private in the age of reality television) is permeated by politics. The personal *is* the political, as seventies feminism proclaimed, and thus the personal space of the home is always already political. The notion that men do political and economic work as *producers* in the public sphere while women do nurturing, emotional work in the domestic sphere as *consumers* has been resolutely challenged. Our private, emotional encounters with

media texts, for instance, are not so much consumptive as *productive*, generating pleasure, anger and other emotions, templates for rebellion, and our very subject positions themselves. Modleski's (1982) analysis of women's television soap operas in *Loving with a Vengeance* illustrated how "mass produced fantasies" could nonetheless create space for resistance among viewers who sustained lively interpretative communities and individual fantasy lives. Radway's (1991) *Reading the Romance* uncovered similar potential in women's typically domestic, daytime consumption of Harlequin romance novels, narratives through which readers are also able to carve out pleasurable *and* political spaces for their hopes within a patriarchal order.

Cinema, consumed at home more than ever before, has been similarly derided as a pacifying pleasure that depoliticises viewers through its formulaic plots (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947). And yet, like the aforementioned authors who addressed television and novels, through the ensuing discussion of *Traffic*, *Black Hawk Down*, *21 Grams*, *Beyond Borders*, *Hotel Rwanda* and *Crash*, I propose that the cinema can confront viewers with politicized discourses, which might form rather than atomize viewing communities through the myriad discussions and interpretative frameworks that constitute fandom or merely reception. In considering how this small corner of contemporary US cinema organises Western visions of the global network society, it is imperative to address the *history* of cinema as a politicized leisure pursuit—as a means, that is, of practicing emotional citizenship.

## Early Cinema and Citizenship

Early film's status as popular rather than high culture generated voluminous criticism of the medium. In the late nineteenth century, anxieties about the "massification... democratization, [and] commercialization" of culture in Britain fuelled fierce critiques of popular culture and its adjoining technologies (Arnold, 1882; Brantlinger, 1983, p. 114). After sensation novels, pulp fiction, and comic strips, which began to be syndicated internationally in 1895 (Mattelart, 2000), the cinema would become the most influential purveyor of popular entertainment until the invention of television. For the second half of the nineteenth century, new cultural experiences like travelling carnivals, theme parks, shopping pavilions, and photographs—all priming the populations in the US, England, and Western Europe for the birth of the cinema—enthralled the masses.

The introduction of these media had serious ramifications for inherited notions of culture, taste, social class, and gender, leading to concerns over the dissemination of immoral imagery, unaccompanied women in urban centres, and unwashed masses congregating around the latest attraction. In England and France, the "establishment of the department store in the 1850s and 1860s," for example, "created a new arena for the public appearance of women" and thus "[n]ew desires were created for her by advertising and consumer culture" (Friedberg, 1993, p. 37). Importantly for the impending arrival of the cinema, these desires "depended on the relation between looking and buying, and the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye" (Friedberg, 1993, p. 37).

The department store, which "offered a protected site for the empowered gaze of the *flâneuse*" constituted a "proto-cinematic device," a technology that, upon



entering the social world, was democratically rationalised for new and unexpected purposes related less to shopping than to seeing and being seen. Although they took place in entirely or largely commercial spaces, the practices of shopping, tourism, and enjoying the “rhetoric of walking” the crowded streets emboldened women and the new industrial working- and middle classes to develop public selves to be seen and perhaps even heard—laying the foundation for increased participation in the public sphere. The established leisure classes, by contrast, were now forced to share urban space and select cultural pursuits—moviegoing among them—with a greater variety of bodies (Friedberg, 1993, p. 38) Spatially and socially, then, popular culture threatened established culture. But perhaps the threat originated not in the access of the less empowered to the *pleasures* of popular culture, as moralists claimed, but in their access to new social *spaces* and thus to new discursive and expressive possibilities.

By the 1890s, when the department store, the mechanized carnival, and the comic book were cultural fixtures, entrepreneurs built the first free-standing commercial cinemas in England, North America and Western Europe. Most cultural critics understood them to be extensions of earlier lowbrow theatre attractions. Even subsequent, nuanced commentators such as Siegfried Kracauer (1987 [1926]) described the cinema as part of a “Cult of Distractions.” Despite the name of the essay, Kracauer in fact issues a call for proletarian viewers to *capitalize* on this new technology by consuming film messages actively and becoming politically united, rather than atomized, through them. That is, as Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord (2007, p. 11) note, “Kracauer, like Benjamin, saw in the overlap of art, technology, and everyday life before fascism—especially in cinema and its reception—a possibility for experience to be productive of new social relations

resistant to the petrification of the *ratio* [oppressive social rationality].” But this “process can only take place,” Kracauer argues, “by going directly through ‘the center of mass ornament, not away from it’” and thus “Kracauer’s early work, his phenomenology of the surface, rhymes with Benjamin’s in many ways” (Marchessault and Lord, 2007, p. 11).

Kracauer’s intervention, then, even while it envisions cinema’s potential, nonetheless presumes a passive spectator failing to exploit the possibilities of film technology. Viewers always risked being seduced by the mere sensation of this ostensibly “corrosive” cultural form; as is well-known, in the interwar years cinema continued to figure as the *other* of the “legitimate” forms of culture practiced by the empowered classes (in Friedberg, 1995, p. 224 n80). As another type of circus, the cinema was a diversion for the idle mind that appealed to viewers’ “lowest instincts” (Brantlinger, 1983, p. 200), numbing lower class spectators momentarily from their opposition to the stratified social order, “reinforc[ing] bourgeois hegemony and blunt[ing] the development of radicalism” (Friedberg, 1995, p. 250).

Several decades later, in the 1930s, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1947]) considered the ideological work of the cinema in liberal capitalist economies. These thinkers were less concerned, in the Arnoldian sense, with the decline of traditional forms of “great” culture under the weight of the popular forms pandering to unrefined, popular tastes. Rather, they sided with the labouring classes, or proletariat, whose subordination they located in a multifaceted and totalising system within which culture played a central role. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p. 109) famously saw movie-going as “the prolongation of work under late capitalism,” a distraction so politically pacifying that the predictable and formulaic narratives viewers consumed constituted a continuation of the “mechanized labour process” that typified many

viewers' working lives. As Landsberg (2004, p. 122) notes, however, for Horkheimer and Adorno and "those who lived through World War II, mass politics was indistinguishable from fascism" and their deeply pessimistic assessments of movie-going cannot be understood outside of that context.

Despite what some see as the renewed relevance of the culture industry thesis in our age of vertical integration and media convergence, Landsberg (2004, p. 122) advocates that contemporary scholars "grasp the potential of the Negt and Kluge public sphere to produce new solidarities and new collectivities" through the cinema. With the United States experiencing its "largest waves of immigration from Europe" in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as "the mass migration of African Americans to the industrial centers of the North," according to Landsberg (2004, p. 2) the cinema "made possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives" that had once been "disseminated through community life." By visiting "an experiential site such as a movie theatre," in Landsberg's sanguine estimation, a person could "suture[ ] himself or herself into a larger history" and could thereby reconnect with an ethnic or religious community whose close relations had been ruptured by modern, industrial life. The cinema could be a rudimentary educator and historian, it could foster affinities and imagined communities between the different ethnic groups populating large urban centres, and it could even be a mechanism for the negotiation of resistant ideological positions and practices of democratic citizenship.

Janet Staiger (2000) has also examined the political potential of mainstream cinema—its stories and its realms of consumption—to foster communal spatial-affective experiences in North America in the early twentieth century. Staiger (2000, p. 21) suggests that "the immigrant experience in the nickelodeon may have been

more complex” than scholars still realise. The experience of moviegoing was likely as educational and even as politicising as other established pursuits like attending church or a town hall meeting. Early mainstream cinema did more than naturalise unequal social relations, she suggests, contrary to what the cultural industry thesis might suggest; rather, the film narratives, which may have been formulaic but which often addressed issues of history, class, and belonging, and depicted common social problems, may have helped populations of viewers less invested with power to question, challenge, or simply understand the larger structures and narratives encompassing their lives.

The cinema was a physical space that could arrange “structures of feeling,” a term Raymond Williams first used in his book *A Preface to Film* (1954) with Michael Orrom, in conjunction with the cinematic narrative itself, comprising the pleasurable, empowering, pedagogical, and even disciplinary experience of moviegoing in the period before television and video. Judith Mayne highlights the two forms of education enacted through the cinema of the 1920s and 1930s, which were imbricated with the pleasures and structures of feeling configured by mercantile culture: “While the immigrant was being familiarised with American culture and consumerism through the ‘shopping window’ of the screen,” already exhibiting the latest styles, consumer products, domestic technologies, and manners, “the collective experience within the theatre should also be considered as a potential force for promoting resistance to industrialisation” (in Staiger, 2000, p. 20). The cinema of the period, for Mayne, enabled viewers to collect *en mass*, to undergo a communal experience, and to begin the work of forming opinions and political positions in relation to the conflicts and celluloid histories playing out on screen. The early cinema, these scholars suggest, may have enabled viewers to forge new

relationships with their own ethnic groups and with the many others populating their neighbourhoods, people who constituted the wider “imagined community” of their adopted nation.

Examining this potential, Miriam Hansen (1993) has influentially built upon the theorizations of Habermas, Negt, and Kluge to investigate the cinema as a potential public sphere in its own right, capable of assembling strangers in a common pursuit and even promoting dialogue among them, both during and after the exhibition of the film. Perhaps influenced by French New Wave director Francois Truffaut’s critical assessment of sound cinema (Ebrahimian, 2004, p. 101), Hansen laments the arrival of talking pictures, which silenced viewers and encroached upon the cinema’s potential as a space of dialogue; with soundscapes now part of the cinematic *dispositif* or apparatus exerting power on viewing subjects, films arguably cornered “spectators to an absorbed, identifying viewing position” (Hansen, 1993, p. 21). But the addition of sound, like any major technological change, yielded an assortment of possibilities in place of the social practices it rendered obsolete; on top of experiencing the infinite potential of human speech as a narrative component in the cinema, as in the theatre before it, audiences would sing along with intermission songs with lyrics scrawled on the screen, as depicted in *The Last Picture Show* (1971) whose nostalgic elements are addressed ahead. Indeed, both the addition of music and the invention of musicals have been the subjects of inquiry (Altman, 1981; 1987; Feuer, 1981).

Sound, therefore, may not have obliterated a cinematic space and experience that many remember through the lens of nostalgia (Stacey, 1993). Indeed, Staiger points to the possibilities for expression and community formation enabled by the outright noisy New York underground cinema movement of the sixties, driven by

figures like Andy Warhol. In this context, and others including drive-ins and the outdoor cinema movement, the actual screening was a mere ingredient in a much broader experience. Talking, smoking, and “ingesting illicit drugs helped contribute to a casual viewing context” in which counter-cultural communities could constellate themselves around shared cultural resources (Staiger, 2001, p. 21).

Mayne, Hansen, Landsberg, and Staiger touch upon the difficult issues of class, race, gender, and alienation in their discussions of immigrant viewers in the early and mid-twentieth century, but never directly scrutinize the experiences of individual minority groups.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the present analysis is not ethnographic. It is not the result of social research involving viewers, not is it even located in the field of subculture studies or film reception studies more narrowly. Rather, this inquiry builds upon these authors’ considerations of the cinema as a technology that disseminates discourses, which can shape wider notions of community and the good. Although their modes of reception are not scrutinized here, motion pictures have unquestionably supplied forms of popular education, and influenced community formation and therefore cultural and social memory. Still, here my concern is narrative cinema’s discursive and psychological configuration, or “subjectivisation,” of implied (rather than social) viewers, who take up various ideological and ethical positions.

Informing my approach to cinema and society, social historians have attempted to understand the relationship between mass culture and politicization, spectacle

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<sup>20</sup> In her well-known essay “*Schindler’s List* is not *Shoah*,” however, Hansen (1996) examines the infamously jubilant response of one Oakland, California high school class to *Schindler’s List* when they viewed the film during a field trip. Nearly seventy predominately black and Latino students “laughed and talked while Holocaust horrors were on screen” (Rosenthal, 1994: n.p.). The students were immediately ejected from the cinema. In the ensuing debate, parents and community groups were surprised to learn that the students considered the shootings unrealistic compared to those they witnessed on a regular basis (Hansen, 1996).

and pacification since the nineteenth century when pre-cinematic popular culture like billboard advertising was proliferating and ascribing a “cinematic” quality to everyday life. According to Charney and Schwartz (1995) and their contributors in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, the cinema as a space, a narrative form, and hub of social experiences such as fan clubs, has been a major component in reconfiguring our idea of *the social* throughout the past century, especially in the US but also in Canada, India, Europe, South America, and parts of Africa and Asia. According to Singer and Keil (2009, p. 1), beginning in the 1910s the US cinema along with “ragtime music, the fox-trot dance craze, and lavish revues like *Ziegfeld Follies* signalled the weakening grip of Protestant moral austerity.” Because films circulated widely, the “boundaries between urban and rural America became less distinct” as “urban national culture infiltrated the hinterlands as never before, rendering the periphery’s consciousness of and contact with the cultural center more extensive” (Singer and Keil, 2009, p. 2). Other forms of “contact” were addressed diegetically in the films themselves, and especially in the “social problem films” alluded to earlier, but these dramatized instances of contact often focused on naïve middleclass men confronting the cultural *periphery* and its marginalized figures (Patton, 2007). Indeed, a range of “social cinema” traditions inform the global network films examined here given that these earlier narratives also involved the discovery of hidden or unacknowledged connections to the other—concerns with civil rights, for instance, that permeated their moment in American history. And what about the issue of *history* as it relates to culture and consciousness?

The vast majority of the arguments advanced in this dissertation assume some correlation between *history* and *culture*. But this relationship is not so simple to theorize, in spite of the fact that these films seem to “respond” to unique

contemporary technological developments and economic crises. That is, as Kellner's (2009) use of Sartre's term "transcode" reminds us, cultural artefacts reflect *and* transform historical and political discourses; cultural texts are therefore not solely reflective in any simplistic allegorical sense but *engage* history and take on meaning in diverse and unexpected ways. The ever-dynamic relationship between cultural trends—particularly *genres*—and historical events deserves some attention.

### **Genres: Expressions of Individual Consciousness and Historical Concerns**

In many cases, scholars retrospectively authorize a dominant interpretation of a text by locating its concerns and its *formal generic features* as somehow illustrative of its historical period. Indeed, I understand the relationship between global network films and the historical experience of globalization to be dynamic and meaningful and certainly not arbitrary; surely the creative workers who risk their profit margins by depicting the unpleasant elements of the network society understand their films to be engagements with current events as well. Still, dangers await scholars who too readily declare a given cultural text or form to be "definitive" of its era.

Diagnosing contemporary texts in this way is unwise because the narrative of history and future judgements will doubtlessly challenge any contemporary assessments. It scarcely bears repeating that Orson Welles's extremely timely masterpiece *Citizen Kane* (1941) was only a modest success upon its release and would lose in eight categories at the Academy Awards, principally to John Ford's Welsh mining drama, *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), a film that steered clear of any commentary on World War II, US capitalism, corrupt elites, and the recent Great



Depression.<sup>21</sup> Neither critical nor popular taste endorsed *Citizen Kane*, “the greatest film of all time,” as the film of its era when it was exhibited. Looking back, of course, *Citizen Kane* is *the* definitive film—and one of the representative art objects in any medium—of its time. Seldom have the crises of American capitalism been so profoundly explored.

Genre may have been a key problem preventing the immediate popular success of *Citizen Kane*, just as it presents a problem for my discussion of global network films. Welles’s film was wildly experimental for a narrative film of that period, unfolding as it does through the recollections of various unreliable narrators who scarcely knew the mysterious media tycoon. And some scholars suggest that it simply baffled viewers even while it embodied “the political unconscious of the early 40s” (Mulvey, 1992). What, then, is genre and what is the relationship between genre and history?

Genres, according to Rajan (2000) and Gledhill (1985), are “expressions of consciousness” about the historical periods that produced them. But they are also discursive contrivances—a principal reason why I prefer to think of global network films as a *cultural form* that takes generic shape across a host of spy thrillers, war films and the like. Global network films can be unified by their propensity to combine existing modes of expression and continue the “social problem” tradition of conjoining serious thematic ambitions with a popular form. Network films digest a

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<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1972), based on Mario Puzo’s sensationalist popular novel, was marketed as a film with few artistic ambitions, intended instead to be a profitable crowd pleaser for the ailing Paramount Pictures, which was bankrupt only two years earlier. It commented frankly on postwar capitalism, institutional corruption in law enforcement and politics, and the centrality of crime in American life. Its trajectory unfolded in the opposite direction from *Kane*’s. *The Godfather* became the “great American film” *par excellence* celebrated by cultural authorities, deconstructed in film classes, and alluded to in countless media (Jameson, 1979).

range of existing social cinema traditions, and in a variety of genres, in their efforts to present something *different*, and by extension to envision our unique historical concerns (global connectedness) in unique ways (network narratives).

In literature, theatre, television, and perhaps the cinema especially, genres exist. They function, in fact, as sets of determinants that powerfully inform the conception, production, promotion, and reception of cultural texts. One might assume, then, that scholars of genre have been primarily devoted to the division of literature, drama, and cinema “into types...much as the botanist divides the realm of flora into varieties of plants” (Allen, 1989, p. 44). Indeed, many scholars have laboured to define and police the boundaries between generic categories (Bordwell, 1989; Frye, 1957; Gledhill, 1985; Neale, 1980; Williams, 1977). These inquiries have produced a massive volume of material examining Greek Tragedies, Medieval Epic Poetry, and the rise of the modern novel, much of which has limited relevance to the topic at hand. Given the massive sweep of history these debates concern, I would like to align my use of the term “genre” with Romantic and post-Romantic definitions of genre in the field of literary theory primarily. Romantic investigations of genre, according to Rajan (2005), were uniquely sophisticated because of their imbrication with the philosophical debates of the time. And the Romantics in England and Germany have indelibly influenced how we apply generic categories to cultural texts today.

In eighteenth century Germany, art forms and philosophical inquiries were enmeshed. The German Romantics in particular were “*interdisciplinary* thinkers who approach[ed] genres in philosophical (and psychological) rather than mechanical ways” (Rajan, 2005, p. 227; italics in original). In Rajan’s view, Hegel’s *Aesthetics* (1835) was a “watershed text” first in Germany and then across Europe and the UK,

which “open[ed] new directions” for philosophical investigations of art as a “mirror” in which the philosopher could view “the inner essence of his own discipline made concrete and real” (Rajan, 2000, p. 227). For German Romantics,

The role of ‘philosophy’ is not to confer a systematic order on history; rather (post-) Hegelian theory sees genres as attempts at philosophical problem-solving that are finally subject to historical and cultural difference. (Rajan, 2000, p. 227)

German romanticism’s unique contribution to modern notions of genre is “its ‘philosophical’ genre theory,” which was indebted primarily to “[Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe’s theory of morphology”—the study of language’s meaningful units based upon the naming of anatomical and botanical parts in the natural sciences (Rajan, 2000, p. 227). Goethe’s influence was recalibrated in the twentieth century when the Russian Formalist Vladamir Propp (1928) wrote his influential book *Morphology of the Folktale* and Mikhail Bakhtin (1927) wrote his essays examining “speech genres.” In Goethe’s estimation, “like plants, genres have a *Gestalt* which is not an abstract schema or norm but the individual and characteristic *shape* of the work” (in Rajan, 2000, p. 227). Post-Romantic literary scholars have understood genres in this way, as “organic expressions of consciousness” that—like global network films—are also shaped by “historical and cultural difference” (Rajan, 2000, p. 227).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The purity of genre suggested by Goethe’s analogical use of nature appears somewhat compromised by these twin characterizations: if genres are organic expressions of consciousness, can they also spring forth from contingent historical conditions? Goethe is most renowned for his five major plays: *Gotz von Berlichingen* (1773), *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787), *Egmont* (1788), *Torquato Tasso* (1790), and *Faust*: Parts 1 and 2 (1808, 1832). With genre’s impurity in mind, it is interesting that Goethe subtitled *Faust* in generic terms as both *Faust: A Tragedy*, as well as *Faust: A Dramatic Poem*. See Abraham Hayward (trans.) (1856). *Faust: A Dramatic Poem*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields.

Contemporary ideas of genre have their seeds here, although recently cultural theorists have questioned the validity of genre, not merely as an assortment of categories that endlessly overlap, but as a meaningful instrument of analysis (Neale, 1980; Stam, 2000; Tudor, 1974). Stam (2000, p. 14), for instance, questions whether or not genres are “really ‘out there’ in the world” or are in fact “merely the constructions of analysts.” Such questions challenge the ontological status of genre as a signifier of something fixed, nameable, and meaningful in diverse contexts, constituting the empirical dilemma: are genres out there or hermeneutically produced? This dilemma of origins is rooted in a logical impasse of which Andrew Tudor (1985) provides a useful example:

To take a genre such as the ‘western’, analyse it, and list its principal characteristics, is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are ‘westerns’. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the ‘principal characteristics’ which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. (Cited in Gledhill, 1985, p. 59)

This circularity makes the concept of genre particularly slippery for scholars to identify, casting doubt upon the validity of genre analysis altogether. Genres paradoxically emerge organically from the inspired individual celebrated in Romantic thought, but *historical* conditions influence them. Global network films, in my analysis, exist at this meeting point between immaterial individual human

consciousness<sup>23</sup> (not dictated by history) and material conditions (dictated by history).

For instance, scholars, popular commentators, and filmmakers have almost universally interpreted the New Hollywood cinema of the seventies as a collection of narratives that reflect and reproduce the traumatizing imagery of the Vietnam War, instances of urban violence, and tragically suppressed protests fuelled by anti-war sentiment, unemployment and social segregation (Adare, 1981; Hansen, 1980; Lowenstein, 2005; Smith, 1975). The decade was arguably a unique age of anxiety in which the gritty, predominately counter-hegemonic films *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Patton* (1970), *The French Connection* (1971), *The Godfather: Part One* (1972) and *Part Two* (1974), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) could all win Oscars for Best Picture and attract mainstream audiences. Such arguments may be valid in as far as there surely is a meaningful relationship between the events of history, public sentiments, and the reception of certain forms of culture rather than others; my arguments here depend on it. But what is important for social historians to remember as they forge such linkages is that a given public mood can demand as well as *resist* cultural engagements with the troubling events of history in confusing and contradictory ways.

Walt Disney World in Florida, for instance, opened to massive success in 1971 and foreign and domestic crowds made the pilgrimage in steadily increasing numbers throughout the decade, despite the economic recession inaugurated by the

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<sup>23</sup> Radstone's (2000) psychoanalytical work on trauma cinema, memory, and the "war of the fathers" that began September 11, 2001 foregrounds the *ahistorical* nature of many of the stories we tell ourselves and thus challenges historically "reflectionist" readings of narrative forms. Most of our stories, she claims, explored timeless concerns and the simplest structuralist interpretations can unearth narrative tropes (separation, initiation, return) and concerns (generational conflict, enduring violence) that date back to the time of the epic (Radstone, 2000; 2006).

oil crisis and Japan's and Germany's mounting economic power. Can these consumers' spending in pursuit of family leisure and spectacle be understood in relation to the depressed US economy? Similarly, US citizens who were disturbed by the thousands of soldiers lost in the Vietnam War, and by the later Watergate scandal which exposed their leadership as deceptive and criminal, may well have selected escapist entertainments before electing to relive the Washington scandal by viewing a mainstream film like Alan J. Pakula's meticulous *All the President's Men* (1976).<sup>24</sup> Tellingly, by the middle of the decade the boxing epic *Rocky* (1976) supplied the cultural experience at which fatigued audiences were purportedly having "religious experiences" (Friedkin, 2006).

*Rocky* would defeat the more relevant *All the President's Men* for Best Picture at the Oscars, as well as Sydney Lumet's favoured drama *Network* (1976), which grimly exposed the corporate greed and infantilizing treatment of the public by a major television conglomerate that suppressed unpatriotic news. In an effort to correspond with the perceived public mood, *Network's* protagonist Howard Beale (Peter Finch) invites viewers of his television news program to open their windows and yell into the street: "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"<sup>25</sup> This line became famous, and *Network* is now revered as great

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the Archie Bunker situation comedy "All in the Family" (1971-1979), which addressed racism, sexism, immigration, the war, and the weak economy in a way that undermined the working class perspective of its protagonist, was the number one rated show in the US from 1971-1975. The meaning of this popularity and the ideological uses of the show by diverse audiences have been debated widely in communication studies (Brigham and Giesbrecht, 1976; Perse, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Lumet even stages memorable scenes in which hundreds of New Yorkers open their windows and nearly drown out the traffic noise with their cacophonous, dissenting voices. (Indeed, the fact that television enables these people to unite in their anger as citizens oddly valorises the medium the film means to skewer). As rival social problem film director Norman Jewison told the American Film Institute: "When Americans heard that, that's how they felt. [Screenwriter] Paddy Chayevsky hit a nerve." (Jewison, 2007: n.p.).

American cinema along with *All the President's Men*, in spite of the former's moderate commercial success (\$23,698,877) when compared with *Rocky's* earnings (\$117,235,247). But *Rocky's* bravado, according to popular commentators (Friedkin, 2006), anticipated the patriotic "re-masculinization" of the US that purportedly began when cinematic citizens Ronald and Nancy Reagan started campaigning in 1980 on the basis that the US economy could be invincible again. *Rocky's* famous phrases and its story of individual determination and triumph are integrated into popular culture in ways impossible to measure, largely because of the cultural climate that received the film. Conversely, Lumet's and Pakula's more literate and intellectually challenging films, released the same year, neglected to transcend the gap between popular tastes, the public mood, and spectators' curious suspicion of (and quests for) cultural capital.

### **American Cinema and Cultural Value**

According to Holt (Schor and Holt, 2000, p. 224), Bourdieu's key argument in *Distinction* "is that tastes are structured through continuities in interactions with material culture." What people elect to consume, amid a variety of cultural options, can tell scholars as well as other consumers something significant about the material and social conditions that help forge these continuities. Popular tastes on the one hand, and cultivated tastes on the other, common among upper class and learned groups who can appreciate "important" aesthetic achievements, have long been at odds in discussions of culture and social class (Arnold, 1882; Hoggart, 1957; Veblen, 1897; Williams, 1977).

Film since its inception has had an uneasy relationship with traditional taxonomies of taste and cultural capital enforced to discriminate between the realms

of popular and legitimate taste in the fine and performing arts. Since global network films address important issues and timeless themes, albeit amid the popular form of US narrative cinema, contextualising how taste has come to bear on “serious” cinema seems necessary. Initially the Lumiere brothers exhibited their films to elite audiences who could pay large sums to be titillated by the latest attraction. But from 1895 to 1906, the “cinema of attractions,” which offered thrills akin to those sought at carnivals and sideshows, and thus attracted popular audiences, emerged as a commercially viable film form (Gunning, 1999; Karnick and Jenkins, 1995). As the grammar of narrative cinema took shape in the 1910s, owing in many ways to D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a schism formed between ambitious agents who wanted to cultivate cinema as commercial entertainment and those who wanted to explore its aesthetic and technological possibilities for their own sake. Globally, the dividing lines were drawn between Hollywood films, designed to entertain, and art films, whose criteria belie a profoundly European bias.

Art films informed by aesthetic movements such as Impressionism showed critics of high culture that cinema could be art. But US producers disdained the idea that European art films had the exclusive right to be considered great cinema. US films, themselves illustrations of artistry and innovation from the start, needed a system of taste not directly tied to the European traditions of great literature and art.<sup>26</sup> Because Hollywood’s dominance over the global film industry by the 1920s enabled such voluminous output, the institution of regimes of taste needed to be tailored to fit the wide range, purpose, and quality of American studio films. Great

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<sup>26</sup> Walt Disney’s film *Fantasia* (1940) is often cited as an example of both US art films gaining widespread recognition and assuming their place among established media of visual art, and US cultural anxieties about appealing only to low, popular taste. Disney’s chosen soundtrack mediates this anxiety: a collection of classical European masterpieces, the score combines high culture with the popular medium of animation (Goldmark, Kramer, and Leppert, 2007).



cinema thus became a category of judgement open to Hollywood films as well as imported art films, a discourse of taste and cultural capital that led in many ways to the founding of the Academy Awards, first held in 1929.

In this sense, as though battling the inferiority complex of a younger nation “founded” violently by Britain and France, with their centuries of great artistic production, American cinema could be regarded as great because America itself said so. This achievement, while significant and ultimately liberating for the most brilliant filmmakers who were to follow, did not suture over the partition between what is championed as great and what selected *en mass* as popular. In the US industrial context the commercial imperative to produce popular culture meant that “lower” tastes were always looming beneath creative decisions, governing how narratives were cast and staged, and ultimately marketed back to the audiences to whose desires they were supposed to correspond. But other sorts of films with higher ambitions were always created within the confined creative spaces of the studios themselves; the films that advanced the possibilities of the medium, or that mapped major themes, social problems, and upheavals previously reserved for the high arts, thus scarcely correspond to the films that may have satisfied popular taste.

As the success of *Rocky* in the politically complex post-Nixon era illustrates, popular tastes are often understood to prioritize immediate pleasure over the intellectual labour and sober engagement demanded by “higher” cultural experiences, which promise superior and lasting rewards. Popular demand thus has a tendency to make little or no space for the less immediately pleasurable but historically prescient forms of culture that ostensibly empower people in far more significant ways, enabling subjects to make sense of their own “relationship to the social” in liberating ways (Jameson, 1992, p. xvi). The division between “great

cinema” on the one hand, and the films that actually infiltrate a given culture on the other, emerges from the inherited wisdom that higher, serious cinema considers deeper, more sombre thematic issues—like mortality, moral dilemmas, and historical catastrophes often tied to the period from which they emerge—whereas lesser films offer pleasing spectacles and fleeting pleasures unrelated to the social and historical circumstances of a given audience. The ways in which viewers and cultural producers engage with, and disengage from, history are complex, as I have suggested above, and scholars should be wary of assigning *intentionality* to artists, writers, and filmmakers whose products may engage history in unplanned ways.

*Traffic*, for instance, was written and filmed prior to the September 11 attacks and the ensuing war on terror, and yet its mapping of porous borders, transnational flows, and the rage produced by US foreign policies anticipates and reflects the concerns of the early twenty first century. The Bush Administration even used drug infiltration points along the US borders as markers of possible entry points for terrorists, aligning the two external threats. *Black Hawk Down* was similarly in post-production when Washington and New York were attacked, and yet its prophetic and indelible images of victimized Americans and Islamic rage have made it one of the most discussed films of the past decade—a rendering of the new, postmodern form of technological warfare that its producers had no idea would materialize in Iraq and Afghanistan (Klien, 2005). The decision to script and film these narratives prior to 9/11 (*Traffic* was an adaptation, and the *Black Hawk Down* incident took place in 1993) illustrate how the political unconscious of US concerns at the turn of the century emerged in these authors’ minds as expressions of consciousness—that, in fact, their films were not “reflections” of historical events but a *combination* of ahistorical individual creativity and the political mood. The global network film, surely

a reflection of contemporary concerns, is a similar combination of inherited genres and concerns that transcend our moment. It can be understood as an extension of five established US social cinema traditions.

## Chapter 3

### Social Cinema Traditions and Historical Trauma

Although further film traditions in world cinema and individual genres are surely reference points for the writers, producers, and directors of global network films, given my US focus, five social cinema traditions provide the primary precedents. The global network film emerges from:

1. the “social problem film” of the thirties, forties, and fifties, in which protagonists confront prejudice, addiction, poverty, or crime;
2. the “economic guilt film” in which socially privileged citizens typically confront the suffering of the underclass, usually within their own country;
3. the “city film” in which strangers experience traumatic or benevolent contingent encounters amid urban architecture;
4. the “eco-trauma film” in which natural disasters, menacing creatures, and the effects of pollution or development threaten human lives and the social order;
5. the “contagion-carrier film” in which human networks are mapped through the movement of a virus or illness amongst a national or global population.

These traditions remind us that even though the processes of globalization have entered a new phase of efficiency enabled chiefly by neoliberal trading policies and nascent production economies that have become indispensable nodes in the network society, cultural production engages these new developments through *existing modes of representation*.

On the one hand, this proposition seems uncontroversial. After all, seldom are new art forms born. On the other hand, however, this claim might appear to overlook the many ways in which modes of representation have changed and *become unique* as a result of the network society's new technologies. A variety of technology scholars (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Feenberg and Barney, 2004; Wilhelm, 2000), popular culture scholars (Jenkins, 2006; Thorburn, Jenkins, and Seawell, 2004), network scholars (Castells, 2001; 2008; Barney, 2008; Coombe and Herman, 2001) and free culture advocates in legal studies (Winner, 2004) examine how new media technologies have changed modes of representation and communication. Like paper or the typewriter, new technologies (from camera phones to editing software) are therefore not merely devices but socially situated objects that enable new social practices—including the documentation of everyday life and momentous events alike.

New cinematic developments, I argue, much like other forms of communication, may *appear* novel but in fact reproduce inherited discourses that influence the depiction of poor populations, women, minority identities, Western masculinity, etc. That is, new technologies are no match for endurance of ideology in reshaping public consciousness; indeed technologies can be read as “materialized ideology” according to Marcuse (Feenberg, 1999). Like ideology itself, popular discourses change slowly and are perhaps usefully understood as a terrain in which the values of the present *overlap* with inherited values rather than break radically from them. New ideological and cultural developments never truly disband with prior ways of thinking and prior aesthetic traditions (although their proponents may firmly reject them) but these developments—as genres exemplify—constitute their newness and difference in relation to traditions. Global network films incorporate the

aforementioned social cinema traditions but explore contemporary concerns. The following sections map these five continually influential social cinema traditions.

## **The Social Problem Film**

Social problem films are almost as old as Hollywood itself. The most widely cited definition posits that their “central dramatic conflict revolves around the interaction of the individual with social institutions (such as government, business, political movements, etc.)” with only “indirect concern with broader social values (those of the family, sexuality, religion, etc.)” (Roffman and Purdy, 1981, p. viii). Indeed, in *The Hollywood Social Problem Film*, Roffman and Purdy detail a range of narratives dealing with race (Joseph Manceiwicz’s *No Way Out* 1950; Stanley Kramer’s *The Defiant Ones* 1958; Douglas Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* 1959), class (Frank Capra’s *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* 1936; Gregory La Cava’s *My Man Godfrey* 1936), poverty (Henry King’s *One More Spring* 1935; John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath* 1940), addiction (Victor Fleming’s *The Wet Parade* 1932; Billy Wilder’s *The Lost Weekend* 1945; Otto Preminger’s *The Man with the Golden Arm* 1955), and mental illness (Mitchell Leisen’s *Lady in the Dark* 1944; Anatole Litvak’s *The Snake Pit* 1948). The authors remind us that Hollywood since the 1930s has maintained resources for the production of motion pictures addressing disconcerting social issues, most of which are less profitable than genre films.

Cindy Patton (2007) offers a more critical evaluation of these films in *The Cinematic Identity*. In the social problem film of the late forties and fifties, she claims, performances of a newly enlightened, cosmopolitan, but nonetheless authoritative discourse of masculinity took centre stage and risked marginalising the social

problems themselves. During the forties, “a kind of watered down version of the Method [acting style]” became “naturalized as ‘real’” (Patton, 2007: 3). Prominent examples of such performances include Gregory Peck’s appearances as a New York journalist who adopts a Jewish identity to study prejudice in Elia Kazan’s *A Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947), and as a lawyer defending an innocent black suspect in Robert Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), Marlon Brando’s performance as a dock worker battling a corrupt union in Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* (1954), and Frank Sinatra’s performance as a tortured heroine addict in Otto Preminger’s *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955). According to Patton:

This milquetoast humanism promotes tolerance but understands tolerance to be the property of white, Christian males who use it to re-establish their position as the Universal from which are distinguished the particulars who need to be tolerated (Blacks, Jews, eventually women, other ethnic groups, the aged and disabled, and, arguably, gays and lesbians). (Patton, 2007, p. 3).

Nonetheless, for a “few crucial years, the cinema became...a venue for working out the meaning and mode of representing authentic selfhood” through naturalistic performances and narrative journeys that resembled the problems of the day: prejudice, corruption, crime, addiction, racism, and the difficulties of being bi-racial explored in *Pinky* (1949) and *Imitation of Life* (1959) (Patton, 2007, p. 3). This ostensibly new sensitivity would be “a prerequisite” for hegemonic Hollywood masculinity to retain its appeal and relevance amid the climate of “post-World War II civil rights activism and discourse” (Patton, 2007, p. 3-4).

Glenn Ford’s performance and narrative journey in Richard Brooks’s social problem film *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955) typifies Patton’s characterization of white

male tolerance when confronted with the other. As an idealistic teacher, Ford delivers a sermon on racism to his students, several of them black, signifying the film's engagement with the nascent civil rights movement (Sidney Poitier even plays a small role) alongside its central concern with delinquency. This rendering of aberrant inner city



**Figure 5. Richard (Ford) confronts gang violence in the classroom. © 1955 MGM**

youth, some of whom habitually assault their public school teachers, managed to expand discussions of this difficult issue across public discourses generally. The closing credits even present a declaration scrolled across the screen demanding that parents, teachers, and concerned citizens address this growing social problem. Later similar films, however, chiefly *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Norman Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), would become celebrated by the Academy and the American Film Institute, and commemorated in US culture, for their more direct examinations of racism, accomplished unsurprisingly through their depictions of white men thwarting or overcoming their own prejudices.<sup>27</sup>

Like social problem films, global network films typically address human suffering, inequality, or broken institutions (represented by violent schools, corrupt police departments, and biased courts in the older cinema) through white male protagonists who journey from naivety to self-knowledge through their encounters with trauma or traumatized others (as we will see in *Traffic*, *Black Hawk Down*,

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<sup>27</sup> Actor Sidney Poitier's performance in *In the Heat of the Night* is affectionately remembered as a socially important articulation of defiance and integrity in the face of Southern bigotry, especially through his widely quoted assertion that in the Northeast US people did not refer to him as "boy" or worse because "They call me Mr. Tibbs!" But as lauded as the actor, the film, and the memorable phrase are, many people forget that the Academy Award for Best Actor did not go to Poitier, but to famed "method" actor Rod Steiger for his depiction of the racist, Southern sheriff who learns to conduct himself humanely in the film.



*Crash*, *Babel* and others). But these newer films also engage with “the values that function *behind* the mechanisms” of military, juridical, corporate, or humanitarian bodies, and their interventions locally and in the lives of unseen others (Roffman and Purdy, 1981, p. viii). Based upon the many case studies presented in Roffman and Purdy’s history of the social problem film, and my own selection of global network films, one might be tempted to make a generalization: social problem films predominately affirm the benevolence of US institutions and white masculinity, which are cast into crisis but capable of correcting their own deficiencies; global network films, by contrast, generally attempt to question the values embedded in these institutions, their governing discourses, and their actual endeavours.

Global network films are distinct from most social problem films produced in the mid-twentieth century when, in many instances, father (and less often mother and teacher) knew best. In the twenty first century, the “fathers” played by Michael Douglas in *Traffic*, Sam Shepard in *Black Hawk Down*, Don Cheadle in *Hotel Rwanda*, George Clooney in *Syriana*, Ralph Fiennes in *The Constant Gardener*, and Brad Pitt in *Babel* are at least initially unable to grasp the complexities of life in the global network society and impotent to varying degrees in their efforts to alleviate the human suffering they witness. or to protect their own families. Across a range of global network films, as I will examine ahead, we see that US diplomats, politicians, generals, foot soldiers, doctors, aid workers, and executives represent institutions that may act in malevolent ways; as individuals enmeshed in networks that are beyond their control, these Western men in some cases lack sufficient knowledge even to reevaluate and amend their own conduct. Of course, many of these films remain ideologically complicit with the US hegemony they critique. But by presenting critical perspectives on privileged Westerners’ activities in poor regions of the world,

global network films expand upon the narrowly national context of another long running narrative form: the “economic guilt film” (Clover, 1993; Lowenstein, 2005; Nystrom, 2004).

## The Economic Guilt Film

Landmark films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), based upon John Steinbeck’s (1939) narrative about the plight of “the people” in the midst of Great Depression, or even *Citizen Kane* (1941), about one man’s soul-destroying obsession with wealth and fame, suggest in a proto-Marxist fashion that accumulation itself incurs a cost—whether to the labourer’s body or to the capitalist’s peace of mind. Both films, for instance, address the impact of the stock market crash. But even less sombre cinema, such as *film noir*, adheres to this moral economy. Classics like William Wyler’s *The Little Foxes* (1941), Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Michael Curtiz’s *Mildred Pierce* (1945) criticise the pursuit of wealth and social status as socially divisive and morally corrosive. Narratives fuelled by avarice, however, are innumerable, and therefore beyond the scope of this discussion. Economic *guilt* films are a much more specific formation. They are of central importance to my investigation of the global network film and the cinematic network society, while remaining only loosely defined, and thus I devote some extended attention to this film tradition here.

According to Clover (1993) and Lowenstein (2005), economic guilt films assume their definitive form in the late sixties and seventies, surfacing as counter-cultural dramas about “dropping out” as a response to the crushing demands of life under capital, evidenced in Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), Francis Ford

Coppola's *The Rain People* (1969), Bob Rafelson's *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), and Michealangelo Antonioni's American film *Zabriskie Point* (1970), in which University of California students embroiled in campus protests (one of whom uses the alias Karl Marx) flee to the desert, shed their clothes, and protest a corporation's plans to build a massive residential development over sacred land. According to Clover (1993):

The story is a familiar one in American popular culture. The city approaches the country guilty in much the same way that the capitalist approaches the proletarian guilty (for plundering his labor) or the settler approaches the Indian guilty (for taking his land). In fact, films like *Deliverance*, *Hunter's Blood*, and *The Hills Have Eyes* [parts 1 and 2] resemble nothing so much as thirties and forties westerns of the settlers-versus-Indians variety. (Clover, 1993, p. 134)

Westerns and settler films, and the economic guilt films of the seventies, eighties, and nineties, remind us that "we all inhabit...a society built on Indian graves" (Clover, 1993, p. 134); middleclass wealth and comfort, that is, have come at considerable cost and in crude terms they have incurred a *debt*. This characterization of economic guilt sheds light upon how the term guilt is deployed here in its phenomenological Sartrean sense, rather than in its juridical or even religious sense.

Clover's definition also specifies *whose* guilt is referenced; as North Americans with European or other non-native ancestry, "we" belong to a group that has exploited others and benefited irreversibly from historical instances of oppression that continue in gentler, bureaucratic forms. The economic guilt referenced in the majority of these films thus refers to the oppressors' guilt, the guilt of having committed punishable deeds and received no punishment. However, as scholars in Postcolonial Studies and those on Truth and Reconciliation Committees from South Africa to Eastern Europe know, this facile moral equation is only a corner of a much

larger and more complex picture. Indeed, Clover's paradigm aptly suggests that the victimization endured by Native Americans and other colonized populations is often *itself* colonized by others, especially white men from "the country" and the Southern states who have far less justification for their status as victims.

In John Schlesinger's Oscar-winning *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), for instance, the Texan protagonist Joe Buck (Jon Voight) represents an unwitting victim of the polarizing US economy. This polarity reaches its apotheosis in tragic-comic scenes in which the unemployed Joe commingles with

New York's class of equally unemployed millionaire socialites; these elites are momentarily titillated by Joe's cowboy outfit and naïve

demeanour, but consider him to belong to another species entirely. Tellingly, he seems to be welcome nowhere in his own country. In

Texas, Joe and his fiancé are attacked and raped by savage locals, likely motivating his journey North; his co-workers at the Texas diner that employed him are indifferent and even hostile toward his optimism; and during his sojourn as a prostitute in New York where big dreams presumably come true, Joe is ridiculed and disciplined in cruel ways by the Fifth Avenue ruling class *and* by enlightened liberals, gays, socialists, and counter-cultural figures of all stripes (Le Coney and Trodd, 2006). Schlesinger and screenwriter Waldo Salt invoke an odd sense of economic guilt indeed. Although Joe's class markers elucidate his non-hegemonic status, white masculinity nonetheless deserves society's sympathy in the late sixties US national context. Dire economic conditions are a major theme, alongside the corrosive effects



**Figure 6. Joe and Rizzo are depicted as the weak economy's victims coping with homelessness. © 1969 MGM**

of the commoditization of experience. As multiple billboards suggest—some depicting the Marlboro Man or similar commodified cowboys—Joe has not merely journeyed North in his own country but has travelled through modernity itself, from the bucolic (albeit violent) Southern farming economy that represents the United States's past to the commodity future embodied by ads and the crowded concrete spaces of Manhattan in which everything is for sale—even people.

Similarly, in the celebrated New Hollywood film *The Last Picture Show* (1971), director Peter Bogdanovich renders the remaining inhabitants of a dying Texas town as victims of economic variables that are “hurting the farmer,” the well-worn US narrative that laments the ways in which younger generations and economic trends alike appear indifferent to the agrarian origins of the national economy. The West Texans, played by Ellen Burstyn, Jeff Bridges, Cybil Shepherd, Sam Bottoms, and Ben Johnson, are also homeless in their homeland like Joe in *Midnight Cowboy*. The town's young people loiter in the pool hall and attend the doomed cinema on its closing night, but have no prospects whatsoever aside from relocating to the big city. Ben Johnson, playing the town's wise elder, Sam the Lion, in an Academy Award-winning performance, delivers a valediction before his death about swimming in the town's lake as a teenager; the lake is in fact a barren tank dam excavated for irrigation purposes. Sam's recollection of his idyllic swim with the girl that got away

can therefore be read as the film's more critical evaluation of the dubious nature of nostalgia itself.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, as actress Ellen Burstyn recalls, there was nothing wholly good or gentle about Archer City, Texas, in the seventies, let alone these earlier periods:

There was a boy named Lloyd Catlet who was a local that Peter [Bogdanovich] hired for us to get the accent from him...At one point somebody asked him 'Well what do you do for fun around here?' And Lloyd answered, 'Whoop niggers.' And there was this silence and nobody said anything. But I felt this resolve pass through us that said, 'All right young man, we will take on your education.' And we did. (Bowser, 2002, n.p.)

Indeed it is difficult, given this revelation and the socio-historical context it illuminates, to feel economic guilt for the outmoded farmers and oil workers who are merely forced to relocate. The history of slavery, and the practice of lynching, which endured well into the sixties, remind us that Sam and the other supposed victims were also *victimizers*. Burstyn offered this recollection to interviewer Kenneth Bowser for this documentary *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (2003), based upon Peter Biskind's (1999) eponymous book about the New Hollywood movement. The film boasts dozens of celebrity interviews and it screened in competition at Cannes in 2003 before being purchased by distributors; it understandably found a very large

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<sup>28</sup> Although *The Last Picture Show* links the guilt for the town's demise with dry oil wells and indifferent business interests aligned with Houston, Dallas, or the industrial North, the film generally articulates the plight of the poor, the old, and the obsolete in gentle terms. And even though Sam's speech deconstructs itself in some ways as a product of nostalgia (the lake was itself a product of industrial modernity), the film is earnest in its condemnation of progress and its celebration of a better past. It elicits economic guilt for sombre, white Texans in disturbing ways, then, partly by idealizing the goodness of this past. The film is set in 1951 and Sam is nostalgic for the turn of the century.

audience for a documentary.<sup>29</sup> But tellingly, Burstyn's comments were not included in the film.

*Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* is itself a profoundly nostalgic project on screen and on the page and Burstyn's tale of entrenched racism ruptures Bogdanovich's and Bowser's own nostalgia for the 1970s when they were Hollywood writers and liberals ostensibly active in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>30</sup> But the actress's narrative accomplishes something else: it gives voice to this rural white man's palpable *anger*, which is also a definitive feature of economic guilt films. Indeed, similar resentment rumbles beneath Joe's disappointed optimism in *Midnight Cowboy* and Sam the Lion's nostalgic soliloquy in *The Last Picture Show*, threatening to materialise as vengeance.

## **Economic Guilt and Vengeance**

Seventies revenge films were thus exceptional in some ways. They were spectacles offering exploitative pleasures that also connected with public taste and the national mood. In fact, revenge itself fuels a series of violent economic guilt thrillers from this period such as John G. Avildsen's *Joe* (1970), which concerns the working class rage channelled by the "greatest generation" against the liberal "hippie" youth (mostly college students) who take their freedoms and their elders' suffering for granted; Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972) based upon

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<sup>29</sup> *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (2003) had two major premiers in the US in 2003, and had television premieres in France, Norway, Mexico, and Sweden from 2003-2005. The film was screening at film festivals as late as October 2005, more than two years after its release. Widely available on DVD, even for rent, the film was reviewed-promoted in more than thirty prominent publications in Europe, the UK, and North America.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Bowser's nostalgia for legendary periods in filmmaking—and for a better America—is also evidenced in his Hollywood history film *Frank Capra's American Dream* (1997).

Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* (1960), and *The Hills Have Eyes*, (1977), which dramatize "proper" middleclass families being victimized by abject lower class families disgusted by their wealth; and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), which dramatises the cannibalism and depravity that one rural family resorts to after the local meat packing plant makes their jobs redundant. Amid references to the gas shortage, the five college-age, middleclass friends who stop to refuel in the family's abandoned Texas town do not fare well. Undoubtedly, however, John Boorman's film *Deliverance* (1972) remains perhaps the most celebrated and enduring economic guilt film of the period.

Based upon James Dickey's (1970) eponymous novel, which engaged with Biblical, mythological, and Southern Gothic traditions, *Deliverance* thus remains one of the most discussed narratives of vengeance in US culture in any medium (Houck and Picart, 2006; Lowenstein, 2005; Narine, 2008); despite being a violent thriller, the film's cultural value was elevated by Academy voters who nominated it for Best Picture, Best Editor, and Best Screenplay. *Deliverance*'s central concerns with US middleclass privilege, the exploitation of natural resources in the service of consumer culture, and the morality of violently defending a "way of life" that is by many accounts unsustainable loom large over the global network films of today. Boorman's film also concretized the major anxieties that afflicted Americans during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not unlike the military conflicts taking place today, the Vietnam War was the nexus of a global, ideological conflict between East and West. But within the United States, numerous conflicts, including those between social movements supporting and opposing the war, played out between North and South. Several scholars have thus read the film as an allegory of the American



experience battling an unknowable enemy in the wilderness of Vietnam (Lowenstein, 2005).

Ed's journey epitomizes the most disturbing component of the economic guilt paradigm—not the reprisal of the victims, but *the vengeance of the guilty oppressors against the object cause of their guilt*. And Ed is interestingly played by Jon Voight, who—in a reversal—portrayed the poor, barely literate Texan in *Midnight Cowboy*. In *Deliverance*, Ed is not merely confronted with the suffering populations his way of life produces, but he must silence them as well.

After all, as Lowenstein (2005, p. 132) notes, “the narrative arc of rape-revenge in *Deliverance* legitimizes the glaringly uneven resolution of the film's class conflict, where ‘civilized’ city men kill the ‘savage’ country



**Figure 7. The corpse's protruding hand is a symbol of the middleclass men's economic guilt in *Deliverance*. © 1972 Warner Bros.**

men without ever...facing legal consequences for their actions.” Faced with the prospect that a few poor, rural men could keep these events “hanging over” them for the rest of their lives, the middleclass men opt to kill the human reminders of their guilt and inter them in a landscape set to be flooded. The rural poor men, already subsisting, will thus be buried twice: first in a shallow grave, and then deep beneath a “big dead lake” on which Atlanta families will drive powerboats.

The poor men's attack on Ed and Bobby therefore does crucial work, like terrorism has done in this decade, in galvanizing the rightness of middleclass consumer hegemony. Indeed, Christopher Dickey (2007, n.p.), whose father wrote *Deliverance*, has linked the rape-revenge plot along the river with the terror-revenge plot that has characterized nearly all of this decade:

I started thinking about the movie's particular relevance for the post-9/11 world. My old man and I disagreed about many things, but when I watched the re-released film again just recently, in light of current headlines, I realized just how well he'd tapped into those mind-sets that eventually helped plunge us into the Mesopotamian quagmire...And the river? That's the war in Iraq. (Dickey, 2007, n.p.)

The unsavoury responses of ostensibly “civilized” people to their own victimization, as the interrogation practices sanctioned at Guantanamo Bay illustrate, enacts a second round of violence on the middleclass men by reducing them to the level of their barbarous attackers.

If Boorman's *Deliverance* poses the quintessentially uncomfortable questions about economic guilt to middleclass viewers—and a later Boorman film, *The Emerald Forest* (1985), depicts angry locals dynamiting a hydroelectric dam that has damaged their eco-system—perhaps we might get a more complete picture of how economic guilt is negotiated in US cinema since the seventies by comparing the director's provocative plots with those of another *auteur* whose ideological footing seems directly opposed.

### **Steven Spielberg and Economic Guilt**

Steven Spielberg's family-friendly corpus might come to mind as a series of recuperative narratives that envision the underclass and the benevolent middle class in gentler terms. In many ways, Spielberg's films are sympathetic to the plight of the poor (although these people almost never occupy central roles in the director's resolutely middleclass fantasies) and they indulge in the “Hollywood Marxism” that directs animosity toward the “cruel egotism and opportunism of the rich” whilst paradoxically celebrating middleclass consumption and economic ambitions (Žižek,

2008, n.p.). As *Jaws* (1975) makes clear, however, even Spielberg's more benign cinema choreographs confrontations between middleclass civility and guilt, and lower class incivility and rage, in a way that similarly and therapeutically disbands with the unpleasant human reminders that the utopian middleclass worlds of Spielberg's imagination are enabled by the other's labour and suffering.

Indeed, Spielberg's rise through the studio system, I suggest, is in part a function of the prodigious director's astute and soothing handing of economic guilt narratives. For instance, Spielberg dramatizes the mistreatment of the poor, white, Southern couple who steal a car, create a media frenzy by leading a police chase across Texas, and gain public support in their efforts to recover their baby from Child Services in his feature film debut, *The Sugarland Express* (1974). Screenwriters Matthew Robbins and Hal Barwood based the film upon recent historical events in Texas and thus, somewhat atypically, the poor underclass parents Lou Jean (Goldie Hawn) and Clovis Michael (William Atherton) are rendered sympathetically here, whilst middleclass bureaucrats and senior law enforcers emerge as indifferent in their disproportionately violent response to the couple's demands. It is notable, however, that despite being uncouth, the couple represents Spielberg's primary object of fascination: the family.

It is therefore less surprising that he should align viewers' sympathies with these people rather than the legal system they fight, the barrier thwarting their status as a family. The mother and father simply want what is "natural"—to be parents to their child—but the paternal authority of the law supplants the maternal and paternal authority that reigns supreme within the nuclear family. Here, that is, the state governs through discipline (the young father is also on parole) subjects who wish to experience their subjectivity, perhaps naively, as though they themselves govern it

freely; Texan mantras like the former state motto, “It’s Like a Whole Other Country,” and the unspoken “laws” by which armed “free individuals” govern themselves provide an edifying backdrop for the film’s characterization of disciplinary institutions, including Child Services itself. The staging of the violent ambush that awaits Clovis in his final bid for his child exemplifies the deep division Spielberg enforces between the juridical and the familial versions of paternal authority.

In *Jaws*, by contrast, the law and the law of the father are fused in the figure of one of the United States’ most ritualized characters—the small town police chief or sheriff. A law enforcer as well as a family man, Brody (Roy Scheider) sutures over the partition that plagues the father in Spielberg’s earlier film. Here the police chief’s pursuit of the shark (the “impossible object” or the Lacanian *object a* represented in *Sugarland Express* by the child) challenges the greedy town council and the wealthy business interests. These ruling class players would rather promote a cover-up to maintain the fantasy appeal of their Capraesque small town, Amity, in order to ensure a



**Figure 8. Brody initially fails to protect the town as a sheriff and his family as a father. © 1975 Universal Pictures**

lucrative tourist season. On top of confronting the establishment, the middleclass Brody also spars with the working-class fisherman and war veteran, Quint (Robert Shaw) who demands ten thousand dollars to hunt the shark after it kills a local teenaged girl and a younger boy. Quint’s grating presence as a reminder of the idyllic tourist town’s industrial origins is exemplified by his famous entrance into the film; as the town council holds a community meeting, and people begin squabbling over solutions, Quint, sitting in the back row, loudly rakes his fingernails down a

chalkboard on the wall prompting every face to turn in his direction. Aurally, then, Quint immediately figures as an unpleasant presence (albeit a reminder that the town still needs its working class for this perilous task) necessitating his expulsion from the sanguine community along with the shark itself.

As the narrative progresses, the ideological function of the greedy town council is taken up by the high society biologist, Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss), a bachelor who usurps the ruling class position. Still, he makes an impassioned case that the shark, as a threat to human life, should supersede economic concerns (he is independently wealthy and thus out of touch even with local business interests). Brody, Hooper, and the crude Quint represent the middle, ruling, and working classes as they set sail in this curious version of *Moby Dick* (1851). The men test themselves and each other in pursuit of their target—the impossible object, in the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, directly aligned with the white whale in Melville’s famed novel of vengeance.

Each of the men clearly stands in for an entire social class. This formation grants significance to the famous scene in which the men sing a drinking song: it is an instance of inter-class harmony, a utopian moment ruptured only when the shark itself ruptures the boat’s hull. It is significant, then, that only the middleclass Brody and the wealthy Hooper survive. Hooper’s survival in the film is, in fact, a notable departure from his demise in Peter Benchley’s source novel (1974). Why are Quint’s death and Hooper’s triumphant survival important? As Jameson (1979, p. 28-29) suggests:

Quint is defined as the locus of old-fashioned private enterprise ...[H]e also strongly associates himself with a now distant American past by way of his otherwise gratuitous reminiscences about World War II and the

campaign in the Pacific. We are thus authorized to read the death of Quint in the film as the twofold symbolic destruction of an older America...a now outmoded kind, but also the America of the New Deal and the crusade against Nazism. (Jameson, 1979, p. 28-29)

A background player in Benchley's novel, Quint in the film is a prominent human reminder of the high price so many poorer or rural Americans paid for the prosperity and liberties postwar generations were to enjoy, freedoms that Quint and many of his generation saw arguably being abused by the hedonistic pursuits of the Baby Boomers during the late sixties and seventies (indeed,



**Figure 9. In this publicity still, Quint (Shaw, right) depicts the town's industrial past whilst Hooper (Dreyfus, left) represents the US economy's post-industrial future. © 1975 Universal Pictures**

the shark's first victim is a young hippie girl who has partied through the night with friends on the beach, and is killed trying to entice a boy to skinny dip with her). Quint's generation, having accomplished great things and altered the course of history, is nonetheless outmoded in the world of the film, and out of touch with the thriving middle class and especially "whiz kids" poised to lead the US out of recession and into the Reagan years.

Hooper, disdained in Benchley's novel as a promiscuous child of privilege, is significantly recast in Spielberg's film as a technologically savvy whiz kid with obvious associations with the prodigious film director himself. Hooper represents the future of the US economy, as Spielberg—directing his first in a series of blockbusters, a form that would fuel Hollywood earnings throughout the eighties and become a fixture in popular culture—represented the future of his industry. Along

with the middleclass everyman Brody, Hooper thus survives whilst Quint, the physical labourer of the old America dies. Furthermore, Brody and Hooper represent “an alliance between the forces of law-and-order and the new technocracy of the multinational corporations” (Jameson, 1979, p. 29). Once Quint is bitten in half like the sailor he described awaiting rescue with him in the Pacific during the war, Brody’s and Hooper’s teamwork allegorizes an “alliance which must be cemented, not merely by its fantasized triumph over the ill-defined menace of the shark itself,” but by “the effacement of that more traditional image of an older America,” whose erasure must be complete “before the new power system takes its place” (Jameson, 1979, p. 29). If lingering signifiers of this obsolete mode of production and its adjoining ideology are not annihilated, as the men struggle to do in *Deliverance*, the unpleasant ensuing scenario may be a familiar one: merely repressed, removed from sight, or even killed but “*not properly buried*” (Žižek, 1991, p. 23; italics in original), those people who have suffered or been wronged are liable to linger metaphysically into the present, often with the sole purpose of inducing guilt in the living.

In *Poltergeist* (1982), greedy real estate developers threaten the middleclass family by unleashing spirits after building tract housing over native burial grounds; the ambitious father (Craig T. Nelson) in fact works for the development corporation ironically in order to secure his family’s place amid the comforts of suburbia. But he is punished for his financial aspirations when the vengeful spirits torment his son and abduct his young daughter. Punctuated by scenes of the workaholic father falling asleep in front of the television each night, *Poltergeist* is entirely concerned with the impact of capitalism on the family, the environment, and other sacred spheres. Even in the comparatively reassuring *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), about a

benevolent spiritual visitor or “alien messiah” (Ruppersberg, 1996), a newly single mother (Dee Wallace) is largely absent from the plot as she works long hours to support three children and pay for a home in a growing real estate development that is encroaching on the natural world; the children’s absent father is with another woman in Mexico, we learn, although discussions of his absence hint that he may have died in or returned traumatized from the Vietnam War.

In *The Goonies* (1985), which Spielberg wrote and produced, the unparalleled divorce rates of the eighties are openly referenced as absent parents leave their children and teens to fend off commercial developers who plan to build a country club over their middleclass neighbourhood in Oregon. Tellingly, their mobilization against the avaricious developers is never depicted directly as a middleclass-ruling class dispute. Rather, in a “hysterical” fashion (Modleski, 1991), it plays out in a displaced manner between the kids and the Fratellis—a lower-class, criminal family composed of two grown Italian American men (Joe Pantoliano and Robert Davi) and their overbearing mother (Anne Ramsey)—with whom the children battle. As in *Poltergeist*, the development project is halted when the children expose the wonders beneath the plot of land. And even in *Jurassic Park* (1993) the re-constituted family, composed of childless palaeontologists and the grandchildren of the park’s founder, John Hammond (Richard Attenborough), must learn to outwit hungry dinosaurs *and* greedy investors who prioritize their concerns with capital gains over human safety and biological ethics. As the initially detached scientists learn to care for the two children, a family is born as Hammond’s dream of a commodified dinosaur wonderland is destroyed.

Popular commentators such as Biskind (1999) suggest that Spielberg’s comforting tales of middleclass family trauma and resilience have their roots in the



harsher aforementioned films of the seventies, a critical, counter-cultural trend that Spielberg and George Lucas arguably helped end with their studio blockbusters (Wood, 1989). Spielberg's films, and economic guilt films generally, remind us that the global network film emerges out of American film history, which has depicted traumatic epochs before, such as the recessionary seventies in which rising oil prices and recovered German and Japanese economies motivated outsourcing, significant US unemployment, and crime. These issues are dramatised directly in John G. Avildsen's *Save the Tiger* (1973) (a follow-up to his film *Joe* and a precursor to *Rocky*) in which a Los Angeles businessman (portrayed by Jack Lemmon in an Oscar-winning performance) ponders burning down his bankrupt textile factory in a market flooded by cheaper foreign goods. Interestingly, *Save the Tiger*, a "city film," concludes as Lemmon wanders into ballpark and resignedly watches a Little League team play baseball—a conclusion reproduced in Soderbergh's *Traffic*, perhaps the most influential global network film.

## The City Film

If global network films explore themes of economic supremacy and precariousness established in this earlier cinema, structurally they bear additional similarities: the global network film's three-part story structure, outlined above (a. rupture, b. investigation, and c. return), has long been the standard Hollywood screenplay configuration, according to its key proponents, Syd Field (2006), William Goldman (2001), and Robert McKee (1997). And the components of the standard script—"separation, initiation, and return"—derive from the oldest Western narrative form: the epic. Indeed, as Mulvey (1989; 2006) has shown, the vast majority of

narrative films, scrutinized even briefly, reveal an “Oedipal logic” in the journey of the “main controlling figure” who leaves home (to the foreign world of New York in *Midnight Cowboy*, to the Appalachian river in *Deliverance*, out to sea in *Jaws*), faces a trauma which initiates him into a new form of consciousness, and “returns” home, whether literally, as a changed person, or figuratively. These components of the epic, in which the protagonist typically traverses a great distance, now structure films whose characters scarcely leave their neighbourhoods.

The “city film” is the third narrative form reproduced structurally and thematically in global network films. This type of cinematic narrative, which populates world cinema from China, the Czech Republic, France, Japan, and even Canada, is characterised in its fictional incarnation<sup>31</sup> by a series of contingent encounters between dissimilar and apparently unrelated people, divided by class, race, urban geography, or the law (Clarke, 1997; Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2001). American city films helped refine a set of conventions throughout the seventies, eighties and nineties.

Notable examples include Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *After Hours* (1985), Robert Altman’s *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *Nashville* (1975), *The Player* (1992), and *Short Cuts* (1993), Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), William Friedkin’s *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985), Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Summer of Sam* (1999), John Singleton’s *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), Lawrence Kasdan’s *Grand Canyon* (1991), Joel Schumacher’s *Falling Down* (1993), Jim Jarmusch’s *Night On Earth* (1993), Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*

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<sup>31</sup> City films have a long history in documentary as well. Although the catalogue of such films is vast, notable examples include silent cinema such as *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927), postmodern art cinema such as *London* (1994), critical assessments of urban inequality such as *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), and tributes to cities such as *Une Place Dans Ma Coeur* (2006) about life in Paris.

(1994), Mike Figgis's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003), Michael Mann's *Thief* (1981), *Heat* (1995) and *Collateral* (2004), and Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004; released 2005). Relying upon coincidences, unexpected connections, and collisions, city films invoke the network as an organising metaphor. They surely helped plant the seeds of today's network narratives because they hinge upon the intersection of lives, the butterfly effect of a single, often traumatic event, or the revelation of interpersonal linkages, often amid or leading up to a momentous event or spectacle.

Like global network films, city films focus on individuals who are challenged and disciplined into new modes of being, whether these are meditative or reactionary, albeit through local rather than global encounters with the other. The city film relies upon rupture, transgression, human collisions, coincidence, and shared trauma—all of which have been adapted by the global network film to map twenty first century global relations. Two examples, *Grand Canyon* (1991) and *Falling Down* (1993), illustrate these broadly defined ways of responding to unexpected encounters amid the unforgiving technologies of urban space, at times offering nuanced illustrations of their protagonists' alternately humane and violent negotiation of their conduct in relation to the foreigners—from roving thieves to neighbours—who share the city space.

Lawrence Kasdan's multi-plot film *Grand Canyon* dramatizes a series of miracles disguised as mishaps, which prompt dramatic changes in the lives of the alienated urbanites they constellate. After car



**Figure 10. Mack (Kline) and Simon (Glover) share a contingent encounter prompted by the claustrophobic urban space of Los Angeles. © 1991 Twentieth Century Fox**

problems strand the shallow, middleclass accountant, Mack (Kevin Kline), in South Central Los Angeles, his Lexus attracts hostile black gang members as well as his black “saviour,” Simon (Danny Glover), a tow truck driver, who reasons with the young men by showing them street credibility and “respect” in a way unknown or unavailable to Mack. Mack’s sense of existential debt to Simon prompts him to initiate future meetings, and to develop a new ethical stance in relation to the other. Simon’s experiences encompass a good deal of suffering (he is divorced, nearly broke, and unable to thwart his nephew’s gang membership) but they have also imbued him with a nuanced perspective on city living that Mack and his middleclass friends (who, tellingly, may primarily be his clients and investors) never consider.

Meanwhile—simultaneity is a key feature of city film narratives—closer to home Mack’s wife, Claire (Mary McDonnell), discovers an abandoned baby in some hedges while jogging, an event she interprets as momentous and intended for her alone. Indeed, Claire thinks she hears a homeless man whisper to her and Kasdan openly foreshadows a supernatural event in this scene and others. Although she has children, Claire has wanted another child with Mack and thus thinks the big Other has acknowledged her desire. While Mack helps Simon move his nephew into a nicer building away from gang territory, his pompous friend, Davis (Steve Martin), who produces action films and advocates more violent scenes, is himself mugged and shot in the leg. Rethinking his indulgent conduct momentarily, and even the harm inflicted on millions of young minds by his movies, Davis’s revaluation of his hegemonic privileges leads him back to doing precisely what he had done before. As Ebert (1992, n.p.) notes in his four star review of *Grand Canyon*, similar to “the characters in two other Kasdan movies, *The Big Chill* [1983] and *The Accidental Tourist* [1988],” Mack in particular “finds that the nearness of death can be an

inspiration to live more thoughtfully.” Even a driving lesson becomes a tense discussion of the web of connections and split-second decisions that define each human life. The three parallel plots, two instigated by violence or the threat of violence, illustrate how in Hollywood’s liberal view at least contingent encounters with the other reconfigure or prompt the revaluation of hegemonic middleclass “conduct” or “self-government” (Foucault, 1980a). It is unclear, for instance, whether the black tow truck driver Simon dramatically recalibrates his own outlook, although he perhaps learns that there are at least a few benevolent wealthy Angelinos, and, as a sign of recovery, he agrees to go on a date with Mack’s secretary.

That is, as in the social problem film, the white hegemonic perspective enframes the narrative itself, however much the central trajectory might involve the guilt elicited by this hegemony or the central figure’s ethical rebirth. As Hsu (2006, p. 4) suggests, in his discussion of *Grand Canyon*, *Short Cuts* (1993), *Magnolia* (1999), and *Crash* (2005), which are all Los Angeles city films, the roving camera, interpersonal connections or situational coincidences, and continuity editing that unite a range of perspectives all *appear* to assemble a narrative told from poor, wealthy, white, black, young, and old points of view: “ensemble films share formal and stylistic elements like rapid cross-cutting or ‘short cuts,’ a propensity for montage and continual camera motion” (Hsu, 2006, p. 4). These techniques insert the viewer as an omnipresent figure, privy to connections to which the characters are oblivious, even though their lives represent a social network:

*Grand Canyon* opens with a movie producer and a lawyer walking out of a Lakers game, and later shows black characters watching basketball games on TV; the woman who runs over a child in *Short Cuts* has no idea that, after walking home on his own, he will collapse, fall into a coma, and eventually die; *Magnolia*’s various

characters have no clue that they are all connected by the quiz show “What Do Kids Know?” (Hsu, 2006, p. 4)

Only the viewer, that is, enjoys the “omniscient point of view” that is unavailable to the characters (Hsu, 2007, p. 4). However, with its promise of multiple ethical positions and multiple gazes, as the parallel narratives purportedly unfold through the perspective of their main controlling figures, “the viewer’s privileged perspective only yields further mysteries, additional examples of inexplicable, seemingly ‘magical’ coincidences” (Hsu, 2006, p. 4-5). And although these ambiguities might suggest the presence of a multi-vocal narrative with polysemous potential, offering viewers multiple and even uncomfortable subject positions, these films “are often partial in the most literal of ways, unwittingly reflecting the white male (and presumably liberal) perspective of their directors” (Hsu, 2006, p. 4-5).

*Grand Canyon’s* preoccupation with Mack’s and Claire’s ethical and spiritual rebirth (with a new black friend and a new baby in tow) is thus unsurprising. But in this manner, the film’s critical depiction of the violent movie producer’s failure to change the course of his life, even after being shot and thus subjected to the very clichéd form of violence he peddles, can be read as an enlightened (if not entirely successful) attempt by Kasdan to transcend the limits of his own perspective and to emphasise, as *Falling Down* does less comfortably, that traumatic, contingent encounters with the other can just as easily provoke responses rooted in regressive indifference and rage.

In Joel Schumacher’s *Falling Down*, a traffic jam similarly immobilizes the white, lower-middleclass protagonist, William (Michael Douglas), and motivates him to abandon his car on the freeway. No saviour arrives in this scenario, and even the police are too preoccupied to assist William and the other motorists stranded in the

midst of a heat wave. Openly referencing the city film's Oedipal preoccupations with separation, initiation, and the return home, William's repeated refrain throughout *Falling Down* is that he is simply "going home." Home, in his imagination, is a Venice Beach house where his wife and child await his arrival for his daughter's birthday party. Home, we learn, is in fact a barren room with a single bed and a student desk, unchanged from his childhood, in his mother's house. As William begins his journey home, however, the viewer has little idea that these contradictions and thwarted desires fuel his eventually violent rampage through East Los Angeles (Mahoney, 1997). In this "other" world William, like Mack, encounters an array of people whose racial, linguistic, and ideological backgrounds vary from his own: "You come to my country and you don't even have the decency to learn my language!" he says to a Korean American store clerk. But his response to these encounters, as in *Deliverance*, is to react with violence rather than ethical reappraisal, especially when several young Latino men confirm the stereotypes he upholds by attempting to rob him for being in their "territory."

Traversing several districts, and colliding with a construction worker, a fast

food restaurant manager, a neo-Nazi libertarian army surplus merchant, and persistent beggars alike, William unleashes his rage alternately upon the city's poor, multicultural inhabitants, and upon its privileged ruling classes. Tellingly, the latter group enjoys an expansive country club as a refuge from a malevolent urban landscape in which empathetic relations with the other no longer seem possible



**Figure 11. The unquestioning defence worker William (Douglas) confronts the other in an urban wasteland and responds violently. © 1993 Warner Bros.**

(Mahoney, 1997). The golf course, as an example of privilege and indifference carved indelibly into the urban architecture which protects the wealthy behind groomed hedges and security fences, enrages William further. Chided by two golfers, William flies into a tantrum and forces the men to flee: “You should have children playing here! Family picnics! You should have a petting zoo, instead of electric carts for you old men with nothing better to do!” he says, referencing the better world as he envisions it. This vision is not unlike the Spielberg-influenced fantasy realm of middleclass family bliss from which William has been expelled, first through divorce and then through his wife’s restraining order against him—a document interestingly intended to limit his movement across urban space.

*Falling Down* exhibits interesting linkages between the economic guilt film, city film, and global network film traditions and presents a vision of *neoliberal individualism* that has become commonplace in contemporary popular culture in gentler forms. By focusing on a low level weapons manufacturing employee coping with having been recently downsized, the film contextualizes the social and structural determinants that often result in the seemingly inexplicable outbursts of violence reported in news media as anomalies devoid of any context; in neoliberal discourses, such violent men are loners who “keep to themselves”—that is, they turn their backs on communal relations and participation in the public sphere—and hence no one could have seen the transgression coming. Community involvement and healthy public avenues of expression, however, are decreasingly available in the democracy governed by neoliberal principles that envision each individual and each family as a corporation whose earnings should be spent buttressing security around the home-as-fortress and buying one’s way into private communities, clubs, and schools. It is little wonder, then, that *Falling Down* depicts public urban space as a



series of criss-crossing fences, graffitied tunnels, impassable freeway embankments, and vacant lots that are not only disconnected and disconnecting for their inhabitants, but themselves hemmed in by walled communities and barriers protecting the wealthy. For those disempowered or merely narrow-minded inhabitants who have never developed a cognitive map of their urban experience, the city is thus an “inescapable” terrain that merely taunts its less mobile inhabitants with the promise of escape (Sobchack, 2004, p. 18); claustrophobia, as in the opening traffic jam, desperation, and anger are somewhat more understandable responses in this context.

Navigating a finite space with a seemingly infinite number of inhabitants and possible points of collision, William undergoes a gradual conversion from the disciplined, militaristic patriot he once was—a man who believed deeply in the middleclass way of life that his weapons ostensibly defend—and into the nihilistic, anti-American “terrorist” he becomes, enraged by the typical, everyday experiences that comprise this very lifestyle (driving to work, eating fast food, shopping, accruing debt). William’s previous ideology, epitomized by his personalized license plate, which reads “D-FENS,” is reconfigured to deconstruct rather than defend the freedoms, privileges, banalities, frustrations, contradictions, and unrealized (or unrealizable) promises of middleclass life in Los Angeles in the nineties. “Wait a minute. *I’m* the bad guy?” he asks a detective earnestly as he attempts to reunite his family in Venice Beach by taking them hostage. In a country whose leaders are quick to transport armies to distant locations in order to protect the middleclass way of life violently, and in a city whose violence and “turf wars” merely extend or literalize the gentler machinations of white middleclass and upper class hegemony over urban space, conducting oneself correctly is no easy task. By encountering the

other and responding violently, William, the film suggests, has failed the lessons of self-conduct and “self-actualization” that maintain social order in lieu of antiquated technologies of discipline (Barry, Osborne, and Rose, 1996, p. 218). Fittingly, William’s mother, suffering from dementia, proudly displays her son’s elementary school notebooks to the detective as proof that “he is a good boy” who has learned his lessons, makes his bed, and is a law-abiding citizen.

This incidental detail hints at an alternative reading of William’s violent “war with the everyday world”—as the film’s marketing puts it. Perhaps he has *not* failed to learn the lessons of conduct and self-government in a liberal democracy. Perhaps William is the very product of the discursive *dispositif* constellated by affectively enforced state discourses (anthems and pledges that imprint patriotism), disciplinary discourses (injunctions to be a good student and a law abiding citizen), and private sector discourses that combine national, disciplinary, and free enterprise discourses in the mongrel institution of the publicly-funded private weapons manufacturer with its injunctions to work hard for one’s country, albeit amid a corporate structure that will never compensate the majority of workers fairly. Governed by these narratives, and actively taking up the “self-improvement” work they demand, William may not be an aberration or an “enemy of the state” but its *very product*—a docile body in the right context, but also a monstrous creation that might return once repressed. What we produce either sustains the social order or comes back to *haunt* us.

## **The Eco-Trauma Film**

World cinema has in this decade come to play an astonishing role in environmental communication. But popular, avant-garde, documentary, and

educational films have, of course, long envisioned the environment in (or as) crisis (Brereton, 2004; Cubitt, 2005; Ingram, 2000). Ishiro Honda's *Gojira* (1954) dramatizes Godzilla's mutation amid the radioactive wasteland left behind by atomic testing in the Pacific, and frames the creature's rampage across Japan as nature's revenge. Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959) follows its big name American cast through the trials of their remaining days following a nuclear war. Peter Watkins's Academy Award-winning *The War Game* (1965) used documentary realist conventions to envision similarly terrifying conditions following a nuclear apocalypse, and frightened many viewers. Charlton Heston's famous discovery of consumers' unsettling sole food source in Richard Fleisher's *Soylent Green* (1973) takes place in a squalid, overpopulated world destroyed by industrial pollution. Military testing and radioactive waste disposal on the ocean floor have deleterious effects on the local sturgeon, leading to a monstrous surprise for the military contractors in Sean Cunningham's *Deepstar Six* (1989). And more recently, disaster film director Roland Emmerich employed leading US and Canadian digital effects teams to render a world frozen by rapid climate change in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and destroyed for ambiguous reasons in *2012* (2009); in the first film a callous US politician modeled on former Vice President Dick Cheney refuses to ratify an international emissions treaty and later apologizes.

Eco-trauma films also comprise stories unrelated to industrial waste, nuclear weapons, or the military complex. Many concern people simply struggling to survive in unforgiving natural environments. These films have taken a range of forms throughout the twentieth century, from the "dust bowl" films, like *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), to the "creature features" of the 1950s, to the 1960s (and still thriving) horror and "slasher" films in which seclusion and disorientation in the natural world

are the real antagonists. Films that address people traumatized by the natural world, or vice versa, are often called “eco-horror” films, of which there are copious fans and popular discussions. But cinema on this topic does not always conform to established horror genres.<sup>32</sup>

Eco-trauma films are often deceptively simple in formal and narrative terms. Naïve urbanites typically get in over their heads when they leave the city for “the country”—such as the remote Appalachian river in *Deliverance* or the arctic outposts in John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) and *The Last Winter* (2006). Far from their televisions and air conditioning, these urban protagonists often discover that modernity has stripped them of any familiarity with nature and any ability to live according to its demands and rhythms. Their encounter with the other, represented by a natural obstacle or a human-induced contaminant, prompts these people to reconsider the priorities governing their urban lives. Often, however, this reappraisal occurs at the very moment the characters are defending themselves against the menacing wilderness in order to return to the city—to get home, the driving force behind Greek epics, city films, and many eco-trauma films alike. In the highly derivative recent mainstream horror films *The Cave* (2005), about scientists trapped while exploring caverns in East Europe, *The Descent* (2005), about a group of young women lost while cave diving in Appalachia, and *The Ruins* (2008), about two American couples trapped amid Aztec ruins by voracious vegetation and frightened locals, the protagonists long to return to their urban comforts even while they

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<sup>32</sup> Eco-trauma cinema is a more accurate term for two reasons: these narratives always encircle the threat of trauma, whether to the individual, society, or the environment itself; and as the renowned independent filmmaker John Sayles has pointed out, even features marketed as horror or action films can unfold as allegorical dramas in which the tension results as much from impoverished human relationships and impotent social institutions as from the threat of the creatures themselves. The deadly coalmines in Sayles’s lauded film *Matewan* (1987) are scarcely as menacing as the coal company’s avaricious managers.

recognize that their antiseptic city lives and competitive careerism have made them callous, indifferent, and capable of selfish behaviour—conduct that is tested, of course, by the mounting tribulations they face during their ordeals.

In a third narrative variation—one with obvious post-9/11 overtones—an external threat infiltrates an idealized community, destabilizing the social order and testing the values of each resident. Creature films in the tradition of *Gojira*, *Jaws*, and Warner Brothers' highest grossing film of 1954, Gordon Douglas's *Them!*, about ants enlarged by nuclear testing, provide a key means of staging this trauma (Sobchack, 1990). The most successful Korean film of all time, Joon-ho Bong's *The Host* (2006), in fact concerns an aquatic creature that terrorizes the residents of Seoul after they pollute the Han River with industrial chemicals and pharmaceuticals. *The Host* engages in an open intertextual dialogue with *Jaws* in its depiction of a crowded but idealized version of the Korean city and in its narrative focus on a family in crisis.

In Spielberg's *Jaws* the police chief Brody moves his family to the island town to escape the traumas of big city crime and the existential dilemma of risking death day after day on the job (in Benchley's novel he is a local). The polysemous shark can thus be equated with this returning, repressed threat of violence, as well as with communism, voracious capitalism, or the lingering memories of war, which afflict Quint, whose many comrades were killed by sharks while awaiting rescue following the sinking of the USS Indianapolis on 30 July 1945. In *The Host*, the repressed traumas that resurface with the horrific creature are rooted in other historical events or anxieties, including US Military testing and the ecological footprint imposed by Korea's attempt to modernize rapidly. As Hsu (2009, n.p.) notes: "Through its intertwined genealogies of monstrosity, contagion, and biological hazard," the film

also “presents a critique of U.S. and international interventionism that stretches from the Korean War and the post-1997 structural adjustments imposed by the IMF to the biological and environmental harm caused by toxic dumping and chemical warfare.” Indeed, the military presence throughout the film, and the rigid lockdown imposed by the quarantine, enable the director to present imagery reminiscent of police states, totalitarian regimes, and even concentration camps. Indeed, imagery of the US invasion of Iraq appears on television screens whilst cloaked and hooded figures openly reference the prisoners at Abu Ghraib (Hsu, 2009).

As *The Host*’s politicized engagement with contemporary and recent historical traumas attests, the line between fictional narratives and the real can be confusingly blurred in eco-trauma films, in unique ways. The ecological harm we have caused, often connected to military testing, armed conflicts, or weapons dumping, and the ecological threats that may await us as a result of more general apathy in the corporate sector, perhaps terrify us because they are actually existing phenomena, and thus more menacing than any outlandish axe murderer. In fact, it is the “nature” of ordinary people, too often capable of devastating the natural environment and other living things, that comes most sharply into focus when disastrous events unfold in these narratives. Thus, whether protagonists are threatened by an unfamiliar wilderness, having left home, or by an intruder whilst safe in their community, with its Sheriff and Mayor standing guard, as in *The Host* and the very real Katrina disaster, the trauma that begins to unfold is often an uncanny version of the traumas people themselves have inflicted upon the eco-system or upon people different or distant from themselves. And yet this symmetry, as preposterous discussions of New Orleans’ punishment for its “sins” by rising tides make clear, is too neat and unsatisfactory beyond a certain level of analysis. Nature does not merely visit our

own violence back upon us, but rather forces us to confront our own propensity to *inflict* the traumas to which ecological degradation, like scar tissue, bears witness.

Witnessing is perhaps cinema's highest purpose. And in this way, as theorists such as Bill Nichols (1992; 1994) argue, every film is a documentary, if not of actual people or events, then of a time, its automobiles, its developed spaces and undeveloped natural landscapes. The Western genre, often addressing ecological traumas like drought and starvation, is a film form that has captured the sparsely populated prairies and the grandeur of Monument Valley for future generations to behold (Slotkin, 1998; Tompkins, 1992; Walker, 2001; Wright, 1975). Enlightened frontier films such as John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) and Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) also examine the decimation of the American peoples, which, as Costner has said, serves as one of the United States' founding "sins."<sup>33</sup>

And new ecological sins are underway. The "privatization" and domestication of film *consumption*, driven in some ways by the plasma screen-home theatre culture—technologies built directly into many new urban high-rises—presents an ominous possible future as these toxic screens, made amid questionable health conditions in China, will one day soon become toxic waste. Since the eighties Western electronic waste recycling initiatives have adopted the economically appealing habit of transporting electronic devices, including cathode ray tube televisions, which contain considerable amounts of toxic lead, back to China where many of the devices were

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<sup>33</sup> As Costner's financially disastrous career, beginning its decline ironically with his anti-Exxon *Waterworld* (1995), and bloated personal and professional expenditures attest, cinema *itself* is not immune from the political economic critiques that encircle the energy, agriculture, automobile, and consumer goods industries. Film is unquestionably the most wasteful of the arts. Its technologies produce carbon and toxins in every phase of production, including future restorations, and its performers and crews fly between shooting locations and urban centres on largely empty aircrafts, collected from airports by limousine or SUV. But the industrial waste does not end there. Developing film requires ammonia and silver. And no aesthetic achievement on the "silver screen" can refute that fact.

built. In one destination city, Guiyu, lead poisoning levels among children have reached 69% (Chen, 2008). The conditions for workers and health risks to the residents of these cities are relatively well-known in North America and Europe.

In Canada, Jennifer Baichwal's National Film Board documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006) features interviews with workers in these areas, and has screened repeatedly on CBC Television, on the Sundance Channel in the US, and on similar channels in France, Spain, and the Netherlands. In the US, CBS's recent exposé "The Electronic Wasteland" (2008), produced by Scott Pelley and Solly Granstine for "60 Minutes," followed shipping crates of cathode ray tubes, ostensibly destined for recycling stations in Colorado, all the way to China where the dumping sites are protected like military bases. And in 2009, *TIME* magazine featured a prominent story on corporate responsibility entitled "E-Waste Not" (Walsh, 2009).

What is surprising about these exposés is not how traumatic they are for North American media consumers, given the health problems, birth defects, and deaths they document, but how *little* they seem to affect consumer appetites for these technological devices (no studies of this correlation are presently available) and how well consumers are therefore able to manage their cognitive dissonance. Surely China's remoteness from North America and Europe is a major factor in consumers' reasoning, along with the rural locations of the e-waste cities themselves. In addition, lead poisoning is not contagious; North Americans have devoted far more media attention and public health resources to the H1N1 flu strain, which has killed only four thousand people globally. Poisoning from toxic dumping, we might say plainly, affects "locals" whilst viruses affect the "global population." As Priscilla Wald (2000:



201) has argued, in fact, it is through the threat of *transmittable* contagion that “we’re all related.”

## The Contagion-Carrier Film

The final tradition that informs contemporary global trauma cinema is the contagion film, an outgrowth of the “carrier narrative” in Western and postcolonial literature that concerns the threat and containment of infectious viruses and diseases, which spread from a source throughout a human network (Wald, 2000; 2008). Such narratives gained renewed prominence in the eighties and nineties, coinciding with the global spread of HIV and AIDS, but have appeared in mainstream cinema since the mid-twentieth century, from low budget thrillers to allegorical dramas directed by Hollywood’s elite. Elia Kazan’s *Panic in the Streets* (1950), Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and Ubaldo Ragona’s *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) are influential early examples of contagion narratives concerned with averting widespread outbreaks by quarantining healthy populations and often mobilising military force against those deemed contagious.

As a testament to Hollywood’s faith in this tradition’s enduring appeal, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has been remade three times. Philip Kaufmann’s big budget version (1978), starring Donald Sutherland, Veronica Cartwright, and Leonard Nimoy, presents an environmentalist message with counter-cultural overtones amid an ambiguous narrative that criticises both the military’s treatment of US citizens, in the interests of security, and the military’s apparent *complicity* with the invaders. Abel Ferrera’s *Body Snatchers* (1993) locates the threat of contagion in the very *midst* of a Southern US military base. Military officials dismiss public concerns with

the contagion, and reports that people's family members have transformed into unfeeling drones. Given its disciplinary priorities, intended to ensure docile bodies and ideological conformity, the military is again shown to be complicit with the plan to replace humans with compliant humanoids. And Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Invasion* (2007), with Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig in the lead roles, explicitly suggests that the type of indifferent conformity achieved by the invaders through contagion is akin to the pacified sensibility of post-9/11 Americans. The defining ideological and psychological features of this era encircle the US public's submission to the Law of the Father and the desire of the big Other embodied dubiously by strong Republican leadership (Klein, 2007), and popular acceptance of appealing narratives of national trauma and patriotic recovery circulating in the commercial media—all enlisted support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Kellner, 2005; 2009).

This third version of *The Invasion* was itself plagued with problems from the start. Studio executives at Warner were reportedly unhappy with the initial cut of the film because of its politicised suggestions. In fact, these managers ultimately brought in *The Matrix* (1999) filmmakers Andy and Larry Wachowski, who had earned millions for Warner through their sequels (2002; 2003) and merchandising, to re-script and re-shoot entire scenes (Ebert, 2007). *The Invasion's* point is thus confused throughout. For instance, in a narrative *critical* of mindless conformity, a puzzling scene appears in which the invaders suggest that there would be no Iraq conflict or Darfur genocide if people were *more* receptive to the idea of a uniform society—less demanding, that is, of their civil liberties and rights to worship and live in different ways. The pursuit and defence of difference among liberal North Americans and Islamic fundamentalists alike are thus divisive practices, according to the film, which enforce tribalism rather than serene sameness. In tampering with the

film's original sentiment, then, the Warner executives inadvertently advanced a pro-fundamentalist and even fascist message that unflinching support for undemocratic political leadership, and religious and ethnic *uniformity*, is an acceptable and even laudable way to practice one's citizenship in the neoliberal age. The *Invasion* story, in its various forms, is not the only contagion narrative to embody an increasingly repressive ideological outlook with the passing of time.

Richard Matheson's contagion novel *I Am Legend* (1954) has been thrice filmed: as *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) by Ubaldo Ragona; as *The Omega Man* (1971) by Don Siegel, starring the prominent Christian Republican Charlton Heston as the last healthy person on earth; and by Francis Lawrence as *I Am Legend* (2007) starring Will Smith in the same role. When considered as a group, each remake can be understood to envision the solution to the spread of the lethal contagion in increasingly "regressive" and "reactionary" terms (Žižek, 2008, n.p.). The original film suggests that the human race is simply being replaced by a more advanced species, also native to the planet, which is poised to become the dominant life form on earth. Human beings may perceive members of this species to be zombies, but they perceive humans as Neanderthal forebears. The lingering presence of the human hero is therefore not an act of defiance and human resilience, but an anomaly. A military scientist who has tested vaccines on himself, Dr. Robert Morgan's (Vincent Price) unique immunity deposits him as a relic in evolution's march forward. He is like the cave men that scientists have found preserved in ice, the last of his kind who has outlived his intended lifespan into an age populated by a newly advanced humankind. Matheson's novel is, in science fiction circles and beyond, considered a major work, due undoubtedly to its humbling suggestion that our dominion over the planet and other living things is temporary.

In the second film version, *The Omega Man*, this astute suggestion about the vulnerability of people in the face of the evolutionary process is supplanted by a Judeo-Christian salvation motif that seems out of place in the story; after developing a vaccine, and thus redeeming humanity, Dr. Robert Neville (Charlton Heston) adopts a Christ-on-the-cross pose as he dies. The image of Heston's body dissolves into an image of a crucified Christ, which lingers into the closing credits. More troubling, perhaps, is the fact that the zombies he fends off are predominately played by African American actors. Tellingly, Neville lives in luxury in a high-rise suite, having gleaned every appealing consumer item from the empty shops, with the world's remaining supplies stockpiled in a storeroom. And he fears leaving his quarters to venture into the menacing urban environment below. Amid his scavenging in the city, Neville encounters Lisa (Rosalind Cash), a healthy black woman who becomes his love interest as they join forces to save several hidden survivors from the virus. Although Siegel's film attempts to broach the race, class, and ideological divisions between the white doctor and the militant black woman, who is styled like a member of the Black Panther movement, it succumbs to the much more powerfully racist associations it forges hysterically in its *mise-en-scene* (the hysterical assignment of guilt is addressed at length in Chapter 6).

Heston's persona looms large and the narrative situates itself clearly within the tradition of reactionary US commercial and independent seventies cinema. In fact, the same year Siegel also made the classic urbanoia film *Dirty Harry* (1971), which openly celebrates white male vigilante justice



**Figure 12. Neville (Heston) adopts a Christ pose as he dies, having saved humanity with his vaccine. © 1971 Warner Bros.**

in a cityscape overrun by criminal minorities. In all of these urban films, white men ranging from racist factory workers to genteel factory owners and physicians are thrown into crisis by being forced to compete with the newly empowered other: Mexican American workers, post-Civil Rights Movement African Americans, with increasing mobility into the neighbourhoods of major US cities, and recovered Asian economies whose industries began to challenge the hegemony of US industrial production in the seventies (Harvey, 1989). Whereas *The Omega Man* depicts its Aryan protagonist battling swarms of black bodies in a ghettoized, dystopian version of Los Angeles, however, the third film version, *I Am Legend* (2007), manages to make even more regressive suggestions in spite the presence of its black star, Will Smith.

In Lawrence's film, Dr. Neville fights swarms of contaminated inhabitants in a post-9/11 Manhattan, envisioned here as red-eyed albinos. In this ostensibly enlightened version of Matheson's story, choreographed by a black director, Neville discovers a cure for the virus before rescuing a



**Figure 13. Anna (Braga) and her son (Tahan) arrive in the Christian enclave in Vermont. © 2007 Warner Bros.**

South American woman and her son who have travelled North in search of other survivors. A Fundamentalist Christian, the woman, Anna (Alice Braga), challenges Neville's central beliefs as a scientist and begins to convince him that a Christian compound of healthy people exists in Vermont. Although he responds by asserting his faith in the years of painstaking scientific trials that have enabled him to identify a vaccine and validate its efficacy on infected subjects, Neville meets a fate strikingly similar to Heston's. Under siege by a number of his contagious adversaries, the

military scientist exhibits his Christianity by sacrificing himself in a final battle, enabling Anna and her son (Charlie Tahan) to escape from Manhattan in his fortified SUV and find safe passage to Vermont. If this facile version of Christianity is able to succeed in its assault on scientific principles (the contagion was in fact created by avaricious scientists certain they had cured cancer), the racism of the earlier film recurs here as well, and in a much more brazen form. The film concludes not with a Christ pose but with the image of an all-white Christian enclave, hidden in the Vermont wilderness, which opens its massive gates to the woman and her son (a black soldier nonetheless appears to guard the entrance). It is this “pure” society upon which the US (and the world) will rebuild; and it is this white Christian society for which the black man has laid down his life. Whereas one of the central premises of the contagion-carrier film is that “we’re all related” (Wald, 2000, p. 201), it is unusually clear in *I Am Legend* that—to paraphrase George Orwell—some of us are more related than others.

## **Twenty-first Century Cinema and the “Idea of Others”**

Relating to others, from the menaces depicted in social problem films to those in contagion and global network films, is the unifying thread and the core of my central question about network films and insular US subjectivity. To conclude this chapter I would like to address the work of Charles Acland (2003; 2004) who has built upon the observations of Mayne and Staiger, and fused the theoretical traditions of political economy and British cultural studies to provide some of the best insights into the operation of commercial cinema in the contemporary symbolic, semantic, and financial economies. Finding links between rigidly distinguished and

policed theoretical traditions within Marxism, Acland also makes concrete connections between production, the international business of exhibiting movies, and the micro-level affective responses the film texts themselves generate in their arenas of consumption. Acland combines a phenomenological account of the affective and sensory experience of a multiplex visit with analyses of the various ways in which individual film narratives fit into this experience; indeed, viewing a social issue film about poverty in a commercial cineplex peddling fast food can be a contradictory experience indeed. But although cinema chains have historically “struggle[d] to standardize attendance, spectatorship, and viewing contexts,” Acland’s attention to the *dynamism* with which people engage with the cinema as a practice in their everyday lives enables me to remain optimistic about the potential of even the most shamelessly commercial culture to generate public debate and opposition to the very hegemonic system of production, distribution, and consumption it exploits (Acland, 2003, p. 80).

Acland’s (2004) analysis of the global journey and public impact of Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) expands on his analysis of industrial constraints, viewing contexts, and individual experiences of pleasure and physical and virtual community. Contemporary commercial cinema’s appeal to simultaneity, he suggests, provides a source of pleasure for viewers which is nonetheless infused with political potential for community-building across national lines. These transnational affinities, surely forged by Moore’s film, are quite at odds with the global mono-culture that many suggest Hollywood cinema enforces. Acland argues that there is “a time sensitivity and spatial consciousness marking contemporary cinema-going,” and “films are understood to be ‘everywhere’ as the trailers promise” (Acland, 2004, p. 903). Making sure Moore’s film did appear “everywhere” was not easy; in May 2004,

as it was premiering at the Cannes Film Festival, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, produced in part by Miramax Films, was denied a distribution deal by Disney, Miramax's parent company. Acland sees the ensuing struggle by the Weinstein brothers, founders of Miramax, to release the film independently as an important and heartening example of the ingenuity that has become increasingly mandatory since 1986. Under Reagan, the 1948 Paramount anti-trust decree, which separated cinemas and distributors from production studios, was all but reversed and major Hollywood distributors purchased massive theatre chains in their move toward vertical integration; the stifling effect of this synergy has been well documented (McChesney, in Soar and Ericsson, 2000).<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the way these "political economic forces squeeze and confine spaces of cultural life," the resulting near-simultaneous global release of *Fahrenheit 9/11* in June, July, and August of 2004 "construct[ed] a feeling of commonality in film culture across geographical distance," and, I would add, provided evidence that many in the US were as horrified by their nation's military initiatives as those in the international community (Acland, 2004, p. 903). Like "the influence of the newspaper," discussed by Benedict Anderson (1982), "people grasp not only the content of the articles but *an idea of others* coincidentally reading elsewhere" (Acland, 2004, p. 903; italics mine). The compelling function of this idea of others is that, like imagined communities themselves, this sense of connectedness informs the decisions and indeed the conduct of citizens at the practical level of everyday

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<sup>34</sup> Robert McChesney (2000) has noted Time-Warner's misuse of its media properties when *TIME* magazine produced a cover that closely resembled the promotional material for Jan de Bont's disaster film, *Twister* (1994), which was a key "tent pole" property of Warner's film division expected to bolster earnings. The magazine's "story" on the dangers of tornados was, of course, pure marketing. The deeper problem McChesney identifies is that the public, receiving more news from fewer sources, now consumes more news on fewer *topics*, especially traumatic-sensational issues identified as commercially beneficial (Soar and Ericsson, 2000).



life. In liberal democracies today, we create and experience this sense of connectedness when we crowd into Internet cafes or public libraries to read the news online, communicate, and share videos and files; when we bring home DVDs and engage in a domestic cinematic experience that began with Beta and is now a generation old; and when we participate in the more traditional but enduring leisure pursuit of going to the cinema.

Although my analysis is textual more than contextual, and technologies of exhibition and social communities of reception are beyond the scope of this project, the cinema remains a fascinating social space that deserves some attention here. Cinemas are spaces of private enterprise which stifle certain forms of conduct, but, as my theoretical outlook and cinemagoing experiences suggest, they can nonetheless operate as “third spaces” that enable the negotiation and practice of citizenship. As Nikolas Rose (1999, p. 167) suggests in his discussion of museums, there remain spaces in capitalist societies that may charge a fee, segregating their audiences, but nonetheless “promote community as [their] central unit” and are fuelled by the participation of many; and museums, after all, are free to the public one day per week, and everyday in Britain.

Like other technologies that are “democratically rationalized” (Feenberg, 1992), cinemas, which are problematically expensive, can be understood to offer *subversive possibilities* for community-building that are at odds with their corporate design as overwhelming centres of pleasure and consumption. The feelings they structure, then, are not simply feelings shaped by material conditions and commercial imperatives, but feelings that have “material consequences”—such as community and affinity formation—as well (Williams, 1977, p. 128).

## Chapter 4

### Global Networks and Circulating Guilt

Can global network films instil in viewers this *idea of others*—an experience that has also been called “felt cosmopolitanism”? While watching Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu’s US global network film *Babel* (2006) in a large, corporate cinema in February 2007 the night before the Academy Awards ceremony, with a multicultural crowd of people, I had difficulty at first understanding the source of my pleasure, until I began to consider Acland’s insights. As we collectively laughed at the racial stereotypes populating the film, which the diegesis also challenges in some ways, and tried to sympathise with the belligerent American couple who are victimized in Morocco but nevertheless surrounded by suffering much worse than their own, I became convinced that something about the imagined simultaneity of this viewing experience made it enjoyable: the idea that this crowd and many like it around the world were in similar cinemas following the same global trauma narrative, in which American, Mexican, Japanese and Moroccan people discover they are connected in unexpected ways, was the source of this feeling. In this case, the political economy of industrial promotion (culminating in the awards season and the Oscars), and exhibition (the corporate theatre chain) fused with both my idea of others and undoubtedly with *Babel*’s global diegesis, which is itself concerned with simultaneity. The macro structures of promotion and exhibition fused with other structures that are less easily theorised because they are the personal “here, now, alive, active, ‘subjective’” elements of cultural experience (Williams, 1977, p. 128).

In her prominent attempts to grapple with the “here, now, alive” aspects of mediated and commercialized cultural experiences, Vivian Sobchack (1994, p. 83) deploys a phenomenological approach to examine how “cinematic and electronic technologies of representation” have altered “our means of signification during the past century.” Scarcely examined in North America, she claims, “is the similar impact these technologies have had upon the historically particular significance or ‘sense’ we have and make of those temporal and spatial coordinates that orient our social, individual, and bodily existences” (Sobchack, 1994, p. 83). Our various modes of existence, as workers, siblings, parents, include our *emotional* modes, which I have attempted to link to the cinema as an emotional public sphere—a technological instigator of emotional citizenship that has since been joined by web-based “social media.” Before the public incorporation of the Internet into the majority of households and workplaces in North America, Sobchack made a prophetic observation:

Whether or not we go to the movies, watch television or music videos, own a video tape recorder / player, allow our children to play video or computer games, or write our academic papers on personal computers, we are all part of a moving-image culture, and we live cinematic and electronic lives. (Sobchack, 1994, p. 83)

The incorporation of new technologies into everyday life is a process inseparable from the exercise of power, then, whether it is the disciplinary or state or corporate power exerted on users by the devices, which can represent “materialized ideology” (Feenberg, 1999, p. 7), or whether, as Sherry Turkle argues in her aptly titled book *The Second Self* (1984), it is users’ own quests for psychological “mastery” and a semblance of social power by using media technologies to re-experience one of the stages of childhood development characterized by a sense of supremacy (Turkle,

1984, p. 78). The technologization of everyday life, including work time, domestic time, and leisure time perhaps most of all, produces cinematic and electronic lives in Sobchack's view. But this production of subjectivity is, of course, a negotiated rather than a determined or unidirectional process. Due to visual media's reach into our lives, resulting from new information, communication, and portable exhibition technologies, this moving-image culture disseminates narratives that become enmeshed in the "discourse of everyday life"—a discourse through which individuals express themselves, resist the enactment of power, discipline themselves and others, and make meaning from daily experience (de Certeau, 1984). In short, by situating film as a fantastical-pleasurable *and* a potentially politicizing technology, I take seriously Sobchack's proclamation that as *citizens* we live electronic and cinematic lives.

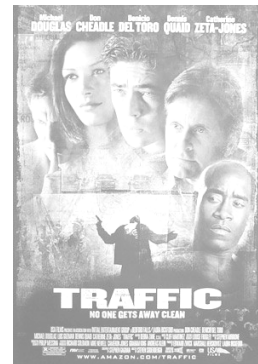
Living cinematic lives, in today's context, is not necessarily glamorous or even appealing for viewers but can be understood as the overwhelming outcome of media in our lives. As any viewer of the six o'clock news knows, we often see images we would prefer to avoid. And yet these disturbing pictures of starvation and violence, for instance, often prompt us to consider our priorities and our place in the "global system" as Jameson suggests. Research on US news media has asserted that viewers ponder their values and individual politics when confronted with challenging or divisive news stories (Gamson, 1992; Hallin, 1993). Using the aforementioned ideological and psychoanalytic theoretical approaches to discourse, rather than the administrative or opinion-based modes of social research (on actual people) often used to study news media, I would like to turn to the films themselves in order to examine how the *implied* (theoretical) viewer of global network films is enlisted in the work of pondering *connections* and even his or her proximities to sites of trauma.

Having defined the formal features of these films, provided synopses of their narrative concerns, and situated them within the tradition of cinema and citizenship, I would like to get to the heart of the analysis by devoting some attention the visions of the network these narratives orchestrate. Given the amorphous nature of the network as a concept, and of ideas such as the information society and the digital age more generally, these often thoughtful and always revelatory popular discourses provide an appealing terrain on which to gauge what the network society *means* at the macro level of global trade, at the level of “the nation,” an increasingly fluid ideological and physical formation, and at the micro level in individual experience. These individuated apprehensions of one’s place in the “global system” (Jameson, 1988, p. 347) include familiar forms of “emotional citizenship” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p. 158), including “economic guilt” or “buyer’s remorse,” the sense of futility that consumers experience in the face of the oppressive labour conditions looming behind consumer items, and the sense of impotence individuals experience through bearing witness to the breakdown of borders in the service of economic globalization.

### ***Traffic* (2000): Drug Cartels, Fluid Borders, and Uncontrollable Networks**

If networks enable “flow” and “flux” in their unbridled ability to circulate information and commodities, then borders are their adversaries. Perhaps the most influential global network film of all, Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000; based on the British miniseries

*Traffik* 1989) may indeed be “the movie of the decade,”<sup>35</sup> and it is unsurprising that it concerns global networks, porous borders, and an impotent American man at the centre of the drama. The film links Mexican, Columbian, and American lives of wealth and deprivation through the global drug trade. In many ways, this film anticipates the multi-plot cinema of globalization that would become an indelible part of visual and even political culture throughout this past decade. In *Traffic*, one of only two films in this corpus that predate 9/11, the sequence of events characterizes the US as a nation under siege, with its security threatened by the barbarians at the gates and compromised by its own porous borders. Traumatic ruptures to the fabric of insular lives abound: in Columbus, Ohio, Robert (Michael Douglas), a Supreme Court Judge-turned-Drug Czar, becomes enmeshed in an unsavoury human network when he discovers his teenaged daughter Caroline’s (Erika Christensen) drug addiction. With Caroline’s health in serious jeopardy, Robert also faces political ruin if word of her addiction begins circulating in the elite social networks he inhabits. The scrutiny he receives at Washington events populated by lobbyists, journalists, and politicians (many of whom play themselves in the film) hints at the unpleasant side of a socially networked life. Indeed, seeking respite, Robert often withdraws into his office where he drinks liberally from a hidden bottle of scotch.



<sup>35</sup> Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) opened to critical praise including proclamations that it was the movie of the decade and this generation's *Blade Runner* (1982): set in surveilled London plagued by terrorist bombings, the film concerns widespread infertility due to pollution, draconian anti-immigration laws, perpetual wars, and social segregation; Cuarón even reproduces imagery from Abu Ghraib in his depiction of imprisoned populations. The film critiques post-9/11 xenophobia allegorically but represents transnational flows as stunted and illegal. *Traffic*, I argue, not only spawned a dozen derivative network films but it depicts a paradoxical world of flows *and* heightened security that is uniquely consistent with the post-9/11 world of economic globalization it anticipated. See Ebert (2006) and Žižek (2007).

Networks are ambivalent in the film. They are threatening in their efficiency, which Washington gossip illustrates and which the drug cartels epitomize. They can end political careers and flood comfortable US suburbs with drugs and crime. The Tijuana and Juarez networks are dramatized as unstoppable forces; importantly, even US drug enforcement offensives targeting one criminal group are understood to help the other crime syndicate. Indeed, law enforcement agencies are corrupted in this way on the Mexican side of the border, targeting select groups only. Under the guise of a war on drugs, the army General Salazar devastates one drug cartel in order to ensure the regional monopoly of its chief competitor, which employs him. But networks are also dangerous when they fail to function at all. These failures take place on three planes.

*Transnational* criminal networks may be able to traffic drugs and capital with stunning efficiency, but law enforcers cannot coordinate transnational agents as successfully and thus find themselves impotent to coordinate complex tasks based upon international cooperation. *National* political and judicial networks within the US also fail to stop the shipments because, as Robert learns, the cartels simply have bigger budgets than the US government. And the *domestic* network, the family (and even the community), fails because none of its members communicate even their most pressing concerns to one another. As Robert struggles to coordinate transnational and national actors in the war on drugs, a domestic subplot reveals that Caroline's mother, Barbara (Amy Irving), has known of her daughter's drug use for a number of months and remained apathetic. A casual drug user herself during her college years, Barbara interprets her Harvard-bound daughter's activities as part of a rebellious phase. Caroline of course insinuates to her mother that her drug use stops at marijuana. Barbara accepts this misinformation and overlooks the growing

ramifications of Caroline's heroine and cocaine addiction, which she nurtures at home. And Robert, the "main controlling figure," becomes enraged with both members of his family for deceiving him and one another.

In a troubling scene that represents the apotheosis of the US nuclear family's "trauma at home" (Greenberg, 2003; Narine, 2008), Robert ventures from the white suburbs of Columbus, lined with pillared colonial homes, into the African American core of the city where he extracts his daughter from an act of prostitution in an abject flop house. Complicated by his new position of political power, Robert must choose between continuing the global war on drugs by advocating tougher (trans)national *judicial* policies, or pausing to consider the *social* complexities driving their demand, which he now experiences in his domestic life. Everyone from liberal academics concerned with race (Shaw, 2005) to conservative "old boys" like William F. Buckley (2001) have analyzed *Traffic* and its political protagonist's response to global and domestic traumas. As Buckley (2001) writes,

[T]he drift of the movie—like the drift of public policy in the matter of drugs—is: Continue, at breathless speed, to accomplish...nothing. At a recent press conference, Press Secretary Ari Fleischer was asked if the president had seen the movie. Answer: Yes. Have there been any policy changes on the matter of drugs? Mr. Bush has said that in his view (personally tested), treatment is more effective than punishment. To this end, when talking about the subject with the president of Mexico, the idea was evidently tossed around to concentrate less on interdicting supply than on "reducing demand." (p. 62)

Reducing demand here means engaging in the type of revaluation the Drug Czar takes upon himself in *Traffic*. Striving to be more than a hard-drinking careerist who seldom experiences the ramifications of his own policies, Robert considers his role,



as an absentee father, in fostering the over-scheduled pressures and resentments expressed by his teenaged daughter—two factors that motivate her demand for drugs.

In a parallel plot in La Jolla, California, Helena (Catherine Zeta-Jones), a socialite, suddenly finds herself caught between Mexican drug runners, police surveillance, and financial ruin when her husband is exposed as a key operative in a Mexican-American drug cartel. Helena, like Robert, faces a difficult choice and she is similarly surveilled—in this case, literally, by Montel (Don Cheadle) and Ray (Luis Guzman), the detectives who listen to her conversations for incriminating statements. Should she take her husband's position in a network driven by human suffering and thereby maintain her comfortable lifestyle and her kids' positions in private schools? Or should she extract herself and her children from the global drug trade and accept a safer but more modest lifestyle? Interestingly, we learn that Helena's upbringing was extremely modest, and likely impoverished, and thus wealth is not so easy for her to relinquish. Like Barbara, who kept her daughter's drug use a secret, Helena's frivolous concerns with her public image in the community, in the face of others' trauma, exposes the troubling gender politics typical of several of these films; these issues receive sustained analysis on their own in the following chapter. Unlike Robert, Helena inserts herself into the network, rather than withdrawing. The dangerous intermingling of her private, domestic life and the transnational network that sustains it is best represented by her climactic foray into drug running. Driving her Mercedes SUV, a family vehicle derided in sexist terms in popular discourses as being synonymous with feminized, suburban "grocery getting," Helena nervously crosses the US-Mexico border to meet with Mexican contacts and return with a large shipment of cocaine. The film's unambiguous

suggestion on this score is that Robert, the Washington bureaucrat, may have had an epiphany about the US demand for drugs, but that traffickers with fewer social options are more difficult to stop. In any fifty billion dollar cartel, one node can always be readily replaced, just as Helena replaces her husband.

Market logic, *Traffic* suggests, is the most powerful governor of global networks. Although this ambiguously conservative film never engages in the widespread disdain for governments that is a key tenet of the neoliberal project of economic globalization, *Traffic* depicts the US government as a collection of impotent institutions when faced with criminal cartels. Responding to distant, national, or domestic traumas is best accomplished *privately*, not in government corridors, both by receding from public view into the realm of the family, and by seeking private care and self-help in user-pay clinics. Given his opposition to the war on drugs, Robert's withdrawal from politics may be the most ethical choice, but it is nonetheless continuous with neoliberal discourses. Robert's journey from public servant to private citizen is thus paradigmatic of the journey these films generally—and often unwittingly—celebrate.

The following images powerfully illustrate this neoliberal ethics of self-government. Robert first appears in the film in his public role, making a courtroom judgement and then meeting with law enforcement officials at the border (Figure 13). His last appearance, in which he speaks the film's final line, is as a private citizen who, along with his wife, is supporting his daughter in a rehabilitation clinic (Figure 14). Perhaps Robert's response literalizes one of *Traffic*'s central suggestions: that although we may be embroiled in various networks, in the current phase of globalization we can become as isolated as we are connected. The type of transnational trade dramatized in the film, and legal forms of exchange, are

motivated by the accumulation of private wealth for a relatively small number of individuals, a motivation fuelled by the quest for distinction and isolation. David Harvey's (2005) analysis of neoliberalism emphasises the ascendance of private interests over public ones; this discourse champions private property and individuated workers and families who will presumably be better off with fewer taxes and fewer public services. *Traffic*'s concluding scene (below) illustrates the unpleasant side of this ideology: when things go wrong, we are on our own.



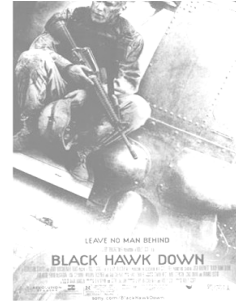
**Figure 14. Robert's initial appearances emphasise his public role as the US Drug Czar. © 2000 USA Films**



**Figure 15. In Robert's final appearance, he appears alongside his wife supporting his daughter's addiction treatment. © 2000 USA Films**

## ***Black Hawk Down* (2001): Technological Superiority Out of Control**

Things go wrong in *Black Hawk Down*, Ridley Scott's operatic restaging of the tragic US mission to retrieve a war criminal in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993. And as the soldiers' interactions explicitly confirm, every man is on his own—a fact that directly contradicts the film's tag line, "No Man Left Behind." Like so much American popular culture of the early twenty first century, *Black Hawk Down* seems alternately obsessed with exposing and documenting the trauma of the real, and suturing over it with a binaristic narrative of heroism that eschews larger ethical-political questions. Hollywood's neoliberal propensity to delimit narrative focus to the disciplined individual has been the subject of much celebration and some debate since the turn of the century. This past year, tentative condemnations of Kathryn Bigelow's Academy Award-winning *The Hurt Locker* (2009) surfaced (Scott, 2010); the film follows a swaggering, anti-social bomb disposal expert who enrages his colleagues and neglects his family, but "gets the job done." The film never once meditates on the wider reasons behind invading Iraq, a point the filmmakers have discussed with pride in their many promotional appearances. This individual-centred formation is even evident in the considerable production of fantasy franchises this century. Examining the repression of trauma and ethical questions in this genre, Cubitt (2006) and Werber (2005) analyze the ideological function of fantasy films such as *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) and the Christian-themed *Chronicles of Narnia* (2005-2008) in the post-9/11 symbolic universe.



As *Traffic*'s conclusion in the private clinic ambiguously affirms, the individual's private responses to trauma and self-disciplined will to heal are often celebrated in

popular discourses as the best ways of practicing our citizenship. Before dissecting *Black Hawk Down*'s narrative features, an unusually disturbing pre-9/11 mainstream film deserves some attention, and helps contextualize this mode of storytelling. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) foreshadows *Black Hawk Down*'s attention to the individuation and privatisation of the global citizen's responses to trauma.<sup>36</sup>

According to Owens (2002) and Klien (2005), *Saving Private Ryan* arguably instigated this current trend in trauma films by focusing on the lone soldier's plight and bracketing larger political questions, which the film concludes are best left to politicians and intellectuals. Attempting to comment on the morality of sending a dozen men to save one soldier's life, the film in fact celebrates the soldiers' collective ability to conceal their own trauma and to repress their questions concerning the larger reasons why they fight (Hasian, 2001). Indeed, Tom Hanks's character, Capt. Miller, hides from his men when he begins to have a panic attack, concealing his tears and tremors from those he commands. Emerging as disciplined, unthinking warriors, who each fight selfishly, simply "to get home" to the girl next door or wife who awaits them, the Charlie Company soldiers tellingly unleash their repressed energies on members of their own battalion: in puzzlingly anti-Semitic scenes, the Jewish soldier, Mellish (Adam Goldberg), emerges as a tough talking weakling. He and the educated Corporal Upham (Jeremy Davies) are denigrated by their squad

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006), a prominent Hollywood treatment of the 2001 attacks, adheres closely to this paradigm by unfolding as a family melodrama concerned with two fire fighters' survival and the activities of their anxious loved ones while the men are pinned beneath rubble. In fact, the film strains to obscure the people, politics, motivations, and the act of terrorism that caused the catastrophe, opting instead to provide an uplifting tale of exceptional survival and American resolve. These creative and ideological choices, made in opposition to Stone's previously conspiratorial narratives, *Salvador* (1985), *Platoon* (1988), *JFK* (1991), are themselves of great interest, of course, given that they are evident in *Black Hawk Down*.

for being intellectuals and therefore frail, too concerned with questions of history and identity to be effective warriors (Shetley, 2008). Indeed, Spielberg enforces this political position (discernible in his other films) at other levels of the text: most pointedly, Capt. Miller's authority over the men relies on his ability to conceal the fact that he is himself a schoolteacher.

Scott's *Black Hawk Down* cannot be understood in isolation from Spielberg's earlier film because it refines this so-called "pro-soldier, anti-war" narrative of individual trauma and survival amid a recognizable landscape populated with Islamist militants and supreme US military technologies whose efficacy is nonetheless uncertain. Even in the Army and the Navy, selfishness reigns in Scott's film. As Hoot (Eric Bana), an experienced soldier, says, "Once the first bullet flies by your head, politics and all that shit go right out the window." Indeed, this statement may be illustrative of *civilian* life in the US in the age of terror; having been attacked, the complexities of political relationships recede behind more pressing concerns with security and vengeance.

Produced with American military support to emphasise American soldiers' resilience and heroism after being shot down over Mogadishu, Somalia, Scott's film underwent a re-edit following September 11 (Lowenstein, 2005). When compared with *Saving Private Ryan*, Scott's *Black Hawk Down* finds a similar place for its intellectual soldier, Grimes (Ewan McGregor), although here he is re-educated in the ways of war rather than dismissed as cowardly; it is unclear, however, whether being discounted or converted into a hardened soldier is the preferable option. A data-entry clerk who is lampooned for his ability to type, Grimes is nonetheless thrown headlong into battle where he struggles, stays close to the stronger men, but ultimately learns to fire rockets lethally.

The men fight only for themselves against a faceless swarm. After the helicopters are shot down, the US soldiers fight hordes of black bodies filmed somewhat out of focus, as Spielberg filmed the Germans in his earlier film, in order not to humanize them. This film is not about a battle, in as far as two opposing interests would then require depiction, but about US soldiers and their exhibitions of grit and “character” (Klien, 2005). Although several scenes establish the army’s commitment to protecting civilians, co-ordination and even communion with the other is shown to be impossible, an ideological position that I suggest influences the film’s rendering of networks in the age of technological “virtual” warfare. No foreign contacts can be trusted given that the US rangers and navy seals are the foreign invaders in this context. Innocent-looking Somali children conceal cell phones with which they communicate American positions to the Islamist militants in Mogadishu; a trusted Somali informant attempts to deceive the US military into storming the wrong building; and even before the battle begins, as the men gaze at the serene ocean from their helicopter and ponder a swim, nature itself is portrayed as a deceptive and hostile other—“It’s beautiful,” says their pilot, “And it’s loaded with sharks.”

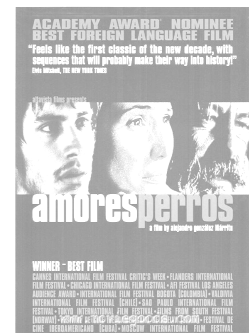
In *Black Hawk Down*, networks appear no more trustworthy than the locals or their menacing landscape. The communication network between General Garrison (Sam Shepard) and the various people at his command at first seems to grant him God-like command over their actions. But as the film progresses and the events become more dire, Ridley Scott (who perfected this technique in *Alien* [1979]) shows crack by crack how even the most rational and secure systems break down. Garrison’s gaze is supreme and his arsenal in a nearby base is stocked, but still an entropic force wrests control from him.

The communication network is intact. Satellites and circling helicopters surveil the operation, and Garrison directs the pilots and the ground troops. But no intervention, it seems, can ensure the mission's coordination or success. Perhaps in this way, aside from its neoliberal celebration of “the politics of our selves” rather than the politics of our nations, which put certain bodies in harm's way (Allen, 2008), *Black Hawk Down* can be understood to criticise the US Army's fictive, techno-surgical strikes enabled by information technologies, and to question the neoliberal faith in the promises of the wired age more generally. As in *Traffic*, Scott's film suggests that behind the curtain, and behind billions of dollars worth of technological innovation and strategic planning, there is really no one in total command—control is never entirely assured. In the dystopian tradition of science fiction, our machines complicate matters and thwart human control. And when transgressions occur, “the system” is unprepared for the challenges they introduce and impotent to isolate potential victims from their impact.

## **21 Grams (2003): Juridical Impotence, Vigilantism, and Networked Lives**

The same year *Traffic* was released, and whilst *Black Hawk Down* was in production, Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's network film, *Amores Perros* (2000) played widely to critical acclaim and utilized a multi-plot structure (it was excluded from my corpus because it was not a US production, however).

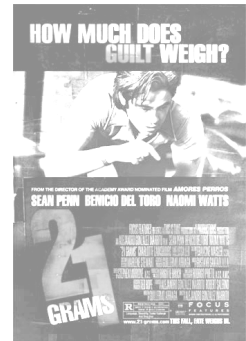
*Amores Perros* (*Love's a Bitch*) is principally a “city film” that links disparate lives of comfort and abject poverty in Mexico City, using automobile collisions as a key device—emulated subsequently in *Crash* (2005). A human





network takes shape around a car accident and a series of illegal dogfights; Valeria (Goya Toldeo), a victim of the accident, loses her dog and her livelihood as a fashion model, for instance, while a homeless bystander gains a canine companion and, subsequently, his will to live.

This narrative provides the context behind the same director's first US film, *21 Grams*, in which a car accident kills a young father and his two daughters in a comfortable suburb of Albuquerque, New Mexico, leaving a traumatized widow, Cristina (Naomi Watts). The collision makes possible the transplantation of the man's heart into an ailing mathematics professor, Paul (Sean Penn), who begins a relationship with the unwitting Cristina. Meanwhile, the apparently Mexican American driver, Jack (Benicio del Toro), who caused the deaths, awaits his fateful encounter with the traumatized widow and the professor whose life he extended.



The connections, that is, need to be made meaningful in order to enable a resolution but the multiple perspectives upheld by each character—and by the impotent state authorities—make this process difficult. Jack's fundamentalist Christianity is juxtaposed with Paul's faith in the mathematical probabilities connecting human lives. And yet both men essentially pursue the same goal, a renewal and a second chance. While Jack's narrative journey is dominated by his own guilt, self-imposed penance, and will to be redeemed, Paul's concern is his new heart and the guilt he feels over the tragic accident that made it available to him. Indeed, the marketing campaign for the film asks viewers a range of questions, including "How much does guilt weight?" which appears on the poster included here. The human network in *21 Grams* is certainly less complex than the ones arranged in

*Traffic*, but the film's focal point is very similar. Only three people are directly linked here, and their domestic lives are the sole focus in spite of the fact that a public institution—the courts—leads to the characters' prolonged suffering. Because Jack is scarcely punished by the state, he turns to a preposterous and exaggerated form of religion for his penance; he seeks punishment from his pastor; he aggressively counsels the troubled teens assisted by the church, at one point attacking them physically; and Cristina and Paul, disgusted by Jack's freedom, become vigilantes who attempt to intervene where the state failed.

In *21 Grams*, the network as a social formation is equally traumatizing and potentially redemptive. On the one hand, the terrible accident robs Cristina of her family, connecting her to Jack, whose very presence in her upscale neighbourhood was unusual in the first place—he took a detour because he was late. These two people, divided along cultural and socio-economic lines, would never likely have met, and remaining disconnected would certainly have been the preferable option. (Indeed, even liberal Hollywood found itself engaged in a similar discussion in 2007 when director Bob Clark and his 22-year-old son were killed by Hector Velazquez-Nava, a Mexican illegally living in the US. Like Jack, he was drunk and navigating a large truck). On the other hand, the accident prolongs Paul's life, and Cristina is consoled by her relationship with Paul following her period of mourning. Additionally, Cristina and Paul together offer Jack the punishment and penance the US legal system has failed to furnish, prompting his first steps toward his own forgiveness and recovery. As in *Traffic* and *Black Hawk Down*, individual discipline is underscored to the degree that vigilantism is celebrated, and the impotence of the state looms large.

Mathematical certainties notwithstanding, the all-seeing Other in this film is not the justice system but a Catholic version of God infused with fundamentalist

overtones; one of the film's refrains, which a tough-talking pastor (Eddie Marsan) repeats in the presence of his wayward followers (former convicts, addicts, and criminals), is that "God knows when even a single hair moves on your head." In a typically Bush-era fashion, God, more than mathematical probabilities or state institutions, oversees the relationships in the film (whose writer and director were raised in the Catholic tradition). Each character's individual vision of God thus operates as his or her own silent witness to their immoral, transgressive, and reformed conduct. Given that the network is both traumatizing and potentially healing, this omnipotent force can also be understood to restore the equilibrium shattered by the collision.

Given Jack's ambiguously Mexican American identity, however, one wonders whether *21 Grams* perhaps unwittingly suggests, like contagion films, that we are *too* proximate for our own good, and that the densely populated and diverse global cities of the future will be rife with unwanted literal and figurative collisions. Connections in the age of globalization can enlarge the insular experiences of wealthy homemakers and comfortable professors to include communion with the transnational other, and seemingly magical coincidences can occur (as in *Grand Canyon* and *Crash*), but these very points of contact can also prompt more privileged citizens to retreat further into their territories of exclusion: homogeneous suburbs, walled communities, private schools, clubs, health clinics and the like. The vision of the global network *21 Grams* arranges thus hinges on this contradiction; the new connections, supply lines, labour programs and cross-border flows that can alleviate suffering (enabling destitute Mexicans or other migrants to survive and thrive in Western democracies, for instance) can also foster great suffering, abuse and corruption, and moments of contact that national borders are ostensibly in place to prevent. Indeed, the question

that *Beyond Borders* poses is: what if the very networks that enable humanitarian interventions also result in corruption, abuses, and the distribution of more than food and medicine?<sup>37</sup>

### ***Beyond Borders* (2003): Western Aid Cartels and Humanitarian Commerce**

Dramatising a more charitable human network, Campbell's *Beyond Borders* (2003) focuses on medical aid cartels in African refugee camps, and other conflict zones in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. The film at first seems concerned with gauging the impact of these networks upon the suffering populations they assist, who face starvation or the traumas of war, but in fact—in a markedly Eurocentric, neoliberal fashion—the narrative examines the disciplined British doctors, nurses, politicians, volunteers, and donors who elect to engage in dangerous humanitarian work. The rupture that motivates the action occurs when Sarah (Angelina Jolie), the idle young wife of an industrialist (Linus Roache), attends a black-tie fundraiser. Interrupting the event, Nick (Clive Owen), a British doctor, makes an appeal for donations to support his hospital in Africa, and even introduces an orphaned child to the crowd of Londoners. Disturbed by Nick's presentation, Sarah is further shocked by the wealthy crowd's hostile response to his plea. Attracted to his commitment, and repelled by her insular life, Sarah leaves London to join Nick in his makeshift hospital. There, a melodramatic scene initiates the action.



Discovering an emaciated child far from the others, Sarah demands that it receive medical care. The doctors suggest that the hospital staff needs to find better

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<sup>37</sup> Political scientist Adam Branch (2008) has focused on this question in some ways in recent research that asks how Western aid cartels introduce capital into conflict zones that can prolong humanitarian crises. See Branch (2007; 2008).

uses for their limited resources; this child will most likely die and cannot divert attention from more promising patients. The ethical conundrum here is familiar of course, but the troubling feature of this scene is its (witting or unwitting) engagement with the public discussion that encircled South African war photographer Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1994 photograph of a starving child crawling toward a UN tent in Sudan whilst a hungry vulture looms in the background. The question Carter's photograph posed to all journalists, but especially those covering war and famine, naturally concerned the ethics of intervening in situations where one might save a life. As though the traumatic nature of the photograph and the Pulitzer Prize ceremonies were not to ensure that the image circulated widely, Carter's suicide mere months after achieving international fame prompted sober reflection on the relationship between the media and trauma, whether it is the result of warfare or drought and famine (Kaplan, 2008).

In *Beyond Borders*, Sarah intervenes where Carter did not. She gathers the child up in her arms, demands care, and tends to it for a time in the makeshift hospital, ostensibly re-educating the cynical field doctors who had offered negative prognoses. Indeed, aid workers' own cynicism about the business of international humanitarian aid emerges as a major theme in the film. Following her initially heroic act, Sarah's naïve, preconceived notions about altruistic Western volunteers begin to wane as she visits more sites of historical trauma and encounters the array of personalities—and interest groups—populating them.



**Figure 16. Kevin Carter's photograph depicts a helpless Sudanese child pursued by a vulture. © 1994 Kevin Carter**

Although the film's melodramatic elements blunt its political inquiry, the narrative focus nonetheless encircles Sarah's journey, as a disciplined individual, from innocence to experience (and "global citizenship") as she unearths the complex reasons behind Western apathy toward international refugees.

Some resistance to humanitarian interventions may come from those scholars who see aid *itself* as the wrong answer in many Euro-African networks of exchange (Shiva, 1991).

Western commercial extraction of oil, diamonds, gold, cadmium, and other resources devastates the economies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and other countries in ways that far outstrip the meagre financial aid packages that the UK, the US, Belgium,



**Figure 17. Sarah symbolically saves the child where Carter had resisted intervening. © 2003 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission.**

Canada, and the Netherlands offer these poor countries; billions are extracted while mere millions are injected, and often with rigid stipulations. "Fair Trade Not Aid" has, in fact, become a mantra of the anti-globalization movement, whose members have managed to see past the apparently benevolent cartels of aid that mask the enduring machinations of business as usual. Sarah's initial intervention in the humanitarian network, on behalf of the child, thus becomes complicated by her subsequent discoveries and by the vision of the network that *Beyond Borders* ultimately presents.

Transnational networks in *Beyond Borders* may enable the swift delivery of food and medicine, and social networks may enable impromptu fundraisers for London's elite, but these apparatuses also permit the left hand to remain indifferent to what the right hand is doing. The gala fundraiser establishes the grim reality that

those in attendance may be as concerned with their own pleasure, and with making social contacts, as they are with the plight of the starving people in whose name they raise funds. And Nick, initially disgusted with the indifference of London's business elite, nonetheless comes to *resemble* them in odd ways as he begins to barter with corrupt officials in remote parts of Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia.

In exchange for more formidable sums of money, which he purportedly directs toward medical supplies, Nick delivers weapons covertly for the CIA. He also gathers intelligence for the US that is sure to assist its operatives who travel the world galvanizing their country's interests. Nick's activities, aimed at providing aid, are therefore less likely to end the turmoil in these countries given that he serves a regime whose goal is to render poorer countries pliable to US demands. As Nick becomes increasingly embroiled in clandestine relationships, a warrior for private funds who ends up delivering pharmaceuticals and weapons for the world's largest consortiums, Sarah becomes a *public* figure in her role as a UN spokesperson.

Unlike Nick, Sarah embodies a less self-interested set of mercenary ethics, and in fact lobbies governments and policymakers themselves in her quest to see human rights improve and widespread suffering diminish. With her star power in tow, Sarah-Jolie represents the film's faith in public institutions rather than private, user-pay advocacy, which all too often results in the preservation of business interests and the maintenance (even by force) of the political status quo. Although the film was released in 2003, photography took place in 2001 when Jolie became a Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Popular folklore reproduced in the pages of *People* magazine has suggested that the script for *Beyond Borders* inspired Jolie to pursue the UN position (Silverman and Fowler, 2003). But an alternative narrative has unsurprisingly suggested that the

actress's existing commitment to human rights inspired her to make the film. In either case, the film's imagery galvanized Jolie's symbolic trajectory toward becoming this decade's cinematic global citizen *par excellence*. In her Ambassador role, as in her films, including *Tomb Raider* (2001, 2003) in which she protects Cambodian people and artefacts, and *A Mighty Heart* (2007) about Al Qaeda's abduction of journalist Daniel Pearl, Jolie has attracted considerable media attention—ironically through the culture of celebrity that encircles her *private* life—to causes that deserve public attention and the support of Western government initiatives. These government agencies, as events in Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Congo and Uganda have illustrated throughout the nineties and this past decade, often struggle to coordinate their activities even when they do decide to act.

### ***Hotel Rwanda* (2004): Global Networks, Isolation, and Dissipated Accountability**

An inescapable example of the failure of such initiatives, and of US foreign policies in Africa generally, remains the Clinton administration's refusal to land security forces in Rwanda in the wake of the ethnic violence that followed the death of the country's President, Juvenal Habyarimana, in 1994. Terry George's film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), produced by independent US studios, is not a scathing critique of Washington's indifference but an examination of the exploitative networks of trade, white privilege, and failed diplomatic efforts among Belgian, Canadian, and UN bureaucracies leading up to the 1994 Rwandan Civil War. UN Lt. General Romeo Dallaire's bestselling memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003) is widely credited with introducing many to the tragedy, in which





800,000 people, mostly Tutsis, were killed in less than 100 days. Canadian producer-director Peter Raymont (2004) adapted the book into an eponymous Emmy-winning documentary, and Canadian feature film director Roger Spottiswoode (2007) made a dramatization starring Roy Dupuis. Raoul Peck's television film *Sometimes in April* (2005), and Michael Caton-Jones's *Shooting Dogs* (2005) were other prominent dramatizations of the massacre, but *Hotel Rwanda* remains the most successful and widely discussed non-documentary production.

George's film concerns the sequence of events that led a Rwandan hotel manager, Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), to harbour 1268 Tutsi refugees in the building, ensuring their survival after UN convoys remove only white tourists and residents. Rusesabagina's emergence as a saviour figure, along with the number of people he saved, has prompted many in the popular press to compare him with Oskar Schindler. This association, adopted in the film's marketing, was used to promote the film in countless columns by film "critics" (Schaefer, 2005). Such critics, of course, and the wider culture and lifestyle sections they generate, are today mere extensions of the promotional mechanisms that dominate print and visual media, especially leading up to a product's "launch" or a film's release. Schaefer (2005) reproduces some interesting assessments of the film and its star in his review:

He's been called the hardest working man in show business, but Don Cheadle finally has the role that is expected to make him a Best Actor Oscar contender. Writer-director Terry George's fact-based drama *Hotel Rwanda*, opening Friday, casts Cheadle as Rwandan hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina, who saved 1,268 people during the country's tribal genocide in 1994. Rusesabagina, who now lives in Belgium with his family, has since been hailed as Africa's Oskar Schindler. (n.p.)

Cheadle, according to the reviewer, is himself a disciplined individual who works hard for the benefit of his industry despite receiving less recognition than many of his more famous collaborators, such as Steven Soderbergh (an Oscar-winner for *Traffic*) and George Clooney (a winner for *Syriana*). In fact, according to Schaefer (2005: n.p.), “Cheadle had to wait for box-office heavyweights to pass up the role before he got the chance.” Such David and Goliath discourses are pure marketing, of course, and entertainment journalists often reproduce claims from studio press releases unquestioned and unchanged (and media conglomeration often demands that a single article be reproduced in hundreds of the company’s news publications).

The more compelling feature of Schaefer’s claim, however, is its neoliberal fixation on the disciplined individual, unsupported by the institutions around him, who nonetheless finds the will to act ethically and to succeed against the odds. These off-screen discourses correspond nicely with Cheadle’s diegetic heroism as a man who faces open hostility from groups as disparate as the Hutu Army, the UN, and the Belgian consortium that owns the hotel and demands that it be evacuated rather than serve as a refugee centre. Consistent with Cheadle’s discursive position in Hollywood, his character’s abilities are likewise underestimated by these powerful groups. Still, Rusesabagina emerges as an unusually proficient mediator, a diplomat whose skills shame the wealthy, white ambassadors and executives who attempt to direct him by phone from their posh European boardrooms; he pacifies the Hutu army with the hotel’s cache of beer, he calms terrified guests, he negotiates with a UN official and his corporate bosses, and he even assists a US film crew in disseminating a crucial piece of footage that provides indisputable evidence of organized killing. This fictional footage reproduces a segment of disturbing historical footage in which Hutu militants round up and dispatch a group of villagers in a

systematic way. In 1994 the absence of visual evidence of organized genocide enabled many US and European decision makers to delay committing forces to protect the citizens of the country.<sup>38</sup>

It is indeed disturbing that in 1994, the year when commercial Internet services made the network society a feature of millions of North American households, Rwandans were charged with the task of illustrating to the international community (with whatever meagre photographic technologies available to them) that the Hutu Army was in fact operating in a coordinated, organized systematic way—as a network of sorts. Random acts of violence, or even “acts of genocide” according to the Clinton administration, would not warrant US intervention, but evidence of systematic killing might do so. *Hotel Rwanda* characterizes the genocide as the rational project that it was, but the film depicts the other networked relations, between various juridical, humanitarian, diplomatic, media, and military institutions as tense and ultimately impotent. As in *Traffic*, *Black Hawk Down*, *21 Grams*, and *Beyond Borders*, *Hotel Rwanda* increasingly focuses on the individual actor’s sense of abandonment within an ostensibly functional and even efficient network. In spite of Rusesabagina’s success in pleading for an evacuation, the United Nations fails to see that non-Europeans might require their protection as well. Global networks, then, even those like the UN and designed to enable the “coordination of tasks and the management of complexity (Castells, 2001, p. 3), not only isolate individual agents but are capable of concealing relations of power and dissipating accountability. The

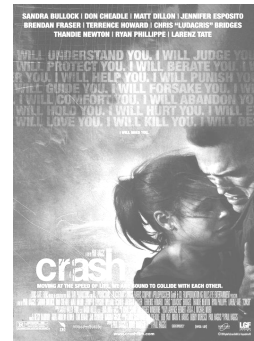
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<sup>38</sup> The Rwandan genocide continues to be characterized by a scarcity of historical visual documentation. Prof. Allan Thompson, who covered the Rwandan genocide as a field reporter, exhibited this seminal piece of historical footage at the *Media, War, and Conflict Resolution* conference at Bowling Green State University in September, 2008. I am indebted to Prof. Thompson for answering my questions. See Thompson, *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* (2007).

Rwandan genocide begs us to consider who is to blame when imperialist manipulation looms in the recent past (Belgians put the minority Tutsis in charge of government), when ethnic antagonisms that baffle many are allowed to be realized, and then race, in the UN's own logic, emerges as a principal taxonomy determining who requires protection.

### ***Crash* (2005): Institutional Discipline and Interpersonal Networks**

The following year, back in Hollywood, actor-activist Don Cheadle would reach new professional heights in Haggis's *Crash* (2004; released 2005), the controversial Best Picture winner that explores global issues locally by examining how disparate lives become networked through the crime, corruption, confusion, alienation, inequality and stifling urban geography plaguing the world's most multicultural city, Los Angeles. Opening with a car accident involving two detectives (Cheadle and Jennifer Esposito) en route to a crime scene, the film uses roving car thieves and subsequent collisions as a means of throwing blacks, whites, Asians, Persians, Hispanics—but curiously no Arabs—into tense proximity. *Crash* is certainly a city film and an “LA ensemble film” more specifically (Hsu, 2007) because collisions and road rage, claustrophobic human relations and “urbanoia,” and mobility (physical and social) and immobility provide the terrain on which Haggis and co-writer Bobby Moresco explore prejudice in its various forms. But with one penultimate revelation, this city film's allegorical mapping of global relations dissolves into a direct engagement with global networks that warrants its inclusion here: a van, stolen by two black car thieves, turns out to contain a group of starving Asian sweatshop workers being trafficked by Korean smugglers into the US.



Among the many other surprises populating the narrative, this discovery enlivens the already “clever, philosophical, socially committed car thieves” to engage in a unique moment of ethical reflection (Chocano, 2005, n.p.). Barred from many of the benefits enjoyed by other Americans due to their socio-economic determinants, Anthony (Chris Bridges) and Peter (Larenz Tate) justify stealing cars because they are deeply critical of most aspects of life in the US, from the transit systems to social segregation to the racism Anthony senses in daily interactions (Peter plays the optimist). Social limitations notwithstanding, however, neither of the men has endeavoured to make the most of the opportunities available to him. Their lives are not easy but neither are they characterized by desperation; a few thousand dollars is always available for a night’s work. When they discover the migrant workers chained to the floor of the vehicle they have stolen, even these supposedly oppressed men must reconsider their comparative comfort in relation to unemployed Filipinos, for instance, two thousand of whom leave their country each day in search of work according to the Philippines National Statistics Office. The disjuncture between international populations’ will to work and reside in the United States, and these men’s low opinion of their society gives them pause, and Anthony, the cynic, reconsiders his ethical position. In fact, he turns down several thousand dollars in order to free the migrants in Chinatown with some meagre food money. If these workers indeed paid for their passage to the US, as is common, and suffered for their dreams of reaching sacred American ground, the fact that *Crash* establishes the US as a racist and unreceptive country supplies an additional note of irony.

On top of the human networks it organizes, implausibly in some cases, *Crash* also examines powerful institutions including City Hall, the LAPD, Internal Affairs,

Health Management Organizations (HMOs), and Hollywood studios themselves.<sup>39</sup>

The film illustrates, often as didactically as a morality “puppet show” (Sarris, 2005; Scott, 2005), how these institutions rationalise our relationships, enable indifference toward suffering, and make us the bearers of various disciplinary (and even oppressive) tactics, which we enact upon ourselves and others. Indeed, Los Angeles’s institutions (and surveilled spaces) emerge in disturbing ways as technologies of “social management in which social conduct is subjected to diverse strategies of regulation” (Bennett, 2005, p. 5). The film’s incorporation of Hollywood into its diegesis by way of a subplot about a white producer imploring a successful black television director to instruct his actors to speak less correctly, and “more *black*,” poses questions about the type of “social management” in which *Crash* itself engages. One wonders, that is, what compelled an assortment of white production personnel to offer the public their imagined experiences of racism. Are film producers not the ultimate social managers of the human codes of conduct they stage? Indeed, viewers of all stripes may begin to get a

nagging feeling that [writer-director] Haggis, a Canadian who has resided in this city for most of his adult life and who suffered a traumatic real-life encounter with a pair of armed carjackers a few years ago, seems to have experienced some misplaced guilt over his lingering low opinion of the gentlemen who took his car, followed by anger at the guilt, more guilt at the anger, and so on. (Chocano, 2005, n.p.)

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<sup>39</sup> Haggis’s *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), which concerns the fate of a US soldier back from a tour in Iraq, also examines institutions. Its police department is virulently sexist, its military base is unhelpful even to a forty-year career soldier (Tommy Lee Jones) in search of his son, and a sub-plot about a slaughterhouse worker, fatigued by his job, who becomes violent rounds out the film’s Foucaultian critique of institutions: the military similarly routinizes killing; the police department renders abusive and sexist behaviour acceptable; and Hank, the career soldier, reveals his military values with a climactic racist outburst.

This reviewer's assertion, part of a lengthy and bitter assault on the film, diagnoses *guilt* as a driving force behind the film's production. This emotion, I would add, also informs every corner of the narrative itself. When Anthony and Peter stalk and rob Rick (Brendan Frasier), a district attorney with political ambitions, and his wife Jean (Sandra Bullock), Rick is not traumatized or angry but becomes immediately concerned with offering to the press a racially sensitive response to his family's victimization by black men; he cannot lose the "black vote" by appearing to be a hegemonic figure who is now confirmed in his fears of the black man. While his wife's latent racism is unleashed (perhaps representing the anger ostensibly residing in Haggis's psyche), Rick, who is likely having an affair with his black assistant, is guided by guilt in the sense that he is deeply aware of his hegemonic status. Along with his staff, he decides to generate publicity in an interesting way.

Rick: Fuck! Why do these guys have to be black? I mean, why? No matter how we spin this thing, I'm either gonna lose the black vote or I'm gonna lose the law and order vote!

Karen: You know, I think you're worrying too much. You have a lot of support in the black community.

Rick: All right. If we can't duck this thing, we're gonna have to neutralize it. What we need is a picture of me pinning a medal on a black man.

By pinning a medal on an exemplary black LAPD officer, the district attorney can appear both sensitive to different communities and firm in his commitment to law and order. His plan is challenged, however, when the most deserving officer turns out to be an immigrant from Iraq.

Another powerful white man, Flanagan (William Fichtner), an Internal Affairs officer, engages in more public relations management with Rick following a different

incident—a white detective has shot his third black suspect needlessly. In this instance, still motivated by guilt in obvious ways, Flanagan and Rick attempt to evade the inevitable public outcry by changing the details surrounding who fired first. This revision will code the dead black man as a criminal, they reason, but it will stave off the protests and even anti-LAPD riots that might ensue. Whereas Rick and Flanagan practice their racism in private, however, a third example of white male guilt explores the extent to which authority figures can exact their private prejudices on the public.

Officer Ryan (Matt Dillon) is an openly racist homage to Mark Furman, the officer made famous during the first O.J. Simpson trial. He targets black citizens vengefully because an affirmative action initiative destroyed his father's business and has left him with no health coverage for a chronic illness. Perhaps Ryan's neoliberal insularity is motivated solely by rage, then, but perhaps guilt figures here as well. After needlessly pulling over Cameron (Terrence Howard), the television director, and molesting his wife, Christine (Thandie Newton) during the traffic stop, Ryan is fuelled by his own guilt in a subsequent scene. When he is called to an accident on an overpass, Ryan climbs intrepidly into an overturned SUV as gas pours onto the street. He discovers that the woman trapped inside is, of course, his former victim Christine who lashes out at her tormentor. Now more motivated than ever, and imbued with a new ethical stance ("I am going to reach across your lap to cut off your seatbelt," he says, "May I do that?"), Ryan stays with Christine as flames engulf the vehicle, pulling her to safety a moment before it explodes. The scene itself is staged disturbingly with erotic overtones, and in the film's most famous image, reproduced on the poster above, Ryan and Christine appear to embrace in their moment of shared trauma; her faith and his goodness are redeemed.



*Crash* suggests that *disconnection* rather than connection enables people to behave badly. Indeed, the film's opening lines, delivered by Don Cheadle following his involvement in a collision, offer a kind of thesis about the indifference as well as the desire enabled by disconnection:

It's the sense of touch. In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.

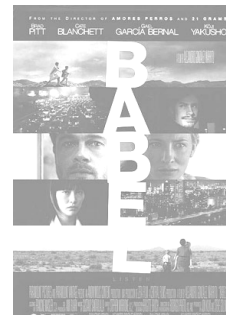
Each actor in the network is self-interested, unaware of his or her embeddedness in a community of any kind, and therefore able to justify his or her behaviour by arguing that it has little impact on the social order or on other people's lives; the thieves can steal and never meet their victims or, if they do, they will never witness these people's ensuing phobias and galvanized prejudices; officer Ryan can work alongside black colleagues but never see how his version of racism afflicts these very people and their children in their private lives; and Rick and Flanagan can make backroom deals and policy decisions most luxuriously because as bureaucrats rather than law enforcers they are *several* steps removed from the ramifications of their choices. Whereas *Hotel Rwanda* underscores its protagonists' physical and social isolation, each of these characters is deluded by their sense of isolation because everyone is connected in this vision of Los Angeles.

As *Crash* configures the network, everyone is *not* isolated but rather enmeshed in asymmetrical relationships that profoundly affect other actors; the white detective may go unpunished for three senseless shootings in the midst of the legal bureaucracy that surrounds him, but the black television director who protests a

simple stereotype at work might never work in studio city again. The film's rendering of proximities belies its didactic, utopian promise that unearthing our networked relationships with the other will prompt us to reevaluate the ramifications of our seemingly isolated and inconsequential activities. On the global scale, within the context of US consumerism and the debates around resource consumption alone, this lesson—that others are affected by seemingly isolated decisions—is perhaps the principal political message targeting US citizens in public discourses more generally, given our age of widening polarities and thickening connections. A Best Picture nominee the following year, *Babel* delivered this message, in similarly didactic terms, to US audiences who offered the film a cool reception. Its director, Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu, in fact worked to avoid comparisons with *Crash* whilst engaged in his promotional tour following his Best Director win at Cannes (Mitchell, 2006).

### ***Babel* (2006): Global Media, the Butterfly Effect, and US-Arab Relations**

In *Babel*, Iñárritu and Arriaga (the creators of *21 Grams*) take their visions of connectedness international. In this film the lives of disparate people in the US, Mexico, Morocco, and Japan become entwined when an American tourist, Susan (Cate Blanchett), is shot with a rifle while travelling with her husband on



a tour bus in Morocco. The shooting is an accident, the result of two local brothers' misguided attempts to outdo one another. The film is of course named after the Tower of Babel, created by God in *Genesis* 11: 1-9 to “confuse” communication between tribes whose members had become too coordinated in their efforts to build

a tower to the heavens. God, displeased with their pride, created the world's languages:

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.  
And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them."  
"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."  
So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth (*Genesis* II: 1-9)

The filmmakers' Catholicism, which embodies a critical perspective on such instances of divine vengeance, appears to inform *Babel* in interesting ways—in as far as authors' dispositions can be read in dialogue with the values espoused in their fiction. Lamenting the tragic ramifications of God's intervention on the one hand, *Babel* also suggests that the only omnipresent perspective in the contemporary age, the literal big Other, is generated by the roving lenses and circulating pixels of transnational media. Indeed, we hear and see news broadcasts narrating the events almost *as they take place*—but the media, unlike God, fail to see human endeavours clearly and are impotent to intervene. The film thus appears to lament to tragic *absence* of God as an authorizing force, even though his punitive interventions foster human suffering. Just as he had confused human communication, however, God seems ambiguously capable of intervening at the outset of the tragic events. His presence, for Lacan, represents the desire of the big Other—the gaze in front of which we announced our presence and whose injunctions we endeavour to obey.

As the film opens, for instance, we see the two Moroccan brothers enact curiously Biblical narratives for which, in this case, God intervenes punitively: their

benevolent but authoritarian father charges them with the task of protecting the family's sheep and goats, as "lambs of God" perhaps, initiating their journey across the arid landscape and toward the highway and the US tourists. The sight of young neighbour changing clothes in her hut tempts the brothers, and one brother cannot resist peering in on her. And with the introduction of the rifle, a serpent of sorts that brings an end to their naïve innocence, the brothers begin to antagonize one another, governed now by selfishness and pride. The older brother becomes jealous when the younger one exhibits a natural ability to shoot the rifle. They emerge as Cain and Abel, divided by their disciplined and undisciplined approaches to serving their father. Nevertheless, both boys will face the same ultimate fate, chiefly because the shooting (which also plagues them with guilt as their first serious "sin") is interpreted by the gaze of the international media as an act of terrorism.

The US government's position on the accident stalls a range of efforts to extract the victim and her husband, Richard (Brad Pitt), from the remote village with no hospital. US diplomats, we learn, endanger the American couple in order to appear non-compliant in the eyes of the international community—a political stance that involves preventing Moroccan emergency vehicles from assisting the Americans. The traumatic event crystallizes a human network involving the couple's Mexican nanny, Amelia (Adrianna Barraza), the Moroccan boys (Ali Hamadi and Mustapha Amhita) who fired the gun, the Japanese owner of the offending weapon, Yasujiro (Koji Yakusho) and his daughter, Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi). Each character is disciplined in the aftermath of the event by the type of law enforcement that characterizes post-9/11 life: Amelia, the domestic worker, is deported back to Mexico for taking Richard's and Susan's children across the border to her son's wedding in Mexico, after working illegally in the US for more than a decade; the Moroccan boys

and their father are pursued and shot by ruthless local police; one of the boys is apparently killed; and Yasujiro, the gun's owner, who gave his rifle to his Moroccan guide as a gesture of goodwill, is investigated by a Japanese detective who pieces together the tragedy. After interviewing the gun owner's deaf daughter, Chieko, the detective discovers that the gift of the gun was also a means of banishing it from the household; Chieko's absent mother had used it to end her life a year earlier and, similar to the Mexican, American and Moroccan families, the remaining family members had been unable to communicate with one another, leading to further, unnecessary suffering.

As in *21 Grams*, the network in *Babel*, here encircling a weapon as an object of exchange, is traumatizing. Its healing dimension is far less apparent in *Babel* than it is in the director's earlier film. The network itself enables violence to escalate. The shooting, for instance, is scarcely as menacing as the lack of communication and the ironic surplus of media documentation that characterize the resulting global network, represented by the US diplomatic response and the ensuing cable news frenzy that forces the Moroccan authorities to "make an example" of the impoverished local family. Literalizing a world in which people cannot make themselves understood to one another, even when satellite telephones and other technologies become available to the US couple, the endless and inaccurate interpretations of the event illustrate the hazards of global networks; the suggestion



**Figure 18. In its arrangement, this publicity still emphasises the connection between the Moroccan boys, the US couple, and the Japanese gun owner's daughter. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

seems to be consistent with the game in which players whisper a single message to one another in a circle and marvel at how the message gets distorted in each act of mediation, and lost along the way. As in *Traffic*, state agencies here fail to coordinate their tasks or manage complexity (Castells, 2001, p. 3) despite being in contact. Given that no authority figure learns of the accidental nature of the shooting, the local police force uses unnecessarily lethal force in order to appease the US officials and the post-9/11 international community. In addition to the dysfunctional transnational media and law enforcement networks populating this film, domestic networks of communication enable further suffering when each actor fails to make him- or herself understood.

In a climactic moment, Richard phones his housekeeper, Amelia, from the Moroccan hospital. Since the couple was scheduled to return home, Amelia has anticipated a day off from work. Straining to conceal his trauma, Richard is curt with Amelia and fails both to communicate the gravity of Susan's condition and to *listen* to



**Figure 19. Richard fails to protect his wife and children and struggles to communicate, leading to a tragic series of misunderstandings. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

the importance of Amelia's need to visit her Mexican family. Richard's recognizably arrogant prioritization of his interests thus represents a second indictment of US hegemony, on top of the diplomatic blunders. Amelia's desperate voyage to Mexico endangers the American children, leads to her deportation, and makes a fugitive out of her nephew, who speeds away from a US border guard. Had Richard's family management (which, as for so many families, includes the management of

underpaid migrant labourers) been characterized by better communication, fewer people would be facing the years of suffering ahead of them.

With its focus on thwarted communication, *Babel* clearly suggests that technological connectedness means little when prejudices inform every utterance and interpretation. Aside from whatever quasi-utopian point the film may advance—that people around the world can live better lives by learning to understand and be understood, and to govern their conduct with fewer misconceptions about the other—the fact remains that the points of contact between these people, who in an earlier era would never likely have met, bring about their suffering, which their inability to communicate merely fails to mend.

In its most didactic commentary on our age of connection, the film concludes by interspersing scenes of transnational news coverage, which document Susan's release from the hospital amid a frenzy of photographers, with scenes of the Japanese detective numbing himself with alcohol after having pieced together the tragedy. Although the media bear witness to yet another happy ending for an American couple, Richard and Susan have learned little. They are, in fact, unaware that the Moroccan family has been destroyed by post-9/11 Islamophobia in the name of their security. They *are* aware of their housekeeper's border-crossing infraction, having agreed not to press charges, but the US couple can scarcely imagine how the loss of her house and her deportation to Mexico will affect her. Even in technologically functional and ostensibly symmetrical networks of exchange, in which power is decentralized, domination can and does persist.

Although these narratives vary widely, as this chapter has hopefully illustrated, the films depict technological (*Black Hawk Down*), economic (*Traffic*, *Beyond Borders*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Babel*), and interpersonal (*21 Grams*, *Crash*)

connectedness not as an end in itself, an inevitability with only democratizing possibilities for symmetrical transnational commerce, but as a formation that enables exploitation, anonymity, alienation, new affective proximities, and new ethical responsibilities to bear witness to the plight of the other to whose predicament one is linked.



## Chapter 5

### Global Networks and Localized Guilt

As we have seen, global network films are concerned with proximities, connections, and the interplay between order and disorder (Boggs and Pollard, 2001). They typically mobilize network narratives or multiple plots in order to illustrate international and intersubjective connectedness in the global age; these plots may be interspersed confusingly, move forward and backward through time, involve multiperspectival, hypothetical scenarios as in Kurasawa's landmark *Rashomon* (1950), or play out according to more established narrative codes. As the previous chapter illustrated, these films typically unfold in a three-part plot: a naïve Western<sup>40</sup> protagonist confronts a revelation or event that upsets his or her world, investigates, unearths a complex set of global relations in which s/he is implicated, and responds defensively or sympathetically or ambiguously—but almost uniformly *privately*, by retreating from public responsibilities (as in *Traffic*, *Black Hawk Down*, *21 Grams*) and even from his or her responsibilities to others (as the UN officers do in *Hotel Rwanda*, and as Nick does by selling weapons in *Beyond Borders*).

In the films addressed in the previous chapter, guilt floats freely and is difficult to assign. Are drug users or drug suppliers to blame, for instance, for the violent and corrosive cartels? Are aggressive US foreign policies to blame for the Black Hawk

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<sup>40</sup> *Blood Diamond* (2006) diverges somewhat by dramatizing its Sierra Leonean character's journey as the "hero's journey," even though it is the white mercenary who undergoes the ethical rebirth. Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), with its Rwandan protagonist, may seem to be something of an anomaly. But it scarcely represents a challenge to the structural logic in which a naïve Westerner encounters an upheaval. Not only is the protagonist, Paul, portrayed by US activist Don Cheadle, the famed star of *Traffic*, *Crash*, and the *Oceans 11* films, but a Canadian UN General (Nick Nolte), a US cameraman (Joaquin Phoenix), and a UK journalist (Cara Seymour) provide three uniformly horrified Western perspectives that mirror Paul's discovery of the siege.

military blunder, which saw US soldiers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu in what became a media spectacle, or was the aim of ending the starvation of thousands of Somalis at the hands of competing warlords in fact the only ethical policy? Is taking bribes from third parties *always* the criminal choice when one does so in order to deliver aid, food, and medicine to remote regions more quickly? Can someone, like Nick in *Beyond Borders*, deliver both weapons *and* aid without presenting a major humanitarian contradiction? These are the questions presented to us by the network society *itself*, which seems to present us with a new way of organising societies and their relationships (Castells, 2001, p. 2009).

But however novel current technological and economic developments may seem, according to nearly half of the global network films addressed here, old fashioned crime and corruption endure. Although the network can dissipate accountability, or obscure guilt in the short term, *The Constant Gardener*, *Lord of War*, *Syriana*, *Blood Diamond*, and *United 93* demonstrate that greed, profiteering, and extreme forms of political violence are often squarely the culprits, as they were in the previous generation's conspiracy narratives wherein villainy and thus guilt are easily located (Pratt, 2001). Whereas the aforementioned films refrained from or failed to assign guilt, and perhaps intentionally left viewers pondering to whom it should be attributed, in the films examined here agents and entire organizations are found to be accountable, even amid the dizzying relations found in global networks.

## ***The Constant Gardener* (2005): Pharmaceutical Cartels, Diplomacy, and Abject Poverty**

In Fernando Mierelles's *The Constant Gardener* (2005), a global network film that provided competition for *Crash* at the Academy Awards, the protagonist's discovery of the relationships behind a series of apparently isolated events similarly motivates the action. Mierelles is the Brazilian director who rose to fame with his frenetic urban drama *City of God* (2002) about unsupervised youth who survive the challenges of daily life in the slums of Rio de Janeiro by joining gangs. Like a growing number of Latin American, European, and Asian filmmakers



(more than ninety percent men), Mierelles was approached by US and UK producers who wanted him to bring his unique approach to a more commercially viable film produced by a major studio—in this case Focus Features, the “independent” arm of Universal Studios.<sup>41</sup> *The Constant Gardener*, based upon John Le Carre's (2001) novel, supplies the appealing narrative components of a thriller and casts globally famous actors in major and minor roles alike; envisioned as a film with critical and commercial potential, *The Constant Gardener* generally delivered by opening to praise (Bradshaw, 2005; Ebert, 2005; McCarthy, 2005) and reaching its audience—unlike so many productions examining African traumas.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Constant Gardener* is nonetheless considered a UK-German co-production due to the role of Vierte Babelsberg Film, a German production company, and the UK Film Council in making the film. Scion Film (UK), the prolific team behind *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), and Canadian director David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* (2007), is also credited with the production. Universal Pictures ostensibly took control of the film for its US promotion, theatrical release, and DVD distribution although it is highly likely the company financed its production, remaining low profile to ensure the film had an “independent” brand.

Unfolding in a series of flashbacks or analepses, the film embodies elements of several aforementioned films, particularly *21 Grams* and *Babel*. It connects the lives of a naïve British diplomat, Justin (Ralph Fiennes), and his wealthy activist wife, Tessa (Rachel Wiesz), with the illegal testing of dangerous experimental drugs in impoverished Kenya, a practice sanctioned and concealed by British politicians. Justin and his colleague Sandy (Danny Huston) work for the British parliament as liaisons in Nairobi, Kenya, where they make the rounds at cocktail parties hosted on plantations but have less interest or expertise in the social and economic realities governing life in the nation. Tessa is a less docile guest, and she makes a sport of confronting corrupt local and Western politicians, as well as industry leaders, in order to challenge their purported interests in the health of the Kenyan economy. In a pivotal scene, a pregnant Tessa receives care in a Kenyan hospital where she believes she witnesses another young mother receiving doses of medicine against her will.

Soon after she becomes a well-known figure in the expatriate community in Nairobi, Tessa is found dead alongside her Kenyan “driver” in a remote Northern region of the country. Her travelling companion turns out to be her closest NGO colleague, Dr. Arnold Bluhm (Hubert Kounde). Justin’s privileged existence becomes unhinged by both revelations: not only has his wife been the victim of a violent murder, she has died in the company of an attractive male colleague with whom she had become friendly. Justin’s search for answers exposes a web of transnational connections between a German drug consortium anxious to conduct human trials, British policy makers, and poor, rural Kenyans who receive their HIV treatments along with additional pharmaceuticals. Of course, Justin is himself implicated in this network. These connections become evident as Justin assembles fragments of

evidence, and as Mierelles assembles non-linear scenes into meaningful montages that similarly provide partial evidence. As Ebert (2005) notes, *The Constant Gardener* may owe its structure to its literary source as much as the recent developments in multi-plot cinema:

The movie is a progress back into her [Tessa's] life, and a journey of discovery for Justin, who discovers a woman he never really knew. The flashback structure, told in remembered moments, passages of dialogue, scenes that are interrupted and completed later, is typical of John Le Carre, whose novels resemble chess problems in which one solution is elegant and all of the others take too many moves. (Ebert, 2005, n.p.)

Unlike some of the aforementioned films, *The Constant Gardener* directs its criticisms toward *one* enterprise rather than dissipating guilt or accountability across the entirety of its networked parties; the tactics of rapacious pharmaceutical cartels are the central concern here. These interests “buy” local politicians and visiting trade advocates, alike, in order to test their dangerous experimental drugs cheaply with no ethical clearance. However, the diplomats and business liaisons absorb their share of blame, and Kenyan officials who accept bribes are partially guilty of enabling countless deaths. Interestingly, as McCarthy (2005) notes, in spite of “the book's ferocious criticism of Kenyan government corruption (the specifics of which are significantly reduced in the film), to its credit, the nation's administration approved shooting there, and Meirelles has gone all out to portray the country in close-up, from the exclusive digs of its foreign compounds to the stupefying squalor of the Kibera shantytown.” It is additionally noteworthy that Germany and England, the countries vilified in the film, together co-produced the picture along with Focus Features-Universal in the US. *The Constant Gardener*, which contains a series of

docu-drama scenes improvised with inhabitants of these slums, therefore assigns guilt but cannot locate it as narrowly as perhaps a good mystery-thriller might promise. This film bears more similarities to the aforementioned network films than it may at first appear.

Like the aforementioned films, and in keeping with the definitive features of the global network film, Justin is enlisted—through a traumatic event—to initiate his own journey of (self-) discovery as he finds himself for the first time politically committed to understanding the mysterious relations of power that have both encircled him for years in his career, and done harm to distant populations. Justin's ethical journey from naïve indifference to concerned and even horrified global citizen, like Robert's revaluation in *Traffic*, is paradigmatic of the neoliberal bourgeois ethical awakening I am examining more broadly through these discourses. And it is interesting, therefore, that one of the ways the UK power players and the European pharma cartels attempt to thwart Justin's investigation is by making the answers to the transnational riddle seem unappealing and even fearful. As the UK High Commissioner, Sir Bernard Peregrin (Bill Nighy), says, "[it will] do you no good to go poking around under rocks, Justin. Some very nasty things live under rocks, especially in foreign gardens."

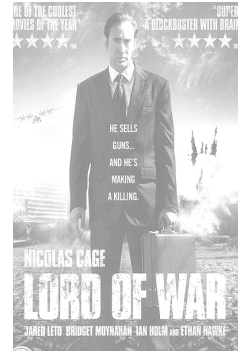
Justin's direct superior, and closest colleague, Sandy, himself conspires with the Commissioner to suggest that Tessa's excursion with the field doctor, Arnold, had been due to their nascent romantic affair rather than their aid work. In this way, they suggest, Justin will only be met with heartache should he continue his uncharacteristically determined quest for answers. Still, Justin ventures from Kenya to Germany (a loose reversal of the *Heart of Darkness* motif), where he encounters the true evils of unmitigated corporate greed in the midst of capitalist modernity and

learns of the drug consortium's plans for a new Vioxx-style wonder drug (for the Western market) to be approved after it is tested on Kenyans.

The configuration of the network here is menacing and potentially useful to organizations that would do harm. Due to the complexity of transnational public-private relationships, and the remoteness of the human traumas they create and conceal, oppressive tactics can proliferate and their orchestrators can be relatively insulated from culpability should they be exposed. Indeed, this vision of the network characterizes its relations as labyrinthine and adaptable to the interests of those imbued with the most power. Buoyed by John Le Carre's claims that his source novel was a sanitised version of historical practices (Caine, 2005), *The Constant Gardener's* disquieting but unsurprising suggestion is that even the Western cartels of medical aid distributing anti-HIV drugs in African countries privilege the logic of the market over the lives of the poor; because generic drug restrictions continue to afflict impoverished nations, provoking an international dialogue that continues to apply pressure to drug and policymakers, this film contributes to a familiar off-screen discursive apparatus. African exploitation by avaricious interests is also the subject of Andrew Niccol's *Lord of War* (2005), a fact-based film based on the life of Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

## ***Lord of War* (2005): Weapons Cartels and “Merchants of Death”**

While the aforementioned films have examined networks of drugs, military coordination, humanitarian aid, migrant workers, and pharmaceuticals, Niccol's film examines global arms dealing. With an odd but effective mixture of cynical humour and urgent ethical quandaries, *Lord of War* reminds us that the world's chief suppliers of arms are the “five permanent members of the



Security Council.” For those viewers who wonder how one might find his way into the world of arms dealing, this film offers some context. A first generation US citizen, arms dealer Yuri Orlov (Nicolas Cage) watches his parents struggle to make their way in Brooklyn by running a deli. He notices amid his violent surroundings a unifying reliance upon weapons; regardless of race or class, everyone in his borough needs protection from an adversary from time to time. Surely these consumer goods have better profit margins than bagels, Yuri muses. New Yorkers, like citizens across the globe who perhaps feel too proximate to their tormentors or rival groups, use weapons as a medium of everyday life, if only to issue threats or maintain security through fear. An opportunist, Yuri moves quickly from selling guns around town to acquiring an abundance of heavy weapons stored in Soviet arsenals following the collapse of communism.

As in *Traffic* and *Crash*, the insulated US protagonist's local endeavours soon lead him into a global theatre of supply and demand. Indeed, in nearly every scene in the film, Orlov is riding in ships and planes and holding meetings in ports around the world. A rented shipping crate stationed in an industrial region of Brooklyn provides a telling symbolic home for some of his inventory, and Orlov uses it as a



sanctuary of sorts. The vast majority of this supplies, however, never touch US soil and thus assembling evidence against him

proves to be a difficult task for Interpol agent,

Jack (Ethan Hawke), who trails Orlov

relentlessly. In the humorous and disturbing

play on words invoked by the title, African

(and some Eastern European) warlords

emerge as the principal consumers for the



**Figure 20. Viktor Bout, the historical “Merchant of Death,” was arrested in 2008. © Associated Press**

cache of rockets and rifles and explosives that Orlov sells, in the process becoming

their white capitalist superior: a Lord of War. Orlov not only lives in isolation from the

direct consequences of his dangerous inventory, unlike the Nigerians and

Ugandans, but he enjoys his freedom as a globally mobile agent, free from the

systems of legal trade. In addition, he effectively exploits legal loopholes in order to

evade trafficking charges; his efficacy at exhibiting just how “free” trade has become

by the nineties is one of Niccol’s central political points; although he maintains some

ethnic ties to his community, Yuri is “post-national” in his outlook and in his

commercial success. In the manner of established corporations like GE, which sells

entertainment, light bulbs, and the world’s largest array of weapons, Orlov seeks out

the cheapest labour sources and inventory costs as well as the highest bidders; and

because he obeys corporate laws, most of it is perfectly legal.

The web of relations becomes more complex, however, as this network

narrative progresses. Orlov begins to enjoy a socialite’s lifestyle in Manhattan, and

even gets married to Ava (Bridget Moynahan), a model-turned-art connoisseur who

is suspicious but—in the profoundly sexist tradition of the golddigger (explored

ahead)—enjoys her wealth too much to jeopardize it. Amid these growing

commitments, Orlov routinely bails out his younger brother, Vitaly (Jared Leto), who suffers from a heroine addiction. And as we come to expect, the otherwise nomadic Orlov must rationalize his perpetuation of various historical traumas once these events become inescapable topics of discussion even in the US. “More people die from cigarettes and cars,” he repeats, but the words begin to sound hollow.

In terms of its configuration of global networks, the film contains two indelible and widely discussed scenes (French, 2005; Koehler, 2005). An opening montage sequence positions the gaze of the camera alongside a bullet as it takes shape in a factory, is packaged, shipped, sold cheaply in Africa, loaded into a rifle, and fired into the body of a young boy. This scene envisions the network in a refreshingly direct manner; there are no hazy points of confusion about at which point the weapons and bullets become capital for criminals to traffic. The manufacturer is only two edits removed from the victim—a representative victim indeed, given the decades-long fighting in countries like Uganda and the Congo.

In a less direct commentary on the network society, a second montage using time elapse photography depicts the fate of a full size bomber aircraft, the type commonly used to deliver aid in remote regions and conflict zones. Here, of course, the plane has delivered weapons, but with Interpol aircrafts drawing near, Orlov distributes his cargo among an initially timid but quickly zealous population of Ugandans. Because he would be intercepted upon takeoff, Orlov pays off the pilot and sacrifices the plane simply by letting it sit idly on the rural airstrip. As the montage begins, we see locals begin to climb onto the aircraft, first removing its small equipment, propeller blades, metal panels, wheels, and so on, and then removing its largest parts until the plane is a skeleton.

A visual rendering of African poverty and resourcefulness in one sense, this sequence is also a more insidious assessment of desperation and unappeasable demand. The plane parts, we assume, will be sold here and there and potentially find their way back into other bomber planes in the region as spare parts. But in the wake of these locals' appetite for weapons, the image of the plane "decomposing" in a sense suggests that there is a natural, inevitable force behind the region's myriad conflicts and demand for weapons. The film assigns guilt to Yuri, and yet ambiguously dampens it in this scene. If these appetites are insatiable, as these pictures illustrate, Orlov and his suppliers are immaterial to the equation—as in *Traffic*, scrupulous people will always be replaced if demand itself cannot be halted. Still, as Yuri's home and professional lives unravel—and as the historical arrest of the "merchant of death" in Thailand illustrates—*Lord of War* may examine complex networks in a way that highlights the hypocrisy of capitalism more broadly, but it assigns guilt in a traditional manner to its central agent, rather than letting it circulate amid a host of people who are isolated from the larger scheme.

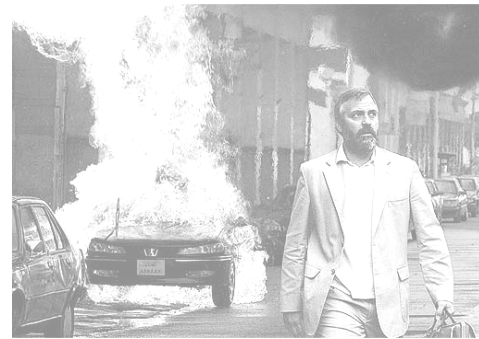
### ***Syriana* (2005): Global Oil Networks and CIA-Sponsored Corporate Mergers**

Whereas Niccol's film criticizes the tactics of weapons cartels, Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005) charts the mechanisms at work in transnational oil cartels and focuses on agents who are presumably isolated from the ramifications of their interventions. Gaghan's film dizzyingly yokes together the networked lives of Texan oil developers, undocumented Pakistani workers who lose their jobs at an Arab refinery when it is bought by a Chinese corporation, two Saudi-style heirs to an oil empire, the fundamentalist sect that recruits the



undocumented workers left unemployed by the corporate takeover, and the central figure, Bob Barnes (George Clooney), a CIA operative assigned to kill the anti-American heir to ensure an industrial merger. Indeed, Robert Baer's (2003) memoir *See No Evil* was the source text for the film, and at this point in the analysis it may come as no surprise that we bear witness once again to Barnes-Baer's white male guilt over having worked for so long to ensure the supremacy of US interests—economic advantages typically enjoyed by bourgeois men like himself.

Barnes in the film is a specialist in “dirty work” who deals with the most dangerous groups in the Middle East and can detonate a car bomb, killing people with whom he had a meeting moments earlier, whilst crossing the street calmly. In spite of his efficiency, owing to an unusual ability to compartmentalize his role from other's trauma and from the wider political scheme itself (to “see no evil” in his actions), Bob botches an attempt to assassinate one of his targets and



**Figure 21. Barnes is able to “see no evil” as an unquestioning CIA operative. © 2005 Warner Bros.**

loses a live US missile when a third party intervenes in one of his fraudulent arms deals. These events leave him abandoned by his own organisation and caught in unfriendly territory where even a fellow operative turns against him. Like Robert's and Caroline's trauma at home in *Traffic*, and Tessa's and Justin's trauma abroad in *The Constant Gardener*, Bob's traumatic kidnapping and torture in an unnamed Middle Eastern country motivates him to begin questioning US commercial and political mechanisms abroad—the dirty work of ensuring US hegemony. Bob had previously resisted making these inquiries in order to segregate his personal and professional life and maintain his peace of mind. And in Washington, he is neither

allowed to deliver his report in a meeting with superiors (some of them played by women who, as I will examine ahead, often represent indifference and narrow concerns with public image) or, importantly, to read about the wider objectives behind his current and past missions.

Barnes undergoes the typical journey of a naïve Western protagonist confronted by the human suffering his imperialist government and his own activities inflict. But like each actor in *Syriana*'s network, he remains unable to see how each node is connected. Gaghan stages this sense of isolation in a scene indicative of the network society more broadly. A disillusioned US commodities trader, Bryan (Matt Damon), stationed in Geneva, has the weekly task of reporting the numbers, presumably to a media outlet or another branch of his organization. In order to do so, he wears an earpiece and faces a small camera. He hears questions, which are not audible to the viewer, and responds to people who are visible neither to himself nor the viewer. It is a strange scene to behold, but not because it is unusual. In today's news media landscape, "talking head" respondents appear in groups, often from multiple cities, and appear at ease in their conversations with the anchor and the other respondents. Often, however, these people can neither see the others, and only hear one another through earpieces, making it difficult to know who is speaking and to whom one is responding. More than commenting on the fabricated nature of panels and virtual roundtable meetings that are ubiquitous in US television news, this scene from *Syriana* can be understood to visualize the wider relations between people enmeshed in the network society—individuated nodes who cannot see the wider relations for themselves.

But guilt and accountability are rendered clearly. The connection Barnes unearths point toward the global players with the most to gain, not merely from the

region's natural resources but from its continued instability. No powerful agent is *isolated enough* from the intervention to claim to be innocent or merely following orders. Commercial exploitation is thus only part of the picture; coordinated acts of violence and the arming of militant groups are also standard practice for the CIA, an organization which in this narrative fosters violence and only publicly appears to quell it. Networks in *Syriana* strangle and seemingly isolate those caught within them but suggests that we are *all* ensnared within them, specifically those involving Middle Eastern energy resources.

It becomes evident to Barnes that American, European, and Chinese exploitation of the region's natural and human resources (and migrant human resources) do much more than simply benefit the ostensibly isolated North American or European oil consumer. Rather, these Western and Asian incursions contribute unsurprisingly to the fundamentalist rage that drives extremist groups to commit acts of terrorism against Western interests, populations, and symbolic targets. The film's thesis, that "everything is connected," belies none of the utopian suggestions advanced in *21 Grams* and *Crash* but speaks with an uncommon level of sophistication about the complexity of contemporary transnational relations as they are mediated through the commodity form. As Bloom (2006, n.p.) suggests, the film's writer-director

has chosen to represent a post-September 11, 2001, world that—through the geopolitics and political economy of oil—is dynamically structured by almost infinite connectivity, complexity, indirection, ambiguity, and speed. This world also seems bereft of any ethical and moral grounding except for the hyperinstrumentality of ethical and moral discourse and behavior, which are beyond good and evil, but not in the manner imagined by Nietzsche. As well, the world seems unknowable....

This, the world of *Syriana*, is our world. (Bloom, 2006, n.p)

Isolated even in the midst of their connectedness, almost in the manner of the Fordist assembly line, each individual agent acts as an instrument of an absent force or interest. But, as I am suggesting, self-interest reigns here as well, and thus no one is guiltless. Indeed, several actors in the network find their moral grounding and attempt to respond ethically, including Barnes and the Saudi-style heir intent on sharing the national wealth with his people. But they find their efforts thwarted and are either killed or re-enrolled in the network's brutal logic.

In other words, criminality and righteousness are possibilities here, but no amount of effort can thwart the CIA's seemingly omnipotent ability to issue an air strike on the heir using satellites. The turmoil nurtured by US (and European and mounting Chinese) commercial interests proves impossible to prevent, given its helpful role in sustaining lucrative trading relationships that many local citizens and leaders are intent on redefining more democratically. The CIA not only prevents Barnes from assisting leaders and investors in the region who want peace and equitable prosperity, it orders him to assassinate the sympathetic Arab heir who intended to share the oil wealth with all citizens.

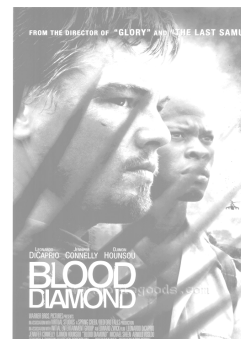
Public and private interests work mysteriously amid the networks in *Syriana*, and viewers are given no reason to trust government bodies over commercial enterprises. Indeed, as Clooney (2005 in Bloom, 2006: n.p.) has stated, *Syriana* was made "in the fashion of the films of the mid sixties and early seventies that were willing to discuss the failures of government as if they were failures of all of us, not just a particular party or group." The contemporary neoliberal terrain of individuated interest groups, who view their own media outlets to have their views affirmed and

live in gated or at least socially segregated communities of exclusion, is itself premised upon new forms of technological isolation which, as Clooney suggests, has ramifications for collective accountability and the definition of *national* moral and ethical commonalities (like those that emerged through struggle to oppose the Vietnam War).

In *Syriana*, to conclude, the government and the corrupt CIA serve individual, private interests rather than the public good; “corruption is why we win,” bellows an oil executive in the film’s most didactic and least compelling scene. US oil conglomerate Killen, facing the prospect of diminished returns from its facilities in the Middle East, pressures the US government to ensure through military force that the compliant Saudi heir assumes power. This public-private arrangement of course allegorizes the very activities that have invoked US opposition (albeit muted, see Calabrese, 2007) to the current “democracy building” intervention in Iraq wherein publicly funded US soldiers, deployed under the guise of national security in 2003, have found themselves guarding corporate convoys of prospectors and business liaisons.

### ***Blood Diamond* (2006): De Beers, Capital, and Endless Warfare**

Commodities have politics, as *Syriana* makes clear, but in the context of global economic competition these resources seem to mediate our transnational, domestic, and even interpersonal relations in inescapable ways. By locating a nation’s source of capital, Ed Zwick’s *Blood Diamond* (2006) suggests, one will find the fuel for economic development and education as well as unending war. But understanding how these source commodities circulate across a





host of global networks is a more difficult task. Zwick, who had been slated to direct *Traffic*, which he ultimately produced, and whom Warner considered hiring to direct *Syriana*, has assembled a film that charts the networked movement of its valuable commodity as it passes from the hands of a fisherman-turned-migrant worker in Sierra Leone, Solomon (Djimon Hounsou), into the hands of a ruthless Zimbabwean diamond trader, Danny (Leonardo DiCaprio), and ultimately into the vault of a DeBeers-like multinational corporation with offices in London. Following the diamond, which the film accomplishes in some ways through the perspective of an American human rights photographer and journalist, Maddy (Jennifer Connelly), Zwick maps a human network in which everyone is connected and simultaneously alienated, mutually hostile, competitive, and isolated from any understanding of the larger scheme.

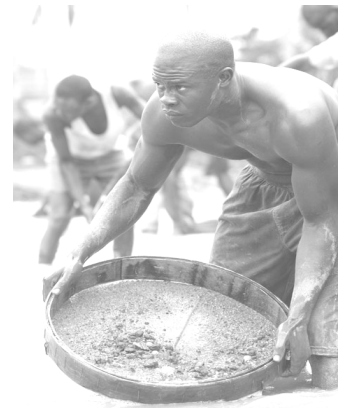
Representing the least empowered node, Solomon wants only to be reunited with his wife (Jassie Vandy), now a refugee, and his son (Anointing Lukola), who is abducted and in the midst of traumatic “training” as a child soldier in Sierra Leone’s civil war, which was itself funded by diamonds throughout the nineties when the film is set. Although Solomon’s life is neither insular nor privileged, his “hero’s journey” is nonetheless motivated by the kidnapping of his family—trauma at home as in *Traffic*. Second, representing the most empowered node, the international diamond lobby wants to acquire Solomon’s stone by any means necessary; it must be stored secretly in order to perpetuate the myth that diamonds are rare and in short supply (Booker, 2007). Indeed the film opens amid a meeting between industry and government leaders in which both parties commit, as least symbolically, to more rigid industrial regulations and mining practices; as the film makes clear, these commitments scarcely affect the conditions of workers and traders in African

countries. These measures, including the Kimberly Process, initiated in 2000 to certify clean diamonds, like the marketing campaigns based on scarcity, almost entirely target European and North American consumers who wish to be reassured about their purchases. And third, representing the most callous, hyperinstrumental node, DiCaprio's Danny is a nihilist mercenary who has devised a series of techniques for successful diamond smuggling.

Alternately empowered due to his "Rhodesian" roots, in his terminology, and his connections in the criminal underworld, and disempowered due to his nomadic existence off the legal grid, Danny undergoes a climactic ethical rebirth as he protects Solomon, gives up the diamond, and is fatally wounded. Solomon and Danny inhabit twin but conflicting narrative trajectories and therefore undergo polarized ethical reconfigurations as they come to understand the network that ensnares them. The film initially depicts Solomon with his family, a gentle man concerned with harmonious community life, and with providing enough income for his wife and child. By the film's conclusion, following his perilous trials alongside Danny, Solomon has undergone a crash course in the economics of neoliberal globalization and is no longer such a gentle citizen; he sees in every interaction how men like him are exploited ruthlessly by rival ethnic groups and foreign interests alike. In fact, in the film's most troubling and arguably racist scene, Solomon learns to unleash his rage on those who have uprooted his family, barbarically using a shovel, a mining tool, to dispatch several men. Danny, by contrast, is initially violent and indifferent with no human connections beyond his menacing business contacts. His ethical settings are therefore reset in the opposite direction as he comes to understand how his violence and selfishness afflict others. Through his kinship with Solomon, and his affinity for Maddy who challenges his insularity, Danny learns to

become a gentle white man just as Solomon learns to become a violent black man. Fittingly, given the film's attention to transnational flows, Danny's final, redemptive statements are communicated to Maddy by cellular phone as she meets with human rights advocates in London whilst he lies dying amid the chaos of Sierra Leone's civil war.

The film encourages viewers to locate other less visible networks as well, and to think more broadly about those networks that are not mediated by pixels or shipping lines. Diamond mining in Zimbabwe and other countries is a poorly regulated pursuit. But it is accomplished amid networks of exploitation and exchange in which each actor demands ascending prices for the commodity they traffic. As Booker (2007, p. 354) notes: "Stones are mined by hand, under the watchful gaze of armed guards; small diamonds are cleverly smuggled under the skins of goats by tribesmen who are bribed to circumvent boarder checkpoints using their traditional pastoral rights." The economy of labour pays diggers roughly one dollar per day, whilst guards who represent the hegemonic regional warlords inspect any worker who might be stealing. Charged with the duties of these guards, but without pay, hundreds of child soldiers populate the film and enforce the will of regional leaders with unflinching commitment.



**Figure 22. Solomon must mine diamonds at gunpoint. © 2006 Warner Bros.**

Indeed, as Lt. General Romeo Dallaire (2006) has suggested, the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts around the world often troubles traditional notions of warfare and thwarts strategists' plans for successful interventions. The presence of armed children has become so successful in a number of conflicts that Dallaire and

his colleagues suggest that peacekeepers consider child soldiers as a “weapons system.” Like landmines, child soldiers halt peacekeepers in their tracks, according to Dallaire, presenting them with the devastating ethical choice over whether to fire upon them. For those soldiers who survive their teens, however, the ramifications of having belonged to a human weapons system linger. As Booker (2007, p. 354) writes: “*Blood Diamond*’s most noteworthy achievement is in illustrating how children are socialized to become soldiers. ...Those in charge step in to fill the vacant gaps of legitimate male role models once the fathers are dead.” The multiple regimes at work in the film, from mining outposts, child soldier brigades, underworld smugglers and weapons dealers to executive board meetings in London and Brussels, together illustrate how networks metastasise in the age of accelerated global trade. Many lives are lost or destroyed in the dangerous terrain between the various nodes, but the commodity’s value increases in each transaction.

Once extracted, for instance, the diamonds are presented to a mix of local and foreign appraisers and traffickers who wait in non-descript offices in nearby towns to begin the exportation process. After this first sale is made, the worth of the diamonds increases significantly and the buyer turns a profit equivalent to weeks of earnings as a miner. Danny himself is a buyer or sorts, and he utilizes shepherds to bypass government checkpoints, although he is caught and jailed briefly. In orchestrating and examining this array of commercial and human networks, often gruesomely, *Blood Diamond* suggests that corporations benefit from these haphazard formations, which divide, alienate, and render violent those actors caught within them, and their executives (like consumers) are all too pleased to know precious little about these apparatuses, and to keep them obscure, because they deliver the commodity cheaply and efficiently. Still, as *Blood Diamond* makes clear in

a final scene in which Solomon speaks at a public hearing, the De Beers-like executives know very well where their diamonds originate. The conflict-free trading policies may target their abuses, but clandestine networks are currently flooding the international market with diamonds from another war torn country: the Democratic Republic of Congo. And because each agent completes only a small step in the larger, unrepresentable system, policing this new network is proving to be exigent.

That is, as the previous chapter suggested, networks can isolate the very people they connect. Danny's satellite phonecall to Maddy from Sierra Leone secures him no assistance from her powerful connections, and he cannot communicate the chaos he sees around him and indeed never attempts such a description. Even as a journalist, Maddy cannot grasp the totality of the cartel or the depths of human suffering the diamond and weapons trade fosters. This failure to communicate is staged similarly in *Syriana*—the US and Chinese oil interests have no way of grasping the totality of the fundamentalist rage their partners are fostering by firing hundreds of migrant workers. And this breakdown of the network is also choreographed in Paul Greengrass's September 11 dramatisation *United 93* (2006) wherein networks of communication isolate terrorists, passengers, air traffic controllers and law enforcement officials from the total picture of the devastating plot that unfolded.

## ***United 93* (2006): September 11<sup>th</sup>, Terrorist Networks, and Communication**

As in the aforementioned films, however, guilt is assigned here given that terrorists at least attempt to coordinate the action.

A competitor at the Academy Awards with *Babel* and *Blood*

*Diamond*, this film may appear to be an anomaly here given the criteria outlined earlier. In my investigation of the global network

film, however, it seemed crucial to include at least one film that addresses the

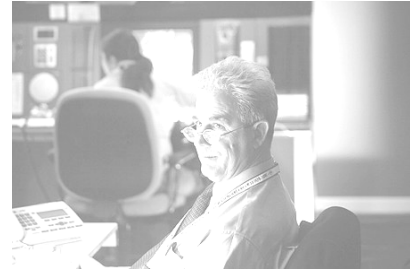
September 11 attacks “directly,” since several other films, such as *21 Grams*, *Syriana* and *Babel*, allegorise 9/11 in their depictions of victimized Americans.

Additionally, *United 93* corresponds with the criteria outlining the features of the global network film, and its direct engagement with the traumatic real of twenty-first century terrorism makes it a prescient text. The network emerges once again as the key to globally coordinated events.

At the hands of the Islamic extremists, scores of US citizens find themselves enmeshed in a clandestine web of relations organized by cellular phone. Although one suspicious passenger is the focus of the film’s opening scenes, he springs into action in a premeditated manner with a group of associates assisting him. Human and technological networks thus emerge as threatening formations; low on manpower and weaponry, the hijackers are a formidable force because of their initial coordination. Just as wireless networks had been indispensable in planning and orchestrating the attacks (Mosco, 2004), in a wider sense networks of communication continue to enable the operation of the terrorist “cells” comprising Al Qaeda, itself a decentralized network.



Alternatively, US security and air traffic networks must function without the benefits of lengthy planning sessions; they must take action with no predetermined plans. Indeed, networks of communication and miscommunication between the air traffic controllers in Washington and New York, the pilots, the passengers and their families,



**Figure 23. Ben Sliney plays himself in *United 93*, re-enacting his fateful decisions. © 2006 Warner Bros.**

and the hijackers themselves, form the core of *United 93*'s narrative. Illuminating the traumatic underside of the network society, as in *Syriana*, no civilian, official, authority figure, group, or government body in *United 93* is privy to enough information or context, despite being in perpetual contact in order to coordinate their tasks and manage complexity (Castells, 2001) to achieve his or her respective goals—not even the hijackers. Still, this isolation never dissipates the terrorists' guilt, as the network does in *Traffic* and *Black Hawk Down*.

Even the aviation director, Ben Sliney, who plays himself, is shown making routine decisions because he is not afforded enough information or context to sound the alarm. Unsure of what the anomaly may be, Sliney assumes that a small private plane likely accounts for the erratic flight path he sees darting about on his screen. None of the other controllers can confirm why an airplane originating at Washington Dulles Airport would change course so dramatically. As scenes from the airplane's cabin are interspersed with scenes of puzzled aviation and government officials, a profound sense of impotence takes shape. Filmmakers have long debated to what effect on-screen mysteries should be revealed to viewers in advance of the characters themselves. Knowing the horrible danger that awaits Hitchcock's characters offers viewers a contradictory sense of supremacy (in their knowledge)

and impotence (in their helplessness); we watch as Lesgate waits behind the curtain to strangle Tony's wife in *Dial 'M' for Murder* (1954), and the suspense mounts in *Psycho* (1960) as Prendergast enters the Bates mansion. *United 93* may invoke terror, but the film is, of course, markedly different from generic thrillers—chiefly because these unspeakable acts took place. That is, a recreation of traumatic *historical* events must operate with certain elements of suspense *unavailable* to the filmmakers; every viewer must watch the horror unfold with the full knowledge of the tragic outcome. That is, the big Other's "God's view" belongs to the viewer who must witness both the communication breakdown and a sequence of events that no protagonist can stop from unfolding (Žižek, 2008). In *United 93*, everyone is connected, but only the viewer is privy to the wider context behind these connections, an omniscient perspective characterized ironically by a sense of helplessness.

By the film's conclusion, it is fitting that primitive face-to-face human communication, resembling a football huddle in the aisle of the airplane, coordinates the ultimate rebellion of the flight's passengers, who overpower their armed captors, redirect the plane, and thwart the hijackers' plans to take scores of lives and potentially destroy the White House. Greengrass's attempt to create a cognitive map of the horror inside the plane and the confusion on the ground generates a powerful discursive apparatus or *dispositif* that associates this picture with the news discourses and documentary footage that it reproduces. The director's focus on human networks rather than disciplined individuals (there are no familiar movie stars here) enriches this map. The vision of the network that emerges here is a sobering reminder that miscommunication can afflict the most technologically advanced nations of the world whilst the most barbaric fringe groups can coordinate



unspeakable schemes, at least temporarily, with relatively simple communication technologies. And although the hijackers fail, and the passengers saved the lives of those targeted by the plane, the US security and aviation agents *do not* triumphantly coordinate their activities in order to obliterate the terrorist threat. The viewer here is made to witness a semblance of historical trauma, and to contemplate the ambivalent consequences of the new ways in which social life and group endeavours can be organized and disorganized in the network society.

*United 93* thus makes serious demands on viewers. But these demands are not unique to this film or to post-9/11 visual culture. As Western narrative cinema continues to document and restage the global traumas of abject poverty, the exploitation of labour, resource-driven conflicts, militarism, and acts of terrorism, it becomes ever more crucial to question how this imagery constitutes Western viewers as spectatorial actors enrolled in the “network of looks” the films arrange (Kaplan, 1997, p. 23). In the next chapter I examine how guilt is assigned in a range of these films *hysterically*, that is, through the unintended associations the films forge in their imagery, diegetic developments, and scenic structures (shot-reverse shot grammar, for instance). Unsurprisingly, inaction and impotence are feminized, according to these associations, whilst agency and the will to alleviate trauma are coded as the work of Western men.

## Chapter 6

### Global Networks and the Feminization of Guilt

In assessing global network films in terms of their narrative concerns with connections, control, and accountability, the formidable presence of *trauma* in these texts is a central finding. Being connected to one another, across borders or across town, means being connected to one another's multifarious predicaments, as many of the naïve figures in the aforementioned films discover. The films discussed in Chapter 4 depicted networks in which powerful Western men confront their complicity with distant traumas (*United 93* presents an obvious exception) but succeed in assigning guilt to greedy corporations or interest groups. The films in Chapter 5 dramatize Western agents embroiled in networks whose workings they cannot control, and whose violence they cannot blame squarely on any single person or agency. This chapter addresses films from *both* categories. But here I examine how the contemporary symbolic economy of US cinema may inadvertently be "gendering" guilt according to the lingering and oppressive categories of active masculinity and passive femininity. As with any discursive analysis, that is, the intentions of the creators are not the primary issue. Indeed the writers and directors may endeavour to illustrate their own admirable politics whilst the conventions they deploy and the imagery they assemble may tell another story entirely.

### Cinema, Trauma, and Impotence

But what is the role of trauma in the already complex terrain of gender? Put simply, in some estimations trauma can halt individual action, while according to other theorists trauma can stimulate a revaluation of the individual's embeddedness

in the “social compact” (Herman, 1992, p. 1). Trauma figures in this study simply because it is an inescapable feature of life in the age of the network society, a communicational terrain in which troubling images from the streets of Kigali, Tehran, Kiev, Sarajevo, or Mogadishu can—more rapidly than ever before—confront insulated Western citizens on television, on film, and online. But given that such images might be discussed in terms of documenting the bodies traumatized by military repression, or in terms of their ability to traumatize the *viewers* of the images, a clear definition of trauma is indispensable.

Psychological trauma has received sustained academic attention throughout the twentieth century but it nonetheless continues to challenge scholars due to its mysterious refusal to settle meaningfully into the psyches of survivors. The relationship between photography, film, literature, personal testimony, visual art and trauma has received scholarly attention since Freud (1917) conducted his early case studies with Josef Breuer, which examined the shell-shocked soldiers of World War I. Scholars have addressed the concept from a range of disciplines including psychiatry (Herman, 1992), literature (Caruth, 1995; Kaplan, 2004; 2005) and history (Friedlander, 1984; La Capra, 2001; Novick, 1999). Commentators, including literary theorists (Caruth, 1995), memory theorists (Radstone, 2000), urban geographers (Harvey, 2005), art historians (Bennett, 2005), and technology scholars (Jensen and Wiest, 2001) have descended upon the field of Trauma Studies. They offer analyses of a global culture in which traumatic imagery circulates with great speed but generates puzzling results.

A major debate in Trauma Studies surrounds the definition of trauma itself. According to Herman (1992, p. 1), a traumatic event (ranging from political to domestic violence) embeds itself in the survivor’s psyche. The event is such a

“violation[ ] of the social compact” that for the survivor it becomes “unspeakable.” And yet, “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman, 1992, p. 1). Thus, “The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (Herman, 1992, p. 1). Because this will to forget or deny the impact of the original traumatic event often results in silence, subsequent theorists have defined trauma as an absence that is necessarily “unrepresentable” because it overloads the human sensorium and forces the psyche to repress memories of the experience. These memories, however, are prone to surface involuntarily and in ways the traumatised person cannot predict, as symptoms. Trauma is therefore personal and yet its representation is beyond the traumatised person’s control. Trauma, like the network, is of concern here because it is unmappable. A total or authentic rendering of a traumatic experience is impossible, leading many scholars to conclude that any attempted rendering risks sentimentalising, revising, and diminishing the magnitude of the original traumatic event.

More recently, scholars have challenged the definition of trauma as an unrepresentable absence, arguing that such a classification risks relegating trauma to “the mystified circle of the occult, something untouchable and unreachable” (Kaplan and Wang, 2004, p. 8). They claim that the “exclusive, ineffable privacy” of trauma must not prevent a more concrete, politically and theoretically useful definition from being explored in order for trauma to be understood and represented to those who did not bear witness to it (2004, p. 9). My goal in scrutinizing and deploying this concept is to synthesise these more recent, competing definitions of trauma while remaining alert to their political, ethical, and aesthetic specificities—

especially because cinema has been the most lauded and the most derided medium of representation in its attempts to envision trauma.

If trauma defies representation, according to some scholars the Holocaust, the Cultural Revolution, the Gulag, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and other historical catastrophes test the limits of representation and reveal the failure of language and other symbols to represent the real—the absent referent that motivates yet escapes signification. Some prominent voices suggest that representations of suffering actually “weaken[ ] the link between public memory and personal experience” (Kaes, 1990, p. 121). The past, they argue, “is in danger of becoming a rapidly expanding collection of images, easily retrievable but isolated from time and space” (Kaes, 1990, p. 121). Filmic and literary representations of trauma weaken viewers’ cognitive links between their own lives and the original events, and foster amnesia, because they cultivate “prosthetic memories” or fictional supplements for the real (Landsberg, 2004). Traumatic historical events, according to this thinking, should not be aestheticized, depicted, or recreated but instead revered and permitted to exist as absences (Claude Lanzmann, in his oral history of the Holocaust, *Shoah* (1985), arguably subscribes to this notion by refusing to employ historical footage or to dramatise past events. He does, however, elicit detailed testimonies from his subjects, demonstrating his commitment to representation in the form of personal narrative). Not surprisingly, the “refusal to represent” past events has been criticised for potentially enabling the erasure of important events from popular memory, and for being complicit with the efforts of revisionist historians, who deny everything from the Holocaust to the Apollo moon-landing.

Since representations of traumatic historical events now abound, from comic books depicting the Holocaust and the events of September 11, 2001, to ubiquitous documentary films, photographs, art exhibits, and eye-witness accounts, the most important debates about representation now concern *which* aesthetic strategies and cultural forms are best suited to the task of representing particular traumatic events. On the one hand, these representations can easily descend into “kitsch,” evidenced during the surge of American patriotism this decade. More than being “in poor taste,” kitsch can operate politically by functioning solely on an affective level and thus trivialising unsavoury details about the original traumatic event (Friedlander, 1984). Conversely, representations that mobilise “realism” as a strategy to signify historical accuracy can also efface ideological and political complexities in their attempts to provide an authoritative statement about past suffering; in fact, according to Žižek (2006: n.p.), the film’s conjured “authenticity...should make us suspicious—we should immediately ask ourselves what ideological purposes it serves.”

As Kaplan and Wang (2004, p. 3) suggest, “the links between trauma, visual media, and modernity are not clear, or not clear enough in a global, multicultural context.” Not all of these links can be made clear, of course, but as psychoanalysis has illustrated, such contradictions are often the most edifying. One of trauma’s paradoxes that is uniquely pertinent to this study concerns its immobilizing and activating possibilities. According to Freud and Breuer (1915; 1919), trauma afflicted soldiers due to its absence from their memories and from their conscious experience of the present. It overwhelmed the sensorium leading to the well-known symptoms of flashbacks, hallucinations, and repetitive behaviours including “replaying” the event or even revisiting the site of the occurrence. Trauma thus overwhelms the cognitive mechanisms and “by-passes the brain’s meaning-making sites” as a result becoming

"dissociated from ordinary consciousness" (Kaplan 2008, p. 4). In this tradition of research, trauma is crippling because it prevents conscious action.

And action is precisely what is depicted in these films according to entrenched gender scripts. As foundational film and visual theorists have argued, men *act* and women *appear* (Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1975). Because the instances of trauma in this study, ranging from drug addiction among wealthy Americans to mass death among stranded Rwandans, are envisioned according to narrative cinema's codes, it is tempting to suggest that the experience of visual pleasure furnished by classical Hollywood cinema has been reconfigured in the twenty first century around the often guilt-inducing experience of "bearing witness" (Felman and Laub, 1992). Bearing witness readily induces guilt at the *spectatorial level*, according to Susan Sontag (2003), because one cannot view images of suffering without either exploiting (and thus perpetuating) that suffering or working actively to contain it.

Due to my concentration on narrative cinema, it is not my intention to suggest that the viewing paradigm arranged by the cinematic apparatus is at all consistent with this definition of witnessing. Witnessing trauma is a social experience rooted in physical proximity that often disturbs the witness and even poses a threat to his or her safety. By contrast, viewing narrative cinema, including the variety brimming with violent imagery, remains a fantasmatic experience that has been arranged meticulously by cinematographers, sound designers, directors and performers. However, there is a nuanced role for cinema to play in the global mediascape and a tentative consensus that we are "call[ed] on...to carefully attend to images of suffering" and to bear witness "through both mundane and extraordinary forms of media documentation" (Rentschler, 2004, p. 296). This type of witnessing, to be clear, is "vicarious witnessing" (Kaplan, 2008), facilitated by media texts, and

therefore vastly different from the “performative act” of witnessing defined principally by “being there,” with its obvious risks to the witness’s psyche and body (Thomas and Vogler, 2003, p.165).

If both mundane and extraordinary media forms, and presumably high and low cultural forms, enrol us in acts of vicarious witnessing, it follows that viewing a contemporary film may be as affecting and enlightening as viewing CNN’s mundane sensation journalism on the one hand, or viewing high art such as the controversial 9/11 memorial statue, *Tumbling Woman* (2001), on the other. Unlike commercial television news (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006), or high art (Bennett, 2005), popular US cinematic narratives pose unique questions about trauma, gender, and guilt. In *Looking for the Other* (1997), an ambitious attempt to fuse Mulvey’s (1975; 1989; 1995) theories of the cinematic gaze with postcolonial theories of looking and power rooted in Freudian (Fanon, 1961; 1967) and Marxist (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988) traditions, Kaplan challenges scholars to think beyond “modernism’s two powerful objectifying gazes,” the “male gaze” and the “imperial gaze,” as we “move into the postmodern cyberage, with its new paradigm of the ‘network,’ or circle of gazes” (1997, p. 22-23). “All peoples will need to be ready for the new paradigms,” she argues, exemplified by “the cyberspace circle or network of looks” (Kaplan, 1997, p. 23). This chapter in some ways responds to Kaplan’s challenge.

For analysis here, I single out Soderbergh’s definitive globalization film, *Traffic* (2000), the multi-plot story of American middleclass complicity with brutal transnational drug cartels (Shaw, 2005); Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006), the fictional multi-plot story of American tourists who spark an international media frenzy when they are mistakenly victimized while vacationing in Morocco; and three Western depictions of recent traumas in Africa: Mierelles’s *The Constant Gardener* (2005),



Andrew Niccol's *Lord of War* (2005), and Michael Caton-Jones's *Shooting Dogs* (2005).

## **Gender, Trauma, and Guilt**

Classical Hollywood cinema arguably “depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world,” inscribing her image as a “lynch pin to the system” because “it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6). With this influential paradigm in mind, I would like to inspect the aforementioned films in order to interrogate what cinematic images of women in the traumatic twenty first century stand for, what anxieties of masculine, military, or even humanitarian impotence they mediate, and what system of meaning they pin together. Based upon the evidence presented in these films, I argue

1. that guilt emerges as a primary psychological response in the implied (male) spectator envisioned by Mulvey's psychoanalytic film theory;
2. that this conscious guilt represents surplus energy, the result of the lack produced by the spectator's impotence in the face of others' trauma, which joins forces with unconscious castration anxieties;
3. and that the guilt elicited by these images of trauma, in accordance with the patriarchal Symbolic Order, is displaced “hysterically” onto images of Western women (Modleski, 1991).

Depictions of trauma are often discussed in terms of their ability to disrupt spectators, and challenge inherited assumptions, but they may also risk galvanizing regressive notions of masculinity and femininity. In the face of trauma, for instance,

the men in the films feel guilty over their failed attempts to be active whilst a range of women are rendered guilty due to their willing passivity.

In these films, a traumatic event, endured directly or witnessed, typically serves as the “stimulus” for an insulated Western male protagonist’s crisis of self, period of reevaluation, and narrative journey (Narine, 2006). Rather than motivating revenge, as in horror cinema (Clover, 1993; Lowenstein, 2005), these initial ruptures unearth guilt in the “main controlling figure” (Mulvey, 1975: 12). In *Traffic*, when Robert (Michael Douglas) discovers that his daughter has turned to needle drugs and prostitution, for example, he must confront in his narrative journey his own guilt over having been an alcoholic, absentee father, as well as an impotent enforcer of anti-drug laws. In *Babel*, when Susan (Cate Blanchett) is mysteriously shot in the midst of a vacation in Morocco, her husband Richard (Brad Pitt) must face his own role in the fractured family’s suffering (which motivated the vacation) and learn that he is not supremely able to protect his family from harm. In *Shooting Dogs*, when the young British teacher Joe (Hugh Dancy) witnesses the first act of brutality in Rwanda, he is similarly guilt-ridden by his impotence, by the indifference of his country’s leaders toward the vulnerable Tutsi population, and finally by his decision to flee the war zone, a privilege afforded to white Westerners. In *The Constant Gardener*, when Tessa (Rachel Wiesz) goes missing in Kenya her husband Justin (Ralph Fiennes) must confront the naïve way in which he conducted his affairs as a diplomat and realize that he is helpless to intervene in the networks of capital and corruption that cause such suffering in the country he was assigned to monitor. In *Lord of War*, Yuri’s (Nicolas Cage) ability to rationalize his weapons profiteering in war torn African nations falters when he begins to enjoy family life; effective at

accumulating capital, Yuri is impotent to protect his family from the danger his greed has forced on them.

All of these films openly investigate Western economic guilt and complicity with the suffering of others, but they are principally about *impotence*. Specifically, Western men fail because they become enrolled in human networks they are unable to understand, coordinate, or act effectively within, paralyzing them in the face of the traumas they struggle to alleviate. The role of the traumatic in forging social bonds and organizing looking relations has been neglected in discussions of socially networked globalization generally, and the socially minded cinema depicting it (an exception is Radstone, 2001). Trauma matters because impotence in its midst (often encoded as feminization) centralizes the issue of gender. A tentative return to foundational feminist film theory, a hermeneutic instrument many scholars consider outmoded, illuminates the ways in which texts such as *Traffic*, *Babel*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Lord of War*, and *Shooting Dogs* negotiate guilt and culpability over Western hegemony in the face of distant suffering and feminize guilt.

## **The Hysterical Text and Displaced Guilt**

The global network films in question are explicitly concerned with *challenging* the very class, race, and gender inequities illustrative of life in the global age, unlike the classical films examined in so much film theory. To varying degrees, however, these films unsurprisingly uphold traditional and outmoded representational economies. Specifically, these pictures elicit conscious spectatorial guilt due to the fact that our gaze as viewers is “identif[ied] with the main male protagonist” who supremely surveys, but often struggles to prevent, human suffering (Mulvey, 1975, p.

16). The guilt these narratives elicit conjoins with the unconscious “terror of potential lack” which according to Freudian psychoanalysis governs the human (not solely the male) ego at a primal level resulting in a surplus of anxiety at the narrative and spectatorial levels that demands to be purged or displaced (Mulvey, 1975, p. 7), .

This curious relation can be understood by reinvigorating another established paradigm in feminist film theory set out by Tania Modleski in *Feminism Without Women* (1991). In her analysis of Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society* (1989) as an allegory of gay male identity finding its voice in the “heterosexual, homosocial environment” of a boys boarding school in 1959, Modleski (1991, p. 138) illustrates how the resolute repression of gay voices in the film’s narrative surfaces in a “hysterical text” comprising a set of visual associations which overdetermine the omitted gay narrative. The text’s steadfast investment in heterosexual male bonding and the boys’ family traumas works to repress the story of the sexual identity crises suffered by the protagonist, who plays the fairy Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* against his father’s wishes, and his shy classmate, “a loner, unable to articulate his feelings” to his irreverent teacher Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) (Modleski, 1991, p. 138).

As in any act of repression, the energies of the wilfully suppressed gay narrative persist, forging covert connections between the gay poet and classroom mascot Walt Whitman, the homoerotic scenes group showers, and the sensitive male literature students. Tellingly, the most flamboyant of the students dies by suicide and the “free thinking” teacher is fired; both are recipients of the surplus guilt the film fails to direct toward the homophobic Law of the father. Similarly, in *Babel*, *Traffic*, and the Africa films, the guilt looming beneath each traumatic context is

displaced hysterically onto the images of Western women, whose own stories are largely repressed. The first of these films presents a paradigm case.

### ***Traffic*, Female Pleasure, and Male Impotence**

When Robert (Michael Douglas), a Supreme Court Judge-turned-Drug Czar, discovers his teenaged daughter Caroline's (Erika Christensen) advanced addiction to heroine, he is rendered increasingly impotent as the addiction worsens. For all of Robert's guilt and faults, including a dependence on alcohol, however, the domestic politics that emerge hint at the hysterical text lurking beneath *Traffic*'s social critique. Robert and his wife Barbara (Amy Irving) privately argue about the seriousness of Caroline's drug problem after disciplining their daughter. Barbara inadvertently reveals that she has known of her daughter's addiction and remained inactive. The active hermeneutic gaze belongs squarely to Robert, however, taking away Barbara's ability even to explain the reasons behind her silence. The screenplay tells us that Robert "looks at his wife," during their discussion, "and then it dawns on him" (Gaghan, 2000, p. 37):

Robert: [yelling] How long have you known?

Barbara: Six months. I found some marijuana, that's all.  
And a little pipe about two inches long. I talked with her.  
She said her friends smoked pot and drank...

We then learn that Barbara herself used a range of drugs during her years in college, and that she wanted to allow her daughter some liberties: "I think she has to find out for herself, on her own," she says, "We have to allow her space." Initially it appears that Robert is concerned with his public image, the feminized terrain of

appearances, and will keep his family's secret because his daughter's problem would mean ruin for him in Washington, but a curious reversal takes place.

By keeping Caroline's drug use a secret from her husband and her community, Barbara emerges as the parent who is ironically the most concerned with her own appearance and public image in their wealthy suburb populated by social elites. And as a former drug user herself, with a liberal stance on the issue, Barbara becomes aligned with her daughter in the pursuit of frivolous pleasure in the midst of others' suffering, which includes the near-death overdose of Caroline's classmate and the suffering of addicts in downtown Columbus. The horrifying effects of the global drug trade, played out on Caroline's body, are thus likely to illicit sensations of impotence and guilt in viewers, largely through our "screen surrogate," Robert, who represents the Law and expresses his guilt concerning his country's complicity with the thriving drug trade. Indeed, it is worth remembering Mulvey's (1975, p. 12) assertion that "the power of the male protagonist as he controls events" produces "a satisfying sense of omnipotence" that is nonetheless precarious and haunted by lack. It is unsurprising, then, that in the network of looks the film arranges, Robert's anger and guilt over his impotence are displaced not onto drug lords or corrupt police, but onto the images of Caroline and her mother, whose frivolous concerns prioritize their own pleasure and the maintenance of untarnished public images. And while Caroline's social reality introduces some nuances, her journey into sobriety remains peripheral to her father's ethical rebirth.

Further adhering to outmoded



**Figure 24. Barbara (Irving) only belatedly takes seriously Caroline's (Christensen) addiction. © 2000 USA Films**

gender roles, Robert's impulse is to engage actively in healing his family (and his country in his public role) whilst his daughter continues using drugs and his wife remains passive and withdraws from activity, only to serve as the repository of guilt and blame. In a penultimate scene, Robert's active quest to heal and prevent trauma culminates in his troubling *Heart of Darkness*-style odyssey from the white suburbs of Columbus, lined with pillared colonial homes, into the African-American core of the city where his gaze, from his Cadillac, at the addicted population induces such revulsion that he fails to notice his daughter passing on the sidewalk. After extracting Caroline from an act of prostitution in a drug dealer's abject lair, Robert, in spite of his limited success, is at the very least celebrated for his efforts as the film's middleclass hero, alongside the endearing Mexican anti-drug agent Javier (Benicio del Toro).

Javier, who takes small bribes, is Robert's double, but he is redeemed in the narrative as a more successful protector of children. In fact, he negotiates for the construction of a baseball stadium in Tijuana where young people can spend their nights playing, safe from idleness and drug use. Javier's heroism, however, is verified by his achievement of this "vision"; as the film concludes, the screenplay tells us that Javier "serenely watches" a group of children playing baseball from a seat in the finished stadium; a representative of the Law, whose vision has appeared, he also watches over the young players. The character's beloved status was validated by the Academy when del Toro won an Oscar for the role and dedicated it, amid cheers, to the Mexicans and Americans living along the troubled border between Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico. Robert may not win his own battle so decisively, and he may be somewhat impotent, but he is an active force for good throughout the diegesis and at the conclusion he refuses to deliver a political speech

endorsing the “war on drugs” and speaks instead at an addict’s meeting in support of his daughter. A concurrent plot in La Jolla, California supplies further evidence of the hysterical set of associations taking shape between women, impotence, guilt, pleasure, and passivity in the face of trauma.

When her husband Carlos (Steven Bauer) is arrested as San Diego’s prime cocaine importer, Helena (Catherine Zeta-Jones), a mother and socialite from humble origins, becomes ensnared between police surveillance, vengeful drug dealers, and financial ruin. With the source of her family’s wealth now evident for her friends and associates to see, Helena must choose whether or not to embrace new trafficking techniques in order to maintain her comfortable lifestyle. Like Barbara, Helena’s frivolous concerns with her public image in the community, in the face of others’ trauma, further highlights this troubling association, as does her relationship with pleasure: in her introductory scene, surrounded by female friends at the country club, Helena boasts that when her doctor allowed her one glass of red wine during her pregnancy, she had two, eliciting laughter from her companions. Moreover, unlike the imagery depicting Mexico (in overexposed yellow) and Washington, DC (in steely blue), Helena’s “Technicolor-style” scenes are shot to emphasise surfaces. The lens filters and a special Kodak film stock were selected, in Soderbergh’s words, to give the scenes an “idyllic, ’70’s television-commercial style” that “contrasts nicely with the rot that [i]s going on underneath” (Silberg, 2001: n.p.). As her husband’s criminal trial begins, Helena continues to prioritize appearances and her own pleasure. She elects to broker future drug deals rather than sell her valuable paintings, begins a secret affair with her corrupt lawyer Arnie (Dennis Quaid), and even has a disloyal witness killed. Helena, we learn, likely knew of her husband’s drug connections long before his arrest.



In a courtroom scene, according to the screenplay, Sheila, a “mousy secretary,” takes the stand to answer questions about her work for Helena’s and Carlos’s construction company. The detectives “Gordon [Don Cheadle] and Castro [Juan Guzman] sit in the back,” unconcerned with the witness and instead “watching Helena who pays close attention to the witness.” The camera additionally directs our gaze at Helena, even though the prosecutor and Sheila are the ones who speak in the scene (the screenplay’s own directions appear in italics):

*Sheila is shown in profile on the stand.*

Sheila: I was the company secretary from 1991 to 1994. I supposedly worked for all six companies. But... they weren’t... I mean, it was just one empty office with a desk and a telephone. We never sold anything the whole time I was there. Sometimes people came and got paid. I don’t really know what we did.

[Cut to Helena in the audience on whom the camera zooms slowly]

Prosecutor: Did Mr. Ayala say where the money came from?

Sheila: No, and I didn’t ask.

Prosecutor: Where do you think it came from?...I’ll rephrase. Did you feel like you were engaged in a legal enterprise?

*Sheila is reluctant to answer.*

Sheila: No, not really.

*Helena catches Carlos’s eye and they share a grim moment. (Gaghan, 2000, p. 48).*

Although Carlos is on trial and sitting in the defendant’s chair, this verbal exchange takes place almost exclusively over the image of his wife, Helena. The central node in a network of looks, Helena is surveilled first by the same detectives who literally record her daily life at home with hidden cameras, second by her corrupt lawyer Arnie, and third by Carlos himself. In addition, if the conflation of the camera’s gaze

with the Law of the father represented by these male screen surrogates is not indicative enough, the camera's point of view as it zooms in on Helena in the courtroom is aligned with the gaze of the judge. The suggestion of the film is clear enough: the questions faced by the company secretary,



**Figure 25. The testimony of a guilty witness plays over the image of Helena (Zeta-Jones). © 2000 USA Films**

Sheila, who quietly took her paycheque for three years, precisely articulate the questions the detectives and viewers have about Helena. But the orchestration of this scene in fact dispenses guilt for a wide range of other people's misdeeds onto Helena's image, indicating, along with Caroline's and Barbara's former and current drug use, the formation of a hysterical web of associations beneath the film's narrative concerns.

In *Traffic*'s critical assessment of the homosocial world of violent men driving, and corruptly appearing to combat, transnational drug cartels, the film's three central women—whose stories are nonetheless marginal—absorb a disproportionate amount of guilt for the suffering fostered by others. Surfacing very briefly, but perhaps most hysterically of all given her uncredited and thus suppressed role in the film, is actress Salma Hayek, a former Mexican soap opera star, whom Javier gazes at in his rear view mirror and who unsurprisingly depicts the “gold digging” wife of an older Mexican drug lord, from whom she stands to inherit a mansion. In *Babel*, which employed *Traffic*'s Oscar-winning film editor, women with frivolous concerns also function to feminize guilt.

## ***Babel* and Post-Traumatic Healing**

In *Babel*, Iñárritu's third film in the trauma and recovery trilogy comprising *Amores Perros* (2000) and *21 Grams* (2003), the lives of ostensibly unrelated people in the US, Mexico, Morocco, and Japan are enmeshed when an American tourist, Susan, is shot with a rifle while gazing out of a Moroccan tour bus at the natives. Her husband, Richard's (Brad Pitt) efforts to find help for his severely injured wife, from a remote village with no hospital, is impeded by an international media frenzy that quickly encircles the "shooting of an American tourist," a statement we hear repeated in the international newscasts we see and hear throughout the film. US diplomats, we learn, prevent a Moroccan helicopter rescue, endangering Susan's life further, in order to appear non-compliant with the principally Muslim nation. Mirroring the circulating media coverage, a transnational human network, involving the illegal migrant labourer who works as their nanny (Adrianna Barraza), the Moroccan boys (Ali Hamadi and Mustapha Amhita) who fired the rifle at the tour bus, and the Japanese owner (Koji Yakusho) of the offending weapon, takes shape around the couple, allegorising the "global flows" of capital and bodies, and the network of looks characteristic of the contemporary age (Featherstone, 1990). Susan and Richard are victimized Americans in a post-9/11 world, after all, and thus their suffering is widely reported. Their post-traumatic status (even prior to Susan's shooting) is represented allegorically by their recently deceased child, which further galvanizes their identities as post-9/11 Americans. The couple, we learn, took the trip to Morocco as respite from their grief over losing a baby to crib death.

In their first appearance, Susan and Richard sit unhappily at an outdoor rest stop in Morocco, away from their fellow Western tourists. Susan looks disdainfully at

her companions and at the locals, she refuses to drink the water, and she begins rubbing disinfectant between her hands. Blanchett's hair is blonde, apparently lightened, her face bears make up, and her skin is radiant, evoking memories of classic Hollywood stars such as Tippi Hedren in *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964) or even Lana Turner in *Imitation of Life* (1959). Aligning her further with the classical era, Blanchett in fact won her Academy Award for playing Katharine Hepburn in *The Aviator* (2004). Seated across the table from her in the scene is Brad Pitt, a major humanitarian object of affection in contemporary popular culture (upstaged by his partner, Angelina Jolie), and the recipient of multiple and "unstable" gazes as a man connoting "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Dyer, 1992; Mulvey, 1975). Pitt's character, Richard, is depicted looking haggard, however, unshaven, his skin made wrinkly with ageing makeup and his hair greyed with dye. Why are these two depictions important? And what do the characters' appearances and concerns tell us about the relationship between gender and trauma? The following scene introduces the Americans at the roadside restaurant:

Moroccan waiter: Salaam

Richard: Salaam

[Susan disregards the waiter]

Moroccan waiter: Do you know what you want to order?

Richard: Yeah, I'll have the chicken cous cous and a Coke.

[Susan inspects the menu, frowning]

Susan: What do you have that doesn't have fat in it?

Moroccan waiter: Everything is delicious.

Susan: I'll, um, have the fried eggplant and a Diet Coke.

Moroccan waiter: Sorry, we don't have Diet Coke.

Susan: [annoyed] Then a regular Coke.

Richard: [friendly] Two Cokes please.

Susan begins disinfecting her hands as her eyes scan the humble outdoor restaurant. When the drinks arrive, Susan instructs Richard to “throw out the ice.” When Richard protests because the cola cans are hot, Susan becomes agitated: “You don’t know what kind of water is in there,” she counters, before angrily tossing the ice from both glasses onto the ground. The couple is grieving or, rather, failing to grieve for their lost child and Susan, it seems, blames Richard for the tragedy and for “running away” in its aftermath. What is notable, in the midst of this traumatic period in her life, is Susan’s preoccupation with her made-up appearance and with avoiding fat and calories, concerns which seem frivolous when compared to the suffering of her family and even the poverty of the Moroccans whom she surveys disdainfully during the first half of the film.

Susan is not only aestheticized in a manner roughly consistent with the entrenched Hollywood codes scrutinised by Mulvey, in stark contrast to Richard, but her concerns with appearance and weight—themselves products of the patriarchal symbolic economy—are

deemed even more frivolous, narcissistic, and aesthetic in the scene because they are juxtaposed with (male) concerns over the real issues: actively healing the family’s trauma and peacefully communing with the natives on a vacation intended, after all, to promote the type of spiritual healing Westerners often seek in Africa and the “Orient.” Interestingly, the couple’s reconciliatory climax, like the film generally, is choreographed in a way that forces Susan to abandon her frivolous and aesthetic



**Figure 26. Susan (Blanchett) remains detached from the locals. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

preoccupations in order to heal actively, to “get real” like her husband, by acknowledging their trauma at home through enduring her trauma abroad.

In this later scene, after a bullet fired from a rifle as part of a wager between two Moroccan boys has accidentally struck the tour bus and broken Susan’s collarbone, she is cared for in a nearby village. Sedated by a native medicine woman and stitched up by a village doctor in a mud hut, Susan’s clothing, hair, and face are covered in dried blood, as well as dirt from lying on the floor, as the scene begins. Awakening, Susan discovers that she has wet her pants while sedated and needs to urinate again in the scene, but lacks the strength to steady herself. Richard asks a villager for a pan, and must hold Susan up as she goes. Curiously, it is only amid this humiliating moment of desperation and utter dependence that Susan reveals her own feelings of guilt over the lost child, previously directed at Richard, by stating ironically, “It wasn’t my fault. It wasn’t my fault. His heart stopped beating.” And only in this moment does Susan begin the cathartic work of grieving, signified ultimately by the couple’s tearful

laughter at their pathetic situation. Given that neither of the parents caused the child’s death, Susan’s ambiguous expression of guilt is troubling here.

That is, contrary to the characterizations of guilty or complicit Western protagonists presented in *Traffic* and *Lord of War*, for instance, *Babel*’s protagonists have done nothing to warrant their trauma at home or their victimization in Morocco. Susan and Richard, for instance, express no economic guilt as citizens of a country whose trade and foreign policies often galvanize anti-Western sentiments in the



**Figure 27. Susan admits her feelings of guilt while filthy and at the height of her desperation. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

Middle East and North Africa. Nor is their victimization depicted as something they brought upon themselves. We might wonder, then, how *Babel* operates as anything more than a cautionary, Islamophobic tale, which suggests that “Americans ought to stay home and treat their [migrant labourer] nannies better” (Schwartzbaum, 2006: n.p.). Although it may appear that Iñárritu’s film is chiefly concerned with American victimization, the wider, global narratives encircling Susan and Richard in fact illustrate the high toll that American global supremacy takes on others.

Through its intertwining narratives in Mexico and Morocco, *Babel* is resolutely concerned with Western economic guilt and establishes the middleclass couple’s supremacy and prioritized treatment chiefly through juxtaposition. Most pointedly, the aforementioned scene in which the US couple reconciles is juxtaposed with images of the Moroccan boys and their father being pursued by vicious local authorities who are aware that their search for the offending rifle and the young culprits is being played out as a global media spectacle, and that their success or failure will affect relations with the international community. While Susan receives care for her gunshot wound in the village and ultimately in a modern hospital, the Moroccan shepherd and his boys are trapped in a ravine by the policemen who open fire indiscriminately and kill one of the boys. Meanwhile, as the Americans heal, their Mexican domestic worker, Amelia, sees her life unravelling, partially the result of her own poor judgement.

Against Richard's instructions that she mind the couple's young children whilst they remain delayed in Morocco, Amelia chooses to attend her son's wedding in Mexico since she had arranged the day off, a rarity for her, and opts to bring the American children along. On the return border crossing, Amelia's nephew Santiago (Gael Garcia Bernal) speeds away from the US border official to avoid an interrogation, depositing Amelia and the children in the desert where they spend the night. When the surveilling authorities discover Amelia wandering alone in the sweltering landscape the following morning, she is reprimanded for having left the children to search for help and quickly deported back to Mexico. In the scene transcribed below, the



**Figure 28. The camera's gaze is aligned with the Law, with no reverse shot, as Amelia (Barazza) is found guilty. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

gaze of the camera violates the shot-reverse shot grammar, which is the cinematic standard in narrative cinema used to depict two characters conversing (Bordwell, 2007). Additionally, the shot, which begins with Amelia nearly in profile, is soon framed over the Immigration Officer's shoulder, adopting a gaze with close proximity to his actual point of view. Amelia, who prioritized her own pleasure by attending her son's wedding and by rekindling an old romance during the festivities, squirms and breaks down under the scrutiny of the camera's and the officer's gazes.

[Amelia in profile]



Immigration Officer: It's a miracle we found those kids, ma'am. I don't know how you could have left them alone like that out in the desert.

Amelia: How are they, sir?

Immigration Officer: That's none of your business. Do you know how many kids die [cut to Officer's POV] each year trying to cross this border?

Amelia: I raised these kids since they were born. I take care of them day and night. I feed them breakfast and lunch and dinner. I play with them. Mike and Debbie are like my own children.

Immigration Officer: But they are not your children, ma'am. Plus you've been working in this country illegally.

[...]

Immigration Officer: Nevertheless, the government of the United States has deemed that you are seriously breaking the law, [cut to the Officer in profile] and is determined to immediately and definitively deport you. [cut back to Officer's POV]

The scenes of brutal police officers shooting at the boys and their father in Morocco, and this scene, which concludes with Amelia's gloomy reunion with her relatives in Mexico, juxtapose the Americans' suffering with the impact of the event on a range of others. For having invested in the American couple's plight, only to be shown the much worse fates of "Third World" characters,

the spectator is made to feel guilty due to the unequal prices paid by each actor in



**Figure 29. Only one shot, in profile, reveals the Immigration Officer (R.D. Call) but no reverse shot adopts Amelia's point of view. © 2006 Paramount Pictures. Used with permission**

the network, a toll intensified in Amelia's case by the unrelenting gaze of the camera, and the Law its point of view represents.

The guilt unearthed at the narrative level is of course linked with the oscillating feelings of supremacy and impotence encompassed in the experience of cinematic spectatorship more generally, as theorized by Mulvey; the supremacy of the spectator's gaze is always precarious since it fixates on the bodies and images of aestheticised women to conceal and compensate for the unconscious sensations of lack governing the ego. Women's images have, according to Lacanian film theory, provided a repository for unconscious anxieties of impotence and lack because they are adorned for the viewer's pleasure (Amelia must undergo her arrest and interrogation in the red dress she wore to the wedding), and additionally controlled in the cinematic space by the director's instructions and by the gaze of the camera. My suggestion is that these cinematic renderings of global trauma elicit conscious spectatorial guilt at the narrative level, which is displaced and projected onto images of women. Importantly, as I have suggested, this tendency is most evident in depictions of Western women.

*Babel's* third, Japanese plot is surprisingly self-contained, for instance, and unrelated to Western consumption, indifference, or hegemony. The wealthy rifle owner, Yasujiro, and his daughter, Chieko, are primarily concerned with mourning for their wife and mother who presumably committed suicide with the same gun, motivating Yasujiro to give it to his Moroccan hunting guide. Chieko's deafness and alienation from other high school students is also a central obstacle. She copes by experimenting with drugs and acting out against her father through exhibitions of public nudity. Indeed, Chieko's nude body, as a locus of the Western male gaze, presents questions worthy of analysis; she exposes herself to her male classmates

in a café and to the young detective (another representative of the Law) who visits her apartment, having traced the gun back to her father. But although *Babel* could have envisioned Chieko as a stereotypical, Japanese hyper-consumer, flanked by gadgets and with shopping bags in tow, it is notable that Chieko is yet another woman in *Babel* who is victimized by circumstances beyond her control. Despite her hedonistic activities, Chieko is not associated with the guilt of impotence or indifference in the face of suffering that is discernable in the other strands of the narrative (Hassapopolou, 2009).

Notwithstanding *Babel*'s critical moments, like its fixation on American arrogance and indifference, culminating in the US couple's triumphant helicopter rescue, during which the anonymous Moroccans who assisted them are pelted with debris, we can see how guilt is feminized. Susan's aesthetic concerns with diet and her appearance, and her selfish refusal to engage with the locals, juxtaposes her with Richard's active effort to heal the family. Similarly, Amelia's concerns with her own pleasure, represented by her son's wedding and her rekindled romance, hysterically secure her in *Babel*'s symbolic economy as a repository for the formidable guilt the film elicits at the narrative and spectatorial levels. As the final films will demonstrate by way of conclusion, even disparate subject matter does little to alter the curious economies of guilt and textual hysteria illustrated in *Traffic* and *Babel*.

### **Three Africa Films: *The Constant Gardener*, *Lord of War*, *Shooting Dogs***

These three US and UK “Africa” films all appeared in 2005 but were met with vastly different critical and popular receptions. Fernando Mierelles’s *The Constant Gardener*, about German pharmaceutical testing on rural populations in Kenya, was financed in the UK (with some German backers) and released by Universal, receiving a warm critical response and four Oscar nominations (resulting in a win for Supporting Actress). Andrew Niccol’s *Lord of War*, financed independently in the US, polarized critics and viewers, earning little for a Nicolas Cage action film even while many critics admired its compelling examination of global arms dealing. And *Shooting Dogs*, a BBC film co-financed by the UK Film Council, found almost no audience after being shelved for nearly two years without a distributor. Eventually released in the United States as *Beyond the Gates*, the film dramatizes the United Nations’ desertion of twenty five hundred Tutsi refugees at the Don Bosco School during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

### ***Shooting Dogs*, The Clinton Years, and the Feminization of Public Relations**

Despite receiving a British Academy Award nomination for journalist-turned-producer David Belton as a “Promising Newcomer,” *Shooting Dogs* screened in UK cinemas for only two weeks in March 2006, earning just \$40,848. Indeed, distributors’ resolute rejection of the film, in spite of Caton-Jones’s commercially successful history in Hollywood, and a very positive critical consensus (Foundas, 2005; Phillips, 2007), provides evidence that this unsettling narrative of genocide and Western indifference was indeed repressed through institutional means. Since

mainstream Rwandan Civil War films began appearing in 2004, each has taken a relatively similar approach to depicting an event during which more than eight hundred thousand people lost their lives. *Shooting Dogs* details the plight of Tutsi refugees who seek refuge amid the secure Don Bosco compound because it is protected by UN Peacekeepers. Inscribing the Law of the Father in the lives of these Rwandans, and in the patriarchal symbolic



**Figure 30. Father Christopher (Hurt) is yet another Western patriarch who fails to shield his "family" from trauma. © 2005 BBC Films and Warner Home Video**

economy of the film, Father Christopher (John Hurt) presides over the Catholic institution with the help of several teachers; the young and idealistic Englishman Joe Connor (Hugh Dancy) is a recent arrival in the former colony and as an innocent in the imperialist tradition spanning from Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (1611), to Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (1901), and to the young doctor, Nicolas, in *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), Joe becomes the film's focal point.

As the Hutu aggression mounts, some twenty five hundred Tutsis and others seek refuge inside the compound. The terror and hardships in the crowded enclosure dominate many of the film's scenes, and a gathering swarm of Hutu militia outside the gates makes matters worse. The UN Peacekeepers stationed there are permitted to shoot any dogs found eating human carcasses, but are restricted from firing upon the murderous militia itself. Methodically, the film depicts the failure of the UN and Belgium to send support. The traumatic conclusion in fact results from the UN's withdrawal of white residents only, followed by the extraction of their own troops only five days into the conflict. Father Christopher, interpreting the events as a test of his faith, insists upon staying and the majority of the film's dialogue is

devoted to deliberations between the two principal men. The only substantial character to arrive is the UN Captain, Charles (Dominique Horwitz), and thus the strategy meetings remain homosocial. The Catholic setting begins to have an ironic resonance since, as in that church, women are allowed no positions of power or enunciation in the debates that will direct their fates. One possible exception is the beautiful eighteen year old Rwandan, Marie (Clare-Hope Ashitey), who herself manages to escape and survive when Charles and Joe hide a group of people in a delivery truck and abandon the compound and its refugees, of whom most are killed. Despite the fact that throughout the film Marie is the object of Christopher's, Joe's, and the UN soldier's gazes, especially when she jogs inside the compound, in a refreshing power reversal, Marie is able to question Joe about his decision to flee the country in a scene presented in the film's epilogue in England.

But *Shooting Dogs* is a film of white men talking and black men killing, which represses, according to Modleski's theory, any narrative investment in the overwhelming levels of victimization faced by women in African countries such as Rwanda. This suppressed text, involving suffering so widespread that it proves literally to be "unspeakable," is analogous to the real story, the story of gay persecution, that is never told in *Dead Poets Society*. And as in that film, wherein the gay male body is punished, in *Shooting Dogs* the feminine, when it does appear, functions as a repository of blame. A crucial documentary scene near the film's conclusion begins the work of dispensing the considerable guilt the film elicits, but it is also the clearest evidence of the film's hysterical text. Following some of the most violent scenes, during which viewers, through Christopher's and Joe's gazes, are made to feel outraged at Western apathy, actual news footage of a press conference fades in. At the podium we see an apparently American female official. Wearing a

suit and speaking in the detached style of a public relations expert, the official makes a statement about the “acts of genocide” reportedly occurring in Rwanda. An off-screen male voice asks, “What’s the difference between ‘acts of genocide’ and ‘genocide?’” And the woman answers:

Female official: Well, I think ... as you know... there’s a legal definition of this ... clearly not all of the killings that have taken place in Rwanda are killings to which you might apply that label ... But as to the distinctions between the words, we’re trying to call what we have seen so far as best as we can ... and based, again, on the evidence, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred.

Male voice: How many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide?

Female official: Alan, that’s just not a question that I’m in a position to answer.

The fictional footage then resumes with the conclusion of the story. Of course, this documentary footage binds the film’s fictionalized and belated narrative scenes with the real, in the form of a publicized exchange at a press conference. The female official in the scene is in fact US State Department spokesperson Christine Shelley who at a separate press conference on April 28, 1994 defended the Clinton administration’s hesitation to intervene in Rwanda, stating



**Figure 31. Between images of dead bodies, *Shooting Dogs* presents historical footage US spokesperson Christine Shelley defending the Clinton Administration’s inaction in Rwanda during which she refuses the use the word “genocide.”**  
© 2005 BBC Films and Warner Home Video

that “the use of the term ‘genocide’ has a very precise legal meaning, although it’s not strictly a legal determination. There are other factors in there as well.” The man we hear (and do not see because there is no reverse shot, similar to Amelia’s interrogation scene in *Babel*) is journalist Alan Elsner, who questioned Shelley at the April 28 press conference with similar results. Shelley’s and Elsner’s exchange, quoted above, took place on June 10, 1994 at a press conference where Elsner had been preparing to confront Shelley again. Elsner, by his own admission, was displeased after the April meeting, and had grown frustrated with the State Department’s semantics:

I should explain that as the son of a Holocaust survivor, I am very sensitive to issues of mass slaughter. I have often asked myself what I would have done if I had been living during those terrible years. [...] The Clinton administration had had its fingers badly burned the previous October in Somalia and the last thing it wanted was another military involvement in Africa. So it took cover behind this legal fig leaf. But to me, the distinction between “acts of genocide” and “genocide” was meaningless, especially to the hundreds of thousands of victims. (Elsner, 2004: n.p.)

Undeniably, the Clinton administration along with the UN deserved to face questions as honest as Elsner’s. After all, in the six weeks between the press conferences, tens of thousands of lives were likely lost whilst a modest peacekeeping presence would have dissuaded the poorly armed Hutu aggressors. Elsner, even with his self-professed sensitivities, should be able to ask the questions that concern him and his readers and Shelley, a lawyer in a highly visible role as the State Department’s spokesperson, should expect to be confronted, to be bound by her administration’s directives, and to face uncomfortable public moments. However, the point here is that the use of this footage and this exchange, whose participants had a history,



during a crucial moment in a fictionalized narrative film depicting trauma and impotence, risks positioning this woman as a repository for the overwhelming surpluses of guilt amassed by the film's depiction of others' impotence and misdeeds. The film is so resolutely male that the sudden appearance of a woman, preoccupied with frivolous language games, and with presenting an acceptable public image, hints at the hysterical text and unsavoury associations lurking beneath *Shooting Dogs*' admirably outraged narrative.

### ***The Constant Gardener*, Sexual Betrayal, and the Crisis of Integrity**

*The Constant Gardener* and *Lord of War* embody fictionalized portrayals of women occupying similarly complicitous and frivolous positions of privilege in the midst of widespread suffering. Among the more disturbing features of *The Constant Gardener* is the network of looks that encircles Tessa (Rachel Weisz) throughout the film (indeed some of the domestic scenes, which involve shots of Tessa bathing, were even captured with a video camera by Ralph Fiennes, whose character is learning to use the device). Tessa is introduced as an activist and possibly a graduate student. She is nonetheless able to marry the more mature Justin (Fiennes), a moneyed diplomat, due to her attractive qualities and command over the complicated political regimes that Justin operates within.

In the stodgy political circles depicted in the film, Tessa is often a welcome agitator and even the powerful men she lambasts for their exploitative policies in Kenya enjoy her company. In particular, Justin's closest colleague Sandy (Danny Huston), a corrupt British trade ambassador, begins to exhibit an open interest in Tessa, which intensifies along with his malicious plot to conceal the bribes he has been given in order to allow German drug testing on rural Kenyans. In a troubling

scene, however, Tessa manipulates Sandy using sexual advances because she needs a secure document he possesses.

Tessa: Sandy, what do you think of me?  
Sandy: I think you're beautiful.  
Tessa: Do you?  
Sandy: Yes.  
Tessa: Really?  
Sandy: Yes.  
Tessa: Well, you can have me if you show me the letter.  
Sandy: Ooh. Are you serious?  
Tessa: Yeah.  
Sandy: When?  
Tessa: Um, when I get back from Loki  
Sandy: Tessa, if anyone ever found out I'd shown you the letter, I'd be ruined.  
Tessa: No one's gonna know, Sandy.

Tessa's intentions are good, of course; she alone is committed to combating corruption and Western imperialist practices in Africa, in which even her husband takes part. But the scene sets the tone for the wider problem of the film: Tessa and a colleague go missing in a rural region of the country, but was she having an affair with her companion, a



**Figure 32. Viewed from Sandy's (Huston) perspective, informed activist Tessa (Weisz) is reduced to promising sexual favours, putting her fidelity and credibility on trial. © 2005 Focus Features**

Kenyan doctor? As Justin begins to unearth the conspiracy around illegal drug trials, Sandy and his colleagues put Tessa's sexual history on trial in order to cast doubt on her credibility. Although this is the work of the film's antagonists, the insinuations never subside but rather enforce, once again, an opposition between men who want to pursue action and women who are preoccupied with frivolity and their own pleasure, even in the midst of abject poverty. Tessa is exonerated; she had been successful in finding documentation incriminating UK officials and voracious drug

companies; she had manipulated Sandy for a crucial document; and she had remained faithful to her husband, Justin. But the fact that the case against Tessa's credibility is so easy to make, on the grounds that she is an unfaithful pleasure-seeker, evidences the enduring presence of these associations—in the film and in the wider culture.

Critics liable to claim that selective, scene-specific readings of cinematic texts produce dubious results should note that in each of these films, and in the Africa films in particular, these scenes are among the very few instances in which women appear at all. Squeezed between lengthy sequences devoted to the heroic activities of the main controlling figures, who, while they may fail, are actively committed to unravelling mysteries and protecting the innocent, these depictions are unfortunate and all the more resolute in the associations they forge between women and pleasure-seeking frivolity in the midst of others' suffering.

### ***Lord of War*, Material Comforts, and Ethical Failures**

Married to arms dealer Yuri (Nicolas Cage), who likewise exploits the corruption in various African countries, Ava's (Bridge Moynahan) role in *Lord of War* casts her as nothing less than a fashion model—and specifically a materialistic pleasure-seeker concerned chiefly with attending social engagements populated by Manhattan's elite. Whilst her husband serves as a “merchant of death” in meetings with war lords and terrorist groups (the basis for Yuri's character, a Russian citizen now in prison, sold arms to Al Qaeda), Ava circulates in posh Manhattan studios and augments her concern with fashion to include the visual arts—further linking her with the terrain of images and artifice. Yuri's business dealings may be reprehensible, but the film seems to ask its viewers what kind of woman would resist questioning her

husband's vocation in order to enjoy a host of material comforts? That is, although there is no moral equivalence between Yuri and Ava, and she hurts no one in her daily interactions, the fact that she represents the worst features of American excess and insularity in the face of the other's trauma secures her as a complicit repository of blame. As in *Traffic*, this film suggests that Ava is not as naïve as she seems; like Helena, who suspects her husband of drug trafficking, Ava is slow to turn against Yuri, and only does so when everyone else condemns him as well—when his prospects are dashed. She appears to endorse his activities so long as they create a certain standard of living:

Ava Fontaine: We have enough. You can stop now.

Yuri Orlov: It's not about the money.

Ava Fontaine: What is it about?

Yuri Orlov: I'm good at it.

Ava here seems both aware and supportive of arms dealing as a means of getting set up in life in the early portion of a marriage. It is only when Yuri refuses to cease his illegal activities that Ava sounds the alarm. She follows him secretly, inspects his shipping crate of weapons, collects their two sons, and leaves him.



**Figure 33. Ava (Moynahan) and Yuri (Cage) enjoy socialites' lifestyles in Manhattan. © 2005 Lions Gate**

On one score, this act redeems her; but on another, her conduct conforms with that of the gold digger who enjoys material comforts so long as these are available with little inconvenience. To simplify an admittedly more complex sequence of

events, when times turn bad for Yuri and his luck eluding the law has run out, Ava leaves him. Her voracious appetites for expensive fashions and home décor are not incidental. As noted earlier, consumption is a feminized activity and women continue to be addressed by the preponderance of ad campaigns and expected to make many of the consumer decisions for their families. Today, when excessive shopping and material comforts are rightly linked with the economic exploitation of poorer populations, engendering economic guilt, feminized consumption (aligned with the pursuit of pleasure) is thus linked with others' trauma in obvious ways.

This association is particularly insidious when consumption is a definitive experience in liberal democracies, one in which we *all* participate with varying levels of pleasure. Additionally, providing a materially comfortable existence for one's family is celebrated when it is a traditional, career-oriented male pursuit. And yet the more thankless tasks of stocking and restocking households, managing income and debt, and allotting resources among family members not only scarcely counts as *work* when women perform them, but they are derided in popular discourses; women need to become "domestic divas" or "home managers" in order to be validated. That is, traditional stay-at-home mothers have somehow failed, according to *Lord of War*. In a penultimate discussion with her husband before leaving him, Ava divulges her wider concerns, which transcend Yuri's criminal trade:

Ava Fontaine: Yuri, I've failed at everything else in my life. I'm not going to fail as human being.

It is therefore unsurprising that Western women should serve as a repository of blame and that Western men should be feminized or rendered impotent when they prioritize consumption, pleasure, or fail to prevent the calamities they witness.

By each depicting middleclass Western men travelling abroad only to bear witness to the suffering of others, *Traffic*, *Babel*, *Shooting Dogs*, *The Constant Gardener*, and *Lord of War* reference a long imperialist literary tradition. More insidiously, however, each of these films presents a controlling male protagonist whose failures to alleviate the traumas he witnesses feminizes him or is blamed on women's inaction. Contrary to Mulvey's conclusions about classical Hollywood cinema's ability to offer the implied spectator a semblance of voyeuristic supremacy or fetishistic scopophilia hinging on the presence of aestheticized screen starlets, the orchestration of male activity and female passivity in these recent trauma films produces excess anxiety—threats of male impotence, discernable at the narrative level, that augment the primal threat of castration. Rather than dissipating or suspending these threats pleasurably as in classical cinema, these films amass these anxieties and demand that they be purged or displaced. In this way, consistent with Mulvey's central claims, the films illustrate the endurance of a host of gendered associations. Because the threat of male impotence and failure, in the face of ongoing traumas, present a challenge to the patriarchal symbolic economy formidable enough to unhinge established systems of meaning in Western societies, this threat is displaced hysterically onto the images of Western women populating these narratives.

Implicitly, this chapter has argued for the continued revaluation and relevance, in the digital age of freely circulating and often traumatizing images, of Mulvey's investigations of the various ways in which the primal, unconscious lack at the core

of the ego motivates the interminable quest of the subject for plenitude inside the symbolic order. Modleski's theory of the hysterical text, understood as the associations forged from the energies of an important but socially silenced narrative contained inside an existing narrative, also holds great promise for future analyses of trauma culture.

In the aforementioned corner of this wider terrain of media, aestheticised images of women act as receptacles of blame and anxiety, and thus we can see in these films how the conscious threat of impotence elicited in each distressing context conjoins with the primal absence of *lack* to threaten the viewer's quest for plenitude—the object-cause of the gaze and the ego's pursuits more broadly. In our age of anxiety, in which no one is disentangled from global trauma, the guilt of Western democracies' humanitarian impotence in the global theatre may be intensifying the primal anxiety of separation, which everyone endures and attempts to overcome, and which Mulvey turned into a powerful explanation for the pleasure of cinematic spectatorship. Spectatorial guilt elicited through our main controlling figures' incommensurate sense of powerlessness in the face of others' trauma, demands that images of women absorb fears, common to all of us, that we are helpless beings in the wake of history's violent march forward.

## Chapter 7

### Global Networks, Ethical Imperatives, and Agency?

Are we helpless beings in the age of connection? Is it not the case, as many suggest, that those of us in industrialized economies now wield *unprecedented* power over the labouring economies whose factory wages support Western hegemony? In fact, both realities can exist simultaneously. The ability of commercial and political interest groups to exert economic power over labouring economies does not ensure that individuals can exercise agency *within* these networks. A division takes place in the sense that the macro-level endeavours of conglomerates often create the externalities that individuals try to (or are later employed to) address. When an oil company leaves behind contaminated worksites in Ecuador, for instance, the company's employees are withdrawn and deployed to the next job whilst a small task force of scientists and even environmentalists is employed to gauge the damage. Even the science officers, employed to hold the company to an ethical standard during production, cannot influence company policy or activity until after the toxic damage is done. A commercial network like this one is of course arranged to ensure the powerlessness of certain seemingly empowered individuals. But avaricious networks are not the only ones that can stifle individual agency. In fact, in the media of the public sphere, the fixation on Western hegemonic supremacy often *obscures* the ways in which the individual agents who represent these structures are rendered powerless. It is this sense of impotence that the aforementioned films work through.

According to the most prominent theories of the network society, those of us in comparatively empowered positions ought to be able to coordinate complex tasks



and manage risk and contingency *more* effectively than ever before (Castells, 2001). Technology theorists like Suchman (1987; 2007), however, understand human-technological networks to be social formations that mediate subjects and their tasks, and that may not always enable new forms of agency and coordination.<sup>42</sup> After all, networks are based upon human interacting with machines, and indeed arranging their labour around the demands of these devices. Suchman (2007, p. 10) addressed basic-level transactions between workers and computers, unearthing some “important differences—more particularly *asymmetries*—between humans and machines as interactional partners.” Although actor-network theory does not explicitly inform my approach here, its influence is inescapable. The gun and the automobile are noted examples that present obvious asymmetries (Feenberg, 1999): to the shooter and the driver these devices inflict minimal discomfort; to the target and the pedestrian the weapon and the car are life-threatening. Due to this asymmetry, the driver—much like the benevolent US manufacturer dependant upon sweatshop labour, for instance—does not understand his actions to be life-threatening. Such reminders of the less harmonious workings of human-technological networks are valuable, and they interest me because they problematize the inherited wisdom that humans naturally have dominion over machines and nature, and that human agency has only been *augmented* and not compromised by the technologies of the information age.

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<sup>42</sup> Suchman (2007, p. 10) famously used “conversation” as a concrete case study and a metaphor for interactions of various kinds between technology and people, discovering in the process that “human conversation does not follow the kind of message-passing or exchange model that formal, mathematical communication theories posit.” Instead, humans “co-construct” meaning through an “array of embodied interactional competencies,” a discovery Suchman applies to the analysis of “people’s encounters with the machine.”

Castells thus makes a host of assumptions about how effectively human actors are able to interact with technologies within complex systems; theories of the network society are thus also theories of human agency. But if theories of the network society assure us that our potential power as individual actors remains intact, what do the parables envisioned in the *cinematic* network society tell us? As my discussion of global network cinema illustrates, a different and less optimistic picture emerges. Based upon the various interventions we witness the central agents attempting in these films, the cinematic network society is a symbolic terrain that casts *doubt* on the supremacy of human agency and yet presents several hopeful visions of ethical rebirths.

In fact, the vision of the global network that emerges in these narratives may intermittently express a utopian dream of total coordination and interpersonal equity: in *Traffic* one Mexican drug cartel is eradicated, and Javier's baseball park offers hope for Tijuana's youth to escape addiction and lives of crime; in *Beyond Borders* medical supplies alleviate suffering in remote regions and Sarah the socialite undergoes an ethical rebirth; in *Syriana* and *The Constant Gardener*, the central figures turn against their oppressive employers through acts of defiance. Bob Barnes (based upon CIA agent Bob Baer) drives through the desert in an attempt to warn the Saudi heir that his life is in danger, and is killed in the US airstrike targeting the heir's motorcade, while Justin Quayle returns to rural Northern Kenya where his wife was killed and where he will surely be dispatched for having unearthed the pharmaceutical conspiracy. Both agents attempt to rebel against the entrenched operations of the oil and pharma networks that encircle them. Crucially, these interventions are also suicidal. The perfect world the men strive for, as the term utopia suggests, can be found nowhere.

That is, as Jameson (1979) points out, within capitalist ideology and thus the majority of popular culture, such moments play a dual role: they taunt us with a vision of a better world, a fairer and even classless world; but this glimpse is typically contained within a narrative that reinscribes class divisions as the *natural* order of things. Jameson emphasises the importance of the early family and wedding scenes in *The Godfather*, for instance, which take place in the postwar world of opportunity; the film's vision of a near-utopian US, full of immigrant success stories, is crucial to the impending destruction of the Corleone family. Similarly, as the *Jaws* example reminds us, the fleeting moment of utopian harmony between the proletarian fisherman, the petit bourgeoisie sheriff, and the moneyed intellectual—depicted literally as a song they sing while at sea—is quickly shattered by the death of the labourer, which ensures the survival of the law and order (the sheriff) and the new economy (the post-industrial worker).

Likewise, the insinuation in many of the recent global network films I have examined is that transnational connectedness has the utopian *potential* to reduce inequality and enable consensus building. Our central figures move around the world fluidly, for instance, in many cases enjoying the freedoms of the global age, and one of the visual pleasures offered by these films is surely furnished by each protagonists' ability (however temporary) to coordinate people and resources around an honourable goal; Nick initially succeeds in channelling aid to Africa in *Beyond Borders*; in *Traffic*, Robert initially coordinates his drug policy aims with those of his Mexican counterpart, Salazar (only to be unpleasantly surprised by his corruption later). Although they encompass utopian moments, then, these narratives inexorably illustrate how global networks introduce complexities into human endeavours, and challenge individual human agency; as the capitalist undertones of *The Godfather*

and *Jaws* demonstrate, it is “the system” itself that triumphs, rather than the protagonists themselves. The *difference* between Jameson’s examples and these recent ones is that global network films *attempt* not to naturalize the existing social order and US hegemony but rather to highlight inequality and induce guilt in privileged viewers. As I have suggested, the films succeed in many ways as disruptive texts, and yet they fail in their general celebration of privatized emotional citizenship, and private-philanthropic rather than political action.

## **Global Networks and Individual Ethics**

Knowing how to take action is difficult, given that global networks present us with an ungraspable totality that defies comprehensive representation. But we attempt to coordinate our actions, as the oil company’s environmental scientists do, by striving to map our surroundings, to assess the damages we have inflicted or enabled. The ethical quandary in which we find ourselves, I suggest, is the result of new relationships between machines and people, and between networks and people. In other words, our trajectory from premodern social beings, to subjects of modern power and knowledge, to objectified actors operating with narrow perspectives in the midst of today’s interpersonal and commercial networks, has inevitably modified our ethical relations with one another. Historical examples of similar ethical quandaries shed light on the present.

For more than two centuries, philosophers have debated the relationship between ethics and global networks. In his treatise on globalization, ethics, and global citizenship, entitled “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1991 [1795]), Kant examined the ethical imperatives faced by “the commercial states” of Europe and the Americas as a result of their tightening, networked relationships with poor

and often colonized trading partners. According to Murdock (2006, p. 17), Kant optimistically saw “the thickening network of sea routes and maritime traffic” as a means of connecting “the distant parts of the world,” and “accelerating global flows of people, ideas, and cultural products.” As Kant was observing the nautical networking of the world, however, he was also aware that the potential sense of connectedness he envisioned, as well as the ethical relation to the other this proximity might produce, was unlikely to materialize. Whereas the philosopher had hoped world trade would bring diverse nations “closer to a constitution establishing world citizenship,” he noted that the lessons of history shed doubt on his utopian vision of the industrial age to come (Kant, 1991 [1795], p. 93). The “perfection” of his vision would be compromised by the “inhospitable actions of the civilized...commercial states”:

The injustice which they show to lands and peoples they visit (which is equivalent to conquering them) is carried by them to terrifying lengths. America, the lands inhabited by the Negro, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc., were at the time of their discovery considered by these civilized intruders as lands without owners, for they counted the inhabitants as nothing. In East India (Hindustan), under the pretence of establishing economic undertakings, they brought in foreign soldiers and used them to oppress the natives, excited widespread wars among the various states, spread famine, rebellion, perfidy, and the whole litany of evils which afflict mankind. (Kant, 1991 [1795], p. 93)

Of course, Kant’s sentiments about his historical moment are unsurprising given the abundance of barbarous activities, including Spanish, British, Belgian, and Dutch colonialism, that loomed over his present and informed his more pessimistic predictions. The global network’s utopian ethical-political potential to engender “world citizenship” and “universal hospitality” was being comprehensively

undermined “by the actions of the civilised” who impose “injustice...carried by them to terrifying lengths.” But what is notable about Kant’s concerns, according to Murdock (2006, p. 17), is that the “central opposition between cosmopolitans and conquistadors, between a world system based on open flows, equality of respect and creative collisions and one organised around asymmetric power and domination, continues to structure contemporary debate.” Indeed, discussions of the economic and cultural benefits of liberalised world trade, as well as its terrifying consequences, are inescapable today. In *Networking the World, 1794-2000*, Armand Mattelart (2000) identifies the well-known dialectic between totalization and fragmentation:

The homogenization of societies is inherent in the unification of the economic sphere; their fragmentation is the corollary. The gap is widening between market rationality and cultures, between a technoscientific system that is being generalized and the wish to affirm a sense of belonging. This distortion is turning the outcome of humanity’s march toward integration into an enigma. (Mattelart, 2000, p. viii)

The enigmatic outcome of the networking of the world, however, may be the result of our own teleological thinking, as well as an expression of the widely acknowledged tension between unification and fragmentation that characterizes everything from urban geography (Harvey, 1997; 2005), to postmodern art (Jameson, 1981; 1991), and contemporary global commerce (Ravenhill, 2008). That is, to speak of an outcome, to anticipate the squalid global metropolis envisioned in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), for instance, with its “mish mash” dialect of English, Mandarin, Japanese, and German, as a future space in which everyone is crowded together out of economic necessity and alienated and partitioned by high security zones of

exclusion, overlooks the fact that we are *already* living with the outcomes of globalization.

The point of thinking historically, of considering Kant's thoughts about such a different age, is to remind ourselves that "thickening networks" and other changes of this magnitude are experienced as *processes* and not as radical shifts or end results. Thinking about a world of "total integration" as an end is somewhat misguided in my view because such a world is never likely to exist: as many historical and contemporary upheavals illustrate, every push toward integration and homogenization is confronted dialectically by a push toward strengthening national, regional, religious, and ideological boundaries—the pursuit of what Marshall McLuhan, in the middle of the twentieth century, and Bill Clinton, at the end of it, have both referred to as a postmodern version of "tribalism." New global territories might be "opened up" for resource exploration and commerce, but as events in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran suggest, traditions, like traditional forms of power, will endure for better or worse. Kant himself appears to have been painfully aware of human immutability when he wrote "Perpetual Peace," which characteristically juxtaposes an ideal cosmopolitan ethics with the failure to realize its potential empirically.<sup>43</sup>

Half a century after Kant published his treatise, another key thinker influentially considered how transnational networks of trade, labour, and communication would

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<sup>43</sup> Kant was not tormented by the bifurcation of thought and action, however, because he theorized ideals. According to Spinello (1995, p. 24), Kant's thought "is known for its severity and inflexibility." Kant's formulations of his categorical imperative in *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* intentionally characterise ideal human conduct in ways human beings can scarcely realise: "For Kant the ethical life is never achieved; rather, we are always striving to close the distance between our real moral situations and the ideal of the categorical imperative" (Spinello, 1995, p. 26).

enable the commodity form to mediate human relations in a mounting number of national contexts. Frederick Engels was a resident of Central London in the years leading up to the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The spectacle of this exceptionally empowered and crowded node in the global economic network, bustling at the height of Britain's imperial power, would have been a humbling sight. One can envision Engels strolling the banks of the Thames River in order to marvel at the world's busiest commercial seaport whilst considering the future of global capitalism as a social formation. Despite viewing only the most visible side of its machinery, in the form of non-descript crates with mysterious contents being unloaded in the docklands by stalwart British workers, Engels was able to consider the human toll—still veiled from the Western gaze in many ways today—exacted on the populations of the production economies who produce these crates' contents, from Afghan opium, Turkish saffron, Virginian tobacco and cotton, Zimbabwean diamonds, and Congolese ivory, to everyday items such as tea and sugar from China and India.

Engels's insights into the abstraction of the commodity's relations of production from its conditions of consumption are documented in analyses of *The Communist Manifesto* and Marx's *Capital* (1867), which Engels edited, and in the tradition of Critical Theory that arose in the mid-twentieth century and spurred the development of Cultural Studies across a range of disciplines, and of Communication Studies as a discipline unto itself. Marx and Engels, in considering the commodity form as *the* principal medium through which human relations would be governed, were necessarily also examining or unwittingly illuminating the operation of the *network*; commercial value as well as intangible economies like meaning and desire are, after all, created through networks of *exchange*. Whilst Engels bore witness to the banal



labour of ships being unloaded, he was likely able to envision the multifarious global networks of exchange, near and far, within which the Docklands on the Thames represented only one node.

Another half-century later, in 1899, perhaps the most mythologized creative meditation on the global network linking the Thames River with distant economic exploitation was published in three subsequent issues of London's *Blackwoods Magazine* by the Polish-born, French-educated former mariner, Joseph Conrad. On the first page of *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator proclaims that the "sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway," foreshadowing the journey through the heart of the Belgian-occupied Congo into the very "midst of the incomprehensible" where more than three million Africans died during King Leopold's reign alone. Indeed, her examination of photography's role in launching the first human rights movement in 1904, Sliwinski (2006, p. 333) notes that "Hannah Arendt (1994 [1965]) was mistaken to think that crimes against humanity were crimes that only appeared when the Nazi regime attempted to exterminate the Jewish people in the middle of the 20th century." In fact, "George Washington Williams...first conceived of 'crimes against humanity' in 1890, some 50 years before Auschwitz. The charge was levelled against King Leopold II of Belgium and it referred to atrocities occurring in his personal colony, the Congo Free State" (Sliwinski, 2006, p. 334).

By inserting a naïve Western witness into the Congo, *Heart of Darkness* offers one of the most profound and opaque considerations of a world networked through oppressive trading relationships. Conrad's scrutiny of the hazy distinctions between civilisation and barbarity, and "innocent" acts of witnessing and active complicity, unearths complex linkages between the commodity form, the ethics of bearing

witness, and codes of human conduct that the aforementioned films of globalization have investigated. As Marx and Engels had done, Conrad locates the commodity's more mystifying features *not* in the material realm of its function, but in the individual psyche whose relation to the commodity imbues it with value as an item to be exchanged—so long as certain mysteries continue to encircle it.

As global network films such as *Traffic*, *Syriana*, and *Babel* also illustrate, the proximities *and the distances* offered by the network, when it is expansive enough to conceal the commodity's relations of production from consumers, can both be understood to generate the abstract meanings, desires, and mysteries that create its value. The point of Marlow's confrontation with the grand piano, after witnessing ivory's conditions of production in Africa, is precisely to illuminate the incompatible understandings of the commodity form that the process of fetishization works to create. In the midst of the contemporary phase of globalization, metastasising networks of economic and cultural exchange continue to promise us new forms of communion and ethical affiliation with the other, and cultural contact, hybridity, and difference as a refuge from capitalist sameness. But these networks also promise us the commodities themselves, and their adjoining pleasures, just as they have since nautical networks began to thicken two centuries ago.

Promises of products and promises of difference and distinction are thus supplemented with the promise that, as consumers, we will be insulated from any knowledge of unsavoury conditions of production that might compromise our pleasurable relationship with our purchases—as the central agents initially are in *Traffic* (drugs), *Blood Diamond* (gems), *Syriana* (oil), *Lord of War* (guns), and *The Constant Gardener* (pharmaceuticals). One of the network's precarious guarantees, as is evident in any contemporary transnational trading cartel involving Western

corporations, Southern labour contractors, and their own sub-contractors, is surely the idea of *disconnection*, distance, and abstraction upon which the fetishization of commodities depends. As the ruminations of Kant, Engels, and Conrad historically document, the very proximities necessitated by networks of exchange, mediated today by cyberspace, mass media, and globally circulating cultural forms such as cinema, haunt those of us living in economies that benefit from the network's circuitry and profit from the disempowered nodes in the Global South to which we are connected. As Kant asserted, the new connections themselves pose ethical questions. Do contemporary visions of the network society take these concerns into account?

## **Castells's Optimism**

Castells's generally optimistic ruminations on the contemporary network society deserve some attention here. He suggests that global networks, mediated in his analysis by the Internet, chiefly enable actors in the corporate sector to coordinate people, resources, and complex tasks from decentralized locations or nodes. Castells's project in *The Internet Galaxy* (2001) is to aid business interests in the information age. For individual social actors, he claims, global networks enable new modes of expression, collaboration, political activism, community formation, and sociability. In liberal democracies, we experience these benefits the most tangibly. However, as he later notes in the volume, "the coordination of these tasks and projects" is nevertheless "assigned by authoritative figures who, at the same time, control [the] resources" (Castells, 2001, p. 39-40). Castells thus tempers his optimistic assessment of commerce in the information age with a reminder that

hierarchies are scarcely dismantled given that the goal of capitalism is not to spread but to concentrate power and wealth—and he acknowledges that criminal cartels are an inevitable outcome of new global connections. Due to the “extreme social unevenness of the development process” in poor countries, “everything and everyone that can be a source of value can be easily connected” and “equally easily disconnected” when “he/she/it ceases to be valuable” (Castells, 2001, p. 265).

Disconnection can also result when the input of these actors ceases to be consistent with the objectives of the more empowered actors, regardless of its financial worth, as we see dramatized in *Traffic*, *Syriana* and *The Constant Gardener* when their central male “whistle blowers” turn against their ruthless employers. It is also well known that independent and amateur media produced in Iraq, for instance, has been resolutely stricken from Western airwaves since 2003 and US policies prevent even US media from documenting returning caskets. The same forms of amateur media, produced by protesters and witnesses following the 2009 election in Iran, by contrast, have been *embraced* and circulated widely on CBC, CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS. One key distinction is surely that these major media companies cannot produce their own content in Iran, whereas they have been embedding journalists in Iraq for six years. But the second obvious distinction is that Iraq war footage of suffering civilians and soldiers would create anti-war sentiment in North America whereas the post-election, pro-democracy Iranian protesters’ footage galvanizes support for Western intervention in the Middle East generally; people there want to be “free.”

Castells, that is, pays homage to some of the unpleasant externalities of the metastasising network of global capitalism, but he envisions this process as an *inevitability* and thus misses some of the ways in which being connected (as Iraq

surely is) to global media and commodity flows can itself be oppressive. Developing countries “are caught in a tangled web,” he suggests, because “being disconnected, or superficially connected, to the Internet is tantamount to marginalization in the global, networked system”: economic development “without the Internet would be the equivalent of industrialization without electricity in the industrial era” (Castells, 2001, p. 269). But connection to the system of exchange can sustain the marginalization of certain populations (Branch, 2008), enabling business interests to exploit pristine landscapes for their natural resources and promote mass migration to squalid urban centres where workers may be actors in the global network but surely experience few of its benefits.

The relations between those who benefit and those who suffer has been my object of analysis here, by way of my examination of discourses concerned with ethics, human suffering, and conduct in the networked age. Seven of the cinematic narratives represent *thwarted* agency and dissipated accountability in global networks (*Traffic*, *Black Hawk Down*, *21 Grams*, *Beyond Borders*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Crash*, *Babel*), while five of the films attempt to assign guilt directly to malevolent interests and dramatize *attempts* by the central figures to act as agents and arbitrate human suffering (*The Constant Gardener*, *Lord of War*, *Syriana*, *Blood Diamond*, *United 93*). The films thus question whether our ethical relations with the other are malleable outside of the material configurations in which we find ourselves—the configurations of the network society in which Wall Street traders and the poorest labourers are all enmeshed. That is, the networks that mediate social life in the global age affect us all, even if the result is the *suspension* of our affective and ethical responses. By devoting attention to these representations, I have asked whether or not political consciousness can be configured in resistant and

oppositional ways when material conditions (in our case, those of neoliberal globalization) enframe the subject and reveal the world in stifling ways, as “reserves” of exploitable human and natural resources (Heidegger, 1955).

## **Foucault and the Politics of Our Selves**

This question is not easily answered because it strikes at the core of a major tenet within Marxism itself—that life determines consciousness, rather than consciousness determining life—and identifies a division enforced in more dramatic ways between scholars of ideology and Foucaultians invested in questions of power, epistemology, social conduct and control. In the latter philosophical tradition, consciousness—although it is constantly entangled with technologies of discipline and discourses of self-improvement—retains its autonomy; the subject’s relation to power can be oppressive, but one can also opt to negotiate this relationship in productive ways. Taking up a Foucaultian position, citizenship theorist Engin Isin (2002) equates *resistant* subject positions with the practice of citizenship itself. Ethical relations with others, he argues, can best be achieved through specific forms of citizenship.

Citizenship materializes for Isin only when political consciousness takes shape in social practices. *Being* a citizen is a dynamic set of practices rather than concepts, and citizenship is only realized when one expresses one’s “right to constitute oneself as an agent to govern and be governed, deliberate with others, and enjoin determining the fate of the polity to which one belongs” (Isin, 2002, p. 1). To deliberate means to act purposively with one’s interests at heart, to act “as an agent to govern” as well as accept forms of government. The citizen who acts in his or her

interests, then, must also accept legislation, however formally or informally enforced, over his or her activities. These forms of government will surely limit his or her pleasure in order to serve the larger purpose of citizenship: namely, as Isin suggests, the relegation of violence, chaos, and lawlessness to the margins of civilization and the establishment of peaceful relations conducive to human inquiry and endeavour. Citizenship is not solely the pursuit of one's own security and liberty, then, but is itself constituted by a responsibility both to the big Other (the omniscient third party) and to the human other.

Indeed, according to Isin's historical account of citizenship, the confrontation with the other plays perhaps the most influential role in the formation of citizenship.<sup>44</sup> From the streets of the ancient Greek or Roman polis to the media-saturated metropolises today, he argues, citizens constitute their citizenship in relation to outsiders, slaves, the disempowered, refugees, the barbarians at the gates who are not entitled to the rights guaranteed by citizenship. Referring to the tradition of Orientalism in Western epistemology, Isin is of course critical of this tendency. And yet, as I have suggested, these encounters with the other—and even encounters with trauma or the other's suffering—inaugurate new ways of being, and thus complicate the self-other dichotomy. In the contemporary context, global citizens (and not just Westerners) are forged “at the moment when it becomes possible to conceive of oneself differently, to re-orient oneself toward the other, and to reconstitute identity qua alterity” (Isin, 2002, p. 284). This process of ethical

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<sup>44</sup> Foucault's (1973; 1977) investigations of the other's difference or deviance in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish* illustrate how difference (even if it is arbitrarily diagnosed) dialectically produces discourses of normalcy, acceptability, lawfulness, manners, and thus “proper” citizenship. His *History of Sexuality* (1976-1984) series likewise illustrated how the policing of difference amongst bodies in Catholic and non-Catholic societies forged norms of acceptable conduct that arose in opposition to actual and perceived transgressions.

reevaluation may sound Orientalist in these terms, but conceptually it is something quite different and more profound. Taking non-citizen “aliens” and the suffering poor and homeless as examples, Isin illustrates how the would-be citizen’s encounter with these populations ultimately leads to the amelioration of both groups’ conditions of existence; citizens galvanize their conceptions of the rights and ethical *responsibilities* as citizens and thus work to alleviate the suffering that undermines the principles of being a “neighbour” (Žižek, Santner and Reinhard, 2005).

## **Individualized Ethics and Personalized Politics**

Indeed, our responsibilities as figurative neighbours are, as ever, the subject of impassioned debate. In the contemporary phase of neoliberal globalization, “ravaged wages and ravaged bodies saturate the global marketplace” (Berlant, 2000, p. 42). This marketplace has produced “new conditions of growth,” as well as the widely documented polarity between classes of empowered, mobile global citizens and disempowered, immobilized populations whose otherness presents an ethical dilemma for the privileged (Sassen, 1996, p. 13). And yet

The media of the political public sphere regularly register new scandals of the proliferating sweatshop networks “at home” and “abroad,” which has to be a good thing, because it produces *feeling* and with it something at least akin to *consciousness* that can lead to *action*. Yet even as the image of the traumatized worker proliferates, even as evidence of exploitation is found under every rock or commodity, it competes with a normative/utopian image of the U.S. citizen who remains unmarked, framed, and protected by the private sphere of his life project. (Berlant, 2000, p. 42)

Grappling with the ethical failures of empowered Western citizens, Berlant suggests that we exist in a “moment of expanding class unconsciousness that looks like



consciousness” only because we are *aware* of distant suffering through its media presence (Berlant, 2000, p. 43). We are, however, more adept at managing—that is, downplaying—our responsibility to the neighbour. According to Berlant, we accomplish this partial or total disavowal chiefly by *individuating* the systemic regimes of oppression (apprehending the incomprehensible totality through the fetishized, decontextualized image of one foster care child, for instance, or one refugee success story) and by individuating our own affective or political response (a discrete donation in lieu of political agitation). Whereas Wahl-Jorgensen (2008) argues for the practice of “emotional citizen” that combines “rational” debate with the inevitable forms of outrage that accompany discussions of economic disparity and global trauma in political debates, Berlant sees a danger here. Berlant’s assertion is, of course, that we privatize our political energies, and cope with them through individuated expressions of “sentimentality” rather than unleashing them in the public sphere in ways that address deficiencies at the institutional level:

Sentimental politics makes these confusions credible and these violences bearable, as its cultural power asserts the priority of interpersonal identification and empathy for the vitality and viability of collective life. This sanctified mentality also gives citizens an outlet, something satisfying to do in response to overwhelming structural violence. (Berlant, 2000, p. 45)

Berlant’s work can also be understood to embody an implicit critique of Foucaultian investigations of supposedly self-governing individuals as yet another facet of the contemporary fixation on private life and personal politics. After all, in their investigations of everything from reality television makeover and weight loss programs (Ouelette, 2008), to immaterial labour (Cote, 2007), to the neoliberal pressures on the individual family to coordinate its educational and health care

concerns privately, the studies that mark the resurgence of interest in Foucault's late work have delimited much of their focus to "the politics of our selves" (Allen, 2008). Of course, this tradition of scholarship never asserts that individuals are entirely disentangled from injunctions to obey political authority (laws, disciplinary institutions), but that these commands are assimilated almost willingly into the micro-level decisions of everyday life.

Akin to Berlant's critique of privatized politics, then, Foucault's theory of governmentality, and the recent variety of sociological and cultural analyses deploying it, have as their basis the objective of *exposing* how power and ideology operate to constrain human action or produce action that serves certain interests; in this way, these scholars' attentions are indeed directed at the wider structures governing the citizenry—the structures that Berlant suggests are too often ignored when the externalities of globalization invade Western consumers' consciousness, and when the ensuing scandals concerning exploited "third world" labour erupt. The disjuncture between the individual's vantage point, personal code of ethics, and ability to act at the micro-level, on the one hand, and the network's mystifying, unrepresentable, and unmappable nature, on the other, is therefore a major concern in this scholarly tradition and a central concern of my inquiry.

At the theoretical level, there is something compelling in the interplay Foucault's work underlines between the individuated, micro-level ways in which we experience power as, for instance, the rightness of our emotions or actions, and the macro-level, institutional functioning of power over our minds and bodies—our submission to the gaze of the big Other in the form of surveillance cameras and invasive security screenings. Daily experience thus encompasses individuated practices of self-discipline, self-government, and moments of self-indulgence and

respite (Foucault, 1977; 1980a; McCarthy, 2001). But it also necessitates our collective *deference* to authority in ways that suggest the enduring presence of the Lacanian big Other; the Other's theoretically omnipotent gaze is present in everything from email surveillance and homeland security to CNN's aerial footage of "surgical" military air strikes, marauding paparazzi, gated and surveilled communities, and reality television. Today, that is, power may circulate fluidly among subjects who electively adopt "technologies of the self" to direct their fates with seeming autonomy (Foucault, 1980), but power can also confront us unilaterally and appear all the more mystifying because of its intangible, unrepresentable nature.<sup>45</sup>

## **The Cinematic *Dispositif* and Global Consciousness**

By examining cinema as a *dispositif* or apparatus of discourses that can celebrate or stabilize certain regimes of knowledge *and* disrupt others, and that attempts to *represent* how power itself functions, I have attempted to illustrate that consciousness (whether it is the product of power or ideology) can reshape life. Even staunch Marxists have asserted the same. Cobley (2004, p. 203) suggests, for instance, that twenty-first century Marxism is changing and incorporating questions of individual subjectivization by power, and individual ethical conduct. Even Terry Eagleton appears to take a Foucaultian ethical turn. According to Cobley, "whereas the old Marxist-Eagleton used to tell us that consciousness follows from material practices, the new ethical Eagleton suggests that consciousness will change material practices" (Cobley, 2004, p. 203).

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<sup>45</sup> In airports, we are surrounded with countless screens (presenting news, flight schedules, weather updates, sports highlights) that allow us to remain in visual contact with the outside world whilst we ourselves are surveilled. In this setting we are simultaneously individuated and made to submit to a centralized authority. See McCarthy (2001).

Popular cinema rooted in the consciousness industry of Hollywood operates powerfully by disseminating some of the narratives people adopt in order to structure and encode their daily experiences, including their moments of celebration, mourning, reflection, and rebellion. If cinematic narratives can offer us objects of libidinal investment (celebrities) that promote emulation and changes in conduct, if they can enable the release of psychic energies on the one hand, and assign our anxieties to certain scapegoats (as discussed in the previous chapter) in regressive ways on the other, what might cinema—as a map of the unmappable—continue to do for contemporary discourses of Western subjectivity? After all, this presumed subject, which is less a stable position than an intersection of forces (Foucault, 1978), is under pressure from so many directions at the moment—ecological, political, humanitarian. My inquiry has aimed to examine some of the ways in which popular cinema during the Bush years and into the future, might offer Americans and those of us within the US's sphere of influence a means of mapping the social totality and configuring our modes of conduct and agency within the network society.

In all of the aforementioned films, cinematic protagonists experience the network as a seemingly inescapable formation, regardless of whether it isolates and stifles them or enables them to confront their proximities to sites of trauma. As Galloway (2004, p. 5) notes, “distributed networks have no central hubs and no radial nodes,” no centres but also no margins. With no sidelines on this playing field, Galloway suggests, actors cannot extract themselves from global networks. The impossibility of getting *outside*, for Western consumers and cinematic heroes, is significant, just as it is in more devastating ways for the world's labouring populations, embroiled in supply networks of production rather than consumption. It is because of the “rise of the network society” as a social formation that we see in

this cinema the contemporary discourse of Western subjectivity being *integrated into* rather than isolated from international economies and distant traumas. That is, as we have seen, the connected and globally minded Western subject that is depicted in popular discourses is equally the result of the “rupture” of the September 11, 2001 attacks as s/he is the product of a subtle and perhaps unconscious epistemological shift toward cognitively mapping social life in the global age *as a network*.

My corpus of films depicts empowered Western agents who *do* experience the benefits of US hegemony within the network society, but who nonetheless attempt to intervene on behalf of the other. In doing so, they exhibit their ethical rebirth after having been confronted with the other’s suffering. Generally speaking, these interventions are continuous with the neoliberal project because they overwhelmingly hinge on the privatization of the problem (dealt with in the domestic sphere among family members) and political action itself—resulting in vigilantism, in the worst cases. These dual privatizations suggest that public social mechanisms are impotent and thus that systemic problems can only be solved temporarily through private, individual action. To conclude, some illustrative examples from the films ought to remind us how these forms of action are envisioned more broadly in the midst of our neoliberal moment.

## **Acting Alone in the Age of Connection**

*Traffic*, for instance, depicts the government as an impotent institution and suggests that responding to distant or proximate suffering is best accomplished both by receding from public view into the realm of the insular, neoliberal family, and by seeking private care and self-help in the form of user-pay clinics. Robert’s climactic

refusal to deliver his “war on drugs” speech, and his retreat from Washington, advances the claim that supporting private advocacy groups will help American families succeed where the public sector has failed. Robert’s journey from public servant to private citizen is paradigmatic of the journey these films generally celebrate.

In *Black Hawk Down*, this logic embraces the soldiers who learn to fight only for themselves. The disturbing dimension of the film is its suggestion that once soldiers enter combat zones and the “first bullet” is fired at them, “politics and all that shit go right out the window,” as the experienced navy seal says. The film’s “soldier patriots” thus cease to be ethical beings at all, as they lumber across the Somali countryside in armoured vehicles, increasingly unconcerned with the wider factors motivating their mission. In the film’s view of the centralized but uncoordinated network, however, the ability of the soldiers to intervene on each others’ behalf is celebrated as a response to the chaos, and as an emblem of their residual agency.

In *Beyond Borders*, the private black tie fundraiser that connects Nick and Sarah likewise says a great deal about how popular discourses envision the work of distributing medical aid and coordinating humanitarian interventions. Nick is explicit about the failure of governments to back his medical aid activities in the African refugee camps, and he attends fundraisers only because his operation is continually running out of funds. The film, at least, attempts to comment critically on his predicament, first by juxtaposing his efforts with Sarah-Jolie’s public advocacy as a UN representative, and second by depicting his descent into mercenary criminality, arguably out of necessity, as he exchanges weapons with guerrilla groups. A vigilante of sorts, his response to aid cartels is nonetheless indicative of neoliberal celebrations of individuated activity.

In the somewhat similar context of *Hotel Rwanda*, for instance, the manager Paul is forced to be a vigilante when he is abandoned by his Belgian employers and by the UN trucks that offer no support. His ability to “act alone” in the midst of a stifling network is his profound achievement, saving twelve hundred lives from the Hutus by filling empty hotel rooms, and overcoming corporate indifference and diplomatic and governmental apathy. Of course, as previously discussed, George Clooney’s symbolic rebellion against his government’s violent meddling in the Middle Eastern oil industry in *Syriana*, and Leonardo DiCaprio’s symbolic actions to thwart the violence wrought by the Sierra Leonean gem trade in *Blood Diamond* powerfully imbricate celebrity itself in the discourses of ethical global citizenship.

## Conclusion

### Cinematic Global Citizenship

My analysis of global network films and the cinematic network society characterized by cinematic and real world discourses has made three central assertions. First, I have suggested that these network narratives can be understood to challenge the hegemonic celebration of transnational flows, connectedness, and networked relations by embracing these logics in order to examine the impotence, mis-communication, and alienation that can result. Second, I have suggested that these narratives depict Western subjectivity as implicated *in*, rather than isolated from, the real of distant traumas. This sense of proximity prompts the global citizen-protagonists (Jolie, Pitt, Clooney, DiCaprio) to reevaluate his or her position within a given network, resulting in new ethical behaviour (*Syriana*, *Blood Diamond*), or defensive, regressive activities (*Black Hawk Down*, *Babel*, *Lord of War*) intended to ensure insular modes of subjectivity. And third, I have suggested that cinematic protagonists, often played by humanitarian celebrities who function as fetishized objects, limit the films' critiques by glamorizing privatized practices of citizenship and insular cinematic global citizenship. By way of conclusion, I would like to explore the third proposition in more detail by devoting some attention to these celebrities' exhibition of their ethics in their off-screen and on-screen conduct.

Is the Foucaultian notion of "conduct" the only way of naming this particular set of behaviours? Is this new, globally aware ethical self not merely *disciplined* into assuming a socially acceptable form? Is the cinematic global citizen an ideological construction, a phantom position into which we become interpellated? Or, if our conduct is neither governed nor disciplined, might we be adopting new ethical



practices, which we experience as free choices, because we are, in fact, participants in what Deleuze (1995) called a “control society”? It seems necessary at this point to defend my preference for Foucault’s theoretical models over Deleuze’s compelling assessment of control, a term which could aptly describe the incarnation of subjectivity that my study investigates.

According to Deleuze in “Postscript on Control Societies” (1995 [1990]), Foucault envisioned the “society of discipline” to be a temporary formation, which would lead to a more flexible and de-centralized “society of control” in which the “modulation” rather than the physical government of behaviour was the primary goal (Deleuze, 1995, p. 177). In the latter society, the discipline once enacted by educational institutions would be replaced by “perpetual training” rather than punishment (Deleuze, 1995, p. 178). Indeed, perpetual training describes what global citizenship seems to be in contemporary debates—a number of practices that we each enact out of a hazy sense of duty to our own self-improvement. Deleuze identifies the shift from power’s enactment *vis-à-vis* the subject’s moments of contact with disciplinary institutions, to its functioning amid a wide range of longitudinal *practices*: continuing education, exercise, transgression and rehabilitation, and the quest for professional success. All constitute perpetual practices that function amid a new and “dispersed...system of domination” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 182). Why, then, have Foucault’s theories been more apt for the present analysis of power’s dispersion throughout the cultural landscape?

Chiefly, it is my position that Foucault in his later writing already allows for the “[m]obility, speed, and flexibility” Deleuze describes as distinguishing features of the control society (Hardt, 1995, p. 43). Foucault’s late work foregrounds his realization at the end the seventies that “society has changed and individuals have changed

too,” with people exhibiting more “independen[ce]” than the disciplinary model presumed (Foucault, 1994, p. 533).

Hollywood celebrity wonderfully exemplifies how “various forms of knowledge and expertise” play roles “in organizing differentiated fields of social management in which social conduct is subjected to diverse strategies of regulation” (Bennett, 2005, p. 5). “Instead of looking *through* those mechanisms” like city hall, the courts, the prison, or the asylum “to decipher the modes of power that lie *behind* them,” Foucault’s later work suggests that we all enact “instruments of government” upon ourselves through a range of “multiform tactics” that enable us to govern our selves in ways that are often consistent with the demands of the reigning ideology—in this case, neoliberalism (Foucault, 1988 [1980a], p. 103). *Humanitarian* celebrity, in particular, extends the neoliberal fixation on individual conduct, private action and keeping one’s politics “personal,” all of which divert attention from the necessity of collective *social* action.

Celebrities’ public appearances *as themselves* are therefore compelling, all the more because of the fact that these people are also *playing themselves* in their efforts to fulfill the desire of the big Other and to elevate their positions in the contemporary celebrity economy (Žižek, 2008). In terms of celebrity spectacle, few if any events rival the annual Oscars ceremony. The two Academy Awards ceremonies following the September 11 attacks celebrated *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) and *Chicago* (2002) at gala events during which various tensions were palpable among the cinematic global citizens in attendance. The Oscars—a now global media event viewed by a billion people—provide an obvious, though not unproblematic, means of assessing which cinematic figures and which genres are celebrated each

year.<sup>46</sup> But the ceremonies are *more* interesting due to the less glamorous, spontaneous, and troubling moments that inevitably take place. These moments, I suggest, are often instances in which one's celebrity and one's citizenship overlap. Examples range from Vanessa Redgrave's pro-Palestinian acceptance speech in 1978 during which she singled out the "Zionist hoodlums" protesting outside the auditorium, to Ed Harris's refusal to applaud Elia Kazan's Lifetime Achievement Award due to his cooperation with McCarthy's creation of Hollywood's Communist "blacklist," to Michael Moore's 2003 anti-war tirade. Addressing these non-diegetic but nonetheless cinematic moments has helped me gauge the complex ways in which US and world cinema can mediate wider political narratives. The Awards also provide one means of assessing how filmmakers and performers govern their conduct—in contrived and spontaneous ways—and exhibit (or conceal) the politics of their cinematic lives (Allen, 2008).

## **Cinematic Global Citizens On the Red Carpet**

### **The Academy Awards 2002: Revering New York**

In the film industry, productions hopefully exhibit widely and see their theatrical run culminate in a busy awards season. Awards themselves are intended to culminate in the production of celebrity itself, ushering the chosen few into new

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<sup>46</sup> One of the most laborious components of my dissertation research has been creating and traversing an archive of Academy Awards ceremonies. Not only were VHS tapes the sole recording device available to me until the 2008 awards, which were recorded to DVD, but the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) maintains strict control over footage and transcripts of the ceremonies, never re-airing them except in the form of tiny clips featuring only "highlights." The spontaneous moments, and speeches involving political messages, are relegated. Indeed some of my tapes have been searched and rewound so many times that they are beginning to atrophy; digitizing the tapes with a newly acquired DVD-R device has ensured their survival.

categories of being. It is therefore fitting that this analysis culminates in a discussion of the Academy Awards—an odd combination of choreographed performances and speeches, and spontaneity. The 2002 ceremonies were interesting in themselves given the many references to terrorism and New York (but very seldom Washington or the Pentagon) throughout the evening. Before Whoopi Goldberg's hosting duties began, Tom Cruise took the stage to deliver a short speech addressing the relationship between films and people's memories. Setting a tone that journalists identified as "defiant" (Bamigboye, 2002, n.p.), the actor even responded to suggestions that the Academy cancel the awards ceremonies that year. "Should we celebrate the joy and magic movies bring?" Cruise asked, "Dare I say it? More than ever." Clearly, according to Cruise's scripted "apology," in times of crisis the movies offer escapist pleasures. But escapism is never the whole story in as far as fantasy is never pure or distinct from conscious concerns.

What followed, curiously, was a short documentary by the controversial US documentary filmmaker Errol Morris, a director whose subjects include murderers, Holocaust deniers, inventors, lion tamers, scientists, and the late Robert S. McNamara, an architect of the US war in Vietnam. Morris's films pose difficult questions about memory itself. And his controversial re-staging of events that people recollect (but that may not have happened) has generated the majority of the controversy around him. In his 2002 Academy Awards film, the director asks a series of people ranging from Laura Bush to Iggy Pop to reflect on what films mean to them and what memories they trigger. Rather than problematizing memory as usual, Morris is a passive and supportive listener. This disparity between what many viewers anticipated from Morris and what transpired set an important, patriotic, and

uncritical tone for the ceremonies. Later in the evening, the context behind Morris's introductory film became clearer.

Late in the evening Woody Allen shocked viewers and received a standing ovation when he appeared in person to introduce a tribute to depictions of New York in film. The director's film *Manhattan* (1979) glamorizes the city, which many see as the "star" of the movie, and Allen's persona as the quintessential New Yorker made him the perfect choice. He is additionally known for his perennial absences from Oscars ceremonies and his general antipathy toward Los Angeles, a city that "produces no garbage," as he quips in *Annie Hall* (1977), "because they turn it into television shows." The opening speech and film about cinema and memory was thus a means of setting the tone for Allen's tribute to New York, a collection of images of a wounded city with patriotic overtones. Such special presentations were crucial to the first post-9/11 Oscars ceremony because the films themselves had little or no relationship with the city or the tragic events. As a cinematic global citizen, Allen did the proper, ethical thing in the wake of 9/11, and thus exhibited himself as a patriot. This form of discipline—or in Foucault's gentler terminology, self-government—is epitomized perhaps by the mantra that followed the traumatic attack, "We Are All New Yorkers." Allen, the director who avoids Los Angeles and airplanes generally, appeared at the Oscars presumably to show, in neoliberal fashion, that each of us can do our part—in memorializing the damaged city if not in understanding the roots of the Islamist hostility.

The Best Picture nominees were Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), Baz Luhrman's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), Robert Altman's *Gosford Park* (2001), Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), and Todd Field's *In the Bedroom* (2001); the only nominated global network film was Ridley Scott's pro-

soldier war film *Black Hawk Down*, which was a surprise winner of several awards (although Scott would lose the Directing award again, having lost the previous year to Steven Soderbergh who won for his global network film *Traffic*). The sombre but defiant tone of the ceremonies thus tells us something significant about American popular culture in the new age of Al Qaeda, exploding mail, and anthrax letters, whilst the films themselves predated the events of September 11 and thus engaged an anxious but more peaceful historical moment.

### **The Academy Awards 2003: “Shame On You, Mr. Bush”**

The following year’s ceremonies are revelatory, however, because late 2001 and 2002 was the first period in which productions were selected for development or shelved based upon the studios’ attempts to attract the “post-9/11” US audience. The resulting films surprised many. The popular and critical celebration of Rob Marshall’s film *Chicago* (2002), based on the comedic Broadway play about women who meet in prison after killing their husbands, provides an interesting example. The first musical in decades to win the Academy Award for Best Picture, *Chicago* won multiple awards at an Oscar ceremony scheduled March 23, 2003, only two nights after the US-led invasion of Iraq. Winners and presenters, notably Dustin Hoffman, Nicole Kidman, and Adrien Brody, emotionally referenced their horror over the US military initiatives, although Kidman, in a rambling speech, ultimately defended her right to be winning an award because even after 9/11 “art is important” (Cates, 2003).

As *Chicago* was rewarded time and again throughout the evening, a palpable tension was discernable in the auditorium. Principally, the tension was the result of the standard rift between Hollywood liberals who comprise the vast majority, and the

few outspoken Hollywood Republicans such as Clint Eastwood, Charlton Heston, Matthew McConaughey and conservative democrats like Academy President and former Lyndon Johnson Chief of Staff, Jack Valenti. But it was likely due to the frivolity of the celebration in which they were engaged that many Academy members appeared anxious and committed to maintaining their composure.

McConaughey, for instance, joylessly introduced Martin Scorsese's Best Picture nominee *Gangs of New York* (2002) as a film about clashing civilizations with obvious post-9/11 overtones. Scorsese's film concludes with an aestheticized shot of the World Trade Center towers, suggesting that the "gangs" warring for control of dwindling resources are no longer different immigrant groups located near the Five Corners neighbourhood in New York, but global military powers and extremist groups intent on disrupting the flow of capital. Although the Texan actor appeared tense, he never digressed into commentary of his own. Later in the evening, as Dustin Hoffman pointedly emphasised the horrors of life under military occupation in his introduction to Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), the Academy Awards director, Gilbert Cates, cut to McConaughey in the audience several times to register his visible opposition to Hoffman's comments. The anxious decorum only lapsed briefly when director Michael Moore took the stage to accept his award for *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

In his now famous tirade, Moore arrived on stage with every documentary filmmaker nominated in his category in order to proclaim their collective preference for non-fiction over the fiction. The fiction he was addressing, however, was circulated not by Hollywood studios but by the Bush Administration, which remained in power due to "fictitious election results" and "took this country to war for fictitious reasons." The audience at first cheered and then booed as Moore chanted "Shame

on you, Mr. Bush!” Political statements are expressly forbidden during the awards, and thus even fellow anti-war liberals tend to discipline winners and presenters who violate this rule. As the *Daily Telegraph* reported: “Many of the stagehands were booing the loudest, and one of them was so incensed by the outburst that he followed Moore backstage to harangue him” (Robinson, 2003, n.p.).

In a marked transition, however, the late Academy President Jack Valenti took the stage directly following Moore, whose entourage was still exiting through the wings, to present the award for Documentary Short Subject. Notably, the conservative Valenti, a swaggering Texan, presented the award to directors Bill Guttentag and Robert David Port for their patriotic film *Twin Towers* (2002), whose victory was likely anticipated. On stage, the men thanked the New York firefighters for making “the ultimate sacrifice for their country” and even rehashed the cliché from late 2001: “We Are All New Yorkers.”

In light of Moore’s widely documented speech, it is important to remember this subsequent moment of hegemonic patriotism, which was much more consistent with the national mood from which Moore’s comments diverged. The 2003 Oscars were not a moment of protest as cultural memory might lead us to believe (clips of Moore’s speech still circulate widely online in spite of the Academy’s rigorous restrictions), but of patriotic *composure* and discipline for many conservatives and liberals. Still, given that a billion people tuned it to the global “media event,” several winners seized the opportunity to make notable but more measured statements about terrorism and the US military response.

Best Supporting Actor Chris Cooper elicited cheers when he proclaimed: “In light of all the troubles in this world, I wish us all peace.” Best Actor Adrien Brody received a standing ovation by acknowledging that he was “receiving an award at



such a strange time” and by dedicating it to Wladyslaw Szpilman, the pianist and Holocaust survivor whom he depicted in *The Pianist*; addressing US soldiers including friends stationed in Kuwait, Brody concluded his remarks by saying, “whether you believe in God or Allah, may he watch over you tonight. And let’s pray for a peaceful and swift resolution.” Similar pro-soldier or pro-peace (but not necessarily anti-war) statements that made no reference to the political context behind invading Iraq were common. Susan Sarandon, usually outspoken, restricted herself to giving the peace sign as she took the stage. Actor Gael Garcia Bernal, however, provoked some quiet opposition and loud support when, introducing a song from the film *Frida* (2002), he eloquently stated:

Frida Kahlo once said ‘I don’t paint my dreams. I paint my reality.’ Maybe because she was alone. The necessity for peace in the world is not a dream. It is a reality. And we are not alone. If Frida were alive today she would be on our side—against the war. (Cates, 2003, n.p.)

The 2003 Academy Awards ceremonies evidence the decidedly non-allegorical relationship between culture and history, or art and life. Scorsese’s patriotic *Gangs of New York*, for instance, a thematically muddled and creatively overblown essay about rage and vengeance among nineteenth century immigrant communities, connected neither with viewers nor with Academy voters, earning little money (\$77,000,000 domestically against a production budget of \$97,000,000) and losing embarrassingly in ten Oscar categories. After Miramax had ingeniously marketed *Chicago*, by contrast, audiences drove its North American earnings to more than \$170,000,000, and six thousand Academy members elected to recognise it with

multiple awards on March 23, likely with little idea of their country's military plans for March 20.

Notwithstanding several patriotic displays throughout the evening, the dominant sentiment at the 2003 award ceremonies was, in my estimation, some variation of *guilt*. Audiences and the cinematic global citizens who win the awards and are allowed to vote were confronted with the type of culture they had elected to support at a moment when Islamic fundamentalist rage demanded to be understood, when their military was fighting a war in one country, and violently invading another at that very moment. As Kidman's difficult public moment as a winner illustrates, managing the disjuncture between the frivolity and material excesses of celebrity on the one hand, and humanitarian crises (including US military campaigns) on the other, exemplifies in a perverse, exaggerated form the challenge privileged citizens face in conducting themselves in our age of polarization.

## Cinematic Global Citizens on the World Stage

In a world of staggering contradictions, reconciling experiences as disparate as celebrity and desperation is difficult. Still, some people are able to manage and monitor their conduct in ways that mediate this polarity rather than exacerbating it. That is, although promotional culture and humanitarian causes have long been saturated by Hollywood imagery, contemporary neoliberal philanthropic discourses have begun to use celluloid images and their activist-celebrities—Angelina Jolie, George



**Figure 34. UN Ambassador Jolie with a local child in Namibia. © Associated Press**

Clooney, Don Cheadle, Danny Glover, Harrison Ford, Leonardo DiCaprio, Mia Farrow, Steven Spielberg, Sean Penn, Susan Sarandon—in more sophisticated ways. Cinematic imagery and real life political activity are, as I have argued, confusingly entwined. I would like to conclude this inquiry by finding my way back out of these cinematic worlds. The social world to which I return, however, is scarcely as “real” as it may have seemed in the years before the moving image culture took such a powerful hold. By way of conclusion, I suggest, the following cinematic global citizens supply a uniquely apt means of reflecting on the “half-real” terrain of the cinematic *dispositif* that I have located as Hollywood’s response to the nascent network society (Juul, 2005).

Perhaps the paradigmatic cinematic global citizen of this young century, Angelina Jolie’s stardom is inseparable from both the landscapes of Namibia, Thailand, and Cambodia where her film *Beyond Borders* was shot. Even the humanitarian mission of her fictional *Tomb Raider* character Lara Croft—to protect ancient ruins, relics, and indigenous peoples from the imperialist Western corporations who would harm them—has been operative in galvanizing the actress’s symbolic ethical commitments to the populations of African and Southeast Asian countries. Indeed, off-screen, Jolie “sponsors her own wildlife project on Cambodia,” and has purchased many hundreds of forested acres in the region in order to create a wildlife preserve, which will also protect ancient structures and artefacts (Brockington, 2008, p. 559). Jolie’s quest to help refugees as a UN Spokesperson in *Beyond Borders*, outlined above, has not only helped forge her global persona, but images of the actress holding starving babies in the film have fused with similar images of her private pursuits, including charitable work in Namibia. And thus far the actress has adopted a Cambodian boy and an Ethiopian girl. Symbolically wading

into the “war on terror,” Jolie appeared in Michael Winterbottom’s *A Mighty Heart* (2007) as Marianne Pearl, the resolute wife of American journalist Daniel Pearl who was kidnapped by Al Qaeda while on assignment in Pakistan.

Likewise, George Clooney depicts a conscientious objector unwilling to continue

assassinating Arab politicians in Gaghan’s *Syriana*, based upon a living CIA agent’s memoir, and a

principled McCarthy-era news producer in his own film, *Good Night and Good Luck* (2005); Clooney’s father, Nick, was a trusted news anchor for thirty years, a fact repeated during the marketing of the latter film. Nominated for Academy Awards in acting, writing, and directing categories in the same year, Clooney enjoyed comparisons with Orson Welles whose target in *Citizen Kane* (1941) was media tycoon William Randolph Hearst, his manipulation of the news, and his silencing of dissent. Off-screen, Clooney has been a Darfur activist for the past five years, he appears in the documentary *Darfur Now* (2007), and in February 2008 he became a UN Spokesperson.

Changing course from the host of conflicted and chauvinistic characters that made him famous, Michael Douglas, a fellow UN Spokesperson, portrays the conflicted US Drug Czar struggling to make an ethical decision concerning his addicted daughter and the global war on drugs in Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (whose production team also



**Figure 35. UN Ambassador Clooney with children in Darfur. © Associated Press**



**Figure 36. UN Ambassador Douglas with Kofi Annan and Jonathan Granoff. © Associated Press**

made *Syriana*). Douglas anchors the film's multifarious narrative and, in sharp contrast to his Oscar-winning role as a greedy investment manager in *Wall Street* (1987), depicts a man whose ambition gives way to an ethical awakening. Moving throughout the film's various docu-drama scenes, the actor converses with actual senators and other politicians in Washington, Mexico City, and at the border crossings through which the drugs flow. Privately, Douglas supports Peace One Day, a disarmament charity, and Stand Up and Take Action, an anti-poverty foundation, among other charitable organizations, in addition to his public appearances with the United Nations.

Similarly, Leonardo DiCaprio, who undergoes an ethical rebirth on-screen in *The Beach* (2000) and *Blood Diamond*, is a known eco-activist off-screen. Cast as a hedonistic Gen-Xer in two environmentalist films, he bears witness to human suffering and environmental degradation in Thailand in *The Beach* and in Sierra Leone in *Blood Diamond*. The first film, derided by critics, also became a cautionary tale for the film industry, drawing additional criticism and a lawsuit for the ecological devastation it caused by using heavy machinery to rearrange the earth and vegetation in a protected Thai ecosystem (Tzanelli, 2007); in the latter



**Figure 37. Environmentalist DiCaprio promoting “conflict-free” Jaeger Le-Coultre watches at a *Blood Diamond* premiere. © Associated Press**

film, a more seasoned DiCaprio was active in casting orphaned children from Mozambique, ensuring them paid work, and his image in the film

has been used to promote conflict-free diamonds. In the image reproduced here, the actor is promoting Jaeger Le-Coultre wristwatches, worth six figures, in a campaign highlighting their use of conflict-free diamonds. Active in anti-pollution campaigns for

the American Lung Association, as well as in his own ecological foundation, DiCaprio produced and narrated the widely distributed documentary film *The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour* (2007) about tactics to avert severe climate change and further environmental degradation.

Steven Spielberg has maintained a high profile as a humanitarian and philanthropist since directing *Schindler's List* (1993) and releasing the film the same year the US Holocaust Memorial Museum opened on the Washington Mall. Spielberg has been involved in countless

commemorative projects since then, producing a range of documentaries including *The Last Days* (1997), a lauded film about five Hungarian Holocaust survivors. The

director's Shoah Foundation has archived thousands of hours of survivor testimony, providing for scholars and students a welcome West coast supplement to Yale's well-known Fortunoff Archive in Connecticut. More recently, however, Spielberg's pointed allegorical critique of contemporary global terrorism and the US-led war on terror in his film *Munich* (2005) stirred such debate in Israel, the US, and the UK that his own status as a global citizen came under fire; the living person and his celluloid imagery, which dramatized Israel's response to the Palestinian terrorist network that infiltrated the Olympic games in 1972, could not be separated.

Under pressure, the director agreed to append a disclaimer, which he delivers personally, to the beginning of *Munich*, which assures viewers that he remains pro-American and pro-Israeli despite condemning the cycles of violence these nations perpetuate. As Spielberg's resignation as Creative Director of the Beijing Olympics (the result of pressure from another symbolic figure, Mia Farrow) illustrates,



**Figure 38. Spielberg promotes Holocaust education and donates to university archives and human rights organizations. © Reuters**

humanitarian stars embody in their private, public, political—that is, cinematic—lives the various ways in which global citizenship remains primarily a discourse of self-government rooted in proper “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 87).

Whereas publicly supporting or condemning a given national government poses threats to one’s reputation, as the *Munich* and the Olympics examples show, practicing one’s citizenship privately is in vogue. Donating as a private individual (no matter how publicised) to a private ecological or humanitarian foundation, or adopting a child, is in many ways politically safe and even beneficial to the celebrity’s symbolic stature as a cinematic global citizen; supporting organizations with extreme mandates, as Tom Cruise and Mel Gibson have discovered, can of course be politically dangerous. But given the privatisation of political activity that is celebrated at the moment, it is my suggestion that the discourse of global citizenship has emerged concurrently with our era of networked flows of people, capital, and information precisely *because* the global citizen’s profoundly neoliberal imperatives—to donate privately, to consume ethically—represent private, individual practices of the self (epitomized in celebrity philanthropy) which destabilise transnational capitalist logic not at all.

In fact, these injunctions, once again encircling the individual, serve to distract from and prolong the institutionalised economic exploitation enabled by the network society. In other words, shifting the focus to individuals and their actions prevents larger questions concerning inequality and systemic violence from receiving attention. It is through this lens that we can understand how the fetishization of select symbolic commodity-bodies, comprising the surpluses of affect and sentiment that drive the economy of stardom, has become so central to the process of defining global citizenship around celebrity rather than around changes in *public* practices

that might disrupt the polarizing potential of the free market. Still, the global network films these people inhabit, as extensions of the Hollywood social problem films of the past, disseminate inspiring cautionary and disciplinary narratives as I hope I have shown. The cinematic incarnation of the *dispositif* detailed above, which constitutes a discursive matrix of real world traumas, proper responses, the promotion of ethical consumption, and political and environmental activism, therefore merely utilizes the star economy in the often aspirational and cosmopolitan vision of twenty first century social selfhood it presents.

Closely mirroring the operation of ideology itself, cinematic narratives have been widely understood to interpellate spectators into the subject positions (as workers and consumers) deemed most beneficial to the social order. My suggestion has been, drawing on the example of the *Cinema Paradiso* in the insular Italian village, that cinema has the potential to disrupt and problematize subject positions that may be comfortable but are no longer sustainable. If it is through popular stories, such as the narrative of the American Dream, that individuals themselves become “subjectivised,” such narratives must also hold the potential to point the way toward the different ethical formations and ways of being demanded by the proximities of the network society (Foucault, 1981). Stories, for better or worse, have tremendous power and are vital to our practices of constituting our own ethical dispositions—“the politics of our selves” (Allen, 2008).

In an effort to ascertain how Western conceptions of social, economic, and technological connectedness in the network society are being mapped in the midst of a confusing and traumatising historical moment, I delimited a corpus of twelve prominent Hollywood productions distinguished by their depictions of urban, national, and transnational networks. Given that any understanding of a particular cultural or



historical moment cannot solely be a question of political authority, culture, economics, technology, or innovations in communication, as isolated factors, American cinema—whose apparatuses of production, promotion, exhibition, and reception combine these disparate elements—provided a unique communicational terrain for this case study.

Foucault's influential theorizations and the *dispositif*, as a multivalent constellation of discourses, have enabled me to suggest that twenty first century Hollywood is a dynamic site of production, itself constituting a *dispositif* of discourses, which link celebrated, disciplined, and anonymous, traumatised bodies through depictions of the physical and virtual networks encircling the globe. Lacan's arguably incompatible view that power emanates from the surveilling Other, and is further produced in our relation to it, has supplied an indispensable theoretical supplement. Cinema is nothing if not the play of signifiers, arranged and rearranged for viewers (and filmmakers) in a search for plenitude within the enabling and stifling terrain of the Symbolic Order. As Lacan asserts, this order stipulates the very rules within which our desires operate and through which we struggle to express ourselves and to signify. And Jameson's indispensable examinations of cinema in the "global system," and individuals' efforts to navigate this "unrepresentable totality," have enabled me to scrutinize these twelve important films in ways that address their potentially pedagogical function as cognitive maps. Mapping and signifying our individual experiences and challenges are especially important activities in an age when reality has been converted into mediatized and commoditized forms—a "theatre of suffering." As the globally celebrated, scrutinised, and governed symbolic bodies populating these global network films combat suffering on screen, in fictional and historical narratives as well as in their private and public political activities, these

people exemplify specific modes of conducting our selves according to the stipulations of our neoliberal ethical moment, and embody in their insulated narcissism, private philanthropy, public advocacy, and earnest humanitarianism what it means to live in our age.



## Appendix I: Distinguishing Witnessing from Spectatorship

Traumatic imagery is in many ways a surprising feature of everyday life in North America given that our relatively young nations—whose founding took unimaginable tolls upon black and indigenous populations—have nonetheless undergone far fewer historical catastrophes than their African, European, and Asian counterparts. Indeed, the complex reasons behind the “Americanization” of the Holocaust fuel an entire scholarly sub-industry (Novick, 1999). War journalism on the evening news, true crime television series, Hollywood depictions of historical catastrophes, fictional dissections of traumatised bodies in today’s highest-rated television dramas (“CSI-Crime Scene Investigation,” “Bones,” “House,” “Nip/Tuck”), and the actual deconstruction and reconstruction of bodies on popular surgery-makeover programs (“Extreme Makeover,” “The Swan,” “Plastic Makes Perfect”) all remind us that representations of trauma abound in our contemporary cultural environment. New media and their networks merely enable connected viewers to exchange news footage and series episodes, or upload original pictures and videos themselves, in near real time.

Arguably in response, or as part of the continuum, popular culture continues to celebrate *therapeutic* discourses, which are often rooted in the psychoanalytic tradition and tend to constitute the majority of people as traumatised in one way or another (Berlant, 1997). These discourses take shape across a vast terrain of lucrative “healing,” “talk therapy,” and “self-help” industries, whose influence in popular media is undeniable (HBO’s series “In Therapy,” based upon an Israeli series, presents entire sessions and little else). As Berlant (1997) argues, trauma has become central to the experience of modern urban life and to discourses concerned with constituting Americans as “citizens” of the world’s imperial centre. This arguably “infantilizing” disciplinary process involves young Americans’ curriculum-sanctioned visits to their capital, where the Vietnam War Memorial, The Korean War Memorial, the World War Memorials, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Lincoln Memorial Museum (concerning slavery) dominate their agenda (Berlant, 1997). But to what end? Surely these voyages to Washington and Arlington are not solely about transmitting some sense of history to elementary students comfortably at home in the digital age. In an age of massive but often invisible authentic (rather than fictionalized) suffering, such sanctioned activities are also designed to instil some sense of the other’s suffering in naïve students, beyond teaching them about dates and military activities. The role of trauma is thus multifarious.

Alternatively, some scholars assert that instances of trauma can enliven the subject to reassess the social environment as a hostile or liveable terrain. According to Herman (1992, p. 52), such events “call into question basic human relationships ... They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others... They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.” Even here we can see the volatility of this term: “traumatic” can define the event, the psychic reaction, and the ensuing symptoms.

But the suggestion is clear: witnessing or sustaining trauma can supply an unpleasant stimulus to scrutinize the relationship between oneself and the big Other.

In these films, a traumatic event or discovery typically shatters a Western protagonist's ordered world, connecting multifarious people and plots, and motivating their various journeys through the narrative action; the event, the response, and the aftershocks can all be traumatic. Trauma thus has a structural and thematic function in global network films. The circulation of their imagery in the global network society engenders a complex physical and virtual space in which we can map, negotiate, resist, reassess and make meaningful the experience of distant suffering and transnational connectedness.

## Trauma and Desensitization?

What responsibilities might new proximities bring? What are the most basic parameters of bearing witness to the other's suffering through media? As the history of scholarship on this topic suggests, the witness is charged with a series of responsibilities but these may not produce desirable outcomes (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Felman and Laub, 1992; Sontag, 2003). In a recent study, Kurasawa (2009) produced this table:

Perils	Tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silence</li> <li>• Incomprehensibility</li> <li>• Indifference</li> <li>• Forgetting</li> <li>• Repetition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice</li> <li>• Interpretation</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Remembrance</li> <li>• Prevention</li> </ul>

**Table 1. The Work of Bearing Witness (Kurasawa, 2009, p. 96).**

As Kurasawa illustrates here, bearing witness to the suffering of the other through an expanding range of new media forms presents opportunities as well as perils. The "tasks" represent many of our highest hopes for media as a social force in our lives. The perils are consistent with many criticisms of the media in general, especially those inspired by the Frankfurt School and the Marxist Situationist movement, which understand electronic media such as cinema to pacify citizens and distract them from the machinations of power.

The cinema's hyperreal simulations may likely augment the perils of bearing witness because, as Rentschler (2004) and Kaplan (2005; 2008) make clear, cultural forms such as photographs enable "vicarious witnessing" only. Being a spectator is vastly different from the experience of being a physically present witness. In order to clarify the various shades of witnessing, Kaplan (2008) has identified five "degrees" of witnessing.

1. Direct experience of trauma (trauma victim).
2. Relative or close friend of trauma victim or clinical worker brought in to help the victim (close but one step removed from direct experience).
3. Direct observation by a bystander of another's trauma (also one step removed)
4. Clinician hearing a patient's trauma narrative—a complex position with both visual and semantic channels; it involves the face-to-face encounter with the survivor or the bystander within the intimacy of the counselling session. (also one step removed)
5. Visually and verbally mediated trauma (i.e. viewing trauma on film or other media, or reading a trauma narrative and constructing visual images from semantic data). (two steps removed)

**Table 2. The Five Degrees (Kaplan, 2008, p. 3).**

Cinema is “two steps removed” and “visually and verbally mediated” (degree 5). In fact, due to my focus on cinema—and narrative cinema specifically—it is not my intention to suggest that the viewing paradigm arranged by the cinematic apparatus is consistent with the definition of “witnessing” as it is defined in the majority of academic analysis (Felman and Laub, 1992). Witnessing trauma is a social experience that often disturbs the witness and even necessitates therapeutic interventions, as the current Gulf War veterans’ pursuits of health care for traumatic stress disorders evidence. Viewing narrative cinema, even if it is composed of violent imagery, is largely a fantasmatic experience that has been arranged meticulously by cinematographers, sound designers, directors and performers; even instances of trauma or suffering, surprisingly central to melodrama and romance genres, are choreographed to produce dramatic tension or melancholy as a feature of the visual *pleasure* generated by the film as a whole.

The disjuncture between witnessing as a potentially politically activating process, and cinema as a pleasurable, satisfying, pacifying activity is therefore my concern here. As canonical texts on visual culture demonstrate, mediated witnessing cannot help but confront us with a paradox (Sontag, 2003). Although photography and television are not interchangeable with cinema, the camera’s mediation of a traumatic event can bring into view the suffering of the other, just as television brought the war into US living rooms in the later stages of the American war with Vietnam. As Sliwinski (2006, p. 335) suggests, “Human rights, we might say, are conceived through the recognition of their loss. Or put explicitly, human rights are conceived by spectators who, with the aid of the photographic apparatus, are compelled to judge that crimes against humanity are occurring to others.” But this mediation—especially pronounced in the cinema—also ensures that distance, indifference, and incomprehensibility are inescapable outcomes as well, jeopardizing the urgency and sense of responsibility that witnessing can activate.

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