ROBERT BURGOYNE
University of St Andrews

Embodiment in the war film: *Paradise Now* and *The Hurt Locker*

ABSTRACT

In this article I compare two recent films that foreground the body at risk in the new wars of the twenty-first century. Paradise Now *(Abu-Assad, 2005) and* The Hurt Locker *(Bigelow, 2008) convey the subject of the body in war from what would seem to be opposing perspectives, the first representing the experience of a resistance fighter, a suicide bomber in present-day Palestine, and the latter rendering the perceptions of a US soldier, the leader of a bomb disposal squad in Iraq. Seeming opposites, antitheses of each other, the two protagonists and the two films can be set face to face in a way that brings the changing nature of modern war into frame. No longer defined by the ideology of total war that shaped the grand narratives of twentieth-century combat, the new imagery of war and resistance, of insurgency and counter-insurgency, is crystallized here in a new symbolic iteration of the body at risk.*

KEYWORDS

embodiment
suicide bombing
post-heroic war
body at risk
war films
combat films

BODY GENRES

Of the many cinematic forms that can be described as body genres, the war film is clearly a defining example, drawing its most memorable scenes and its most intensive cultural meanings from the way the body, both as agent and patient, as living and dead, is depicted. In no other genre is the liminality of

the body represented in quite this way. Situated in a kind of shadow zone between organic life and national symbol, between sacrificial object and agent of sovereign violence, the body of the soldier conveys in visceral form a vision of history produced from intensive sensual impressions. From the early sound films depicting World War I to the portrayals of self-sacrifice and loss in *Letters From Iwo Jima* (Eastwood 2006) and *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998), the body in the war film expresses in a singular way our immersion in history, framing the past in a way that foregrounds corporeal experience.

What Edward Luttwak (2002) calls the new post-heroic war, however, has created a particular challenge for narrative representation, as much of the dramatic scenography that sustained the great narratives of war in the twentieth century – the climactic battle, the overwhelming bombardment, the mass choreography of the assault – has given way to the very different representational order afforded by small insurgencies that flare unpredictably, by the homemade bomb, and by the remote targeting and digital inter-coding of drone attacks and satellite surveillance. While the great war films of the twentieth century were shaped by a concept of total war, of war to end all war, a theme resoundingly apparent even in the titles of films like *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola 1979) and *The Longest Day* (Annakin 1962), the continuous, contourless warfare of the current period has a much more limited symbolic range.

In this article I compare two recent films that represent a sharp turn away from the 'decorporealized' warfare that has dominated the narrative design of many contemporary war films – what one writer has called the 'battle of the screens' – to focus directly on the body of the soldier in a period of war whose narrative dimensions are only now beginning to emerge (Stewart 2009). Foregrounding the body at risk in the new wars of the twenty-first century, *Paradise Now* (Abu-Assad 2005) and *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow 2008) convey this subject from what would seem to be opposing perspectives, the first representing the experience of a resistance fighter, a suicide bomber in present-day Palestine, and the latter rendering the perceptions of a US soldier, the leader of a bomb disposal squad in Iraq. Seeming opposites, antitheses of each other, the two protagonists and the two films can be set face to face in a way that brings the changing nature of modern war into frame. No longer defined by the ideology of total war that shaped the grand narratives of twentieth-century combat, the new imagery of war and resistance, of insurgency and counter-insurgency is crystallized here in a new symbolic iteration of the body at risk.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the suicide terrorist as the 'dark opposite, the gory doppelganger of the safe, bodiless soldier', and emphasize the contradiction the suicide bomber poses to the strategy of bodiless war: 'Just when the body seems to have disappeared from the battlefield, it comes back in all its gruesome, tragic reality' (2005: 45). What I would like to emphasize in pairing these two films is the uncanny mirroring, the doubling of one combatant by the other, their close entanglement. In the suicide terrorist of *Paradise Now* and the armoured, shielded soldier of *The Hurt Locker*, the antithetical faces of contemporary war can be discerned, a dualism powerfully expressed in the climactic scene of *The Hurt Locker* when the 'human bomb' and the bomb squad leader embrace one other. Clothed in a suicide vest, the body of the human bomb represents the dark dream of an imagined nation formed only in the act of sacrifice, conjured into existence only through an act of violent and spectacular death. The armoured body of the main character in *The Hurt Locker*, by contrast, can be read as the representation of a nation traumatized by conflict, nearly immobilized by the desire to wage a war in

which 'no soldier is lost'. The opposing perspectives of these two films, very different in terms of visual style and mode of address, together provide a kind of split-screen depiction of the subjective landscape of modern war.

THE BODY AS A WEAPON

Paradise Now follows the last three days in the life of a suicide bomber in the West Bank, depicting the transformation of the main character, a shy young man living under the shadow of a complicated family history, into a ritualized sacrificial subject, an imagined agent of national redemption. The film offers a nuanced treatment of what is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the shifting character of war in the present: the use of the body as a weapon. In recent years, suicide as a tactic of war has become the emblematic and most terrifying weapon of contemporary geopolitical conflict, confirming the horrifying potency of the body in the theatre of combat. At a point when technology had seemed ubiquitous and overwhelming, the power of bodies in war has suddenly returned in the form of an agency whose traumatizing impact reverberates throughout the contemporary world. Understood by theorists such as Machiavelli and Clausewitz as the most important weapon of war, the body of the committed partisan seems to have freakishly metamorphosed into the figure of the 'human bomb' in some sectors, a figure who is celebrated – like the partisans of the past – in areas of the society in which he or she lived, and demonized in the cultures under attack.

Although the extensive literature on the symbolism of martyrdom, sacrifice and the human bomb in contemporary Palestine cannot be summarized here, the scholarly works on the subject describe a complex sociological phenomenon in which religious, political, and military ideas and purposes are combined in an act of spectacular violence. What emerges as central in these readings is that the act is deeply embedded in society. As Ivan Strenski writes,

> While these deaths seem to be calculated, utilitarian acts of individuals […] they are motivated by a vengeance marked by a strong desire for 'spectacular revenge'. They are thus exemplary signs that are intended for certain audiences […] Their success seems necessarily to rely upon the kind of communal recognition and subsequent ritual celebration of the operations by the community from which the bomber comes.
>
> (2003: 7)

Another writer discusses the shattered body of the human bomber being resurrected and reincarnated, restored to animate existence in the martyr videos and funerary celebrations that follow (Morag 2008). The spectacular violence of the human bomber may thus be seen as a kind of performance of the national imagination. Laden with explosives, the human bomber will be blown to pieces, thus reproducing the image of a land that has been divided by the settlements into fragments, each with a different status. As Farhad Khosrokhavar writes, 'Although his body will be shattered into thousands of pieces, his martyrdom will make it intact as is the idealized Palestine in his mind' (2005: 135). 'Our bodies', as the main character Said states, 'are all we have left'.

Opening with shots of a young woman crossing into Nablus, *Paradise Now* renders the entry into the West Bank explicitly as a transit into a war zone. Required to pass through a roadside checkpoint, she is immediately confronted by a checkpoint guard who asserts control of her possessions,

intimidating and dominating her with his gaze and manner, silently threatening, a tone that is reinforced by the automatic rifle trained on her body. Without voice-over, explanatory titles or embedded media to provide context, the film opens on a world defined by tension.

As the film unfolds, the scenic construction of the daily milieu is emphasized. Said, the main character, and his friend Khaled lead ordinary lives of semi-skilled labour at a car repair shop, a life defined by quotidian regularity – work, glasses of tea, family dinners and the occasional provocation in the form of reminders that Said's father was executed as an Israeli collaborator, and that there is no work or prospects for advancement beyond what they have at present. The Palestine of the film is portrayed as a nation that has been forcibly removed from history, stripped of a sense of its place in the movement of nations, intentionally cut off and moved back in time. The buzzing confusion of war is here reduced to the low hum of the occupied territory, with all the tension that this condition implies. Rather than the spectacle of confrontation in a contested space, a trope that had been a defining feature in war films for a century, *Paradise Now* focuses on the inner feedback loop, the daily experience of shame and the way it forecloses a positive connection both to the historical past and to the possibility of a future.

The film's close dramatization of the psychology of martyrdom embeds the act of becoming a human bomb in a community and a history, but at the same time it underscores the isolation of the human bomber, and suggests the ambiguous status of acts of human bombing in the Palestinian community. Suha, the daughter of a famous Palestinian revolutionary and martyr, argues with Said against the practice of human bombing, opposing it on both practical and theological grounds. On the other side of the argument, the leader of the Palestinian terrorist group that recruits Said and his friend Khaled quietly and effectively plays on the frustration and emotional vulnerability of the two young men, seeming to offer an antidote to the sense of impotence that defines life in the Palestinian territories. Understood in its traditional sense as a means of bearing witness to a cause, as a form of testimony, martyrdom is combined here with a set of inflections particular to the Palestinian situation to create an embodied form of violence that is ceremonial and abject, communal and destructive of community.

In the videotaping of the martyr speeches by Said and Khaled and the ritual that surrounds it, *Paradise Now* articulates themes of war as embodied performance, depicting the transformation of the characters into agents of an imagined national redemption. Combining the disparate iconographies of political revolution and religious sacrifice, the martyr ritual in *Paradise Now* centres on the body, mapping it onto different symbolic systems, transforming it into a figural expression of the history and imagined community of Palestine. As K. M. Fierke writes,

> The ritual surrounding the act, from videotapes recording a last will and testament, to headbands and banners, are symbols of the empowered individual making a free choice to self-sacrifice for the cause […] these rituals turn the act into *performative* traditions and *redemptive* actions through which the faithful express their devotion.
>
> (2009: 168)

With an automatic rifle propped against his hip, wrapped in a Palestinian headscarf, Khaled reads a carefully scripted history of injustices committed by

the Israeli state. Finishing with a dramatic flourish, and invoking God's bless-
ing, he asks the cameraman and his assembled audience if his well-crafted
performance was satisfactory. Yes, he is told. But he will have to do it again.
The camera for some reason did not record.

Despite the break in form, the martyr speech conveys a chilling serious-
ness. Khaled and Said are portrayed wielding rifles, dressed in fatigues, and
wearing ammo belts and headbands, as the camera, framing in a frontal,
centred shot, slowly tracks in to close-up. Here, in striking contrast with the
concealment and 'passing' that is critical to the success of the human bomber,
who must blend in with the social scene he is targeting and pass anonymously
within the target society, the visibility of the performance is emphasized.
Although the human bomber will be clothed in innocuous garb during the
mission, and his or her weapon will be hidden from view, the video celebrates
and even exaggerates the visibility of the threat. The almost atavistic image of
the resistance fighter presented here recalls Jean Baudrillard's description of
the terror attack – the terrorist suicide, he writes, is personal, carried out in
broad daylight:

> everything resides in the defiance and the duel, in a dual, personal rela-
> tionship with the adverse power. Since it is the one that humiliates, it is
> the one that must be humiliated – and not simply exterminated. It must
> be made to lose face [...] The other must be targeted and hurt in the full
> light of the adversarial struggle.
>
> (2002: 412)

Baudrillard emphasizes the actions of the human bomber as a kind of secular
combat in open, contested space. But the religious meaning of sacrifice is also
important here. In the martyr rituals, the bodies of the characters are trans-
formed from what Gilles Deleuze calls the quotidian body into the ceremonial
body (1986). Along with the filming and the narrating of the martyr speech,
the film details the careful washing of the characters' bodies, the shaving and
the close haircut – all rendered in a slow montage accompanied by the sound
of prayers. Accenting the ceremonial transformation of the body, a ritual puri-
fication of the self dominates this sequence. The closing shot of this sequence
reinforces this idea. Depicting the two lead characters dressed in dark, formal
suits seated at a long table filled with food, the framing of the shot and the
seating arrangement directly recall Leonardo's *The Last Supper*.[1] The connota-
tions of sacrifice and the body are emphasized in a way that is simultaneously
religious, national and cross-cultural. As Strenski writes, 'If in Israel/Palestine
one goal of these deaths is to attack others outright in *jihad*, then another,
simultaneous one, is to create a Palestinian political entity by making a *sacrifi-
cial* offering to Allah and the *umma*' (2003: 4; emphasis in original). The ritual
transformation of the body in *Paradise Now* coalesces around the idea of sacri-
fice, underlined by the iconic imagery of *The Last Supper.*

The martyr ritual is also, however, closely entangled with the subjectiv-
ity and personal history of the individual characters. In preparing for martyr-
dom, the main characters of *Paradise Now*, Said and Khaled, seem to illustrate
the way the violence of the martyr is understood as a purification of the self.
Said is recruited, and remains committed to this role, partly because his father
was accused of being a collaborator with the Israelis, and was executed by the
leaders of the first Intifada; Said's act of self-sacrifice is thus directed inter-
nally as well as externally. Balancing its depiction of martyrdom by showing

the characters shuttling between moments of lucid self-understanding and a kind of traumatized acting-out, the film underscores how the 'grammars of violence' that criss-cross the occupied territories – the violence of the Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint, the raids and shelling that seem to take place daily, the jihadi revenge celebrated in the martyr videos and posters, and the internal violence against their own people by the leaders of the Intifada – culminate in violence against the self (McDonald 2012). In the violence of self-sacrifice, against one's own body, the enemy is perceived not simply as existing outside but also 'inside', internally, in a body that must be purified. As one writer explains, an internalized loss of dignity is here transformed through religion into a sense of sin, with martyrdom serving as a chance for redemption. 'Death allows martyrs to recover their spiritual virginity, to wash away their sins […] a beatifying death releases them from their everyday humiliation' (Khosrokhavar 2005: 133). The martyr video thus also serves as a way of mediating between the personal lives of the character and the larger, imagined community of Palestine.

The ritual ablutions and prayers depicted in this scene serve to initiate the body into its liminal status as 'already dead', as the characters will live their remaining hours post-mortem, becoming 'living martyrs' (Khosrokhavar 2005: 134). Once the suicide vest is locked into place, Said, the main character, takes on an explicitly spectral quality. Wandering around Nablus after the plan has broken down, dressed in his dark suit with the explosive vest locked onto his body, he returns to his mother's house, haunting the places and neighborhoods that were his native turf a few hours before. Looking for his friend Khaled who is searching for him as well, and searching for the leaders of the resistance who have melted back into the population, Said cannot remove the vest, and yet cannot bring himself to commit to the act. He begins to think he is physically locked into a certain destiny. 'If they take on the role of oppressor and victim, then I have no choice but to become a victim. And a murderer as well', he says while looking into a mirror. Lying on his father's grave, riding in his friend Suha's car, walking like a spectre among playing children, it is as if he had become *unheimlich*, already dead. Sweating profusely and acutely aware that he is now a menace to his own village, Said finally decides to take up with his own body an agenda that has increasingly become an isolated act, removed from the community sanction that seemed to authorize it, antagonistic, in some ways, to his original motives. What had started as a collective quest, an aggressive assertion of collective will, a push into history, concludes in solitude, as Said is portrayed in an extreme, isolating close-up, the camera closing in to reveal only the character's eyes as he makes his decision whether or not to consummate the act.

WAR AS A MEDIUM OF EXPERIENCE

The Hurt Locker foregrounds the body in an equally explicit manner. Encasing its protagonist in a 100-pound Kevlar 'bomb suit', the film isolates the main character, Sergeant William James, as dramatically as the suicide vest isolates the human bomb in *Paradise Now*. Opposites or antitheses of each other, the suicide bomber and the leader of the bomb deactivation squad both bring into focus the problem of bodies in war, their destructive potency and their vulnerability. By underscoring the body at risk, *The Hurt Locker* also presents an implicit critique of the distance – moral and physical – of remote targeting and weaponry. The reality of war as embodied activity and embodied violence asserts itself here in a visceral way.

Beginning with an epigraph from the author Chris Hedges, 'The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug', from his book, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (Hedges 2002: 2–3), *The Hurt Locker* immediately conveys a picture of war that would have been unimaginable in the war films of the twentieth century. Framing combat as an addictive pleasure, an ongoing, private and collective need, the film departs radically from genre convention, disdaining the formulas of older war films – the pathos formulas of sacrifice and loss – for a mode of address that emphasizes the adrenalized experience of risk. Although traces of this theme can be found in films such as *Patton* (Schaffner 1970) and *Apocalypse Now*, *The Hurt Locker* foregrounds the idea of private experience and pleasure in war, rendering war as a somatic engagement that takes place outside any larger meta-narrative of nation or history. While the irregular fighter of the Palestinian insurgency, embodied in the character of Said in *Paradise Now*, can be partially mapped as the flawed protagonist of history, a distorted emblem of frustrated national emergence, the figure of the combat soldier here is divorced from any national or social meta-narrative. Instead, a mood of pure visceral excitement prevails: in the figure of Sergeant William James the anxiety of entering a no-man's-land of risk is matched by the exhilaration of locating the hidden triggers, finding the secret connections, living life in a threshold state where discovery and revelation are instantly counterpointed by the threat of annihilation. Foregrounding the importance of private experience and pleasure in war, the almost erotic charge of defusing the bombs, the film underlines the 'meaning' that war gives as a form of intense bodily excitement, personalized, in which the palpable experience of risk, of the body at risk, is necessarily separated from any kind of larger national narrative. As one writer describes it, 'The kind of combatant who dominates nearly all the new wars would have had no place in those that shaped the course of European history in the 18th to 20th centuries' (Munkler 2004: 12).

This theme of war as an 'embodied medium of imagination and experience', as one writer puts it, is powerfully expressed in the opening sequence (McDonald 2012). Without preamble, scene setting, or narrative exposition *The Hurt Locker* plunges us directly into a chaotic street scene in Iraq, with none of the connective shots and narrative backstory that would typically bind the protagonists to a social world. The abrupt, *in medias res* opening confronts the spectator with an overpowering sense of spatial disorientation. In contrast to the traditional war film, where the cartography of the battlefield is defined from the outset with panoramic long shots and aerial overviews – a mapping operation that can be read as the cinematic analogue to the act of taking control of a geographic space (Conley 2007) – *The Hurt Locker* opens suddenly on an urban setting in which the streets have been turned into minefields and the markets into snipers' nests, visualizing through a fast, fragmented montage an experience of war no longer defined by fronts or sectors, a war in which improvised bombs and irregular combatants are concealed in the folds and textures of urban life.

Here, sense impressions dominate – the amplified heartbeat, the quickened breathing, the labour of motion. Along with the sonic layering of the sounds of the city and the shouts of the soldiers, the optics of multiple cameras translate the kinaesthetic impressions of combat into powerful contrasts of speed and delay, movement and pause. The film opens with a tracking shot taken from a camera mounted on a remote controlled robot. The sound of a heartbeat is heard on the soundtrack, along with the frantic noise of a Baghdad neighbourhood

being cleared of people – the shouted commands, the bark of megaphones, a jet screaming overhead – the first images and sounds of the film picture the scene of war as near pandemonium juxtaposed with cool, rational efficiency. The doubled, contradictory signals of panic and control create an extraordinarily intense sequence: images taken from the robot viewfinder are accompanied by the high-pitched whir of automated equipment, a reassuringly high-tech sound that is overlaid with the sound of a tachycardic heartbeat that grows in intensity as the scene progresses. The rapid montage and omnidirectional shot design functions here as a kind of enhanced 'logistics of perception', to borrow a phrase from Paul Virilio (1989), serving as a metaphor or index for the new modes of technologized war in the contemporary battle space.

As the scene advances, however, the montage of different shot sizes, angles and speeds begins to acquire a different overtone, a counterpoint conveyed by the ominously slow movements of the leader of the bomb squad, Thompson, as he approaches a concealed bomb. Encased in the Kevlar bomb suit, his movements are dreamlike, ponderous, distending the action in a way that is reminiscent of Eisenstein's (1925) contrapuntal speeds in the Odessa Steps sequence. Immersing the spectator in the heightened sensory experience of a space that contains threats from every direction – from above ground and below, from near and far – the soundtrack and frenetic cutting style of the film emphasize the vulnerability of Thompson's body, a vulnerability that is exaggerated by the suit of armour. Thompson's laboured breathing, the physical effort of moving, the sensation of paralyzing weight, form a striking contrast with the speed and fluency of the camera work. The sequence culminates in a sudden, slow motion eruption of earth, as the bomb detonates, lifting Thompson, Kevlar suit and all, and flinging his body towards the camera.

In the slow motion rendering of Thompson's death, his visor smeared and covered in blood, we are reminded that the war film is fundamentally a machine for emotions; the visceral experience of excitement, risk and dread that dominate the opening are converted in the final shot of the sequence into an expression of loss, with the body of the soldier falling in slow motion nearly into the space of the spectator. Here, the affective power of the war film comes clearly into view. Although the face of Thompson is screened from view, concealed by the blood-covered visor, the pose of the body as it is driven towards the camera, arms outstretched, the low, intimate camera angle, and the silence convey a powerful sense of pathos.

Hermann Kappelhoff and Elizabeth Bronfen have both identified certain scenes and figures in the war film as 'pathos formulas': recurrent scenes and shots that are used to orchestrate memory and emotion. Kappelhoff defines the 'shell-shocked face' – the frozen moment of traumatic awareness rendered in close-up – as the fundamental formula for pathos in the American war film, a device for registering and communicating an intensive affective experience of loss and fear, emotions that are transmitted to the spectator and experienced almost ritualistically in the repeated iterations of the war film genre (Kappelhoff 2011). Bronfen, for her part, extends her analysis of pathos in the genre to a larger consideration of combat representation, finding that the war film is a privileged vehicle for the articulation of collective memories of loss and sacrifice that may no longer persist in living memory but are nonetheless retained in the artefacts of culture, in particular, in the mass mediated forms of popular film. As a genre of re-enactment, she argues, the war film derives its emotional power from the phantom return of a repressed bad history, called up and revivified in the pathos formulas of the genre (Bronfen 2012).

In my view, *The Hurt Locker* defamiliarizes the pathos formulas of the war film while retaining something of their general outline. Alongside its well-known sequences of expressive somatic excitement, a number of scenes convey a powerful sense of pathos, an affective quality that has been relegated to the background in the criticism of the film. In the long decrescendo that follows Thompson's death, for example, *The Hurt Locker* reminds us that 'history is what hurts'. The quiet, sombre setting of this scene, with its rows of boxes containing the remains of soldiers killed in Iraq awaiting shipment back to the States, communicates a deep, understated sadness. Sanborn, the sole mourner here, places Thompson's dogtags in a white box, and spends a few silent moments in farewell. The traditional graveside vigil over a fallen comrade, exemplified in films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* (Malick 1998), is here reduced to a minimum. Nearly silent, bathed in fluorescent light, profoundly lonely, the scene evokes the history of the war film in a way that touches on the status of the body in contemporary western war. The invisible allied dead of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, seldom photographed and almost never publically acknowledged, marks a sharp point of contrast with the cult of the martyr that has developed around the suicide bombers and irregular fighters of the insurgencies in contemporary conflict regions. It also, however, marks a major departure from the history of western war representation, in which the dead have often had a prominent symbolic and physical presence. In Iraq and Afghanistan war representation the invisible dead have yet to be symbolically represented, and seem to have no place in cultural rememoration.

GRAMMARS OF VIOLENCE

As the film progresses, its intensive focus on the body at risk as a medium of experience begins to accumulate a kind of latent charge, an affective afterlife suggested in the tone and imagery of many sequences. Although the spectacular and harrowing combat scenes of previous war films – the night patrol and the trenches, the bombardment and the assault, the mass choreography of battle and the gruesome intensity of individual combat – are missing, the film nevertheless defines the drama of the body at risk in a way that reinforces the traumatic cultural history embedded in the genre. The film's almost anthropological interest in violence as a form of embodied experience and imagination begins to read as a traumatic acting-out. The power of war to force meaning from embodied experience finally seems to evoke not just experiential excitement, but rather the search for extremes, as if this might provide an opening to a new imagining of war. In the imagery of the living body encased in Kevlar armour, the corpse turned into a bomb, and the liminal body locked into a suicide vest, we view a new cinematic iteration of what Kevin McDonald calls the 'grammars of violence' that define the war film genre (McDonald 2012).[2]

The search for extremes is embodied in the character of William James. Remote and solitary, the character seems to have severed most of the characteristics that would ordinarily serve to connect the prosaic world of the spectator to this new scene of war. Joining the IED team as its new leader after the death of Thompson, James isolates himself from any genuine human interaction in a way that recalls Hedges' epigraph, 'War is a drug' (Hedges 2002: 2–3). Although several commentators have compared James to Willard in *Apocalypse Now*, the differences between the two characters are even more striking. Willard is an observer of the action, quietly watching and commenting as the events of the plot unfold, continuously grafting us into his thoughts

2. The concept of 'grammars of violence', as Kevin McDonald helpfully suggests, can be extended from its conventional understanding as a kind of subjective script that determines behaviour in violent confrontations, a set of assigned roles and parts dictated by 'grammatical' rules of violent encounters, to encompass a mode of experience, a way of defining the self in relation to others. Although McDonald's discussion centres on terrorism and jihadi videos in the United Kingdom rather than the war film, his approach to violence as a medium of experience has been helpful in formulating this article.

and memories. James, by contrast, is defined not by interior monologue or psychologically expressive close-ups, but by the actions he performs alone. The mementoes he keeps in a box beneath his bunk are not pictures or keep-sakes of his son or wife, but rather consist of the triggers of the bombs he has dismantled, 'the things that nearly killed me'. Radical in his approach to dismantling bombs, James emblematizes the idea of war as an embodied medium of experience, marking a kind of extreme in the portrayal of the body at risk. Disdaining the use of the 'bot, removing the Kevlar helmet at the first opportunity, and disappearing behind a smoke screen in order to conduct his work alone, James seems to be seeking out a kind of threshold or border. Where Willard in *Apocalypse Now* is defined by Kurtz as a 'grocery clerk, come to collect the bill', James seems driven mainly by the private pleasure of excite-ment and fear, of living in a threshold state.

James encounters this border experience, this threshold state, in the film's first 'body bomb' sequence, where the body as a weapon takes on an explic-itly melodramatic and horrific turn: the social face of war here returns in the form of atrocity and exaggerated villainy. The film's extreme manipulation of emotion in this scene evokes the pathos formulas of the past, but pushes them into the emotional range usually reserved for horror, as the shell-shocked face of the sacrificial soldier of older war films is here replaced by the face of an innocent child. Arousing a sense of outrage and denunciation, the scene seems close to the emotional hyperbole of grand guignol, exploitative in its unrelenting depiction of body horror in the context of war. As the scene unfolds, however, the destruction and horror of war comes clearly into view, its barbarity is exposed, with all its dark allure subtracted. As with other key moments in the film, the sequence centres on the complex emotions and meanings associated with the body in war.

The body of the teenage Iraqi boy who called himself 'Beckham' is discov-ered by the EOD team lying on a table, covered in blood, with his abdomen sliced open and a bomb planted inside. 'Ever seen a body bomb before?', Sanborn asks Eldridge, the youngest and most skittish member of the team. Here, the destructiveness of war is condensed into a figure of atrocity with a difference: the victim is now also a weapon; the victim of terror has become the medium of terror, the body turned into a bomb. The scene reaches a height-ened quality of visceral intensity as James decides to dismantle the bomb inside Beckham's abdomen, an act that puts into a single frame the imagery of bomb defusing, with its wires, leads and secret triggers, and the imagery of surgery, the manipulation of organs, vessels and flesh. James' delicate and intricate work, his skill with his hands, takes on a new meaning, as the almost tender act of working on Beckham's body brings into relief the somatic focus of the war film, its concentrated body imagery, and its baseline of visceral experience. Filmed in extreme close-up, the sound track dominated by James' breathing and the buzzing of the occasional fly, the sequence culminates in James lifting the explosive from Beckham's chest cavity. He then wraps the body in a white sheet, and carries it from the building.

James' rescue of Beckham's body can easily be read as pathological, and the scene itself as an ideologically loaded manipulation of audience emotion, depict-ing grotesque body trauma in order to make a flagrant political point about the villainy of the insurgency in Iraq. From this angle, the film appears to revert to the propagandistic stereotypes of an earlier period, rendering an act of diabolical cruelty in a way that arouses an intense and highly directed emotional response. The ambiguity in the form of the sequence, however, the slowed tempo and

focused imagery, the nearly silent soundtrack, suggest another reading. In the doubled meaning of the body of Beckham – the victim of terror become a weapon of terror – the film creates a metaphor for war, its pointlessness and barbarism and its self-reinforcing nature. The cycle of violence that war engenders and promotes is crystallized here in the body of Beckham, a scene that is as distant from the dream of 'bodiless war' as can be imagined. In ironic contrast to the epigraph that begins the film, 'War is a force that gives us meaning', the sequence refocuses to draw a different lesson, expressing in Beckham's face a stark reminder of the barbarism of war, its pointlessness and futility.

This scene constitutes a pivotal point in the film, as the accretion of violence and threat pushes James into a series of scenes that suggest a traumatic acting-out. Seeking retribution for Beckham's death, James pursues phantom villains through night-time streets, breaks into Iraqi homes and later shoots his own team member, Eldridge, in a misguided pursuit through the shadowy alleyways of a labyrinthine night town. In these powerful and nightmarish scenes, the city seems to swarm with threats: every glance, every pedestrian, conveys a sense of menace. Acting on impulse, locked into the cycle of violence, James nearly shoots an Iraqi professor and his wife. Here the after-charge of violence without meaning, of murder without cause, drive the character along a downward spiral that begins to resemble a death wish, as the character takes on a kind of willed abjection.

In the culminating sequence of the film, James confronts a suicide bomber, locked into a vest. And here the two films I have discussed in this article seem to come face to face with each other. Dressed in a dark suit like the suicide bomber in *Paradise Now*, the Iraqi suicide bomber and the leader of the bomb squad are literally rendered as doppelgangers, a point that emerges in the *mise-en-scène* and in the dialogue, like the coded representations of a dream. At the level of the scene's manifest content, the Iraqi man is pictured as a victim, pleading to have the vest removed: 'He is a family man, he is a good man', the Iraqi interpreter keeps repeating. At the level of the scene's latent content, another message comes into view. 'This is suicide, man!' Sanborn protests, and James replies, 'That's why they call it a suicide bomb, right?'

The scripts the characters enact, the grammars of violence that define the roles in the new contourless wars of the twenty-first century, are crystallized in this exchange. In the film's articulation of the death wish that imbues the addictive cycles of war, *The Hurt Locker* conveys a message that may be entirely accidental, a product of its unconscious, as it were. Nevertheless, in the locked embrace of the two figures in this scene, the film articulates something close to the historical imaginary of the present period. And although I am sensitive to the reminder provided by Hardt and Negri that we should never view 'the wars of the oppressor as the same as the wars of the oppressed' (2005: 90) the two films, *Paradise Now* and *The Hurt Locker*, with their emphasis on embodied perception, provide a striking iteration of the cultural imaginary of war in the early twenty-first century.

REFERENCES

Abu-Assad, Hany (2005), *Paradise Now*, Occupied Palestinian Territory: Augustus Film.

Annakin, Ken (1962), *The Longest Day*, USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Badiou, Alain (2007), *The Century* (trans. Alberto Toscano), Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baudrillard, Jean (2002), 'L'Esprit du Terrorism'/'The Spirit of Terrorism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101: 2, pp. 403–15.

Bigelow, Kathryn (2008), *The Hurt Locker*, USA: Voltage Pictures.

Bronfen, Elizabeth (2012), *Specters of War: Hollywood's Engagement With Military Conflict*, Chapel Hill, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Conley, Tom (2007), *Cartographic Cinema*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Coppola, Francis Ford (1979), *Apocalypse Now*, USA: Zoetrope Studios.

Deleuze, Gilles (1986), *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Eastwood, Clint (2006), *Letters from Iwo Jima*, USA: Dreamworks.

Eisenstein, Sergei (1925), *The Battleship Potemkin*, Moscow: Mosfilm.

Fierke, K. M. (2009), 'Agents of death: The structural logic of suicide terrorism and martyrdom', *International Theory*, 1: 1, pp. 155–84.

Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio (2005), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, London and New York: Penguin Books.

Hedges, Christopher Lynn (2002), *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, New York: Public Affairs.

Jameson, Fredric (2009), 'War and representation', *PMLA*, 124: 5, pp. 1532–47.

Kappelhoff, Hermann (2011), 'For love of country: World War II in hollywood cinema at the turn of the century', unpublished manuscript.

Khosrokhavar, Fahrad (2005), *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.

Luttwak, Edward N. (2002), *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Malick, Terrence (1998), *The Thin Red Line*, USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

McDonald, Kevin (forthcoming 2012), 'Grammars of violence, modes of embodiment and frontiers of the subject', in K. McSorley (ed.), *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience*, London: Routledge.

Morag, Raya (2008), 'The living body and the corpse – Israeli documentary cinema and the *Intifadah*', *Journal of Film and Video*, 60: 3/4, pp. 3–24.

Munkler, Herfried (2004), *The New Wars*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Schaffner, Franklin J. (1970), *Patton*, USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

Spielberg, Steven (1998), *Saving Private Ryan*, USA: Amblin Entertainment.

Stewart, Garrett (2009), 'Digital fatigue: Imaging war in recent American film', *Film Quarterly*, 62: 4, pp. 45–55.

Strenski, Ivan (2003), 'Sacrifice, gift and the social logic of Muslim "human bombers"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15: 3, pp. 1–34.

Virilio, Paul (1989), *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, London: Verso.

SUGGESTED CITATION

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Robert Burgoyne is Professor of Film Studies at the University of St Andrews. He is currently researching and writing on the war film as a 'body genre'. His recent books include *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*

(rev. ed., University of Minnesota Press, 2010); *The Epic Film in World Culture* (ed.) (Routledge, 2010); and *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

Contact: Department of Film Studies, University of St Andrews, 99 North Street, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9AD, Scotland, UK.
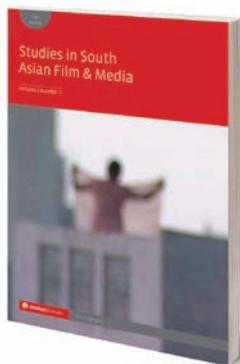E-mail: robert.burgoyne0@gmail.com

Studies in South Asian Film & Media

Call For Papers

Special Issue

Indian Theatre Special Issue:

The Body
Guest-Editor: Sreenath Nair
Studies in South Asian Film and Media; Spring 2013.

A rare collection of essays on interdisciplinary scholarship and trans-national performance research.

The body is central to Indian discourse and practice. From religion through philosophy, aesthetics, martial arts, medicine and performance practice, Indian knowledge is about the knowledge of the body. Indian systems of knowledge give great emphasis to the objective and corporeal aspects of physical techniques, training and performance practice. Similarly, the body is understood equally as a site of 'symbolic appearance' in everyday life as well as in performance practice, where the presence of the body is marked by the absent 'real'. The consumption of the body as a symbolic appearance is deeply embedded in Indian thought and performance practice: In the religio-spiritual traditions, the body is a means of attaining enlightenment; in the *Natyasastra* it is an illusory mechanism for the actor's symbolic appearance and allows the audience to access *rasa*, the aesthetic experience of performance; in medicine, the body is the site of pleasure, and sickness and disease are hindrances to the pleasures experienced by the bodily organism. The body is always about practice and the practice is the only way to access the body. The practice provides techniques and principles that are objects of symbolic exchange in performance. In this way, the performer's body is a site of techniques and corporeal principles that generates and reorganizes the artistic (symbolic) practice. Training is a bodily involvement of practice, and a process of inscribing the 'illusory' drive' in the performer's body. Training is a pre-performative process, which formulates the 'expressive order' of the body, and stimulates and prepares it for the performance. The body is the only medium to access the body. Practice helps the very functioning of the corporeal logic and the perceptual demand of the body in performance.

The special issue aims to explore the Indian concepts and practice of the body in a range of theoretical, practical, transcultural and historical contexts within the fields and disciplines of aesthetics, philosophy, dance/choreography and performing arts. The issue will also look at how recent theoretical developments in critical, cultural and race theories will offer a better understanding of the Indian material on the body. Bodily representations in contemporary media, design, digital and performance art will also provide key interests .

The special issue presents a range of scholarly essays on Indian aesthetics, intercultural theatre and contemporary performance research from eminent and young scholars in the UK, USA and India.

Editors
Jyotsna Kapur
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
jkapur@siu.edu

Alka Kurian
University of Washington, Bothell
aaj.safm@gmail.com

Aarti Wani
Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune, India
aartiwani@yahoo.com