Terrified Men, Monstrous Masculinities:
Representing & Recuperating American Masculinities in
Contemporary Hollywood ‘Terror Threat’ Films

Submitted for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Glen Donnar

School of Media and Communication,
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

April 2013
For Dan, For Packie
Candidate Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

This thesis explores how masculinities are represented and recuperated in Hollywood ‘terror threat’ narrative films from 2005-2010, films directly and indirectly addressing 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. It aims to examine cinematic attempts to restore, redeem and ‘remasculinise’ threatened or ‘in crisis’ masculinities in post-9/11 Hollywood genre films, specifically in relation to experiences of and responses to terror. The thesis concentrates on four key films, *World Trade Center* (Stone, 2006), a post-9/11 disaster film with elements of melodrama and the ‘mine accident’ film, *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008), a SF-horror ‘discovered footage’ cum ‘monster movie’, *I Am Legend* (Lawrence, 2007), a post-apocalyptic SF film (with horror elements, including in relation to zombies and vampires), and *The Kingdom* (Berg, 2008), an action-thriller also analysed as a ‘frontier western’. This cross-generic focus facilitates the analysis of contemporary cinematic difficulties recuperating and redeeming masculinities following the violent incursion of the ‘terror-Other’. The thesis finds the ‘terror threat’ films trouble scholarly assumptions on the tendency (or capacity) of Hollywood to redeem and recuperate conventional masculinities, specifically in relation to – or at the expense of – maligned females and ‘terror-Others’. In contrast to dominant critical perspectives, this study demonstrates the uncertainty, ambivalence and incoherence of ‘remasculinisation’ or masculine redemption. Ultimately, this study of ‘terror threat’ films highlights persistent anxieties, unstable identity constructions, uncertain performances of masculinity, ambivalent redemptions and recuperation, and even masculine monstrosity in the encounter with terror.
# Table of Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** 4  
**ABSTRACT** 5  
**TABLE OF FIGURES** 7  
**INTRODUCTION** 8  
**HOLLYWOOD GENRE, MASCULINITY & 9/11** 8  
**RESEARCH QUESTION** 12  
**DESIGN OF THE STUDY** 17  
**AMERICAN ‘CRISES’, MASCULINITIES & HOLLYWOOD** 23  
**CONSTRUCTING & CONTAINING 9/11 & THE ‘WAR ON TERROR’: HOLLYWOOD, GENRE & GENDER** 35  
**‘REMASCULINISING’ AMERICA: HOLLYWOOD, A ‘WAR’ ON TERROR, WOMEN & ‘OTHERS’** 43  

**CHAPTER ONE – WORLD TRADE CENTER** 59  
“SHIELDING US FROM WHAT WE ARE NOT YET READY TO SEE”: THE UNIFORMED ‘HERO’ AS VICTIM, SURVIVOR & FATHER 59  

**CHAPTER TWO – CLOVERFIELD** 111  
“THERE’S NOWHERE TO GO”: LIMITED EVERYMEN & THE UNKNOWABLE MONSTER, ‘AMERICA’S OWN MONSTERS’ 111  

**CHAPTER THREE – I AM LEGEND** 164  
“I CAN STILL FIX THIS”: REMASCUINISING ‘PROTECTIVE’ MASCULINITY & BECOMING A MONSTROUS SAVIOUR 164  

**CHAPTER FOUR – THE KINGDOM** 219  
“A VARIATION ON VENGEANCE”: THE AMBIVALENCE OF REVENGE IN A ‘WAR ON TERROR’ ‘WESTERN’ 219  

**CONCLUSION** 274  

**FILMOGRAPHY** 280  

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 287
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.2</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.3</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.4</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.5</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.6</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.7</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.8</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.9</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.10</td>
<td>106</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.11</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.12</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.1</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.2</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.3</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.4</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.5</td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>FIGURE 2.6</td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>FIGURE 2.7</td>
<td>138</td>
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<td>FIGURE 2.8</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.9</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.10</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.11</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.12</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.1</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.2</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.3</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.4</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.5</td>
<td>184</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.6</td>
<td>194</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.7</td>
<td>203</td>
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<td>FIGURE 3.8</td>
<td>203</td>
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<td>FIGURE 3.9</td>
<td>203</td>
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<td>206</td>
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<td>FIGURE 3.11</td>
<td>206</td>
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<td>FIGURE 3.12</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.13</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.14</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.1</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.2</td>
<td>224</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.3</td>
<td>224</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.4</td>
<td>236</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.5</td>
<td>242</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.6</td>
<td>242</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.7</td>
<td>242</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.8</td>
<td>255</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.9</td>
<td>255</td>
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<td>255</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.11</td>
<td>256</td>
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<td>FIGURE 4.12</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Hollywood Genre, Masculinity & 9/11

The films examined in this thesis were produced during a period (2005-2010) encompassing the second term of the Bush Administration in the latter half of the 2000s following the attacks on the United States of America (hereafter America) of 11 September 2001. During this time, wars loosely housed within a wider ‘war on terror’ continue in Afghanistan and Iraq. Kathryn Bigelow’s *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), released at the time of finalising this thesis, outwardly represents the cultural culmination of a period of American national uncertainty. In depicting the search for and killing of Osama bin Laden, declared architect of the 9/11 attacks, in May 2011 the film seemingly marks the final, violent destruction of the threatening ‘terrorist-Other’ and the retributive redemption of America over 9/11, attacks that open the film and motivate its female CIA operative protagonist, Maya (Jessica Chastain), in her quest. Maya’s resilience and perseverance seemingly eradicates the uncertainty and underlying shame emanating from 9/11, and even perhaps annuls the sense of emasculation and ensuing declarations of national and male ‘crisis’ that followed in political and media discourse, and that were subsequently represented in popular culture, including Hollywood. However, the closer examination of the impacts of America’s decade-long encounter with terror on popular cultural representations of gender, and specifically ‘American’ masculinities, perhaps suggests otherwise, with persistent anxieties about the impact of terror on the nation seemingly unresolved at film’s end despite the annihilation of the nation’s symbolic ‘terrorist-Other’.

‘It’s Just Like a Movie!’: Mediating 9/11 & Invoking Hollywood Disaster

The first section of this introductory chapter demonstrates how multiple discourses around Hollywood genres and genre and gender codes were mobilised in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in first ‘understanding’ 9/11 and subsequently articulating the ideal or desired response. In particular, this response was militarily expressed through the ‘war on terror’ and culturally expressed in part through
Hollywood narrative film. Rather than a separate literature review, the review of critical and existing literature in this thesis is integrated throughout the introduction and succeeding chapters. This is particularly appropriate because of the thesis’s cross-disciplinarity and the cross-generic scope of the study, both of which mandate the application of multiple theoretical paradigms.

Although 9/11 was widely described as ‘unimaginable’ and ‘unprecedented’, the attacks were initially widely configured and ‘understood’ in the news media via repeated, persistent allusions to cinematic history, Hollywood genre and gender codes. More specifically, the attacks were particularly likened to Hollywood SF and disaster movies, and clearly framed in apocalyptic tones. In this respect, as Page (2011, p.305) observes, the attacks were paradoxically both “utterly incomprehensible and, at the same time, wholly recognisable”. Scholars readily noted that it was as if Hollywood disaster movies had ‘pre-mediated’ (Grusin, 2004) the attacks, had virtually fantasised, desired and imagined the wholesale destruction of key American symbols into being. Equally, famed director Robert Altman excoriated Hollywood’s ‘irresponsible’ passion for the spectacle of disaster: “The movies set the pattern, and the [perpetrators] have copied the movies” (Bell-Metereau, 2004, p.143). Witnesses similarly assimilated the attacks, commonly described as “just like a movie!”, through filmic experiences of Hollywood disaster and spectacle (Dixon, 2004; Kellner, 2009; Muntean, 2009; Rickli, 2009). As Muntean (2009, p.51) observes, this sought “to disarm the terrifyingly uncertain nature of the attacks by making them knowable through a mode of familiar, safely mediated spectacle that so often reaches a definite conclusion”. Yet 9/11 was clearly not a movie. Furthermore, it did not conform to predetermined cinematic narrative conventions such as ‘good’ defeating ‘evil’. As Rickli (2009) attests, it offered a “defective and thus unsettling reference”, which in

1 The term ‘war on terror’ changed numerous times, before being officially dropped by the Obama administration in 2009.
2 See also Kellner, 2009. The attacks were persistently framed in apocalyptic tones on TV and in newspapers, framing perhaps exacerbated by predating millennial concerns (see Wallis & Aston, 2011).
3 See Baudrillard, 2002; Žižek, 2002; Dixon, 2004; King, 2005; Cettl, 2009; Page, 2011; Overpeck, 2012.
4 Altman continues: ‘Nobody would have thought to commit an atrocity like that unless they’d seen it in a movie”. Hollywood seemingly acknowledged these criticisms in its response, readily self-censoring by pulling productions related to terrorism, digitally altering promotional materials and deleting film images depicting the Twin Towers (see Dixon, 2004, Rich, 2006, Dodds, 2008, Rickli, 2009; Briefel & Miller, 2011; Page, 2011), which effectively doubled their erasure by extending it to the digital world. Hollywood support for the Administration’s response was enlisted in meetings with Karl Rove (Bell-Metereau, 2004; Dodds, 2008) and publicly offered by the president of the Motion Picture Association of America (see Valenti, 2002).
not adhering to narrative conventions withheld catharsis. For this reason, Kendrick (2008, p.519) claims the attacks posed similar difficulties for Hollywood as the Vietnam War, an idea that will be further considered later in the thesis.

While Hollywood genre and spectacle immediately became a significant part of the public discourse about 9/11, its proposed contribution to representing the attacks caused significant consternation in America. Indeed, Jordan (2008) finds commentators and filmgoers were sceptical of Hollywood’s first forays into directly representing 9/11 on screen – World Trade Center and Paul Greengrass’ United 93 (2006) – particularly of Hollywood’s capacity to represent it accurately and authentically. While United 93’s designation as a Hollywood film is debatable – given its British director, lack of stars, and cinéma vérité aesthetic – Jordan (2008; see also Prince, 2009) observes its was typically reviewed as a Hollywood film – possibly because it addresses a recent and traumatic ‘American story’. Yet Jordan’s (2008) review of United 93’s early critical reception equally finds commentators agree that the comprehensive cultural memory of 9/11 significantly requires the ‘Hollywood treatment’ (see also Dawes, 2009). That said, many commentators denied any Hollywood film could represent 9/11 accurately, without distorting the national trauma for dramatic purposes or exploiting it for commercial profit, and those that did alleged this would be in spite, not because, of the film’s Hollywood trappings (Jordan, 2008). The dominant critical position became that in order to mediate 9/11 Hollywood seemingly needed to transcend typical approaches to the ‘imagination of disaster’. In debating American audiences’ preparedness, it seems it was not films about 9/11 that caused concern, but that Hollywood would be making them (Jordan, 2008). However, it appears to be more than this, the chief concern not so much the fear that Hollywood’s commercial imperatives (or insensitivities) would dishonour 9/11’s victims, but that cinema’s singular capacity to enlarge and make spectacular via projection would enshrine and enlarge the day’s original fear.

5 See Lewis (2006), for example. Regardless of its designation, United 93 satisfies this thesis’ designation of a ‘terror threat’ film, one in which America is targeted by terror.

6 See also Lee, 2006; Muntean, 2009; Stevens, 2006; Lewis, 2006. Commentators represented 9/11 “as a shared national experience […] about to be reframed by cinematic translation” (Jordan, 2008, p.199), implying a fixed, stable understanding of 9/11 – and one that would be irrevocably transformed by Hollywood.
The political and media rhetorical response to 9/11 was also in part framed in gendered terms, witnessing the express conflation of gender and national identity in characterising the attacks – connecting national crisis with masculine crisis. Commonly described as both emasculating and feminising, 9/11 seemingly reanimated and codified predating and persistent ideological and cultural (including cinematic) concerns about American masculinity in ‘crisis’.\(^7\) The attacks not only diagnosed or demonstrated masculine failure and inadequacy, but were blamed on others. Julie Drew’s feminist rhetorical analysis of media discourse and presidential speech in 9/11’s aftermath finds each explicitly gendered American national identity, characterising the nation as emasculated and feminised (see also Hannah, 2005; Faludi, 2008). The violation or breach of America’s borders and emasculation in the collapse of its towers, symbols of the nation’s economic might, symbolically destabilised national-masculine identity and threatened prevailing American narratives of national invulnerability.\(^8\) Again blurring the national and personal, according to Drew (2004; see also Nayak, 2006), the news media feminised victims (including images of male panic and fear at the Pentagon) to signal the nation’s ‘violation’ and rhetorically define injury and trauma as feminine and symptomatically weak. Additionally, according to Drew (2004; see also Faludi, 2008), post-9/11 media discourse asserted the attacks not only feminised the nation, but that America was already feminised, and conservative commentators directly implied that a bemoaned loss of ‘traditional’ masculinities had damaged national security (Godfrey & Hamad, 2012). In a sense, this implied America was threatened not by the attacks but as punishment for the perceived devaluing and recession of normative (read white) American masculinity.

The attacks also thus presented an opportunity for redress and for a shifting notion of ‘America’, to recuperate ‘traditional’ gender roles and codes and to cement America’s international ‘position’. Indeed Hannah’s (2005, p.551) observation of the “prominence of themes of violation and penetration” in policy pronouncements and

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\(^7\) While 9/11 was certainly not initially configured as merely an ‘American’ event, its (re)configuration in this respect, predominantly by the Bush Administration and news media commentators, ostensibly came to dominate public discourse.

\(^8\) See Baudrillard, 2002; Žižek, 2002; Smelser, 2004; Drew, 2004; Nayak, 2006 for expression of these sentiments.
media commentary perhaps signals this two-step characterisation of the attacks and the (desired) response. Consequently, not only were particular types of male performance or masculinity valorised, but there was a perceived need for the nation to ‘remasculinise’, partly through a militaristic response and partly through popular (cultural) discourse. Political and media rhetoric repeatedly advanced the necessity of ‘remasculinising’ American identity, actively invoking westerns and action genre and gender codes to advocate (desired and actual) appropriate responses. Drew (2004) argues that 9/11 seemingly mandated the immediate and ongoing (re)construction of prevailing American narratives of national identity, finding that public discursive responses asserted America “must become more masculine if it is to become less vulnerable”, moving from passive victimhood in favour of strong, punitive action (2004, p.76). In this sense, ‘remasculinisation’ required (re)militarisation; with a muscular, military response – a ‘war on terror’ – expressing, in Dodds’ (2008, p.1629) words, a renewed “sense of masculine assertiveness”. Nayak (2006, p.42) further argues the attacks initiated a “reassertion of state identity that pivots violently on gender and race” – that is, not only ‘remasculinisation’ but Othering.

**Research Question**

Popular cinema constitutes an integral part of the cultural response to moments or periods of perceived crisis, turmoil and change. This is particularly true given the prominent and persistent invocation of Hollywood, genre and spectacle in the mediation and configuration of the attacks of 9/11, the (desired) national response and the ensuing ‘war on terror’.10 Yet Susan Faludi contends in her influential polemic, *The Terror Dream* (2008), that America displaced and avoided confronting the impact of the attacks and popular film failed to explore their impact on the American psyche post-9/11.11 However, Gallagher’s (2006) assertion that numerous action films

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9 Drew (2004) argues the pervasive desire to masculinise, as well as enabling a shift to a more muscular, interventionist foreign policy, was also a response to the shame of such globally public emasculation.
10 While Lewis’s (2006, p.40) claim that film is the “only artistic medium that now seems capable of informing the national mind about the shape and meaning of events” is perhaps too strident, Dawes (2009, p.288) considers film to be “a powerful agent in the construction of cultural memory” of 9/11.
11 Indeed, the *Slate* and *New York Times* reviews of *United 93* and *World Trade Center* note that each merely “did precisely […] what other cultural representations of 9/11 have done before and since: replicate, not delve” (Faludi, 2009, p.3).
explicitly respond to 9/11 demonstrates the limits of Faludi’s focus on direct representations of 9/11. In this vein, recasting Julian Smith’s (1975, p.3) observations about Vietnam-era American cinema, I also contend that while few Hollywood films directly represent the events of and following 9/11, the effect of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ on popular film has been similarly pervasive, including in relation to the representation of ‘American’ men and masculinities in crisis. In Smith’s (1975, p.25) earlier words, 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, “went underground” in popular cinema, “surfacing in strange places, taking off its mask only briefly”. Avoidance, deflection and displacement may mark popular cinematic representations of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, yet the prominent conflation of Hollywood and gender in configuring 9/11 and diagnosing the desired national response nonetheless requires detailed examination. Therefore, this central research question was developed to examine the representation of ‘American’ masculinities in direct and indirect/allegorical popular cinematic representations of the experience of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’:

**How are masculinities represented and recuperated in Hollywood ‘terror threat’ narrative films from 2005-2010?**

It is first necessary to elucidate the selection of the thesis’ key films and define the key terms that delimit and guide the study. A specific focus on representations of ‘American’ masculinities in the encounter and experience of terror – and beyond the so-called ‘action genres’ – not only marks this study’s original contribution to the field of gender representational practices, but facilitates a cross-generic study of recent Hollywood narrative films. The challenges of a cross-generic study are certainly significant, particularly in relation to the dangers of even appearing overly schematic in covering the existing critical literature and each (sub-)genre's history, and outlining generic characteristics and functions. That said, while a single genre analysis may be more conventional – and straightforward – a cross-genre analysis can comprehensively explore wider representations of gender in Hollywood post-9/11, tracing gendered responses to terror and related threats to America and ‘American’ masculinities across and within (sub-)genres. Indeed, Carter and Dodds (2011, p.111) “argue that thinking across films” – both in relation to film cycles and film structuring, such as genre and montage – “opens up possibilities for the analysis of geopolitical cultures of films post 9/11”. Nevertheless, the wider scope of a cross-
genre analysis does necessitate delimiting the set of core films to mainstream Hollywood narrative films that, first, directly depict the experience of and encounter with ‘terror threats’ against ‘America’ and, second, were released between 2005 and 2010.12

The thesis focuses on what I define as ‘terror threat’ films to explore an under-researched area in relation to cinematic representations of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. ‘Terror threat’ films specifically represent the encounter with ‘terror-Others’, agents of terror that seemingly target victims indiscriminately, malevolently and without purpose or rationale.13 ‘Terror threat’ films also specifically represent an attack on ‘America’, that is, a terror attack on and/or ongoing terror and threat towards notions of ‘America’ as a society, nation and/or ideology (irrespective of particular geographical location). While other film choices are possible, the selected films principally represent notions of ‘terror threat’ and threats to particular conceptions of the American ‘home’ or ‘homeland’.14 Thus, the thesis explores representational practices of gender in selected films that specifically depict acts of terror and/or its ongoing threat, investigating the experience of terror both as an event and a lived state.

While the focus on ‘terror threats’ largely shapes the identified timeframe, a focus on films released between 2005 and 2010 generally concurs with Cettl’s (2009) analytical filmography of terror cinema post-9/11. Numerous scholars swiftly interpreted Hollywood films in the late stages of production or already complete at the time of the 9/11 attacks as ‘9/11 texts’ (e.g. Black Hawk Down (Scott, 2001) and The Sum of All Fears (Robinson, 2002)). However, it is judicious and prudent to focus on films produced wholly within the ‘post-9/11’ period, particularly given Hollywood’s

12 The attacks of 9/11 – although also encouraging a reassertion of ‘America’ as an idea(l) in seeking to gain support for and thereafter prosecuting the ensuing ‘war on terror’ – also witnessed a ‘turn inwards’ in the discursive characterisation of and response to 9/11, and a desire to (re)consolidate (as well as extend) national borders. As such, this thesis explores an idea of ‘America’ as within national (conceptual) borders, echoing constructions of ‘America’ in earlier periods of crisis.
13 Although this definition of a ‘terror agent’ falls outside typical academic definitions of terrorism, particularly given the lack of discernible political goals, it certainly coheres with popular and contemporary political usage.
14 It therefore excludes mere representations of attacks on ‘Americans’, e.g. Hostel (Roth, 2005) and Turistas (Stockwell, 2006). The thesis also only references ‘American’ films, i.e. produced within and/or significantly about ‘America’. As such, it references The Lost Patrol (Ford, 1934) and Beau Geste (Wellman, 1939), but not Children of Men (Cuaron, 2006). The only exception to this condition is for non-American films directly/explicitly associated to a key film, such as Gojira (Honda, 1954) in relation to Cloverfield and The Last Man on Earth (Ragona, 1964) in relation to I Am Legend.
lengthy industrial production processes. More importantly, although Cettl focuses specifically on direct representations of terrorism, as opposed to more allegorical ‘terror agents’ (like giant monsters), he nonetheless observes that, as occurred during the Vietnam War, American cinema largely avoided addressing 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ before 2006, with a wave of ‘terrorist films’ beginning the following year and across the final years of the Bush Administration.\textsuperscript{15}

As such, the thesis examines four key films, \textit{World Trade Center} (Stone, 2006), \textit{Cloverfield} (Reeves, 2008), \textit{I Am Legend} (Lawrence, 2007) and \textit{The Kingdom} (Berg, 2008), which each address a different temporal and/or spatial-geographical aspect of the encounter with or experience of terror, beginning in New York on 9/11.\textsuperscript{16} While I draw on other recent films, close textual analyses of the above films are of particular benefit in revealing each film’s oft-overlooked complexity. Nevertheless, this thesis also explores a number of secondary contemporary films in the course of my close textual analyses, including \textit{United 93} (Greengrass, 2006), \textit{The Strangers} (Bertino, 2008), \textit{War of the Worlds} (Spielberg, 2005) and \textit{Munich} (Spielberg, 2005). The selected films ‘terror threat’ films appropriately offer direct and indirect cinematic representations, articulations and re-imaginings of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, specifically articulating the gendered experience of terror and the impact of terror on ‘American’ masculinities.\textsuperscript{17} An explicit focus on the represented experience of terror in the ‘terror threat’ films in relation to Hollywood and genre history consciously disrupts ahistorical constructions of 9/11, that argue the attacks ‘changed everything’ and mark a decisive break from pre-9/11 contexts. As such, the thesis also references

\textsuperscript{15} Dodds (2008) also observes a shift from approaching the ‘war on terror’ allegorically and obliquely to directly (especially in documentaries) in final years of Bush Administration (2006-2009), and shift from valorising individuals to critiquing/ exposing government policy.


and engages films across Hollywood history to identify specific post-9/11 characteristics and thoroughly examine contemporary Hollywood representations of ‘terror threats’ and masculinities.18

While most academic work on representations of masculinity explores cinema, Dennis’ (2011 p.115) recent survey of the scholarly literature on representations of masculinity in popular culture finds significantly less focus on mainstream film. Indeed, Dennis observes that the vast majority of published academic work on masculinities addressing more celebrated films, such as Brokeback Mountain (Lee, 2005) and Full Metal Jacket (Kubrick, 1987). Tasker (2002, p.214) argues it is important to focus on non-canonical films “to redefine monolithic assumptions about ‘dominant masculinity’” and show the heterogeneity of representations. Hollywood genre films are also consistently considered by many scholars to historically represent, diagnose, explore, and shape contemporary sociopolitical fears and anxieties connected to issues of ‘American’ national identity, especially in periods of perceived crisis or turmoil.19 Nonetheless, an implicit critical distinction between ‘serious’ or ‘difficult’ cinema and Hollywood genre remains, with a film’s sociocultural and political currency and relevance, for example, in relation to 9/11, seemingly muted by its deployment of genre conventions (see Prince, 2009). However, King (2011, p.128) argues persuasively against viewing post-9/11 blockbusters as ‘empty’, asserting they also (re)deploy the rhetoric, iconography and imagery of 9/11 to “revise, rewrite and remember history” and facilitate ‘recovery’. Indeed, she asserts they “invit[e] new understandings of American experience” by virtue of their supposed ‘emptiness’, in their capacity to displace and then explore 9/11’s trauma (pp.164-5). Even when masculinity studies explore particular genres, Dennis (2011) finds they predominantly focus on ‘male action’ genres, perhaps

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18 The cross-generic scope of the thesis and focus on Hollywood narrative cinema precludes a focus on televisual texts. Post-9/11 television series like Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009) complexly analyse ‘human responses’ to sudden terror attacks through protagonists that typically assume ambivalent ideological positions and characterisations (Charles, 2009). However, while the affordances of serialisation do facilitate such complex examinations – and represent another area for further research – I contend such ambivalence is equally evident, if not as comprehensively articulated, in these contemporary Hollywood ‘terror threat’ films.

19 Scholars expressing this view in relation to (sub)genres examined in this thesis include, but are by no means limited to Broderick (1993), for example, on SF-apocalypse, Kakoudaki (2002) on disaster and SF-disaster, Carroll (1990), Clover (1992) and Hantke (2011) on horror, Slotkin (1992) on westerns, and Wood (2003) on 1970s buddy films. Horror and westerns are also heavily invested in gender relations and anxieties through the representation of existential threats.
associated with the privileging of individualistic heroes in westerns and action movies and/or the male-dominated cohorts particular to war movies. This skews the focus on the representation of dominant or hegemonic masculinities and can overlook the heterogeneity of performed masculinities on screen.

Design of the Study

In this section, I briefly outline the aims of the study, its research design, scope and methodological approach. I also define key understandings of Hollywood, narration and genre. Furthermore, I detail the necessary theoretical context to establish the study’s approach to popular cinematic representations of gender, to clarify how scholarly understandings of gender inform my exploration of mainstream representational practices and situate the study within the existing literature on American screen masculinities.

This thesis explores how and whether ‘threatened’ masculinities are recuperated in mainstream Hollywood narrative films following the violent incursion of a ‘terror threat’ or ‘terror-Other’. As part of this, the thesis explores how the selected ‘terror threat’ films seek to recuperate and reinvigorate threatened, destabilised American masculinities by variously containing (the) horror/terror of 9/11, the uncertain resolution of the ‘war on terror’ and the ongoing threat of the ‘terror-Other’. In diverse ways, each of the ‘terror threat’ films explores the desire and capacity to contain the chaotic, spectacular and persistent threat of terror through the controlling or withholding of cinematic spectacle, and adherence to conventional narrative structure and genre conventions, including closure/resolution, gender codes and film style. Such containment strategies facilitate the recuperation or ‘remasculinisation’ of ‘American’ masculinities. For example, by withholding or confining the spectacle of terror to embedded TV screens, ‘in crisis’ masculinities can be more readily recuperated, with otherwise overwhelming terror partially managed.

Although research on 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ in relation to gender and genre post-9/11 continues to grow, scholars have not sufficiently examined the intersections
of terror, gender and Hollywood (within and across genres) or specifically addressed cinematic representations of masculinity in response to and in the experience of terror. Scholars have predominantly focused on a few aspects of cinema’s response to 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. They have concentrated on direct representations of the ‘war on terror’ in Hollywood, despite their uniform commercial and critical failure. Allied to this is a distinct non-narrative critical focus, with strong interest in documentary, particularly in relation to the war in Iraq. Even in the examination of indirect/allegorical mainstream narrative films, scholars predominantly focus on evocations of the ‘real’, such as 9/11 imagery or rhetoric. Thus, there is a need to explore representational practices in Hollywood narrative cinema of ‘American’ masculinities that specifically depict the event and ongoing experience of terror, investigating terror both as an event and a state. The thesis does this by examining mainstream cinematic representations of gender in selected ‘terror threat’ films across a diverse range of direct and indirect/allegorical genre articulations of the experience of terror.

**Textual Analysis**

Masculinity studies in cinema typically adopt a purely cultural studies approach, focusing on narrative rather than (also) form. Yet Horrocks (1995, cited by Dennis, 2011) argues cinema’s capacity to display and visualise is integral for the dramatisation of crises of masculinity. As such, this thesis, while also incorporating a contextual cultural studies approach, utilises analytic methodologies more specific to cinema studies, and in which the consideration of film style and form is integral to situating the films and gender representational practices within Hollywood genre history and the cinematic medium. Its cross-generic focus on a mix of direct and allegorical responses to the experience of terror in popular Hollywood films, aligned with multiple (sub-)genres) is also distinctive. As such, the most appropriate method to address the research question is via a qualitative textual analysis of selected

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20 Most early responses to the impact of 9/11 on popular culture only offer an addendum or update to previously published texts, revising earlier critical arguments in light of the attacks. Furthermore, while many genre studies, in SF and horror in particular, consider contemporary genre films in relation to American national identity post-9/11 – and are engaged throughout the thesis – cross-generic anthologies on post-9/11 American popular culture do not assume a specific gender focus.
Hollywood ‘terror threat’ narrative films, particularly given I will demonstrate how multiple genres and genre codes were discursively invoked in the overall context of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’.  

Textual analysis tenders an understanding of the context in which a text operates to explore its construction and meaning. It delves within, as well as across, texts because it involves more close-grained, contextualised analysis. Moreover, it aims to demonstrate “how meaning is organised” through the ways words, images and sounds are presented and combined (Deacon et al. 1999, p.17). Textual analysis acknowledges the researcher is not an objective observer “but actively engaged in meaning production in interpreting the text(s)” (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005, p.192). As with alternative methods, textual analysis – a diverse method multiple within itself also – still represents “only one possible interpretation” (McKee, 2001, p.147). It is nonetheless important to note that this thesis represents only one, however significant, reading of Hollywood’s cultural response to 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. As Walsh (2011) observes, “epochal classifications of large-scale historical change”, including broader notions of a post-something Hollywood, are fraught. Moreover, “[s]ocial formations are complex, contradictory and fast changing” and popular culture is “similarly multifaceted” in representing them. As such, while Hollywood responses to the 9/11 attacks and the ‘war on terror’ have been interpreted through a variety of paradigms and theoretical frameworks, such as trauma, religion or globalisation, this thesis concentrates on terror and gender.

Textual analysis expressly aims to provide cogent, coherent interpretations of texts in a particular, acknowledged context, which McKee (2001, p.146) observes includes genre, the particular codes and rules used to generate meaning and “the wider public context”. I thus adopt a concerted contextual approach, indebted to post-structuralism and feminist criticism, considering the sociocultural, political and cinematic – including narrative, form (genre and style), historical and industrial – conditions of the selected key films’ production and reception. More than simply considering the

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21 That said, an audience study holds potential for further research.
22 That said, the thesis occasionally addresses trauma, religion and globalisation, and the globalisation paradigm holds particular potential for related further research.
23 Gallagher’s (2006) study of ‘action’ masculinities in American popular culture adopts a similar approach.
texts as polysemic and open-ended, I am avowedly interested in deconstructing and decentring gender and institutional power structures, principally by identifying gaps, fissures and ruptures in representations of the ‘remasculinisation’ or recuperation of normative masculinities. Given the interpretive nature of textual analysis prescribes numerous possible valid interpretations of a text (and equally discounts many), a consideration of context should anchor analysis. Textual analysis’ appreciation of the wider public context and latent textual features, rather than solely the manifest features of texts in isolation, is a strength that facilitates wider claims about their reception and cultural impact (Hansen et al. 1998; McKee 2001), albeit cautious and qualified ones. Accordingly, this thesis’ focus on contemporary Hollywood narrative film also necessitates equal consideration of each ‘terror threat’ film’s critical reception. Indeed, utilising select critical opinion not only augments the still-developing body of scholarly writing on the selected films, but captures the more immediate responses and context of the films’ release and theatrical exhibition.

A Note on ‘Hollywood’, Hollywood Narration & Genre Assignation

Given the cross-generic focus on recent Hollywood narrative cinema it is necessary to succinctly outline how ‘Hollywood’ is understood for the purposes of the study, how the selected films relate to principles of ‘classical narration’, and how genre is conceived and designated. ‘Hollywood’ is not just a geographically situated film industry, but a set of filmic standards, values and ideologies, industrial practices, marketing strategies and audience expectations (Higson, 1989). ‘Hollywood’ represents a complex set of institutions and meanings, a fluid ‘idea’ rather than a fixed place or style of filmmaking. In short, the selected films clearly fall within the broader industrial mode of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption typical of Hollywood cinema.24

The key films also fall within principles of Hollywood ‘classical narration’. Some scholars have argued the narrative principles that guided the classical Hollywood

24 While Hollywood film is produced for a global market, this thesis predominantly considers readings in relation to domestic spectatorship. Nonetheless, the consideration of ‘terror threat’ films and gender representations in specific relation to foreign markets does present an opportunity for further research.
system have changed significantly since the end of the studio-era. According to Bordwell (2006), one such argument claims spectacle has assumed primacy over storytelling and narrative, and stylistic unity has evaporated; fragmentedness supposedly reigns, industrially and narratively. For example, Holloway (2006, p.83) identifies a continued post-9/11 trend towards ‘allegory lite’, which he defines as “a commercial aesthetic so packed with different hooks pitched at different audience groups that a degree of aesthetic and narrative fragmentation has become intrinsic to the way Hollywood tells stories today”. As a consequence, Holloway claims direct representations of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ are rendered incoherent and political critique is dulled in trying to cover (or appease) all ideological positions. However, this seems more simply a commercial trend in Hollywood, rather than specifically connected to post-9/11 America. More fundamentally, Geoff King (cited by Bordwell, 2006, p.6) argues that while blockbusters “may have led to an emphasis on certain genres and on more episodic forms of narrative […] this is not the same as narrative being displaced”. This is echoed by Walters (2008, p.216), who similarly finds that an examination across periods and styles of Hollywood filmmaking primarily demonstrates the endurance of narrative coherence. As such, Walters (2008, p.218) concludes there is no perceivable rupture between classical and ‘post-classical’ Hollywood. Correspondingly, although a fluid, flexible system, Bordwell (2007) asserts contemporary mainstream film style “adheres to the principles and particulars” of traditional continuity editing. Contemporary films may be “more willing to create gaps and inconsistencies”, but the classical system of narrative continues to flourish, including through highly coherent storytelling (Bordwell, 2006, p.188). In short, the ‘terror threat’ films largely adhere to Bordwell’s conception of ‘intensified continuity’, a post-1960s narrative style, editing principles and generic structure predominantly underpinned by conventional Hollywood narrative principles.

As a cross-generic study of the experience and encounter with terror, it is finally also necessary to briefly describe how genre and genre designation is understood in a contemporary sense. Genres, rather than designated via a set of specific, distinguishing characteristics or categories or a particular set of films, serve diverse groups, particular places and specific times. Indeed, as Rick Altman (1999, pp.207-
genres “serve diverse groups diversely” and “multiple conflicting audiences”, such as local and global audiences, producers, directors and critics. According to Jancovich (2002), genre designation is historically and socially specific, more often a matter of collective and common sense consensus and, as such, liable to change and shift over time. Neither are genres impermeable or distinct, with fixed, identifiable boundaries. As Bordwell and Thompson observe, Hollywood films have always exhibited hybridity of sorts, mixing multiple and various genre elements, although Jancovich (2002) observes the particular social contexts in which texts are produced and received inevitably shapes and emphasises certain generic and hybridist tendencies. For example, SF creatures and monstrous bodies are also historically and thematically tied to horror film, with extensive and extended debate amongst genre critics over what constitutes and identifies SF and horror, going back at least to 1950s Cold War films such as Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Siegel, 1956) and Them! (Douglas, 1954) (see Jancovich, 2002). Nonetheless, there remains a certain generic ‘legibility’ across time, space and cultures, even if generic designations shift and transform across each. Genres, fluid and overlapping, can be used to “flag likely plotlines, narrative structures and emotional effect” (Dodds, 2008, p.1624). Indeed, Steve Neale (2000) observes generic traditions also shape expectations audiences (and producers) have of ‘certain denouements’. Not only do the ‘terror threat’ films cover a diverse range of genres, but each genre was numerously invoked in characterising or responding to 9/11 and, as I will contend, also displays a certain generic instability.

This thesis explores the representation and recuperation of masculinities over four chapters, specifically exploring representations in recent Hollywood cinema across four (sub-)genres, a mix of direct and indirect representations of 9/11, its aftermath and the ensuing ‘war on terror’. Each chapter gradually moves outwards temporally and spatially from 9/11, New York and ‘Ground Zero’ through to the ‘war on terror’ and articulations of ‘America’ abroad. Each chapter progressively moves from the city and the terror event to the ‘outpost’ and the wider, ongoing ‘war on terror’. Chapter One examines an articulation of the immediate experience of 9/11, of living within or inside a terror event, in a post-9/11 disaster film with elements of melodrama and the ‘mine accident’ film, World Trade Center. Chapter Two

26 More recently, Alien (Scott, 1979), which similarly blends SF and horror, is considered a key genre hybridisation, and part of a general 1980s hybridisation of genres (Jancovich, 2002).
represents the experience of living through terror and wider citywide destruction in the SF-horror ‘discovered footage’ cum ‘monster movie’, *Cloverfield*. The third chapter examines life during the ‘war on terror’; living with persistent, ongoing terror after the city is destroyed in the post-apocalyptic SF film (with horror elements, including in relation to zombies and vampires), *I Am Legend*. The film also articulates the desire to undo 9/11 and the quest for a safe, protected ‘outpost’. Chapter Four explores the depiction of a post-9/11 terror attack on an ‘America’ abroad – the ‘outpost’ destroyed – in *The Kingdom*, an action-thriller also analysed as a ‘frontier Western’. The film not only depicts the desire to re-imagine the response to 9/11 but the desire to re-do 9/11, ‘over there’.

**American ‘Crises’, Masculinities & Hollywood**

In the following sections, I briefly outline the development of popular and scholarly understandings of masculinity and multiple theoretical approaches to gender. In so doing, I chart historical understandings of the persistent alignment of crises in American national identity with masculinity (including in popular cinema), particularly in periods of national turmoil and instability. I also outline the key scholarly arguments and findings on the representation of masculinities in Hollywood film. I describe dominant critical assumptions about Hollywood representations of gender, focusing on Hollywood’s often-assumed participation and ideological role in the resolving of ‘male crisis’. The existing literature largely contends Hollywood’s cultural response, specifically in relation to gender representations, functions to recuperate or ‘remasculinise’ hegemonic masculinities, and often through violence. I finally detail scholarly readings of Hollywood representations of gender, within and across genre.

Given there have been many detailed explorations of masculinity in Hollywood since the 1940s, the thesis merely summarises scholarly approaches and key analyses, primarily to frame my approach to the contemporary representation of masculinities in Hollywood. Additionally, these representational trends, invariably related to specific socio-historical periods, are also reconsidered throughout the remainder of
the thesis in relation to the selected films and the post-9/11 context. Indeed, certain aspects and periods are of particular significance to the thesis because they strongly inform the existing literature on recent Hollywood representations of masculinity, and arguably need to be significantly reconsidered. By considering multiple theorisations of masculinity and gender, the long-standing relation of crises in American identity with masculinity, and scholarly approaches to the historical representation of Hollywood masculinities, I also establish the value of explicitly examining recent representations of masculinity in specific relation to the experience of terror.

**Masculinities, in Theory**

In this section I concisely outline how gender, and masculinity in particular, has been theorised historically. I also foreground how it will be utilised throughout the thesis. Given this is a study of representational practices in contemporary Hollywood cinema, I believe it is important to resist the exclusive employment of any one theoretical framework or understanding of masculinity – which forces cultural representations to fit within a particular theoretical paradigm – but consider various understandings and approaches where pertinent. This is particularly important given that, although the study favours contemporary theorisations of gender, mainstream cinematic representational practices are complex, and likely comprise an at times contradictory and possibly incoherent combination of popular and theoretical understandings of gender. As such, Hollywood narrative films may promote the direct relation of sex and gender or present a binary relationship between masculinity and femininity, rather than as a network of affiliations and interactions. As Connell (2001; see also Tasker, 2002) recognises, while ‘masculinity’ is not determined by biology, it is often popularly linked to the position of men. This is particularly relevant in relation to the key films studied in this thesis, which all tend to present heteronormativity as ‘natural’ and particular gender roles as sex-aligned or biologically determined. Indeed, masculinities are predominantly aligned with men, a conflation of sex and gender perhaps linked to the industry’s mainstream commercial
imperatives (see Gallagher, 2006). Moreover, key films in this study predominantly define common values or ideas of the ‘feminine’, such as nurturing and care-giving, conservatively or narrowly, and punish transgressions by female characters. More significantly, the films predominantly define ideas of the ‘feminine’ pejoratively if embodied by male characters – as an insufficiency or failing that must be ‘overcome’. Nonetheless, while I reiterate that such representations, terms and values are imposed cultural stereotypes, and not advocated by the study, they will nonetheless be addressed and detailed on their own terms.

Recent approaches across the fields of feminism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and cultural studies consider gender to be non-biological, fluid and plural. Additionally, gender is constructed and relational, or discursive and performed. However, even though notions of the masculine and feminine have long applied and shifted across sex and biology, gender is popularly considered strongly relational to male and female biology; and gender as stable, fixed, and innate. As Butler (1999, p.xv, p.xxi) observes, this understanding implies that there is “an interior essence that might be disclosed” and gender is “a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant”. Sociologist RW Connell (2001, 2005) succinctly outlines the weaknesses of earlier dominant approaches to understanding gender. First, ‘role theory’ emphasises ‘role models’, gender roles and the performance of socially-defined roles, like ‘father’ or ‘police officer’. Yet Connell argues ‘role theory’ cannot grasp issues of power or gender changes over time and space. Second, a ‘categorical’ approach treats women/men as pre-formed categories and ‘explains’ gender through biological difference. While this approach may better address issues of power it exaggerates differences between men and women and cannot account for gender complexities or the interplay of race, cultural difference, class and sexuality. That said, such approaches to understanding gender continue to be culturally prominent in popular discourse, including in Hollywood film.

Nonetheless, discursive or relational approaches to understanding gender are now academically ascendant. As Tasker (2002) articulates, gender is increasingly explored in a sociopolitical context and focuses on both its instability and relationality. For

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27 Popular film aligns itself “with perceived gender norms and ideals” and popular understandings of the relation between masculinity and male biology, or ‘maleness’, for commercial reasons (Gallagher, 2006, p.13).
example, Connell (2001), a pioneer in the field, advocates a relational understanding of gender. According to Connell, masculinity is not internal, but a social construction, built from a configuration of everyday, embodied practices. Nor is it individual, but built through “a structure of social relations” and “shared symbolism” (2001, p.45). As such, masculinity changes with time and place, across different periods and different cultures/geographies, and thereby needs to be treated as multiple or plural. Connell observes masculinity is multiply defined – that is, as masculinities – particularly in modern, multicultural societies but also within particular cultural settings within such societies. Masculinities are fluid, dynamic, complex and changeable, “in which we make ourselves – and are made” (Connell, 2001, p.46) – over time, as the ‘social world’ equally “defines, positions, empowers and constrains men” (p.43). Moreover, gender is also non-discrete, tied to sexuality, race and class, which also only exist “in and through relation to each other” (McClintock, 1995, p.5 cited by Gilligan, 2012, p.175). Thus, masculinities do not exist in isolation and only come into existence when people act; masculinities are defined, constructed and performed socially. They are persistently negotiated in relation to – and interaction with – others, including other/alternative masculinities, and tied to notions of desire and power.

This relationality is also related to a discursive understanding of gender, usually aligned with philosopher Judith Butler’s seminal text, *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999), and which overlaps extensively with Connell’s relational approach but is the dominant critical approach in contemporary cultural studies of popular culture and cinema. A discursive approach contends gender is “a set of discourses that are contested, accepted and resisted within networks, rather than binaries” (Tasker, 2002, p.215), and is thereby relational. Butler’s theory of performativity further describes gender as constructed, performed and embodied, “manufactured through a sustained set of acts” (1999, p.xv). In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler asserts (1993, p.xxi) performativity “is not a singular ‘act’ for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” that “conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.” In this sense, repetition seeks to render the performance of gender (and gender itself) as if ‘natural’, innate, stable and fixed. Indeed, this conceivably explains the attraction of theoretically superseded but popularly resonant understandings of gender, particularly in periods of individual, institutional and/or national instability and turmoil. And
although Kim (2007) observes it is impossible to perfectly occupy any normative identity, a relatively seamless reiteration of performative norms is necessary to create a viable, comprehensible subject to and for others. That is, in order to become what Connell terms a ‘meaningful body’, gender performance is constrained by or must generally observe popular and/or dominant gender understandings within a particular group or cultural context.

Butler argues that gender has no origin but is an effect of institutions, practices and discourses (1999, p.xxxi). Moreover, Connell (2001) contends that while particular ‘acts’, described as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, characterise individuals, these acts are also defined and sustained by institutions like the military. In this sense, Connell asserts some ‘masculinities’ are privileged while others are marginalised, even excluded. Connell describes those privileged as ‘hegemonic’, that is, both normalised in positions of authority and dominance, and a socially represented and reinforced ‘ideal’ centred on a “sense of capability” in McGillis’ (2009, p.31) words. Indeed, Connell (p.49) defines hegemonic masculinities, which subordinate other masculinities, femininities and women, as ‘highly visible’ and masculinities associated with ‘feminine’ others invisible or absent in contrast. Holmlund (2002) also notes the relative absence of ethnic bodies in the privileging of white ones or, as Kim (2007) attests, dis-identification with the Other.

In short, it is hegemonic or normative masculinities that have most been analysed in the scholarly literature on representations of masculinity in Hollywood. Connell (2001) contends this initial critical focus predominantly exposed the negative impacts of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy on women, with much less focus on the practice of power between men, and across hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, including ethnic and minority masculinities and the young. Thus, there appears significant value in specifically exploring the relations of ‘American’ masculinities with the ‘terrorist-Other’, and on exploring hegemonic masculinity beyond the articulation of its one-way and one-sided impact on ‘Other’ masculinities and ‘American’ femininities.

American Crises: Masculinity & Hollywood
In the following sections, I outline how American national identity and hegemonic masculinity are often linked, especially in periods of perceived crisis. I also outline key scholarly readings of Hollywood’s historical representation of masculinities in particular genres since World War II, which typically reinforce scholarly assumptions about the reinforcement and reassertion of hegemonic masculinity and male power. I finally outline some dominant paradigms in the examination of screen masculinities, such as masochism, suffering, recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ (particularly through violence), which are significant in this study on post-9/11 Hollywood masculinities. While there is a tendency towards ‘periodisation’ and too broad or too overarching claims about Hollywood film or a particular genre across a defined historical period, many of the key arguments about Hollywood genre representations of masculinities are nonetheless relevant to this study. That is in examining recent Hollywood representations of masculinities specifically in relation to the experience of terror, I draw on and engage various identified ideas and tropes, including ‘scarred’ men, overcivilised males, failed fathers and failed professionals, and absent mothers.

Historically, crises in American masculinity, and predominantly white masculinities, are intertwined, even equated, with crises of American national identity, including those after Pearl Harbor, post-WWII, during the Cold War and post-9/11. This perhaps aligns with Connell’s (2001) assertion that institutions are also typically gendered, including the nation-state and Hollywood. However, the perceived, ongoing ‘crisis’ of masculinity in American society is most often pinpointed to the 1960s and 1970s, and the impacts of feminism, civil rights and Vietnam. Nilges (2010) also further emphasises the continued domestic impacts of economic globalisation since the 1980s.  

Moreover, scholars often link cinematic representations of masculinity and real-world contexts to changes or threats to masculinities. In this sense, Nilges (2010, p.31), exploring popular cultural representations of the post-apocalypse, contends that when America feels threatened, that is, during “moments of national instability […] regressively equated to threats to masculinity”, popular cinema and television typically reinstate a reinvigorated traditional notion of hypermasculinity. That is, “concepts such as order and control are gendered and frequently produce a

28 Connell (2001) also argues that from 1980-2000 there was a multifaceted cultural movement to reinstall men from their perceived redundancy to their perceived place of privilege.
‘crisis of masculinity’ once threatened”. Likewise, Gallagher (2006; see also Kord & Krimmer, 2011), examining constructions of active masculinities in popular American ‘action’ film and literature from the 1960s, argues that cinematic representations of male action compensate for real-world threats, manifested in the workplace and the domestic sphere, to masculinity.

Dennis’ (2011) recent survey of the scholarly literature argues there was relatively little academic interest in masculinity in popular Hollywood cinema until the early 1980s, with scholarly interest in representations of masculinity increasing markedly only from the early 1990s.29 Yet it is also true that a consideration of masculinities in film is arguably central, if not explicit, for example, in analyses of the western genre and auteurist discussions of directors like John Ford. Nonetheless, in the vein of a focus on post-60s impacts of feminism and civil rights on white/institutional masculinities, cinematic crises of American masculinity are also typically traced back to post-60s representations of crisis (e.g. Robinson, 2000; King, 2011). However, this should more properly be traced back to earlier moments in Hollywood cinema, including 1950s melodrama and ‘women’s pictures’. In this vein, Gallagher (2006) also notes that popular texts have responded to social and economic changes in gender relations since WWII. Indeed, Silverman (1992), writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, influentially identifies ambivalent, fractured and unstable masculinities ‘at the margins’ of post-WWII Hollywood war movies and film noir – popular cultural outliers in a sense. Gallagher (2006, p.8) too observes how film noir and women’s melodramas similarly emphasise ‘damaged’ or ‘compromised’ masculinities. This contestation is even apparent in genres popularly considered to communicate ‘ideal’, stable, coherent ideas of ‘American’ masculinity.30

Hollywood Masculinities: Crisis & Recuperation

30 For example, Leigninger (1998; see also Durham, 2004) finds an interest in problems related to the embodiment of masculinity in post-WWII westerns.
Overall, Hollywood is typically – at least historically – considered to recuperate damaged or threatened hegemonic masculinities, especially white masculinities, through an arc of crisis, recuperation and resolution, particularly through narrative structures and genre conventions.\textsuperscript{31} That is, ‘crises’ at least temporarily destabilise and decentre normative masculinity’s dominance, thereby requiring its recuperation via recentring through a focus on bodily suffering and/or ‘remasculinisation’, typically through redemptive acts requiring violence. Such protagonist arcs are evident both within individual films and across particular genres, especially in periods of national uncertainty, rapid change or turmoil. Indeed, a review of public discourse and scholarly work on ‘American’ masculinities, including in society and cultural representations, can make it seem more pertinent to ask when masculinity is not in crisis. This continues to be the predominant position in recent scholarly work. Walsh (2010), whose work does not directly address the threat and anxiety underscored by 9/11, propounds the ‘recuperative’ thesis of masculinity, where national crises are followed by periods of ‘remasculinisation’ across the culture. Gallagher (2006, p.5), who briefly considers the post-9/11 action film, also implicitly advocates the ‘recuperative’ thesis, with “issues surrounding masculinity raised and resolved” in examples of the contemporary Hollywood action film.\textsuperscript{32} Durham (2004) cogently suggests masculine recuperation is particularly likely in ‘male action’ genres, defined to include action film, war movies and westerns. Such recuperation may thus be augmented by a focus on narcissistic heroes in action movies and westerns and the normalisation of violence, first for bodily suffering and then for ‘remasculinisation’.

The near uniformity of this response to ‘crisis’ or ‘threat’, initiating an arc of recuperation through bodily suffering and/or a return to ‘traditional’ masculinities, raises suspicions over whether claims of persistent masculine or male ‘crisis’ are disingenuous, suspicions that also associate or link individual masculinities to state power. For example, Wendy Brown (1995, pp.193–4, cited by Price, 2008, p.70) suggests that state power and masculine performance similarly offer insincere repudiations of their power to conceal dominance and privilege, with “power and

\textsuperscript{31} See Savran, 1998; Robinson, 2000; Durham, 2004; King, 2011 for the expression of similar sentiments. O'Connor (2010) also observes “the Hollywood movie industry – imbued as it is with the capitalist ethic – has supported the political and economic systems on which it relies” (p.35).

\textsuperscript{32} Dodds (2008, p.1624) also claims “the political and cultural status quo frequently prevails” in the endings of action films.
privilege operat[ing] increasingly through disavowal of potency”. However, while Pamela Robertson also claims crisis is a discursive strategy invoked to recentre and reinforce privilege, Walsh (2010) reminds that non-hegemonic forms of masculinity are also marginalised. Robinson (2000, p.6, emphasis in original) also observes that “the persistent representation of white male wounds and […] masculinity under siege offers ample evidence of what is felt to be [its] real condition” in contemporary American culture. In short, irrespective of whether claims of a loss of power are ‘real’ or merely represent a pervasive (self-)deception, their persistence and saturation mandates consideration, analysis and exposure. Moreover, as Walsh (2010) observes, given masculinity is never stable, and is always being renegotiated, crisis is in a sense a persistent condition of masculinity. Nonetheless, and representative of a common tension – even contradiction – in how hegemonic masculinities are perceived, Walsh (2010) also describes crisis as a period of disorder that precedes restructuring and reestablishment. In this respect, masculinity is both always in crisis and always (being) recuperated, recentred or re-established.

**Hollywood Masculinities, Masochism & ‘Remasculinisation’**

Much scholarly work demonstrates how Hollywood routinely constructs victimised or masochistic masculinities, often as part of the ‘recuperative’ arc typical of Hollywood screen masculinities. Walsh (2010, p.34) notes the centrality of masochism in representations of masculinity, asserting that emasculation, sacrifice and victimisation announce masculinity’s “performative construction”. Savran (1998, p.37), whose American cultural studies work focuses on victimisation as a means to control and regulate hegemony from the 1950s, observes that “cultural texts constructing masochistic masculinities characteristically conclude with an almost magical restitution of male power”. That is, Hollywood films destabilise dominant or hegemonic masculinities in order to reinforce and recuperate them and reinstitute the cultural status quo. King (2011, p.164), writing about Hollywood male sacrificial victim-heroes, including post-9/11 examples, even asserts that “masculinist fantasies of American resilience and redemption must be constantly reinscribed”, but may often

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33 See Silverman, 1992; Tasker, 1996; Savran, 1998; Robinson, 2000 for example.
“be naturalised and normalised as self-evident”. In this sense, even the incessant ‘need’ to call attention to and recuperate its ‘crisis’, a seeming weakness, serves to strengthen masculine power.

Thus, the very focus on male or masculine crisis is often considered to not only represent but reinforce its persistent, recentred power. Even scholarly opinion that disrupts uniform notions of the recuperation of screen masculinities recognise that this does not necessarily diminish hegemonic masculinity’s power. In this respect, Robinson (2000), similarly arguing from the basis of 1960s upheavals, not only sees evidence of “an ongoing process of remasculinisation” in recent decades, but also finds narratives that require a different interpretation (see also Price, 2011). The ‘rhetoric of crisis’ that Robinson identifies “accommodate[s] a range of narratives”, variously characterised by competing interests and intentions. In essence, she identifies competing ‘fictions of crisis’, which in essence either aim “to heal a wounded white masculinity [and] remasculinise America” or “to dwell in the space of crisis” and reimagine (dominant) masculinity (p.11). Regardless, Robinson observes that male ‘crisis’ need not signify male disempowerment, for “there is much symbolic power to be reaped from occupying the social and discursive position of subject-in-crisis” (p.9). Yet while ‘crisis’ serves to (re)centre dominant masculinity, she concludes that, not wanting to discount the persistent power of masculinity, male power is neither absolute nor secure.34

The crises of generic Hollywood masculinities following WWII are generally accepted to accelerate in 1960s and 1970s American cinema, emphasising masochism, suffering, sacrifice and enduring crisis, destabilisation and humiliation. For example, Durham (2004) links key developments in westerns, and their relative demise, to America’s sociopolitical and cultural context, particularly the mid-1960s and Vietnam, where defeat highlighted ‘American’ (and masculine) vulnerability at home and abroad. As Silverman argues in relation to post-WWII Hollywood masculinities, Nama (2008) also identifies observes numerous expressions of (white)

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34 For example, Robinson (2000) considers Deliverance (Boorman, 1972) ultimately unsuccessful in closing down anxieties associated with its troubled men’s masculinities, even after their apparent recuperation and reassertion. Walsh (2010) also contends that the endurance of subjection functions to secure identity, confirming the resilience and resistance of the male body in order to first discipline and then empower it.
Cultural criticism now routinely emphasises the polysemous and at times contradictory complexities of masculine and male representation in Hollywood (see Leigninger, 1998; Durham, 2004). For example, Gallagher (2006) also argues for a similar increase in the deployment of melodrama in male-oriented action – a mode typically associated with ‘women’s films’. Before this, Cohan and Hark’s (1993) renowned Screening the Male anthology variously considers masculinity in terms of display, ‘feminised’ males, masquerade, masochism and ‘mothers’. In this sense, and because of a critical focus on ‘muscular’ bodies and projects of violent ‘remasculinisation’ in 1980s action movies, there is a tendency to focus on the male body in writing on cinematic masculinity, both as a marker of the ‘ideal’, strength and capability, and to figure vulnerability and humiliation. Steve Neale’s (1983) Screen essay on the display and spectacularisation of male stars – a partial response to Laura Mulvey’s (1975) famed essay on the cinematic gaze – argues male stars, and particularly action stars, have long been objects of the cinematic gaze. The camera invites us to look at the male body – the star body – as a marker of ‘ideal’ masculinity, but in gazing at it the audience nonetheless objectifies it; as spectacle the male body is to-be-looked-at by others, thus connoting its vulnerability. This vulnerability is also figured in the spectacle of bodily suffering, a trend that Nama (2008) observes in 1960s and post-Vietnam Hollywood but which arguably reaches its zenith in the suffering and masochism of hypermasculine 1980s action bodies.

Given the body is the site of masculine performance and identity, notions of masochism are intimately tied to the spectacle of the visible, wounded body – the
body and its pain fetishised for others. Following Studlar and Silverman, Robinson (2000) argues masochism is predicated on deferred resolution and release, theatricality and display. Masochistic narratives prominently feature the display of male wounds to evidence and “manage and/or heal the threats to a normativity under siege” through physically and emotionally wounded bodies (p.5). The 1970s, however, also represent the beginning of a cultural backlash, reversing the endured suffering of the wounded, humiliated (white) ‘American’ males through violent ‘remasculinisation’. This includes a cinematic focus on the ‘sensitive male’, and his final compelled-and-desired descent into ‘savagery’, a development Kehr (2012) likewise perceives throughout 1970s American cinema and links to the moral effects of Vietnam. Yet while Walsh’s research focuses on gender and sexuality, he is similarly interested in the relationship of emasculated, victimised and aggressive masculinities, and how vulnerability is linked to violence. Violent action is not only the traditional masculine and generic response to threat and emasculation, but, in line with genre expectations, “imagined to be […] a necessary restorative” (Carter & Dodds, 2011, p.110; see also Gallagher, 2006). Yet notions of violent ‘remasculinisation’ or recuperation of ‘in crisis’ masculinities after destabilisation and bodily suffering is routinely accepted to have accelerated (to the point of exhaustion) in 1980s action cinema.

This period generated numerous highly influential analyses of action film representations of masculinities, such as Susan Jeffords’ (1994) *Hard Bodies* and Yvonne Tasker’s (1995) *Spectacular Bodies*. These analyses famously tie the spectacle of muscular, ‘hard bodied’ stars like Sylvester Stallone to the ‘remasculinisation’ of Reagan-era American politics after Vietnam (see Cohan & Hark, 1993; Jeffords, 1994; Tasker, 1995). However, while 1980s action heroes foreground “the spectacle of the male body in action and pain” (Gallagher, 2006, p.11), they nonetheless “bear few of their [Vietnam-era] predecessors’ scars” (p.18). Visible bodily suffering is often temporary, less ‘felt’ and more cartoon-like, with masochistic suffering not only serving to recentre focus, but often facilitating ‘remasculinisation’ through violence. Moreover, in 1980s action, women are “absent or incapacitated”, ensuring heroism “becomes the *de facto* province of men” (p.14).35

35 That said, Gallagher (p.14) notes that this produces another ‘crisis’, “the inability to demonstrate heterosexuality”. 
Gallagher (2006) extends Jeffords’ earlier identification of the increasing tendency to define heroic masculinity through fathering into late-1990s cinema (see also Kord & Kimmer, 2011). Kord and Kimmer (2011) explore the co-optation of femininity in 1990s and 2000s cinema, contending that subsuming ‘mother’ within the father’s ‘maternal’ personality is a general trend in 1990s cinema, another supposed period of ‘sensitive’ men and masculinities in Hollywood film, echoing and extending Gallagher’s (2006) observations about 1980s action cinema. Such co-optation not only signals the availability of ‘feminine’ qualities such as nurturing and care-giving for men, but arguably preserves (white) male hegemony.

The remainder of this chapter demonstrates that a key cultural implication of the 9/11 attacks lies in notions that American national crisis is again equated with masculine crisis. This initiates – and perhaps even requires – the political and cultural recuperation of hegemonic American masculinities, either via recentring through suffering or via the revalidation of ‘traditional’ masculinities and ‘remasculinisation’ through violence. This seemingly explains the predominance of scholarly presumptions that post-9/11 film masculinities would mimic the tendency towards ‘muscular’ ‘remasculinisation’ in 1980s action cinema, particularly to redress earlier suffering and humiliation. Yet the dominance of this supposed reinvigoration of 1980s action gender discourses in post-9/11 analyses establishes a need to further examine representations of masculinities after 9/11 specifically in relation to the encounter with terror, and beyond the ‘action’ genres.

**Constructing & Containing 9/11 & the ‘War on Terror’: Hollywood, Genre & Gender**

The remainder of this introductory chapter establishes the study’s key foci, specifically in relation to representations and recuperations of masculinity in contemporary Hollywood narrative film. It particularly considers how the popular cinematic recuperation of normative masculinities is achieved through more than narrative means, but also occurs through film structure itself, including the
relationship of spectacle to character, and the adherence to genre conventions and expectations. For example, while commonly described via cinematic referents, 9/11 was predominantly experienced televisually, which interestingly associates the domestic experience of terror with the communication and containment of spectacle in the ‘terror-threat’ films. As such, I discuss this ‘domestication’ of modern terror in relation to Hollywood’s historical relationship to spectacle in SF-disaster films and passion for the destruction of cities in relation to 9/11. Additionally, I demonstrate how each – the attacks and the responses to them – were in part explicitly interpreted in gendered terms, and again invoking Hollywood genre. This gendered the nation, diagnosed perceived gender deficiencies and outlined desired responses, valorising professional masculinities and promoting the return of ‘traditional’ masculinity and ‘father figures’. Again, as part of the integrated literature review, I consider scholarly claims about post-9/11 Hollywood representations of gender and genre throughout to identify critical research gaps in the existing literature, assumptions and claims that require further interrogation or elucidation. I particularly note how scholars predominantly interpret how Hollywood genre has represented and recuperated ‘traditional’ masculinities post-9/11 at the expense of women and ‘monstrous’ and/or Orientalised ‘terrorist-Others’.

Collapsing Boundaries – Invoking National ‘Crisis’ & Individualised Home(land) (In)Security

The characterisation and mediation of 9/11 specifically relates to the ‘terror threat’ films and the representation of masculinities via the significant deployment of Hollywood genre, the invoking of national crisis, and the significance of television screens for domesticking terror, threatening the American home, promoting individualised security and containing the spectacle of terror. Although commonly described through Hollywood genre referents, the aesthetic of the day’s horrific imagery was also decidedly non-cinematic, diverging sharply from contemporary disaster genre codes and predominantly garnered from amateur footage, which offers a limited rather than an omniscient perspective. Thus, despite its uncanny, unsettling evocation of Hollywood genre and imagery, ‘9/11’ was defined just as much by its televisual mediation, predominantly constructed and witnessed via television. The
attacks were not only highly mediated, but swiftly constructed “as an event […] inextricably tied to its mediated coverage” (King, 2011, p.148; see also Wessels, 2010; Overpeck, 2012). Its sheer excess, scale and horror, in concert with the immediacy, extent and endless repetition of live televisual coverage arguably signalled, and perhaps augmented, its trauma (see also Norris et al., 2003). Indeed, given the immediacy and extent of coverage, as Muntean (2009, p.52) attests, “perhaps one of the most terrifying aspects of 9/11 was […] how it[…] momentarily disrupted any and all conceptions of ‘secure’ seats of spectatorship”. The unceasing media coverage also connoted and exacerbated the impotence, helplessness and incapacity of audiences. As Weiss (2001, cited by Faludi, 2008, p.154) notes, the ignominy of the attacks was aggravated for audiences who “could do nothing but watch from a safe remove”. 36 Yet television screens not only confirmed the veracity (if not the nature) of the threat, but collapsed boundaries between city and nation, battlefield and home, and marked terror’s symbolic breach of the American domestic space.

This was augmented by political and media rhetoric, with the attacks, which targeted the twin centres of American economic and military might, configured as both as national and domestic, that is, linked to breaches of national borders and the American home. Indeed, the particulars of 9/11’s live televisual mediation facilitated the Bush Administration’s invocation of national ‘crisis’ and existential threat via a rhetorical collapse of boundaries – the city as a battlefield, the nation as attacked and the home as vulnerable. Indeed, this characterisation of the city or home(land) as (also) a battlefield arguably serves to encourage or justify ‘remasculinisation’ in the ‘terror-threat’ films. Faludi (2008, p.5) contends 9/11 was readily figured in the American media “as if the hijackers had aimed their planes […] at the white picket fences of the American domicile”. Faludi observes this notion of a threat to the American home was reiterated persistently, with President Bush stating in his fifth anniversary speech in 2006: “We face an enemy determined to bring death and suffering into our homes”. This, as much as for any perceived political desire to deflect responsibility, further extended the attacks’ into/onto the American home. Tellingly, Carter and Dodds (2011, p.99) extend this into the ensuing ‘war on terror’

36 Smith (1975, p.21) also connects Vietnam to television in relation to witnessing/watching and accompanying feelings of impotence, with being able to do nothing about it.
years, in which “both individuals and households […] have been rendered increasingly insecure”. The attacks were represented as having breached America’s borders and as threatening everyday American domestic life, exposing its vulnerability and ongoing insecurity, and demanding emphatic response.

In the aftermath of 9/11, political and news media constructions of the attacks explicitly invoked ‘crisis’ – beginning the process of defining national crisis as a crisis of masculinity – and rhetorically defined 9/11 as an act of war. For example, Bush opened his address to the UN General Assembly in 2003 by rhetorically collapsing boundaries, noting that on 9/11 “New York became a battlefield, and a graveyard, and the symbol of an unfinished war”. Popular and political discourse produced and reinforced a new political paradigm: ‘9/11 changed everything’. Indeed, Sturken (2007, p.167, cited in Dawes, 2009, p.287; see also Kaplan, 2003) argues the attacks engendered a new kind of nationalist political discourse of “historical exceptionalism” centred on the belief “that history itself was transformed on 9/11”. Yet equally, famed historian Richard Slotkin (2001), writing in 9/11’s immediate aftermath, suggests that when a nation suffers “an event that upsets its fundamental ideas”, particularly of self, “its people look to their myths for precedents, invoking past experience”. Hence, the Bush Administration and conservative commentators claimed the attacks represented a new paradigm, while simultaneously invoking Pearl Harbor and WWII and Hollywood genre and gender codes in characterising the response (see Kaplan, 2003; Faludi, 2008). In a sense, both the military and cinematic aspects signalled a historical response to define a supposedly unprecedented present and articulate a desired-but-nostalgic future.

37 It must be noted that ‘American’ responses to the 9/11 attacks were multiple and multi-faceted, including non-violent responses such as large public concerts. Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on the part of the nation’s wider response that arguably came to dominate public perceptions.

38 The transcript of Bush’s address is available at http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/international/22TEXT-BUSH.html. While Carter and Dodds (2011, p.107) correctly observe 9/11 was discursively portrayed in western media as “an attack against the nation”, its characterisation was also broader than this, as attacks against ‘the west’ or, even more problematically, ‘civilisation’. The centrality of consumption to the appropriate/desired ‘response’ to 9/11 was also clear and is considered throughout the thesis: “Bush proceeded to make a plea to US citizens to show their patriotism and commitment through consumerism” (Nayak, 2006, p.55; see also Overpeck, 2012).

39 This notion of a ‘post-9/11 America’ is reflected in the before-and-after dualism attached to Bush’s presidency and character (Hannah, 2005); what Hantke (2011) describes as the origin myth of the Bush presidency.

40 Duncombe (2011) argues the parallels to Pearl Harbor figured 9/11 within the same representational frame, as a surprise attack resulting in the loss of American innocence. Moreover, the effects of 9/11 and the resultant ‘war on terror’ were also
The discursive collapsing of distinctions between ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic-home’ continued in the characterisation of the threat as not only everywhere, but always. As Overpeck (2012, p.111) argues, the dominant national mood communicated that America had “suffered a personal violation”, blurring the personal and the national. This blurring was precipitated by the Bush Administration’s portrayal of terrorism’s threat as existential – with (western) society imperilled and in an open-ended struggle for its very survival –which legitimised its militaristic and domestic response but emphasised the nation’s fragility and lionised the threat (see also Dodds, 2008; Svendsen, 2008). Hay and Andrejevic (2006) attest that American neo-liberal policy rhetorically defined the post-9/11 threat to domestic daily life as dispersed and proliferated; terror could strike anywhere and anytime. This state of enduring threat to domestic daily life is represented in Homeland Security rhetoric and advances the unceasing necessity of ongoing provisions both against insecurity and to displace existential fear, including technologies for the monitoring of citizens, articulating their duality as potential threats and to police fellow citizens. However, articulating enduring and total insecurity also builds expectations towards individualised security responsibilities and ‘naturalises’ a shift towards personal security regimes. Thus, rather than indicting the state, such rhetoric depoliticises governmental failure and shifts responsibility for security onto individuals who must individually secure the home against the ongoing, active threat of (all) Others. While Hay and Andrejevic’s connection of the neo-liberal ethos to personalised security is hardly a neo-liberal notion – and is in many ways connected to long-standing ideas of American individualism and long-associated with particular types of movie hero – the characterisation of 9/11 arguably prompts a reassertion of personalised security and the persistent threat to domestic everyday life.

linked to a psychological perception created by socio-economic shifts/changes (i.e. globalisation) that predate 9/11; “the fear of lack of control and stability” in a world “widely perceived as chaotic, complex, confusing, and threatening” (Nilges, 2010, p.27). That said, while Nilges (2010, p.32) argues the “present surge in [apocalyptic] narratives” located in socio-economic shifts of the 1980s and 90s, they were “ideologically connected to and dramatically amplified by the “war on terror”’.

41 Kapur (2007) asserts fear was utilised as a tool and “foreclosed any discussion” about the attack’s historical, political, or economic causes.

42 Price (2009, p.69) argues films are in this sense culturally significant because they “act as preparatory models”, ‘preparatory models’ that, reproduced in other contexts (and) beyond fiction, echo, amplify and reinforce each other.

43 The home as threatened is a typical trope of horror, disaster films and westerns, although 9/11 also exemplifies horror’s fascination with the sudden, violent intrusion of evil into the everyday (including the home).
Hollywood Spectacle, New York & 9/11 Imagery

Hollywood has for decades offered extravagant spectacles of destruction to audiences, who revelled in the fantastical destruction of key American architectural sites and entire cities. Sontag (1965) famously writes of the appeal of this ‘imagination of disaster’, the strange pleasure in watching cities and humanity destroyed, in Cold War SF cinema. Spectacle, a “longstanding and pervasive feature” (Keane, 2006, p.1) of Hollywood’s cinematic representation, typically allows a privileged position, maximum visual pleasure and all-encompassing experience of disaster and apocalypse, so audiences can securely, unaffected and detached, delight in catastrophe largely emptied of identifiable or individual death (see Sontag, 1965). Indeed, such spectacles are arguably rendered ‘safer’ yet by the digital effects used to represent them (Kakoudaki, 2002).

New York, in particular, is a recurring, persistent ‘spectacular’ cinematic target. Historian Max Page (2011) even posits that a continuing American ‘obsession’ in witnessing the city’s destruction reinforces its iconic status and international pre-eminence. Page argues such spectacles function diversely as warnings-premonitions of real disaster and/or celebrations of the city’s greatness. However, New York occupies an ambivalent place in the American (cultural) imagination. It serves as a stand-in for (American) civilisation itself, representative and exemplar, and thus any attack targets a specific idea(s) of ‘America’. According to Page (2011, p.305), it also invokes long-standing cultural themes of the ambivalence towards cities, immigrants and racial diversity, along with “the apocalyptic strain in American religious life”, and thus in some sense is also viewed as separate from other conceptions of ‘America’. New York inspires veneration, fear and resentment, its iconic skyline symbolising both America’s economic and political power and its arrogance and decadence. And the city’s (cinematic) strengths are also its weaknesses, a historic

44 Specific generic and historical aspects of the disaster film are further considered throughout the thesis, specifically in extended sections on the role of spectacle in Chapter One, key generic differences to pre-millennial films and the construction typical protagonists in Chapter Two, and the representation of fathers in Chapter Three.

45 New York’s pre-eminence as the American city of choice for spectacular destruction is perhaps matched only by Los Angeles.
immigration entry point associated with openness and cosmopolitanism, but its skyscraper heights and island iconicity make it persistently vulnerable to external threats, and its sprawling urban indifference producing and offering anonymity and concealment to dangerous elements within.46

Hollywood’s focus on spectacular destruction has long been criticised for proffering images absent of meaning. For example, critics castigate spectacle’s vacuity, “as cosmetic, mechanical thrill-seeking” that “eliminat[es] character development” and overwhelms narrative (Keane, 2006, p.5). Ironically, however, such pleasure in Hollywood’s destructive spectacle was criticised following 9/11 because the supposed ‘hollowness’ of such fantasies of destruction, was now saturated with meaning.47 Consequently, persistent debates on Hollywood’s capacity to represent 9/11 prompted initial expectations from scholars and social commentators that Hollywood spectacles of destruction would cease post-9/11 or that spectacle, violence and horror would at least be subdued (Dixon, 2004, Keane, 2006, Page, 2011). Yet as Page (2011; see also Prince, 2009) notes, the prediction Hollywood would refrain from visualising New York’s destruction was swiftly disproved, and numerous films have since represented it as the target of environmental, apocalyptic, alien and monster attacks – evidence nonetheless of the city’s continued symbolic significance in the American imagination.48

Nevertheless, Hollywood’s response has arguably witnessed a somewhat changed representation of spectacular destruction, one that paradoxically evokes the fears engendered on 9/11 and withholds spectacle to contain its overwhelming horror. A telling feature of initial post-9/11 Hollywood ‘imaginations of disaster’ (Keane, 2006) personalised the tragedy and avoided spectacle by primarily confining experience to the subjective, limited perspectives of characters. This approximates the mediated experience of 9/11 and the horrific, partial individual experience of real disaster and terror, which unlike Hollywood cinema, “creates frighteningly open-ended realms of

46 This is persistently highlighted in its repeated cinematic flooding and targeting by movie monsters (see Chapter Two for noted examples), but also in films like the pseudo-documentary film noir, The Naked City (Dassin, 1948).
47 Such critical horror is perhaps not only a consequence of 9/11’s real destruction and terror, but critics earlier dismissal of such spectacle in the blockbuster era.
48 Page significantly observes that such cultural imaginings were preceded by the graphic, near-apocalyptic and oft-disseminated imaginings of scenarios of terror by policy-makers and politicians.
meaning; not knowing “what happens next, to whom [or] why” (Kakoudaki, 2002, p.146). Muntean (2009, p.54) similarly notes that such examples of “missing the event” renders characters’ “experience and knowledge […] hopelessly fragmented and incomplete”. Such observations reflect assumptions about the ‘safe’ viewing position offered by the omniscient camera, and preface the manner in which 9/11 was initially experienced via amateur televisual footage. Although 9/11 afforded a superabundance of images, from a multiplicity of perspectives, its televisual mediation offered no master (Hollywood) perspective and therefore no ‘safe’ viewing position, part of why the attacks were so anxiety inducing, and further blurred notions of private and public, inside and outside. While the actual ‘event’ is representable at some level, 9/11 seemed virtually cinematically unrepresentable for a number of reasons. Yet Price (2008, p.64; see also Williams & Linneman, 2010) argues that when a fictional film refers to 9/11 or the wider ‘war on terror’ there is “a logical transference from the fictional environment to a wider social universe of political meaning” – that is, the “memory of lived disaster” can “give these images a haunting presence on the screen” (Burns, 2009, p.31). Explicit references and clear evocations of 9/11 and ‘war on terror’ imagery were, however, roundly criticised by reviewers and commentators, deemed unnecessary, distressing and exploitative. The conflicting, contradictory impulse – compelled to look but desiring to look away – is equally apparent in Gunn’s (cited in King, 2011, p.161) observation that their persistent, relentless televisual replay resulted in “a longing to return to, and escape from, the violent scene”. Nonetheless, with cinematic spectacle no longer ‘safe’, the withholding of spectacle also functions to contain the spectacle of (real) terror, by not showing it, which thereby facilitates masculinity’s recuperation in the ‘terror threat’ films.

‘Shapelessness’, Narrative & Genre

49 Firstly, Muntean (2009, p.55) observes a sense of mastery or control over an event as massive and excessive as 9/11 is impossible. Secondly, the attacks were in some sense already over-represented as images and spectacle – rendering any fictional cinematic representation gratuitous (see Lewis, 2006).

50 Williams and Linneman (2010, p.199) concur, claiming the use of evocative or shocking imagery related to beheadings, e.g. in Syriana, “is a powerful device to help the audience connect a fictional portrayal of Arabs to real-world violence”.

51 This is further demonstrated in Chapters One, Two and Four.
The benefits of withholding spectacle to contain it are mirrored in narrative film structure itself, with narrative and genre characteristics likewise containing (real, overwhelming and chaotic) terror, and thereby facilitating recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’, including in the ‘terror threat’ films. Writing about Hollywood’s depiction of the ‘war on terror’, Stewart (2009, p.45, cited in Carter & Dodds, 2011, p.103) suggests it is “too shapeless for plot […] or finding narrative drive or closure”. While Muntean (2009, p.58) contends containment within a narrative (and formal) structure “whose outcome is already known” renders a film “inherently unable to represent the chaos and anxiety – the initial failure of narrative” that made 9/11 so traumatic, perhaps therein lies its significance. As King (2011) earlier suggests, by displacing the traumas of the attacks, conventional narratives can facilitate remembering and recovery. Thus, simply narrativising 9/11 earns a measure of mastery or control, making what exceeded the capacity to comprehend comprehensible. This is a commonly held effect of narrative. For example, citing Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Copier (2008) notes that apocalyptic films give meaning and coherence to organise, explain – and thereby counter – the chaos of existence via conventional narrative structure, and a beginning, middle and end (to the film if not its story). Moreover, while admittedly depoliticising events, a focus on individual, ‘small’ stories humanises, personalises and thereby manages what was epic and iconic. Deploying genre tropes and expectations similarly contains terror, arguably overcoming supposed ‘shapelessness’ and excessiveness by providing structure and reducing complexities. In these ways, the horror and terror of 9/11 and the uncertainty of the ‘war on terror’ are managed and contained by being more, not less, ‘Hollywood’.

‘Remasculinising’ America: Hollywood, a ‘War’ on Terror, Women & ‘Others’

52 This in fact mirrors the Bush Administration’s discursive strategy to prosecute and justify the ‘war on terror’ through binary divisions (see Carter & Dodds, 2011). National myths similarly seek “to impose order on chaotic and disturbing experience – to resolve haunting contradictions and contain apprehensions” (Faludi, 2008, p.254).
The ‘muscular’ militaristic response to 9/11, particularly through the ‘war on terror’, conflated ideals of masculinity and national identity, and even presented national identity as masculine. More than this, it again invoked western codes and tropes and ‘frontier’ discourse. Slotkin (2001; see also Hannah, 2005) asserts that, along with the myth of the ‘good war’ (of Pearl Harbor and WWII), America invoked the myth of ‘savage war’ (based on the frontier myth), called on when American identity or ‘manhood’ “feel[s] profoundly threatened” or symbolically injured to rationalise and legitimise a limitless, violent, and “perhaps irrational use of force”. That said, America’s response was not atypical, as Nilges (2010) observes, with Jeffords (1994, cited by Dodds, 2008; see also Overpeck, 2012) identifying how during the Reagan-era a militaristic foreign policy was twinned with domestic values centred around hypermasculinity, ‘father figures’ – who in the course of protecting the state become better fathers in Hollywood film – and family life and nostalgia. As noted earlier, Nilges (2010, p.31) similarly contends that when America feels threatened, popular discourse and culture typically reinstate a reinvigorated, ‘traditional’ notion of masculinity. While popular culture also provides critique of such notions of masculinity, Nilges does imply how post-9/11 political and cultural ‘remasculinisation’ was associated with western tropes and constructions. Overall, there is significant synchronicity in the existing literature about rhetorical (gendered) responses to 9/11 and subsequent popular cultural responses, including from Hollywood.

Avenging, Sacrificial Action Heroes

Chief among the western and action gender codes valorised in the wake of 9/11 was the ‘ideal’ masculinity that would be required to eradicate, in Hannah’s (2005, p.558) words, the “gender-based insecurity” the attacks elicited. According to Faludi (2008), in contrast to the ‘9/11 changed everything’ paradigm, the attacks prompted nostalgia for cinematic conquest and triumph from classical westerns – also an altogether simplistic view of the western. Yet Hollywood western and 1980s action codes of the avenging, righteous, individualistic hero were repeatedly and nostalgically cited.

53 Slotkin also notes this typically also turns against domestic victims. ‘Savage war’ “clearly entails a fundamental refusal to respect boundaries”, including legal, national and moral (Hannah, 2005, p.559).
(Hannah, 2005; Faludi, 2008) and ‘traditional’ notions of masculinity – as transgressive, capable, prepared for violence and paternalistic – were explicitly valorised in the gendered response to 9/11. Numerous commentators suggest the valorisation of ‘traditional’ masculinities was also discursively realised via a (call for the) return to ‘traditional’ gender codes, roles and spaces, which mandated the consequent subordination of women. Scholars perceive this discursive elevation of (white, paternal) masculinities was echoed in Hollywood genre films – and notably at the expense of women and the foreign Other – which similarly valorises male sacrifice and suffering to recuperate damaged or otherwise disavowed ‘traditional’, patriarchal and professional masculinities. Indeed, King (2011, p.165) claims a wave of ‘sacrificial films’ following 9/11, imply “the nation has not only suffered […] but also been redeemed and improved in the process”, with the recuperation of national identity finally “dependent on the traumatic heroism of men”. Gallagher (2006; see also Carter & Dodds, 2011) also observes the continued construction of violence as redemptive and regenerative in post-9/11 action film. Thus, with the hero’s suffering linked to national suffering, American national identity is equally recuperated and ‘remasculinised’ through the redeeming of sacrificial, normative (and invariably white) masculinities, typically through violence.

The Return of the Avenging Professional-Father & Becoming ‘Mother’

Another key facet of the representation of masculinities in the ‘terror threat’ films explores the redemption of fathers following a crisis, and the explicit linking of fatherhood to public-professional identity and ‘protective’ uniforms. The elevation of ‘father figures’ again highlights the apparent synchronicity between news and political discourse following 9/11 and later Hollywood representations. Indeed, Tasker and Negra (2007, p.13, cited by Godfrey & Hamad, 2012, p.160) observe that both the state and popular culture likewise “offer[ed] fantasies of patriarchal protection”. Kord and Kimmer (2011, p.52) even suggest cultural representations of

54 Akin to McGillis’s (2009) description of B-picture cowboys, such transgressive masculine heroes fulfil popular mythic notions of the man who takes charge and shoulders responsibility, and without whom society could not be secured. Drew (2004, p.74; see also Faludi, 2008) argues the mediated construction of President Bush as determinedly eager to reassert control “reveal the cultural and media enthusiasm” for this ‘remasculinisation’.

55 For example, see Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2008; Melnick, 2009; Godfrey & Hamad, 2012.
crises in masculinity invariably morph into crises in fatherhood, with the father “an ideal vehicle for national myths”. Hollywood has supposedly prominently redeployed images of strong fathers, helpless daughters and absent mothers to facilitate (national) ‘remasculinisation’ post-9/11, with the recuperation of the father a proclaimed trend in film and television, for example, in action films and serial TV action and fantasy (Godfrey & Hamad, 2012) and SF-‘alien invasion’ films (Gunn, 2008). That said, the redemption or restoration of the ‘father figure’ is an acknowledged and persistent staple of Hollywood cinema that, as Copier (2008) similarly recognises, and as noted earlier in relation to 1980s and 1990s action cinema, significantly predates 9/11. Moreover, the conservative return of the strong father is well-established in post-apocalyptic popular cinema, which Broderick (1993) finds not only promotes ‘renewal’ through heteronormative articulations of the couple, the family and community, but increasingly reinforces the symbolic order and conservative social regimes, typically through the restoration of the ‘father’ and patriarchal law.56

As noted earlier, cinematic catastrophe is not only a frightening form of punishment, but also represents an opportunity to redress perceived social ills and insufficiencies.57 Indeed, as Nilges (2010, p.31) argues, because the loss of “traditional structures of stability and protection that are connected to the logic of fathering” post-9/11 is considered frightening, the cinematic “return to paternalism and the restoration of the strong father becomes positively associated with the rejection of an unpleasant present”. Hollywood thus often nostalgically represents a return to and reinstallation of an imagined past through an imagining of crisis and catastrophe, particularly through (refigured) gender roles and the return of the ‘father’. Nilges (p.31, see also Price, 2011) further contends the narrative of “the absent, troubled or impotent father” is frequent post-9/11, with paternal deficiencies

56 Kakoudaki (2002) also argues, in an article finalised in the wake of 9/11, that 1990s SF-disaster films, while neither produced nor received in an attempt to understand the contemporary American political landscape, nonetheless also reflect social times and anxieties through their capacity to render social problems visible, particularly around race and class; “politically eloquent despite [their] lack of depth”. These films “mark the rupture of meaning and national understanding” and in response use disaster and coordinated, collective response to offer a utopian alternative to complex social and political realities. In relation to United 93 and WTC, Žižek (2008, p.155, cited by Charles, 2009, p.3) asserts one ‘utopian perspective’ apparent in disaster movies implies American society “need[s] a major catastrophe in order to resuscitate the spirit of community solidarity”.

57 The initial apocalyptic framing of 9/11 is again interestingly signified here, and played out in popular cinema. That is, the association of 9/11 to apocalypse not only marks a time of tribulation, but a subsequent revealing or unveiling, for example, of dormant qualities of heroism, and foreshadows a final victory over evil.
resolved in response to a larger crisis, as in Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*, a remake of HG Wells’ novel and a 1953 film. Kord and Kinner (2011), examining SF and apocalypse-disaster films, likewise note that a world crisis repeatedly initiates a transition from diminished, inept ‘actual’ fathers to symbolic ‘ideal’ fathers. As such, the crisis must be solved by the father, which often requires violence, justified because enacted in the protection of the family. However, the elevation or return of the ‘father figure’ highlights gender’s relationality and the tendency for hegemonic or normative masculinities to establish their dominance at the expense of others. That is, the cinematic redemption of fathers seemingly also requires female helplessness (as daughters) and absence (as mothers). In the ‘terror threat’ films, along with an absence of governmental-military institutions, there is a concomitant absenting of mothers, with each absence creating ‘space’ for the redemption of the ‘father figure’, who becomes both the strong ‘father’ and the care-giving ‘mother’. Hence, representations of catastrophe, disaster and apocalypse often become an opportunity to restore or reinvigorate authority (and the status quo) and recentre (white) masculinity through the mythic figure(s) of the ‘avenging hero’ and the ‘strong father’.

A significant offshoot of this paternal focus, and also prevalent in the ‘terror threat’ films, concerns the hybridisation of professional and paternal masculinities. The domestication of the attacks of 9/11 is not only present in the collapsing of public and private boundaries via their live mediation and subsequent characterisation, but in post-9/11 Hollywood depictions of masculinity. This is interestingly articulated in Godfrey and Hamad’s (2012) analysis of the post-9/11 action film conflation of professional and paternal ‘protective’ masculinities (see also Brayton, 2011; King, 2011). Godfrey and Hamad (2012, p.164) describe the elevation of ‘protective’ masculinities, typically related to former policing and covert protective services, as a conflation of “public/private sphere paternalism […] according to the cultural logic of post-9/11 ideal masculinity”. In connecting fatherhood and public sphere work, Godfrey and Hamad argue films like *Taken* (Morel, 2008) recuperate “failed domestic fatherhood via [the] triumphal resurgence of public protective [professional] paternalism” (p.161). That is, their conflation into a hybrid ‘protective’ masculinity

deployed public-professional work to (re)validate previously derided or devalued performances of ‘traditional’ masculinity and the redemptive violence of the ‘strong father’. Carter and Dodds (2011) similarly observe that such professional father figures critically connect national and familial security.

Akin to the absenting of mothers, Godfrey and Hamad further note this conservative ‘professional’ recuperation of ‘traditional’ paternalism is tied to the imperilled daughter. This echoes Faludi’s (2008) description of American political and media efforts post-9/11 to restore national myths of (male) invincibility and (male) impregnability via a return to supposedly ‘traditional’ American gender types. Faludi ostensibly extends Nilges’ observation about the persistently reactive American popular cultural promotion of hypermasculinity to suggest that when threatened America turns to Hollywood western myths and stories of heroic or ‘manly’ men saving imperilled women. In the Hollywood western tradition, the ‘prominent’ feature of jeopardised white women and children justifies retributive vengeance and (re)militarisation (see Nolley, 2010; O’Connor, 2010). In this respect, Godfrey and Hamad (2012) also identify western tropes in relation to the portrayal of the ‘Arab Other’ in recent action cinema, depicting the resolution of threats to females through righteous, redemptive paternal violence. However, this thesis will contend the post-9/11 representation of the hybrid professional-father is arguably more complex in the ‘terror threat’ films and his recuperation ultimately less certain than Godfrey and Hamad claim. Furthermore, a focus on cinematic representations of the avenging, transgressive hero-father’s troubling use of ‘protective’ professional skills outside of an official or sanctioned professional role, is particularly unusual given how widely ‘protective’ uniformed roles and performances were celebrated in 9/11’s aftermath.59

Valorising ‘Protective’, Uniform(ed) Masculinities

Political leaders and the popular media repeatedly valorised particular types of men and masculine performance in the wake of 9/11 and the succeeding ‘war on terror’, notably firefighters, police officers and the military (see Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2008; 59 Indeed, such a focus is more akin to 1970s vigilante action film figures played by the likes of Charles Bronson and even Clint Eastwood.
Dodds, 2008). The highly gendered valorisation of ‘protective’ uniformed roles as representative of an ‘ideal’ masculinity explicitly aligns the wearer – and ‘remasculinisation’ – to that of the nation (and national identity). Moreover, gender in narrative film is an assemblage of signs, which includes the body and dress (Durham, 2004; Tasker, 2002), and ‘protective’ uniforms are routinely portrayed as representative of institutional and/or national identity in narrative cinema (for good and ill admittedly). However, Hollywood depictions of the performance of ‘protective’ uniformed masculinities and roles post-9/11 have been largely overlooked in favour of vigilante fathers, even though the ‘terror threat’ films numerous explore the relation of ‘protective’ uniforms to personal identity, redemption and ‘remasculinisation’, both personal and national, and relation of the ‘protective’ uniform to fatherhood.

Fashion scholars predominantly posit a close relationship between what individuals wear, identity and the communication or display of ideal masculine attributes. Indeed, according to Craik (2007, p.132; see also Calefato, 2000), uniforms serve as shorthand signifiers of the identity, characteristics and role of the wearer and afford a “visible lexicon of [valued] social characteristics, skills, attitudes, and habits”. Perhaps consequently, Craik (2007, p.138) claims uniforms both play “a dominant role in defining modes of masculinity” and that the ‘ideal’ attributes of masculinity inscribed in uniforms – such as activity, competence, capability, strength, practicality and even ‘uniformity’ – are typically aligned with normative masculine roles and attributes. Craik argues the spectacle of the uniform and its display of masculine attributes, both for the self and for others, combine in the performance of masculinity itself, particularly for uniforms emblematic of ‘doing’/action. That is, meaning resides primarily not in the body and what it does, but in how it appears to others, appropriating power and authority from the uniform and profession to the wearer. Nevertheless, Craik observes that such continuity between the uniform and masculinity is problematised in women’s uniforms, particularly police and military. Indeed, the stark absence of women from ‘protective’ uniforms that will be observed throughout the ‘terror threat’ films represents an absenting as significant as that of mothers.

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60 Gender in narrative film also includes accent, and the actor’s presence and star persona, most thoroughly explored in Chapter Three.
Yet uniforms also arguably offer a more complex relation of the body and masculinity than fashion scholars typically claim. More than communicating the trained body and representative of national idea(l)s, uniforms also cover, conceal and even compensate for the individual-wearer’s failings or vulnerabilities (see also Butler, 1990). Thus, ‘protective’ uniforms, more than merely making visible the performance of masculinity, can also conceal or repress wearer attributes or behaviours that perhaps contradict connoted ideals, of the uniform and of normative masculinity. For example, while Craik (2007) claims ‘dressing up’ in a sense prefigures what lies underneath, and thereby the intimate correlation of identity and uniform, she also acknowledges discrepancies and distinctions between the gendered uniform and the gendered wearer/body. This seemingly admits the ongoing tension and potential disjuncture between (the experience of) wearing the ‘protective’ uniform over its connotative, ‘ideal’ meanings and between the appearance and performance of ‘protective’ uniformed masculinity, tensions and/or discrepancies that significantly impact on the representation and recuperation of masculinities in the encounter with terror, especially when hybridised with fatherhood.

Nonetheless, uniforms, particularly military, also play an ideological role, one associated with their role in gender. More than communicating belonging to a particular social institution, Tonchi (2000, p.155) asserts the military uniform connotes a sense of belonging to a specific idea and (idea of) nation. The military uniform also helps the wearer adhere to associated values, expectations and meanings and equally reassures others, alleviating uncertainty in communicating ‘commonly understood’ ideas of collective strength, authority, discipline and order (Greco, 2000). Equally, the sense of reciprocal belonging, duty and unity connote the abnegation of the self in service of the nation. Nonetheless, the uniform is both a marker of unity and of difference. That is, while Calefato (2000, p.203; see also Greco, 2000) observes the military – or ‘protective’ – uniform literally “makes men uniform”, it is also paradoxically “the emblem of separation […] between familiar and alien, ‘ours’

61 Neither can the ‘protective’ uniform be considered in isolation, but non-discretely with other aspects of gender and identity, like fatherhood.
62 Butler (1990) recognises this dual capacity, observing that clothes both cover and articulate the body.
63 Interestingly, the ‘golden age’ of the uniform coincides with the “birth of the modern state […] and the emergence of nationalism” (Tonchi, 2000, p.154).
and ‘theirs’, identity and otherness” (p.196). In this sense, and of particular relevance to the ‘terror threat’ films, the visibility of the (‘protective’) uniform, as much as its connoted authority, confers a sense of legitimacy, one conversely withheld from the often invisible, non-uniformed and therefore illegitimate terrorist-Other.

**Othering the Invisible, Monstrous ‘Terror-Other’**

Political and media rhetoric also advanced American ‘remasculinisation’ through the ‘war on terror’ and binary constructions of the terrorist threat as wholly Other, as ‘them’, in contrast to ‘traditional’ American masculinities. It is not unusual for a foreign enemy to be ‘created’ to reaffirm and solidify social and political boundaries (Williams & Linneman, 2010; see also Duncombe, 2011). Indeed, ongoing state identity production often encourages construction of the very differences that threaten in order to sanction the state’s protection against threat (Nayak, 2006, p.45). Accordingly, the existing literature claims the ‘remasculinisation’ of normative ‘American’ masculinities in post-9/11 Hollywood largely occurs in relation to the terrorist-identified Other, the ‘terror threat’ ‘created’ merely to facilitate recuperation at their expense. The ‘terror threat’ films feature absent 9/11 attackers, giant monsters, ‘vampire-zombies’ and ‘Arab/Muslim’ terror masterminds, but in each the terror-Other is inhuman, rendered abject and marked as monstrous. This post-9/11 representation of the monstrosity of both direct cinematic terror figures in action and allegorical ones in horror and SF is telling – terrorists-as-monsters and monsters-as-terrorists. Thus, allegorical monsters are represented in accordance with discursive

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64 I utilise Nayak’s (2006, p.58) employment of ‘Arab/Muslim’, to similarly “politicise and denote the conflation […] into a singular entity” of Arab and Muslim.

65 Nayak (2006, pp.42-43; see also Aguayo, 2009; Duncombe, 2011) claims 9/11 led to a wider Orientalist discursive and military project, ‘forcefully coding constitutive differences’ between dominant Self and subordinate Other, to ‘resurrect’ American identity as strong and impenetrable. Although this is difficult to quantify, and could be associated with increased scholarly attention, Aguayo (2009, p.42; see also Nayak, 2006) also claims a resurgence in post-9/11 representations that “reinvigorat[e] Orientalist discourses”. Culcasi (2010, p.583) observes “[t]he construction of the Middle East is deeply embedded in Orientalist discourses”, and while specific imaginings have altered slightly, Orientalist discourses “have survived and are now deeply ingrained in everyday American life” (p.584), the terminology merely changed from ‘Orient’ to ‘Middle East’. Sardar and Davies (2010, p.248) also note that, despite the so-called unprecedented nature of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, by “referring to and feeding off all the conventions and associations of ideas that have gone before” the contemporary ‘Arab/Muslim’ terrorist “emerges less from the world of political reality than […] the western imagination” (see also Shaheen, 2001; Wilkins, 2006; Williams & Linneman, 2010).
constructions of the modern terrorist threat, as personifications of evil, characterised as malevolent, without rationale or purpose, their monstrosity especially evident in their deliberate yet indiscriminate targeting of civilians (see Christiansen, 2008). Moreover, their monstrosity is further signalled in the tendency to represent post-9/11 movie ‘monsters’ as abject, a tendency exacerbated by CGI that disavows the terror-enemy’s humanity (see Hantke, 2011). In so doing, post-9/11 Hollywood serves to contain, nullify and annihilate difference, including through the adherence to genre expectations and history.

Cinematic monsters – including Orientalised terrorists – articulate our anxieties (and desires), and their conventional annihilation or suppression exorcises these fears and threats, at least temporarily. Inevitably, as Hantke (2011, pp.240-241) observes about Cold War SF-horror, these films offer “a space for reifying, manifesting and confronting, and thus for exorcising collective anxieties”, and the “reassertion of individual, collective and institutional control”. In so doing, they typically depict the reinvigoration of society and the status quo and a return to some form of normality, however fragile (see Carroll, 1990; Clover, 1992; England, 2005). However, as suggested, monsters are not so much discovered as made (Halberstam, 1995, cited in Christiansen, 2008), discursively constructed or ‘created’ much like the terror threat following 9/11. As Wessels (2010, p.107) observes, “stories of monstrosity function allegorically”, irrespective of whether they reify sexual anxieties, racial fears or national traumas. As Christiansen (2008) too observes, monsters represent “ways of seeing and understanding the world” and offer instruction on how a culture not only see its Others but itself. Indeed, Hantke’s (2010, 2011) and Prince’s (2009) shared view that the post-9/11 years are broadly analogous to Cold War life under persistent nuclear threat are reflected in Hantke’s observations about a recent (re)turn to 1950s Cold War-era SF-horror films or genres.66 In this respect, monsters also accumulate meaning intertextually, via the cinematic monsters that precede them, with their contemporary meaning shaped by Hollywood genre history. In this respect, with the monster reductively characterised as evil and inhuman, Christiansen (2008, pp.7-8) claims that rather than representing “transgressive and dangerous Otherness, these movie monsters [… represent] distinctively American responses to social fears”. That

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66 Hantke notes this is apparent particularly in relation to remakes of invasion films like War of the Worlds and The Invasion (Hirschbiegel, 2007) and the revitalisation of the trope of the giant creature or monster, such as in Cloverfield.
is, rather than marking difference or Otherness, they are intimately linked with historical generic monsters and “an integral part” of American culture. Thus, Christiansen claims the allegorical terrorist-monster’s potentially frightening difference is annulled through the cumulative cinematic history of generic constructions of monstrosity, just as in action cinema’s ‘Orientalisation’ of the terrorist-Other.

Not only were terrorist characters marked as monstrous, but they were tied to cinematic genre history and the construction of the avenging hero and ‘ideal’ masculinity. Hollywood western cinematic history and genre codes in particular were repeatedly invoked post-9/11, in combination with Orientalist imagery and ‘frontier’ discourse, to construct the modern terror threat. Although utilising stereotypes that perhaps betray a somewhat convenient ignorance of the more complex ‘reality’ (including in classical Hollywood westerns), numerous scholars identify the conflation of ‘Indians’ and ‘Arab/Muslims’ in public discourse after 9/11 – again blurring distinctions between the foreign and the domestic. For example, Hannah (2005, p.558; see also Faludi, 2008) claims post-9/11 discourse was reminiscent of “centuries of stereotypes of Indian combat” and Hollywood western iconography, invoking both a cowardly enemy opposed to civilisation itself and an unyielding retributive hero. Post-9/11 rhetoric and policies also reinvoked a ‘frontier’ desire to violate boundaries in order to, in McGillis’ (2009, p.7) words, exercise “active control of an Other that requires stewardship and taming”. Again suggesting the synchronicity of public discourse and later cultural representations, Godfrey and Hamad (2012) similarly identify western tropes in the construction of the ‘Arab/Muslim’ Other in recent action cinema, typically enacted in order to secure or solidify American identity and recuperate ‘traditional’ masculinity both through rendering the Other monstrous and its violent annihilation.

Such arguments about the seeming discursive and generic containment of the monstrous terror-Other, however, tend to downplay how each is stimulated by fears and anxieties both about the Self and of the Other. For example, counter to her overall

67 See, for example, Aguayo, 2009; Nayak, 2009; Duncombe, 2011. And like Orientalism, the cinematic representation of Indians comes from a long intellectual and cultural tradition built up over centuries, and particularly through popular westerns (see Nolley, 2010).
argument, Nayak (2006, p.44) also claims that American Orientalising efforts “reveal that fear has always been necessarily present in the relationship” between America and its ‘constitutive others’, even prior to 9/11. Holmlund (2002) correctly castigates the relative absence of and lack of engagement with ethnic bodies in the privileging of white ones. However, recognising gender’s relationality, Walsh (2010; see also Duncombe, 2011) acknowledges that identity is dependent on the rigorously opposed and excluded Other – peripheral but symbolically central.68 As such, this thesis contends a more unsettling significance and impact of such ‘invisibility’ and lack of engagement with the hegemony, dominance and recuperation of American masculinity. Thus, as in the supposed recuperation of professional-fathers, the representation of the monstrous terrorist-Other in the ‘terror threat’ films is arguably more complex than critically presumed. Indeed, this contention mirrors Hantke’s (2010, 2011) observations on the now acknowledged ideological variation and complexity of both 1950s Cold War-era Hollywood SF-horror and contemporary scholarly criticism, a variation and complexity currently lacking in critical considerations of post-9/11 ‘monsters’. In short, consensus claims in the existing literature about the comprehensive annihilation of monstrous difference, literally and generically, establishes an opportunity and need to explore whether and how (mis)representations of the Orientalised/monstrous Other complicate and/or trouble Hollywood ‘remasculinisation’ despite numerous strategies to ameliorate and annul their frightening difference.

‘Remasculinisation’ Troubled, Ambivalent & Incoherent

Contemporary popular cinema constitutes an important part of the cultural response to the attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing ‘war on terror’, and Hollywood genre and gender codes were repeatedly invoked in the mediated construction of 9/11, its subsequent interpretation and the conduct of the ‘war on terror’. Despite the centrality and diversity of gender codes in characterising 9/11 and the responses to it, scholarly work specifically addressing masculinities in contemporary Hollywood is somewhat

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68 Duncombe (2011, p.38) also recognises, the struggle for identity recognition is dialogical rather than one-way. And Nayak (2006, p.45) observes orientalism also “reflects insecurity about the Other becoming an actor rather than object”. The “very agency of Others challenges US conceptions of itself and its modes of internal/international domination”.

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limited. Critical assumptions of a post-9/11 reinvigoration or ‘remasculinisation’ of ‘traditional’ and hegemonic masculinities predominate, and are mainly confined to particular ‘action genres’, especially action movies, and fathers acting outside their sanctioned professional roles. Furthermore, scholars tend to read generic representations of American masculinity unambiguously or schematically, even when suspecting its recuperation or narrative resolution to be unconvincing or unreassuring. An Editorial in Cineaste (2007) perhaps reflects this, asserting the numerous commercially unsuccessful ‘war on terror’-related Hollywood films “all shed light on the state of the American psyche”, not only on the threat to the home posed by the Other but by the war itself, before further noting they “[i]ronically enough, […] undermine the resurgent male triumphalism that Faludi assails”. 69 Yet the Editors, focusing on direct representations of the ‘war on terror’, miss the greater implication of their observation, namely, the uncertain or limited textual support for claims about the prevalence of Hollywood ‘remasculinisation’ post-9/11.

Admittedly, although the critical consensus on Hollywood’s ‘remasculinisation’ of primarily ‘traditional’, transgressive, professional-paternal and white masculinities post-9/11 is widespread, it is not wholesale. For example, Nilges (2010, p.28) argues the ‘crisis’ of the “loss of traditional forms of stability and protection” is most obvious in “the figure of the white male action hero, who, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, is […] increasingly unable to avert threats to family, community, and nation”. Faludi (2008) too, in contradiction of her primary argument, echoes this interpretation of recent Hollywood. In concert with this, Renner (2012; see also Crowe, 2012) notes, albeit only briefly, a recent focus on ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ protagonists in recent apocalyptic cinema. Indeed, a focus on less-than-ordinary Everyman figures, thoroughly overwhelmed by extraordinary circumstances, is similarly evident in the ‘terror-threat’ films. 70 Although Tudor (1991) identifies horror film’s long-standing interest in the trials of the isolated, overwhelmed Everyperson-victim, Renner’s observation ostensibly recognises greater complexity and diversity in representations

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69 This may in part be a consequence of the 9/11 cycle of 2007-08 being released while “still very much ongoing and with no apparent end in sight” (Carter & Dodds, 2011, p.103).

70 This ‘ordinariness’, rather atypical to the genre, not only marks the overwhelming scale of 9/11 but rationalises consequent protagonist insufficiency as human and understandable – although this remains frightening and unsettling.
of cultural ‘remasculinisation’ post-9/11, thereby disturbing dominant critical assumptions.

Scholarly explorations of post-9/11 cinematic ‘remasculinisation’ also focus primarily on white masculinities. In this respect, Nama (2008, pp.40-41; see also Brayton, 2011) argues blackness in post-9/11 SF cinema functions “to promote an image of a racially integrated America” and “to assure a nation grappling with post-9/11 paranoia […] that patriotic solidarity transcends racial loyalty”. In so doing, anxieties about domestic racial difference are assuaged through ‘multicultural fantasies’ that function to transcend or contain race, subordinating it in the service of nation and/or displacing it onto the alien-monster Other (Nama, 2008; Magill, 2009). However, rather than a specifically post-9/11 condition, Nama (2008; see also Magill, 2009) acknowledges that experiences and conditions of race, and blackness in particular, are persistently and historically elided in SF. While this reinforces Linda Williams’ (2002) assertion of a general ‘inexpressibility’ of race in contemporary American popular and visual culture, by overlooking racial difference, films and scholarly readings of post-9/11 cultural responses, as bell hooks (1996) earlier argues, may simply preserve the white dominance and hegemony in declining to contest it. As such, there is a significant need to coextensively explore white and black masculinities, and issues of race and ethnicity in the ‘terror-threat’ films, and in relation both to protagonists and ‘terror-Others’.

Nonetheless, it seems arguments about the post-9/11 ‘remasculinisation’ of American society, politics and popular culture too readily resituate Jeffords (1994), implicitly assuming a Republican presidency post-9/11 would encourage political and cultural responses mirroring Reagan-era America, rather than Vietnam-era or Cold War America, for example. Yet this thesis expressly explores the significance of narrative incoherences within the ‘terror threat’ films, which ostensibly conform to the principles of ‘classical narration’. That is, rather than dulling, as Holloway (2006) claims, such incoherences represent politically and culturally significant ruptures or breakdowns within such a highly coherent system. Indeed, such cinematic narrative ‘incoherence’ has been linked previously to national periods of turmoil, as Smith (1975) contends in relation to Vietnam, that the ‘disorienting’ and “indeterminate nature of that war [it] couldn’t seem to win or abandon, was reflected in our
filmmakers’ inability to find an appropriate format for presenting the war to a mass audience”. Robin Wood (2003, p.62) also asserts 1970s Hollywood cinema’s relative incoherence, arguing that dramatised issues and conflicts “no longer even appear to be resolvable within the system, within the dominant ideology”. In short, the potential significance of textual incoherence and ambivalence in post-9/11 Hollywood, and particularly ‘terror threat’ films and the ‘remasculinisation’ of American men, masculinities and national identity therein, needs to be further examined rather than dismissed.

Therefore, this thesis’ specific focus on ‘American’ masculinities in the encounter with and experience of terror represents an opportunity to redress critical gaps and reconsider recent, persistent and dominant critical assumptions on the success and extent of post-9/11 Hollywood’s recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ of men (including black and Everyman protagonists) and normative masculinities represented as ‘in crisis’. This thesis interrogates whether these Hollywood films promote a return to ‘traditional’ gender codes and ‘roles’ during a perceived time of crisis, particularly at the expense of maligned women and ‘terror-Others’. It particularly explores representations of ‘protective’ masculinities, most notably via hybrid uniformed-paternal ‘roles’ or types of masculine identity specifically valorised following 9/11 and explicitly aligned with national identity. It also importantly examines how the encounter with the ‘terror-Other’ impacts on damaged or threatened ‘American’ masculinities. This satisfies Connell’s (2001) call for more focus on relations of power between men, exploring masculinities from both the dominant or hegemonic perspective and that of marginalised – including monstrous – masculinities. It also facilitates a consideration of the significance of ‘American’ anxieties about the Self and fears of the Other, rather than presumes the power and recuperation of hegemonic masculinities – typically white males – over Others (femininities and foreign masculinities). In so doing, I contend that the redemption and recuperation of ‘American’ masculinities is more ambivalent, compromised, uncertain and unstable than existing scholarly accounts presume in the encounter with terror in the Hollywood ‘terror threat’ films.

Wood (p.62) nonetheless notes these were soon followed by “demoralisingly ‘moral’ reactionary movies” like Star Wars (Lucas, 1977).
As such, the next chapter in the thesis explores a direct representation of the immediate experience of 9/11 in New York at ‘Ground Zero’. The chapter explores not only how *World Trade Center*, a post-9/11 disaster film with elements of melodrama and the ‘mine accident’ movie, represents the city and the terror event, but how it explicitly links the attacks to the American home and family. Chapter One particularly examines the tensions between private and professional aspects of male identity via the father-officer and various symbolic but ambivalent ‘returns’, both to the home and to the ‘protective’ uniform, that function to recuperate and ‘remasculinise’ damaged normative ‘American’ masculinities. The chapter finally explores the representation of women and gendered spaces, the erasure of ethnic difference, and the significance of the wholly and disconcertingly absent ‘terror-Other’.
Chapter One – World Trade Center

“Shielding us from what we are not yet ready to see”: the Uniformed ‘Hero’ as Victim, Survivor & Father

This chapter exemplifies the notion that Hollywood actively seeks to place masculinities ‘in crisis’ before seeking to stabilise, restore and recuperate normative masculinity. World Trade Center does this through strategies of narrative and generic containment in a post-9/11 evocation of the disaster subgenre and the containment of cinematic spectacle, with non-computer generated imagery from 9/11 confined to (inside the frame) TV screens. While the film conflates paternal and professional identity as ‘protective’ masculinity, it is not only not ‘traditional’ or violent, but uniformed. World Trade Center explores the immediate experience of 9/11 and thus goes inside the terror event, representing the experience inside what would become ‘Ground Zero’: a hyper-localised and (a) mediated experience of terror in the vulnerable American home. The film also marks the transition from crime scene to war zone or battlefield via one key character’s return to military uniform, which seemingly recuperates and ‘remasculinises’ American national identity. However, this symbolic return to the uniform is also equally indicative of incoherence and ambivalence and finally destabilised against the disquieting absence of specifically who attacked on 9/11, the unspecified and unnamed ‘terror-Other’.

This chapter first outlines critical and societal anxieties about Hollywood’s proposed representation of 9/11, as briefly described in the Introduction. This in a sense explains the consequent choice for both World Trade Center (henceforth WTC) and United 93 to go inside 9/11, inside the World Trade Center and Flight 93. The chapter explores the representation of 9/11’s subsequent impact on normative uniformed masculinity and the consequent responses to collapse of the Twin Towers and entrapment inside the wreckage of ‘Ground Zero’. WTC seeks to contain (the) disaster, the horror of the attacks, by controlling cinematic spectacle and only representing them indirectly, inside TV screen frames. The film seeks to contain terror through narrative and generic conventionality and an abrupt and disquieting mid-film ‘subgeneric shift’, from ‘disaster epic’ to the ‘mine accident’ movie. I also
explore the significance of establishing masculine identity through a conflation of paternal and professional identity intimately associated with the wearing of uniforms (police and military) and performance of a ‘protective’ role. Yet public-professional ‘protective’ masculinity is subsequently destabilised and threatened by not the attacks but the collapse of the buildings, as professional capacity is overwhelmed and masculine mobility erased. This refuges the relationship between professional and paternal, requiring the elevation of previously neglected familial roles, as father and husband, in reimag(in)ing and re-asserting conventional ideas of masculinity by substituting fatherhood for benevolent paternalism and professional identity. The recovery of WTC’s wounded men and their return to the refigured American home also re-establishes normative masculinity as active, potent and mobile. However, the symbolic return of fathers to the home is ambivalent with space in the film clearly and pejoratively gendered, with ‘Ground Zero’ a masculine (and male-only) space of search-and-recovery and the home ‘feminine’, confined, constrained and fearful. I then consider how rescuer-characters concurrently seek to ‘remasculinise’ in and through a return to the uniform, not only to signify the shift to wartime, but to recuperate damaged ‘American’ national identity. The chapter finally demonstrates how these ideas of return, redemption and recuperation of masculine identity, both as father and through return to the uniform, are unsettled because they are achieved via male masquerade and in the yawning, absence of the ‘terror-Other’, a discomfiting absence which fundamentally inhibits the reassertion of masculinity, as relational.

Oliver Stone’s WTC (2006), a post-9/11 disaster film, purports to be a film about revelation – both biblical and prosaic. Released five years after 9/11, the film tells the true story of the entrapment, survival and rescue of two Port Authority police officers, Staff Sergeant John McLoughlin (Nicolas Cage) and rookie Will Jimeno (Michael Peña), trapped in the collapse of the Twin towers on 9/11. 72 Rescuers become victims following their entrapment in the first tower’s collapse and WTC introduces Dave Karnes (Michael Shannon), an accountant who dons his former Marine uniform to search for survivors, finally locating McLoughlin and Jimeno and enabling their recovery. Karnes, based on a real-life participant and a character numerous scholars and reviewers deem the film’s most important, watches news of the attacks at work in

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72 The officers were two of only twenty survivors pulled from the rubble of Tower Two – the second tower hit but first to fall.
Connecticut. In the following scene Karnes visits his church to seek guidance in relation to his response. The first shows the Bible, open to “The Book of Revelation to John” (or “Apocalypse”), identifying the attacks as a time of tribulation for character and nation alike. In light of Revelation’s significance, they also represent a ‘revealing or unveiling’ – and foreshadow a final victory, an ultimate ‘overcoming’. The film’s voiceover epilogue, from McLoughlin, reiterates this notion of revelation – of unveiling, overcoming and seeking truth. The attacks of 9/11 mark a radically refigured state of affairs for America and a new threat, but in the film they also reveal the spirit of American perseverance, community and faith in responding to this new threat. McLoughlin’s survival and rescue equally represents the overcoming of conventional masculinity’s destabilisation. Ultimately, \textit{WTC} may be more about shielding than revealing, invoked in Karnes’ transcendental declaration upon seeing the thick cloud of smoke, ash and debris that shrouds the rubble of the fallen twin towers: “It’s like God put up a curtain of smoke, shielding us from what we are not yet ready to see”. \textit{WTC} ultimately attempts to shield audiences, formally and narratively, from the horror and disaster of events already over-represented \textit{and} the ambivalent representations of masculinities, uniforms and the home.

\textbf{Hollywood & Directly Representing 9/11}

As outlined in the Introduction, commentators and filmgoers were sceptical of Hollywood’s capacity to represent 9/11 accurately and authentically, without distorting the national trauma for dramatic purposes or exploiting it for commercial profit. Yet equally – and ambivalently – many commentators also “agreed that the ‘cultural memory of 9/11 would be incomplete until’ Hollywood responded (Jordan, 2008, p.205). Nonetheless, commentators debated American audiences’ preparedness (see Lee, 2006; Muntean, 2009; Stevens, 2006). In particular, it seemed cinema’s singular capacity to enlarge and make spectacular via projection was the chief concern; fearing that it would enshrine and enlarge the day’s original fear. For example, those few that did consider Hollywood capable of ‘memorialising’ the day attested this would require that it ‘transcend’ typical Hollywood approaches to the ‘imagination of disaster’ (Jordan, 2008).
Although designating *United 93* a Hollywood film is highly debatable – given its British director, its *cinéma vérité* aesthetic – it was uniformly read as a Hollywood production or through this paradigm (See Prince, 2009). Commentators commonly praised *United 93*’s ‘transcendence’ of Hollywood ‘type’ in its authenticity and veracity. Rather than satisfy debate, *United 93*’s ‘authenticity’, in contrast to opening a space for Hollywood to mediate 9/11, led to critical unease and resistance, particularly over its ‘dispiriting’ ending – “the feel bad American movie of the year” (Darghis 2006). Edelstein’s (2006) otherwise positive appraisal was reflective of *United 93*’s reception: “If it was indeed a saga of heroism, its heroes weren’t conventionally introduced, and all, *unconventionally*, perished” (emphasis added). The film was paradoxically both *too real* in its claustrophobic evocation of events and dispiriting ending and *could never be real enough*, in any case, as a Hollywood movie (and which exceeds the known public record).

Even greater public and media consternation greeted confirmation Oliver Stone was to direct a 9/11 film, *WTC*. Stone’s ambivalent representations of recent American history and experiences – “Stone seemed permanently at war” (Denby, 2006) – led numerous critics to fear (read: assume) he would dishonour the day’s tragedy and its victims. His earlier presidential and Vietnam-era films – *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *JFK* (1991), and *Nixon* (1995) – also led to assumptions that any Stone 9/11 film would negatively represent the Bush Administration’s role and perhaps even indulge his proclivity for conspiracy theories. And finally, his common stylistic flourishes led to expectations that “the usual Stone tics”, shifts from colour to black-and-white, repetitions of action or “explosions of light to italicise evidence of evildoing” (Alleva, 2006, p.24; see also Edelstein, 2006), would overwhelm, even consume victim-survivor stories.

73 Regardless of its designation, *United 93* satisfies this thesis’ designation of a ‘terror threat’ film, one in which America is targeted by terror.

74 The film’s ‘authenticity’ deemed to lie in Greengrass’ extensive research and interviews with participants and families, his documentary-realist aesthetic, and his use of minor actors and real participants in prominent roles. Akin to his earlier *Bloody Sunday* (2002), Greengrass makes spare use of non-diegetic sound, prefers naturalistic lighting, and primarily restricts the narrative to the perceptual subjectivity point-of-view, i.e. the vantage from which a character could presumably see. That said, Marcks (2006) succinctly demonstrates the many visual effects and formal devices Greengrass uses in constructing the ‘artificial reality’.

75 See Johnson, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Klawans, 2006; Muntean, 2009; Stevens, 2006.

76 Such concerns were only fuelled by controversial comments Stone made shortly after 9/11. As part of a film panel in New
Yet, \textit{WTC} seemingly merits none of these concerns. Stone, like Greengrass, uses survivor accounts and participation to claim a measure of authenticity and veracity.\textsuperscript{77} These interviews, along with the involvement of participants as script consultants and extras, seek to affirm Hollywood’s telling of their story; as Stone suggests it “was crucial that it be responsible and accurate […] it had to be right on” (Jaafar 2006). The “fervour” of each director’s assertions of adherence to ‘the details’ and ‘reality’ of 9/11 highlighted the loftier aims and claims of the films and ensured they could not be dismissed as ’common entertainment’ (Muntean, 2009, pp.56-57). Nonetheless, \textit{WTC}’s conscious and concerted play at ‘authenticity’ and verisimilitude paradoxically ‘shields’ or conceals the film’s formal style, its conventionality or ‘Hollywoodness’.

\textbf{Containing (the) Disaster: Cinematic Spectacle & Conventionality}

Atypically for Stone – and much to the surprise of critics – \textit{WTC} is formally, narratively and stylistically conventional.\textsuperscript{78} It uses well-known actors, dramatic visual effects and score and, as Keane (2006) writes of disaster films, offers closure in in focusing on a few ‘representative characters’ who make their way towards survival. Yet, ironically, it is primarily \textit{WTC}’s formal and generic conventionality, its embrace of ‘Hollywood’ style, that most opens a space for it to mediate 9/11. That is, in contrast to commentators’ stated desire for Hollywood to ‘transcend itself’, it is \textit{WTC}’s conventional structure, its ‘Hollywood-ness’, which was consistently applauded as its most admirable and surprising feature.\textsuperscript{79}

The existing literature focuses on \textit{WTC}’s conventionality and deployment of classical narration techniques. Indeed, Pheasant-Kelly (2010, p.1; see also Rickli, 2009)
contends that *WTC*’s conventional narrative structure, in offering closure and filling in narrative ‘gaps’ about 9/11, “promotes catharsis”. The film is consciously “a visual narrative of empowerment […] constructed to repair the American sense of self and restore national integrity” (Ozcan, 2008, p.207). Thus, the film’s conventional structure seemingly enables it to mediate 9/11 and facilitates its reconstruction and recuperation of wounded normative masculinity. And while this chapter also explores how *WTC* works narratively and formally to not only recover its trapped men, but normative ‘American’ masculinity (and in turn the nation), I contend the film is more complex and less certain than critically assumed. That is, scholars too readily take the film’s conventional structure and ostensibly conservative style and narrative as given. Thus, while the existing literature treats the trajectories of the trapped men, their wives and the parallel experience of Karnes as complimentary, this chapter explores how each experience impacts on and complicates that of the other. In this respect, this chapter also explicitly considers the relation of gender to space, including the explicit gendering of space, and its impact on the recuperation of normative masculinity.

In short, the existing literature claims either that *WTC*’s conventionality offers catharsis or that its narrow, personal focus also arguably “shield[s] us from the true dimensions of the tragedy”, the film “a comforting diversion” which ultimately fails to satisfy (Rosenbaum, 2006). Yet perhaps it is the film’s embrace of ‘Hollywood’ style ultimately unsettles its capacity to either afford catharsis or redeem wounded masculine and national identity, particularly in its too neat, almost pat epilogue. Muntean (2009, p.58) too contends that containment within a familiar narrative – the promotional poster clearly denotes the trapped men’s survival – inhibits *WTC*’s capacity to “re-present” 9/11’s chaos and “the initial failure of narrative”. However, in contrast to Muntean’s assertion, *WTC* is arguably, and perhaps unavoidably ambivalent and incoherent. That is, almost in spite of itself, *WTC* is finally overwhelmed by loss, absence – of victim-bodies and perished colleagues – and slippage. In this respect, *WTC* becomes not only a surprisingly ‘authentic’ mediation of 9/11 but offers a less coherent, reassuring or ‘cathartic’ representation of the experience of 9/11, and a more ambivalent representation of the recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ of ‘in crisis’ normative masculinities than is characteristically claimed in the existing literature.
Nonetheless, *WTC*’s familiar genre cues and structure manage the day’s chaos. *WTC*’s formal conventionality, in concert with its sentimentality, valorisation of uniforms, reintegration of the family and restoration of the ‘father figure’, is a strategy that seeks to contain the ‘uncontainable’ horror of 9/11 and reiterate conservative values. As Johnson (2006, pp.49, 51) rightly observes *WTC* “never lets you forget” you’re watching a movie; Stone personalises the tragedy “and surrenders to the most elemental form of Hollywood mythmaking”. Zacharek (2006) further testifies that if films about 9/11 must be made then Stone’s “old-fashioned dramatisation” is perhaps “more honourable”, in contrast to *United 93*. In his focus on two men’s struggle for survival, Stone seeks to humanise and personalise what was epic and iconic, but also to manage the horror, to gain a measure of control over it. In particular, *WTC* specifically uses narration and style to contain the disaster, its horror and its spectacle. As Rich (2006) notes, the “familiar cues of genre entertainment” ‘comfort’ an audience potentially traumatised by the prospect of the attacks’ restaging. Although Muntean (2009) observes that a sense of mastery or control of an event as massive and as excessive as 9/11 is impossible, by simply narrativising and restaging the events, along with its focus on one small story, *WTC* gains a measure of mastery or control over the tragedy, making what exceeded the capacity to comprehend comprehensible. Stone himself affirms this, along with the story’s representativeness: “You have to handle the wound very delicately. […] You just deal with the subject delicately because it’s a small one but also a big one” (Jaafar, 2006). In an argument aligned with trauma theory, in such a way the horror is managed, reduced, contained.

As outlined in the Introduction, spectacle is a ‘longstanding’, ‘pervasive’ feature of the disaster genre and the cinematic representation of disaster revealed in the cinematic, fantastical destruction of key American architectural sites, chief among them New York. Following 9/11, such unabandoned pleasure in spectacle was criticised because the previous ‘hollowness’ of such spectacles was now saturated with meaning as a consequence of real destruction and terror. Compounding this, 9/11

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80 This is not to claim *WTC* is a more fitting ‘commemorative text’ than *United 93*, but more to reconsider ideas of how Hollywood can, does and perhaps should effectively memorialise public tragedies for audiences.

81 The value of narrativisation poignantly noted by the real John McLoughlin: “Revisiting these events became a form of therapy for the real men […], became cathartic for all of them” (*WTC* Production Notes, 2006).

82 A point also made by Pheasant-Kelly (2010, p.13) in relation to moments of abjection in *WTC*. 
seemed to be virtually cinematically unrepresentable, not only because of the horrific invisibility or under-representation of most of its victims (before they could be memorialised), but because of its over-representation as spectacle. In this sense, the relative “unseen-ness”, employing Muntean’s (2009, p.55) expression, of the respective subject matter in both WTC and United 93 is telling, with both choosing to go ‘inside’ events and representing “previously obscured and private details”.

Moreover, while films that directly depict 9/11 both represent and respond, in the attempt to articulate and comprehend, they are also in part impotent and overwhelmed. For it is equally impossible to represent the scale of the actual and symbolic loss that 9/11 represented – a sense of loss that Drew (2004) extends to normative notions of masculinity, that is, masculinity as active, protective and capable. Thus, WTC may be a ‘direct’ representation but, unable to fully represent the ‘unrepresentable’, it remains as defined by indirectness – by absence, slippage and ambivalence – as allegorical films.

Nonetheless, in WTC, commentators applauded Stone’s restraint in minimising, even forgoing, spectacle. Critics testified ‘approvingly’ of the film’s visual sparsity and its willingness to forgo the temptation of spectacle; the “epoch-defining disaster is rendered in shorthand – the shadow of a plane, the thud of the impact – largely mediated by TV” (Hoberman, 2006; see also Scott, 2006). Stone's intention to de-emphasise spectacle, to de-spectacularise the narrative and thereby contain the disaster, is highlighted in his use of a 1.85:1 (Academy Flat) aspect ratio, as opposed to the more ‘epic’ 2.35:1 ratio typical of contemporary disaster films, it “could have been spectacular, but [...] not in keeping of what [the film/story] is about” (quoted in Gentry, 2006, p.58; see also Jaafar, 2006). It also allows a greater sense of constricted, cramped space. Similarly, Stone also drained colour from the World Trade Centre scenes following the first plane’s impact (Gentry, 2006). It is in part these visual deprivations, this withholding of the spectacular in a ‘disaster movie’, in which WTC seeks – in what Hoberman (2006) styles “a new-style disaster film” – to

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83 United 93 was similar lauded, but in WTC’s case it was because of its ‘Hollywoodness’ not because of its deemed ‘authenticity’.

84 For more on how this virtual absence of the ‘terror-Other’, the attacks’ perpetrators, outside of a ‘shadow’, ultimately inhibits WTC’s project of male recuperation and (national) remasculinisation.

85 This is an aspect ratio Stone had used only irregularly since Wall Street (1987) almost twenty years earlier, typically preferring wider screen ratios.
memorialise the tragedy and redeem Hollywood’s perceived complicity in not only imagining but revelling in disaster.\textsuperscript{86}

More intriguingly, Stone also de-emphasises spectacle in \textit{WTC} by, in a sense, shifting ‘register’ within the disaster subgenre mid-film. The film opens with shots of New York’s daily awakening and the daily influx of workers from surrounding areas on public and private transport – the city’s lifeblood flowing to its centre – the omniscient camera and establishment of ‘ordinariness’ hallmarks of the disaster genre and the epic disaster movie in particular.\textsuperscript{87} Stone’s early establishment of ‘ordinariness’ and ‘routine’ via the omniscient camera “merge[s] our memory of [9/11] with our memory of every [other] disaster movie” (Rich, 2006; see also Edelstein, 2006). However, following the collapse of the first tower (only thirty minutes in), the film shifts ‘generic register’ from disaster epic to the smaller ‘mine accident’ disaster movie. While ‘epics’ also render the experience of disaster intimately and specifically, as now a ‘mine accident’ film, the hero’s role is transfigured; the trapped men’s survival now becomes their heroism. While this feature of the subgenre pre-dates 9/11, the redefinition of \textit{WTC}’s disaster ‘hero’ as someone who survives rather than prevails certainly coheres with Freda’s (2004, cited by Takacs, 2008, p.499) claim that survival has become a form of heroism in post-9/11 popular culture. As abrupt and unsettling as this mid-film shift is (because it forces changed audience expectations), only such a shift in ‘generic register’ enables \textit{WTC} to satisfy generic conventions, shifting formal expectations from rescue to survival. By ‘shifting’ subgenre mid-film, Stone formally recuperates McLoughlin; when rescuer becomes victim and survival is the mark of the redefined hero. Thus, \textit{WTC} formally, as much as narratively, facilitates the redemption and restoration of destabilised conventional masculinity.

\textit{WTC} also contains the disaster through the fixing or anchoring of place, manifest in its very title and concentration on confined spaces.\textsuperscript{88} Each confined space – not only

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{86} Hoberman (2006) and Klawans (2006) even view \textit{WTC} as an attempt to recuperate Stone’s own reputation – although Klawans does not view this kindly.
\item \textsuperscript{87} These opening shots also establish a ‘narrative of innocence’, identified by Marita Sturken (cited in Dawes 2009, p.289) as part of the process by which the \textit{WTC} was transformed into ‘sacred ground’, but also a trope of the disaster genre.
\item \textsuperscript{88} A strategy similarly evident in all of the films that directly represent 9/11, e.g. \textit{United 93}, and also noted by Kendricks (2008, p.523). Moreover, Stone does not fully or accurately convey the space of the ‘hole’ – he breaks down the space separating the
the ‘hole’ (the space within the collapse where the men are entrapped) but also the home – may be constraining and oppressive, but equally contains and consequently limits the disaster’s horror and the characters’ helplessness to a bounded, enclosed space (the significances of the ‘hole’ and home is discussed further later). This strategy is similarly evident in United 93’s final and complete shift to events on the hijacked plane, significantly only after efforts to avert the attacks are ineffective and disaster is inevitable. In WTC, the audience's primary experience of the attacks and the collapses is restricted to the narrow, limited experience of McLoughlin and Jimeno. While atypical in disaster movies, which traditionally favour omniscient narration, this is a telling feature of post-9/11 Hollywood ‘imaginings of disaster’ according to Keane (2006). Such a focus similarly enables Stone to personalise the tragedy and aver spectacle by primarily confining himself to the subjective, limited perspectives of characters.

WTC further de-emphasises spectacle by largely mediating the day’s iconic scenes of destruction via televisions. Although the attacks were routinely described as ‘just like a movie’, in line with observations in the Introduction, Stone relies on television to restage them; as Rich (2006) observes, in WTC “the larger story of 9/11 […] transpires on another screen altogether” (see Figures 1.1-1.2). Tellingly, this remediation by television is also the only non-computer animated scenes of destruction or death in the film. As such, the audience’s witnessing of the disaster(s), like that of the men’s wives and fellow officers in the film, is largely restricted to and mediated via TV news coverage – as indeed it was on 9/11. Again reflecting and reiterating the limited experiences of characters who can only watch, representing the day’s most horrific images on TV screens also frames and reduces their horror by containing their scale. By not showing, or only showing the spectacle on the small screen, WTC de-spectacularises it and “knits the audience back into the experience of trapped men – so we rarely feel the men are alienated from each other or get a sense of how separate and impacted in the rubble they really are (See section on screen and gendered space). Other than in the establishing shot of the Ground Zero ‘hole’, space is thereafter collapsed for the audience, and for the men.

89 Jimeno is unaware even that the towers have collapsed upon his rescue at film’s end.
90 Such a shift is not evident in the made-for-TV movies about 9/11.
91 One or two notable – and distracting – exceptions aside, while this strategy decontextualises the horror, in one sense increasing the terror, it similarly contains it.
92 The film also literally contained the disaster through its construction of a set 1/16th scale of the zone at Ground Zero (see WTC Production Notes).
[9/11,] constructing the audience members as witnesses [and making] the proceedings more acceptable to us” (Rich, 2006). While confining the horrors to the small screen figures the helplessness or impotence of those watching (especially in positions of authority), the small screen also contains and manages the horror.\(^93\) Thus, TV screens ambivalently reveal the horror and their impotence, but also contain them.

Ultimately, \(WTC\) opens a space for Hollywood to mediate 9/11 by being \textit{more}, not less, ‘Hollywood’. Along with a three-part structure approximating order-disorder-order restored, \(WTC\) offers closure in a celebration barbecue epilogue set two years after 9/11. \(United\ 93\), on the other hand, as Pheasant-Kelly (2009, p.102) observes, “stops rather than ends” in an abrupt cut to black prior to its tragic conclusion,\(^94\) which numerous commentators find dispiriting rather than fitting. In \(WTC\)’s epilogue, when Cage (as McLoughlin) and Peña (as Jimeno) embrace the men they portray, the ‘real’ men affirm not only this telling of their story, but Hollywood’s right to tell it.\(^95\) The epilogue, a scene of rebirth and reconnection for wider American society, seemingly restores and returns the men to home and family, seeking to erase the vulnerability and insufficiency evidenced when the attacks overwhelm the performative capacities of uniformed masculinity.

\textbf{FIGURE 1.1}

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\textbf{FIGURE 1.2}

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\textbf{Emasculation, Vulnerability & Insufficiency}

\(^{93}\) The most iconic moments of destruction are similarly only shown on TV screens or as blips on air traffic monitors in \textit{United 93}.

\(^{94}\) All other televisual representations of Flight 93, while avoiding the plane’s crash, do nonetheless represent or acknowledge it – which \textit{United 93}’s cut to black does not – by including images of its aftermath.

\(^{95}\) McLoughlin and Jimeno appear in the film as extras, most notably in the film’s epilogue of renewal, celebration and community.
After the first plane hits Tower One, the PAPD officers are called back from their foot patrols to the Port Authority and a team chosen to head to the World Trade Centre to assist in its precautionary evacuation. McLoughlin is readily figured as highly competent and knowledgeable about the WTC complex, having worked at the Towers when they were bombed in 1993 and consequently redesigning contingency plans and safety and emergency protocols to confront any future attack (WTC Production Notes, 2006). However, the limits of McLoughlin’s competence and knowledge – or, rather, how events will exceed his capacity – are foreshadowed even before they arrive at the site, as McLoughlin admits: “There is no plan. We planned for everything […] but not this. Not something this big”.

FIGURE 1.3

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It is only back at the Port Authority, and on televisions, that the officers – and audience – witness the aftermath of the first plane’s collision, initially considered an accident (see Figure 1.3). The first impact is withheld, in line with the subjective character points-of-view, but also in tacit acknowledgement of the ubiquity of these images in media and social discourse (and a conscious absenting of the perpetrator ‘terror-Other’). This limited perspective, however, also disturbs notions of uniformed officers possessing greater knowledge or privileged access to information. As Muntean (2009, p.54) notes, it is as if the officers are somehow, despite their physical presence, “missing the event”; “their experience and knowledge of the event […] hopelessly fragmented and incomplete when compared with the television apparatus”. Television screens exemplify the passivity and impotence (of those watching) in the face of terror, but this impotence is horrifyingly extendable to government, police and the military. Indeed, the officers in WTC, the air traffic controllers and military observers in United 93 and the military and government in Lions for Lambs all watch screens passively, impotently. Thus, screens not only evoke 9/11’s predominantly mediated experience but seemingly demonstrate the incapacity of governmental institutions in response to 9/11 and throughout the ‘war on terror’. 
The limits on knowledge and dependence on the news media for information – in contrast to the self-sufficiency and privilege typically connoted by the police uniform – are further highlighted as they debate the early television images. Communication devices are repeatedly demonstrated to be deficient, limiting the officers’ knowledge and impacting on their collective capacity to act, and replaying the breakdown in communications that bedevilled first responders on the day. One other shot similarly signifies the officers’ impotence and prefigures their coming immobility. When the PAPD officers first disembark at the WTC complex they horrifyingly witness a body falling from the burning towers. The falling body prefigures the trapped men’s own fall (as well as that of the buildings) and vulnerability. This depiction of fundamental vulnerability shows how vulnerability necessarily “implicates the subject of representation and the viewer” (Fitzpatrick 2007, p.85) – both the officers and the audience – and renders the viewer speechless and helpless, nonetheless wishing to act in response. The helpless officers debate their capacity to at least try, however futile, to help people trapped in the towers. Nonetheless, their helplessness is rendered as immobility, as paralysis; the men rooted to one spot until McLoughlin returns.

The men hesitate when McLoughlin asks for a small group of volunteers before Jimeno, a rookie, volunteers. Two others – Rodrigues and Pezzulo – follow, moving to the front of the team. McLoughlin, on entering the buildings, leads the team around the complex, collecting the necessary rescue equipment and breathing apparatuses before attempting to ascend Tower One: “We won't save anyone if we

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96 Although such unambiguously positive connotations are not true of representations in 1970s police procedurals, for example, they are immediately and repeatedly established as such in the opening of WTC.

97 Notably without assigning specific blame, the officers continue to discuss third-hand fragments of information and speculation garnered from family members (from radio and TV): “They hit Tower Two”. In this sense, the film parallels Tora! Tora! Tora! (Fleischer, 1970) in its representation of how communication breakdowns inhibit America’s ability to respond to, even prevent, the Pearl Harbor attacks in 1941. However, in Tora! Tora! Tora! a slow bureaucracy and the accumulated effects of individual failings are the problem, as opposed to communications chaos and the excessiveness of events.

98 While Zacharek (2006) claims the chaotic tumble unnecessarily and distressingly depicts imminent death, the ‘falling man’ (like all shots of the Twin Towers outside of a TV screen, that is, on the cinema screen) is computer animated. This again highlights the film's timid construction of authenticity, standing in marked contrast to Stone's repeated use of the Zapruder 8mm film – and his fetishisation of the image and the death moment – of JFK’s assassination in JFK (1991). Nonetheless, the shot, beyond Kendricks’ (2008, p.522) claim that the image is “an insufficient symbolic stand-in”, counters – albeit in a fleeting and distant manner – the otherwise absence of (unrecovered and unrecoverable) bodies and, like the officers’ later experience trapped in the ‘hole’, also represents a border or “threshold position” (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p.90); between life and death, the past and the future.

99 Chris, a former colleague of McLoughlin’s at the WTC complex, will later join the team prior to the collapse.
can’t breathe”. The scene continues to showcase mobility and align it with professional and masculine identity, as in *The Kingdom*. During this process, the men continue to encounter and debate contrary information and rumour, not even certain the initial impact marks an attack or that there has been a second impact. Finally ready to ascend, Tower Two begins to collapse. McLoughlin, realising a collapse is under way, surveys the impending civilian victims in the background but – in another instance of ‘watchful’ impotence – is merely able to scream out to run for the elevator shaft before the group are caught in the collapse.

While McLoughlin’s knowledge and competence saves his men when he points towards the elevator shaft, the collapse renders his meticulous collection of rescue and breathing equipment redundant; competence becomes impotence. The collapse, like any traumatic event, “thwart[s] initiative and overwhelm[s] individual competence” (Herman, 1997, p.53, cited in Ozcan, 2008, p.211); no matter how knowledgeable and resourceful McLoughlin is, his actions are necessarily ‘insufficient’ in averting disaster. While this foregrounds McLoughlin as a hero, it is also as a hero overwhelmed, with events quickly exceeding his capacity to respond. This impotence is recognised by McLoughlin in his later question, “What good did we do?” – the past tense reflecting the cessation of his earlier policing-rescue role. Impotence becomes immobility as McLoughlin returns to consciousness following the tumult of the collapse, blinding light and an abrupt cut to black. Returning to consciousness, to life from death, McLoughlin asks his men to sound out (the significance of names to professional-masculine identity is discussed later). Rodrigues and Chris do not answer the men’s plaintive pleas: “They’re gone”, Jimeno acknowledges. Only Pezzulo of the three surviving officers is able to move but he is killed shortly after in the succeeding collapse of Tower One while trying to free Jimeno. Both McLoughlin and Jimeno are pinned under debris, the immobility and impotence foreshadowed in watching the ‘falling man’ now literal and McLoughlin’s broken walkie-talkie also reiterating the persistent failures of communication devices. Professional mobility is no longer privileged with the surviving officers immobilised.

The men’s vulnerability – and the vulnerability of conventional masculinity – is here figured in immobility and inaction, in contrast with opposite attributes connoted by their uniformed personae. Denby’s (2006) characterisation of a fight between two
paraplegic veterans in Stone’s earlier *Born on the Fourth of July* as an “emblem of futility”, equally applicable to McLoughlin and Jimeno. Professional-masculine identity is characterised by the futility and impotence of action in *WTC* throughout their rescue effort, and reinforced following the collapse. This emasculation echoes *25th Hour*’s (Lee, 2003) connection of its prison-bound Monty’s (Edward Norton) literal fear of emasculation in prison with “the sense of emasculation that is at the centre of the post-9/11 malaise” (Taubin, 2003). Similarly, in *WTC*, and especially given the police uniform is a significant way to communicate masculinity, the officers are emasculated when they are immobilised in the collapse – no longer able to *perform or embody* uniformed masculinity.

**Uniform(ed) Masculinity, Performance & Paternalism**

As outlined in the Introduction, scholars argue there is a close relationship between what we wear and identity – and particularly in narrative cinema. From the outset, *WTC* persistently and intimately aligns men and masculinity with the wearing of a uniform and performance of a protective role. Whilst akin to Godfrey and Hamad’s (2012) identification of ‘protective’ masculinity, *WTC* foregrounds its *uniformed* embodiment, with uniforms rather than the skills associated with them most emblematising ‘protective’-professional authority. When McLoughlin wakes, he showers and puts on his police uniform without ever turning towards his wife; male identity is sheathed and privileged in the uniform even in the home. Uniforms play a dominant role in defining *and* communicating modes of masculinity (Craik, 2003), with normative masculine roles and attributes – activity, competence, capability and strength – typically inscribed in (certain types of) uniforms. In *WTC*, uniforms define the wearer as his role, shorthand signifiers of the identity and performative (personal and professional) characteristics he possesses.

This alignment of men, uniforms and ‘masculine’ attributes unsettlingly highlights the persistent absenting of women from particular *gendered* roles and *gendered* spaces

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100 *25th Hour* implicitly connects Monty, the convicted heroin dealer protagonist, with the victims of 9/11 (and the Towers themselves) – and, as in *WTC*, associates masculine and national identity – as it follows his final day of freedom before he is required to begin his sentence. One key change Lee makes from the source novel (published before 9/11) is to set events in 2002.
throughout the film. Significantly, the only female PAPD officer possesses remains tethered to the reception desk, ostensibly immobile.\(^{101}\) This ‘maleness’ is unrealistic, and inaccurate, and it is significant that the film chooses to effectively represent an all-male police force. In keeping with this, males are persistently presented as protectors and women as victims at the WTC site.\(^{102}\) Even the businessman who informs Jimeno about children possibly trapped in the complex is more-than-victim, exhibiting a protective-paternal capacity. On the other hand, a businesswoman – a character Stone deemed a too intense and hysterical victim – who similarly implores McLoughlin to ‘do something’ was deleted from the final cut, thereby excising her from the site. This exemplifies how \textit{WTC} not only conflates sex and gender but negatively and repeatedly identifies women as immobile or victims, when it does not exclude them from particular roles and spaces entirely, as will be discussed further in relation to the trapped men’s wives and the male-only search-and-rescue space of ‘Ground Zero’.

Nonetheless, fashion scholars contend police and military uniforms connote collective strength, social status and authority, reliability, self-control and commitment. In this sense, \textit{WTC} suggests uniforms afford certainty about “the idea of identity sustained” by \textit{and} through the uniform (Calefato, 2000, p.196). \textit{WTC}’s uniformed males thus appropriate, reinforce and communicate the power and authority of their uniform \textit{and} also offer reassurance to others. Uniforms also erase markers of difference – exemplified in \textit{WTC}’s erasure of ethnic difference through the trapped officers’ shared experience. They literally make men the same, uniform. Yet, as noted in the Introduction, in the context of 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, uniforms also represent a positive marker of difference, related to being identifiable (and possessing identifiable characteristics), in contrast to the treacherous, hidden, unidentifiable – that is, non-uniformed ‘terror-Other’. Nonetheless, while uniforms in \textit{WTC} make visible the performance of masculinity they also seek to ‘naturalise’ or conceal it, in a sense, by making it \textit{uniform}.

\(^{101}\) A male officer will later even take over the phone from her when Jimeno’s wife, Allison, is angered by her uncertainty and lack of specific information.

\(^{102}\) Even though three quarters of 9/11’s casualties were male, the only victim-body (excepting the indeterminate falling body), implied rather than represented, is also female, Karnes accidentally standing on a single high-heeled shoe when he arrives at ‘Ground Zero’.
Uniforms also repress or suppress (personal) characteristics in discord with the ideals connoted by the uniform. Earlier, running towards the unfolding catastrophe and horror, McLoughlin is discernibly reluctant to enter the buildings but proceeds nonetheless, signalling both the excessiveness of events and how uniforms shape and influence actions and behaviour. He shuffles towards the buildings, almost sidelong, persistently glancing backwards but resisting the desire to return in the direction in which civilians flee. A reverse shot, which conceals his face from the trailing volunteer officers, shows the audience he is now marked by uncertainty and rising fear. McLoughlin’s reluctance to continue signals the discrepancy between uniform and man, the public-professional ideal and the private reality. The obligations of the uniform compel him to continue, while the ‘ordinary’ man resists and seeks to remove himself from the space – again suggesting a discrepancy between the uniform and its wearer, and a lack or insufficiency beneath the uniform. WTC persistently reiterates this tension, revealed in the literature, between compulsion and choice, reflection and transformation, evident in ‘wearing’ versus ‘putting on’ a uniform.

Uniformed masculinity is similarly associated with fatherhood or a paternal role early in WTC. After McLoughlin puts on his uniform he checks on his sleeping kids, as father-and-officer. Admittedly pragmatic behavior, this seemingly minor moment's significance solidifies over succeeding moments involving children; particularly unusual given the 9/11 attacks did not especially involve children on the day. This alignment of the uniform with a paternal bearing is immediately reinforced when McLoughlin, standing behind reception at the Port Authority, briefly raises his head from his morning reports and quietly observes another officer on bended knee comfort a lost young girl. The subsuming of fatherhood within McLoughlin’s uniformed identity is extended to his officers, asked to keep particular watch on their patrols for a young runaway girl: “This is important!” Yet this moment also signals the first slippage or incoherence in the narrative. This first ‘Missing Person’ not only foreshadows the many to come, but in her subsequent absence from the narrative, how the attacks overwhelm men’s capacities, exposing the vulnerability of masculinity and the film’s project of containment. Nonetheless, a paternal role is further linked to uniformed masculinity when, after being informed by an injured businessman that

103 The ‘Everyman’ figure, as ‘less than ordinary’, is explored in detail in Chapter Two on Cloverfield.
104 This seems a particularly strange request given the size and population of New York City.
there are children in the buildings, McLoughlin tells Jimeno, “Don’t worry, they got them out”. Thus, in *WTC* normative masculinity is not only uniformed, but paternal; a uniformed paternalism that is protective, quietly observant and benevolent.

**The Schism Between Wearer & Uniform**

However, *WTC*’s ambivalence about the relation of the uniform to ‘conventional’ masculinity represents its key tension; one equally evident in the literature on uniforms and identity outlined in the Introduction. That is, while *WTC* aligns masculine identity with the attributes inscribed in uniforms, it likewise admits a gulf between the uniformed and non-uniformed self. In *WTC*, the conflation of uniform and wearer is variously privileged and problematised. The film explicitly seeks to identify McLoughlin with his uniform, the man as possessing the attributes and modes of behaviour that his uniform (and protective role) connotes and implies the uniform, as for the superhero, is transformative – representing a sort of *becoming*. As much as uniforms communicate identity, they are equally transformative of it, suggesting a schism between uniform and wearer. The identity of the younger PAPD officers in McLoughlin’s unit, including Jimeno, is swiftly tied – for themselves and the audience – to their uniformed persona: their names are only given (stamped on their lockers) immediately after they are in uniform, after they have figuratively ‘put on’ their identity (see Figures 1.4-1.5). Their locker room banter also ceases as each puts on the uniform, marking a (performative) transformation from civilian/boy to police officer/man. This representation of masculinity as ‘ideal’ – that is, sober and professional rather than their earlier ‘boyish’ masculinity – when in a uniformed ‘protective’ role, is reiterated when the film introduces former Marine Karnes, who again dons his uniform to gain access to the site and search for survivors (the uniform changes the wearer, but also revives what is inherent-but-dormant).

Thus, in *WTC*, the uniform ambivalently both reflects the self, men *are* their uniformed identity, but equally makes them who they are. While the tension is not logically inconsistent it does perhaps suggest why the film is ambivalent in relation to men, masculinity and uniforms. The officers identify themselves and are identified with and as their job, with the ideals and duties of their profession, embodied by and
enacted through their uniforms – they represent and are represented by their uniforms. Yet the film also signals the transformative aspects of ‘putting on’ the uniform, how it changes each man, becoming someone different and becoming linked to something greater. And it is this tension between equivalence and discrepancy of wearer and uniform – the male and the male-in-uniform – that ultimately reveals what the restitution of the uniform via Karnes ‘shields’, that is, the failings and insufficiencies of normative masculinity in the attacks.

The uniformed persona is privileged and presented as ideal, but it also cloaks and conceals – it ‘shields us from what we are not ready to see’. While McLoughlin’s acknowledged emotional (and physical) isolation – “I don’t smile a lot”, so “people don’t like me” – is characteristic of stoic conventional masculinity, it also implies how he uses his uniform to shield himself (from others). Uniforms, more than making visible the performance of masculinity, allow wearers to suppress personal characteristics that do not cohere with the connoted ideals. They also unsuccessfully seek to conceal – or ‘shield’ – individual insufficiency or vulnerability. And ultimately, the officers’ failure to rescue anyone in the Towers – even to ascend a single level – casts a conventional masculinity aligned with the uniform and a protective role into question. The collapse and the officers’ consequent entrapment expose male vulnerability, over capability, in the face of catastrophe. The officers’ protective role flounders, as police officer-disaster heroes become victims. The exposed insufficiency of uniformed masculinity likewise exposes the insufficiency of the wearers themselves. In this sense, uniforms also highlight the perceived lack and vulnerability of normative masculinity they seek to but cannot cloak.

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**FIGURE 1.4**

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**FIGURE 1.5**

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This vulnerability is mostly figured in the loss of control, persistently highlighted in their entrapment and their initially helpless, passive, narrow experience of the collapses, in cruel juxtaposition with the sense of control earlier connoted by their uniforms. The appearance of control is overwhelmed, then absent, exposing the fragility and vulnerability of masculine-uniformed performance. The centrality of control in WTC, and its loss, is mirrored in United 93. As Rosenbaum (2006) observes, United 93 inevitably depicts how ‘frighteningly little control’ air traffic and military control rooms had, the audience “constantly watching people watching screens, seeing the horror develop in what the screens reveal and conceal”. Indeed, the head of ground operations’ despondent admission, “That’s it. We’re finished here”, signals the moment United 93 diverts focus onto the plane, relying on the actions of its passengers to recuperate this (professional, institutional, national) loss of control. As Rosenbaum (2006) contends, however skilfully done, United 93 ultimately cannot erase “the prospect of no dawn at all”, much as the uniform in WTC cannot shield conventional masculinity on the advent of terror; a masculinity in crisis. Yet while WTC certainly implies insufficiency is human and understandable, given the overwhelming nature of 9/11, it is equally discomfited and unsettled by such insufficiency, and seeks to overcome it through the renegotiation of masculinity and erase it through a concurrent recuperation of uniformed masculinity.

Masochistic Masculinity ‘In Crisis’ – Entrapped, Wounded & Passive

Given uniformed masculinity is tied to the state of the nation throughout the day's attack, the men’s entrapment and the destabilisation of normative masculinity mirrors America’s similar fall (into darkness). Ozcan (2008, p.211) concurs, observing that McLoughlin’s claim they are “bleeding inside” is also “a metaphor for the bleeding city and nation”. McLoughlin and Jimeno are trapped and isolated, and their survival, figured through wounded bodies, is immediately experienced as suffering and punishment. Aligned with Robinson (2000) and outlined in the Introduction, WTC becomes a ‘masochistic narrative’, with normative masculinity ‘under siege’. In WTC, the men’s wounding is figured in immobility and inaction and as a loss of control.

This is persistently highlighted in their helplessness, passivity, limited vision and restricted knowledge in the ‘hole’ – the space within the collapse where the men are entrapped – in stark contrast with the characteristics earlier connoted through their uniforms. If uniformed masculinity is defined through activity, as competent and capable, it is destabilised by the men’s entrapment, and they no longer able to sufficiently embody the uniformed masculinity through which their identity is constituted.106

Uniformed masculinity in \textit{WTC} is also, quite conventionally, defined by inexpressivity and the repression of speech and emotions. In line with Robinson (2000), the film offers a ‘language of crisis’ through a vocabulary of blockage and release; a blockage now literalised in their immobility and incapacitation. Another collapse sends a fiery shower of rock into the ‘hole’, crushing McLoughlin’s legs and burns Jimeno. Both men scream, yell at each other and weep – and in the invisibility of their physical wounds their screams are pointedly hysterical. Thus, having lost control not only of the rescue effort but of themselves, they (tear)fully and irrevocably shed their uniformed identity. McLoughlin’s repeated screams symbolise the pain or difficulty that accompanies the destabilising of his masculine-professional identity. This moment of hysteria is also one of release, as the symbolic blockages that each man’s, and particularly McLoughlin, uniformed identity has both reinforced and concealed is painfully abandoned. Yet their scream-punctuated ‘release’ is also liberating, and facilitates a reconstruction of masculine identity that eschews the uniform. Indeed, their wounding compels the two officers to talk with each other for the first time as men, about their non-uniformed identities (thereby elevated), families and emotions.

Thus, the ‘hole’ is vital in \textit{WTC} for the men’s identity reconstruction, for it affords the men psychological space and time in which to renegotiate masculinity. Rather than abject, it becomes a productive space; functioning as a boundary between masculine/feminine and public/private. The ‘hole’, which Stone describes as womb-
like (Jaafar, 2006), is a feminine space that facilitates the men’s symbolic rebirth, and affords them the psychological space and time to confront the challenge to their identity and construct an alternative masculinity. And in concealing their wounded bodies under rubble, from their families and colleagues, and the audience, WTC partially confounds notions that masochism “must be made visible” (Robinson, 2000, p.13), tied to the spectacle of the wounded body. Far from ‘displaying their wounds’, the men’s damaged masculinity, previously predicated on notions of display through the uniform, can only be renegotiated in the concealment of the ‘hole’. Reconstruction requires concealment rather than display of the men’s wounded bodies, shielded by darkness and rubble. In this sense, the ‘hole’ is a productive space precisely because it contains and conceals. It contains the story-events, personalising what could otherwise only be mediated abstractly in/as the collapse of two towers. It also contains the horror and sheer magnitude of the attacks, the two men’s story encapsulating the horror of 9/11, and conceals the site/sight of the buildings collapses.

Moreover, WTC attempts, subverting its relatively more conventional employment of stars (most notably via the complex star image of Nicolas Cage), to conceal and contain – and so afford ‘authenticity’ – notions of performance. In stark contrast to Will Smith in I Am Legend, WTC seeks to erase markers of star performance. Just as critics feared Stone’s involvement, many were concerned that Cage’s star status and hyperbolic performance style would efface, even erase, the real man and story. Yet many critics lauded Cage’s subsuming of his own star persona in ‘service’ of the account of McLoughlin’s experience; as Scott opines, Cage “turns all his intensity inward” (2006; see also Denby, 2006; Edelstein, 2006; Hoberman, 2006; Rich, 2006). Stone (WTC Production Notes, 2006) similarly commends Cage’s atypically subtle, “restrained performance” – his hysterical screams seemingly aside – as evidence he “could […] play ‘against type’”. Indeed, for the vast majority of the film Cage as McLoughlin, as star and hero, is immobile, inactive and unrecognisable, his body concealed in dark and rubble. Not only is the star-hero immobile and invisible, but he is a victim who, unable to restore himself let alone rescue others, must ultimately be rescued. While Hollywood conventionally foregrounds the display of stars, WTC hides or veils its star in rubble and darkness, subordinating the star to the story through the dimming and immobilising of his star power. Cage sacrifices his star persona and often (at least recently) histrionic, idiosyncratic performance of
masculinity in favour of an equally constructed one, as understated, grounded and ‘natural’.

When McLoughlin and Jimeno can no longer perform their profession, when their uniforms (can) no longer represent their identity, WTC seeks to reconstruct, or reimagine, an alternative masculinity. In this sense, the officers’ entrapment forces them to refigure their identity and foreground their literal and figurative return to the home; the ‘hole’, the site of emasculation and incapacitation, becomes paradoxically vital for the redefinition of masculine identity.

**Reimag(in)ing Masculinity: Restoring Agency, Fatherhood & Rescuing the Self**

It is only following the literal breaking down of their uniformed masculinity that the men can construct an alternative masculinity, one that eschews the uniform for one centered on the role of husband-father (a characteristic already present, although previously subsumed within the uniform). McLoughlin makes this transition after his breaking-down cum ‘release’, when he re-imagines and reconstructs the film’s first scene, where he rose from bed without turning towards his wife; privileging the uniform over the home.\(^\text{107}\) In this idealized reconstruction, he rolls over and embraces his wife before he ‘puts on’ the uniform, interrogating and erasing his failings and earlier inattentiveness as a husband. Now privileging his role as husband, this re-imagining commences McLoughlin’s figurative return to the home and redefinition of his masculinity. In a sense, McLoughlin's re-imagining of his waking up erases or recuperates his failure as ‘hero’-rescuer through his restoration as husband.

As noted earlier, WTC repositions the disaster hero as someone who survives rather than prevails. Stone’s depiction of immobile, passive victim-heroes, arguably ‘feminised’ by their entrapment, particularly given Stone’s characterisation of the ‘hole’ as womb, drew criticism. Lewis (2006, p.43) claims Stone seems to have made “skewed” choices for protagonists, that of all who entered the Towers, Stone chose two men “whose chief distinction was to lie supine and immobilised for thirteen hours

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\(^\text{107}\) Awake, though seemingly sleeping, Donna similarly does not turn – a moment of equivalent distress and hurt for her when McLoughlin appears to have died in the collapse.
… and] to depict only stoic, passive endurance”. While Lewis makes an important observation on Stone’s surprising character choices his characterisation of WTC’s protagonists is too limited, for they certainly also represent other character virtues he identifies – perseverance, courage and sacrifice. Moreover, WTC also redefines and restores the trapped men’s passive, wounded masculinity by simply ‘staying’ with them, but also by (re-)establishing their continued agency visually and linguistically, by focusing on fatherhood and survival, and implying the men rescue themselves. Indeed, in contrast to Adelman’s (n.d.) claim that “citizenship [in WTC] is reduced to depending on someone else to do something”, it is at their most vulnerable and impotent that the film foregrounds their continued, persistent reproductive potency as fathers. The paternal element of uniformed identity is thus vital, as the one aspect associated of uniformed masculinity that does not fail in the attacks, evinced by the successful evacuation of the children (albeit by other uniformed males). As such, fatherhood becomes the identity through which damaged conventional masculinity can be reconstructed. Over two flashbacks and the epilogue – each saturated with light, resisting the darkness of the ‘hole’ – WTC connects the men to each other, restores them to the home and signals rebirth. The flashbacks detail advancing stages of pregnancy, before societal and personal rebirth via an alternative (non-uniformed) masculinity in the epilogue’s final freeze frame of Jimeno raising his young daughter (unborn at the time of the attacks).

The epilogue (two years after 9/11), a ‘thank you’ barbecue the men give to honour their rescuers, was also routinely criticised, deemed unnecessary and akin to a made-for-TV movie – “Stone can’t show New Yorkers […] helping one another […] without later adding a voiceover about how everyone helped each other that day” (Zacharek, 2006; see also Alleva, 2006). However, recovery and the return home requires more than physical safety and security, but that the story is remembered and that survivors reconnect with their community (Herman, 1997, cited by Ozcan, 2008). As such, the epilogue is necessary for recovering and restoring the men to their

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108 The exception, of course, being Karnes, but “he is wound a bit too tight” (Lewis, 2006, p.43). The significance of Karnes’ highly ambivalent representation is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

109 The stark absence of uniformed females from the complex suggests it is reasonable to assume the children's rescuers are male in Stone’s story-world.

110 In the first flashback, McLoughlin and Donna discover they are unexpectedly pregnant. In the second, later flashback, Jimeno and his heavily pregnant young wife, Allison, discuss baby names.
families and for the audience. The barbecue also figures as an opportunity for the rescuers and the men's families to celebrate the men’s powers of survival. Indeed, the epilogue ostensibly fulfills King’s (2011, p.165) claims about post-9/11 ‘sacrificial films’, which imply America “has not only suffered […] but also been redeemed and improved”, with the recuperation of national identity finally “dependent on the traumatic heroism of men”. Tellingly, by foregrounding their identities as fathers and their literal role in the persistence and flourishing of society (in the freeze frame) the barbecue predominantly serves to complete the restoration of paternal potency and agency to the previously immobile, passive trapped officers.111

WTC further restores the trapped men’s agency by implying they rescue themselves through concerted focuses on survival and linguistic restorations of agency. The film tellingly focuses on survival rather than rescue in both a narrative and a temporal sense. While this is not unusual in ‘mine accident’ films, these survival narratives typically give equivalent attention to the rescuers’ stories, ordeal and challenges.112 Yet the vast majority of WTC depicts McLoughlin and Jimeno’s fight for survival prior to their discovery. Indeed, their recovery, which required approximately three hours for Jimeno and ten for McLoughlin, and its perils are diminished in the film and occupy little screen time; the men “pulled out so quickly that we do not get a sense of the painstaking struggle involved or the fear the rescuers felt” (Liss, 2006). While the film’s focus on the entrapped men’s experience, and therefore their sense of their recovery, makes this logical, it nonetheless lionises survival over rescue.

Likewise, when Jimeno is pulled from the ‘hole’ by his rescuers, McLoughlin restores his agency linguistically, pointedly calling out: ‘You done it, Will. You made it’. This linguistic restoration of agency is doubled in McLoughlin’s, near death and struggling for survival, final hallucination prior to disinterment, in which Donna (Maria Bello) exhorts him to ‘get unstuck’, to ‘get off your ass and come home’. Significantly, the rescuers tirelessly working in the ‘hole’ to secure his recovery completely disappear during the hallucination. Muntean (2009, p.54) claims it is almost as if their return is

111 Stone’s use of the two men’s story as a microcosm of the entire day thus attributes not only their trials but also their qualities – their resilience and courage – to those of the nation.

112 The ‘real’ McLoughlin and Jimeno consider their rescuers the ‘real heroes’ because they “didn’t have a choice” (WTC Production Notes, 2006).
“made possible by the empathic connections they shared with their kin”. However, even Donna’s call on McLoughlin, as his hallucination, implies he calls on himself to return home. Such linguistic restorations overcome the men’s helplessness, impotence and incapacitation, and suggest they are responsible not only for their survival but to some degree for their own rescue.

More than merely restoring the men’s agency, *WTC* implies that the men actually gain strength from the collapse of the towers and their ordeal. When the father of Allison (Maggie Gyllenhaal) informs her Jimeno has been located alive, he opines, “He’s made of rocks, is he not?!”. Indeed, when he reaches hospital, Jimeno has rocks suctioned from his mouth and insides. Ozcan (2008, p.209) observes how the film’s official poster constructs a visual metaphor in which the two men are “miniatures copies” of the two towers. However, more than merely copies, it is as if literally ingesting the rubble (of towers representative of American power and identity), thereby erasing them as symbols of weakness and loss. The men's survival in a sense figures both the symbolic persistence of the towers and implies an equivalent strength constitutes every American (man), and announces the impossibility of destroying the strength of spirit each represents.

By redefining the men’s identity primarily through fatherhood (as opposed to the uniform) and restoring their agency, *WTC* not only humanises their experience – as well as that of the nation’s broader symbolic loss – but also disavows their apparent passivity and re-establishes the men as bodies of action and doing. The film signals the redefinition of their masculinity and, in substituting their uniformed personae, absolves their failure as hero-rescuers by restoring (or returning) them as husband-fathers. In concert with McLoughlin’s re-imagined waking, the focus on fatherhood facilitates the men’s reconstruction of their identity and signals a symbolic return to the home. However, as a productively ‘feminine’ space in which the men were initially rendered immobile and passive, the connection of the ‘hole’ with the home suggests an ambivalence towards the representations of femininity and alternative masculinities.
Calling Father Home & Ambivalently Gendered Spaces

Only upon the men’s entrapment and breaking down does WTC widen its focus onto the parallel experiences of the families and wives, waiting at home for news of their husbands’ fates. This widening, accompanied by multiple, often shared, flashbacks to family life, bliss and routine connect the men in their ‘hole’ with their wives (and with each other) in their homes, facilitating the refiguring of the trapped men's identities and return to the home. Yet the representation of women in the home – constrained, tethered, helpless and passive – also figures the ambivalence of gendered spaces. While femininity is also associated with nurturing and caring, and women represented as holding the family together, the representation of women and consistent alignment of sex and gender is nonetheless a conservative notion – and hysterical at times. Moreover, the film’s conflation of sex and gender and the persistent gendering of spaces and exclusion of women from ‘Ground Zero’ and active, uniformed roles, thus also signals the ambivalence of the trapped men’s return to the home.

The notion of being called (to return) home is repeated numerously and the ‘hole’ is variously linked with the home – and is the only ‘Ground Zero’-related space in which women enter in the film – which facilitates the men’s renegotiation of their identity but also underlines the ambivalent representations of space and gender, home and masculinity in the film. This return to the home is also heavily figured in their final recovery, and even Donna’s call on McLoughlin to return home suggests the same. The rescuers, a panoply of variously uniformed colleague-brothers repeatedly declare “You’re almost home” and “We’re gonna get you home”, and following their recovery from the ‘hole’ proclaim: “Welcome home”. However, Jimeno’s interpretation of his ‘vision’ of Jesus perhaps most figures this notion of being called home. Stone claims WTC is more about light than containment (Gentry, 2006). Light is immediately searched for by the men following the collapse, representing their tenuous but persistent connection to life. Light is also returned after night falls by the rescuers’ flashlights, and even the fires at the WTC represent warmth and light rather than danger. Yet it is the men’s flashbacks, hallucinations and visions that most figure the 'hole' as a sacred space filled with light and function to call the men home. Just prior to being discovered, Jimeno’s vision of Jesus (‘the light’) reintroduces light into
the darkness. Although it merges into the light of a family memory and then returns via the fires above the ‘hole’ and Karnes’ flashlight, when Jimeno is jolted back to consciousness, he interprets his experience as a vision of Jesus, suffused with light and carrying a water bottle: “He’s telling us to come home, John”. Significantly, Jesus’ radiance in Jimeno’s vision was created using (and resignifying) the 3M Scotchlite reflective tape used on emergency service uniforms; so “it completely exploded in light” (WTC Production Notes, 2006). Thus, this allows Stone to recount Jimeno’s documented experiences in the ‘hole’ without adhering to his Christological worldview and equally angelicises the rescuers and specifically the uniform.

Yet Stone’s likewise likening of the ‘hole’ to a grave (Johnson, 2006), also underscores it, and thereby the home, as an ambivalently gendered space, reinforcing the underlying ambivalence that enshrines WTC. The ‘hole’ functions as a grave for the trapped men (and literally for Pezzulo), and their recovery, like their return to consciousness after the collapse, signifies a return to life and resurrection without death. Most notably, as McLoughlin is disinterred, the ‘hole’ is visually figured as grave, a rectangular space cut into the rubble (see Figures 1.6-1.7). As McLoughlin reaches the surface his face passes from darkness to light; darkness, which was total in the ‘hole’ and which sought to dominate light – literally and figuratively – throughout the film has been resisted and overcome. Moreover, the camera continues to ascend towards the heavens, returning to the film’s early invocation of Apocalypse in McLoughlin’s symbolic Rapturing.

The home and ‘hole’ are also each represented as distinct, contained spaces; provisionally, at least, offering those within protection (and distance) from the chaos, fear and horrific consequences of the attacks. Yet the ‘hole’ places distressing limits on perspective and knowledge, echoed in McLoughlin’s repeated screams of “I don’t know”, signalling how the attacks overwhelm and challenge McLoughlin’s

113 Hollywood’s disconcerting association of ‘Latin American’ characters with religious and often explicitly ‘Catholic’ visions, connoting their faith as (more) ‘authentic’ and pure, is repeated in I Am Legend (Chapter Three).
114 While Ozcan (2008, p.212) even claims the blending of Jimeno’s vision – the light of Christ – with Karnes’ flashlight “functions to reinforce the representation of Karnes as ‘the saviour’”, this conveniently ignores the ambivalence of Karnes’ representation and character (which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter) and Stone’s emphasis on the rescue as collective.
conception of self. Nevertheless, and as will be repeated across the ‘terror threat’ films, these limits on knowledge – in ‘missing the event’ as it were – also shield he and Jimeno from the site/sight of their insufficiency and failure as would-be rescuers but now victims; Jimeno even asks his rescuers where the buildings have gone after he is disinterred.

**FIGURE 1.6**

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**FIGURE 1.7**

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While this containment vitally ‘shields’ the trapped men and offers a space for them – and the audience – to confront the threat to their identity (and the nation), Stone nonetheless cuts the screen time in the ‘hole’, to avoid “oppress[ing] the audience” and use the homes as “antidotes to the hole” (quoted in Johnson, 2006, p.50). Yet, while the men’s and wives’ numerous flashbacks/hallucinations of home are saturated with light, Stone likewise acknowledges how confining and oppressive the homes are: they “become like ‘holes’ as the light closes down and the day runs out” (Johnson, 2006, p.50). The space of the home is as constrained as the ‘hole’. Enclosed, the home equally functions as a sort of cage for men and women. Indeed, the frame presses against characters in the homes, holding them tight and constraining within. The trapped men’s helplessness, impotence and passivity are mirrored in the restricted experiences and perspectives (restricted to news media) of their wives and families. The trapped men’s experience is also significantly mirrored by the passivity and impotence of men (particularly but not only non-uniformed) in the home. Most notably, as Allison’s brother sits on the couch watching the collapse of one of the towers on TV, he is reduced to helplessly, almost obsessively, fidgeting with the remote control, a beer in his other hand. Even McLoughlin’s brother, a fellow PAPD officer, is diminished in the home, reduced to passively watching the news media for information on the attacks, again negatively connecting the experience in the home with that in the ‘hole’.
The home is also a space in which knowledge is not only limited but feared, and perhaps rightly so. Throughout the film, women fearfully look outside through windows – as does the audience, sharing the women’s perspective – awaiting yet fearing news from without. When colleague-officers arrive with news of husbands, the wives inside break down; most notably, when McLoughlin’s brother first arrives, Donna, fearing he is fulfilling his fraternal promise to deliver ‘bad news’, rushes out the front door and screams repeatedly in the futile hope of preventing further breach of the home: “Don’t you come in here! Don’t you come in here and tell me he’s dead!” This is reiterated in the wives’ expression of anger at the persistent intrusions of television – and thereby the reality of the attacks – into the domestic space: “They keep showing it over and over and over!” Even when Jimeno’s wife, Allison, can bear the home’s confines no longer, fleeing the home offers no escape from the ambient buzz and blue light of televisions along the street, and strangely reminiscent of Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Spielberg, 1977) or Poltergeist (Hooper, 1982). Further testifying to the medium’s ambivalence, television is both the main source of comfort and information, yet also omnipresent, oppressive and, paradoxically, fragmentary/partial.115 Yet while Donna’s reaction invokes the home as a contained, protected space, its ‘unfinished’ state and the domestic mediation of the attacks imply the impossibilities of such an ideal.

The futile desperation of Donna’s attempt to ‘keep out’ the horrific reality of the attacks is amplified by the presence of newspaper and electrical tape on the front door glass panes – a hasty, temporary, insufficient endeavour to shield the home from the world beyond but evidence of the fragility and vulnerability of the home. In this sense, the home is perhaps connotated as ‘America’ – thereby again signalling the collapse of nation and home, and the persistence of representations of 9/11 as an attack on the American home – the nation futilely attempting to keep out or protect itself against the outside world, but in an unfinished state of ‘construction’ and so somewhat neglected and vulnerable. This both gently excoriates McLoughlin’s neglect of the home and foreshadows the prospect (and reality) of his permanent absence as undesirable. In the unfinished renovation job, WTC here signals the perceived insufficiency of McLoughlin’s non-uniformed identity, reinforced across a

115 Rickli (2009) similarly notes how this scene emphasises television’s omnipresence on the day, but fails to consider its relation to Allison’s unsuccessful attempt to flee its ‘eye’.
series of shared flashbacks with Donna that highlight his incompetence with home maintenance and work tools. Yet it also signals anxieties about his absence from the home – both a potential-permanent absence and a pre-attack symbolic absence, evinced in his privileging of the uniform over the role of husband and consequent neglect of the home.

This already-absence is reiterated in his fragmented final hallucination. He asks Donna if he has been a good husband: “Did I love ya right, good enough?” In the absence of a reply, McLoughlin questions what is missing in their marriage before Donna finally replies, “What with me and the kids, and you with the Department […] I guess we just stopped looking at each other” – her pause articulating a pre-attack division between the two spaces and thus that he needs to accept the requirements of family and home as necessary components of masculinity. Acknowledging mutual responsibility, WTC nonetheless implies that McLoughlin’s privileging of uniformed masculinity over his role as husband-father led him to neglect the home, and left it precarious and vulnerable. In connecting ‘Ground Zero’ and the home, WTC suggests that uniformed masculinity was weakened and overwhelmed not by the attacks but before them, particularly through male diminishment in the home. In this sense, the attacks are catalytic, gently excoriating McLoughlin for leaving the home in a state of disrepair and neglect, and thus vulnerable and fragile, but also inspiring a reconstruction of ‘America’, with the father restored as its head, with wounded masculinity recuperated through restoration of the male to (and as head of) the home. Yet as much as WTC connects and equates the spaces of the ‘hole’ and the home, they are also opposite. That is, in contrast to the home, the ‘hole’ is a place of destruction and death, an in-between or even horrific ‘nothing’ space. As such, the film tries to transport the men from the ‘hole’ to the ‘home’, and thereby connotes a return to a reinvigorated, restored ‘America’. Yet in contrast with Godfrey and Hamad’s (2012) conclusions about ‘protective’ masculinities, WTC also arguably suggests the inability to reconcile the two aspects of masculinity – one associated with the home and one with the uniform – is the problem, reiterated in the film’s subsequent return to the uniform.

Additionally, the conspicuous absence of women from ‘Ground Zero’ – only uniformed males physically enter the space of search-and-rescue – reiterates the
ambivalent gendering of space in *WTC*. The ‘hole’ is the only space women enter, and only figuratively, particularly exacerbated in contrast to the uniformed male-only space of search-and-rescue above via shared flashbacks and the trapped men’s hallucinations in the ‘hole’. The wives are also only associated with their husbands’ experience after they are entrapped and need to re-imagine and redefine compromised masculine identities. Although the wives want to go to the site, each is repeatedly deterred or physically prevented from heading to ‘Ground Zero’, while Karnes receives God’s ‘backing’ and is readily admitted by the National Guard. In so conflating gender, and pejoratively aligning the female body with victim status and immobility, the home thus becomes an ambivalent space of return and identity restoration for the trapped men. Yet it is equally apparent that by connecting the ‘hole’ and the home, as Hoberman (2006) observes, the film collapses battlefield and home(front), recognising a more figurative notion of ‘home’, but one equally threatened and vulnerable (the significance of this collapse in relation to the military uniform is discussed later).

The Erasure of Ethnic Difference & Return of the Uniform

As is typical function of disaster and apocalypse films, the ‘hole’ and ‘Ground Zero’ also demonstrate how the attacks destabilise or disturb preceding hierarchies before reorganising and reinstating them, albeit refigured, thereby reviving a particular configuration of society. Initially, the attacks solidify order and hierarchy – McLoughlin assumes the lead role and Jimeno is treated as a rookie, required to ‘babysit’ the equipment cart while others collect equipment. Even after the collapse, screen space is used to first separate and isolate the trapped men. McLoughlin is unable to see his men, physically separated from Jimeno (and Pezzulo’s body), or the light above. The surviving men’s early conversations in ‘the hole’ equally mark the division of their police rank and their personal and professional identities, implying this is the first occasion the two have discussed their non-professional identities. The space of and in the ‘hole’ is reconfigured over time to visually bring the two men together. The film thereafter collapses screen space (and thus emotional distance),

116 Just as the only female PAPD officer remains at reception throughout, only one among the film’s pantheon of rescuers is identifiably female, glimpsed only briefly from behind and in the background.
communicating their conversations as steadily more intimate through shot-reverse shot editing. Indeed, after their rescue, the two men are shown side-by-side in their hospital room, united and equal. In this, Jimeno and McLoughlin’s masculinity, consciousness and survival are linked. However, the interrelationality of uniformed masculinity (and thereby national identity) is foreshadowed in McLoughlin’s mantra to “Stay together!” upon entering the complex, but most heavily figured in the final rescue operation, in both the officers’ recovery and their disinterment. Informed McLoughlin may not survive, Jimeno tells Emergency Services officer Scott Strauss (Stephen Dorff) to cut off his leg because “If he dies, I die – that’s just the way it is”. These instances also foreground masculinity as sacrificial, with such self-sacrifice and shared service routinely associated with (and enacted through) uniformed masculinity in WTC.118

The attacks reorganise, even erase, social and racial hierarchies, but the narrational strategy also highlights WTC’s concerted erasure of difference. This erasure of difference is most evident in relation to ethnicity. While ethnicity is clearly coded in WTC, in the composition of Jimeno’s family and numerous popular culture references, ethnic difference is neutralised, even made invisible. That is, ethnicity does not mark difference so much as it is used to demonstrate that everyone (or all Americans at least) is and wants for the same in spite of surface differences of rank, age and ethnicity. Evinced in the shared experiences in the ‘hole’, in the homes and across America on the day, the film’s elision of difference through the equivalence of American experience, however, effectively erases ethnicity. It also undercuts New York’s (and America’s) vitality through or because of difference, in stark contrast to Lee’s 25th Hour.119 Indeed, the trapped men’s relationship in some sense mirrors that

117 This revisits and refigures an earlier scene when McLoughlin tells Jimeno to ensure he does not go to sleep, for he will never wake, and “If you did, I die”. This interrelationality of masculine (and, as uniformed, national) identity, the combination of belonging, obligation and collective strength evoked in uniforms demonstrating the bonds that motivate men to rescue their own (country)men, is reiterated repeatedly, as brother-officers visit colleagues’ homes to speak to wives and in the final collective characterisation of the trapped men’s rescue.

118 For example, Jimeno earlier asserts their deceased colleagues’ collective choice to enter the buildings, “We wanted to go in”. Jimeno reminds McLoughlin the men had volunteered and were simply compelled because of who – equated with what, and what they do – they were: “That’s who they were”. However, Jimeno’s declaration reiterates the tension between wearer and uniform, invoking conflicting notions of choice (they volunteered because they wanted to go in) and compulsion/obligation (they were compelled by the duties associated with their uniformed roles).

119 Monty unleashes a litany of declarations of “fuck you” in front of a mirror to New York City’s diverse populace, shown in cutaways, unleashing his anger – also impotent – towards each and every its diverse ethnicities, races, types, professions and
of interracial buddy films, which Tolliver (2003) asserts is the typical way Hollywood addresses race. Yet rather than a focus on the overcoming of difference, on men who must cooperate across difference to survive, \textit{WTC} seeks to \textit{annul} or \textit{erase difference}.\footnote{While the erasure of difference is also arguably achieved in ‘interracial buddy’ films through a symbolic ‘overcoming’, there is nonetheless a different tenor to \textit{WTC}’s representation of the trapped men’s relationship, as if there never was any ‘real’ difference to be overcome. The ‘interracial buddy’ film is discussed further in Chapter Four on \textit{The Kingdom}.} For example, as McLoughlin’s health slips, Jimeno assumes a lead role in their refrigured relationship, coaxing McLoughlin to talk and ensuring he stays awake. He tells McLoughlin he wanted to become a police officer because of the 1970s TV show \textit{CHiPs}, in which two ethnically different motorcycle police officers – one Hispanic, the other blond and ‘all-American’ – work as partners. \textit{CHiPs} ambivalently spotlights both ethnicity and the uniform’s capacity to ‘make men uniform’, the capacity of subgenre and uniform alike to both foreground and \textit{erase} ethnicity and difference.\footnote{This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, in specific relation to the star persona of Will Smith.} Significantly, McLoughlin, who claims not to know the show, later hums the \textit{CHiPs} theme song to stay conscious and endure his pain, both assuming and collapsing the men’s difference.

The officers performance of uniformed masculinity is overwhelmed in-and-by the excess of the attacks and their consequent entrapment, immobility and incapacitation. Yet \textit{WTC} seemingly recuperates the trapped men’s vulnerable, wounded identities by allowing them to renegotiate or construct an alternative masculinity that eschews the uniform and in celebrating their return to the home, however ambivalent. Yet despite refiguring masculine identity, \textit{WTC}’s final recourse is to have more males ‘put on’ a uniform in the attempt to recover and rehabilitate damaged conventional masculinity. The men’s reconstruction and symbolic return is terminally disrupted when \textit{WTC} subsequently privileges Karnes’ (and Sereika’s) ‘putting on’ as a return to one’s ‘true’ self. As Godfrey and Hamad (2012) likewise observe, and as evident across the ‘terror threat’ films, this highlights the redemptive, restorative characteristics of \textit{performing} a protective role.\footnote{Lapsed paramedic Chuck Sereika’s return to the uniform and key role in the rescue functions similarly to Karnes’} In so doing, the film denotes the redemptive characteristics of uniformed, conventional masculinity for American males (and American national identity); only in uniform are males presented as whole and classes, and also finally at himself (Taubin, 2003). In a sense then, \textit{25th Hour}, which while invoking shared experience also acknowledges, emphasises and finally embraces the city’s cultural and ethnic differences as difference.
redeemed as men in WTC. The manner of this return to and restitution of the uniform undermines WTC's attempts to broaden conventional masculinity beyond the uniform through McLoughlin and Jimeno. In privileging an earlier-and-now-redundant masculinity after redefining it, WTC not only presents these masculinities as competing rather than complementary, but undermines McLoughlin and Jimeno’s attempts to redefine or reconstruct their masculinity. Reinstating the film’s privileging of the uniform, yet now predicated on conspicuous rather than ‘natural’ performance and masquerade, is highly ambivalent.

Redeeming & Remilitarising Masculinity & ‘Ground Zero’

Immediately following the trapped men’s ‘breaking down’, WTC introduces Dave Karnes, a Connecticut accountant, and foregrounds his return to the uniform and lead role in their discovery. The Marine uniform worn by Karnes looms large in WTC, seemingly recuperating uniformed masculinity as the spectacle of the uniform and its display of masculine attributes, in Craik’s (2003) words, combine in the performance of masculinity itself. Indeed, Karnes’ uniform signals that America is now in a time of war, which requires a different, even a more appropriate, type of uniform. Nonetheless, the military uniform not only suggests a non-natural state (and time), but it remains disturbing that the place (military) uniformed masculinity is reasserted is also an American city. Numerous reviewers even consider him the film’s most significant character and hero, the character on whom Klawans (2006) contends “the entire picture hinges”. However, Rich (2006) questions why Stone “elevat[es] this figure from the hundreds” who performed valorously on 9/11. Why, for example, is Karnes’ story a focus, especially given his limited role in the final recovery, over those who “took a far bigger risk” entering the highly unstable ‘hole’ to help recover the men and who also ‘put on’ the uniform (Klawans, 2006)? First, by focusing on the men’s survival rather than their rescue and on Karnes over former paramedic Chuck Sereika, WTC elevates the two officer’s roles in their survival and, thereby, their heroism. Perhaps, as Klawans (2006) observes, although Sereika’s story also offers redemption and a return to heroism from victimisation, Stone is keener to assert “the rescuer as warrior” – to reassert a militarised masculinity. In this choice, Stone seemingly fetishises a return to the uniform and remilitarisation. Yet the ‘weird’
staging and overt self-consciousness of Karnes’ ‘return’, reiterated in Michael Shannon’s casting and performance, is highly ambivalent and thus less certain than critically assumed.

Karnes’ return to the uniform superficially resolves anxieties about normative masculinity, reinstating an image of authority and control destabilised by the attacks – figured (although displaced and contained) in entrapment. Yet it is also representative of a predating cinematic trend in films, whereby 1990s SF-disaster films mark a generic shift from exploring responsibility for disaster onto ‘disaster response’, that is, focusing on the capacity to contribute to the collective effort and resolve the threat rather than diagnose its genesis (Kakoudaki, 2002). 123 Introduced as he watches President Bush’s post-attacks press conference on television, Karnes subsequently visits his Church and declares to his Pastor that God is calling him on a new ‘mission’. Indeed, it is telling that, as Figure 1.8 demonstrates, that Karnes’ introduction is akin to that of the western hero. Like Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) in The Searchers (Ford, 1956), Karnes not only towers over others but is framed pressing at the edges of the contained office space, demonstrably ‘out of place’ within a ‘domestic’ setting. Remilitarised by President and God, he gets a buzz cut and re-dons his uniform. 124

**Figure 1.8**

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Karnes’ immediate ‘declaration’ that America is at war, his remilitarisation through return to the uniform and his subsequent presence in military uniform also signify ‘Ground Zero’ and New York as a battlefield. Like his earlier Vietnam films, WTC is “also a kind of war movie” (Denby, 2006) and New York “a society of continuous risk” (Tonchi, 2000, p.153), reinforced when Karnes joins with another former Marine also searching the site, another who has returned to the uniform. When Karnes locates Jimeno, he declares, “You are our mission!” – for Marines ‘never leave a man

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123 This focus on ‘disaster response’ as opposed to assigning responsibility or blame is symptomatic of the ahistorical response to 9/11, and is more fully explored in Chapter Two on Cloverfield.

124 Drew (2004, p.74) argues that a like focus on the image of the president “reveal the cultural and media enthusiasm” for his (re)construction as determined and eager to reassert control, and the remasculinisation of American identity.
behind’. Karnes’ initial ‘declaration’ to office colleagues, “I don't know if you guys know it yet, but this country is at war”, is also the first confident statement of ‘knowing’ since the attacks, countering McLoughlin’s preceding screams of “I don’t know!” Karnes’ declaration, mimicking Bush, initiates the ‘push back’ and recuperation of threatened conventional masculinity and ruptured national identity. Donning his old Marine uniform, Karnes’ ‘true’ identity is associated with the wearing of a uniform and performance in uniform.

As outlined in the Introduction, while the military uniform connotes reciprocal belonging, duty and unity, it particularly communicates a sense of belonging to a specific idea and (idea of) nation. Thus, Karnes’ return to uniform marks not only the transition from peacetime to wartime, but a return to a ‘muscular’, militaristic American nationalism associated with the male in (military) uniform, odd both in a contemporary and an urban setting. Indeed, this is particularly pertinent to WTC, with uniforms, reiterating Baudrillard’s claim (cited by Calefato, 2000, p.201), exemplifying and enacting the ‘ideological cohesion’ of the nation; the quality shared by all its male characters, and in marked contrast to their status in Stone’s earlier Vietnam war films Platoon and Born on the Fourth of July. Thus, in Karnes’ uniformed return WTC also denotes the redemptive characteristics of uniformed masculinity for American national identity. Reinforcing the alignment of conventional masculinity with the uniform, Karnes’ redemption through his new ‘mission’ likewise enacts national redemption in the return of/to the supposedly reassuring performance of uniformed masculinity.

The Ambivalence of the Transgressive ‘Hero’

125 WTC also figures Ground Zero as a battlefield (and thus the attacks as an act of war) by implicitly connecting them with future, foreign battlefields (see also Kendrick, 2008). In a final telephone conversation following the men's recovery, Karnes informs his boss, as he stands on the rubble of the former towers, his return to work is uncertain: “They’re gonna need some good men out there to avenge this”.

126 As Lichty and Carroll (2008, pp.398-9) note, while similarly about ‘confusion’, ‘disorientation’ and ‘survival’, Platoon focuses on the enemies within as much as those without, exemplified in Taylor’s (Charlie Sheen) concluding narration, “… we fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us”.
Karnes is the character who most straightforwardly conforms to conventional notions of ‘the hero’, given McLoughlin’s immobility and victimhood and the film’s valorisation of uniformed masculinity. He is both a model of conventional, ideal masculinity – in his capacity to take command and wrest back control – and a transgressive figure; using the uniform to gain access to the site and continuing the search after it is temporarily halted. For Karnes, as Calefato (2000, p.199) observes, the uniform functions as a ‘password’; by dressing as a Marine he obtains access to a ‘Ground Zero’ site to which those without a uniform is prohibited entry (a National Guardsman lets Karnes pass unimpeded as he tells other civilians they cannot enter). Thus, it is only by ‘putting on’ the uniform, and symbolically (re)claiming its associated attributes and authority, that Karnes is able to participate in the rescue. As such, and akin to McGillis’ (2009) description of B-movie cowboys, he fulfils popular mythic notions of the man who takes charge and shoulders responsibility, the man without whom society cannot be secured nor success achieved. In his eschewal of the ‘everyday’ and return to the uniform, Karnes becomes not only vital, but also necessary to the protection and sustenance of the civilian world of work, home and family. As Calefato (2000) argues, the uniform symbolises the separation of familiar and alien. Thus, Karnes’ uniform – and the omnipresence of other protective uniforms – introduces familiarity into the ‘alien’ landscape that marks the ruins of the Twin Towers.127 Karnes’ final walking on and over ‘Ground Zero’ reasserts American certitude and dominance; his walking ‘all over’ the earlier site of emasculation symbolising the reassertion of uniformed masculinity and connoting ‘Ground Zero’ as (now) a war zone rather than a space of search-and-rescue – America will now bring the attack back to those that attacked them.

Yet Karnes’ ambivalence is most unsettling. Karnes’ return to the uniform re-institutes and re-establishes a conventional masculinity predicated on the uniform. This uniformed return also symbolically restores the (idea of the) nation as unified and resilient. But Kendrick’s (2008, pp.523, 526) characterisation of Karnes as “the quintessential American fighting man” and “a ready metaphor for the undaunted American spirit in the face of catastrophe” is wilfully narrow. Only a narrow reading of Karnes’ character enables a straightforward appraisal of the redemptive qualities of

127 It is also an equally unsettling reminder of continued ‘real world’ wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
‘putting on’ the uniform in the rescue and restoration of masculinity (and nation), ignoring the utter ambivalence of both Karnes’ representation and reception. Indeed, in contrast to Kendrick’s observations, \textit{WTC} offers as ambivalent a representation of heroism and resilience as does \textit{United 93}.\textsuperscript{128} Karnes is the first character to recognise America is at war and heroically and, via transgressive access to the (closed) site, locates the trapped men. However, tellingly, following Karnes’ statement about God “shielding us from what we are not ready to see”, a firefighter – certainly the most valorised first responder in the aftermath of 9/11 – participating in the search at ‘Ground Zero’ rolls his eyes and drolly comments: “Nutjob!”\textsuperscript{129} Karnes’ ambivalence is also readily figured in wildly diverse critical and audience responses. These appraisals of his character ranged widely from Karnes as heroic, divinely inspired and emblematic of a renewed American masculinity – “a biblical warrior out of the New Testament by way of Vietnam” (Rich, 2006) – to being a poorly rendered, unmotivated robotic zealot (see Klawans, 2006; Liss, 2006; Zacharek, 2006). Audiences too seemingly registered this ambivalence – test audiences even believed his character fictional – requiring that Stone insert biographical details of Karnes’ real reenlistment and tours in Iraq in a postscript: audiences thought he added the Marine story for ‘hype’ and a ‘happy ending’ (Jaafar, 2006; Johnson, 2006). A minority of commentators, like Johnson (2006, p.51), register the character’s ambivalence, describing Karnes as a “vigilante GI Joe action figure – a born-again Christian soldier” (see also Denby, 2006). Edelstein (2006) even considers the film better for Stone’s ambivalent representation of Karnes, “as both a valiant saviour and a monomaniac Holy Warrior”. Yet the relative paucity of commentary on such persistent ambivalences in \textit{WTC} is striking, with most critics assuming Stone’s intentions – in part to redeem his own reputation, but also to ‘honour’ the attack’s victims – apposite to his previous ‘war’ films. While Karnes’

\textsuperscript{128} Ambivalent masculinities are not unusual in Stone's oeuvre, particularly in his other war films, although the conflicting masculinities in \textit{Platoon} for example, though equally representative of the nation, seem to represent not only basic distinctions between good and evil, but contrasting conceptions of ‘America’.

\textsuperscript{129} Equally, Karnes’ ‘calling’ comes primarily via television – a pointer to the ambivalence with which Stone considers such a ‘return’, given his ingrained disdain for the mass media, which “entrances and pollutes and trivialises [...] with fragments of information that [present] an incomplete, confusing and finally abstract picture of the world” (quoted in Gentry, 2007, p.57). This televisual ‘calling’ is later reiterated, as Karnes is also watching New York Mayor Rudi Giuliani on TV when he is getting his military standard buzz cut.
characterisation is on one level unsuccessful because poorly rendered, his ambivalent characterisation is arguably significant.

Karnes’ character is deeply unsettling; and it particularly unsettles because his character is too noticeable (for both supporters and critics). Karnes troubles notions of performance in conventional Hollywood form. Shannon’s portrayal – and Karnes’ actions – draw attention to his character as character, as performed. Indeed, Stone admits the character’s ambivalence in casting Shannon. In a way, the film is suspicious of such holistic, conventional notions of masculinity. While any ‘putting on’ is somewhat self-conscious once framed and narrativised, Karnes’ robotic, yet fundamentalist stoicism particularly draws attention to his character as self-conscious – and thus his masculine-uniformed identity as constructed rather than ‘natural’. It renders him as McGillis describes B-Western masculinities: “a fantasy […] an elegiac substitution for that which we cannot have” (2009, pp.4-5). While Karnes restores or produces order, and acts as a palliative for the sense of failure and loss expressed by McLoughlin – ‘What good did we do?’ – he is also an ‘emblematic’ reminder of that failure and loss, to re-use Calefato (2000). Karnes’ performance inevitably unnerves rather than reassures, and so disturbs the return of certainty and reassertion of uniformed masculinity (and nation) that his performance supposedly enacts. It also suggests Stone’s ambivalence towards the remilitarisation of conventional masculinity (and nation), counter to Drew’s (2004) assumptions on its pervasiveness post-9/11.

Rehabilitation of & through the Uniform

130 Shannon’s later film and television work adds further weight to the consideration of the significance of the ambivalence of both his performance and Karnes’ character, particularly in relation to religious extremism in Take Shelter (Nichols, 2011) and Boardwalk Empire (2010-).

131 This ambivalence of male character in films that directly address 9/11, even if only obliquely, is equally evident in 25th Hour. Before reuniting with Monty on his final night before prison, his friends, Jacob (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and Slaughtery (Barry Pepper) (who lives in an apartment overlooking ‘Ground Zero’), discuss Monty’s plight while looking down over the site. They express their own guilt, anger and helplessness, which “suggests something of what New Yorkers feel about the 9/11 attack” (Taubin, 2003), but Slaughtery also proposes that, having profited amorally on the despair of others, Monty is now reaping what he has sown. Taking place with ‘Ground Zero’ in the background, Jacob and Slaughtery’s conversation controversially links to the Twin Towers, an ambivalent symbol of American power and commerce that may equally have invited punishment, an implicit association reiterated as the camera zooms in on ‘Ground Zero’. Also see Dawes (2009, pp.285-6) for a similar observation on the political undertones of this scene, which “merges the local with the universal”.

98
Karnes’ return to uniform similarly demonstrates how the attacks destabilise and the symbolic return remakes (and re-establishes) societal order. Equally, it signals the redemptive qualities of the (return to) uniform and Hollywood’s/America’s “addiction to fables of redemptive uplift”, in Rosenbaum’s (2006) words. Karnes’ return to the uniform is a return or revival of his ‘true’ identity yet also transformative. Karnes readily (re)defines himself through his uniform, becoming what he dresses as. Indeed, the uniform is again shown to be also wholly transformative, evident when ESU officer Strauss first asks his name Karnes replies, “Staff Sergeant Karnes”. When he subsequently asks if he can use something shorter Karnes replies without irony, “Staff Sergeant”. The uniform transforms its wearer in this instance from ‘overcivilised’ accountant to hypermasculine Marine, and moves him from the margins to the centre of the narrative. The attacks present an opportunity to return to an unconstrained performance of military masculinity. Karnes finds fulfilment and redemption in his new ‘mission’, in the wearing of the uniform and the performance of uniformed masculinity, which also covers or conceals his earlier everyday, non-‘protective’ masculinity. Yet the expression of military masculinity in New York and the strangeness of Karnes’ embodiment unsettle its return. Moreover, the privileging and redemptive qualities of uniformed masculinity also ultimately undermine McLoughlin and Jimeno’s (painful and pain-filled) redefinition of masculinity for one that eschews the uniform.

Another ‘putting on’ or return to the uniform is perhaps even more revealing in these respects. As the final recovery effort gets under way, Strauss asks if anyone among the assembled rescue workers is a paramedic. A male voice is heard further down the ‘pile’, the owner still indistinguishable in the dark and amongst the rubble: “Used to be”. Strauss scoffs, but the man clammers up and informs him he is capable, but that his registration lapsed after he had “a few bad years”. It is only when the lapsed paramedic, Chuck Sereika (Frank Whaley), figuratively ‘puts on’ his former uniform, reclaiming the associated attributes and duties, that he can participate in the rescue (after all, no one without a uniform is permitted within the site). It is also only through ‘putting on’ the uniform that, like Karnes, Sereika redeems, or more properly rehabilitates, himself. Sereika only becomes his best self when he again becomes paramedic.
During the trapped men’s disinterment, the film further emphasises redemption as collective (and therefore national) via a compendium of uniforms – firefighters, police, FBI agents, paramedics, soldiers and emergency services, another means of eliding ethnic diversity or difference in the film. All toiling as impromptu rescue workers, first Jimeno and finally McLoughlin are passed symbolically down the wreckage of ‘Ground Zero’. The unbroken chain of uniformed men, extending into off-screen space, who pass the recovered men from one hand to the next are united and one, supposed ciphers for the united national response – and in this sense the exclusion of females from this ‘remasculinisation’ of the nation is again notable. Fellow rescuers even earlier rebuke Strauss for telling them to leave the ‘hole’ because it may collapse. Sereika’s improbable response follows, and signals how Sereika must and can only redeem or rehabilitate himself through undertaking the rescue: “I’ve been in and out of rehab for years. Finally figured out the only thing I’ve ever been good at is helping people. We’re doing this together”. Sereika also rebukes Strauss for withholding the collective opportunity for redemption as well as for elevating himself above the merely representative. Sereika's declaration, however contextually improbable, continues the confessional tenor of his speech and reiterates the impact of the uniform as literally rehabilitative in his case. It emphasises not only the rescuers’ shared, collective fate, but the redemptive possibilities offered in and through the performance of uniformed masculinity. The rescue thus rehabilitates or redeems what the uniform represents (American national identity), as much as who (its male wearers) and what it covers (their self-perceived insufficiencies).

Thus, *WTC*’s conclusion reasserts masculinity as uniformed, and the uniform as representative of the nation. The restitution of the uniform reverses (and conceals) the impotence and helplessness otherwise embodied by the trapped men and, perhaps more so, the men confined in the home and incapable of ‘performing’. Sereika’s transformation appears complete when a police officer asks him what he is doing there after the trapped men’s rescue – implicitly challenging Sereika’s ‘right’ to be at the site. Sereika hesitates, before confidently self-identifying: “Paramedic”. The officer’s resounding affirmation, “Thatta boy!”, reinforces the alignment of ideal masculinity with a protective uniform and testifies to its redemptive qualities. Yet whilst he does have to prove himself – to himself as much to other first responders – this privileging of the (figurative return to the) ‘uniformed’ persona is equally
troubling. Karnes’ and Sereika’s ‘putting on’ of the uniform again highlights an unsettling schism or discrepancy between uniform and wearer. The uniform cloaks the wearer with the reassuring associated attributes and qualities of the uniform, and thereby uniformed masculinity, but also denotes the perceived insufficiency of the non-uniformed male it seeks to redress but serves only to conceal.

**Male Masquerade & the ‘Remasculinisation’ of the Uniform**

Uniforms also highlight gender’s constructedness and how its performance is constituted by and through the uniform. Thus, WTC’s seemingly straightforward privileging of the uniform finally unsettles normative masculinity and its uniformed rehabilitation. Karnes in his role as accountant, and Sereika through his implied alcoholism, admit not only the discrepancy between male and uniformed identity, but the perceived insufficiency and lack of worth associated with the non-uniformed aspects of their identity. ‘Putting on’ the uniform seeks to erase such insufficiencies, but merely conceals them; they remain ambivalently predicated on notions of conscious performance and masquerade. As Craik (2003, p.143) observes, uniforms intended to express upright and positive attributes can equally become symbols of insufficiency. In this sense, Karnes’ return to the uniform becomes, as Craik implies, ‘ambivalent’, ‘unstable’ and ‘unsettling’. In locating the trapped men and remasculinising ‘Ground Zero’, Karnes reasserts a masculinity embodied in and enacted through the uniform and the performance of a protective role. More than simply restoring uniformed masculinity, Karnes’ embodiment is self-consciously hypermasculine, exaggerating and distorting the characteristics earlier associated with uniformed masculinity. And ultimately, the conscious and conspicuous performance of hegemony destabilises it, with hegemony no longer ‘natural’.

*WTC* presents Karnes and Sereika’s returns to uniform as returns to their ‘best’ or ‘true’ selves (they are represented as inauthentic out of the uniform), in an expressed attempt to once again render uniformed masculinity as convincing, reassuring and able. But this reassertion is ambivalent and unconvincing – for the audience and other

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132 Sereika’s acknowledged battles with alcoholism function similarly.
characters; unsettlingly, both Karnes and Sereika masquerade, a type of subversive performance or impersonation that exposes all gender as performed or constructed, in their protective roles. Thus, both returns to uniform and participation in the search at least partially rest on falsity; Karnes is a former Marine and Sereika’s paramedic license has lapsed. In order to participate in the search-and-rescue, both must at this stage ‘play’ their role. Karnes clearly and consciously impersonates a Marine, not only ‘putting on’ the uniform and getting a Marine-standard buzz cut but in ‘playing’ the role in order to obtain a ‘password’ for access and enter ‘Ground Zero’. The film implies their resumption of prior roles marks a return to performing an ‘innate’ role, irrespective of whether it is yet ‘official’. Yet it is telling that the film focuses only on non-official or dormant examples of performance. More than this, the implication of any notion of masculinity as ‘innate’ or ‘natural’ thereby undermines the trapped men’s painful renegotiation of their identity. Indeed, a ‘healthier’ representation of the recuperation of normative masculinity would arguably allow the men to perform their roles without uniforms.

While superficially reassuring and restorative, their masquerade to some degree reveals normative masculinity – all masculinities – as performed rather than ‘natural’, something ‘conventional’ masculinities are loath to do. As Butler (1990, p.xxv) observes, the masquerade puts the ‘reality’ of gender into crisis and reveals gender as ‘changeable’ and ‘revisable’. Karnes’ masquerade unsettles ‘remasculisation’ because it is only through masquerade that normative (uniformed) masculinity can successfully function, destabilising the restoration of uniformed masculinity, the uniform and, in turn, masculinity.133 It is such details, seemingly minor, which unsettle the restoration of masculinity and of the uniform. In WTC, masquerade is employed to conceal the vulnerability and insufficiency exposed by the attacks – both McLoughlin and Jimeno's insufficient response to them, and Karnes and Sereika's 'inauthenticity' when they occur – beneath the appearance of stable uniformed masculinity.

133 Stone seemingly admits as much, preferring ‘proper’ or ‘legitimate’ professional male authority (in the character of ESU officer Strauss) over the masquerade of Sereika. Significantly, while Strauss enters the ‘hole’ before Sereika in the film, Liss (2006) details that Sereika was actually the first person to reach Jimeno – a notion that would have further unsettled the restitution of a fully functioning and balanced masculinity after the masquerading Marine has located the trapped men.
Stone’s emphasis on ‘authenticity’, in *WTC*’s alignment of man with uniform and actor with ‘real’ officer, seeks to disavow such discomfiting notions of performance and masquerade. Even the centrality of Karnes as soldier – along with the focus on the two trapped men – serves to reduce and obscure 9/11 as personal rather than historical. Thus, in order to offer a narrative of rehabilitation and recuperation required, as Aufderheide (1990, p.86) observes of post-Vietnam films, the “revisioning of history as personal tragedy” to “an emotional drama of embattled individual[s]”. Yet the performances, reiterated – in a form of doubling – by the ‘putting on’ of uniforms, do not (and cannot) authenticate a conventional masculinity or individuality represented as natural and innate, but rather reveal it as performance. Karnes ultimately reinstates a hyper-masculinity that inevitably and irrevocably disturbs the idea of masculinity it seeks to restore (MacKinnon, 2002); that is, his performance shields yet reveals. Karnes’ ‘putting on’ – a ‘dressing up’ that embodies and enacts that (that is, the uniform) which has been shown insufficient in order to recuperate it – ultimately illuminates both the masquerade and that which is lacking. As Butler (1990, p.67) observes, masquerade “conceals this loss, but preserves (and negates) [it] through its concealment”. In revealing gender as ‘changeable’ and ‘revisable’, *WTC* also problematises the notion that each man’s return is to a ‘true’ self or the expression of an ‘innate’ identity. Thus, Karnes and Sereika, in putting on the uniform, force a recognition of masculinity as performed rather than restore a masculinity associated with ‘true’ identity if defined in a limited way.

When masculinity is destabilised through entrapment, immobility and passivity, other males – and the film – seek to redress this insufficiency through dress, to conceal (rather than resolve) it through the uniform. The film’s only recourse when uniformed masculinity is destabilised is to have other men ‘put on' uniforms. While the uniform ‘shields’, that which is covered or veiled remains, and Karnes and Sereika’s remilitarisation and rehabilitation of masculinity also reminds of the insufficiency each seeks to redeem or erase. *WTC*’s equation of (successful, complete) masculinity with the reinstated performance of uniformed protective roles finally problematises the trapped men’s earlier attempt to redefine, or broaden, conventional masculinity beyond the uniform. Certainly, the film broadens the number of available, meaningful masculinities in the ‘hole’. Yet in subsequently advocating a return to the uniform *WTC* again privileges this masculinity – privileges what McLoughlin and Jimeno
were but no longer are. In a sense, to be complete requires adherence to one’s assigned role regardless, as Jimeno states earlier of his killed colleagues, “They couldn't have lived with themselves if they hadn't gone in. That's who they were” (emphasis added). Uniformed masculinity, thus, remains privileged, undermines the trapped men’s painful struggle in the ‘hole’ to redefine or construct an alternative masculinity that valorises survival but eschews the uniform.134 WTC’s ultimate response to the attacks’ exposure of the insufficiency of the uniform lies not then in the establishment of an alternative masculinity, but in having more men ‘dress up’ in uniform to perform protective roles. Even more disconcertingly, Karnes notably disappears at film’s end; he is neither part of the rescue nor present in the epilogue of communal celebration. Karnes is again akin to the western hero, the individual on whom society relies but who remains ‘out of place’, who cannot be incorporated. As such, Stone thereby admits that this type of masculinity can never represent enough, and is in some sense dangerous, further troubling masculinity already disconcertingly reasserted via male masquerade.

Absence, Ambivalence & the Threat of the ‘Terror-Other’

This chapter demonstrates how WTC is haunted by the (male) insufficiency – physical, professional, emotional – and loss it variously seeks to conceal. This insufficiency and loss is mirrored by the many absences that overwhelm the film’s conventionality and further undermine its already ambivalent recuperation of conventional masculinity. Even after, McLoughlin and Jimeno’s rescue, and perhaps even more so, absence haunts and overwhelms WTC, the film ultimately about and unable to shield the audience from persisting absence and loss in spite of its desire to deflect each via the men’s recovery.135 It would be mistaken to consider the absence of bodies in WTC, timorously signified in the digitised ‘falling man’ and a woman’s shoe, unique to a post-9/11 context.136 Yet such absences do figure as incoherences,  

134 Neither trapped man ever returns to the police force.
135 Throughout WTC, characters cling to traces, such as memories stimulated by clothing or particular rooms.
136 Far from “being remarkable in its acute absence of bodies” (Pheasant-Kelly, 2010, p.12), WTC’s unwillingness to show American dead killed in a foreign attack has a long pedigree. For example, the only confirmed, clearly represented casualties of the attack on Pearl Harbor in In Harm’s Way (Preminger 1965) are incidental and indirect – an adulterous couple driven off the road by a military truck.
and become cracks in *WTC*’s conventional structure, such as that of the supposedly ‘important’ but quickly forgotten ‘missing girl’.

More significantly, numerous moments of cumulative significance following McLoughlin and Jimeno’s rescue render the film's closing unsettling and unconvincing, dwarfed by greater loss and absence. Dawes contends the epilogue “authorises and validates the film […] as an ‘authentic’ interpretation of September 11” (2009, p.292). Yet in contrast to this, its supposed “final scenes of optimism” (Pheasant-Kelly 2010, p.11), which culminate in a paternal embrace that Ozcan (2008) claims restores order, provides closure and induces hope, *WTC* resists closure. Thus, unable either to fully represent the loss or fill in the gaps, its male characters’ redemption is undermined and unsettled. On the morning of 12 September, following the men’s rescue and reunion with family, *WTC* shifts focus to those who cannot be rescued or recuperated. First, although Strauss is informed about the men’s wellbeing, he is then told, “We're still missing fourteen [colleagues]”. He immediately returns to despair, as he helplessly casts his eyes across the rubble: “There could be thousands of people out there. Where the hell are they?” The helplessness and impotence reversed in the men’s rescue immediately returns, mirroring that of first responders following the collapse of the towers, who felt incapable of responding to the attacks: “And there was nothing we could do” and “There's no rescue […] You're just going to recover body parts” (Faludi, 2009, p.52). Redemption is thus immediately overwhelmed by the magnitude of loss and the definitive, human insufficiency of any response.

Subsequent shots of various modes of public transport hearken to the film’s introductory shots of the men in McLoughlin’s volunteer team who perish in the collapse, reiterate this sense of greater, overwhelming and unfathomable absence and loss. Each transport type, earlier filled with New Yorkers, is now empty. While this showcases the city's persistence – its “resilience and continuity” (Pheasant-Kelly 2010, p.12) – it is also a reminder of devastating loss and absence, of the three deceased officers and indeed all New Yorkers (whether through fear, injury or death) who caught the train, ferry or subway that morning. The empty public transports are

137 Dawes (pp.293-4) later argues this ‘authenticity’ is “unbalanced” by the use of computer-generated imagery.
thus inadequate, and deeply unsettling, signifiers of persistence and resilience (see Figures 1.9-1.12, in which the lower camera positions ‘the day after’ reiterate the horrifying absence of people). Even the inclusion in an early establishing scene of actual PAPD lockers, which “remained untouched, and [...] hung memorialised ‘legacy’ photos of the officers” (WTC Production Notes, 2006), used by officers who lost their lives, similarly reminds and foreshadows those lost – an already absent. This also mirrors a similar absence of firefighters in a pub scene in 25th Hour. These absences are irrevocably underscored as Allison and her family solemnly survey the countless Missing Person notices placed in the hospital, engulfing their reverie over Jimeno’s recovery. In spite of the successful rescue, the film necessarily, repeatedly and finally laments those unrecovered; a gap WTC cannot (and perhaps does not want to) close, ultimately reflecting the ambivalent, incomplete, unnerving reality of the attacks and their impact on conventional masculinity.

FIGURE 1.9

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From seeking to contain the horror by focusing on the ‘small’ human experience of the trapped men and their families over the architectural and symbolic, these moments return scale to the attacks and the film. They extend the human element beyond the two men’s story and grant a face to those absented by the attacks. However, while necessary to consider 9/11’s wider consequences, the power of these absences in WTC accumulates and eventually overwhelms the supposed ‘optimism’ of the epilogue.

FIGURE 1.10

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FIGURE 1.11

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As Adelman (n.d.) observes, agency and individual initiative are finally “dampened by the overwhelming sense of helplessness”. Stone’s (quoted in Gentry, 2007, p.49)

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138 In interview, Stone affirms this dual nature of the film, agreeing that the film is both a small story and “conveys the arc of America on that day” (Jaafar 2006).
own recollections of 9/11's victims recognise this: “They'd never be coming home. That’s when it struck me the hardest. That’s when I felt the emptiness”.

FIGURE 1.12

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The seeming neatness of WTC’s ending and thus its redemption of uniformed masculinity are forever destabilised by another persistent absence. Indeed, it is the yawning absence of specifically who attacked on 9/11, the unspecified and unnamed ‘terror-Other’, in stark contrast to United 93, that irrevocably overwhelms WTC’s project(s) of masculine redefinition and recuperation. Beyond veiled reference to a ‘them’ who will be confronted ‘out there’, WTC assiduously looks away from its ‘terror-Others’; incoherently suggestive of an attack-event without a cause. WTC’s unwillingness, or incapacity, to identify the terror threat or the perpetrators is characterised by Lewis (2006, p.43) as a “deliberate incuriosity”, and one that makes the film “so thin”. WTC may be ‘unsatisfying’ because it “comes close to big events while sedulously declining to look at them”, but this may in part represent its significance. While another strategy of containment, this ‘incuriosity’ likewise signals not only the impossibility of containment, but the difficulty to rearticulate, redefine and reassert normative (uniformed) masculinity. Masculinities are defined, constructed and performed in relation to and interaction with others, including Other/alternative masculinities; they neither exist nor can be reconstructed in isolation, even though this is what WTC attempts by absenting the ‘terror-Other’. Thus, WTC cannot erase the challenge violently announced by the perpetrator-Others on 9/11. As relational, ‘American’ normative masculinity struggles for redefinition or reassertion against the absence or void these ‘terror-Others’ represent. That is, the ‘terror-Other’ fundamentally troubles the recuperation of ‘American’ masculinity in WTC in its very absence and in the degree to which the film stages it via the displaced utilisation of the men’s entrapment to rework male-female relations (and restore men to the home).
Conclusion: Masculinity/ies Unredeemed

WTC seemingly satisfies critical assumption on Hollywood masculinities: it formally and narratively works to restore normative masculinity (and, aligned with the uniform, national identity) through the restitution of male agency and the return to the home and through the ‘remasculinisation’ and remilitarisation of uniformed masculinity. The film firstly facilitates the wounded, passive entrapped men’s reimagining of a conventional masculinity through a restoration of agency and return to the home. In a sense, WTC’s recuperation of the trapped men as fathers, by uniformed males as symbols of returned authority, restores masculinity to an ideal position. For in the restoration of the father to the home – however ambivalently represented – paternal influence is restored where its presence had waned; male wounding and victimization reverses his threatened cultural position and power. In this respect, the attacks are catalytic rather than cataclysmic, and it is the men’s wounding and entrapment that are necessary to recentre and restore paternal authority. Yet the film subsequently, and paradoxically, reasserts this same destabilised type of masculinity through rescuers who return to the uniform in response to the attacks. The attacks thus serve to restore conventional masculinity and recentre phallocentric power, evinced most clearly in Karnes’ assertive walking ‘all over’ the earlier site of emasculation, symbolising the reassertion of remilitarised masculinity (and paternal authority, with which uniforms are earlier linked). Yet in also seeking to restore a masculinity embodied in the protective uniform, WTC ultimately undermines the return to the home. Entrapment suggests the insufficiency of uniformed masculinity, but this insufficiency is confirmed by the restitution of this self-same version of masculinity through masquerade.

Masculinities marked by ambivalence, instability and insecurity ultimately frustrate conventional formal and narrational restorative devices to convincingly restore male power in WTC. First, conventional masculinity is only restored via heteronormative masquerade. This masquerade both reveals the earlier insufficiency of uniformed masculinity and undermines the trapped men’s reimagining. Second, the film incoherently, even hysterically, attempts to articulate conflicting ‘rhetorics of crisis’ (Robinson, 2000); that is, to both reimagine an alternative masculinity and remasculinise by healing the wound (to the uniform). As a consequence, it can
persuasively achieve neither. Finally, given masculinity is relational, *WTC* is unable to reimagine or reassert masculinity in isolation; that is, it cannot be redefined against the film’s absent Other, the attacks’ perpetrators. Following Robinson (2000, p.4), male power is nonetheless shown to be “neither absolute nor secure” in *WTC*. Ultimately, the trapped men are recovered and uniformed masculinity seemingly ‘remasculinised’, but the men’s reconstruction is undermined and uniformed masculinity’s insufficiencies revealed through masquerade; its insufficiencies merely ‘shielded’ or concealed by the uniform and reiterated in the discomfiting absence of the ‘terror-Other’.

*WTC*’s unsuccessful striving for the coherence of classical narration, evinced by its absent Other and its conflicting ‘rhetorics’, nonetheless ultimately reflects the ambivalent and unsettling reality of the attacks and their impact on conventional notions of American masculinity. *WTC*’s formal and narrative attempts to promote redefinition, rehabilitation and closure – for its male characters and the nation, all represented by the uniform – ironically founder when the film frees the trapped men and itself from its contained ‘small’ story. When the film (also, finally) conveys the wider horror, loss and absence, it resists closure, appropriately mirroring the film’s wider social context. Inevitably, the horror, scale of the unrecoverable loss, and its unfathomable absences, and destabilisation of identity exceed and overwhelm *WTC*’s epilogue of individual persistence, national revival and masculine recuperation. Despite seemingly delivering a simple, straightforward Hollywood narrative about courage, survival and male (and through the uniform, national) redemption, *WTC* can never fully contain the horror it represents, or represent the horror it contains. Yet, rather than formal and narrative conventions and closure, this may be the most ‘authentic’ way for it to mediate the experience of 9/11 and the persistence of destabilised masculine identities. Rather than ‘catharsis’ through a “tightly framed”, unified group at the barbecue (Pheasant-Kelly, 2010, p.12), *WTC* is evidence of continuing trauma. Yet, it is because of its inability to ‘displace’ other narratives, gaps and absences that *WTC* effectively mediates 9/11, and appropriately represents those lost and that destabilised by the attacks – or thereby rehabilitate conventional masculinity. Jordan (2008, p.199) argues that memorial texts, products of society’s emotional and political investment in reshaping the world, “not only represent a historical event, but seek to […] influence future [audience] interactions and
considerations”. In this sense, this first film in the study establishes the persistent, relative absence of the ‘terror-Other’ and ongoing anxieties over the capacity to redeem and recuperate unstable and threatened conventional masculinities in the encounter of/with terror. *WTC*’s conventionality ‘shields’ the audience from ‘what we are not yet ready to see’ but what is concealed ambivalently, incoherently and unsettlingly persists – and is perhaps the film’s real revelation.

The next chapter extends *WTC*’s interest in the ‘ordinary’ man to a concerted focus on the non-professional Everyman’s response to terror. The Everyman is *Cloverfield* is similarly overwhelmed by the scale and horror of terror, but this is exacerbated by his generically atypical Everyman status in a ‘monster’ movie. The Everyman’s recuperation of ‘in crisis’ or destabilised masculinity is equally ambivalent, immediately undermined and only partial, particularly stripped of the professional capacities and familial responsibilities that serve to shield masculine identity in *WTC*. Yet the return to – and reinvigoration of – the uniform via male masquerade perhaps most connects to the next chapter, in which the *less-than-ordinary* urban Everyman masquerades as a quest hero in a displaced response to terror.
Chapter Two – *Cloverfield*

“There’s nowhere to go”: Limited Everymen & the Unknowable Monster, ‘America’s Own Monsters’

This chapter continues *WTC*’s focus on the immediate experience of terror, but *Cloverfield* extends this from the representation of living *inside* the large-scale terror event to living *through* one – and thereby transitions from disaster to horror. In a sense, in its clear evocation of 9/11’s amateur footage, *Cloverfield* takes us from the representation of what could not be represented on television (that is, inside the Twin Towers) to an indirect restaging of what was most horrifyingly represented (that is, the street perspective) on 9/11. While another representation of a terror attack on New York City, its *displaced* and *indirect* exploration of the immediate fears and terror generated by 9/11 via a monster movie cum amateur camera ‘discovered footage’ film functions as an illuminating corollary to the first chapter. *Cloverfield* represents the limited, subjective, ground level experience of a localised-but-citywide terror event, in a monster movie absent the typical and reassuring omniscient perspective. As such, the film frighteningly locks the audience into its characters’ highly mediated but inherently limited and restricted perspective, yet again largely ‘misses the event’ and thereby its true scale and horror. *Cloverfield* also broadens the consideration of the Everyman, now *less-than-ordinary* rather than representative and ‘unmanned’ *prior to* terror. Moreover, *Cloverfield* not only suggests that male insufficiencies and failings precede the advent of terror, but more pointedly that they may even *invite* the monstrous attack and inhibit the recuperation of Everyman masculinity. Like *WTC*, the film enacts various containment strategies, but ultimately explores the difficulty for genre and narrative, and the amateur subjective camera to contain the massive ‘terror threat’, particularly given its giant monster’s persistent elusiveness and (sub)generically atypical resistance to representation.

This chapter begins by outlining the historical cinematic significances of movie monsters, articulating contemporary fears and anxieties, and New York as a ‘spectacular’ urban/cinematic target for them. I then describe *Cloverfield*’s generic hybridity, as a monster movie recast through realist horror, and especially its
incorporation of the pseudo-documentary and amateur camera ‘discovered footage’ aesthetic. In relation to horror, the chapter then considers the significance for male characters of the camera and filming others. The power of looking through the camera and the associated desire for control is immediately undercut and destabilised by female characters, repeatedly ‘unmanning’ the film’s Everymen – and being consequently punished for it. I thus outline how the less-than-ordinary Everyman’s response to large-scale terror must be displaced, unable to counter the monstrous threat professionally, onto a heroic quest, and specifically the rescue of a now prostrate, helpless female. The ‘unmanned’, overcivilised urban Everyman is thrust by terror from visually marginalised into narrative and cinematographic focus; the terror event an opportunity to reverse prior ‘unmanning’, but ‘remasculinisation’ is also fatally compromised by it. Thus, Cloverfield ultimately showcases the limits of the Everyman’s displaced response and undermines his quest to ‘remasculinise’, particularly through the breach of the giant monster, the film’s ‘terror-Other’. The massive monster exceeds the Everyman’s capacity to ‘know’, contain and visually ‘capture’ it, a problem exacerbated by the inherent limited-ness of the hand-held camera. The audience, locked into the victim-perspective and absent both the omniscient camera and an ‘expert’ protagonist, equally endures disturbing restrictions to vision and on knowledge. Ultimately, this chapter argues Cloverfield more than undermines the already disempowered Everyman’s ‘remasculinisation’, finally identifying a more ‘monstrous’ figure requiring annihilation.

Cloverfield, New York and the Imagined Experience of 9/11

Cloverfield, like WTC, exemplifies a persistent tension between concealing and revealing, but is ultimately more interested in hiding and concealing. The film’s production was highly secretive – concealing production plans from cast, crew and the online film community. Yet, similarly, the production also strategically released trailers, concealing both title and monster, and revealed snippets of extratextual information on the Internet to pique fan interest. Cloverfield is also a film whose monster is consistently concealed – symptomatic of not only the ‘invisibility’ associated with terrorism but urban anonymity, as in I Am Legend (Chapter Three). It resists representation and exceeds the capacity of male characters to visually ‘capture’
it within their handycam frame. Most disturbingly, it remains elusive, particularly given the film’s adherence to the limited Everyman perspective precludes the generically typical identification of an origin story or any rationale or explanation for its attack.

_Cloverfield_ follows five twenty-something New Yorkers – celebrating Rob’s (Michael Stahl-David) going-away party prior to his departure to Japan for work – after an attack on the city by a large, unidentified monster. The film details a small-scale experience of a large-scale apocalyptic terror event, signalled by opening Department of Defence titles that declare the following video was recovered from “the area formerly known as Central Park”. Comprising only this ‘discovered’ amateur video footage, _Cloverfield_ adheres to a pseudo-documentary, realist aesthetic and, thus, also to its inherent partiality and limited-ness. After the attack begins during the party, Rob’s brother, Jason (Mike Vogel), is killed when the monster destroys Brooklyn Bridge. The group’s escape blocked, Rob decides on a redemptive quest to rescue his spurned love, Beth (Odette Annable), who is injured and trapped in her father’s high-rise apartment. Accompanying him on his ultimately futile quest are Jason’s bereaved girlfriend, Lily (Jessica Lucas), her cynical friend Marlena (Lizzy Caplan), and Rob’s best friend, the less-than-ordinary Hud (T.J. Miller), who films most of the group’s experience of the monster’s attack. Marlena is killed by dog-sized parasites that ‘feed off’ the monster and Hud later by the monster, although it appears that Lily is safely spirited away from the city on a military helicopter. Ultimately, Rob and Beth seemingly die, trapped in the complete obliteration of Manhattan, as the military initiates a ‘Hammer Down’ protocol in the seemingly vain hope of annihilating the monster. The amateur video also contains footage shot on an earlier day of Rob and Beth’s fledgling romance book-ending and interspersed throughout the monster’s attack – with the narrative intermittently cutting back to this footage, functioning as flashbacks, contiguously unfolding on the video as the monster’s ‘records over’ it and ostensibly seeks to erase it.

139 As in _I Am Legend_ (Chapter Three), the regimes that failed to prevent or avert the catastrophe appear to underpin society’s continuation. Indeed, it only becomes clear at film’s end that Central Park’s ‘formerly known’ status is a direct consequence of military action.
As outlined in the Introduction, Hollywood’s unabandoned pleasure in destructive spectacle was criticised following 9/11, as the assumed ‘hollowness’ of such spectacles suddenly became saturated with meaning as a consequence of real destruction and terror. Although scholars and social commentators speculated such spectacular scenes of particularly New York’s destruction would cease post-9/11, a number of Hollywood films, including *Cloverfield* and *I Am Legend*, soon again imagined the city’s spectacular destruction.\(^{140}\) As Corliss (2008) notes, the city is seemingly “as irresistible to filmmakers as it is to terrorists”. *Cloverfield* thus continues New York’s virtually unabated symbolic status within the ‘imagination of disaster’ (Page, 2011); the city an island target and ‘entry point’ for destruction by enraged movie monsters and threats invariably coming from or involving water (in line with its historic openness and immigration site).\(^{141}\)

Irrespective of whether the film was positively critically received, *Cloverfield*’s clear and discomfiting evocation of iconic 9/11 imagery elicited an ambivalent critical response, as outlined in the Introduction and in relation to *WTC*. Ultimately, critical attention focused almost exclusively on the film’s imagery, as exploiting well-known amateur footage yet also intensely recreating the terror of the experience, particularly through aesthetic means. Indeed, *Cloverfield* overtly evokes the amateur street-level footage that constituted much of the most iconic coverage of 9/11 in its early imagery of destruction and panic. Most clearly, early in the monster’s attack, a skyscraper collapses in on itself, shot from the same street level and angle as amateur footage of the collapse of building two. As the building collapses a dust cloud (again) heads towards the camera, sending panicked citizens running towards and past the camera. Hud’s camera even mimics oft-used amateur footage of the hurried escape into a store as the dust cloud completely envelopes the street outside and turns all black. When the main characters emerge from the store they discover those outside covered in grey ash, wandering like ghosts, as paper flutters down from the sky.\(^{142}\)

\(^{140}\) Stevens (2008; see also Corliss, 2008; Ebert, 2008; Lee, 2008) similarly notes the resumption of “historical eagerness to eradicate New York in our imagination”.

\(^{141}\) For example, monsters traverse oceans to descend on it in *The Beast From 20000 Fathoms* (Lourié, 1953) and *Godzilla* (Emmerich, 1998), and floods wreak havoc in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), *When Worlds Collide* (Maté, 1951) and *Deluge* (Feist, 1933).

\(^{142}\) *War of the Worlds* also recasts 9/11 imagery and evokes fears generated in the immediate aftermath – collapsing buildings, downed airplane, rows of missing persons photographs, ‘sleeper cells’ – “They’re already here” – and the protagonist is even
Wallis and Aston (2011, p.56, see also Berardinelli, 2008) implicitly note this ambivalence, the film “both a mechanism to comment on post-9/11 fears and a way of crudely appropriating 9/11 imagery”. Indeed, its clear evocations of amateur footage implicitly reprised critical debates prior to WTC’s release that Hollywood would, in Zacharek’s (2008) appraisal of Cloverfield, ‘repackage’ 9/11 as entertainment. While she claims there is no reason horror films should not mirror real-life fears she criticises the filmmakers for needlessly “cheapening […] real-life tragedy” for commercial reasons – real-world horror ‘reprocessed’ as “endlessly, cruelly commodified images” (Phillips, 2008). In the end, critical opinion echoed the debates that surrounded WTC and United 93, but was particularly discomfited by a supposedly ‘low-genre’ film making explicit references to 9/11, evoking its experience and recreating its imagery.

Alternatively, the scholarly literature on the film echoes Hantke’s (2011, p.237) observation that Cloverfield “not only depicts but affectively re-enacts, recreates, and reproduces the massive devastation” of 9/11. Richards (2008, see also Lee, 2008; Savlov, 2008; Totaro, 2008) is likewise representative of a vein of criticism that praised how Cloverfield recreated the experience, emotionally and aesthetically or technically, of 9/11, via “the sort of frantic footage we associate with unfathomable terror”, recorded not by professionals but bystanders. Therefore, it is not just the imagery but how it is visually presented that recalls 9/11. Cloverfield comprehensively reconstructs the imagined individual experience of 9/11, an aesthetic conflation of the predominant mediated, televisual experience and the local, personal, ground level experience represented in those televisual images, via amateur hand-held video footage (see Hantke, 2011). While Stevens (2008) labels the hand-held aesthetic a “cheap gimmick”, Haar (2008; see also Lee, 2008) considers the ground-level perspective so “much more harrowing”. In evoking amateur ground-level footage covered in the ashes of a recently evaporated victim of the alien attack (see also Sánchez-Escalonia, 2010). Its supposed ‘exploitation’ of 9/11 was similarly slated in critical responses (see Wallis & Aston, 2011), but has been more positively received in scholarly work. Even before an attack on New York is confirmed, Cloverfield explicitly situates itself in ‘a post-9/11 world’, with multiple characters asking if it is ‘another terrorist attack’, as Ray’s daughter likewise asks early in War of the Worlds, which similarly focuses on the Everyman’s experience. Fluttering papers are similarly represented in WTC, possibly ciphers for falling bodies.

143 Berardinelli, 2008; Corliss, 2008; Dargis, 2008; Ebert, 2008; Lane, 2008; Phillips, 2008; and Stevens, 2008, express similar sentiments.
Cloverfield thereby induces the fear associated with such an unknowing, uncertain, limited position and disrupts audience faith in the amateur camera’s capacity to present events in full. Indeed, the film’s aesthetic is especially jarring – prompting apocryphal tales about its bodily effects on cinema audiences – not only placing the audience in the chaos of the moment, but persistently recalling audience attention to the camera.

Giant Movie Monsters: Contemporary Fears & Anxieties

Movie monsters and SF creatures occupy a rich cinematic and generic history, and are routinely considered to reflect contemporary sociopolitical fears and anxieties, particularly in periods of perceived national crisis, such as the oft-cited relation of giant monsters and creatures to Cold War anxieties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’ have been followed not only by a revitalisation of tropes such as the giant creature, but Hantke (2010) observes a recent resurgence in Cold War-era SF invasion films, particularly in relation to remakes, like War of the Worlds and The Invasion (Hirschbiegel, 2007). Monsters movies typically delight in spectacle, especially of their giant monsters, both allowing audiences to confront and displace contemporary fears and anxieties.144 That is, the creature is a ‘creation’ (however unintended), whose articulation and ultimate evacuation serves to contain the fears and anxieties it evokes. Giant monsters not only signal how humanity or science has ‘overreached’ (Carroll, 1990), but also routinely (re)present an opportunity to reinvigorate society, often purging guilt through (particularly male) sacrifice, and renew it via heterosexual union or familial reunion, like in apocalypse-disaster films.145 Indeed, Reeves acknowledges, in characterising Rob’s quest, that Cloverfield represents a “way of dealing with the anxieties of our time” (Cloverfield DVD Commentary, 2008). Hantke (2010) also observes that contemporary critical consensus recognises a wide range of ideological variation across films – a degree of

144 It is also a characteristically global threat, with Godzilla traversing continents and oceans on its way to Manhattan. Moreover, most of the damage is the result of overzealous military and political action, most notably in blowing up the Chrysler building.

145 For example, in Gojira the young scientist’s guilt about such scientific ‘overreaching’ compels his redemptive act. His act of redemptive self-sacrifice also signals the reinvigoration of the professional elite and partial exorcising of the scars of defeat in WWII (his scarred face possibly signals his shame).
complexity and ambivalence often precluded from critical considerations of post-9/11 monster and invasion films. While Cloverfield textually acknowledges its indebtedness and intertextual association with famed Hollywood monster movies and monsters, it most readily compares to Gojira (Honda, 1954), particularly given its cultural significance is discomfortingly tied to actual rather than feared contemporary experience (see also Overpeck, 2012). That is, as Gojira articulated contemporary Japanese anxieties, Cloverfield evokes 9/11’s amateur, hand-held camera footage to articulate the contemporary mediated experience of terrorism.

Cloverfield’s monster similarly articulates contemporary American anxieties in a ‘period of crisis’. As such, the Cloverfield monster is starkly different to its direct forebears. While the monster in Gojira and Godzilla (Emmerich, 1998) is not malevolent or irrational, the Cloverfield monster’s threat is, a feature characteristic of numerous monstrous threats in War of the Worlds, I Am Legend and Quarantine (Dowdle, 2008). In its deliberate yet indiscriminate targeting of civilians, the Cloverfield monster is quite clearly a terror agent, if not by recognised definitions – lacking discernible political goals – then certainly by popular standards. Incomprehensible and without identifiable motivation, as Hantke (2011, p.244) observes, this monster “displays a sense of enmity so uncharacteristic as to render its motivations all the more impenetrable”. More than merely a ‘return of the repressed’, Christiansen (2008; see also Overpeck, 2012) considers Cloverfield “a willed attempt at articulating cultural anxieties and frustrations”. Indeed, Christiansen (2008) argues that the Cloverfield monster is the “perfect personification” of how Western culture regards the terrorist, “a myth of evil” (see also Stewart, 2008). As

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146 Reeves inserted stills from King Kong (Cooper & Schoedsack, 1933), Them! (Douglas, 1953) and The Beast from 20000 Fathoms into the film – first identified by avid film fans and circulated online (see also North, 2010; Hantke, 2011). King Kong signifies the clash of primitive and modern, but also more ambiguously represents the enslaved Other’s revolt against the West. The other two monsters specifically evoke anxieties about the consequences of atomic testing from the Cold War 1950s.

147 Gojira, roused by atomic experimentation, is further provoked by the Japanese military (Gojira critiques Japanese society as much as the nation that dropped the atomic bomb), wreaks havoc, paying particular attention to Tokyo. In scenes that recall the firebombing of Tokyo and the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Godzilla breathes radioactive fire across the city, setting the city's buildings aflame, the monster's call and heavy footsteps aurally reminiscent of a bombing raid. Cloverfield’s closing credit theme, “Roar” (Michael Giaccomo) also explicitly invokes the theme from Gojira. Similarly, extratextual information on the Cloverfield monster from its viral online campaign, about the fall of a Japanese satellite into the ocean and the Japanese underwater drilling company, ties the monster closely to Gojira’s Japanese origins.

148 This in particular problematises the film’s visual designers’ claims the monster is merely a baby experiencing separation anxiety, as Coyle (2012) reports.
Christiansen (2008) observes, “it attacks the symbolic landscape […] from a position of secrecy”; the monster’s “body pliable and flexible, chaotically fluid”, allowing it to “avoid apprehension or containment” (Wessels, 2010, p.117). The uncharacteristic multiplicity of the terror threat is especially horrific. The dog-sized, spider-like parasites the giant monster carries make the terror more intimate and personal by bringing it to ground level. Rendering the monster “both one and many” (Christiansen, 2008; see also Overpeck, 2012), also links the monster-parasite relationship to the structure of the modern terror organization, with a symbolic host giving succour and a platform to smaller organisms, like terror cells. In short, Cloverfield is a monster movie for post-9/11 America, with a monster that is clearly, in line with creator J.J. Abrams’ aspiration, “[America’s] own”.

The existing literature on Cloverfield focuses primarily on how the film recreates the affective experience of 9/11 via mediation. Most scholars explore the film’s evocation of the predominant experience of 9/11, its mediation (via the amateur camera) of the experience of 9/11, the affective re-enactment or restaging of iconic and frightening televisual amateur footage (see Christiansen, 2008; Wessels, 2010). This focus on the figurative restaging of 9/11 results in heavy employment of trauma discourse, even if only tangentially, a tendency Hantke (2011) persuasively challenges in outlining mainstream cinema’s predisposition to generically contain rather than ‘work through’ trauma. In this vein, there is also a focus on how the film technically re-enacted the experience of contemporary terrorism, both its style (e.g. Bordwell, 2008, 2012) and use of sound (Coyle, 2012), specifically exploring the film in relation to generic practices. North (2010), Wessels (2010) and Reinhard (2011) also consider how Cloverfield’s viral marketing campaign encourages active, participatory audiences, including towards the feature film. Wessels (2010, p.133) even argues that amateur videos produced for a Paramount Pictures contest spatially extend the film’s narrative, as a localised attack expands nationwide, mimicking and literalising the Bush Administration’s similar discursive move in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

The existing literature also focuses on the film’s hybridity, and most obviously its merging of the ‘discovered footage’ horror film and the SF giant monster movie
common to 1950s Cold War American cinema. In relation to the monster movie, scholarly writings on *Cloverfield* typically argue that the unnamed monster’s intertextual relation to 1950s monsters and creatures contains and reassures, e.g. Christiansen (2008), despite the monster’s figuration with contemporary terrorism. However, North (2010, p.91) calls for further elucidation of the ‘gaps’ left by the fundamental and persistent mystery or openness of the monster’s meaning. Indeed, only Hantke (2011, p.244), who nonetheless decries the film’s unwillingness to explore the larger causes and consequences of 9/11, recognises that it is the monster’s “incomprehensibility […] constitutes its major allegorical function”. Yet perhaps it is this very ‘unwillingness’ or incapacity, figured equally in the film’s constant adherence to the amateur camera aesthetic and in its monster’s incomprehensibility and unknowability, which represents *Cloverfield*’s allegorical significance. Overpeck (2012) comes closest to exploring the film in relation to masculinity, arguing the monster’s attack merely presents a ‘narcissistic’ opportunity to undertake a redemptive quest. However, Overpeck’s analysis of the film’s ‘recuperative themes’ overlooks the impact of the monster or the significance of the hand-held camera, particularly evident in his too strident assertion about the clarity of the film’s resolution and its monster’s fate. As such, in relation to North’s call for elucidation of the ‘gaps’ created by the monster’s ‘mystery’ and Hantke’s observation about the monster’s allegorical function, this chapter notably explores *Cloverfield*’s depiction of the ‘remasculinisation’ or redemptive quest its protagonist undertakes following the advent of terror. This ‘remasculinisation’ is investigated specifically in relation to the disruptive giant monster’s persistent elusiveness and unknowability, the characteristics of a hand-held camera consistently aligned with male characters, and the equally disruptive role of the film’s seemingly maligned females.

**Spectacle, Spectators & the Subjective Experience of Terror**

Monster movies enthrall audiences *as and through* spectacle, allowing a privileged, all-encompassing experience and maximum visual pleasure of the monster and its

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149 Although typically described as ‘found footage’ films, Bordwell (2008, 2012) prefers the term ‘discovered footage’, primarily because the term ‘found footage’ has a long history in film criticism to denote experimental assemblages by artists like Bruce Conner. I utilise Bordwell’s term throughout this chapter.
destruction. However, *Cloverfield* evokes the realism of disaster-terror by entering and staying inside the spectacle, but ties it to the (predominantly mediated) experience of 9/11. That is, unlike self-reflexive genre pastiches and parodies of pre-millennial adaptations of 1950s SF creature and invasion films, more recent recreations, including *Cloverfield* and *I Am Legend* (Chapter Three), recover “genuine menace from [their] hyperbole and melodrama” (Hantke, 2011, p.238). Reflecting the predominantly mediated experience of 9/11, Rob and the other partygoers go straight to the television and the news media after an earth-shaking shudder and blackout marks the monster’s ‘entrance’, with television significantly serving to establish the veracity of the threat for characters but also reminiscent of 9/11’s construction “as an event […] inextricably tied to its mediated coverage” (King, 2012, p.148). In a sense, the attacks are made real through television (see also Overpeck, 2012); with people glued to televisions as the news media both confirmed the ‘reality’ of the attacks and constructed a narrative through which to make sense of them. This connects the experience of the *Cloverfield* audience to their earlier experience of 9/11, re-enacting how the attacks ‘disrupted seats of spectatorship’ (Muntean, 2009). Indeed, the ‘discovered’ video itself arguably similarly establishes not only the veracity of the group’s quest, but the veracity of the threat. Moreover, in *Cloverfield*, this ‘disruption’ is made literal and multiple, with the multiple ‘narratives’ the video comprises – the opening love story and the party – each disrupted.150

*Cloverfield*, in its evocation of the experience of 9/11 and as a consequence of its chosen stylistic aesthetic – and the raw, horrified, limited personal experience of terror, is a monster movie more interested in the victim experience. Rob and the group’s response is characterised by panic, inaction and impotence, as the group is

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150 In *Cloverfield*, television screens also communicate an overwhelming and horrific spectacle characters are (soon to be) caught within. Hud numerously films television screens, such as in the electronics store, so they fill the entire frame. As North (2010, p.84) observes, these screens nonetheless still only afford a ‘partial view’, a perspective further “obscured by being seen on a TV screen, too small to convey any details”. More than this, TV screens primarily signify the passivity and impotence (of those watching) in the face of terror, as they function in *WTC* for families and police officers. In this respect, television screens reflect *Cloverfield’s* arguably pessimistic generic shift from the omniscient perspective onto the individual, street-level experience of terror. The shift onto the ‘ordinary’ individual also signifies the limited responses available to its overwhelmed protagonists and the relative impotence of the military-governmental response. While Stewart (2008) claims the film is about “terrorism’s human effects, not its spectacle”, it may be more accurate to describe this as a shift towards the personal experience of spectacle – frightened, helpless, limited.
literally caught inside the spectacle of terror. As Rob finally testifies, they were “caught in the middle” of events, implying that proximity to terror – spatial and temporal – limits the capacity to ‘know’ or comprehend it. Rob speculates that someone who later watches their video will undoubtedly know more about the monster, although the limitedness of the personal video camera and the elusiveness of the monster inevitably frustrate such ‘knowledge’. This disrupts the typical audience position in monster movies, the omniscient perspective providing a safe aesthetic distance from which to revel in the spectacle of destruction. As North (2010, p.86) similarly articulates, the omniscient cinematic perspective is “spectacular, rather than visceral” and thereby offers “an empowered overview”. Thus, horror for the audience of Cloverfield lies not only in the monster’s transgression and threat to society but in being anchored to the characters’ individual, ground-level experience of terror. The film’s confinement to the personal or subjective camera horrifically collapses the distance between character and audience. As Stewart (2008) recognises the audience is “suture[d] […] into the middle of the action” and, even more disconcertingly, the film “leaves you there” (Berardinelli, 2008). Positioned with the film’s victim-characters, the film’s persistent adherence to the subjective camera (and sound) traps character and audience alike within the spectacle of terror. In this respect, Cloverfield represents the “partial, threatened, unsafe” point of view Kakoudaki (2002) associates with real disaster, and explicitly evokes the fearful, disorienting individual experience of 9/11 through the predominant mediated perspective of the attacks (see also North, 2010). In essence, Cloverfield suggests the true horror lies in being caught inside the spectacle, in being overwhelmed by the spectacle of disaster and terror, unlike in WTC, where being trapped inside the spectacle in some way shields the trapped men from its horror.

151 This characterisation of the group’s response is also suggested by Berardinelli, 2008; Corliss, 2008; Schwarzbaum, 2008; Totaro, 2008; Zacharek, 2008; Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2010.

152 Coyle (2012, p.234) similarly connects this to sound in the film, which “trigger[s] anxiety, tension and dread” in its identification with characters’ limited, subjective experience.
Realist Horror & the Pseudo-Documentary Aesthetic

As outlined in the Introduction, SF creatures and monstrous bodies are also historically and thematically tied to horror in cinema, and *Cloverfield*’s blend of SF, disaster and horror thus functions as a genre hybrid of the monster movie and a realist-’found footage’ horror. Yet *Cloverfield* also arguably cleverly refigures the slasher in an urban context, its interest in the victim-perspective accompanied by ‘broadly-defined’ characters picked off one-by-one by the ‘monster’. Bordwell (2008) unconsciously reflects this observation in describing the film’s “shooting-gallery plot”. Schwarzbaum (2008) also notes the innovation of the approach in a monster movie, although she does not associate its “masterstroke of lovingly staged banality” with the slasher. As a slasher, long academically associated with issues of gender identification and anxieties, *Cloverfield* also indulges the desire to punish the young – their vacuity, banality, self-obsession and affluence – and encourages shifting audience allegiances, audiences’ almost wishing that the slasher-monster kills the film’s less interesting character types. Hence, Wessels (2010, p.123) assertion that the film’s deployment of 9/11 ideologically mandates audience identification with its young characters and “against the villain (a monster)”, betrays an ignorance both of the generic characteristics of the monster movie and the slasher. In *Cloverfield*, the typical characteristics of the slasher specifically intersect with features of modern terror, in the paradoxically random and indiscriminate (or purely convenient), but also specific, targeting of victims (as a consequence of some moral transgression or slight against the ‘monster’).

153 See also Berardinelli, 2008; Ebert, 2008; Schwarzbaum, 2008; Totaro, 2008; Hantke, 2011; Pile, 2011; Coyle, 2012 – although scholars oscillate between defining the film predominantly as horror or SF. For example, *The Thing* (Carpenter, 1982), and *Alien* explore claustrophobic, restricted, frighteningly intimate and close encounters with monsters, focusing on the transgression and threat to physical and spatial borders of self and society. Such encounters with the monstrous Other explore anxieties associated with the breaching/transgressing of borders and the dissolution of (the coherence of) individual subjectivity and even the nation state. Indeed, the subjective, limited focus and dissolution of subjectivity in *WTC* also implies an affinity with horror.

154 Dargis (2008; see also Lane, 2008; McCarthy, 2008; Franklin, 2008) similarly seems to only recognise the film’s ‘slasher’-like characteristics unconsciously, seemingly a key reason numerous critics withhold sympathy for its generic character types. While consideration of the film as a slasher suggests the value of specific examination of group dynamics in the film, the thesis’ focus on masculinities mandates the consideration of the group dynamic only in relation to this. The film, like *I Am Legend* (Chapter Three), also bears the hallmarks of survival horror, which Totaro (2008) asserts is a growing trend in horror in recent years, with vulnerable, often unarmed, victims focused more on evasion more than confrontation.
Stylistically, *Cloverfield* also exemplifies the recent cinematic resurgence—from thoroughly exhausted by late 2012 (or at least exhausting)—of a type of realist horror that characteristically includes the recovered footage conceit, a pseudo-documentary form, an amateur or personal subjective camera and a film-within-a-film, including American films such as *Paranormal Activity*, *Diary of the Dead* and *Quarantine*. More than merely tied to the events of 9/11, Bordwell (2008) also links this resurgence in ‘discovered footage’ films to recent technological developments in ultra-portable cameras. Bordwell (2008) observes *Cloverfield* employs what is termed ‘restricted narration’ in narrative theory, where a “film confines the audience’s range of knowledge”, often to what a single character or group’s perspective. However, while this is not uncommon in horror and SF, it stands in stark contrast to the omniscient perspective usual to monster movies. Bordwell (2008) outlines the advantages of this perspective, particularly for a lower-budget film, include the capacity to “delay full revelation of the creature”, “build up uncertainty and suspense” and audience involvement through their persistent attachment to the characters’ experience and peril. As Bordwell (2012) argues, the handheld technique “yields a severely restricted range of knowledge”, likewise promoting ‘gaps in audience knowledge’. Indeed, both *Cloverfield*’s adherence to the personal camera and its focus on an Everyman protagonist foreground restricted vision and limited knowledge (see also North, 2010). Nonetheless, Bordwell (2008, emphasis in original; see also Hantke, 2011) contends the film conforms to the principles of classical structure and narration despite its technical fit to the premise of amateur video recording, with jumps or gaps “justified as constrained by the physical circumstances of filming” by hand-held video. Yet restricted vision and limited knowledge also link it to other ‘subjective’ films and examples of restricted narration in film noir, such as *Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery, 1947) and *Dark Passage* (Daves, 1947). However, unlike the optical point-of-view shots in these films, *Cloverfield*’s first-person points-of-view

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155 The pseudo-documentary aesthetic is not a new phenomenon, with *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick & Sánchez, 1999) a noted earlier American example.

156 Like Hud’s relation to television news, characters occasionally encounter newspaper reports or TV (news) coverage providing wider information (Bordwell, 2008).

157 This notion of the Everyman as ‘hero’ in a horror-monster movie is discussed later in the chapter. Additionally, restricted vision and knowledge are also associated with film noir’s ‘Everymen’ ‘private eyes’, struggling (often in vain) throughout the narrative to overcome their position of unknowing.
are ‘mediated’ (Bordwell, 2008), whereby characters use a recording technology to retail the story events through a pseudo-documentary form.

The amateur or personal camera and ‘discovered footage’ conceit also strives to establish the video document’s authenticity. That is, Cloverfield’s hand-held camera aesthetic not only articulates the horror and terror of the individual, ground-level experience (see also Richards, 2008), but the ‘discovered video’ device raises the possibility the depicted events as real/having happened (see also Bordwell, 2012). Similar to its function in United 93, the aesthetic approach still also suggests the banality of the everyday and increases terror and dread, associated with notions of inevitability and inescapability; that what is to follow cannot and could not be avoided. The absence of a score or non-diegetic music, which heightens affect in Cloverfield (Phillips, 2008), also implies the video footage is unadorned and thus, not a ‘movie’. The film’s opening Department of Defence notification (see Figure 2.1) similarly lends ‘authority’ and credence to the succeeding video, functioning not dissimilarly to the ‘based on real events’ opening title with accompanying ominous voiceover in films like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Hooper, 1974) and The Strangers (Bertino, 2008). This superficially supports Kendrick’s (2008) claims, first about the increased use of non-fiction techniques in fiction film, and second that the documentary or home movie aesthetic, “rough, shaky, immediate”, is both a vehicle for the ‘real’ and a source of terror for the audience that ‘cuts through’ boundaries between audience and screen – suggestive of presentation rather than representation. Yet this more rightly seems part of a broader cinematic trend, and one unrelated specifically to the events of 9/11. Additionally, as Clover (1992) notes, this now characteristic generic device long ago devolved its capacity to shock. The aesthetic convention now situates the film generically rather than is an effective strategy to frighten, and might relate more to technological developments and budgetary concerns. It has become so commonplace that audiences recognise it as a device and experience it as an effect/affect, such as it may now function oppositely, and thereby contain rather than enhance the threat and spectacle of terror.

Figure 2.1
Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access
The Status of the Camera

Individual experience and ‘seeing’ in *Cloverfield* is highly, multiply mediated, either via the hand-held video camera, mobile phone cameras or the news media. For characters in *Cloverfield*, the amateur camera documents and cements the reality of events (as having-happened), confirms one’s existence (an index of being) and presence (having-been-there). More than merely television’s capacity, documenting events and one’s life is key to their reality, suggested by Rob’s desire (or need) to film his presence in Beth’s bed and cement the reality of his sexual success; filming makes it ‘real’. As such, the camera claims, and is afforded, greater access and capacity for objectivity, evident in Hud’s repeated declarations at the party, “Look out, documenting”. While Zacharek (2008) criticises how characters use cameras “as surrogate eyes instead of actually seeing”, in *Cloverfield* the camera is ‘needed’ to not only show what happened, but ‘prove’ that it happened. When Hud is asked why he continues to film, he replies that people “will want to know how this went down”. The inherent limitedness or partiality of the amateur camera also creates uncertainty over the ‘documentary record’, the film and camera expressing both a valorisation and mistrust of images. That is, while the first response is to ‘document’ events on camera, nagging doubts over the veracity of what is shown – on how much is captured and how much missed – and its permanence – the capacity to record over (and erase) video destabilises and threatens its assumed capacity to document ‘reality’ – remain.

The personal camera connects being with having-been-there, and connects people to the events they witness. This is both reinforced and underscored as ambivalent by the

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158 This shifts traditional notions of first-hand witnessing, suggesting it requires mediation (to cement reality and presence), rather than opposes it (see also Stewart, 2008). It is also akin to Wessels (2010) similar identification of documenting, witnessing and testimony as central themes in the film.

159 After only a few minutes of an emerging love story (for character and audience alike), the video shifts to a new time signature and Jason and Lily discussing preparations for Rob’s ‘going away’ party, one personal video/narrative erasing another. Rob’s story is recorded over, which in a sense destabilises the ‘reality’ of Rob and Beth’s love story. In the monster’s subsequent disruption of the ‘party’ narrative, “images of the catastrophe” also effectively obliterate “images of the couple’s shared bliss” (Hantke, 2011, p.247). In this respect, not only does the ‘party’ narrative record over the ‘fledgling love’ story, but this second ‘going-away’ party narrative is likewise permanently disrupted, symbolically consumed and overwhelmed, by the entrance of the monster.
numerous camera-phones that record the banal, Rob’s surprise party speech, with equivalent enthusiasm as the extraordinary (see also Wessels, 2010). Early in the attack, before the monster is even partially glimpsed, Hud’s camera captures the decapitated head of the Statue of Liberty – shorthand for the freedoms and liberties typically associated with, and persistently represented as under threat in, a certain idea of ‘America’ – as it hurtles towards them on the street. However, while Christiansen (2008; see also Overpeck, 2012) rightly claims this confirms a symbolic attack on America’s freedoms, “an attack on American values as much as on American soil”, and thereby designates the monster as a terrorist, he underplays the Statue’s symbolic ambivalence in cinema, particularly in relation to notions of ‘America lost’ and just who is blamed for ‘liberty’s’ sundering. First, his observation ignores its frequent deployment in SF and disaster films, symbolising the end of particular notions of ‘America’ but not necessarily tied to an (terror) attack. Second, he overlooks how the film pejoratively portrays the response of the young urban populace, and connotes their complicity, blame and moral equivalence (see also Zacharek, 2008).

Nonetheless, the camera is also the only privileged object in the film; it must survive even if no other character does (see also Wessels, 2010). It also serves as testimony (having-been) and instantiates a culture of performance (a being-for-others, that includes the camera). In this sense, the camera’s capacity to ‘make it real’ is tied to the (re)assertion of masculinity, encouraging Rob’s later rescue quest and consequently requiring that Hud films it. Rob and Beth’s final direct-to-camera testimonies in the tunnel also recognise the capacity for the electronic record to both survive them and extend their life. Yet as Hantke (2011, p.248) argues, while the camera may preserve bodies beyond their material limitations”, the recording nonetheless displays “the destruction of just these bodies”. The ubiquitous presence

160 The promotional poster features Manhattan burning – a clear 9/11 reference – and a ‘headless’ Liberty (Beradinelli, 2008), which North (2010) recognizes as an oft-used iconic image in American cinema. While, Christiansen’s claim is seemingly supported by the United 93 promotional poster, which rather incongruously foregrounds the head of the Statue of Liberty. The notion of an implicit indictment and ambivalent apportioning of blame is supported by the makers’ of Cloverfield’s declaration that the promotional poster for Escape from New York (Carpenter, 1981) is an explicit influence.

161 For example, in response to the decapitation, it is surrounded by young urbanites after coming to rest, eagerly videoing this supposed ‘attack on freedom’, their backs turned from the source of its decapitation, unprepared and blind to the threat.

162 Rob begins his final testimony, as the sirens warning of the impending ‘Hammer Down’ begin, at the same time (6:42 am) he had started filming on the earlier morning in Beth’s father’s apartment. Similarly, Rob’s listing of the names of those killed by the monster implies that the video testifies to both being and loss – it documents, grounds and memorialises.
of the camera and persistent use of direct address uneasily implies the ongoing, self-conscious performance of identity and documentary recordings’ function as testimony of being for others and the camera – “Just tell them who you are”.

Stylistic & Generic Containment & the Representation of 9/11

Generic devices such as the film’s production/distribution logos and the Department of Defense stamp, and their implied institutionality, envelop and contain the film’s terror. For example, the Department of Defense title implies that, although everyday life is terminally disrupted – neither the characters nor Central Park ‘survives the attack’ – military institutions, and thereby society, survive and persist. Interestingly, a watermark over the opening announcing “DO NOT DUPLICATE” is more than a military-governmental injunction but an industrial one (see Figure 2.1). More than playfully associating the film to those sent to voters for Oscar consideration, it mandates appropriate anti-piracy consumer behaviours, an implicit Hollywood injunction that is even tied to the maintenance of the protagonist’s identity in *I Am Legend* (Chapter Three). In this sense, as in *WTC*, *Cloverfield* utilises genre and formal style to contain the horror and terror it articulates (see also North, 2010). That is, while the proximity and partiality of the hand-held amateur camera approximates real disaster – it “creates frighteningly open-ended realms of meaning” as the audience “cannot know what happens next, to whom [or] why” (Kakoudaki, 2002, p.146) – its aesthetic deployment within genre conventions in part resolves, contains and reassures. Moreover, *Cloverfield*’s amateur hand-held aesthetic, it ‘stylistic authenticity’, is formally constructed and concealed in various ways (see also Totaro, 2008; Coyle, 2012).

The film’s cinematographers approximate an amateur aesthetic, using a single camera and multiple takes rather than masters, reverse shots, close-ups and coverage shots. The characters’ video is seemingly unedited, with cuts or edit points artfully

163 While Bordwell (2012; Hamtke, 2011) also flags the prospect that the ‘discovered footage’ has presumably been edited by the military, the jump cuts characteristic of amateur and home video inhibit any confirmation.

164 For example, as a slasher, even absent an understanding of ‘why’ the monster attacks, a knowledgeable audience has some understanding of what ‘happens next’ and to ‘whom’, countering characters’ lack of such knowledge.
concealed in whip/swish pans and crash zooms to construct the amateur, off-the-cuff aesthetic. As a result, *Cloverfield* has much longer takes than other contemporary Hollywood films (Bordwell, 2008). The film’s ‘constructed authenticity’ also includes the actors’ shooting of footage, particularly of events prior to the attack.\textsuperscript{165} *Cloverfield*’s aesthetic and formal features are highly constructed and controlled, offering the mannered appearance of amateur camerawork. As North (2010, p.76) contends, in “simulating the impression that the monster is a chaotic agent not under the control of the filmmakers […] *Cloverfield* feigns the appearance of documentary”. Thus, while *Cloverfield* seemingly does not afford an organised or master gaze or frame, this is itself an organised feature, merely the appearance of instability, discontinuity and unsteadiness.\textsuperscript{166} More than this, while the mediated construction of 9/11 comprised a superabundance of images, from a multiplicity of perspectives, even its co-option within a news media ‘narrative’ left it without a master (or Hollywood) perspective. Indeed, this is part of why the attacks were anxiety inducing. The event of 9/11 is both unrepresentable (in cinema) because it is too ‘massive’ (and the monster also represents this) and over-represented. *Cloverfield*, in a similar sense to *WTC*’s ‘going inside’ 9/11, therefore occupies the space in between, between over- and under-abundance. Despite the limitedness the amateur camera connotes, *Cloverfield* contains anxiety through a single perspective, a master frame of sorts, however inadequate. Pile (2011, pp.302-303) claims that in “spectacularising the horror”, augmented by the ‘thick history’ of the New York’s imagined destruction, *Cloverfield* ‘veils the traumas’ of 9/11. However, it is actually the concealment and blurring of spectacle via the limitedness of the hand-held camera that functions to contain the terror of 9/11, as televisions screens likewise function in *WTC*.

\textsuperscript{165} The opening scene is shot by Michael Stahl (Rob) on a prosumer handycam (and later transferred to film), while T.J. Miller (Hud) likewise shot a good deal of the footage associated with his character, particularly that of the party.

\textsuperscript{166} Coyle (2010) similarly analyses the way sound is ‘crafted and contrived’ in *Cloverfield* to augment the impression of the documentary aesthetic.
The ‘Emergent’ Hero & Privileging Everyman masculinity

The ‘emergent’ hero is a staple of monster and SF-disaster movies. Typically, the (imminent) disaster or attack thrusts a previously minor, marginalised or misunderstood character, an unheralded scientist or a police sergeant, into the role of hero. The ‘emergent’ hero is tasked with responding to unprecedented challenges in order to save society, and possesses skills, training or knowledge of specific value in engaging learning about and countering the monstrous or apocalyptic threat. While elevated to hero status by the catastrophe, the emergent hero has always been ‘heroic’; the catastrophe has merely called on it. In Cold War-era films, this focus culminates in “reaffirming the integrity and efficiency” of institutional power (Hantke, 2011, p.240). Invariably detailing a successfully coordinated, collective response, such films primarily thematise authority, power and professional competence (Kakoudaki, 2002). In writing about disaster films as melodramas, Kakoudaki (2002) contends 1990s SF-disaster films like Armageddon (1998) mark a generic shift from responsibility onto ‘disaster response’, that is, focusing on the capacity to contribute to the collective effort, identifying its genesis, finding a solution and resolving the threat; it is not feared because it can be analysed, described, understood, and thereby managed and contained.

Yet Cloverfield, as also a horror film, offers a reworked representation of the ‘emergent’ hero as an Everyman, atypically privileging Everyman masculinity and attempting to configure it as heroic. In line with Renner (2012) and Crowe (2012), the film comprises part of a generic focus in recent Hollywood SF and fantasy on ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ protagonists in films like War of the Worlds and 2012 (Emmerich, 2009) and signals greater cinematic diversity beyond ‘protective’ masculinities. Such Everymen, arguably less-than-ordinary rather than representative in ‘terror-threat’ films, and overwhelmed by extraordinary circumstances, cannot save society or defeat the aliens, nor does he possess any privileged access or information, or any specialist knowledge or abilities to counter the threat. That is, in contrast to

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167 For example, in Them! the police officer (James Whitmore) who first witnesses the giant radioactive ants’ devastation becomes an integral part of the battle to defeat the monsters. Also, Godzilla, wholly representative of 1990s SF/disaster, is populated primarily by professionals who, however maligned or unwilling, possess the skills required to collectively counter the monstrous ‘threat’.
1950s films like *When Worlds Collide* and *The Beast from 20000 Fathoms*, narrative focus shifts from protagonists officially tasked with saving humanity or averting the attack/threat to protagonists that at most can hope to save themselves and their immediate families.\(^{168}\) Thrust into an elevated role by the catastrophe or attack, such Everymen are unable to draw on specific professional skills, training or knowledge to resolve the threat, nor possesses privileged access to (or a role in) the governmental-institutional response.\(^{169}\) Given Tudor (1991) identifies horror film’s typical investment in the victim function and trials of the Everyperson, who faces the monster isolated from ‘authorities’, significantly pre-dates 9/11, this recent focus on the Everyman highlights how horror devices have been incorporated into other genres post-9/11, perhaps signalling another productive period of hybridisation.

It also highlights, and perhaps reflects, military-governmental incapacity to understand and effectively counter the threat. Yet while Christiansen (2008) similarly observes the military “do not understand, do not try to understand and cannot defeat” the monster, his analysis does not link this incapacity to understand with the incapacity to abolish or defeat the monster. Military-governmental failure also ‘makes space’ for the Everyman to ‘remasculinise’ in the absence of the state. For example, state power in *War of the Worlds* is persistently unable to “establish a sense of order and protection” and is only restored off-screen (Gunn, 2008, p.6). Consequently, Gunn argues the audience transfers authority and responsibility onto the otherwise maligned Everyman-father, Ray, as the only individual possessing the power to protect. Thus, the threat enables oft maligned, even failed, ‘emergent ‘Everyman heroes to redeem previous personal failings.’\(^{170}\) Overpeck (2012) claims that using terror as an opportunity to embark on a redemptive quest, as the Everymen in *War of the Worlds* and *Cloverfield* do, is emblematic of the national narcissistic response to 9/11. However, this first overlooks what Corliss (2008) describes as the “desperate

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\(^{168}\) Even in *When Worlds Collide*—like *2012* (Emmerich, 2009) a reworking of the Noah’s ark story— the supposed ‘Everyman’ is a pilot who eventually performs a vital specialist role, landing the ship-ark on a passing planet to ensure the continuation of human society.

\(^{169}\) Everyman fathers in recent disaster-apocalypse cinema are also explored in relation to *War of the Worlds* in Chapter Three. The Everyman figure is common to film noir, and of particular relevance to *Cloverfield* in the relationship of masculinity to restricted vision and limited knowledge.

\(^{170}\) The genre is highly gendered, with the recent exception of Dr Helen Benson (Jennifer Connelly) in the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008). Even Benson, however, privileges a personal response above a ‘disaster response’, primarily using the disaster to ‘save’ a personal relationship and symbolically become ‘mother’.
optimism” typical in apocalypse and SF-disaster films, of the ascension of the ‘emergent hero’, even linked to personal redemption in 1970s disaster films. More significantly, it fails to address the recent ‘smallness’ of the hero’s response to catastrophe and terror (see also Coyle, 2012). Cloverfield arguably affords a more pessimistic interpretation of the bare necessity of this small, individual response to terror. That is, a ‘narcissistic’ focus acknowledges not so much a disinterest or dismissal of the horror of these events, but their overwhelming, excessive nature. Caught within the spectacle, and with the government and military unable to offer protection, the Everyman is capable of redeeming himself locally, and in the eyes of family and friends, but frighteningly ill-equipped and incapable of understanding or effectively responding to the monstrous or apocalyptic threat. While the attacks are as much an opportunity as a threat for the hero, Rob’s quest does imply the limits of the Everyman capacity to ‘deal with contemporary anxieties’.

Through the quest narrative, the film marginalises the spectacle of the terror event and privileges Rob’s displaced response over direct engagement of the threat. In this sense, the hero’s quest has been refigured post-9/11, with the ostensible Everymen heroes of War of the Worlds and 2012 (Emmerich, 2010) similarly focused on ‘small’ quests in the face of immeasurably massive threats; redeeming familial status privileged over ‘disaster response’. Moreover, with the possibility of understanding the genesis or motivation of the terror-threat clearly beyond the knowledge and purview of the Everyman, the motivation or causes of Cloverfield’s monstrous threat remain unknown. As Totaro (2008; see also North, 2010) identifies, while the film depicts its monstrous effects, it offers only “snippets of speculation” – and ‘snippets’ predominantly withheld from the characters – about its origins. Indeed, because Cloverfield locks us into the Everyman’s victim-perspective, neither does the audience learn or understand why it has attacked or how it can be defeated.171 Characteristic of horror, Cloverfield offers the individual, limited, terrified experience of the Everyman over the military-governmental ‘disaster response’, seemingly viewing the prospects of wider redemption, of saving humanity and defeating the monster, pessimistically.

171 That said, North (2010) contends online campaign materials provide broader context and clues to encourage more committed audience members to assume an investigative role.
‘Remasculinising’ the Everyman ‘Hero’: Needing a ‘Sleeping Beauty’

While slasher horror identification was historically assumed sadistic and masculine, Clover (1992) identified the subgenre’s privileging of the feminine, masochistic but ultimately triumphant victim-perspective. That said, considered to speak “deeply and obsessively to male anxieties and desires” (1992, p.61), Clover contends this requires the ‘masculinisation’ of the ‘final girl’, particularly through ‘unmanning’ the killer. England (2006, p.353), exploring breaches of the feminised body and home in horror, argues this inevitably reifies (after initially complicating) ‘patriarchal binaries’. Yet Cloverfield’s narrative focus is, somewhat atypically for a slasher, centred on the male experience; the film primarily interested in Rob’s redemptive rescue quest rather than its apparent ‘final girl’. 172 This male-focus evokes comparisons with the Vietnam-era ‘city-country’ horror cycle of the 1970s, and films like Deliverance (Boorman, 1972) and The Hills Have Eyes (Craven, 1977). These films demonise modernity’s emasculation of the urban male (through overcivilisation) and detail his supposed ‘remasculinisation’ in the confrontation with the ‘country’ male and nature. Representing equally overcivilised and emasculated urban males, Cloverfield arguably likewise associates and even blames their predicament on prior ‘unmanning’, returning to conservative arguments proffered following 9/11 outlined in the Introduction. Similarly, some form of ‘remasculinisation’ is also required, as threatened or destabilised versions of masculinity must be re-established in the malevolent presence of a ‘terror-Other’.

In Cloverfield, Rob is by no means heroic, panicked, confused, helpless and fearful. Moreover, he is repeatedly marginalised by the camera, occupying off-centre screen space. Incapable of countering or dealing directly with the monster, Rob’s response is displaced onto a quest to rescue the injured Beth. In essence, the film’s structure accords with the quest narrative (see also North, 2010; Overpeck, 2012), with the monster’s attack affording an opportunity for Rob to redeem perceived failings and overcome personal slights. In this respect, while Hantke (2011) correctly identifies the monster as the film’s ‘real attraction’, especially by virtue of its strategic elusiveness,

172 The film’s male focus allows little interest in Lily’s apparent survival, whisked off to supposed safety by helicopter. The film even privileges Rob’s fraternal loss over Lily’s loss of her fiancé.
the film is arguably primarily invested in the experience of its protagonists – as in I Am Legend (Chapter Three). In this sense, the monster’s invasion is catalytic rather than central (see also Overpeck, 2012). Indeed, Hantke (2011, p.244) recognises this in describing the monster’s function to “draw attention to the subjective experience of the havoc it creates, to feelings of victimisation, helplessness, and loss of individual and collective agency”. As such, in response, Cloverfield is primarily occupied with Rob’s redemption, or transformation, and on attempts to reverse this through the reassertion of Everyman masculinity. Indeed, Rob is not even the conventional or ideal ‘emergent Everyman’ hero when the attacks occur. His brother, Jason, immediately displays multiple characteristics of the emergent hero more typical of monster and SF-disaster movies. Decisive, confident and proactive, he quickly establishes their plan to escape the city via Brooklyn Bridge, with Rob falling in meekly behind and repeatedly figured with female characters in screen space. On the bridge, the monster’s tail comes crashing down on Jason. In this respect, Cloverfield provocatively proposes that not only is the ‘ideal’ Everyman hero not privileged in the encounter with modern terror, but, indeed, he is seemingly specifically targeted, eliminated and effectively redundant.

After Jason’s death and the destruction of Brooklyn Bridge – also spectacularly destroyed in I Am Legend in another failed evacuation scene – the remaining group congregates, their escape route devastated. Rob continues to be marginalised by the camera. He stands helplessly, physically incapable of consoling Lily, suitably distraught over the loss of her fiancé, his weakly outstretched hand hanging in empty screen space. His half-outstretched hand cannot bridge the gulf in male adequacy between he and Jason, presently figured in the body of Jason’s fiancé. Frightened, overwhelmed and helpless, Hud’s continued custodianship of the camera – and if Rob is less-than-ordinary in the face of terror, Hud is simply less-than-ordinary – thrusts Rob into playing (at) the hero in Cloverfield; from off-centre and marginalised to the film’s narrative and cinematographic focus. Yet, remaining immobile and non-responsive, it is only upon retrieving Beth’s – who lies injured in her father’s high-rise apartment – voice message that Rob is effectively ‘discovered’ by his quest – in which

173 Jason is swept along the bridge by fleeing fellow citizens and climbs a column to ascertain the group’s whereabouts, as Hud (and the camera) stops with Rob, distracted from the group’s escape attempt by a phone call from Beth.
he will be accompanied by Hud, Lily and Marlena – hesitantly responding to her call upon him to play the hero.

As with the men’s entrapment in *WTC*, *Cloverfield* utilises Rob’s quest to partially contain the horror of the giant monster’s attack, imposing a narrative on the otherwise overwhelming and chaotic experience of terror, and seeking to deflect its excess. *Cloverfield* also seeks to deflect the monster’s threat by valorising a heteronormative relationship and re-establishing conventional gender roles in relation to (im)mobility. Moreover, while Rob is passive, helpless and immobile, particularly in the wake of Jason’s death, the monster’s attack renders Beth injured, prostrate and helpless. Beth’s immobility thereby initiates Rob’s rescue quest, however unlikely, to reverse his earlier indecision and marginalisation. Thus, while his quest may be the only ‘small’, *displaced* response available to an Everyman, it expressly counters his otherwise passivity, immobility and redundancy. As such, Rob’s ‘disaster response’, like that of the Everyman fathers in *War of the Worlds* and *2012*, is personal rather than (also) professional, centred on recuperating his destabilised masculinity through a restored personal relationship rather than protecting society. Rob needs the monster’s attack as much as Beth requires rescue after she is injured and incapacitated. Less-than-ordinary in the face of terror, the Everyman is afforded a path to redemption via the rescue quest, as Overpeck (2012) also argues. In this respect, *Cloverfield* seemingly fulfils public discourse post-9/11, as outlined by Drew (2004; see also Faludi, 2009). Like America, Rob ‘must become more masculine’ to reverse his passive victimhood. Tellingly, Rob’s redemption requires Beth’s passivity, that she be prostrate and helpless, akin to Faludi’s (2009) assertions about post-9/11 American news and popular culture. In this sense, the monster’s attack facilitates ‘remasculinising’ Rob *as* hero, but so too does female passivity. The prostrate ‘Sleeping Beauty’ affords him a heroic role to perform in calling on him to come to her aid, and comprises his only possible ‘response’ to the abstract, overwhelming horror of the attack.1

Thus, the monster’s attack transforms Beth into a passive, fragile victim and (re-)inflates Rob into the role of male rescuer.

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174 Significantly, Beth is no longer wearing the party dress she was wearing when she left the party with Travis when rescued, suggesting she went straight home, *and alone*. 
Empowering the Male (Look) Through the Camera

The camera also transmits a sense of power or mastery to the person who films. In particular, in *Cloverfield* the personal camera repeatedly facilitates male desire to obtain a sense of mastery, power and control with and through its look. It is thus telling that the video, and film, begins with the camera in Rob’s hands, filming Beth’s apartment (but mostly the sleeping Beth). While these earlier moments – which precede the monster’s attack but act as narrative bookends to the monster’s attack – also function as “mementoes of innocence and youth”, as Coyle (2012, p.223; see also Pile, 2011) claims, they also express acts of (male) power/power relationships. Moreover, this claim to power is disavowed throughout: for example, in the ‘going-away’ party scene, Hud similarly invokes the invisibility of the camera: “I’m just documenting. I’m not here”. In this sense, the male ‘look’ seeks to conceal itself behind the camera, and to ‘naturalise’ the union of man and camera. Yet the camera also allows Hud to insert himself into the action, becoming present, and gain greater access than typical. Thus, Hud in particular arguably embraces of the role of camera operator to compensate for his own marginality and lowly status by ‘documenting’ events, seeking to distance and master what would otherwise overwhelm.

In short, the camera allows *Cloverfield*’s Everymen to claim a power or mastery otherwise absent in their lives, a power initially and repeatedly exercised to disempower female characters as ‘objects’. However, *Cloverfield* finally unsettles the assumed (and invisible) power the camera and looking affords the male ‘subjects’ by sundering the initial conflation of gender and sex. The personal camera in *Cloverfield* is wholly aligned with male perspectives, shot choices and narrative focus. While not sutured to its male characters, the camera is literally structured through male perceptions. Admittedly a camera within the film’s story world, the hand-held personal camera doubles as the camera-which-films, and is nonetheless the only perspective offered. Rob first uses the camera to film his and Beth’s fledgling love story. Jason then takes up the camera, filming preparations six weeks later for Rob’s

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175 The camera also shields Hud from the horrific events unfolding around him, as entrapment temporarily shields Jimeno from the loss of the Towers in *WTC* and akin to the ‘aesthetic distance’ typical for SF-disaster audiences.

176 Outside of the Department of Defense title, which nevertheless reasserts (and extends) possession of the video as institutional and patriarchal.
going-away’ party, before thrusting it on Hud, who films the party and later his
Everyman perspective of the monster’s attack and Rob’s quest to rescue Beth.

The film’s intimate and persistent alignment of male consciousness with the camera
is never more evident than after the monster downs the helicopter. While it is
important not to automatically equate optical point-of-view with character point-of-
view, which also encompasses Hud’s ongoing to-camera ‘narration’, Hud’s statement,
“If this is the last thing you see, it means I died”, implies the male ‘look’ and the
camera’s ‘eye’ are one in Cloverfield. That is, if he dies, the recording ends. Thus,
when the monster downs the helicopter, the temporary absence of camera sound
aurally signifies Hud’s temporarily dazed state. Moreover, when the monster soon
thereafter kills the camera operator, the camera becomes unmoored from Hud’s look.
A poignant example of the fallen-camera convention, according to Bordwell (2008),
the camera’s autofocus oscillates repeatedly and uncertainly from Hud to the
background, unable to register or fix on either (see Figures 2.2-2.3). However, these
repeated focal shifts more than signify the camera’s focal indecision, as Totaro
(2008) suggests, but connote Hud’s death – he no longer registers for the camera –
and imply that the camera too cannot see, is effectively blind, without its male
operator. As North (2010, p.88) similarly observes, “the camera too seems to die”
without its operator. This persistent alignment reiterates the unity and
interdependence of male operator and camera, an alignment visually sundered by the
monster, but actually first destabilised by females.

**FIGURE 2.2**

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**FIGURE 2.3**

*Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access*

The males’ shot choices prior to the attack convey the power of looking (and the
camera as its agent). Each male character that takes up the camera first uses it to look
at and objectify a female he sexually desires without her knowledge, fragmenting the

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177 Also note that contemporary cameras are less linked to the eye.
female form, lingering on an exposed leg, scanning over a sleeping body or seeking out a potential mate. The morning after he first couples with Beth, the seeming rationale being to ‘evidence’ his sexual success – to ‘make it real’ – Rob’s camera aerially surveys New York from the window of the high-rise apartment (Figure 2.4). Overpeck (2012) observes how the camera here seemingly ‘insulates’ the couple, but it perhaps more significantly symbolises how the camera similarly seeks to insulate the operator. Indeed, the monster’s sudden, disruptive eruption soon irrevocably disturbs this cosy notion.

FIGURE 2.4
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Nonetheless, immediately after his aerial survey, Rob’s camera slowly passes over Beth’s naked sleeping body, surveying and objectifying her as he has the landscape below (Figures 2.5-2.6). This moment explicitly signals Rob’s perceived/desired mastery and control, associated with bearing the (camera’s) look, seeking not only to empower but disempower what – or who – is made-object. It also, as Wessels (2010, p.119) argues, “normalises surveillance culture”, with the camera’s presence in intimate, everyday situations implicitly accepted. In first filming her sleeping, mirroring her later prostrate unconsciousness, Rob prefigures Beth in his own imagination/perception as a ‘Sleeping Beauty’-type in his quest narrative.

FIGURE 2.5
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FIGURE 2.6
Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access

Likewise, Hud swiftly uses custodianship of the camera at the party – and assumption of the ‘right’ to look – to talk to Marlena, a friend of Lily’s. Indeed, he uses the camera to seek her out on her arrival, the camera permitting him to zoom in on her (Figure 2.7). He subsequently uses it to distantly and ‘invisibly’ surveil her (see also Wessels, 2010), and when he finally builds the courage to move towards her, it is as if
his camera specifically targets her, seeking to constrain her within the frame, not unlike Stone’s camera does to characters in the home in *WTC* (see Figures 2.8-2.9). In detailing this initial construction of a “surveilling gaze” in Rob and Hud’s early deployment of the camera, however, Wessels (2010) ignores how each camera-male gaze is immediately destabilised and contested.

**FIGURE 2.7**

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**FIGURE 2.8**

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**Undermining the Male Look**

Although the camera’s look is intimately aligned with its male operators, and shot choices initially objectify and fragment the female form, the mastery and control sought through the camera is repeatedly destabilised. Inevitably, while the capacity to look through and with the camera is a ‘power’ after all, male dominion of the power and right to look is repeatedly challenged. Thus, *Cloverfield* foregrounds the limits of video and looking, in the ostensible erasure of Rob’s video and female characters’ explicit rejection and/or overturning of their to-be-looked-at status respectively. As such, it is as if Rob’s quest seeks to return to that moment – that space and time, in the apartment.

**FIGURE 2.9**

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**FIGURE 2.10**

Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access

*Cloverfield* also ties the examination, exposure and destabilisation of the male look as emblematic of its protagonist’s vulnerable masculine identity. *Cloverfield* destabilises
claims to power, mastery and control associated with looking, particularly through and with the camera. Most tellingly, females in *Cloverfield* directly contest and challenge this assumed mastery and control. As Hantke (2010, p.147, emphasis in original) observes in relation to recent SF-invasion narratives, the invasion – or breach in the case of *Cloverfield* – although initiating psychological and social transformation, “is not the cause of instability but […] takes place under pre-existing conditions of instability”. Indeed, despite his pretensions to power, Marlena pointedly resists and refuses to be the subject of Hud’s look after he and his camera zero in on her at the party (see Figure 2.10).

Additionally, the initial construction of a controlling gaze is persistently countered by characters’ direct address of the camera (and, in *Cloverfield*, the male operator), further denaturalising the camera and demystifying its presumed power, akin again to ‘first person’ films noir like *Lady in the Lake* and *Dark Passage*. While the camera-film unites character-operator with the camera, such claims also remind the audience – and the partygoers – of the existence-presence of the camera and the look of the male.

This challenge to male power – and indeed its immediate disruption – is particularly evident when the camera is momentarily in Beth’s hands on the couple’s first morning. Rob’s like pretensions to power and control are also immediately unsettled – and establish his perceived need to ‘remasculinise’ as *prior to* rather than a consequence of the attack. Destabilising his claims to mastery of the camera-look, Beth also further ‘unmans’ him through objectification and mockery. As Figure 2.11 indicates, when she turns the camera on Rob, his unease is stark. He squirms uncomfortably in front of the camera, he now made-object of the female look through and with the camera; an early precursor and corollary of the unease associated with being made-object or targeted by the monstrous ‘terror-Other’. This active female look fetishises and even ‘feminises’ Rob through objectification – adding further insight into his later repeated figuring with females at the onset of the attack.

**FIGURE 2.11**

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Rob’s emasculation is redoubled when Beth playfully mocks the unworthy, boyish spectacle of his body, pointedly joking about his lack of chest hair (see Figure 2.12). Thus, Rob’s unconvincing performance as man – or more properly, his failed concealment of his perceived insufficiency – is signalled as masquerade, destabilised in being announced and thereby denaturalised from the film’s opening. The disconcerting exposure of male masquerade as spectacle is also clearly evident in the ‘salaryman’ suit Rob wears throughout the day of the attack. Like the ‘uniform’ in *WTC*, Rob’s suit, the ‘uniform’ of this young urban Everyman, is particularly ill-suited to the role of the monster movie protagonist-hero.\(^{178}\) Moreover, and compounded by his youthful looks, his suit renders him even more boyish, as if Rob is ‘playing at’ rather than performing adult masculinity.

When Rob is temporarily the object of the female look (and the camera), he is clearly evasive, uncomfortable and vulnerable. It is as if she/it sees through him, sees who he really is, and exposes his performative inadequacy as a male. Rob’s prior assumption of the camera therefore cannot conceal or compensate for his self-conscious and perceived boyish unworthiness, his ‘unmanliness’, when the camera conveys the female perspective. Significantly, Rob’s discomfit concludes the scene before the video immediately advances to the day of the attack, and Rob’s attempted redemption of his destabilised identity. Moreover, he does not pick up the camera again until after rescuing Beth and securing his fragile masculinity.

**Shaming America’s Young Urban Male**

While the affluence and ‘whiteness’ (read blandness, or lack of differentiation) of characters is typical of the slasher, it is arguably contemporary urban young

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\(^{178}\) As Rob is celebrating his impending move to Japan to take up an executive position, his suit is evocative of the Japanese ‘salary man’.
professional life that the film targets (see also Lee, 2008). The focus on a young man in *Cloverfield* tellingly exposes Rob’s incapacity to directly respond to the threat – and thereby implying that young, overcivilised, urban American males’ affluent, self-obsessed lifestyles preclude countering the threat of modern terror. However, in a wider sense, *Cloverfield* represents persistent and persisting cultural anxieties regarding American male inadequacy to fulfil normative gender role expectations. Yet it conveniently displaces wider cultural anxieties associated with the institutional-national failures of 9/11 onto young urban professionals. *Cloverfield* is thus ultimately about how an emasculated young urban male, who unconvincingly embodies a ‘real’ man, seeks redemption through a rescue quest. Indeed, Rob seemingly evinces the physical symptoms of shame here and throughout the film, manifesting characteristics outlined confirmed in psychological studies (Scheff, 1990; Tangney, 1995), such as Rob’s repeated inability to meet the other’s gaze (casting down or averting his eyes), most clearly evinced in his repeated avoidance of Beth’s gaze. Rob also attempts to conceal this shame and perceived inadequacy from the intrusive, penetrating look of the camera (which under Hud’s custodianship is effectively *another male’s*), numerousl turning his whole body away, and especially his face, from the first-person camera whenever he is emotional or distraught. Thus, Rob is already shamed, located in his persistent ‘unmanning’ in front of others and the camera and prior to the attacks.

The shame of the overcivilised, and clearly inadequate, young urban male as preceding the onset of terror is similarly apparent in the home invasion horror, *The Strangers*. James (Scott Speedman), like Rob, is similarly emasculated and explicitly ‘feminised’, the film depicting him disconsolately eating ice cream from the tub alone directly following Kristen’s (Liv Tyler) rejection of his marriage proposal. Similarly spurned in love, James also evinces shame, in his perception of how Kristen looks upon him, persistently averting his eyes from her gaze – with the camera approximating her point-of-view – his eyes and head cast downward. His response to the monstrous threat, manifested by the home invaders, is also undermined, but by the

179 Highlighting his ‘protective’ inadequacy, Rob’s back is repeatedly turned away from danger and threat, such as on the bridge and in the subway tunnel when the parasites are revealed by the camera’s night vision. Rob’s shame is located in his projection of how Beth and the camera might perceive him. After quarrelling with Beth at his party she leaves with another man, again ‘unmanning’ Rob. Rob turns his back to the camera when he returns to the apartment, his shame amplified by its (and its male operator’s) witnessing of his humiliation.
heavy absence – or rather presence-absence – of a powerful father figure. One scene in particular locates his shame also in (his perception of) the eyes of the father. During the home invasion by a group of masked intruders, James recalls his father keeps a shotgun in the (vacation) home. However, eventually locating it, James fumbles with the shotgun and admits, “I'm not even sure how to load it”. Kristen responds worriedly: “But you said you used to hunt with your dad”. Still with his head down, and again significantly averting Kristen’s gaze, James’ mumbled reply trails away as his shame of ‘protective’ masculine inadequacy is revealed before Kristen and the absent father: “No, I never did. It was just something I said”.180

Rob’s shame in Cloverfield is perhaps also partially associated with an absent father. Beth’s apartment is identified as her father’s; which significantly doubles as the location and goal of Rob’s redemption. Rob’s quest is seemingly as much about getting back to the father’s apartment as it is the site of his prelapsarian sexual ‘conquest’ to become man. Thus, it is because of Rob’s perceived inadequacy that he films. In a sense, he films at the opening of the film to acquire rather than communicate power and mastery. Yet Cloverfield persistently articulates that the folly of taking up the camera to redress a lack of male control and power. Rob’s illusion of mastery is almost immediately ruptured when Beth takes over camera, which is where Overpeck’s (2012) analysis of Rob’s redemptive quest is lacking, absent any consideration of how the characteristics of the hand-held camera or its use undermines the quest’s success.

Indeed, the advent of the attack, and the manifestation of the monster, coincides with Rob’s confirmed and reiterated humiliation and emasculation. Thus, in an implication that assigns blame for emasculating the American male onto a female, it could be argued that the emasculated and shamed young urban male invites the monster’s breach. That is, the monster’s attack represents not only an opportunity for Rob to redeem himself, but is actively ‘called up’ or created, like all monsters, to punish Beth and reverse his humiliation. Rob’s inadequacy is figured as monstrous rage, as a consequence of his humiliation, and thereby possibly implication him in the

180 Kristen, suitably horrified by this admission in the context, will even load the gun for him before he can shoot it.
monster’s eruption.\footnote{Such representations of internal tensions as external threats are not uncommon in American horror. For example, the monstrous personification of evil in \textit{Cape Fear} (Scorsese, 1991), Max Cady (Robert De Niro), is arguably first conjured by the young daughter (Juliette Lewis), but also constructed by the father (Nick Nolte) in order to reunite the family and re-establish the home (with the father as head).} Also echoing Drew’s (2004) findings on post-9/11 public discourse, Rob’s ‘feminisation’ is depicted as prior to the attacks and attributed to a female. This blaming of a female for both the apocalyptic terror event and the protagonist’s emasculation is even more explicit in \textit{I Am Legend}. In \textit{Cloverfield}, Beth symbolically ‘unmans’ Rob first when she turns the camera on him, objectifies and mocks him, and subsequently when she replaces him as lover. This latter act, in which she is mobile and he immobile and passive, immediately precedes, and thus potentially precipitates, the monster’s attack, which results in Beth’s punishment and suffering, the ‘challenging’ female not only blamed but violently rendered prostrate, passive and helpless.

\textbf{Undermining the Camera: The Masochistic Male Look & the Monster}

The characteristics of the personal camera also formally undermine the presumed power of looking through and with the camera. Indeed, \textit{Cloverfield} persistently evinces rather than reverses Rob’s male powerlessness and (Everyman) ‘protective’ masculine inadequacy in the perspective of the hand-held video camera, associated with restricted and limited knowledge. As ‘home video’, the male operator’s (and the film’s) look is fragmented, partial, decontextualised and often incoherent, especially evident in the frequent jump cuts, particular to personal video, which disorient temporality and space. Rather than the omniscient perspective typically available in the monster movie, \textit{Cloverfield} is locked into the subjective perspective of the hand-held camera, offering only a limited, myopic and restricted perspective. Defined by limited ‘seeing’, by what it does or cannot see, the hand-held camera has only partial vision. Pile (2011, p.292) observes that this \textit{inability} to capture events is experiential rather than merely technical, as “perception and comprehension lag behind the unfolding events, and the camera lags behind” the operator, again reminiscent of the 9/11’s amateur footage. Hud’s attachment to the role of camera operator when he is ‘made object’ by the monster’s attack seeks to compensate for a lack of male control.
and power exposed by its disruptive entrance, ‘documenting’ what would otherwise merely overwhelm in its abstract excess. Yet the characteristics of the personal camera formally undermine its presumed power, just as female contestation does prior to the attack. Clover (1992, p.187) notes that the subjective camera, by also “calling attention to what it cannot see [...] gives rise to the sense not of mastery but of vulnerability”. The film thus denies Hud’s repeated-but-precarious claims to power, authority and agency: “I'm documenting”. Indeed, as Everyman-victim and as documentarian, Hud’s camera persistently ‘misses the action’, a characteristic of the hand-held camera that Wessels (2010) conveniently downplays in asserting the power of the camera’s ‘surveillance gaze’. While such ‘missing the action’ is not uncommon in horror, it is certainly atypical in monster and SF-disaster movies, where the entwined spectacles of monster and destruction are central. The limitedness and unsteadiness of the amateur camera equally confirms Rob’s emasculation, exacerbated in his objectification and ‘unmanning’, as preceding the monster’s attack. The employment of the hand-held aesthetic formally undercuts the film’s explicit narrative goal of recuperating Everyman masculinity through the rescue of a prostrate, passive female, permanently and fatally disrupted by the monster.

The Cloverfield monster’s entrance violently disrupts male claims to mastery and control through the camera and renders the victim-perspective as male. The already destabilised male power of looking is avowedly shattered as the monster confirms and illuminates male vulnerability and insufficiency. Thus, Cloverfield’s first-person perspective is victim-identified and vulnerability, helplessness and fear are very much situated in the male body and perspective. Moreover, the audience is also locked into this victim perspective, and the pressure not even temporarily relieved by the occasional provision of the monster’s point-of-view. In particular relation to horror, Clover (1992, p.229) famously contends the horror gaze is often victim-identified, with its “first and central aim” being “to play to masochistic fears and desires in its audiences – fears and desires [...] repeatedly figured as ‘feminine’”. Thus, rather than the fetishistic look initially constructed in Beth’s apartment and at the party, in Cloverfield the camera is locked into the masochistic victim-perspective, undermining notions of the supposed coherence and stability associated with the controlling male

182 For example, the first time the group is caught in crossfire between the military and the monster, Hud's camera, fixed on the group, largely ‘misses’ the spectacular confrontation.
look through the camera. Most interestingly, *Cloverfield*’s male (mediated) victim-perspective seemingly mirrors the first-person ‘killer-cam’ or ‘i-camera’. According to Clover, in horror this unstable, unfocused and limited perspective calls attention to the vulnerability and imminent, inevitable demise of the perspective holder (the slasher killer) who, marked as monstrous, will be (at least temporarily) defeated or evacuated from the narrative. 183 Hence, Rob and Hud’s repeated assumption of this doomed, unstable perspective via the hand-held personal camera foreshadows their final fate and perhaps their own symbolic ‘monstrosity’ (an idea that will be further explored later in the chapter).

**Collapsed Spaces: The Home as Conduit & City as Battlefield**

As in *WTC*, military presence in the city following the monster’s entrance collapses fronts, with the battlefield and city-home(land) again indistinct. The monster in horror typically blurs, challenges and redefines boundaries between public and private. This collapsing of space is particularly apparent in how the *Cloverfield* monster breaks down the sheer immensity of the city. However, in *Cloverfield* the boundary between city and home is demonstrated as *always-already* porous and permeable, a direct consequence of the proliferation of personal communication devices. The everyday mediation of experience – and characteristics of the hand-held video camera – blurs notions of private and public, and inside and outside, collapsing boundaries between home and city. This inevitably relates to the monster’s entrance, with blame again displaced onto the young for weakening national boundaries. England (2006, p.360) observes that in horror such porousness is ‘disconcerting’, as the home becomes a ‘conduit’ for the horror. The “horrific blur” of public and private evokes feelings of terror by breaking down the ‘myth’ that there is a distinction between private home and public space. The home is no longer insulated from the outside, but horrifyingly permeable – and thereby open to breach and attack, as it will be in *I Am Legend* (Chapter Three).

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183 Nor is this atypical of the realist horror film, with films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity* also extending the vulnerable, unsteady and doomed ‘i-camera’ to protagonists. Indeed, North (2010) argues the camera operator’s death is a subgeneric convention in ‘discovered footage’ films.
As such, *Cloverfield* ambivalently suggests that communication technologies both resist the monster’s invasive threat through documenting it and make the home(land) vulnerable through dissolving boundaries. In this sense, the mobility afforded by media technologies also figures the vulnerable permeability and horrific blur of public and private. As outlined earlier, the *Cloverfield* monster’s attack is first brought into the home (and becomes real for characters) via television, as in *WTC*. Yet the collapse of public and private space is precipitated from the film’s beginning, as the camera dizzyingly moves between inside-domestic and outside-public spaces, demonstrating how modern media and communication technologies not only mediatise experience but collapse traditional spatial distinctions. Repeated jump cuts – a feature of ‘home video – disorientingly transition the audience from one space to another, blurring and linking each. For example, the film opens with Rob filming in Beth’s apartment before a jump cut to Jason filming (about six weeks later) in the streets below. Another jump returns the audience to Rob’s apartment and preparations for his ‘going-away’ party. Thus, the multiple, fragmented, overlapping ‘stories’ and jump cuts persistently connect public and private spaces, but also destabilise and dissolving the (protective), insulating boundaries between. In *Cloverfield*, the everyday technological dissolution of public and private boundaries implies that the ubiquity of media technologies may be symptomatic of the attacked society. Indeed, it may even ‘make space’ for (or even invites) the monster’s attack. While the monster confirms the horrific permeability of home and city in its breach, the way characters use the camera to cross and break down these boundaries renders modern American society *already-always* porous and vulnerable. In a sense, personal communication technologies and the monster equally confirm the shared vulnerability of the city/state and the American home.

*Cloverfield* also blurs public and private distinctions in relation to the mutability of the video, which is variously and simultaneously home video, documentary evidence and feature film, and intended variously for personal consumption, possible military evidence and cinematic exhibition (see also North, 2010). For example, and again

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184 This mutability of communication technologies is apparent in citizens’ filming of Liberty’s decapitated head, which further disrupts and blurs distinctions between personal and public (and the banal and the extraordinary). Hud’s later direct address, “If this is the last thing you see, it means I died”, similarly both predicts his own demise and signals how the (originally) private has become public testimony.
far more than the ‘memento of innocence and youth’ Coyle (2012) describes, the video’s (and *Cloverfield*’s) final shot captures an earlier private ‘home video’ moment *and* concludes a love story. That is, after their apparent death in the military bombardment, the video again switches back to their first day together, on a merry-go-round at Coney Island. However, with an unidentified object simultaneously hurtling into the ocean behind the love-struck couple – yet another marine threat to New York – is also military-government documentary evidence *and* a reworked (because ostensibly withheld) monster movie origin trope. Hantke (2011) argues this shot demonstrates how the film finally privileges the private over the public. Similarly, Overpeck (2012, p.106) cogently argues the film prioritises the “personal experience of private, self absorbed individuals […] over an examination of the causes and motivations” of the attack. Each further contends the couple’s insularity and inwardness is discursively consistent with the final Bush years. Yet this interpretation of the final shot overlooks how troubling this ‘turn’ inwards is deemed, and how *Cloverfield* ultimately indicts such a response as fatal. The final-but-earlier shot also contains the seed of the couple’s inevitable doom. The camera, but not its self-regarding protagonists, captures the fleeting image of the unidentified object hurtling into the ocean. Whether depicting the monster’s arrival or a fallen satellite that rouses it, this moment of seemingly unalloyed joy and redemption also contains within the genesis of the monster and the kernel of demise and destruction. *Cloverfield* thereby arguably indicts rather than advocates such private inwardness, which both foreshadows and reveals these Americans’ fatal disregard. Indeed, the monster’s unknowability and possible invulnerability lies in this self-absorption. Herein, lies the source or origin of their (and the city-nation’s) destruction – their narcissism thus is not a response to 9/11 as Overpeck (2012) claims, but a prior symptom, an originary failing that invites attack. As such, the film’s focus on their experience is, rather than a convenient, self-absorbed deflection, profoundly troubling and they perhaps monstrous.186

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185 According to supplementary online viral campaign materials, this object may be a satellite operated by a Japanese company, which either awakens or gives birth to the monster.

186 The duality of viewing positions is echoed in a duality of ‘ownership’, with the Department of Defense titles symbolically complicating the preceding claims of the film’s production and distribution logos (North, 2010). The blurring of public and private is also evidenced in Hud’s consciously evolving role as camera operator and address to multiple audiences (see also Hantke, 2011). Hud only reluctantly assumes responsibility to document Rob’s surprise party, which like Rob and Beth’s video is ostensibly for a private audience. However, Hud’s role immediately shifts after the attack, from documenting the personal,
This ambivalent conclusion is mirrored in the film’s relation of capital and consumption to terror. After narrowly escaping an attack by the parasites, the group leaves the subway tunnels to ascertain their precise location. On entering an abandoned department store, with mannequins functioning as ciphers for conspicuously absent victim-bodies, it is flooded with blinding light as the military suddenly enters, coming out of the light. The monster’s urban attack, and the consequent presence of the military, thus also figures the city as battlefield. Moreover, the Marine establishment of a command centre in the department store collapses the military, terrorism and the commercial, subversively signalling the uneasy figuring conjoining of America’s commercial interests and consumer lifestyle with its military endeavours. The monster’s attack thus also symbolically figures the penetration of the ‘war on terror’ into everyday consumption. Overpeck (2012) too notes how *Cloverfield* implicitly suggests the centrality of a consumerist response to the attacks and their deliberate excision from the official narrative of the attacks. However, he tends to read such instances as reinforcing official advocacy of conspicuous consumption, rather than at least ambiguous. This is most evident in his tenuous interpretation of early scenes of looting “as a reflection of the encouragement […] to consume” (p.118), which also requires overlooking the film’s implicit criticism of the vacuity and hollowness of the group’s pre-attack lives, which Overpeck himself recognises in characters’ use of mobile phones. Lee (2008) likewise asserts the film’s gleeful destruction of “corporate infrastructure and the unimaginative consumer class” is subversive. On the other hand, the depicted disruption, even desecration, of the commercial – a disruption not voluntarily asked of American citizens in financing the ‘war on terror’ – signals how terror literally erupts within the commercial and the everyday; reminiscent of the broken storefront windows function just prior to the first tower’s collapse in *WTC* (the significance of the victim-as-consumer in the wake of terror is discussed further in relation to *I Am Legend*).

everyday and banal to documenting the public-spectacular for a wider (potential) audience – as Hud numerously asks, “Are you seeing this?”

187 Marlena, injured and infected, pauses then seems to walk ‘towards the light’ – a significant foreshadowing of her imminent fate. The military is again associated with light when the group reaches the final military airlift point, but again foreshadows imminent violent demise, as it may do in *I Am Legend*.
Nonetheless, in *Cloverfield*, the military and government are consistently portrayed ambivalently, as the monster’s attack not only overwhelms their capabilities, but possibly infects their attitudes towards civilians. They immediately treat Rob’s group, citizens under their protection, as potential threats, and when Marlena, infected by a parasite bite, starts to bleed from her eyes, she is immediately quarantined before she explodes across the hospital curtain – again marking the punishment and violent excision of a proficient, challenging female. Her body silhouetted and veiled from the camera’s look, the group are unsure whether she exploded because infected or was shot by military personnel, an ambivalence that Wessels (2010) overlooks but Reeves (*Cloverfield* DVD Commentary, 2008) acknowledges, considering either possibility equally terrifying. The military view of its citizens troublingly signals how the attack blurs distinctions (or at least the capacity to determine them) between friend and enemy, victim and threat, and foreshadows its horrifying extension in *I Am Legend*.

The government-military response also establishes a pattern of military preparedness to sacrifice citizens as collateral damage in the encounter with terror, antithetical to the pointed unwillingness of the representatives of state power in Cold War-era creature features to harm civilians. In large part, this is a consequence of their incapacity and seeming unwillingness to try to understand the monster, and consequent inability to defeat it (see also Christiansen, 2008) similarly observes. More disconcertingly, however, the military acknowledges no understanding of the monster or how to combat it. As Hud declares in horror: “Did you see that [soldier’s] face […] They have no idea [what it is]!” It is also indicative of the ideological response to 9/11 that Westwell (2011, p.833) identifies, one that articulated “the need to annihilate difference”. As Christiansen (2008) further notes, the monster’s incomprehensibility in the film seemingly mandates “the necessity of responding forcefully”. However, in contrast to Christiansen and others, I believe the film considers this fundamental, unrelenting, persistent alterity disconcerting, and its

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188 In *Them!*, the FBI and police refuse to confront the giant radioactive ants until it can be determined whether two children possibly in the tunnels are safe, dedicated to avoiding even inadvertent harm to civilians, even after government officials urge haste in destroying the monsters. The police officer, will even sacrifice his own life to ensure the children’s rescue and repatriation.

189 One soldier tells the shocked group that the military do not know what the monster is: “But whatever it is, it’s winning!”

190 Moreover, much of the annihilation, including undoubtedly massive civilian casualties, is attributable to the military’s final, and apparently unsuccessful, attempt to eliminate the monster (as well as Manhattan).
resolution via annihilation as uncertain. The overwhelming scholarly consensus considers the film ends uncertainly, and without closure, particularly the fate of its monster, with the interesting but tenuous exception of Overpeck (2012), who not only contends the monster is killed in the final carpet-bombing of Manhattan, but that Rob and Beth survive – a ‘final couple’.\footnote{Overpeck’s (2012) too strident conclusion about the certainty of the film’s resolution tenuously rests on a brief Rolling Stone Q&A with producer J.J. Abrams, referring only to a pre-release viral campaign image rather than the feature film and countered by director Reeves’ statements about the couple’s demise.} Indeed, the couple’s demise is formally implied in the trope of the camera’s passing to another owner-operator (in this case the American military) following the previous operator’s death.

As such, even the final military attempt to ‘save’ New York by destroying it is seemingly unsuccessful, or at least ambiguous, with the monster seemingly surviving the bombardment – a voice over a radio declaims, “It’s alive”, at the end of the credits (see also Coyle, 2012).\footnote{This statement purportedly becomes “Help us” when played in reverse, which Overpeck (2012) swiftly presumes is linked to the surviving couple.} Also atypically for the genre, the final ‘Hammer Down’ confrontation with the monster is yet another spectacular instance of destruction that the Everyman-held camera ‘misses’, again undermining its assumed power and mastery. Edelstein (2008) similarly observes how the how film withholding catharsis typically afforded by collaboration between professionals to destroy the monster. As a consequence of the film’s stylistic adherence to the amateur camera and its focus on the Everyman, there is no cathartic, reassuring pay-off for the audience. In Cloverfield, while ‘remasculinisation’ is eviscerated, the monstrous threat is not – and the anxieties it articulates persist.

The Monster as ‘Stranger’: Unassimilable & Unknowable

The monstrous threat in horror cinema conventionally resists or even exceeds visual representation. ‘Discovered footage’ horror films, in particular, are routinely ‘populated’ by unrepresented and unrepresentable threats or monsters. The ‘invisible’ monster persistently eludes framing and is persistently located beyond the edge of or exceeds the frame, which in Cloverfield is a consequence of how the monster’s attack is experienced and mediated (see also Edelstein, 2008). In part then, in Cloverfield the
incapacity to ‘capture’ the monster is tied formally to the inherent partiality and restricted vision of the personal camera. That is, tied to the limited perspectives of its Everyman camera operators, it cannot contain or capture the monster (see also North, 2010). While it is not unusual for the monster to evade and resist representation, and films like *Curse of the Demon* (Tourneur, 1957) and *Cat People* (Tourneur, 1942) represent a basic idea of the inadequacy or limits of visual representation, the *Cloverfield* monster’s excessiveness and resistance to representation remains unresolved and unrelieved at film’s end. The *Cloverfield* monster is *not* beyond vision, but remains *unknowable* to character and camera alike, and because it cannot be ‘known’ by Hud’s amateur camera it cannot be assimilated, understood or eliminated. Rob’s ‘remasculinisation’ through the quest (and Hud’s as documentarian) similarly flails helplessly against the ‘unknowability’ of the monster’s threat. In this sense, North (2010, p.90) contends that, as the “monster cannot be caught on camera, fully understood or reasoned with”, the *Cloverfield* monster is “a truly 9/11 beast”. More than this, and like in *WTC*, an unknowable, undefeated monster formally and narratively undermines Rob’s Everyman ‘remasculinisation’ via the quest. Also a consequence of typically lower budgets, such films cannot afford – economically or epistemologically, assuming ‘evil’ is unrepresentable – to offer convincing representations of their ‘monsters’. This, as well as demonstrating the limits of representation, increases the associated fear and dread; what cannot be seen frightens.

Yet as Carroll (1990) argues, while horror is centrally concerned with the encounter of the known and the unknown, its chief project lies in the engagement of the unknown, in making it at least in some sense *known*. Furthermore, in monster movies, the monstrous threat and its genesis are typically revealed to the audience, as Overpeck (2012) similarly recognises in *Gajira*; the monster and its origin are invariably knowable, primarily through omniscient or unrestricted narration and the skills-

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193 The *Cloverfield* characters’ self-absorption or myopia (noted also by Schwarzbaum, 2008) may further limit their capacity to represent the monster. Moreover, although the visual is privileged throughout by characters and the(ir) camera, as Coyle (2012) demonstrates, the aural repeatedly offers more important cues on the presence of the monster(s).
194 It should be noted that this feature of RKO Radio Pictures horror films in the 1940s contrasts to an earlier tradition in Universal horror films in the 1930s predicated on the monster’s full visibility.
195 Although Carroll notes there must be some films in which both confrontation and discovery of the monster are absent, he is at pains to identify any in particular (which given the detailed and classificatory nature of his philosophical project is significant).
knowledge of professional characters. Indeed, characters often film and photograph the monstrous threat. In *Godzilla*, for example, the network cameraman (Hank Azaria) professionally ‘captures’ the monster.\(^{196}\) Even ‘discovered footage’ films invariably offer contextual information, however fragmented or partial, on the nature of the threat and its onset – even if only retrospective exposition and only for the audience. Thus, the absence of Carroll’s ‘discovery’ category in *Cloverfield*, the manner in which the monster is not only unknown but remains so that is most significant. Indeed, many critical responses underline the discomfiting (and generically atypical) strangeness of this absence of information about the monster (see also Coyle, 2012). The stark absence of information about the monster – what it is, where it comes from – throughout *Cloverfield* signals how it disrupts and confounds, not only visually but epistemologically unavailable to the camera and its Everyman victim-characters, neither able to resolve its fundamental, excessive ‘otherness’.

Confined to the limited personal camera and unsteady victim-perspective of the Everyman, the *Cloverfield* monster’s genesis and motivation remain unknown – and unknowable. Wessels (2010, p.111) claims that difference, embodied in the monster, “is fantasised as something that can be visually identified, marked, and ‘caught’ on camera”. Wessels (p.105) acknowledges that the monstrous figure is excessive and not ‘abolished’, but claims the camera “testifies to the reification of alterity as something that can be apprehended, recorded, and captured”. However, rather than about how “technology can be used to capture, record, know, and recognise” difference, as Wessels (2010) contends, *Cloverfield* explores how it cannot. While the camera operator certainly intends – and indeed does the film’s narrative and genre structure – to contain and manage difference, and to an extent do through the visual record, this is ultimately frustrated and unrealised, both by the monster’s fundamental and surviving alterity and the partiality and limitedness inherent to the hand-held camera; the video record partial, fragmented, unsure. As Hantke (2011, p.252) observes, despite questioning the film’s ‘oppositional potential’, “what [the film] unleashes it hardly contains”. Indeed, despite proclaiming the ‘truth-telling’ capacity of the camera by ignoring the camera’s limitedness, Wessels (2010, p.138) finally acknowledges the futility and hopelessness of Rob’s quest to protect and that “those

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196 The scientist-daughter in *Them!* also repeatedly photographs the film’s giant ants.
who got too close, and faced alterity directly, were eradicated”. In this respect, she likewise recognises the quest’s futility is mirrored in Hud’s like quest to document the monster (or more accurately, his experience of its attack), as “essentially ineffectual” (p.138). Moreover, she here fails to consider the significance that fundamental alterity disconcertingly survives, whereas white, American (male) affluence is destroyed.

_Godzilla_ engages the monster’s perspective – as do most slashers – where the monster is effectively known and knowable to the camera/movie and audience through empathy-inducing monster point-of-view shots and subsequent – and perhaps consequent – declarations of understanding from Nick; “He’s not some enemy… He’s just an animal”. Therefore, although the ‘monster’ is characteristically excessive and unrepresentable, particularly where restricted vision and limited knowledge are usual, SF and horror invariably provide a motivating story and/or expository information about the monster-threat. Yet in _Cloverfield_ there is neither monster point-of-view shots or a ‘killer-cam’ nor a (motivating) story associated with the monster. As such, it remains as unavailable to the audience as to its victims and the military.

One sense in which the _Cloverfield_ monster is perhaps ‘knowable’ perhaps rests in its intertextual kinship to other cinematic monsters. In this respect, Christiansen (2008; see also Wessels, 2010) first asserts the monster is the ‘perfect’ Western cultural personification of the terrorist, “a myth of evil”. As such, this ‘personification’ is “recognizable and familiar” rather than frightening. Wessels (2010, p.127) too claims that anxieties about terrorism’s excessive nature and unpredictability are muted, “collapsed under the sign of the beast”. Christiansen (2008) further contends that, rather than representing “transgressive and dangerous Otherness”, movie monsters represent “distinctively American responses to social fears”. That is, rather than Other they are ‘an integral part’ of American culture. However, he mistakenly suggests that _Cloverfield’s_ “structural dependence on the history of monster films” similarly renders its monster “hauntingly familiar” – a sentiment echoed in McCarthy’s (2008; see also Lane, 2008) characterisation of the film as ‘reassuring’. Alternatively, as North (2010, p.86) argues, while the film may seem ‘comfortingly generic’, “its transplantation into an unfamiliar format, and the concurrent possibility that it might unfold unpredictably as a result, create a dynamic tension between form and content”. And despite concerns about its ultimate political position, Hantke (2011, p.243)
asserts that *Cloverfield* “ends on a none-too-reassuring note of uncertainty”. Indeed, Christiansen too recognises the monster also represents America’s own contemporary ‘internal fears’ and how significantly it differs from earlier monsters. Despite arguing that the monster is “quite conventionally coded” and “so recognisable”, Christiansen (2008) predominantly outlines the strangeness of an ‘incomprehensible’ monster, that “neither can nor should be understood”, in relation to monster film history. To nonetheless claim the *Cloverfield* monster’s representation is reductionist would be possible if *Cloverfield*'s many key generic divergences – the amateur camera and failure to (visually) ‘capture’ or militarily eliminate the monster – did not make it so unrelievedly troubling.

While monsters are characteristically excessive and unknowable, horror films conventionally figure a return to some form of normalcy through the evacuation, however temporary, of the monster from the narrative. As England (2006, p.359) likewise asserts, those who transgress the ‘public-private divide’ are ultimately punished. However, in *Cloverfield*, not only are the monster’s motivation unknown and its perspective unavailable, largely a consequence of its characters’ limited and restricted perspectives, but neither is there a return to normalcy nor evacuation of the threat. The *Cloverfield* monster seemingly survives (and even this is disturbingly uncertain), underlining how the monster eludes such intertextual generic containment. Christiansen (2008) dismisses *Cloverfield*'s representation of monstrous threat because it “only reveals how American terror discourse is constructed” – it “never seriously engages with the monstrous vision of evil” it displays. This implies the disconcerting and profound unknowability of the monster within the contemporary ‘discursive construction’ of terror. As North (2010, p.91, emphasis in original) concurs, in *Cloverfield*, “the mystery is the monster, a manifestation of uncertainty”. Christiansen (2008; see also Wessels, 2010) finally argues that despite being so ‘recognisable’ and ‘familiar’, the lack of closure reduces the monster to “a monolithic vision of evil, as ideologically uncontained and as a disruptive element”. However, in rendering its Otherness absolute, *Cloverfield*'s monster exceeds Hud’s camera’s capacity to visually ‘capture’, know and master it, and thereby precludes any alleviation of the fears and anxieties it represents.
In this sense, it is this gaping, monstrous unknown at the heart of the film, augmented by the limited camera, the Everyman and the extreme proximity to terror, that makes Cloverfield and its characters’ experience, truly horrific. As Hartlaub (2008) observes, the monster’s “mayhem truly does seem to come out of nowhere”\(^{197}\). Critics often misread this characteristic as a generic failing, but as Richards (2008) identifies, “the most frightening attack is the one without apparent reason”. It is unsurprising that the monster exceeds the comprehension of the Everymen, indicated in Rob’s final testimony: “Something attacked the city. I don’t know what it is”. The overwhelmed insufficiency of the professional-military response is compounded by confinement to the personal camera. Tied to the personal camera, the monster eludes the male look and the camera, which offers only first-person fragments from the victim’s perspective; the Everymen protagonists only possess fragmentary knowledge of the monster.

The absolute Otherness of the monster marks it as a ‘stranger’, which defies (state) attempts to define and label it and thus assimilate and make it known. As such, the ‘stranger’, a consequence of modernity, frighteningly, cannot be eliminated. According to Bauman’s (1990, p.149) characterisation, the stranger arrives uninvited, “casting me on the receiving side of his initiative, making me into the object of action” – as arguably occurs in WTC. Thus, like the stranger – and 9/11 – the Cloverfield monster’s breach destabilises physical and epistemological borders. It comes from within and from nowhere, undetected until it breaks into the narrative – too close while remaining distant and unknowable. The home invaders in The Strangers, who wear masks throughout the attack, similarly satisfy this notion of the monster-as-stranger. The film’s victims – and the audience – know nothing of their attackers’ motives (and so they are deemed without one, without rationale, indiscriminate). When Kristen asks why they were targeted, she is only offered the cryptic and banal reply, “Because you were home”. These strangers come, or rather erupt, from within and from nowhere. In War of the Worlds too, the Martian attack literally arises out of the American (sub)urban street. The city has incubated the aliens and given a place for them to proliferate undetected. Cloverfield too represents how the city not only contains the subversive, destructive element within but how the

\(^{197}\) See also Berardinelli, 2008; Corliss, 2008; Ebert, 2008; Haar, 2008; McCarthy, 2008; Phillips, 2008.
anonymity of the urban context conceals the monstrous threat, giving it the panoptic power to act ‘invisibly’ despite its size, also a notable feature of *The Naked City* (Dassin, 1948). This quality of the city is exacerbated by the film’s adherence to the restricted perspective of the amateur hand-held camera, explicitly evocative of the aesthetic and footage of 9/11. This ‘invisibility’ taps into fears that modern terror wears no face, and survives, even thrives, invisibly within. The modern terror threat arises similarly from within, but also from without; it cannot be spatially defined or bounded, it is dispersed, everywhere (and nowhere). The stranger “is a constant threat to the world order” (Bauman, p.149) and “the bearer and embodiment of incongruity” (p.150). Its ultimate threat resides in not so much its size and power, but its indeterminacy, unassimilability and proximity-but-foreignness. Like the stranger, the *Cloverfield* monster disturbs the world’s ‘spatial ordering’, bringing inside “the kind of difference and otherness that are anticipated and tolerated only at a distance’’ (p.150) – or that can be distanced, as in the case of Cold War-era monsters. 198

Yet the *Cloverfield* monster is in some sense not unlike the Cold War-era (or even WWII) ‘enemy within’. It similarly signifies the permanent, everyday menace of (potential) threat. As Kracauer wrote (1946, p.106) it is one in which it is unclear “when or where the […] horror will arrive”. Moreover, *The Thing*’s (Carpenter, 1982) similarly uncertain ending suggests the *Cloverfield* monster is neither unprecedented nor its threat a new paradigm. Yet while Marlena’s infection particularly invokes parallels with Cold War ‘narratives of infection’, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing* – both remade or returned to in recent years – it also distinguishes each epoch’s varying expressions of enmity. While modern terrorism similarly attacks from ‘positions of secrecy’, and thus insinuates itself silently into society, it desires (rather than seeks to resist) to erupt into spectacular ‘visibility’. Moreover, unlike in *Cloverfield*, ‘enemy within’ films consequently work to identify and draw out the ‘monster’, even if its threat remains unresolved. 199 And as ‘enemy’ rather than ‘stranger’, the Cold War ‘enemy within’ can also be ideologically and geographically re-situated and bounded with the defined enemy (see also Overpeck, 2012). The *Cloverfield* monster, or the threat of modern terror, cannot be similarly “kept at a

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198 Indeed, such distancing becomes a symbolic ‘impossibility’ given the construction of the post-9/11 terror threat as stateless.
199 One other key difference remains in the knowability of the actual enemy in the Cold War, for the ‘problem’ was arguably not the war’s knowability but its ‘coldness’.
secure distance, not on the other side of the battle line” (p.149). This is demonstrated by not only the entrance of the monster, but the way it violently and suddenly breaks into and out of the party narrative, as 9/11 similarly disrupted everyday life, transport, work, news media and commerce.

Cloverfield also signals the danger of looking, and particularly of the total, unimpeded look on the monster-stranger, further eroding notions of the assumed power associated with (looking with) the camera. After the helicopter crashes, Hud momentarily leaves the camera. Yet needing to document his ‘reality’, he runs back to the camera and once more voluntarily assumes its victim perspective. Looking up, his first full look at the monster standing directly above immediately precedes – and perhaps mandates – his death. While McCarthy (2008) feels the Cloverfield monster becomes familiar when it reveals the monster, proximity and an unimpeded look on the stranger is fatal for the Everyman; killed immediately following the moment his camera ‘captures’ or apprehends the monster in full. As if contemplating the camera, the monster looks directly at (and through) it, to its operator and the audience – somewhat reminiscent of Marlena’s earlier direct challenge of Hud’s camera – before biting Hud in two. This moment is indicative of what Hantke (2011, p.253) identifies as Cloverfield’s central interest in “exploring (and exploiting) the experience of victimisation”, another instance of masochism following on from WTC that frustrates the reassertion of masculine control. Similarly, in The Strangers, the home invaders only unmask in the final moments, as they prepare to kill the besieged couple. Significantly, their faces remain withheld from the audience, signalling the unrelieved persistence of strangeness and unknowability; seeing the face of the incomprehensible monster-stranger is again to invite one’s own death.

200 In contrast to Hud’s declaration of the necessity of documenting events with the camera, the monster-stranger’s entrance also inaugurates a distinct ‘unpleasure’ in looking. In Marlena’s silhouetted death and the camera’s impeded view of the painful extraction of Beth’s impaled shoulder from a metal pipe in her high-rise apartment, another example of the fallen-camera convention (Bordwell, 2008), Cloverfield suggests a desire not to look (at) as much as to ‘document’. Moreover, while the camera initially fetishises the female body, it also declines to look at or watch females being punished. The camera is impeded or offers only a veiled view of Marlena and Beth’s suffering. This refigures Clover’s (1992, p.51) assertion that horror films typically spend more time watching the suffering of females, giving the audience “time to contemplate her imminent destruction”.
Redemption Undermined: Effacing the Shameful ‘Monster’

Through its quest narrative, *Cloverfield* works to recuperate its emasculated male and redeem Rob’s previously unheroic Everyman masculinity. Rob’s rescue of Beth figures him finally as hero, as Overpeck (2012) notes the significance of his return to Beth’s (father’s) apartment. More than a site of ‘playful morning after’, as Overpeck describes it, the apartment is the site of his initial conquest, a conquest evidenced by the camera but immediately destabilised in Rob’s subsequent ‘unmanning’. As such, when he finally reaches the passive, inactive object of his quest, Beth expresses surprise, and an accusation of sorts: “I didn’t think you would come back”. Rob and Beth’s final declarations of love in a bridge tunnel in the ‘area formerly known as Central Park’ temporarily reaffirm “emotional bonds severed before the disaster” (Kakoudaki, 2002). The monster’s attack not only offers a platform for male redemption but, in line with Broderick (1993), promotes sociocultural ‘renewal’ through the heterosexual couple. Rob’s redemption is fully realised when he and Beth embrace and kiss. He finally becomes the quest hero and fulfils genre expectations in her embrace. Indeed, director Reeves (*Cloverfield* DVD Commentary, 2008) attests that the film’s meaning derives from Rob’s making amends and redemption as quest hero and saying “I love you”. Reeves even claims it is this ‘resolution’, rather than actual survival, that is most ‘life-affirming’.201 Significantly, however, this first redemptive kiss is disrupted by the reappearance of the monster. And ‘renewal’ is violently and permanently disrupted when they are caught inside the military-initiated nuclear annihilation of Manhattan. Thus, rather than participating in the securitisation of the city and society, the military in *Cloverfield* not only fail to eliminate the monster but perversely terminate Rob and Beth’s prospective heterosexual (re)union – the opening Department of Defense information now assuming a starkly different hue.

Ultimately, redemption for Rob is partial, temporary and ambivalent – narratively undermined in the failure, or at best circumscribed success, of his quest. Rob’s redemption through his rescue of Beth is generically and narratively compromised

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201 This transformation is reinforced when, having completed Beth’s rescue, Rob kills the next parasite he encounters, in stark contrast to his ineffectual attempts to earlier save Marlena in the subway tunnels. Moreover, Marlena had previously saved Hud when he was attacked, beating a parasite with an iron bar. She is immediately thereafter bitten and infected, female proficiency and humiliation of the male again punished.
when he and Beth fail to escape Manhattan; neither appears to survive, likely perishing in the military’s apocalyptic annihilation of Manhattan (see also Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2010). Corliss (2008; see also Stewart, 2008) mistakenly characterises the couple as “emblems of survival”.\footnote{While their fate is unclear and the film’s conclusion ambiguous, textual evidence for their demise is offered in the transfer of the camera’s possession to the Department of Defense – it is numerous ‘passed on’ to another after death – and the manner in which the abruptly video stops, akin to when Hud is killed. Hud similarly acknowledges they have no means of survival, let alone escape: “So, our options are: die here, die in the tunnels or die in the streets??”} It is certainly not unusual for the hero’s redemptive actions to require such male sacrificial death, as in Charlton Heston’s characters in \textit{Earthquake} (Robson, 1974) and \textit{The Omega Man} (Sagal, 1971) (see Chapter Three). Yet for the object of the hero’s redemption to also die (in vain) is atypical. As such, it seems that, far from saving Beth, Rob’s quest primarily seeks to ‘act out’ rather than fulfil the hero’s role. Indeed, this is reinforced in Reeves’ (\textit{Cloverfield} DVD Commentary, 2008) declaration that the film’s meaning derives from Rob’s making amends and saying “I love you”. That is, Rob wins redemption (in her eyes, his eyes and the film-camera) simply in ‘coming back’ for Beth. However, it is here that Dargis’ (2008) criticism of the film’s underdeveloped characters – “heroism without a fully realised hero” – assumes new significance. Her criticism, along with Reeve’s assertion the ending is ‘life-affirming’ \textit{in spite of} their demise, suggests a profound pessimism lying in the acknowledgement of the limits of the contemporary, Everyman response to terror-threats, limits and restrictions emblematised in the hand-held camera.

Rob’s vulnerable hero status is also formally undermined when he again takes up the hand-held camera and is again associated with its instability and limitedness. The male look – and supposed power associated with looking through and with the camera – is destabilised by the partiality and limitedness of the hand-held camera, its presumed power moreover undercut repeatedly by females and monster alike. \textit{Cloverfield} discounts male claims to mastery and control from the film’s opening when Beth takes possession of the camera and turns it onto Rob, an undermining reiterated by the disruptive entrance of the monster. However, after the monster forever thwarts any chance of escape by downing the group’s helicopter – Rob, Beth and Hud (Lily, the unrepresented ‘final girl’, is seemingly safely evacuated in another helicopter) – and Hud is killed, Rob again takes possession of the camera. This
reassumption of the camera potentially symbolises and confirms his ‘remasculinisation’, given he has not ‘possessed’ it since being repeatedly ‘unmanned’ and emasculated prior to the attack – and his redemptive quest. However, it – and Rob’s status as hero – is formally undermined by his assumption of the instability, limitedness and insufficiency akin to the hand-held camera – and the doomed, ‘killer-cam’ perspective, as Hud’s death (following Jason’s) demonstrates.

The film’s unwillingness or inability to engage the ‘terror-Other’ inevitably frustrates Rob’s redemptive act. Indeed, while Christiansen (2008) contends the film is the real monster, perhaps it is Rob, the shamed and shameful emasculated urban male, rather than the monster (or the film), that is Cloverfield’s true monster. Rob is finally the ‘monster’ that must be punished and evacuated from the narrative. Clover (1992, p.229) argues that horror ‘plays to’ and finally alleviates masochistic fears and desires “repeatedly figured as ‘feminine’”. In this sense, in seeking both to present and eradicate American male shame, Cloverfield perhaps displaces national-institutional fears of inadequacy and failure onto Rob’s body. As such, the film seeks to annihilate that which most ‘transgresses’ American myths of masculinity; and so it must annihilate that which is most shameful, Rob, rather than the monster.

This recent cinematic ‘need’ in horror to first displace national anxieties of masculine ‘protective’ failure onto the shameful young urban male and then efface them through his annihilation is mirrored in the conclusion of The Strangers. As Beth’s declaration of love functions in Cloverfield, Kristen redeems the previously spurned James by declaring her love and wearing his ring, thereby elevating him finally to romantic hero and ‘husband’. In this sense, and similar to Cloverfield and WTC, the home invasion-terror attack is necessary for James’ ‘remasculinisation’ and the (temporary) reconstitution of society through symbolic heteronormative ‘marriage’ or (re)union. Yet horror’s desire to eradicate that which is most shameful remains unsated; with James a surrogate for the nation-audience’s desire to have its fears and shame punished and eradicated. James’ death is uneasy, deeply unsettling in its very banality, spectacularised if not spectacular. He helplessly awaits the repeated

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203 In a symbolic wedding cum massacre, with the eponymous strangers as witnesses, the couple’s joined hands spotlight the engagement ring Kristen had earlier refused.
plunging of the knife into his torso, dying not as ‘husband’ but as again symbolically ‘feminised’ – bound, acted upon and penetrable.

**Conclusion: “There’s nowhere to go”**

*Cloverfield* offers an innovative genre hybrid to explore the significance of a highly mediated but restricted, ground-level experience of terror. Like *WTC*, it presents male protagonists as overwhelmed, and provocatively suggests that male and national insufficiencies not only precede but may invite terror. It also centrally explores notions of containment, specifically the struggle to contain the monster and the horror of its attack, if not visually within the frame, then generically and narratively, in articulating the ‘quest’ for male redemption and ‘remasculinisation’. Firstly, in its redemptive quest *Cloverfield* endeavours to impose a comprehensible narrative response and generic structure onto an otherwise *too large, too excessive* experience, to contain the terror depicted. Similarly, in his quest, Rob as Everyman develops a displaced response (and ‘smaller’ expectations) to a terror event and monster that he is otherwise incapable of directly countering. Yet the film’s aesthetic and stylistic choices, its divergences from genre conventions, its directly challenging females and its violently disruptive monster, inevitably frustrate such containment strategies and, as such, the success of the redemptive quest itself.

Throughout, *Cloverfield*’s hand-held personal aesthetic explores not only the limits and inadequacy of representation but also communicates the instability, vulnerability and insufficiency of the young, urban American male by destabilising (the power of) looking. Indeed, *Cloverfield*’s employment of a hand-held video aesthetic, which foregrounds restricted vision and limited knowledge, significantly communicates the monster’s frightening unknowability for character and audience alike. Moreover, Everyman masculinity is effectively unredeemed in *Cloverfield* because the monster-stranger is and remains unavailable to the male protagonists – and the audience. In this respect, *Cloverfield* cannot redeem Rob’s ‘protective’ inadequacy, it persists even after his attempts to reverse and redeem it via a displaced quest response. Confined to the limited and unsteady victim-perspective and absent monster point-of-view shots, the monster not only resists representation, but also remains ‘ unknowable’.
Ultimately, *Cloverfield* highlights not only how the unknowable monster confirms masculinity as unstable, vulnerable and doomed, emblematised and communicated through the hand-held camera, but also how the personal camera cannot ‘capture’ or contain the massive threat of its underrepresented giant monster. The film is unsuccessful in containing anxieties and uncertainties associated with its troubled masculinities, even after their apparent recuperation and reassertion.

Ultimately, *Cloverfield* implies there is *no* safe space for the characters – and ‘no secure seat of spectatorship’ for the audience. This is exemplified in the open vulnerability of Beth’s apartment building, upon which a neighbouring building has fallen. Beth’s apartment is a ‘frightening space’, ripped apart by the monster and now exposed to the outside; the home permeable and vulnerable to further attack. The home-city-battlefield, all hopelessly and frighteningly blurred or collapsed, can no longer be a place of return or reinvigoration, nor can ‘home’ be restored through the heterosexual couple. The monster (and the military response) fatally disrupts and refuses the possibility of safe haven – as Rob acknowledges at film’s end: “There’s nowhere to go”. Far from renewal and reaffirmation, *Cloverfield* offers only total obliteration and the ambiguous prospects of the horrific persistence of the terror-threat. While the Department of Defense title signals that society survives – and we watch the film after all – everyday life has been terminally disrupted. Through the Everyman experience, *Cloverfield* represents a shift from ‘disaster response’ to the individual, subjective experience of terror – panicked, partial and uncertain. Refiguring Sontag, Broderick (1993) persuasively argues that pre-millennial apocalyptic SF-disaster movies are rather an imagining beyond disaster to survival. Yet *Cloverfield*’s state of permanent embracing fear, restricted vision and limited knowledge, and inscrutable monster-stranger, seemingly signals not only a limited post-9/11 imagination of masculine redemption but an overwhelming imagination of the inevitability of *dying in* disaster.

While Phillips (2008) notes how exhausting, unrelenting and disturbing the ending is, and the distinct absence of American ‘triumphalism’, perhaps *Cloverfield* and *WTC* conclude somewhat similarly. *Cloverfield* unleashes an excessive monster that, like the absent terrorists in *WTC*, implies the entwined inadequacies of generic (narrative and formal) containment and ‘remasculinisation’, of containing masculine
instabilities and insufficiencies through genre and narrative. In *WTC*, normative masculinities cannot be convincingly redefined or reasserted against the absence of the terror threat. Similarly, Rob’s ‘remasculinisation’ through the quest (and Hud’s as documentarian) flails helplessly against the unknowability of the monster’s threat. In *Cloverfield*, the monster-stranger’s absolute alterity – reinforced, exemplified and exacerbated by the limitedness of the personal camera – articulates how the undefined, elusive terror-threat troubles conventional genre and narrative strategies to manage and contain its terror.

In the end, *Cloverfield* suggests that absent knowing ‘what it is’ or ‘why this is happening’, the unknowable monster-as-stranger remains ‘America’s own monster’ and leaves its Everyman masculine inadequacy unredeemed. The next chapter explores whether restrictions on the capacity of the Everyman to ‘remasculinise’ following terror hold for a male protagonist who fulfils typical genre expectations of the hero, a ‘muscular’ military-scientific figure embodied by an action star. Like the Everyman, the ‘expert’ protagonist is ‘feminised’ early in the post-apocalyptic world. Yet, as professionally representative of institutional masculinity, does he more substantively ‘remasculinise’ and restore the destroyed nation in what is a more conventional post-apocalyptic SF film?
Chapter Three – *I Am Legend*

“I can still fix this”: Remasculinising ‘Protective’

Masculinity & Becoming a Monstrous Saviour

This chapter examines another indirect representation of terror, focusing more on a world after large-scale catastrophe, and the domestic experience of the ‘war on terror’. *I Am Legend*, though, offers a more cinematically conventional SF representation of the post-apocalyptic encounter with a monstrous ‘terror-Other’ than *Cloverfield*. While *I Am Legend*’s monstrous threats are perhaps similarly indeterminate – what indeed are they? – they mark a ‘turn’ inwards across the ‘terror-threat’ films, articulating fears about and the desire to discipline and dehumanise the perceived ‘terror-Other’ within – the internal component of ‘savage war’ that Slotkin (2001) identifies. The film moves temporally outwards from ‘Ground Zero’ (although perhaps not for its psychologically damaged protagonist), extending *Cloverfield*’s explorations of the local, immediate and horrifying experience of living through terror to the experience of living with (the permanent potential of) terror; living in an ongoing, unrelenting state of insecurity and vulnerability. This chapter also extends the exploration of ‘fathers’ and uniformed roles in *WTC*, explicitly linking the paternal and professional ‘protective’ aspects, seemingly to recuperate the failed ‘father figure’, both actual and symbolic or institutional (as military scientist), to restore individual fatherhood and the nation respectively.

This chapter initially outlines how *I Am Legend* genders the apocalypse, establishing female culpability and ‘feminising’ its militarised ‘final man’, who likewise replaces the absent ‘mother’. The film thus establishes its protagonist’s destabilised hybrid identity, the hero variously questioning his ‘protective’ credentials, both professionally – in charge of the failed attempt to avert apocalyptic plague – and in symbolically erasing his status as (also) father. *I Am Legend* articulates professional and paternal guilt through traumatic repetition and the accompanying desire to return to the time *before* apocalypse in order to both prevent and erase it. I then explore the hero’s use of store mannequins to examine how threatened individual identity and
society are initially sustained, but ultimately destabilised, through the (self-conscious) performance of consumption, which otherwise elides race and sex. In doing so, and in consideration also of Will Smith’s star persona, I pay particular attention to both an earlier adaptation, *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971), starring Charlton Heston, and another touchstone text, *The World, The Flesh, and The Devil* (MacDougall, 1959) (henceforth *TWTFTD*), starring Harry Belafonte. The chapter also outlines the unsettling indeterminacy of, and lack of engagement with, the ‘terror-Other’, who nonetheless functions also as Neville’s monstrous mirror. The final section explores female figures as redeemed *and* redeemers, troubling dominant critical opinion about how masculine/paternal redemption is seemingly figured through sacrificial death to ‘save’ a symbolic second ‘family’ *and* the fledgling village-nation. While *I Am Legend* seemingly blames women for the apocalypse and replaces mothers through Neville’s assumption of the maternal role, the arrival of a symbolic ‘first mother’ not only redeems women but makes masculine redemption possible. The film ostensibly restores normative notions of masculinity by privileging militarised masculinity, consumption, individualism and a Christological worldview. It further valorises ‘protective’ professional-fathers, assuages guilt through redemptive male sacrifice, and recovers institutional masculinities as foundational in the reinvigoration of ‘America’. However, in consideration also of the film’s original-but-replaced ending, I finally examine whether *I Am Legend* complicates or undermines sacrificial paternal redemption and ‘resurrection’, not only via female/Other redeemers, but through the final breach of the ‘American’ home-fortress and the hero becoming a ‘monstrous’ ‘terror-Other’, the suicide bomber.

*I Am Legend & Post-9/11 America*

*I Am Legend* is the third filmic adaptation of Richard Matheson’s famed SF-horror 1954 novel and stars Will Smith as the apparent sole human survivor of a viral plague that wipes out much of the world’s population and turns the rest into mindlessly violent ‘vampire-zombies’. Set three years after the ‘apocalypse’ in an eerily empty New York City, the film depicts the struggle for survival and search for a cure by its
‘final man’, military scientist Robert Neville. Battling isolation, psychic disintegration and survivor’s guilt as much as the ‘vampire-zombie’ ‘terror-Other’, a series of flashbacks cumulatively reveal the traumatic death of Neville’s wife and daughter early in the outbreak. However, with the arrival of two other survivors, Neville must sacrifice himself to protect the cure and save the symbolic second ‘family’ and a survivors’ colony that may exist.

Each version variously marries SF and horror, exploring fears that “generalise across cultures and times” of being alone in a threatening world, isolated and preyed upon (Clasen, 2010, p.317). Yet each also explores contemporary cultural and sociopolitical crises and uncertainties, from post-WWII anxieties and Cold War atomic fears to Vietnam. Matheson’s novel addresses post-WWII atomic fears, changes in urban populations, race relations and white anxieties and was regularly adapted for the screen throughout the 1960s and early 1970s (see also Patterson, 2005). Although I Am Legend is loosely based on the source novel, it most avowedly reworks Omega Man, which transforms Neville into a military scientist and literal Christ figure and explores (geographically displaced) Cold War fears. It also seemingly represents a somewhat incoherent and confused/ing parody of the racial, gender and sexual politics of late 1960s America and the subsequent unsettling of (white) male power – and ultimately recentres white institutional masculinity through Christ-like sacrifice. For example, although also about urban decay more generally, Nama (2008; see also Subramanian, 2010) associates the rhetoric of the Family – an

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204 I here re-purpose Clover’s (1992) influential designation of the ‘final girl’ in slasher horror.
205 The novel details the daily struggles, particularly psychological, of its Everyman survivor, Robert Neville, in the aftermath of a viral vampire plague outbreak. Neville daily kills and experiments on vampires – in an attempt to find a cure through scientific means – and is nightly under siege by vampires (led by a former acquaintance). The novel’s description of state-operated burnings and mass graves and the protagonist’s Aryan visage clearly invoke the spectres of WWII and the Holocaust.
206 Although many reviews of the film, often also noting that Omega Man’s scriptwriters receive a story credit, concentrate on Matheson’s original, Matheson declares the film bears little relationship to his 1954 classic novel (Bradley, 2010).
207 An earlier Italian/American co-production, The Last Man On Earth (Ragona, 1964) (hereafter TLMOE), with a script originally written by Matheson but later altered (he uses the pseudonym ‘Logan Swanson’), starring Vincent Price, is the first film adaptation to make ‘Neville’ a scientist and Christ-figure. TLMOE consciously evokes WWII and Cold War atomic fears, and its emaciated and slow-moving vampires evoke the Holocaust and are a precursor to Romero’s zombies. Although named Morgan, I refer to all versions as Neville to aid comprehension. The foregrounding of civil rights in Vietnam-era America is also evident in Romero’s The Night of the Living Dead (1968), avowedly ‘inspired’ by Matheson’s novel but only loosely evoking the Cold War as the outbreak’s cause. The film transforms Matheson’s vampires into zombies to explore the internal and intergenerational conflicts besetting America, and particularly those of race and civil rights by virtue of its Everyman black protagonist. The novel too is claimed to represent “a stark concretisation of white racial [and cultural] anxieties in 1950s America” (Patterson, 2005, p.24), particularly in relation to changes in urban populations.
albino-like cult violently opposed to Neville’s modern existence – not only with the civil rights movement and unrest of the late sixties but with black militancy. That said, although each version explores anxieties of modernity, race and gender, it is invariably more concerned with the lonely experience of its ‘final men’, however obliquely, than with its monsters.

Despite the revolving attachment of various directors and stars throughout the 1990s, a contemporary remake of *I Am Legend* seemingly only acquired renewed *raison d’être* following 9/11. The film is specifically relevant to post-9/11 America, variously recalling the scenes of destruction and rhetoric following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Yet the film’s evocation of the sociocultural and political climate that succeeded the attacks – exacerbated by the ensuing anthrax scare in the weeks succeeding 9/11 – is perhaps most significant. Burns (2009, p.31), writing on how *I Am Legend* draws on the cultural memory of 9/11, argues the “memory of lived disaster runs beneath images of imagined disaster”. Thus, the film’s relevance is twofold: *I Am Legend*’s “sombre mood and persistent sense of loss, as well as scenes of panic” (Westwell, 2011, p.833) shown in flashbacks, depict not so much the experience of a terror event, but the memory of it and of thereafter living with terror (and after loss).

Most straightforwardly, *I Am Legend* evokes 9/11 and its aftermath through the relocation of events to New York from Los Angeles, which spotlights “post-9/11 Manhattan as an epicentre of horror” (Phillips, 2007; see also Hantke, 2011). Neville’s daily broadcast from the lower Manhattan seaport where his wife and daughter died, couples ‘survivor’ and ‘New York’, animating cultural memories of New York “as a central site for loss and as a place that has suffered” (King, 2012, p.151). This also connects *I Am Legend* to *TWTFTD*, a critically overlooked touchstone and post-apocalyptic film also predominantly set in New York, which follows a miner, Ralph Burton, who frees himself from a mine collapse to find a

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208 Warner Bros. first restarted development in 1995, and numerous stars including an Arnold Schwarzenegger-Ridley Scott team were attached. *I Am Legend* was the sixth highest-grossing film and DVD in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

209 See Mitchell, 2008; Mulligan, 2008; Subramanian, 2010; Brayton, 2011; Hantke, 2011; Westwell, 2011; King, 2012 for similar observations.

210 Matheson’s novel is set in LA, as is *Omega Man, TLMOE*, putatively set in NYC is perhaps more reminiscent of LA given it was filmed around the outskirts of Rome.
world suddenly emptied after atomic poisoning. Likewise starring an iconic black crossover star, Harry Belafonte – albeit one more explicitly aligned with black activism and civil rights – *TWTFTD* explores Cold War atomic anxieties but also race and gender relations, post- and pre-apocalypse. Initially finding companionship in repurposed mannequins that nonetheless communicate a sense of the persistence of racial and cultural prejudices even after civilisation has ostensibly ended, issues of race and sex are explicitly explored when two other survivors – a white female and later a white male – arrive.

Additionally, *I Am Legend* also engages in repeated rhetorical designations and echoes of New York as ‘Ground Zero’. In Neville’s flashback to events early in the outbreak, he (in military uniform) attempts to evacuate his wife and daughter from Manhattan. A presidential radio address echoes President Bush’s characterisation of the threat post-9/11: “And make no mistake, my fellow Americans, we are at war for our very survival”. In subsequently arguing with his wife about his responsibility to stay, Neville invokes the city as ‘Ground Zero’ and, in uniform, again constitutes it as a battlefield, as in *WTC* and *Cloverfield*. In then asserting, “This is my site”, Neville ties the site of disaster to ‘protective’ paternal and institutional responsibility and masculine responses to disaster – not unlike the gendering of ‘Ground Zero’ in *WTC* – with ‘ownership’ implied also via a responsibility towards and for place. In many respects, the deleterious effects of Neville’s psychological obsession with place are registered in his inability to establish emotional distance from the site of disaster and loss and his consequent inability to leave ‘Ground Zero’. 211

The existing literature on *I Am Legend* focuses primarily on race and trauma, and the film’s conservative and capitalist tropes. King (2012) writes from a trauma studies perspective, in exploring *I Am Legend* as a ‘sacrificial allegory’ and a Vietnam-era remake of *Omega Man*. Hantke (2011) also explicitly considers the film in relation to various Cold War discourses, notably exploring the film in relation to both ‘containment’ and ‘integration’. In this vein, Nama’s (2008) well-reputed exploration of ‘blackness’ in SF cinema considers *I Am Legend* in relation to Smith’s screen persona, but also in relation to *Omega Man*. Brayton (2011; see also Subramanian,

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211 This is reminiscent of first responders and workers post-9/11 attachment to a site that contained the bodies of comrades and victims to whom they felt connected and responsible.
2010) likewise primarily reads the film through discourses of race and trauma. Yet while a racial focus necessarily includes consideration of masculine discourses, a more specific critical focus on Neville’s readily assumed heroism and remasculinisation is pressing. Moreover, numerous pieces unconsciously conflate Smith’s star persona with his hero Neville, especially in relation to race discourses. Nevertheless, while much of the literature on the film at times mirrors the film’s much-criticised incoherence, the overwhelming critical perspective asserts the film’s conservative ideology, with Boyle’s (2009) analysis particularly attesting the film’s neo-conservative, capitalist ideology in contrast with *Children of Men* (Cuaron, 2006). That said, Hantke (2011) recognises the potential import of the film’s incoherence, reading beyond its ‘dominant’ conservative tropes and considering the film’s ‘oppositional’ messages. He finally wonders whether *I Am Legend* will eventually be recognised for its “right-wing politics or its acknowledgement of [ambivalent and incoherent] complexity in the margins” (p.183). This chapter thus represents a significant intervention on the side of the film’s ‘complexity’, particularly as a consequence of its ambivalence and incoherence.

**Science Fiction Cinema & Apocalypse**

Numerous scholars claim a significant increase in cinematic representations of apocalypse post-9/11, which Renner (2012) attributes to multiple terror, environmental and economic events.212 Such claims tend to downplay or ignore the rise and continued resonance post-9/11 of millennial anxieties in apocalyptic blockbusters from the mid-1990s, but the features of cinematic apocalypses do connect significantly to issues of national identity, gender and ‘remasculinisation’. That said, while pre-millennial blockbusters were preoccupied with impending apocalypse, a number of more recent films are post-apocalyptic, depicting a world after catastrophe and a sustained period of devastation, including *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009) and *The Book of Eli* (The Hughes Brothers, 2010).213 In this respect, rather than

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212 See also Totaro, 2008; Pollard, 2011; Wallis & Aston, 2011 for similar claims on an increase in apocalyptic themes and imagery in post-9/11 Hollywood.

213 While Copier (2008) claims renewal is not necessary in contemporary evocations, Rosen (2008) defines these as “neo-apocalyptic” texts rather than apocalyptic.
Sontag’s famed ‘imagination of disaster’, Broderick (1993), writing about post-nuclear cinematic Armageddon and survivorist heroes, argues that post-apocalyptic SF cinema predominantly affords an ‘imagination of survival’. Given I Am Legend focuses on the effects of destruction and only later reveals their cause in (fragmented, partial) flashbacks, it offers a narrativisation of survival as much as a depiction of post-apocalypse. Indeed, in many respects, I Am Legend suggests that the real horror rests in being the ‘survivor’; isolated, besieged, guilty and struggling to continue.

In apocalypse narratives, the apocalypse typically initiates some form of rebirth and renewal, however tentative, local or partial, following the annihilation of the corrupt world order; the cataclysm a form of punishment, retribution, or judgement against humanity. In classical and biblical examples it thus presents not only a time of tribulation, but also provokes the revelation or unveiling of dormant-though-desirable human qualities, for example, and a final victory. As Charles (2009, p.3) recognises, apocalyptic films “delineate a purged world ripe for reconstruction”, and Nilges (2010, p.30) argues that a key appeal “is that post-destruction societies present simplified versions of life that stand opposed to the complexity of our present”. Thus, apocalypse functions to simplify life and cleanse the world – as Anna tells Neville, “The world is quieter now”, although in I Am Legend this primarily means a ‘post-Fordist’ consumer society seemingly without the ‘problems’ of other people or labour. Hollywood thus often nostalgically represents a return to and reinstallation of an imagined past through an imagining of catastrophe, particularly through (refigured) gender roles and the return of the ‘father’, notions that will be explored later in the chapter.

The critical reception of I Am Legend routinely praises the film’s recreation of a post-apocalypse New York – “a sense of wonder mingled with dread” (Zacharek, 2007) and “a haunting, desolate, plausible beauty” (Ansen, 2007). While critics praise I Am Legend’s initial meditation on loneliness and despair, they disparage its final act’s generic shift to B-movie horror. Stevens (2007), for example, suggests the representation of post-apocalypse New York provokes thoughts about imperial decline and 9/11, before the arrival of the ‘terror-Other’, a hybrid of sorts of the

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214 See also Ebert, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Puig, 2007; Scott, 2007; Stevens, 2007.
vampire and zombie, signals the audience is “safely back in Hollywood”. Such criticism, which primarily centres on the film’s CGI monsters and desire for a conclusive ending, is echoed in critical reviews – an “old-fashioned Hollywood B-movie” that is “apolitical to the bone” (Morris, 2007) and “a schlocky zombie horror flick” (Puig, 2007). Yet this mistakenly implies that I Am Legend’s sociopolitical currency and relevance is muted by the film’s genre trappings.

As outlined in the Introduction, Hollywood genre films, and particularly SF, are historically considered to often address current sociopolitical anxieties and concerns associated with ‘American’ national identity, particularly in periods of crisis. King (2012, p.128) argues persuasively that I Am Legend, just like the supposedly more ‘serious’ films that preceded it, such as United 93, (re)deploys the rhetoric, iconography and imagery of 9/11 to “revise, rewrite and remember history” and facilitate ‘recovery’. Indeed, she asserts I Am Legend is a post-9/11 ‘sacrificial allegory’ – and part of a wave of ‘sacrificial films’ in the years following 9/11 – **by virtue** of being an ‘empty’ blockbuster, in displacing the traumas of the attacks to make sense of them (p.163). According to King (p.129), these remakes doubly displace 9/11, onto fiction **and** in returning to the Vietnam-era, to ‘replay’ anxieties purportedly disrupted by 9/11 and Vietnam “about America’s identity as an allegedly masculine nation-state”. I Am Legend encourages ‘moving on’ not only through narrative, but via an already familiar story, that is, “to move forward with a return to the past” (p.130); both evidence of destabilisation **and** a way to respond to it. Narrative structure, generic tropes and resolution also serve to ‘contain’ catastrophe and facilitate ‘recovery’, providing meaning and coherence, as Copier (2008) notes.

**Gendering the Apocalypse, Feminising the ‘Final Man’**

Yet apocalypse narratives also often represent male redemption and ‘traditional’ representations of race and gender. Indeed, Copier (2008, pp.42-43), writing about 1990s Hollywood apocalypse films, claims classical and popular apocalyptic

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215 The ‘vampire-zombie’ ‘terror-Other’, and how it also relates to the recuperation of Neville’s masculinity, is discussed later in the chapter.

216 See also Ansen, 2007; Ebert, 2007; McCarthy, 2007.
discourses are associated with ‘masculine ideals’ of self-mastery and power, and characterized by a “malignant representation of women”. *I Am Legend* explicitly genders the apocalypse by linking it to the professional female and implying its ‘feminising’ impact on its ‘final man’ protagonist. In an opening television interview, Dr Alice Krippin (uncredited) announces her team’s cure for cancer via viral mutation.²¹⁷ Krippin tellingly – albeit certainly not elegantly – likens the virus to a very fast car being driven by a very bad man with the cure representing ‘his’ replacement by a cop, symbolically seeking to modify or re-engineer undesirable male behaviour. As Figures 3.1 and 3.2 indicate, a sharp cut to an empty, radically depopulated metropolis clearly links the female scientist with bringing forth the apocalypse, although this seems more an instance of well-intentioned but catastrophic female scientific ‘overreaching’ (Carroll, 1990). In this sense, as in *Cloverfield*, blame for catastrophe is initially displaced onto the female in *I Am Legend*.

Later, as Neville re-watches retrieved morning television news video from before the viral apocalypse, a male newsreader describes “ongoing mutations” of the cancer cure, with Krippin notably pictured in the screen’s top left corner. Indeed, while it is conventional to assign blame to science in the sub-genre, it is telling that the Krippin virus, unlike the ‘cure’, is named after her; female scientist and apocalyptic virus eponymous. The report establishes Neville as an adversary or counter, attempting to reverse her errors; Neville (self-)defined against Krippin, both female scientist and virus. Copier (2008, p.44) asserts that apocalyptic Hollywood films link professional women with apocalypse to “resolve a crisis in the gender system” through “enact[ing] the subordination of women”. Brayton (2011, p.73) rightly observes that the “promotion of Neville’s ‘manliness’ relies on an active displacement of women through most of the film”, and Krippin’s ostensible excision after the opening “reinforc[es] the gendered boundaries of science” and facilitates the film’s interest in masculinity.

**FIGURE 3.1**

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²¹⁷ While King (2012, p.156) mistakenly claims the film “initially blames Neville for his suffering”, she cogently observes that *I Am Legend* “emphasises mediation” throughout (p.146).
FIGURE 3.2

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*I Am Legend* also militarises its post-apocalyptic ‘final man’ as urban game hunter, alone but for his dog. Indeed, the film introduces Neville’s sports car and rifle *before* him, his later professional-paternal ‘protective’ identity prefigured by each. Yet Neville’s vulnerable, compensatory masculine identity is foregrounded as militarised, before paternal or scientific – and buttressed “by fast cars, guns, […] and shirtlessness”, as in *Omega Man* (Subramanian, 2010, p.49). Gilligan (2012, p.177) notes a shift in recent SF and action cinema whereby the construction and performance of masculine identities has been displaced from the body and onto clothing and gadgets. Yet Ansen (2007) explicitly associates the masculine star body, the “buff and chiselled Will Smith” – who seemingly subsumes the character he portrays – with the car and the gun. Regardless, the ‘final man’s’ hunt of wild deer is violently disrupted by a lioness that takes his kill, her male mate tellingly consigned to protecting the litter and mirroring his own emasculation. Despite his gadgets, the gendered apocalypse emasculates and marginalises even the militarised male in the post-apocalyptic ‘urban jungle’, seemingly unable to control his environment.

The cumulative impacts of this emasculation and marginalisation of the ‘final man’ are reiterated in the succeeding scene, with Neville figuratively ‘feminised’, preparing a meal for Sam wearing an apron and then bathing the dog, gently chastising the dog for not eating his dinner. As outlined in the Introduction, such representations of the male-action star as *also* mother are not unusual, and the absenting and replacing of mother is similarly evident in the post-apocalyptic *The Road*, Smith’s *The Pursuit of Happyness* and even *The Kingdom* (Chapter Four). As Copier (2008, p.108) observes,

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218 The gun similarly precedes the introduction of the hunter-protagonist in *The Book of Eli*, suggesting a post-apocalyptic nuclear winter defined both by the gun and (man-made) violence.

219 Although Neville is first represented as hunter, he is ultimately the hunted – as is Burton in *TWTFTD*, hunted by a fellow survivor – “as much prey as predator” (Subramanian, 2010, p.49). Additionally, Neville does not kill the lioness after seeing her litter (under the protection of her male mate), with the camera’s representation of Neville’s psychological perspective clearly most interested in the litter and the male, and seemingly the reason he does not shoot her.

220 This moment is reminiscent of similarly emasculated males such as Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962) and Clifford Groves (Fred MacMurray) in *There’s Always Tomorrow* (Sirk, 1956) amongst other examples.
this not only denotes the contemporary fractured family and how the apocalypse threatens humanity and the family, but maternal absence ensures threats can only be solved by the father. While the paternal aspect of Neville’s identity will be more fully discussed later in the chapter, his maternal aspect is not noted in the scholarly literature on *I Am Legend*. As a ‘final person’, Neville of course needs to assume both masculine and feminine roles, not just ‘feminised’ but also ‘mother’. Nevertheless, the persistent pre-eminence of females pre- and post-apocalypse (preliminarily indicated by the lioness), the coupling of virus and female scientist (and her subsequent excision) and Neville’s repeated, persistent emasculation disconcertingly imply female culpability for ‘feminising’ the militarised male, a ‘final hunter’ relegated to canned foodstuffs through his inability to master his post-apocalyptic environment.

**Containing Race & Servicing the Nation in Science Fiction**

While not surprising for a film putatively about the ‘final man’, critical reviews dwelled not only on Smith’s performance, but his performance as star. Smith’s star persona renders Neville’s isolated experience “strangely appealing”: “There is something graceful and effortless about this performance, which not only shows what it might feel like to be the last man on earth, but also demonstrates what it is to be a movie star” (Scott, 2007). Yet in many respects, as is typical both in SF and in relation to Smith’s star image, race is ambivalently expressed in *I Am Legend*. That is, it is ‘invisible’ and ‘inexpressible’, yet an undeniable marker of black survival. Indeed, similar to *WTC*, the film tries to erase ethnic difference amongst the survivors, but also displaces it (and race) onto the ‘monstrous’ Other. However, while Brayton (2011, p.66) claims *I Am Legend* is representative of a recent spate of Hollywood films that visualise ‘multicultural’ disaster or apocalyptic worlds, this is most certainly not a post-9/11 development, as noted in relation to Nama’s (2008) conflicting arguments in the Introduction. Scholars argue that throughout Smith’s

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221 See also Ansen, 2007; Foundas, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Morgenstern, 2007; Morris, 2007; Stevens, 2007; Zacharek, 2007. *TWTFTD* and *Omega Man* similarly showcase (self-conscious) instances of star performance, in Belafonte’s singing and political persona and Heston’s star body and performance aesthetic.

222 This also explored in relation to *The Kingdom* (Chapter Four).
career, the elision or displacing of racial difference tends to preserve rather than destabilise white dominance. In Smith’s earlier SF roles it is critical commonplace to assert that his blackness is inevitably subordinated in the service of saving the nation and (white) state power (see Subramanian, 2010; Magill, 2009). For example, in Independence Day (Emmerich, 1996), Smith’s character is used “to assuage anxieties about the Other” (Magill, 2009, p.129). Moreover, his films and star image “simultaneously mark his blackness while foreclosing its narrative significance” (Subramanian, 2010, p.44). In this sense, and in contrast to Belafonte’s more explicitly political racial persona, Smith’s crossover success is routinely attributed to his ambivalent star image. While Magill (2009) recognises that there are multiple discourses of his stardom for multiple audiences, Smith is nonetheless conventionally considered to possess a ‘safe’ or non-threatening blackness (see also King, 2002) – one that both acknowledges and defuses racial stereotypes – and even transcends race (see also Corliss, 2007; Brayton, 2011).223

Yet Smith’s blackness is also undeniably ‘visible’. This is particularly so in mainstream SF cinema, in which – while preoccupied with representations of difference (especially via the monster) – Nama (2008, p. 2) finds that black characters and especially black protagonists are rare. As such, “Smith has forged a sea change in Hollywood’s expression of heroic masculinity” in SF cinema, which “opens up multiple levels of dialogue around race, visibility, and identity” (Palmer, 2011, p.29). More than this, in black discourses the very presence of Smith in SF fantasies implies the visibility and survival of blackness in the future; one “that the previous generic absence precluded” (Palmer, 2011, p.38). This is given added significance when the black man is put in the atypical (and central) position of saving the world.224 The focus on his muscular star body similarly makes race irrevocably visible, but equally highlights issues of containment.

This ambivalence is associated with Smith’s star image and contemporary Hollywood’s attitudes to race; a shared capacity to make visible and to blur. Nama’s

223 Smith’s success in music and TV and early Hollywood roles cemented his star image as ‘sexually non-aggressive’, heterosexual but not hypersexual (Magill, 2009).
224 Likewise, when Smith helms a project created for a white actor, e.g. Arnold Schwarzenegger in I Am Legend, racial messages are invariably altered as the black body carries racial messages not contained in the material (Tolliver, 2003).
work reflects this conflict when he characterises Smith as championing “a more central, defiant, and charismatic version of black cool” in SF, yet also describes Smith as ‘racially non-threatening’ (p.39, cited in Palmer, 2011, p.34). Palmer (2011, p.34) argues the notion Smith transcends race “is the cultural and economic cushion” for an entertainment industry “that has not yet figured out how to address Smith’s actual blackness”. This almost implies “that Smith’s race is something that needs to be transcended”, an aspect exacerbated by “continually evoking the concept of threat through its perceived absence”, and serves to blur Smith’s racial identity (Palmer, 2011, p.34, emphasis in original). As compelling as Palmer’s analysis of critical readings of Smith is, however, this persistent tension may also in part represent how Smith strategically positions himself, and so downplays Smith’s control of his persona.

Ambivalently Erasing Race, Privileging Class

Palmer’s interpretation also ignores the importance of issues of class over race in relation to Smith’s star image. According to Tolliver (2003), who likewise complicates Smith’s ‘safe’ characterisation, Smith never ‘disappears’ into a role, there is always an “uncontained aura” of his star personality that remains in or hovers over any performance. Indeed, this is particularly evident in the persistence of critical conflations of Smith and his characters already witnessed in this chapter. According to Tolliver, Smith is a (the) signifier of a new, hybridised post-racial identity. Smith’s star image speaks to multiple, disparate audiences and is composed of a series of contradictions and oppositional messages. Yet while his image interrogates and rewrites existing notions of black masculinity, he also consistently “projects a blackness that is voided of its content in order to create new characterisations, to complicate constructions of blackness and to appeal to global markets” (Tolliver,

225 Tolliver (2003) intriguingly suggests the ‘gigantism’ of Hollywood blockbusters “allow[s] innovative black characterisations to slip through”. He, however, overstates Smith’s role in Independence Day and Men In Black (buddy roles rather than star-helmed) and fails to consider the relation of such ‘blockbusters’ to a pre-millennial resurgence in SF-disaster films (Kakadouki, 2002).
Thus, as Tolliver asserts – offering what amounts to an alternate view of Smith’s ‘transcendence’ – social and cultural mobility of identity is central to Smith’s image, that is, “he moves the image of the black man into unclaimed and unexpected spaces”. Smith’s hybridxity marks the intersection of issues of race, class and masculinity, but this means race must be sacrificed and rendered ‘invisible’ to an extent. As such, ambivalently, Tolliver argues Smith’s ‘post-racial’ identity “decentralises and deracialises blackness”. This is particularly evident in *I Am Legend*, and invokes the strange manner in which Smith/Neville is both racially contained and uncontrollable.

For example, Smith/Neville’s blackness is also partially ‘contained’ by being placed in (typically white) mainstream contexts and spaces that ultimately neutralise the perceived ‘threat’ of blackness. While Subramanian’s (2010, pp.49-50) claim that Neville’s four-storey Washington Park brownstone is an upper-middle class signifier that dissociates him from “historical connection to the black community” is certainly debatable, in disavowing blackness, the film does “diffuse the racial implications of white horde (and white zombie-dogs) chasing a lone black man”. More than this, Neville’s attempts to conceal his ‘blackness’ in *I Am Legend* are unsettlingly quite literal. Indeed, on his nightly return home, Neville bleaches (a literal whitening agent) the stairs at the entrance to conceal his location, partially implying that to be black and ‘successful’ in a sense requires ‘de-racing’. This class focus becomes key in understanding how Smith as Neville sustains his identity and performs community post-apocalypse.

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226 Smith’s iconicity is also given meaning domestically by ‘growing visibility and awareness of a black middle class’, cultural ‘reconstruction of the black male image’ in the 1990s, and establishment of a new black cultural presence by post-civil rights generation (Tolliver, 2003).

227 The centrality of Smith’s social and cultural mobility to his star image is evident from his beginnings in music and television, particularly *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (1990-1996).

228 The ‘new identity’ scene in *Men In Black* demonstrates the “price of admission to the mainstream” is the erasure of identity, although Smith’s character’s continued “subversive insistence on style” is significant – “You want to know what the difference is between you and me? I make this look good”) (Tolliver, 2003).
Racing the Monstrous Other

Another aspect of the diffusing of race in SF lies in displacing race, in the ‘racing’ or Othering of the alien as black. That is, despite the ‘structured absence’ of black representation, “blackness and race are often present in SF films as narrative subtext or implicit allegorical subject” (Nama, 2008, p. 2; see also Tolliver, 2003). This is typical in Smith’s SF films, whereby ‘blackness’ is metaphorically transposed onto the alien Other in films like Independence Day and Men In Black (Sonnenfeld, 1997), which thereby “asserts his heroism at the[ir] expense” (Tolliver, 2003). Subsequently, “deraced and repositioned, it allows him an unfamiliar centrality and thus a universal acceptability” – “the race he is defending is everybody’s” (Tolliver, 2003). However, the ‘terror-Other’ in I Am Legend attract widely divergent, competing interpretations, evocative of the tabula rasa quality of zombies in popular culture yet mostly representative of the indeterminacy of their rendering.

Indeed, scholars define the ‘vampire-zombies’, clearly terror agents in their indiscriminate, irrational targeting of the civilian populace, as black, white or ‘Arab/Muslim’ terrorists, and even as more than one. Pak (2010, p.63) argues I Am Legend both confronts race in ‘revisioning’ its protagonist as black, but also uses this “as a way of sidestepping challenging confrontations”. Race and class markers are also offered in I Am Legend when Sam runs into an abandoned building which, in contrast to the lower Manhattan apartment Neville earlier entered, is dilapidated, even condemned, with the huddled ‘terror-Other’ explicitly evoking inner urban black or poor communities. Indeed, the building is marked not only by graffiti, but by symbols reminiscent of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the stencilling of information about corpses on building walls. Brayton (2011) too reads the ‘terror-Other’ through the prism of Katrina, as a proxy for the abandoned black underclass, but quickly reverts to his predominant reading, that is, that they represent white terror. Thus, as in I, Robot (Proyas, 2004), “whiteness becomes a threatening presence through alien alterity, which is reified by the racial identity of the film’s reluctant black hero”
Other scholars extend this association of the ‘vampire-zombies’ with terror, likening them somewhat schematically to terrorists. For example, Subramanian (2010, p.45; see also King, 2012) claims in, Smith’s “star image affirms the multicultural values of the US in implicit contrast with the supposedly fanatical and intolerant Arab terrorist”. Yet matching the post-9/11 characterisation and construction of modern terror, the I Am Legend’s ‘terror-Others’ are an irrational, violent, destructive horde without ideological purpose. Concealed in and by the city, as in Cloverfield invoking the mendacious ‘invisibility’ of the Other. The ‘terror-Other’ are beyond reason and ignore Neville’s final entreaties that he can save them. Although Neville suggests he believes the ‘vampire-zombie’ ‘terror-Other’ can be ‘cured’, he concludes “They’re not gonna stop”, before he reaches for the grenade. They are presented as an unstoppable horde, “[…] an irreconcilable existential threat that can only be tackled with violence” (Westwell, 2011, p.833). Indeed, I Am Legend continues the characterisation of enemies in 1980s action cinema, especially Vietnam films, as anonymous, interchangeable and ‘killable’. Yet perhaps Subramanian’s (2010, p.52) description of the ‘terror-Other’ as ‘colourless’ is most appropriate. Indeed, they even seem to literally change colour, and for example, they are quite bronzed in the derelict building when Neville reluctantly chances upon a group, although they later appear pallid and almost translucent. This not only opens up multiple, oppositional interpretations, in line with Hantke (2011), but marks ‘terror-Other’ as unsettlingly indeterminate, a notion explored in detail later in the chapter.

The Spectacular Star Body

I Am Legend again seeks to recuperate Neville’s initially destabilised masculinity in an early sequence showcasing Neville’s semi-naked torso – or more properly Smith’s

229 Omega Man also mobilises two discourses of whiteness, as diseased and heroic (Subramanian, 2010). African-American Lisa (Rosalind Cash) and Richie are forced to leave the Family when their skin and hair do not turn white, yet Neville later tells Richie (Eric Laneuville) he is receiving, “160-proof Anglo Saxon [blood], baby”. Yet while whiteness is both evil/deadening and Christ-like saviour, Neville too is considered dangerous, complicit, ‘the Man’.
star body – as a marker of ‘ideal’ masculinity. Yet the ambivalence of the black male (star) body, simultaneously visible and invisible, is especially evident when *I Am Legend* spectacularises Neville’s – or rather Smith’s – body when he works out indoors as part of his daily regimen. After ‘unmanning’ Neville whilst hunting and then initially ‘feminising’ him in the home, the film invites us to look at his body as a persistent, untouched marker of ideal masculinity, but nonetheless objectified. The camera fragments Smith’s “hyper-muscular body”, “offered up for the voyeuristic gaze, as an idealised image of (black) male beauty” (Gilligan, 2012, p.179; see also Subramanian, 2010). That said, Neale (1983) observes that male stars, and particularly action stars, have long been objects of the cinematic gaze. During his workout, Smith’s star body – continuing Smith’s persistent association with his athletic physicality since *Ali* (Mann, 2001) – is to be looked at by others, by the audience. In gazing at and spectacularising Smith’s body he is arguably feminised, to-be-looked-at, as well as objectified in terms of race. In the consumption of the star image *I Am Legend*’s focus on Smith’s star body recalls *Omega Man*. However, Heston’s (as Neville) surveillance set-up includes a closed-circuit camera he trains on his living room, and he repeatedly looks at and engages his own screen image, numerously seeking agreement from it, as if distinct from himself. As such, while also signalling his oncoming madness, Heston’s body is often for his own edification, whereas Smith’s Neville repeatedly avers his own reflection.230

The manner in which *I Am Legend* shows Neville build his physique, somewhat extending Tasker’s (1993, p.119) observation that muscles draw attention to “the work put into the male body”, highlights its constructedness. Thus, “whilst Smith’s body initially appears fetishised, his representation is characterised by performance and fragmentation that renders the body and blackness a construction”, rather than naturalised or essentialised (Gilligan, 2012, p.172). In this respect, “the hypermasculine ideal […] is revealed to be a construction”, a result of ongoing work and discipline (p.181). Gilligan further notes that discourses on Smith’s star body since *Ali* have centred on its constructedness and ‘fluidity’, attending to the changes to his body from role to role (e.g. Foundas, 2007; Puig, 2007; *I Am Legend* Production Notes, 2007). As such, Smith’s star body “offers[s] more diverse conceptions of

230 Indeed, when the Family breach his home they destroy the TV screen, quintessential symbol of modernity, but is also a literal star vehicle, last.
ethnicity that are fluid, multiple, and dominated by transformation and performance” (Gilligan, 2012, p.187). Thus, the presentation of Smith/Neville’s exercising star body serves to re-assert an undermined ideal masculinity centred on physical strength and capacity in the face of emasculation and marginalisation. Gilligan (p.181) argues Smith “is not simply passive and there to-be-looked-at” because “shown in action”. As Palmer (2011, p.33, emphasis in original) argues, Smith “moves”, “with a physically kinetic intertextual identity as his star (con)text”. However, while Smith’s body appears dynamic – these are ‘moving pictures’ – it remains only a moving on the spot, Neville confined to the home and running indoors on a treadmill – he literally runs nowhere, all the more remarkable in a world apparently free of other people (Figure 3.3). Moreover, the mobile camera highlights and perhaps compensates for his immobility. This again highlights Smith/Neville’s ambivalence, constructed and uncontainable rather than ‘natural’ or ‘essentialised’, but also immobile and (physically) contained, and not so much about race as his character’s vulnerable state.

**FIGURE 3.3**

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**Fragmented Hybridised Identity & Erasing Father**

Just as Smith’s post-racial, hybridised identity is ambivalent, so too is Neville’s ‘protective’ masculinity (Godfrey & Hamad, 2012). In *I Am Legend*, paternal and professional identities are linked, but the hybridised identity is destabilised because of multiple ‘protective’ failures, with his professional capacities questioned and paternal identity erased. An early flashback detailing Neville’s attempt to evacuate his family links his paternal role to his military identity and foregrounds paternal identity as uniformed, as in *WTC*. The first time we see him as a father, he is wearing a military uniform, as soldier-father, a putting on and over that both obscures and shields him as father, as in *WTC*. Paternal and professional guilt are similarly tied to uniformed identity.

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231 Neville is only shown to be a scientist after shown in military uniform as father. That said, while his paternal identity is only
This professional identity is not only military, although this is privileged from the beginning. King observes that a cut from a close-up of Neville’s face on his lab monitor – as he stares blankly into webcam and his own reflected image – to a second flashback depicting his continued attempts to evacuate his family implies that his continued efforts to find a cure “stem directly from his sense of obligation to his family” (2012, p.150). It also ties Neville’s heroism to his perceived paternal responsibilities – and paternal identity to another uniformed identity (scientific). And according to King (p.152) his need to announce his capacity to ‘provide’, repeated thrice in his daily broadcast, similarly announces masculine anxiety and further demonstrates the trauma as feminising. With his public and private ‘positions of authority’ lost, Neville is most damaged by “ruptures in his performance of hegemonic masculinity” (p.150). His professional guilt and shame also has wider implications, given he seemingly spearheaded the government’s response (as TV news and magazine cover imply). Nama (2008) contends that only an apocalyptic context allows the imagining of racial change, ambivalently cuing social change while associating black power with apocalypse and disaster. Either SF apocalypse movies connect Cold War paranoia regarding radioactive contamination and racial contamination in TWTFTD and Omega Man with “the association of the implosion of racial boundaries with dystopian and apocalyptic visions of the future”, or more recently, a black man becomes president as a comet heads towards Earth (e.g. Morgan Freeman in Deep Impact (Leder, 1998)) (Nama, p.7). In Neville’s professional capacity he “failed to save either humanity or his family” casting his scientific work as atonement (Subramanian, 2010, pp.48-49; see also King, 2012), tying his failure to wider society. As a consequence, Neville is visibly shamed by his own name and averts his eyes, when Anna later asks if he is “the Robert Neville”. Thus, while this suggests his endeavours seek atonement, unlike in Cloverfield, his shame is linked to his professional identity as in WTC.

While claims (see Gunn, 2008) that the father is a stand-in for the state in popular cinema often exceed the bounds of the text, they most likely signify the manner in which in the absence of functioning state, the father assumes its symbolic (patriarchal)

tied to his scientific role at film’s end, his name (as Doctor rather than Colonel) is only declared when in a lab coat.
authority. In *I Am Legend*, for example, Neville is deemed representative of the state (Brayton, 2011) and the nation’s trauma (King, 2012). In fact, in *I Am Legend*, as a consequence of apocalypse, Neville becomes not merely representative of the state but replaces it. That said, this often debatable equation is particularly appropriate in *I Am Legend* given the conflation of paternal and professional (military) identity, particularly linking his professional failure to his familial failure. Moreover, the death of his family and the figurative breakdown of society occur simultaneously at the seaport, explicitly linking father and state and implying that *his* redemption lies in *its* restoration.\(^{232}\) Moreover, while apocalypse erases the state, or renders it irrelevant, it is clearly (and problematically) reborn in *I Am Legend*’s survivors’ colony.

Paternal redemption is an acknowledged staple of SF disaster/apocalyptic films, as Copier (2008) similarly recognises, and seemingly no more prevalent than in the 1990s. However, there appears a recent trend in Everyman father-protagonists, in films like *War of the Worlds*, *The Road*, *The Mist* (Darabont, 2007) and 2012. Renner (2012) likewise observes a current focus on ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ protagonists in contemporary apocalyptic cinema, as noted in Chapter Two. More than this, these films primarily detail the attempts of the otherwise maligned Everyman father – neither scientist nor military officer – to recuperate or reassert his threatened familial position.\(^{233}\) In *War of the Worlds* for example, Ray (Tom Cruise) is a working class, dead-beat New Jersey dad. Divorced and estranged from his wife and children, Ray neither holds the respect of his teenage son nor even recalls his daughter’s peanut allergy and has been symbolically replaced as ‘father’ by his ex-wife’s new husband. As such, like *Cloverfield*, the film focuses on the Everyman’s response to terror, as Ray attempts to deliver his children to their mother and the home after Martians attack Earth. Indeed, he in part redeems his earlier insufficiencies as father by, as Godfrey and Hamad (2012) note about post-9/11 action cinema, repeatedly protecting

\(^{232}\) That said, direct responsibility is displaced onto the disintegration of society, with Neville neither deemed collectively responsible as soldier-scientist nor professionally associated with Krippin. On the other hand, Heston’s Neville is associated with (and chastised for) representing the institutions that failed to prevent the ‘plague’ catastrophe – e.g. “Is there anything you can do, doctor? I mean, seeing as you have lost over two-hundred million patients”. Moreover, in *I Am Legend*, his family remain ‘clean’, somewhat displacing his guilt, with numerous critics disparaging how Neville is spared the ordeal of witnessing either their dissolution or horrific ‘resurrection’ (Bradley, 2010; see also Newman, 2007).

\(^{233}\) The shift extends even to more conventional disaster-apocalypse movies like *I Am Legend* and *The Day After Tomorrow*, in which redemptive focus lies in the perceived need to redeem failings as a father (and husband) and restore personal relationships as much as, if not more than, professional ‘disaster response’ and saving society.
his daughter through transgressive violence, although this is distinctly non-professional in Ray’s case. In this way, as Price (2011, p.120) observes, the deficiencies of fatherhood are resolved by a larger crisis. The Everyman male protagonist inevitably needs the disaster as much, if not more, as his family (symbolic stand-ins for American society) needs him when the disaster-apocalypse occurs.

Unlike the non-professional Everyman father, the instabilities of Neville’s fragmented military, scientific and paternal identity/ies are persistently evident. In *I Am Legend*, the maternal-paternal substitution towards Sam is reiterated but displaced, troubled and even erased over the course of the first sequence in the home. As well as figuring the ambivalence of the black star body in SF, Neville’s exercise routine is also ambivalently linked to his *displaced but persistent* familial motivation. His exercising figure is reflected in a China cabinet over photographs of family. The camera tracks right across his glass cabinet. On one side are photos of his wife and daughter, and his reflection lies on the other side, reflected/contained within but also (visually) separated/split from his family (see Figure 3.4). Also connoting their literal separation – in deaths not yet confirmed in the narrative – this explicitly gives paternal purpose to his regimen *but* also suggests his separation and dislocation from wife and child. As such, his paternal motivation is consistently troubled, an aspect missed in both King (2012) and Subramanian’s (2010) analyses. While King (2012) argues the film ‘doubly frames’ Neville in the lab, both on the film screen and his computer monitor, to indicate both his impotence *and* participation in visual economies of violence, the repeated doubling of his image in reflections throughout the film may more demonstrate the fragmentation and splitting of his identity, as also *separating* the professional and paternal aspects of his identity.\(^{234}\)

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\(^{234}\) During the lockdown, Neville also shuts out his own reflection, perhaps implying an unwillingness to ‘see’ his own reflection. Indeed, when he later enters a Darkseekers’ ‘nest’, he is startled by his reflection – as if he not only no longer recognises himself but who (or what) he has become.
More significantly, the fridge displays a pre-outbreak *Time* magazine cover in which a military uniformed Neville is mooted as “Saviour: Soldier, Scientist”. This again fragments his identities, and the subheading further foregrounds his military identity in noting the ‘Lt Colonel’s battle’ against the virus. Boyle (2009, p.3) claims the magazine cover “establishes his place in a neo-conservative [...] disaster-capitalism complex by appealing to fundamentalist ‘knowledge’” and advances/supports “the mythos surrounding Neville’s (and Smith’s) public celebrity” and an exemplar reconnecting and reviving the state through its black military hero (Brayton, 2011). Yet Brayton conveniently ignores and Boyle too easily dismisses an appended question mark, partially over Neville’s face. As Figure 3.5 indicates, Neville’s unsettling addition, in white, cannot go ignored, the question marking his – and inviting the audience’s – doubts about the efficacy of institutions, of celebrity, and the relationship between militarised masculinity and the state.235 In appending a question mark over his uniformed body, Neville questions not only his professional capacity, marking his perceived failure as soldier (and scientist) but his professional identity itself. However, Neville’s paternal guilt, more than professional, is extended to a literal erasure of self as father.236 The magazine cover further fragments and destabilises Neville’s hybrid identity because it specifically obscures Neville in the family photo beneath, erased as father by his hybrid professional (and seemingly divine) identity. Moreover, the electrical tape attaching the magazine to the fridge implies he added it late after he became confined to the home by the outbreak, and thus that Neville effectively erases himself as father.

*(In)security, Urban Space & the Home*

Interpretations of the systemic failure or absence of the military, police and government in recent disaster-apocalypse are conventionally considered critical in

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235 That said, Neville’s association with Marley also invokes a ‘countercultural ethos’ that softens his identification with institutional authority (Lavoie, 2011).

236 The fridge still holds post-it notes detailing appointments and reminders, the calendar frozen on December, although the film’s present lies in September. These objects imply time froze for Neville when his wife and daughter were killed, acknowledging only a frozen *always-present*. Neville also finds a Christmas tree and an untouched newborn baby’s room in an apartment he searches – he leaves it undisturbed, preserving it as a memorial.
scholarly responses. In *War of the Worlds* and *Cloverfield*, the military is shown to be ‘ineffectual’ against the terror threat (Wallis & Aston, p.57). Similarly, in *I Am Legend*, Mulligan (2008, p.32) claims these act “as critical reflections of US military and governmental errors” on 9/11 and Iraq, and following Hurricane Katrina – a claim representative of dominant critical opinion.237 Along with the failed evacuation and failure to find a cure, the disembodied presidential (voice uncredited) announcement of Manhattan’s quarantine over the radio, as Neville unsuccessfully tries to shepherd his family to safety, symbolises authority’s absence; and more like horror than disaster, with the protagonist(s) alone and isolated. In *War of the Worlds*, as in *Cloverfield*, institutional authority is also overwhelmed and ostensibly absent from early in the attack. This also creates a power vacuum within which Ray is able to re-establish his own paternal, male authority (or reassume one he had eschewed). Yet while catastrophe makes authority available to the hero, it also builds expectations towards individualised security responsibilities.

That is, while the depiction of governmental failure “unsettles claims of blamelessness on 9/11” (King, 2012, p.146), institutional failure in *I Am Legend*, rather than indicted, shifts responsibility for security onto the individual. *I Am Legend* thus invokes Hay and Andrejevic’s (2006; see also Subramanian, 2010) assertions that America neo-liberal post-9/11 rhetoric marks the threat to domestic daily life as dispersed and proliferated in order to shift responsibility for security measures onto individuals and personal security regimes tied to modes of consumption. In short, *I Am Legend* depicts an individuated experience of post-apocalyptic survival absent the state and expressed through consumption practices. The failure and/or absence of government institutions build societal expectations in relation to disaster and depoliticises governmental failure and absence. In this sense, *I Am Legend* sells rather than indict insecurity, promoting Homeland Security rhetoric in its post-apocalyptic world about personal security regimes and the citizen-as-soldier and home-as-fortress. Indeed, it equates the two, citizen and home similarly self-sufficient, but also persistently isolated and vulnerable to diffuse, proliferated and vaguely defined threats.

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237 See for example, Mitchell, 2008; Brayton, 2011; Westwell, 2011; King, 2012.
Neville’s family home has been transformed into a private security state-fortress; now wholly functional, more laboratory, gym and armoury than domestic space. Neville’s heavily fortified home-fortress, which Subramanian likens to a consumerist, gated community (2010, p.51; see also Boyle, 2009), is however a place of retreat and hiding. In this sense, Moreman’s (2008) claim that, unlike in other versions, “Neville is not even under direct threat […] , his home secure since unknown to the monsters” misreads both previous film versions and *I Am Legend*. For it is also true that in previous iterations, Neville’s home, although permeable, fragile and penetrable (as if wounded like the hero), is at once exposed but defiantly announced, besieged but predominantly unthreatened and unconcernedly known. As Clasen (2010, p.324) observes in relation to the novel, “the vampires are largely nuisances”; an irritant rather than threat, disdained rather than feared. On the other hand, Neville’s home in Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* is nightly vulnerable and threatened, and although by what exactly remains only vaguely defined at this point, it seemingly represents a far greater threat to the home, which must be completely destroyed when they come inside. Indeed, on his evening returns, Neville bleaches the entrance stairs to cover his tracks and conceal his location, before initiating a comprehensive dusk lockdown – shuttering all windows, and notably featuring an unchanged, memorialised child’s room – in an attempt to secure self and home against the outside world, including other ‘citizens’, that equally admits persistent vulnerability.

*I Am Legend* literalises the consumer-citizen as (first) soldier through the figure of its military scientist, but also destabilises this designation. Neville as citizen-soldier is vigilant and disciplined, evident not only in the transformation of the home into a private security state-fortress but in his exercise regime and reliance on alarms, regimentation and order. Yet the persistent vulnerability of ‘fortress’ and ‘soldier’ is evidenced after the first lockdown, as the camera (re-)enacts Neville’s spatial and psychological retreat from the front door and city beyond, upstairs and into the bathtub. As Lawrence notes, his camera is “a vehicle for the emotional value of every scene”, to convey what Neville feels (*I Am Legend* Production Notes, 2007, p.11). More than reflective, the camera is also compensatory, particularly for Neville’s repeated immobility. The bathtub, earlier a symbol of the everyday, cleansing and familial routine (and bathed in late afternoon sun when he washes his dog), now invokes insecurity and immobility, where Neville now huddles fearfully with dog and
gun against the terrifying shrieks of the still unseen marauding threat. As well as confirming the ‘final man’s’ emasculation, the sequence advances the unceasing necessity of ongoing (consumer) provisions both against insecurity and to displace existential fear.

Neville’s vulnerable relationship to public space similarly demonstrates the enduring insecurity of even the ‘final man’. Neville’s exercise regime, running on a treadmill and working out indoors, only reinforces this vulnerability. As opposed to Heston’s Neville, whose jogging is incorporated into his daily search-and-destroy missions for the Family’s ‘nest’, Neville has only tenuous dominion over urban space, with space outside the home controlled by the ongoing, potential threat of the ‘terror-Other’. When Neville leaves the home he warily surveys the area from his stoop and uses his dog as scout even in spaces he has ‘constructed’, like the DVD store. Far from ‘infiltrating hives’, as King (2012) mistakenly claims, he only enters their space unwillingly. Neville feels unsafe even in the fullness of day, threat not only everywhere but always. King (2012, p.153) also claims that Neville’s use of maps suggests he methodically ‘stalks’ the ‘terror-Other’. Yet, unlike in previous versions, Neville uses maps and searches to scavenge for supplies (and confirm isolation and loss), rather than hunt and destroy his tormenters. While Neville’s sight is militarised, the gun an addendum of self when he looks through his scope, King’s (2012, p.149) claim that the repeated use of the rifle perspective “implies that experiences of spectatorship and violence have become inextricably linked” overstates the mastery of this gaze and of Neville-as-hunter. Rather than restabilising “the politics of spectatorship” (King, 2012, p.153), and becoming predator rather than prey, in the film Neville never actively hunts the ‘terror-Other’, as King alleges, but deer. Moreover, far from mastery, the scope is compensatory, and exposes the insufficiencies of Neville’s unaided human senses (which extend to his hearing) – he must resort to seeing with the assistance of his scope when Sam senses what he does not (he is golfing rather than hunting). Nonetheless, a state of enduring, dispersed and proliferated threat naturalises the notion that individuals must be responsible for their own security, the citizen a soldier and the home a fortress against the ongoing, active

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238 Neville’s vulnerable relationship to public or urban space is also perhaps symptomatic of the changed relationship to space in modern urban life.
threat of (all) Others. Selling insecurity depends on, rather than dispels, the perception
of persistent threat and persistent vulnerability.

Mannequins: Reifying & Performing Gender & Consumption

However, post-apocalyptic survival and social renewal in *I Am Legend* seemingly requires not only individual security measures but solitary, unfettered consumption and recreation (a characteristic of many survivalist tales). That is, rather than imagining the end of capitalism, as Clover (2008, p.7) claims, Neville (and the film) variously tries to sustain and reconstruct it. Hay and Andrejevic (2006) claim American neo-liberal rhetoric sought to shift responsibility for security measures onto individuals to encourage personal security regimes tied to modes of consumption after 9/11. Capitalist ideology – unlike humans – survives post-apocalypse in spite of the viral plague, through product placement, ubiquitous billboards and the reconstruction of consumption practices, including Neville’s somewhat remarkable post-apocalyptic ‘brand loyalty’. Partly a reflection on contemporary reality, this implies neo-liberal capital’s persistence and resilience (see also Boyle, 2009; Zacharek, 2007), albeit not necessarily in a positive way. That is, while product placement and advertising ‘naturalise’ capitalist ideology and are related to the consumerist spectacle of apocalypse at the movies, Neville’s resurrection of and reliance on consumption practices render it ambivalent and ironic – a critique, if only by implication, and sign of the hollowness of such consumption. After all, given his daily broadcast – as much a plea for a response as an offer of asylum (see also King, 2012) – also connotes anxiety over his inability to persuasively perform normative masculinity, only its overt and self-consciously constructed performance remains.

In *I Am Legend*, Neville’s life in the post-apocalyptic urban ‘jungle’ is that of a consumer rather than a producer – in a world “full of commodities and bereft of people” (Boyle, 2009, p.2). From the introduction of post-apocalypse Manhattan,

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239 This is also noted by Ansen, 2007; Foundas, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Zacharek, 2007. Brayton (2011, p.69) and Boyle (2009) also claim the film’s “enthusiasm for consumer culture” is linked to neo-conservatism via Christian symbolism and showcased ‘conservative’ corporations.

240 Such ‘steadfast’ and remarkable post-apocalyptic ‘brand loyalty’ is mirrored in *The Book of Eli*, in which Nobody (Denzel Washington), before even identified as Nobody, fetishises an iPod and fast-food branded towelettes.
Neville’s speeding sports car is immediately incongruous, a post-apocalyptic car commercial of progress unchecked by traffic (see also Boyle, 2009); Neville literally ‘owns’ the urban streets. Moreover, Neville uses an aircraft carrier for golf and the Museum of Modern Art for fishing, gesturing towards the ascendant Everyman figure, as opposed to collecting paintings to preserve markers of human civilisation. Moreover, he harvests corn in Central Park but we do not see him work, it “is simply there for the picking” (Boyle, 2009, p.2). While the ‘pleasures’ of the apocalypse, in *I Am Legend* at least, witness the erasure of labour and production, Boyle fails to acknowledge that Neville’s isolation is ambivalently experienced and that his consumption habits are inevitably debilitating. That is, while Neville’s consumption habits initially buttress his damaged identity, they also highlight the constructedness of gender performance and its instability. Rendering gender’s construction overt and conscious also exposes its instability, and consequently ruptures Neville’s tenuous performance of normality. More than this, Neville’s conspicuous performance of normative masculinity – partly expressed through reconstructed consumption practices – becomes unstable when exposed as consciously constructed rather than ‘natural’, as it does for Karnes in *WTC*.

The ambivalence towards capitalist ideology and the instability of normative male identity is most evident in how each is reconstructed and sustained through the performance or reenactment of consumption. *I Am Legend* is interested in the sustenance of identity and reconstruction of masculinity through performance for the restoring/buttressing of gender (through) performance and maintenance of sociality and (capitalist) society. Neville’s performance of gender and consumption becomes key to sustaining social and capitalist structures, reinforcing and articulating damaged or destabilised notions of identity and gender, and sanity (but also confirming approaching insanity and thereby debilitating). Neville primarily enacts the ambivalent, disconcerting reconstruction of consumption practices in his repeat visits to the DVD store. While the store is arguably a ‘cultural destination’, a culturally democratic ‘marker of civilisation’ that valorises popular, mainstream culture (as his

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241 Neville blithely walks past unpacked artworks, whereas Heston’s Neville is a self-appointed preserver of civilisation (through art, music, poetry and ‘conversation’ with past great men), as is Burton in *TWTFTD*.

242 Neville later buries Sam in Central Park, where the corn grows over former mass graves.
cars do), the ‘society’ Neville chooses to construct is consumerist.243 As a consumer, connoting a racelessness/classlessness of sorts, he consumes and replaces, rather than preserves through considered collection, as Burton (Belafonte) does in TWTFTD. That “he preserves the routine of returning” them is far from ‘touching’, as Zacharek (2007) alleges, but rather a model of ‘appropriate’ consumption practice. Anderson (2012) observes that to be human post-apocalypse necessitates one form of a nostalgic attachment to consumer goods. However, I Am Legend extends this via its nostalgia for consumption practices; disingenuously achieving “normality by sustaining an everyday experience of consumer society […] to maintain the illusion that he is only renting” (Boyle, 2009, p.4). Moreover, Neville’s nostalgia becomes dangerous to his mental well-being (and very survival) when he extends the nostalgia for goods to consumer practices.244 And in line with Butler’s definition of performativity (1999), citations of masculinity and the performance of normative identity become unstable and untenable when exposed as performance.

It is Neville’s performance of identity/consumption with the mannequins he arranges in a DVD store that most significantly decentralises race, even when ‘embodied’ by the mannequins, in favour of ‘consumption’ rather than class.245 Mannequins enable Neville to reconstruct society and perform community or sociality and foreground his role in society’s sustenance (as ‘final animator’ and scientist). Of course, to protect the illusion requires Neville’s disavowal of his role in the preservation of capitalist

243 Neville’s roots as a post-apocalyptic consumer lie in Omega Man, where the persistence of capitalist ideology is similarly evoked in the film’s sports car opening and Neville’s casual discarding of the car, whereby he re-enacts or performs ‘buying’ a car after noticing the skeleton of a car salesman. That said, he displays ongoing hostility towards and acknowledges the emptiness of capitalism respectively when he insults the skeleton and repeatedly casts unwanted clothing to the ground when shopping. While Heston’s Neville is also associated with the preservation of capitalist ideology, Omega Man in some ways critiques contemporary consumer life – in keeping with its time. Although Neville’s love interest, Lisa, first presents herself as a store mannequin, the film’s dead bodies and skeletons signify not only the collapse of authority and society but, posthumously tethered to their work roles as car salesman or guard, the dehumanising impacts of capitalism.

244 Issues of performance and performed identity have been integral to Smith’s persona since his breakout film role as a homeless gay hustler, Paul, who talks his way into the lives of white New York privilege in Six Degrees of Separation (Fred Schepisi, 1993). Again highlighting intersections of race and class in the articulation and construction of (Smith’s onscreen) identity, Paul’s class masquerade, falsely claiming to be the son of Sidney Poitier (see also Magill, 2009) and later claim of hyphenated, dual heritage, of Poitier and Flan Kitteridge (one of his privileged white ‘victims’), signifies more than a merger of race and class, but the subsuming of race by class. However, as in I Am Legend, performance exposes, and perhaps even encourages, identity instabilities. Paul’s is a failed dream of ‘assimilation’, needing to discard his own identity to put on another more amenable post-racial self (Tolliver, 2003), one learned, appropriated and constructed, and which also implies that to be black and ‘successful’ requires ‘de-racing’.

245 As in Cloverfield, the mannequins are also ciphers for the film’s absent victim-bodies.
ideology, regularly feigning surprise at the mannequins’ presence in simulating and ‘performing’ everyday encounters. Ambivalently, however, they affirm the desire for community and forestall insanity yet confirm and cement isolation. Although *I Am Legend* depicts the joys of solitary consumption, mannequins become a necessary fantasy for Neville to deal with (*and* demonstrate) madness, and also to restore and sustain community/sociality. Neville is “losing his mind […] to hold on to his humanity” (Morris, 2007); “a man trying not to fall apart” in a world “already broken into pieces” (Zacharek, 2007). While the mannequins allow Neville to perform (gender) identity, they also elide race and sex, and highlight control as illusory.  

Just as Neville arranges and ‘talks’ to mannequins to simulate and reinvoke society, when Burton starts collecting provisions in *TWTFTD* he gathers two white mannequins, a female and a male. Yet, the film more explicitly exploring the performance and persistence of class and race, the mannequins (re)animate and preserve (white) society; a ‘civilisation’ marked by racial prejudice and white privilege, and reinforced in his later performance of pre-apocalypse social norms and roles with two fellow (white) survivors. While ‘civilisation’ persists, constrains and haunts Burton from his arrival in New York – he shouts, “I can feel you all staring at me” at the apparently depopulated metropolis – mannequins render this ‘feeling’ tangible and demonstrate how identity is discursively circumscribed by society even after its collapse. The persistence of racial tension or dis-ease, with threat marked by ‘whiteness’, is apparent when Burton suddenly takes to anger towards the white male mannequin, Snodgrass, “What’s so funny? I’m lonely and you’re laughing.” “You look at me but you don’t see me…” The camera here looks over the mannequin’s shoulder, approximating its point-of-view to communicate Burton’s continued

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246 Heston’s Neville is engaged in monological ‘conversation’ throughout (with the dead, his own image and Caesar’s bust), to simulate and reconstruct civil society through (self-)conscious performance of identity and consumption. While Smith’s Neville also looks at his own image on his computer monitor, as King (2012) notes, these are less moments of simulated sociality as self-directed accusations of impotence and failure.  

247 At a birthday dinner party Burton organises for Sarah he plays multiple African-American ‘service roles’, as waiter, cook and entertainer, which implicitly connects his performance to the history of black representation in film. In *Six Degrees of Separation*, Paul also fulfils numerous of these prescribed roles over the course of his evening with the Kitteridges: cook, cleaner, entertainer – and even becomes a stereotypical victim of violence. In a sense, by performing a hybrid blend of post-racial privilege and black ‘service roles’ Paul seeks to conceal his ‘real’ identity (as homeless gay hustler).
feelings of black invisibility. His voice trails off, he picks up the mannequin and throws it off the balcony, “…and you’ve laughed at me once too often!”

Unlike Burton’s conflict with and ‘murder’ of Snodgrass, race is only addressed obliquely through Neville’s mannequins, where ‘consumption’ is privileged over and perhaps even erases race, even though the only mannequins he engages are white. When Neville first arrives at the DVD store he first greets ‘Fred’ (who will later evidence Neville’s ‘loss’ of control and initiate his breakdown), then a ‘picture perfect’ nuclear family, before sex is also elided in his ‘encounter’ with a ‘sexy’ mannequin. Sexual desire is persistently dulled with each film version, transferred in the novel from Neville’s sexual obsession with female vampires (bodies no longer ‘alive’) onto mannequins (bodies never ‘alive’) in Omega Man and I Am Legend; more commodity fetishism. The objectification and fetishisation of these inanimate bodies is especially evident when Neville spies a new, sexy (white) female mannequin perusing the adult section, signalling her availability and his sublimated desires. Irrespective, the possibility of sex resides only in commoditised, fetishised (white) mannequin ‘bodies’, and the lifeless ideal of objectified, sexualised womanhood.

Post-apocalyptic survival and social renewal it seems requires the reenactment of consumption practices with commoditised, mass-produced, inanimate mannequin ‘bodies’; ‘bodies’ that reify consumption and commodify desire. Yet in propounding a consumerist response to apocalyptic disaster and dispersed threat, I Am Legend also articulates its insufficiencies, with society only conceivable through the ultimately debilitating reiteration of consumption practices. Another earlier example of almost compulsive repetition casts graver doubts over Neville’s behaviours. For example, when Neville takes out a jar of pasta sauce he immediately replaces it with another and places it in exactly same position as previous one (see Figure 3.6). All uniform and all uniformly placed and replaced, his stacking recalls and domesticates the

248 Confirming the mannequins’ alignment with race, a third survivor – white and male – who disturbs Burton’s tenuous steps towards forming the final (or first interracial) couple with the first survivor – white and female – is speedily likened to Snodgrass, “[…] don’t laugh at me, okay”. This is reinforced when the white man declares his interest in Sarah: “You know, you remind me of a guy called Snodgrass. I never knew what was in his mind either.”

249 That Neville can only sheepishly steal looks in her direction may also in part be due to Smith’s mainstream appeal and “desired audience demographic” (Palmer, 2011, p.35). In Omega Man, Neville’s sexual desire (and frustration) is similarly transferred onto mannequins, and he is reaching towards a mannequin’s breast just before Lisa presents herself as a mannequin.
iconography of the supermarket. This stockpiling of canned goods highlights Neville’s disciplined routine but also reifies consumption practices, his stacking also an early sign of a repetition compulsion indicative of trauma.

**FIGURE 3.6**

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**Repetition & Regimen/Routine as Disorder**

Taken with the mannequins, Neville’s consumer-citizen habits, rather than safeguarding normality, may signal – even encourage – an unhealthy psychology, and perhaps even monstrosity. Lawrence describes Neville as displaying the regimentation both of a soldier and a solitary man, but recognises that if that “were to start to break down, […] he would fall apart” (*I Am Legend* Production Notes, 2007, p.5; see also McCarthy, 2007). Neville’s obsessive regimentation, routine and repetition are celebrated initially, and key to retaining his sanity. But what previously represented strength is now/also a trauma indicator. Gunn (cited in King, 2012, p.161) contends they demonstrate an ‘obsessive’ but conflicting and contradictory “longing to return to, and escape from” his trauma. Repetition facilitates Neville’s desire to retreat into and stay in the time *before* apocalypse (it hasn’t yet happened), not so much for research, but to paradoxically indulge and erase failure and guilt. It also signals how his *now* is motivated by *before*, as his flashbacks likewise indicate, but also in replaying events to earn a *de facto* do-over. Neville engages in a series of repetitions throughout the film, including repetition of his daily broadcast, as in *TWTFTD*, from the seaport – the site of personal and institutional trauma, where his family were killed and society disintegrated. He also watches videos of morning and news television that, more than merely expository, invoke normality and routine. They also evoke the response to 9/11: “incessantly replaying the images of the day, and […] yearning to undo their memory” (King, 2012, p.161) and again reinforce 9/11’s construction “as an event […] inextricably tied to its mediated coverage”

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250 Neville’s set up at the seaport, facing the water, invokes New York’s history as a key immigration point, a point reinforced when Anna (as a boat refugee) later emerges at the site. In *TWTFTD*, Burton also arrives on Manhattan by boat and broadcasts a radio message: “This is New York calling […] everyday at 12 noon”.

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Yet in a sense, and opposite to characters in *Cloverfield*, Neville watches television in a futile attempt to forestall, withhold or erase admission of the reality of the plague.

Flashbacks also represent horrific return and repetition that, like alarms, become associated with gaps and losses of time. These gaps or fissures signal not only what *cannot* be remembered or retold (like the family’s moment of death) but Neville’s deteriorating sanity. Alarms wake him from flashbacks (through memory-nightmares), a common trope but also indicative of ‘lost’ time (and self), and the merging/blurring of waking hours and nightmares. Similarly his pre-apocalypse assertions of “I can still fix this” are not only met with incredulity by his wife, but disturbingly later repeated to another survivor, and second ‘mother’, Anna, further evidence of unhealthy repetition and Neville’s seeming unwillingness or inability to accept the apocalypse has *already* happened.²⁵²

In these examples, and over succeeding visits to the DVD store, repetition and regimentation become (evident as) a disorder.²⁵³ Disorders are typically a response to a lack of control, reinforced in his use of mannequins. Mannequins foreground his role in society’s sustenance and compensate for his earlier loss of control – Neville cannot stop the virus and watches helplessly as the military helicopter, when desperate citizens send it spinning wildly towards the Coast Guard helicopter carrying his family – but also manifest a profound lack of control. This is not unlike how the men’s entrapment in *WTC* both conceals *and* reveals their loss of control. Indeed, Neville exhibits many of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder: his obsession with routine/discipline, shame over his name, feelings of threat and hyper-vigilance, and persistent traumatic flashbacks and hallucinations. And as will be explored, he also exhibits social withdrawal and detachment from others and restricted affect (see also King, 2012), impulsive/self-destructive behaviour, and loss of belief.

²⁵¹ In *Omega Man*, Neville also repetitively goes to watch *Woodstock* (Wadleigh, 1970) (three years in a row), a like return to *before*, innocence and naivety.

²⁵² Anna’s significance in relation to the recuperation of normative masculinity is discussed later in the chapter.

²⁵³ King (2012) similarly observes that trauma and PTSD feature prominently in other damaged TV protagonists of in 2006-7.
Entrapment & Losing Control: The ‘Cost’ of Performance

The deleterious effects of repetition, especially with regard to the mannequins, are evident in the dangers of disappearing into performance/construction, with Neville finally unable (or unwilling) to decipher the ‘real’ from the (consciously) constructed. From the point he ‘sees’ a mannequin’s head move, Neville is visibly greying, physically diminished, in stark contrast to the earlier exercising ‘ideal’, and will later even appear physically smaller than the diminutive Anna after his rescue. Neville loses control even of ‘his’ mannequins, re-exposing the absence of control signalled in his traumatic flashbacks. The reconstruction and simulation of society through consumption practices, reified through mannequins, leads to psychic breakdown and the physical and psychological disintegration of self, and is indeed exaggerated by Neville’s persistent disavowal of control of the mannequins. His breakdown is implied when, shot from his psychological perspective, he ‘sees’ the mannequin he calls Fred, not only out of context, shifted away from the DVD store, but slowly turn its head to ‘look’ at him. Neville’s subsequent anger towards Fred – “If you’re real, you’d better tell me right now!” – is reminiscent of Burton’s anger against Snodgrass in TWTFTD, although Burton’s sense of control is always tenuous, uncertain; each man’s mannequin ‘murder’ violent, irrational and an admission of a lack of control.254

Immediately after ‘killing’ the mannequin, Neville is ensnared in a trap that perfectly mirrors his earlier capture of a female ‘terror-Other’, but which he is unable (or perhaps unwilling) to avoid as it slowly unfolds. This moment holds disturbing implications for either a self-destructive Self or an underestimated Other, but also begins to transform females into redeemers rather than maligned, countering their earlier representation. Firstly, the elaborate, mirrored trap implies either Neville set it himself, representing his desire to end his solitary struggle (and his guilt), or that he severely underestimates the ‘terror-Other’.255 Neville’s self-destructive complicity is

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254 In line with Anderson’s (2012) argument about WALL-E, the stark cost of Neville’s psychic reliance on consumption practices to simulate sociality may indicate a broader cultural ambivalence towards consumption and mass-produced objects, both reinforcing a ‘deep affection’ for consumer goods and practices and outlining anxieties on its catastrophic effects.

255 In each film version, Neville puts himself in danger with almost deliberate lapses in regimen – invoking the persistent struggle to persevere and the ‘losing’ of control and discipline – and Neville’s blood could attract the Darkseekers to his location.
implied when he later uses a dummy (as a cipher for Neville, but also reminiscent of the hooded Fred) in his subsequent suicidal, after-dark act of revenge at the seaport – the site of familial loss. And as in WTC’s concentration on (the endurance of) male suffering, Neville’s actions imply a persistent post-9/11 ‘American’ male desire to not only suffer, but to be made to suffer – to be punished for perceived failings. Indeed, Neville struggles throughout against the persistent temptation to put an end to his lonely ordeal. Earlier, he wakes in the morning from a flashback-nightmare (as his daughter screams when a plague sufferer crashes into their vehicle), is suggested by a mise-en-scene that foregrounds a pistol he keeps by his bed, representing limited self-defence at best, and more likely suicide to escape painful death or memories.

Yet Neville’s entrapment also offers the first suggestion of females as redeemers, troubling Copier (2008) and Brayton’s (2011) claims in relation to females and apocalypse and somewhat altering the significance of Neville’s final sacrificial act. Neville is knocked out when entrapped, and further injured releasing himself from the trap. Sam saves him from attack by ‘vampire-zombie’ dogs, having repeatedly protected Neville against security lapses often linked to the pain of his flashback-memories of his family’s death, but is fatally wounded in the process. Most tellingly, this is the first time in the film that Neville reveals that ‘Sam’ is actually Samantha. Neville’s protective companion is revealed to be female, not male, and he is compelled to kill her as she ‘turns’, destroying his final living link to his daughter, who had passed Sam over to Neville immediately prior to her death.

Neville’s psychic disintegration is thereafter signalled in ensuing moments whereby performance linked to consumption behaviours that had previously sustained Neville is confirmed as neither persuasive nor ‘natural’. Firstly, Neville returns to the DVD store to ‘talk’ to the ‘sexy’ mannequin, but the camera’s representation of his psychological perspective finally shows the mannequin in focus, confirming her

On the other hand, a deleted scene (I Am Legend DVD Extras) explains the mechanics of the Darkseeker trap, although Neville remains incredulous.

256 This ‘suicide’ attempt (as Anna later labels it) also foreshadows his final ‘suicide’ to rejoin his lost wife and child in death.

257 Neville’s repetition of the Bob Marley song he sings throughout the film, ‘Redemption song’, both recalls the earlier bathing and confirms his breakdown, as his final link to sanity breaks. A shot from Neville’s perspective thereafter highlights the empty screen space in the passenger seat that Sam typically inhabits. Neville abruptly stops the SUV, but a dolly shot continues, the highly mobile but retreating camera and the increasing distance spotlighting his solitude and immobility.
lifelessness and his solitude. His breakdown is then reinforced in his compulsive, blank recitation of all dialogue parts from a scene from *Shrek* (Adamson, 2001).\(^{258}\) Attempting to build empathy with the two survivors who rescue him after his ‘suicidal’ seaport attack, Neville’s ‘zombie-like’ recitation of multiple character parts is definitive evidence of the deleterious effects of isolation – his solitude becomes “a type of furious derangement” (Morris, 2007) – and the schizophrenic effects of unencumbered, solitary consumption, performance and repetition.\(^{259}\) Neville is unable to engage in real conversation, beyond the one-sided ones he shares with Sam and the mannequins, highlighting how his performance of masculinity and sustenance of identity – partly expressed through reconstructed consumption practices – breaks down when exposed as (self-)consciously constructed and performed rather than ‘natural’.

**The Indeterminate ‘Terror-Other’ as Monstrous Mirror**

Alternatively, rather than self-destructively complicit in his own entrapment, the prominence of an Alpha Male ‘terror-Other’ throughout the film troublingly differentiates him as an identifiable leader and clear antagonist for Neville. The Alpha Male notably leads all of the assaults on Neville, and may move the mannequins, given he unleashes the attack dogs after Neville’s entrapment. He is also the only ‘terror-Other’ that Neville battles one-on-one. Yet the Alpha Male is routinely considered to be “merely a plot contrivance” barely distinguishable from the other creatures rather than a clear antagonist (Newman, 2007, p.69). *I Am Legend* installs a binary structure absent in other iterations further signalling its post-9/11 resonance – wholly Other, only ‘us’ versus ‘them’, with no ‘third’ group or ‘alternative humanity’ (see also Hantke, 2011). Never ‘us’, always Other, the film largely withholds their perspective or experience and, unlike in earlier versions, Neville’s wife and daughter never ‘turn’ and he has no prior relationship with any ‘terror-Other’. Thus, the Alpha Male’s possible agency and leadership becomes unsettling given the film and Neville

\(^{258}\) This also reinforces the sense Neville is haunted by paternal failure, deploying *Shrek* – another ‘monstrous’ Other – to reconnect with his daughter.

\(^{259}\) This characterisation of the effects of consumption also suggests comparison with Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978/2004) and even *Land of the Dead* (2005). That said, the poor characterisation of the ‘vampire-zombies’ in *I Am Legend* (outlined in the next section) makes sustained analysis of this element more difficult.
are seemingly equally unwilling to engage with the ‘terror-Other’, and even despite multiple hints he could and even should be interpreted differently his implicit significance is barely articulated, unexplored and incoherent.

As noted earlier, the indeterminacy of the ‘vampire-zombie’ ‘terror-Other’ is evident in wildly divergent – and often convenient – scholarly characterisations. While partially explained by the hybridity of zombies and vampires in recent American horror (see Hantke, n.d.), their indeterminacy is linked narratively with Neville’s wilful misreading of the Alpha Male actions and the film’s re-shot ending – which further blurs any coherent rationale or agency for the Alpha Male – and aesthetically with their poor CGI rendering and characterisation. 260 In I Am Legend – as in Cloverfield and The Strangers – the monster’s motivation is unknowable for the protagonist and therefore misread as if without rationale; their indeterminacy thereby a consequence of the narrative focus on the protagonist’s limited perspectives. This is first evoked when, after Neville captures a female ‘terror-Other’ using his blood as lure, the Alpha Male moves his head into direct sunlight. He screams in rage and pain, and momentarily withstands the sun’s immediate burn before retreating into the dark, seemingly developing a tolerance of sunlight, but also exhibiting social commitment. When Neville later describes this encounter, however, he misreads the Alpha Male’s behaviour. Rather than evidence of social bonds, fidelity and adaptive behaviour, Neville declares the incident demonstrates: “Typical human behaviour is now entirely absent”.261

The indeterminacy of the ‘terror-Other’ additionally lies in I Am Legend’s failure to satisfyingly render them, prompting critical confusion about what exactly they are, labelled variously in scholarly and critical readings as vampires, zombies or both simultaneously.262 This ontological uncertainty is amplified because the monsters are

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260 The film’s alternative ending – replaced after poor test screening responses – is outlined and discussed later in the chapter.
261 After Neville’s observation about ‘typical human behaviour’ a flashback implies people were already-monstrous, as unthinkingly violent and mob-like ‘typical human behaviours’ indirectly cause his family’s death. Indeed, even though most people have not yet ‘turned’, Neville tells his daughter: “Daddy will make the monsters go away”. This is a common feature in recent apocalyptic films like War of the Worlds, The Book of Eli and The Road, where the invasion or apocalypse reveals people to be the ‘monsters’ they already-always were.
262 The ‘terror-Others’ are labelled variously as zombie-like vampires – “non-linguistic animalistic vampire”, yet more zombie than human (Lavoie, 2011, p.279; see also Burns, 2009; Pak, 2010; Foundas, 2007; Edelstein, 2007; Phillips, 2007; Corliss, 2007) – zombies with vampiric qualities – “predatory zombies […] with fangs for teeth” (Ebert, 2007; see also King, 2012;
computer-generated creations, and poorly rendered ones at that. Indeed, as (poorly rendered) CGI creations, their bodies are less recognisably human than in earlier versions. This not only makes it easier to render them abject and inhuman, or monstrous, but thereby permits Neville’s experimentation – Neville does not even grant them a name, unlike his mannequins. Brayton (2011, p.72) contends “it is their difference that accentuates (and legitimises) their dispossession. [They…] personify not only mayhem but also marginality. […] an abject entity of the state”. However, it is also their sameness, at least as constructed through CGI, which further removes “any possibility that they may be construed as human” (Moreman, 2008; see also Hantke, 2011), by the narrative and in Neville’s eyes. Ebert (2007) criticises their uniformity – although this could be argued as significant given the obvious repetition of death masks renders them ‘all the same’, and so anonymous.

Yet despite a lack of critical attention to the ‘terror-Other’s’ overall lack of characterisation, their interstitial indeterminacy arguably represents their key symbolic significance. Nilges (2010, p.29) argues Neville ‘intentionally misinterprets’ the Alpha Male’s behaviour because it would signal the emergence of an alternative humanity. Morris (2007) further suggests Neville’s misreading shows the film has no ‘allegorical nerve’. Yet perhaps Neville’s wilful ‘misreading’ represents the film’s (perhaps unconscious) allegory, not only emblematic of a refusal to engage the Other, but of the consequences of doing so, resulting in his later entrapment. More than this, however, it foreshadows the film’s ultimate inability to recuperate and ‘remasculinise’ Neville’s damaged masculinity without too becoming ‘monstrous’.

On the other hand, the lead Other in Omega Man, Matthias (Anthony Zerbe), is a clear ideological antagonist, his already noted association with counter-cultural rhetoric in opposition to Neville’s individualism. An early flashback montage of

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263 Critical disdain for the CGI monsters was widespread (see Ebert, 2007; Morgenstern, 2007; Puig, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2007) – or both – “white-skinned vampire zombies” (Ansen, 2007; Westwell, 2011; Boyle, 2009; Zacharek, 2007; Ferraro, 2007). Matheson too observes they are no longer vampires, but have vampiric qualities (Bradley, 2010, p.265). Regardless, the ‘terror-Other’, part of the contemporary resurgence in zombie narratives, may in part articulate anxieties the ‘realities’ of the ‘war on terror’ do not afford, expressing widespread fears of terror that proliferates within and of being besieged.

264 In Omega Man, The Family stands in violent opposition to Heston’s military scientist and ‘technologies’ of civilisation and modernity (including books). As in I Am Legend, the camera also pulls back out through his window to emphasise his loneliness.
the outbreak literally shared between the two adversaries – beginning with Neville and ending with Matthias, a former newsreader – establishes their directly adversarial or dialectical relationship. Indeed, Nama (2008, p.51) argues the film signifies the “perception that white masculinity and the institutions it was associated with were under attack” during the period and “real-world racial paranoia over black militancy’s spread to urban centres”. Yet Matthias (also) functions as Neville’s monstrous mirror, and Neville is even compared negatively with him: “You know what, you’re hostile, you just don’t belong”. More than this, Neville and Matthias are mutually constitutive, confirmed in Neville’s hesitance to destroy his enemy even after learning his hiding place – to eradicate Matthias would be to lose the adversary that defines his own existence. However contested, Omega Man in some sense legitimises the hybrid form in giving them a ‘voice’. While the Cold War at least theoretically demands a rational antagonist (to avert mutually assured destruction), this characteristic is seemingly absent in I Am Legend – and the ‘war on terror’.266

Yet despite Neville’s erroneous assessment, the Alpha Male is nevertheless opaquely elevated in I Am Legend, as a mutually constitutive adversary – each becomes defined through the struggle against the other, culminating in their symbolic final/violent coming together. Moreover, the Alpha Male’s persistent attempts to ‘rescue’ his mate imply he shares a motivation with Neville, who is also driven by the desire to recover family. Yet most unsettlingly, he also arguably becomes Neville’s monstrous mirror. Firstly, while the film does not show Neville hunt, his wall of photographs of dead ‘terror-Other’ subjects implies his violence and consequent threat to the ‘terror-Other’. And secondly, after he buries Samantha, Neville becomes associated with darkness, like the ‘terror-Other’, in his suicidal act of vengeance; his actions literally move into the darkness, which further associates him with the monstrosity of the Alpha Male, who is simultaneously moving into the daylight.267

(Caesar’s bust never ‘replies’), his individualism contrasted with that of the Family, celebrated but ambivalent (given he is somewhat crazed).

265 The function of the ‘terror-Other’ as a monstrous mirror is further explored in Chapter Four on The Kingdom.
266 That said, while the ‘terror-Other’ do not possess a ‘voice’ in I Am Legend, nor do they in the novel. Indeed, Clasen (2010, p.319) considers the vampires’ non-social behaviour – they do not talk to one another – a crucial feature. Moreover, the novel is likewise primarily invested in Neville’s experience, with ‘the horror of the monster’ atypically sidelined (Clasen, 2010, p.318).
267 The survivors in Night of the Living Dead also ultimately monstrously mirror, and even outstrip, the bloodlust of the zombies. More significantly, chiaroscuro lighting and makeup establish the black protagonist as (becoming) monstrous late in the
Seeing Monsters, Becoming Monstrous

Indeed, Neville may already be monstrous, evidenced in how he medicalises and dehumanises the body of the Other. Mulligan (2008, p.32) claims Neville “needs to ignore their humanity”, despite contrary evidence, given his tests “do little more than kill”. More than this, King (2012, p.148) argues that Neville’s laboratory ‘images’ – video recordings of Neville’s tests on rats and ‘terror-Other’, and the photos of dead test subjects – figure his ongoing participation in violence.268 When he tests a vaccine compound on the captured female, the death images or masks of countless ‘terror-Other’ are first seen on his wall – anonymous and undifferentiated, but reminiscent of Holocaust victims. Significantly, they are out of focus from Neville’s point-of-view, suggesting that he no longer ‘sees’ them. Moreover, while he refers to ‘human’ trials, Neville persistently denies the ‘terror-Other’ personal pronouns (see also Brayton, 2011). As such, the absence of ‘typical human behaviour’ he identifies is thus also ambivalently displaced onto his cold, clinical testing on formerly human subjects – reminiscent of America’s characterisation and treatment of ‘enemy combatants’. In this sense, the ‘professional distance’ typically afforded typical SF-disaster protagonists becomes dehumanising, even monstrous in I Am Legend. Like ‘enemy combatants’, Neville treats them as inhuman, with what Giorgio Agamben in Homo Sacer terms “bare life”, “those whom the state refuses to recognize as political subjects”, stripped of their rights and reduced to their biological existence (cited in Boyle, 2009, p.3; see also Baishya, 2011); and thus “beyond the state’s (and perhaps the audience’s) purview of moral responsibility” (Brayton, 2011, p.72). Westwell (2011, p.833) claims that in the alternative ending, the ‘terror-Other’ death photographs “suggest that Neville may have behaved unethically”. However, this is also the case in the theatrical release and in Anna’s eyes, as Neville becomes inured to his actions and alienated from himself, similarly dehumanised.

268 The images – of (former) American citizens – also echo Nayak’s (2006, p.51) observation that the “assertion of the US Self is as much about disciplining the Others at home as it is about objectifying Others ‘elsewhere’”.

film, although the audience is also undergoes this transformation, sympathising with his desire to kill the already-always monstrous white male.
The first time the death masks are in focus is when Anna looks at them, the camera assuming her optical point-of-view and her consequent perception of Neville as he experiments. Anna is the only one to give a name to the infected Darkseekers and when she visits his lab calls the female subject ‘her’ (Neville persists with ‘it’).\(^{269}\) Anna’s perspective – and ‘voice’ – disrupts or undermines the coherence and dominance of Neville’s presumptions about the Darkseekers and his own role – experimenting (and killing), as in the novel, “with no comprehension, no sympathy, no remorse” (Patterson, 2005, p.24). In Cloverfield, the Everymen protagonists only possess fragmentary knowledge of events and the monster. Neville is also similarly incapable of understanding the threat, at least until Anna briefly destabilises his dominance of the camera’s point-of-view. The Darkseekers’ threat to the reassertion and recuperation of Neville’s masculine identity thus resides not only in their indeterminacy, but in Neville’s and the film’s unwillingness to engage them; a looking away or unwillingness to ‘see’ that similarly blurs Neville’s identity as he becomes out of focus in Anna’s eyes, foreshadowing his monstrosity (see Figure 3.7-3.9).

FIGURE 3.7
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FIGURE 3.8
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FIGURE 3.9
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Overreading the Religious ‘Turn’

The film’s brief assumption of Anna’s point-of-view also establishes that Neville’s ideological ‘debate’ is not with the ‘terror-Other’ or even Krippin, but Anna – a

\(^{269}\) When Anna declaims ‘My God’ after asking if they all died, Neville misreads her exclamation. She is horrified at the results of his ‘experiments’, and still grants them their humanity and her pity. The ‘terror-Other’ are not called Darkseekers before this point in the chapter to reflect their like status in the film.
dialectical argument between faith and science, religion and secularism, community and solitude. Yet I will demonstrate that scholarly ‘overreading’ of the film’s religiosity seemingly results in mistakenly downplaying the film’s focus on recuperating Neville’s paternal identity and even encourages the mischaracterisation of Neville’s final sacrificial act as unambiguously Christ-like. That said, critical response consistently censured the final act’s abrupt religious ‘turn’ as a “false and flashy faux-religious climax” (Zacharek, 2007; see also Ansen, 2007; Edelstein, 2007) – this ‘turn’ as critically discomfiting as the ‘generic shifts’ in WTC.\(^{270}\) And indeed, from her arrival, Anna is immediately and repeatedly associated with religious iconography. In a sense, the Brazilian Anna calls Neville back into the light – when she first rescues Neville she comes out of the blinding white light of her vehicle lights, like Jimeno’s ‘vision’ of Jesus in WTC, again demonstrating Hollywood’s disconcerting designation of Latin Americans as offering a purer and often explicitly ‘Catholic’ sense of religious devotion.\(^{271}\) And as Neville fades in and out of consciousness after his rescue, and possibly death, it is significant that he again returns to his final moments with his family immediately prior to their death (King, 2012). Perhaps most significantly, as he slips into unconsciousness he focuses on the crucifix dangling from her truck’s mirror, ambiguously suggesting both that he is saved by (Anna’s) faith but also being delivered unto sacrificial death.

While there are multiple Christian allusions throughout the film, such as “a New York permanently decorated for Christmas” (Boyle, 2009, p.1), these arguably more demonstrate an ambiguous mix of biblical and popular/secular notions. Indeed, I Am Legend incoherently implies the apocalypse was divinely ordained and that humans are to blame. While Copier (2008, p.27) argues revelation is seemingly mediated by God, Anna only hesitantly reveals how she knows about the colony, “God told me. He has a plan”, and the ‘vision’ (or ‘listening’) is displaced onto Anna, occurring off-screen. Indeed, although Hollywood evocations of apocalypse resemble their biblical and classical predecessors, they operate “within more of a moral than a religious context” (Renner, 2012, p.207), caused and averted or resolved by human actions, rather than divinely ordained (Copier, 2008) – as Neville emphatically declares, “We

\(^{270}\) An abrupt (sub)generic shift is also outlined in relation to The Kingdom (Chapter Four).

\(^{271}\) And although Anna’s predictions/visions about a survivors’ colony prove correct, critics also routinely view her as ‘weird’, ‘fanatical’ and ‘unconvincing’, much as they do the character of Karnes in WTC.
did this”. Moreover, both Neville and Anna seem “more fanatical than righteous” (Foundas, 2007), hardly a ringing endorsement of either ‘fundamentalism’ and echoing the highly ambivalent Karnes in WTC.

Yet it is the significance of a repeated statement, “Light up the darkness”, that ultimately suggests interpretations of the revival of Christianity in I Am Legend are too strident. For Boyle (2009), the statement, delivered at film’s end by Anna, becomes a supposed injunction for the audience to convert non-believers. Neville’s use of “Let me save you” instead of ‘cure’, as the Alpha Male attempts to break through the plexiglass separating the two, “represents a slip from medical to ecclesiastical discourse”, “all the more striking because of Neville’s consistent treatment” of the Darkseekers “as wholly other” (Boyle, 2009, p.1). Such conversion, however, remains highly speculative, particularly as the Alpha Male comprehensively (and seemingly irrationally) refuses his offer. Thus, while part of his ‘sacrifice’, Neville kills rather than converts, and the survivors ultimately leave the city to the ‘non-believers’.272 Westwell (2011, p.833) too claims Neville’s final sacrifice demonstrates “a commitment to an unquestioning religious or spiritual belief”. Yet Neville first uses “Light up the darkness” to align singer/activist Bob Marley’s musical philosophy with virology, curing hate by injecting love and music (see also King, 2012).273 Hence, as much as implying Neville’s ‘conversion’, Anna’s final employment of the phrase evidences her equivalent embrace of his secular perspective.

**Butterflies, or, Resurrecting Fatherhood**

The film also here confirms the redefinition of females as *redeemers* and, in turn, fatherhood as *resurrected*. Fatherhood is first returned from the margins when, after his rescue, Neville hallucinates the return of his family in his kitchen. The camera, offering his psychological perspective, first shows his wife and daughter, returned

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272 Anna’s eulogy statement regarding “the restoration of humanity” may imply the cure is used on the Darkseekers, but Neville’s characterisation of them as ‘unstoppable’ suggests otherwise.

273 Moreover, a warning to “Stay in the light” appears on an earlier quarantine notice and ‘Legend’ is also the title of the Marley compilation album from which the film’s (and Neville’s) songs derive. The title of the song Neville sings throughout, ‘Redemption Song’, is also central.
home (foreshadowing his proximity to death), before a shot from his optical point-of-view breaks his delusion, as Neville realises it is an unknown woman and boy, Anna and Ethan (see Figures 3.10-3.11). His hallucination associates them with his wife and child and establishes an “ad hoc multicultural family”, with survival “associated with racial and ethnic difference” (Brayton, 2011, p.72) – although again only obliquely – and foregrounds the opportunity to redeem earlier failure to save the ‘family’ by finding the cure.

**Figure 3.10**

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**Figure 3.11**

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Immediately after presenting Anna’s view of Neville’s images of death, *I Am Legend* restores both Neville’s humanity and status as a father (in Anna’s eyes and the audience’s). His gentle placement of Ethan into his daughter’s bed, this return of the child to the bedroom, revives the familial home and finally acknowledges the absence/loss of his daughter. 274 Thus, Anna not only rescues Neville – as Samantha does – but redeems him as father, and it’s her speculation about the effects of cold on the virus that leads to the cure and facilitates Neville’s heroic sacrifice.

Anna’s arrival facilitates Neville’s transition not only from darkness into the light, but from ‘seeing’ to ‘listening’. When Neville is compelled to detonate his inner perimeter defences after Anna unwittingly reveals his home’s location, he perforates his eardrums, destroying his capacity to hear – and again evidencing the paucity of his senses – but allowing him finally to ‘listen’ in a metaphysical sense. Soon thereafter, after the Alpha Male ‘creates’ a ‘butterfly’ symbol in the cracked plexiglass, all sound disappears in the film, as Neville ‘listens’ to the memory of his daughter’s entreaty regarding butterflies. 275 Neville looks back to Anna cradling Ethan, seeing the tattoo

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274 Principally via the verbal transition from “What is her name?” to “Her name was Marley”, although a photo of his daughter with the recently deceased Sam also confirms his daughter’s death, which is never actually shown in the film.

275 Butterflies are also seen on Marley’s pillow, in the cornfield at Central Park, in a glass case in the home, and most tellingly at film’s end, in intimate association with the ‘terror-Other’ (see Figure 3.34).
of a butterfly on Anna’s neck. After he hands her the vial, he replies humbly: “I’m listening”. Yet while Boyle (2009, p.1) claims this represents Neville’s ‘conversion’, his experience “divinely determined”, in line with Hantke’s (2011) observations about the film’s embedded oppositional messages, the moment’s significance is more ambivalent.

Butterflies symbolise transience before transformation, new life resurrected from old, fragility and impermanence, purity and nature, and are predominantly associated with Neville’s ‘transformation’ and the emergence of the ‘reborn’ America of the survivor’s colony. In this respect, Boyle offers a distorted reading of the butterfly as a divine signifier. Butterflies are first and persistently associated with Neville’s daughter, Marley, reinforcing his motivation as paternal and marking his redemption as paternal before professional and familial more than religious. For example, Marley ‘tells’ him to pay attention to the butterfly at film’s end and makes a butterfly ‘sign’ with her hands repeatedly during their attempted evacuation. Perhaps even more tellingly, Boyle overlooks that the Alpha Male, the ‘terror-Other’, not only ‘makes’ the butterfly symbol – an unresolved incoherence as problematic in the film as the earlier trap – but is visually associated with and in some sense becomes a butterfly (Figure 3.12). The butterfly symbol intimately and repeatedly thus tied primarily to his daughter – and remembering Anna also ‘wears’ a butterfly and the Alpha Male’s ‘familial’ motivation to rescue his mate – reinforce the symbol is connected to multiple notions of ‘family’. Neville’s sacrifice to save the symbolic second family principally returns him to his family (through ‘listening’ and then sacrificial death) and resurrects the ‘father’, both of family and ‘nation’.

**FIGURE 3.12**

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As the Darkseekers descend on the ‘final man’, Neville passes on the cure to Anna. In saving this ‘second family’ he is redeemed as father, his primary paternal motivation foregrounded in his final look at a photograph of his family. Additionally, by becoming their ‘protector’, Neville establishes a benevolent paternalist relationship with Anna and Ethan. Hollywood apocalypses invariably figure the self-sacrifice of a
human agent as ‘messianic figure’, in order to save others, from family to humanity (see Broderick, 1993; Copier, 2008; Renner, 2012). As in Omega Man, “a new family is born […] from the broken body of a ‘tragic man’” (King, 2012, p.154). This reiterates his earlier assumption of the maternal role in the home. Neville’s sacrifice both protects the cure and reconnects the family. Contemporary versions of apocalypse are about ‘reuniting’ with the family, rather than God (Copier, 2008, p.245), as with McLoughlin’s symbolic Rapturing at the end of WTC. Although an unstable and changeable concept, like the representation of Smith/Neville’s body, martyrdom is a “spectacular performance, with the body as medium” (Copier, 2008, p.33). Yet while in willing his own death Neville is arguably rendered active, his self-sacrifice to save humanity is primarily intended to redeem him personally, at the level of the family. Indeed, Copier argues such self-sacrifice is most often about ‘continuation’ of the family, through marriage and childbirth, or ‘reconciliation’ or ‘reuniting’ with the family, typically through death.²⁷⁶ In I Am Legend, however, through his reunion-death and in saving the symbolic ‘second’ family, Neville in a sense attempts both.

The recuperation of the white, working-class father in War of the Worlds is similarly ambivalent and uncertain. Ray delivers his daughter safely to the family home and his son, who had earlier run away to the military, miraculously survives. The family is thus reunited and the home reconstituted, and ‘fathers’, actual and institutional, invoked in their maintenance. However, it is as if War of the Worlds seeks to deploy the ‘improbable triumph’ of a father, “plagued with evidence of his unmanly ineptitude” throughout, to erase America’s “memory of a deep and defining defeat” (Faludi, 2008, p.10). In particular, the son’s unexplained and implausible return, and newfound though ungrounded respect, is particularly jarring; he literally emerges out of nowhere. Regardless, in a sense, Ray restores a status quo that excludes him on the basis of class, but that his labour serves to support. The final and irrevocable redundancy of this ‘father’ is an aspect of the supposed recuperation of ‘protective’ masculinity that Godfrey and Hamad’s (2012) analysis omits. Like Ethan in The Searchers, Ray has had to act ‘monstrously’ to restore the home, which thus precludes his presence within it, having used all violent means to protect his daughter from

²⁷⁶ For example, in End of Days (Hyams, 1999), Jericho Cane’s (Arnold Schwarzenegger) sacrifice likewise reunites him with his deceased wife and daughter.
fellow citizen and alien alike. Hence, as Wallis & Aston (2011, p.61; see also Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2010) similarly observe, the father is redeemed but is not reinstalled “as the patriarchal head”, “physically and symbolically cut off” from the family’s embrace (and still replaced by his ex-wife’s new husband). Ray cannot enter the familial home for he is no longer part of it.

“The Cure’s In Her Blood” – A Militarised Christ & Females as Redeemers

Indeed, when Neville looks at the photo of his wife and daughter when he gets a grenade, he perhaps even also briefly (re)unites his hybrid paternal-professional identity. The film fails “to disrupt the unholy alliance between the military-state apparatus and masculinity” and ‘memorialises’ a militarised masculinity in sacrificial death (Brayton, 2011, p.73; see also Boyle, 2009). While the militarist identity seemingly overwhelms the scientific in his violent death, it is also true that his militarised masculinity perishes while the scientific identity persists in the cure – just as Heston’s Neville’s military masculinity is memorialised while his scientific cure persists. It arguably has no place in the future, paradoxically, much like the institutional ‘father’.

* I Am Legend * is routinely read to restore militarised masculinity, along with the religious ‘turn’, through rendering Neville as a Christ figure whose sacrifice seemingly renders him as saviour. All film versions render Neville a Christ-figure. Yet in contrast to Boyle’s (2009, p.2) claim that “Heston performs Christ part-time” while “Smith plays Christ from alpha to omega”, this figuration is clearest in *Omega Man* (see also Nama, 2008). Boyle not only replaces characters with stars, but ignores the repeated association of Heston’s Neville with Christ throughout the film, particularly when, after he declares, “I am immune”, Dutch, a younger white male who will carry Neville’s cure, replies (without irony), “Christ, you could save the

277 That said, the various aspects of Neville’s hybrid identity arguably remain confused and split, as he gives contradictory signals to the Darkseekers throughout the final encounter – claiming “I can save you” (as scientist) as he shows an open palm, yet alternately pointing his pistol and picking up the grenade (as soldier).

278 Indeed, Christ figure iconography stems from *TLMOE*, particularly when ‘Neville’, “My blood has saved you”, is speared and dies on the altar, albeit declaratively as man as opposed to Christ – “I’m a man! The last man!” Significantly this is also a form of staking, which he repeatedly perpetrates on vampires.
world”. Most tellingly, Matthias martyrs Neville by spearing him, before he dies in the Christ pose after passing on a cure derived directly from his blood. His blood spreads across the fountain’s water, signalling the implied potency and purity of Neville’s ‘160-proof Anglo Saxon’ blood, which not only restores whiteness and patriarchy but, according to Nama (2008, p.51) “foreshadows […] the narcissistic self-pity of white male martyrdom” in post-Vietnam Hollywood. Neville’s blood ensures the rejuvenation of human society and symbolic reinvigoration of the legacy of the white institutional ‘father’ as humanity’s ‘father’. A foregrounded shot of the blood and vial, with the infected children massed in the background, clearly connotes he has ensured their survival. And when one of the little girls places his military cap by his body she restores institutional underpinning for society’s survival through a militarised, muscular Christ.

In this respect, I Am Legend’s similar construction is thus clearly not a uniquely post-9/11 response. Neither is it tied to white masculinity. Indeed “[t]here has often been a distinct messianic cast to [black] sacrifice” in Hollywood, with Dargis & Scott (2009) contending Smith now holds “the mantle of the Black Messiah” in films like The Pursuit of Happyness and I Am Legend. While Neville’s sacrifice marks him as saviour and most scholars interpret his blood as the cure, it is ultimately not derived directly from his blood and in death he becomes monstrous (again and definitively). Moreman (2008) mistakenly claims the cure is derived from Neville’s “own special blood”, in thereby contending Neville’s martyrdom marking the hero as “divine saviour” and the film concludes in a “blatant Christ-figuration” (see also Pak, 2010; Subramanian, 2010; Brayton, 2011).280 Yet although Neville is immune he is not unique, unlike in Omega Man – one percent of the general population, including Ethan and Anna, are also immune. Brayton (2011, p.73) further claims the “improved

279 Omega Man “works to construct an aura of scientific authority around the curative properties of white Anglo-Saxon blood […] evoking virtually all the signifiers of objective science” (Nama, 2008, p.49). I Am Legend also does this, to ‘justify’ Neville’s experimentation on the Darkseekers. Nama (2008, p.49) further argues Neville’s ‘160-proof Anglo Saxon’ “is a powerful racial metaphor, with white blood presented as a means to cure and repopulate a diseased and dying world”. 280 Moreman’s observation that Neville assumes “the cruciform position” while exercising is emblematic of scholars’ tenuous associations of Neville with Jesus and hardly equivalent to Heston/Neville’s final Christ pose in Omega Man. Additionally, the “idea of a black ‘Christ’ […] is perhaps incongruous with” American Christian fundamentalism, undercuts neo-conservative readings such as Boyle’s, which need to “ignore the protagonist’s racial identity” (Brayton, 2011, p.69). Perhaps Neville is more properly Joseph than Christ, that is, defending the cure rather than being the cure. In this sense, Anna (her butterfly tattoo would signal her divinity, not Neville’s) and Ethan are the ‘first mother and child’, coming from Maryland and heading to a foreseen survivor’s colony at Bethel.
relationship between ‘blackness and the state’ in *I Am Legend* arises “only through a masculine vernacular that downplays if not excludes women from the narrative of national recovery”. However, he overlooks that females are later and repeatedly figured as redeems – repeatedly saving Neville and as symbolic and literal carriers of the cure – similarly complicating and diverging from Copier’s claims.

Indeed, just as the virus is named after a female, so too the cure is drawn from the body and blood of the female ‘terror-Other’, whom Neville subsequently kills in the grenade blast intended to destroy the Alpha Male ‘terror-Other’. Security is seemingly only imaginable in seeking to destroy the home and all that is different and incomprehensible. Indeed, Neville’s efforts to find a cure “reflect a desperate desire to restore homogeneity” (Patterson, 2005, p.22). The inadequacy of individualised home security is ultimately verified by the Darkseekers’ breach – possibly suggesting the continued vulnerability of the supposedly secured home(land) post-9/11. King (2012, p.154) claims Neville “restores home as a safe space” by safeguarding Anna and Ethan “in the confines of his fortified domestic space”. Yet they flee the putative home and retreat into the lab, which King earlier links to ‘visual economies of violence’, rather than domesticity. Moreover, Neville’s numerous defence mechanisms are quickly overwhelmed; shown to be always already inadequate. The home is irrevocably vulnerable and penetrable, and only its concealment temporarily protects the hollow spectacle of the neo-liberal security ethos. Rather than advocating conservative social regimes of personal security responsibility linked to reified modes of consumption, *I Am Legend*’s ‘imagination of disaster’ acknowledges the insufficiencies of the neo-liberal security ethos and its militarised ‘final man’.

More significantly, and despite Neville’s violence and the Darkseekers’ supposedly irreconcilable difference, the future, more than multiracial, incorporates the Other as foundational; as Neville recognises, “the cure’s in her blood”. And while King (2012) notes the cure is derived from the female Other, she claims that in this respect Neville’s “heroism is compromised” as the “film refuses to sever the hegemony of masculinity from whiteness” (p.160). Yet King overlooks that the blood cure is also a hybrid of Neville’s and the female Darkseeker’s blood, an implicit avowal of ‘difference’ that likewise counters Nama’s (2008) assertions about Hollywood’s strict policing of racial difference in SF apocalypses. In short, the cure represents not only
the survival of difference but difference as foundational (in humanity’s future). Copier (2008) describes the tendency to link feminism with apocalypse as only ever partially successful. However, and in stark contrast to most interpretations of the film, *I Am Legend* ultimately positions the female Darkseeker – like Sam, Anna and his daughter – as a redeemer, of Neville and humanity. Although downplayed, females are not excluded from the ‘narrative of national recovery’ *I Am Legend* offers. Indeed, they numerously rescue Neville, redeem him as father, carry the cure and facilitate his heroism.

An Alternative Ending, or Always Monstrous Masculinity?

The original ending of *I Am Legend*, which was replaced after poor initial test screenings, appears to legitimise the Darkseeker as a new, hybrid form. Yet more significantly, it concretises what is already implicit in the theatrical version – that is, Neville’s monstrosity. In this alternative ending, his daughter’s call on Neville – and the audience – to ‘listen’ now more clearly represents a call to accept difference. The butterfly tattoo is now on the female Darkseeker’s neck rather than Anna’s and the Alpha Male more clearly deliberately ‘creates’ the butterfly symbol, and Neville consequently returns the female Darkseeker to her mate. In so doing, the faces of death on Neville’s wall finally also come into focus for him. Neville’s recognition of the Darkseekers thus also signals his recognition of his own monstrosity, particularly figured in his shift out of focus, which tellingly mirrors how Anna too sees Neville when she earlier sees the images. Neville thereafter leaves the city to the Darkseekers, as he Anna and Ethan leave in search of the (unrepresented) survivors’ colony. As such, scholars argue the alternative ending avoids the violent annihilation of difference, is truly multicultural and complicates binaries of Self and Other. In these ways, Westwell (2011, p.833) claims its “goes some way to undoing their

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281 Also see Hantke (2011) for an alternative criticism of the scholarly tendency to interpret the alternative ending as substantially different from the theatrical release. Hantke (2011) observes that recognition in the alternative ending remains disquietingly tied to anthropomorphic values, and thereby supports integration over difference.

282 See Boyle, 2009; Brayton, 2011; Wallis & Aston, 2011; Westwell, 2011; King, 2012. For example, the conservative colony remains an off-screen hope, multiculturalism is fully supported and black protagonist not doomed to martyrdom (Brayton, 2011, p.74; see also Boyle, 2009). Moreover, Neville ‘gives up’ New York (King, 2012, p.155), and recognises that co-existence is preferable to destruction, and the film withholds “heroic sacrifice” (Wallis & Aston, 2011, p.61).
irreconcilable difference” and Neville’s acceptance of a measure of culpability. Yet irrespective of Neville’s cognisance, such responses ignore Neville’s monstrosity in the theatrical version. That is, while *I Am Legend*’s re-shot ending attempts to construct Neville as saviour through heroic, sacrificial death, Neville remains monstrous *in both versions*.

Ultimately, despite re-shooting the film’s ending, Neville is arguably *always* monstrous, not only in Anna’s eyes but in *becoming the ‘terror-Other’*. In *I Am Legend*, as in *Omega Man*, Neville supposedly “owes his legendary status […] to his role as a typical, self-sacrificial” Hollywood hero (Subramanian, 2010, p.49), as well as his ‘singularity’. The film “privileges both militarism and masculinity” despite the “appearance of diversity and multicultural tolerance” in its black hero and ‘multicultural family’ (Brayton, 2011, p.75). The ending “revalorises sacrificial economies of violence, masculinist heroism, and rejection of the Other” (King, 2012, p.155), leading only to more violence. More than this, however, sacrificial paternal redemption requires monstrosity, becoming and dying as both ‘legend’ and ‘monster’. Thus, redemption is irrevocably compromised when Neville also *becomes* the monstrous ‘terror-Other’ – the suicide bomber – when, with grenade in hand, he quite literally meets the Alpha Male head on, unsettlingly elevating the Alpha Male as his (equal) adversary. While other scholars note Neville’s ‘transformation’ into “saviour-cum-suicide bomber” (Boyle, 2009, p.1; see also Brayton, 2011), they fail to fully consider the significance and implications of his becoming ‘monstrous’. Significantly, Copier (2008, p.34) argues martyrdom is an unstable, changeable concept, including often conflicting historically attached meanings and interpretations. Indeed, Van Henten (2003, p.207, cited in Copier, 2008) finds contemporary complications of the “clear demarcation between victim and perpetrator”, whose very acts of martyrdom also render them “perpetrators of violence”. Neville’s violence may be righteous – to save and rejoin ‘family’ – but his ultimate mirroring the Darkseeker as an agent of terror problematises the recuperation of his ‘protective’ masculinity. Such ‘sacrifice’ is typical of such narratives, and not configured through ideas of Otherness. In the

283 Van Henten’s observations most notably relate to ‘Muslim martyrs’, and Neville’s deployment of mines as part of his defences is also highly reminiscent of coordinated (suicide) car bombings. Combe (2011) also likens Ray’s actions in *War of the Worlds* to those of a suicide bomber.
end, however, Neville’s redemption as father in *I Am Legend* is only conceivable through becoming western society’s monstrous ‘terror-Other’, the suicide bomber.

**The Survivors’ Colony, Patriarchy & Incoherence**

*I Am Legend* ostensibly satisfies Broderick’s (1993) finding that hero myths in SF-apocalyptic cinema increasingly reinforce the symbolic order and maintenance of conservative social regimes, through the redemption of the ‘father’ – however ambivalently – and the nostalgic restoration of the American village-nation. In both *Cloverfield* and *The Strangers*, home is undoubtedly destroyed, but is neither replaced nor reinvigorated as something better. Nor, as England (2006) claims, are the transgressors punished, the *Cloverfield* monster still alive and the strangers driving off to their next destination (and attack). Yet after Neville’s sacrificial death, Anna and Ethan travel with the cure to the foretold survivors’ colony. Yet, as much as Neville is redeemed he is also punished, not only for being of the scientific community that manipulated the virus, but predominantly through his anachronistic devotion to modern technologies and the city – the final explosive fire of Neville’s grenade fades into white, not only purifying but purging. A shot of autumnal trees from Anna’s driver’s point-of-view offers a neat juxtaposition with the opening sequence of Neville’s vehicular perspective in the post-apocalyptic city (Figures 3.13-3.14). Significantly, given Neville is persistently associated with cars, Anna leaves her vehicle outside of the colony walls.

The colony seemingly represents a return to an ideal image of the American foundational township. Indeed, demonstrating how the film literalises Nilges’ observations on apocalyptic nostalgia, Hantke (2011) specifically links the imagined colony to America’s historical past. While seemingly multicultural, according to Brayton (2011, p.74; see also Wallis & Aston, 2011) the colony “reflects a revival of Christianity and American patriotism housed in a fortified rural community”; merely a more remote evocation of the private security state (see also Boyle, 2009). In Neville’s death and Anna’s delivery of the cure, Brayton (2011, pp.74-75) claims that *I Am Legend* proffers diversity ‘working’ to oppress a more threatening Other “to revive the state”, resonating with the anxieties of “American empire in a post-9/11
political climate”. The film seemingly resolves social and cultural anxieties, “a realised harmonious social order whose antagonistic sources have been eradicated” (Boyle, 2009, p.3). Yet although Neville symbolically destroys the Darkseekers, their actual annihilation is merely elided. Not only is the blood of the female-Other incorporated into the cure, but humanity’s continuation requires fleeing the city, overrun by the racial/ideological ‘terror-Other’, to rebuild society in the countryside.284

More accurately, the colony is emblematic of I Am Legend’s incoherent embedding, as Hantke (2011) observes, of ‘oppositional’ messages within its ‘dominant’ ideology, most evident in the colony’s peculiar combination of armed militia, scientific monitoring technologies with green energy. For example, a retina scan of Anna and Ethan both confirms the colony’s non-infection and, with the militia, reinstates the military-scientific institutional regime that failed to avert the collapse (see also Brayton, 2011). A church steeple signifies sanctity and sanctuary, and marks the colony as a Christian space, an earthly ‘new Jerusalem’. Moreover, it is visually linked to Anna’s body, as if the reconstituted church rises from her body. Yet while the wind turbines also evoke a return to a simpler way of life, in line with Nilges’ (2010) contention, they hardly represent, as Boyle claims, a ‘perfect’ “neo-conservative utopian vision” (Boyle, 2009, p.3), particularly when taken with Anna’s disavowal of the technology most aligned with Neville. Additionally, such straightforward perspectives on the colony mandate overlooking the foundational quality of the blood of the (female) Other, the redemptive actions of numerous females and Neville’s final sacrificial monstrosity.

284 While ‘civilisation’s’ continuation in Omega Man similarly requires fleeing the city, this is more an image of 1970s urban decay.
Another ambivalence or incoherence in the depiction of the colony remains under-recognised. That is, despite the appearance of a post-racial imaginary, Anna hands the vial given by Neville over to an unseen white male (faceless, only his hands are visible). Unlike Smith’s earlier SF roles in *Independence Day* (1996) and *Men in Black* (1997), Brayton (2011, p.72) argues that ‘black heroism’ in *I Am Legend* is not only “instrumental to the rearticulation of the nation”, but atypically “realised without restoring white normativity” or recentring whiteness. Yet, in Anna’s transfer of the cure into white male hands, *I Am Legend* partially recentres ‘whiteness’ and again potentially implicates Smith’s screen persona in the protection of white power. While females (or at least certain types) are initially demonised in *I Am Legend*, they nonethelessVariously carry the cure – by blood, faith and hand. Yet in a sense, the viral plague and the breakdown of society (negatively associated with the female scientist) leads to the resurrection of the father (through sacrifice) and restoration of society (as patriarchal) through female actions. Females ambivalently make survival and a cure possible, but ultimately return it to male hands.

As much of the scholarly literature on *I Am Legend* demonstrates, it is difficult to avoid the incoherence of the film itself, particularly in proposing a coherent argument about not only its incoherence, but the greater significance of this incoherence. Hantke (2011, p.183) wonders whether the film’s “complexity in the margins” will come to assume greater significance, and this chapter represents an attempt to demonstrate this contention by revealing the greater ambivalence and incoherence of the film’s articulation of its ‘dominant’ messages. That is, it is not only in the alternative ending that the hero is monstrous or the feared terror-Other recognised or legitimised. King asserts that because ‘sacrificial allegories’ like *I Am Legend* must also “expose the trauma” they seek to dispel or resolve – arguably of failed normative masculinity as much as the 9/11 attacks – they inevitably ‘disallow closure’ and remain ‘ambivalent’ (King, 2011, pp.165-6). Yet more than this, it is precisely because of *I Am Legend*’s ‘closure’ that its recuperation of professional and paternal ‘protective’ masculinities and nation remains wholly and unsettlingly ambivalent. Indeed, such ambivalence is ultimately recognised by scholars that otherwise diagnose post-9/11 Hollywood cinema either too pessimistically or optimistically. For example, although countering their primary argument, Wallis and Aston (2011, p.63) finally (and more accurately) observe that it reveals “the American psyche is still
fractured and uncertain of sociopolitical configurations post-9/11”, with narrative imbalance leading to ambiguous conclusions. And despite Westwell’s (2011, p.815) claim post-9/11 American cinema exhibits an “increased willingness to explore difference”, he too finally acknowledges that there is more accurately a tension between exploration and annihilation in the relationship of Self and Other (p.832). Indeed, *I Am Legend* arguably represents that tension, more rightly emblematic of the film’s ambivalence, incoherence and uncertainty, *within a single film. I Am Legend* firstly seemingly advocates before demonstrating the schizophrenic effects of unencumbered, solitary consumption, performance and repetition. More significantly, the film finally proffers a ‘monstrous’ black saviour whose sacrifice recuperates and reunites his fragmented ‘protective’ paternal and professional identities, but is dependent on female redeemers. It likewise imagines a future-nostalgic village-nation ‘American’ utopia that reinstates failed (masculine) institutions and ‘faceless’ white power, but founded in ‘blackness’, ‘monstrosity’ and the blood of the (female) ‘terror-Other’.

The colony that closes *I Am Legend* leads on to the final chapter and *The Kingdom*’s similar imagining of an American ‘outpost’, but transplanted to an ‘America’ abroad, and one that fears and excludes Otherness rather than is founded – albeit unconsciously – on it. According to Boyle (2009, p.3), while “the terrorists successfully invade Neville’s home […] the survivor’s colony seems impenetrable”. However, Boyle again both too readily assumes the annihilation of the ‘terror-Other’ and the invulnerability of the isolated American ‘outpost’, a key trope of the western genre; a false security – concealing a persistent insecurity – torn asunder by the violent incursion of the ‘terror-Other’. The final chapter also further explores the conflation of paternal and professional identities within constructions of masculinity as ‘protective’. Extending *I Am Legend*’s conceptions of militarised masculinity, including female masculinity for the first time in a ‘terror-threat’ film, I explore *The Kingdom*’s depiction of the *even more* ambivalent function of the ‘terror-Other’ as the hero’s ‘dark’ mirror and the devastating consequences of violent revenge, or traditional action cinema ‘remasculinisation’, on recuperations of ‘American’ masculinities and national identity. The chapter again explores the depiction of blackness, both as part of American conceptions of identity, yet also in relation with the ‘terror-Other’. *The Kingdom* takes the exploration of fathers and uniformed roles
further again, similarly linking paternal and professional ‘protective’ identities, implying not only the father’s specific role in recuperating national identity, but the intergenerational and interracial impacts of ‘fathers on ‘sons’.
Chapter Four – *The Kingdom*

“A variation on vengeance”: the Ambivalence of Revenge in a ‘War on Terror’ ‘Western’

This chapter broadens *I Am Legend* and *WTC*’s explorations of paternal redemption beyond paternal guilt and the father-as-state, to the deleterious, corrosive intergenerational effects of (symbolic and actual) ‘fathers’ on ‘sons’. While *The Kingdom* conflates paternal and professional identity within ‘protective’ masculinity, ‘remasculinisation’ through violence finally destabilises paternal identity. As a forensic procedural, *The Kingdom* also reiterates the desire to return to the time before terror likewise articulated in *I Am Legend* – the masculine desire to undo, reimagine and ‘re-do’ the response to disaster. Throughout the thesis, the terror attacks on America have progressively moved outwards (temporally and spatially) from 9/11 and ‘Ground Zero’. *The Kingdom* extends *I Am Legend*’s compelled departure from ‘Ground Zero’ and New York for an American ‘village utopia’, to the transplanting and re-creation of ‘America’ abroad – from a superficially invulnerable outpost to an irrevocably vulnerable one – a key western cinematic trope. Yet it also looks back to before the attacks of 9/11, attempting to reimagine their characterisation and the consequent American response. As in *WTC*, I consider the significance of an abrupt mid-film ‘subgeneric shift’ from forensic procedural to action ‘shoot-em-up’, one equally associated with countering the destabilisation of masculine identity sheathed in professional-paternal roles. Finally, while preceding chapters explore difficulties to recuperate threatened masculinities in relation with a wholly absent, indeterminate or monstrously unknowable ‘terror threats’, this chapter considers whether these difficulties are erased by the explicit ‘Orientalising’ of the ‘terror-Other’ as ‘Arab/Muslim’ terrorist.\(^{285}\)

The chapter initially examines the ways in which *The Kingdom*, a seemingly reactionary and jingoistic action-procedural genre film, uses it credits sequence and a fictional terror attack to rehistoricise 9/11, recasting it as a crime and geopolitically

\(^{285}\) I again utilise Nayak’s (2006, p.58) employment of ‘Arab/Muslim’, to similarly “ politicise and denote the conflation […] into a singular entity” of Arab and Muslim.
resituating the (ongoing) terror threat to Saudi Arabia. I discuss the film in relation to various (sub)genres throughout the chapter, including revenge, crime and war. I also significantly examine *The Kingdom* as a ‘frontier Western’ (Anderson, 2007), an articulation of the ‘frontier myth’ of the often violent struggle against savagery to secure the outpost-nation. Indeed, Durham (2004) links westerns, action-thrillers and war movies as ‘male action’ genres, encouraging their blended consideration in *The Kingdom*. The opening fictional terror attacks on a oil workers’ compound explicitly articulate an idea of ‘America’ abroad as a ‘frontier outpost’ in hostile territory. In this respect, I particularly consider the film in relation to John Ford’s ‘cavalry western’, *Fort Apache* (1948) – not only because of shared western tropes of the vulnerable outpost within the Other’s territory, but in its narrative structure, and particularly its similarly ambivalent coda (albeit following a vastly *dissimilar* massacre). The chapter then explores how masculine identity in *The Kingdom* is especially destabilised by the inhibition of professional agency and mobility, with its relation to westerns notably tied up in how characters move and respond to the foreign, desert environment. As an action–‘frontier western’, *The Kingdom* not atypically invokes Orientalist discourses of the ‘terror-Other’, reproduced in the film’s binary of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ‘Arab/Muslims’, but also complicates them, particularly through the relations of ‘fathers’ to ‘sons’. The final section explores the generic means through which the film seeks to ‘remasculinise’ American masculinity, including incorporating female masculinity, and restore ‘American’ national identity. First, the film reinstitutes professional agency and symbolically re-territorialises space as ‘American’. And, second, through another jarring and critically decried final-act ‘generic shift’ from forensic procedure to violent action – as crime-solving becomes ‘revenge fantasy’ war – *and* the requisite ‘taking up of arms’ to enact vengeance. However, I finally demonstrate that even this action-war ‘turn’ results in persistent uncertainty rather than ‘remasculinisation’. As in *Munich*’s (Spielberg, 2005) similarly deflating coda, *The Kingdom*’s ‘heroes’ recognise (but cannot articulate) the hollowness and inadequacy of violent retribution, primarily figured in the persistence of violence through blowback and the corrosive personal effects of not only acting like but *being the same as* the ‘terror-Other’.
Rehistoricising & Resituating 9/11: Crime & Genre

*The Kingdom* is seemingly the most straightforward of the ‘terror threat’ films, an action film that Orientalises ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Arabs to overcome the supposed ‘shapelessness’ that effects other Hollywood representations of the ‘war on terror’. After a series of terror attacks that also kills FBI agents on an American oil workers’ compound in Riyadh – clearly coded as an ‘America abroad’ and discussed later in the chapter – a multiethnic FBI team heads to Saudi Arabia to investigate, against State Department wishes. Initially impeded by its Saudi hosts, the investigative team eventually solves the crime with the support of a sympathetic, similarly sidelined Saudi police colonel. The film ends in a spectacular, over-the-top shootout that kills the terror mastermind in the course of rescuing an abducted team member. Yet despite seemingly reducing complexities and establishing closure, the film initially attempts to rehistoricise 9/11 and reframe terrorism as a crime via the action-procedural genre. Indeed, by ending the credits sequence with the beginning of 9/11, *The Kingdom* reframes it as criminal rather than an act of war and, following the compound terror attacks, the appropriate American response as forensic and procedural rather than military. As a forensic crime procedural, the film seeks to both return to the time before terror – as in *I Am Legend* – and prevent the next attack by reconstructing and reassembling the crime and bombing materials.  

Nonetheless, critical opinion on *The Kingdom* was predominantly discomfited by the film’s genre trappings in relation to its representation of real-world terror imagery and comment on the ‘war on terror’. *The Kingdom*’s allusion to the multiethnic squads of WWII combat and 1980s action movies in combination with its stylistic-generic blend of documentary, action, procedural and the ‘interracial buddy’ film suggests it is both “old-fashioned” and “new-fangled” (Corliss, 2007). Critics also typically viewed *The Kingdom* as a conventional genre movie that cloaks itself unconvincingly, even cynically or hypocritically, in “bogus seriousness” (Editorial, *Cineaste*, 2007) – a “jingoistic Rambo-in-Arabia” (Shaheen, 2007; see also Bradshaw, 2007; Scott, 2007)

286 The FBI persistently characterises the compound attackers as criminals. And perhaps this repeated cinematic playing out of the desire to return to the moments before (terror), a desire echoed in the increased popularity post-9/11 of TV procedurals, especially forensic, lies in this capacity to reconstruct. *The Kingdom* pointedly crosscuts images of preparations for a new attack with the FBI team’s reconstruction of the first attacks; linking the two spaces and actions indicates the time pressures on their reconstruction.
revenge fantasy. Scott (2007) further claims that *The Kingdom*, in ignoring the Iraq conflict and its realities, “can be seen as a wishful revisionist scenario”, offering “a cathartic counternarrative” of completion – and “the utopian spectacle of wounded Americans heading home, mission accomplished” (Hoberman, 2007; see also Corliss, 2007). The critically persistent employment of *Rambo III* (MacDonald, 1988) implies *The Kingdom* offers a sort of ‘do-over’ in which ‘this time America gets to win’ (Scott, 2007, see also Rainer, 2007). Yet while the film certainly is revisionist, and in part reinvigorates the ‘muscularity’ of 1980s action movies, this chapter demonstrates it is finally more ambivalent, incoherent and current than critical responses recognise.

The existing literature on *The Kingdom* remains slight, a consequence of its apparent genre conventionality. The majority of work explores the ostensibly xenophobic, racist or Orientalist construction of Saudi characters in the film (Shaheen, 2007; Aguayo, 2009; Creekmur, 2010; Williams & Linneman, 2010), but does not consider how the Other destabilises and troubles normative ‘American’ masculinities. Treating it exclusively as an action-thriller, scholarly writing also uniformly claims the film is jingoistic, conservative and satisfies supposed genre expectations on the utility of violence in restoring the geopolitical status quo and revising the shame of 9/11 and the uncertainty of the ‘war on terror’. Carter and Dodds are representative of this dominant viewpoint, claiming the film portrays violence as “a necessary restorative to the existing geopolitical order” (Carter & Dodds, 2011, p.110; see also Dodds, 2008; Price, 2008). Yet this chapter argues the film is less straightforward than it appears. Hence, while examining the film generically via crime, action, war and revenge, I also significantly explore the film as a ‘frontier western’. Only Šakota-Kokot’s (2010, p.65) thesis on understanding conflict through fiction film, similarly asserts *The Kingdom* is related to the classical western. However, she only explores this superficially via the narrative of the hero-protagonist and a simplistic, rather convenient interpretation of the genre. Alternatively, I contend the film aligns both structurally, formally and thematically with a specific subgenre: the ‘frontier western’. More than this, *The Kingdom*’s conclusion arguably only deflates, implicitly recognising – if not overtly articulating – that ‘remasculinising’ through retributive violence is ultimately incomplete, uncertain and even ‘monstrous’.
Post-9/11 Hollywood films are routinely accused of depoliticising events by ignoring the political for the personal, a tendency presumably amplified in action-war movies focusing on the individual experiences of soldiers over the wider political causes and ramifications of conflict. Yet while *Cineaste* (2007) claims *The Kingdom* “a barely disguised wish-fulfilment fantasy […] to rectify historical myopia”, it also asserts the film and other ‘war on terror’ movies “shed light on the state of the American psyche”, not only through the threat to the home posed by the Other but by the war itself. Thus, although director Peter Berg’s (*The Kingdom* Director’s Commentary, 2007) goal was “to present an act of terror and […] divorce that from politics and religion”, *The Kingdom*, in stark contrast to the discursive political and media responses in the aftermath of 9/11, nonetheless seeks to (re)historicise the attacks, reframe them as a crime, and resituate the ‘place of response’ from Afghanistan-Iraq to Saudi Arabia, by reappropriating blame and linking the country to continued terror.

*The Kingdom*’s opening credit sequence connects disparate archival images and footage to (re)historicise the attacks of 9/11, (re)constructing an alternative timeline that implies its seeds were linked to long-term US dependence on Saudi oil. In this sense, the opening credits mirror a central concern of *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), that is, to spotlight America’s geopolitical and geo-economic relationship with the Saudis. Beginning prior to WWII, the sequence implicitly suggests ownership or right, before the post-WWII presidential agreement of “Oil for protection” similarly implies an asymmetrical relationship and Saudi weakness, but equally that US presence has long historical roots and that they were ‘invited’ by Saudis to offer protection. Nonetheless, the terms of the relationship shift in Arab favour, with US dependence on oil during the 1973 trade embargo “redefin[ing] the balance of power”. 287 A succeeding montage of Saudi leaders with subsequent presidents, each shown as subordinate uncomfortable and emasculated, not only implies the negative effects of this ‘redefinition’ for American national identity and (presidential) masculinity, but – as *Cloverfield* does – satisfies Drew’s (2004) identification of the

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287 The 1930s discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, succeeding the title “Oil is discovered” the camera pulls back to reveal “By an American Expedition”. Although a Saudi-American coalition is subsequently implied in the founding of an Arab-American oil company, DVD Bonus materials clarify that Aramco was a consortium of American oil companies that would control reserves until 1973. A later pictograph swiftly details oil’s underpinning of modern life before emphasising its influence on national security and the military.
rhetorical construction of 9/11 as exposing the *predating* emasculation American national identity.

The opening credits sequence’s focus on more recent history further rehistoricise’s 9/11, introducing Osama bin Laden in explicit connection with the build up to the first Gulf War and subsequent US presence. Bin Laden is literally behind the title, “1990’s terrorist attacks… increase around the world”, before his visage comes into brighter, sharper focus and looms to the fore. While this creates a tight association between Bin Laden and terror *and* signifies his increasing role it also reframes al-Qaeda as rooted in Saudi history rather than stateless (or in Afghanistan or Iraq) and will reinforce the Saudi link to the attacks. Indeed, Figures 4.1-4.3 demonstrate how 9/11 is visually connected to US reliance on Saudi oil, as bar graphs of Saudi production and US consumption form ‘twin towers’, and the US consumption ‘tower’ transforms into the first WTC tower hit on 9/11. The ‘towers’, representative of power, excess, influence *and* exposed vulnerability, build and communicate wealth but invite attack.

![Figure 4.1](image1)

**Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access**

![Figure 4.2](image2)

**Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access**

![Figure 4.3](image3)

**Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access**

The contemporary news aesthetic employed in the credits sequence also seeks to establish the opening’s (and the narrative’s) veracity and historical authenticity,

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288 Yet in keeping with its own vested (re)construction, omitting the growth of the mujahadeen in 1980s Afghanistan. Bin Laden’s presence here also shifts Gulf War focus to the invited but controversial presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia and symbolically and visually connects these to US presence in the Gulf, implying a like consequence onto the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

289 Although the sequence notes Bin Laden’s citizenship was revoked prior to 9/11, it observes that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi. Arguably this reframing makes the same discursive ‘move’ as the Bush Administration made in similarly framing their response to 9/11 along nation state lines, onto Afghanistan.

290 Again, as in *WTC*, the attacks are not represented – as both unrepresentable and over-represented – the screen cutting to black before the graphically simulated collision.
augmented by multiple ‘news’/historical voices and perspectives. Such deployment and integration of news stock footage into (especially the opening of) Hollywood genre films during a time of war is quite widespread, and regularly used in WWII combat (propaganda) films like *Objective, Burma!* (Walsh, 1945). In line with Price (2008, p.64), the opening sequence ties wider real-world political events to its fictional world to give it greater weight. It also implies al-Qaeda’s influence behind the fictional attacks that subsequently open the narrative. *The Kingdom*’s quest for veracity and authenticity is stylistically extended into the story world through its hand-held style and pseudo-documentary aesthetic, similar to *Cloverfield*. The film takes source elements of particular forms of documentary by titling all locations and introducing key characters in an FBI briefing by name and professional specialty. Berg’s preferred style seeks to afford the sense he merely presents unfolding events, as he avoids blocking scenes too specifically and shoots on location to convey a sense the film is a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary. While “Berg’s frenetic style heightens [… the] sense of disorientation” (Puig, 2007), a disorientation the characters and audience will ‘feel’ throughout, his predilection for partially obscured or slightly removed action also connotes a *stylised* lack of control.

While ‘logical transference’ also arguably accompanies references to evocative imagery from the ‘war on terror’, as outlined earlier, *The Kingdom*’s real-world allusions attracted significant criticism. There is certainly a significant disjuncture between the credits and the ensuing narrative in *The Kingdom*, as if the historically situated credit sequence does one thing and its action genre narrative does another entirely. Lumenick (2007; see also Ansen, 2007), for example, argues the credits sequence ‘raises expectations’ but the film soon reverts to action conventions or ‘type’. Replaying debates around *Cloverfield* and *I Am Legend*, the cumulative impact of the news-style credits sequence and hand-held documentary aesthetic gives later allusions to real-world events, such as the beheading of journalist Daniel Pearl, greater-than-typical ‘weight’ within an action genre movie. While Williams and Linneman (2010, p.199) assert the use of imagery reminiscent of beheadings in *The

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291 For example, the early torture scene was shot in an Arizona jail.

292 This tonal dissonance between the credits sequence, centring as it does on 9/11, and the narrative is partially located in the fact the film was in development well before 9/11 (and modelled on the bombing of the Khobar Towers in 1996). Cieply (2007) reinforces this in observing that *The Kingdom*’s politics, like that of 300 (Snyder, 2006), earned praise and criticism in equal measure.
Kingdom and Syriana (Gaghan, 2005) “is a powerful device to help the audience connect a fictional portrayal of Arabs to real-world violence”, critics considered its incorporation within conventional genre form discomfiting – and even “opportunistic and creepy” (Zacharek, 2007; see also Rainer, 2007; Schwarzbaum, 2007). Haar (2007) is similarly unsure whether he is supposed to be entertained or nauseated. It seems The Kingdom’s blurring of reality and fiction inspired an uncertain viewing experience, an experience perhaps amplified by a final-act generic ‘shift’ and a starkly contrasting coda (discussed later in the chapter).

The Kingdom as a ‘Frontier Western’

It is perhaps more pertinent to explore The Kingdom formally and thematically as a ‘frontier western’. In this way, the film will be more clearly tied to historical Hollywood representations of its masculinities – including female and Other masculinities – and ‘Orientalist’ depictions of the Other. Despite The Kingdom’s new-style credits sequence, pseudo-documentary aesthetic and apparent generic structure as an action-procedural, numerous critics note the film’s various western elements.293 Indeed, Durham (2004) links westerns, action-thrillers and war movies as ‘male action’ genres, encouraging their blended consideration in The Kingdom. In this respect, Anderson (2007) offers the useful designation of the ‘frontier western’, projections (and explorations) of the frontier myth (related to colonialism, conquest and control) not limited to ‘classic westerns’ – and particularly amenable to war movies – and would include films such as Green Berets (Kellogg & Wayne, 1968), Full Metal Jacket (Kubrick, 1987), Starship Troopers (Verhoeven, 1997), Alien (Scott, 1979) and Black Hawk Down (Scott, 2001).294 Anderson maintains that westerns are little more than a collection of conventions and themes that could fit within any number of genres. Moreover, Slotkin likewise contends in Gunfighter Nation (1992) that the genre films that succeeded the western, like gangster, SF and WWII combat films, rested on a foundation of character, setting and plot derived from

294 Recent pre-9/11 ‘frontier westerns’ include Rules of Engagement (Friedkin, 2000) and Black Hawk Down (2002), a film completed prior to the attacks but released and subsequently (and problematically) interpreted through the prism of 9/11. Black Hawk Down, for example, invokes the ‘frontier’, in which characters enter a hostile area described as “the Wild West” from an ‘outpost’ of sorts.
the western. While Anderson’s designation reproduces the typology approach he criticises, his designation of the ‘frontier western’ is particularly useful in examining The Kingdom’s contemporary articulation of the ‘frontier’, particularly given his explicit relation of the ‘frontier western’ to ‘colonialism’ and “the vitality of the frontier myth” in post-9/11 Hollywood (p.10). Indeed, while it is important to recognise that classical Hollywood westerns are predominantly made ‘after the fact’, whereas The Kingdom presents an ongoing and uncertain conflict, the film bears significant hallmarks of Hollywood ‘frontier’ westerns, and particularly John Ford’s first ‘cavalry’ western Fort Apache (1948). Examining The Kingdom in specific relation to Fort Apache (1948) is appropriate because of the shared prominence of particular western tropes, most notably of the vulnerable outpost within ‘foreign’ territory, and its particular narrative structure, especially its similarly ambivalent coda (following a vastly dissimilar massacre). The Kingdom, similarly set “on the critical edge between wilderness and civilisation” (O’Connor, 2010, p.32), also depicts a (colonial) beleaguered ‘outpost’, an inciting massacre and vulnerability within hostile space, and offers an ambivalent representation of the ‘Indian’ Other.

Seemingly unconsciously acknowledging the co-extensive concerns of many popular genres, Movshovitz (1984, p.68) argues Hollywood (and America) has often chosen “to imagine their conflicts” ‘out there’, where borders confront the wilderness. Yet while westerns represent the nexus of cultural fears, desires and politics, as all popular genres do, Slotkin also argues that conquering the frontier, twinned with the destruction of the Other, was politically and culturally integral to America’s national identity. Indeed, Nolley (2010, p.83) even claims westerns, despite their occasional critique or ambivalence towards western mythology, are “at root an expression of white culture justifying its expansion”. A key characteristic of western mythology is reminiscent of the transgressive heroes and masculinities observed throughout the study. It depicts “a species of individualism equating freedom with lawlessness and the spectacle of space as an object of wonder […] to be conquered” (Borden &

295 Ray (1985, p.75) extends this idea, claiming many classical Hollywood genre movies as “thinly camouflaged westerns”. He describes these ‘concealed’ or ‘disguised’ westerns as not only “displacing crucial anxieties” but “displacing those [western] structures into the disguises they assumed in other genres” (p.71), although this is arguably more about basic/typical narrative form than genre.

296 The chapter will predominantly consider Fort Apache out of the so-called ‘cavalry trilogy’, particularly given the different screenwriters for each of the trilogy and, consequently, their very different politics.
Essman, 2000, p.31). And the ‘ideology of space’ of the frontier and its representative figure, the individualistic hero, “reassured audiences about the permanent availability of both” (Ray, 1985, p.75). As O’Connor (2010, p.32) notes, this western ‘ideology of space’ “both disavows [American] colonial intention and affirms colonial hegemony” and justifies military occupation based on self-defence. This ‘justification’ is often provided via the threat to or kidnap of women and children, such as in *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* (Ford, 1949), which offers ‘cause’ for retributive vengeance and (re)militarisation, a ‘justification’ nonetheless. That said, scholars tends to engage with how this is also critiqued in films like *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956). Western mythology also invokes a persistent tension between domesticated (which includes the fort) and open, contested spaces, most wondrously represented in the opening contrast of domestic and open space in *The Searchers* but also in the persistent vulnerability of Fort Apache.297

‘Outpost’ America, ‘America’ Abroad

In *Fort Apache*, the ‘outpost’ lies at the edge of civilisation, isolated and surrounded by alien territory and hostile ‘natives’. Indeed, in Colonel Thursday’s eyes the Fort Apache outpost ambivalently represents the end of civilisation and is, quite literally for the stagecoach, the final stop. Yet although it is in many respects another world, the fort is also marked as a multicultural ‘American’ space, both geopolitically and through social ritual. There is a constant struggle to ‘civilise’ space by importing and enacting social rituals and events. The dances and courtships in Fort Apache mirror and mimic society (or at least tries) in the east, and seek to domesticate and transform the hostile, alien space into a community where women preside. Yet as Dave Kehr (2012) affirms, an “emotional climate of loss and uncertainty” pervades *Fort Apache*, a “sense of stagnation and emptiness has settled in […] which the residents have attempted to fill with social ritual […] and domestic warmth”. Movshovitz (1984, p.68) similarly observes that town life in *Stagecoach* is “cramped in oppressive

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297 While men in the home are often represented somewhat pejoratively in contrast to the ‘individualistic’ hero in westerns, confined to domestic spaces marked as the domain of women, *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) and *The Searchers* also deal with the re-orientation of ideas of masculinity and the incorporation of males (the hero notably aside) within the refigured home, as in *WTC* (Chapter Two).
spaces”. Thus, the depiction of the re-creation of ‘ideals’ of home and the work to sustain or (re)establish the ‘outpost’ as home is also ambivalent. Nonetheless, *Fort Apache* establishes this space not only as contested, fraught and ambivalent, but as ‘American’, with Thursday seeking to instil the discipline to ensure its survival. In this sense, although the hostile land is contested and the film finally questions the means through which (fragile) dominion is achieved, the cavalry symbolically raises the American flag to demonstrate ownership of and over it as ‘American’ in *Fort Apache*.

Like *Fort Apache*, the opening of *The Kingdom* establishes the oil company compound as an isolated, vulnerable, beleaguered outpost of ‘civilisation’; an ‘America’ *abroad*, reiterated in the consequent investigation of terrorist attacks on it.\(^{298}\) The film represents the oil compound through the nostalgic reconstruction of “a miniature America” (Lane, 2007); a vision of American innocence, replete with green lawns, baseballs and “heartland-values signifiers” (Schwarzbaum, 2007; see also Salle, 2007). Khatib (2004, cited in Wilkins, 2006) identifies that, in contrast to dirty, crowded Middle Eastern urban spaces or barren deserts, American spaces are represented as green and ordered, as ‘oases in the desert’, literalised in *The Lost Patrol* (Ford, 1934) but also true of the oil compound. Evoking the innocence associated with small town America and community pursuits and activities, the compound is holding a company picnic – a montage of Americana, softball, families, mothers feeding children, and barbecuing.

This idea(l) of ‘America abroad’ is soon complicated, represented as surveilled from within and without, immediately destroying notions of small town security and freedom. Indeed, the first compound perspective is from the softball field looking up towards a Saudi police officer watching over the game from a rooftop. The compound is persistently reminiscent of a prison, with inhabitants surrounded, watched and depicted behind fences. *The Kingdom*’s credits sequence similarly renders the ambivalence of nostalgic images of ‘suburban’ life, accommodations, families and swimming pools inside oil company western housing compounds. As Berg (Director’s Commentary, 2007) admits, they live ‘normal’ American lives – where the “strict

\(^{298}\) The compound’s status as an oil workers’ compound – and therefore commercial and private – is quickly deflected.
Islamic laws outside these walls do not apply” – but only “behind walls and security”. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these images with scenes of Saudi life implies not only the deep social roots of the American community presence in Saudi Arabia but also longstanding social divisions and fissures with Arab life. While it is not unusual to highlight the vulnerability and precariousness of the ‘outpost’ in ‘frontier’ westerns, Williams and Linneman (2010, p.200) appropriately note how such “stark contrasts to a bucolic American cultural scene” give the compound an ‘uncanny’ quality – not dissimilar that of post-apocalyptic New York in *I Am Legend*. This perhaps overstates the impact of these constraints on articulating the space as ‘American’, given surveillance is routinised and inhabitants pay no heed. Yet even when critiqued in westerns, the irresistible, inevitable American advance (usually through violent means) – its Manifest Destiny – asserted the land’s transformability and ownership. And while the oil compound in *The Kingdom* similarly claims, builds on and cultivates ‘promised’ land, this ‘America’ is clearly marked as precariously *inside* anOther’s land, as *out-of-place*; a tenuous ‘occupation’ that allegorically associates it with Iraq and Afghanistan. While the compound still represents ‘American’ soil, a cultivated ‘garden in the desert’, transformed as a space of American values that resembles a protected ‘diplomatic’ space, it remains a forever fragile, superficial (idea of) ‘American’ innocence and community.

The opening attacks on the compound in *The Kingdom* shatter these already ambivalent notions of ‘home’ and ‘America’. As is typical in ‘frontier westerns’, like *Major Dundee* (Peckinpah, 1965), the film deploy a massacre on an ‘outpost’ as an ‘inciting incident’. Moreover, the attacks are overtly connoted as an attack or threat to ‘America’ by the panicked disruption to the softball game and picnic, and ensuing images of violent disruption to American ‘suburban’ life.299 *Fort Apache* similarly showcases escalated or graduated instances of Indian ‘savagery’, such as the cavalry dead splayed across wheels, stated to be on the warpath and colluding with other tribes, to justify a violent response. In *The Kingdom*, the attackers, masquerading as officers, shoot young girls walking dogs and, presented from the attackers’ point of view, even *literally* strafe the western compound homes with bullets. And like in ‘cavalry’ westerns, during their meeting with the Attorney General, Fleury (Jamie

299 *The American* (Corbijn, 2010), *Taken* and *Rendition* (Hood, 2007) all focus on Americans attacked or endangered abroad, not to mention numerous so-called ‘torture porn’ films.
Foxx) and Mayes (Jennifer Garner) describe this as an escalation in aggression requiring a response, outlining a new “zero-sum phase” in which advances in weaponry and a willingness to target anybody will be unleashed. While the compound space is fragile even prior to the attacks, the terrorist attacks unveil the façade of this ‘civilisation’, swiftly replaced by divisions, open vulnerability and isolation. Fleury’s investigation uncovers that inhabitants are insecure and distrustful, with one compound family only leaving their ‘safe room’ when they heard the screams of the neighbours’ children, whose mother “was murdered looking out of her own window, in front of her children”. The fortified outpost-home in *The Kingdom* is persistently vulnerable to attack from without, and the initially nostalgic representation of compound life masks a darker, more liminal ‘American’ experience.

**Collapsing Battlefield & ‘America’, Ambivalently Gendered Spaces**

The ambivalence of ‘American’ compound space in *The Kingdom* extends to gender. As Dodds (2008, p.1628) states, *The Kingdom* is “deeply implicated in the production of masculinities and the gendered division of space”. In marked contrast to ‘American’ compound space, where boys and girls play together and women and men congregate in public, Saudi spaces in *The Kingdom* (that is, outside the compound) are typically male-only. Indeed, throughout the film, Saudi women are veiled and absent from Saudi life, beyond their voiceless, confined, marginalised presence in parts of the home. This is persistently and pointedly contrasted with the suggestion that females play a prominent, vocal role in American life, from politics, security and agencies of government to the schoolroom, and reflects representations of masculinity in each society. For example, Mayes’ active presence in the State Department briefing and debate on the US response self-consciously accentuates the difference between American and Saudi women, to define American society as more inclusive. That said, the complete absence (even erasure, given deleted scenes) of

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300 The sense the opening attacks represent an escalation in hostilities is also identified by Carter and Dodds (2011, p.105), suggesting the ‘fictional attack’ could be read as “evidence of a ratcheting up of the terrorist threat to American lives” in relation to the 1996 military compound attacks in Saudi Arabia depicted in the title sequence; connecting the ‘fictional’ to the ‘real’ world again.

301 Given that at no time do Saudi women have a voice in the film thus, the film redoubles the oppressed experience it criticises.

302 This scene nonetheless appears forced, particularly given she is a forensic examiner as opposed to a political scientist, and
American mothers in *The Kingdom* is significant, and not unlike *I Am Legend*’s like substitution of the ‘father figure’ as *also-mother*. Fleury’s son’s mother is never mentioned – and is not identifiable in the boy’s family poster – and when Fleury later visits Fran’s son after Fran’s death no maternal presence is invoked. Indeed, in the scene where Fleury speaks to Fran’s son, two surrounding conversations with the boy’s mother were deleted from the final cut, excising another female maternal presence from a ‘terror threat’ film. This not only ensures *The Kingdom* remains focused exclusively on fathers, and thereby partially associates the ‘remasculinisation’ of ‘American’ with father-son relations, but also uncertainly casts the film’s critique of the absence (or veiling) of Saudi women.

The absence of mothers further spotlights how *The Kingdom* uncertainly connects and contrasts Arab and American father-son relations. The rooftop where the terrorist attacks’ are coordinated and recorded is a typically male-only ‘Arab/Muslim’ space, is immediately contrasted with Fleury’s visit to his son’s classroom, with its prominent female voices and presence. More than this, the terrorist leader’s grandson – the symbolic Arab ‘son’ – atop the roof is visually twinned with Fleury’s son through each boy’s crayon drawing and family poster. This twinning equally serves to connect Saudi Arabia and America, and antagonist and protagonist. Carter and Dodds (2011, p.99) argue such spatial connections (including that of US-Saudi relations in the credits sequence) show how Hollywood uses cinematic form and grammar to render “these complex/distantiated spatialities of the ‘war on terror’ more visible” (p.108). For example, montage in this scene, and similarly in *Rendition* (Hood, 2007), organises and connects different spaces and different times and “allows us to see such events [and spaces] as distantiated yet connected” (p.109). Berg (*The Kingdom* DVD Director’s Commentary, 2008) intercut the attacks with “something American”, that is, Fleury’s son’s classroom, as if it is “happening at the same time”. Yet it is clear the events in the Washington schoolroom occur hours after the first phase of the attacks, with Fleury’s telephone conversation with Special Agent Francis Manner (Kyle Chandler) at the compound, now shrouded in darkness. Moreover, this montage in the opening scenes implies “the threat [as] to both family life and the nation-state”

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303 The deleted scenes are available as bonus materials in *The Kingdom* DVD (*Bonus materials – Deleted scenes*). This scene in also noted later in the chapter, in relation to also concealing Fleury’s primary motivation in the film.
(p.109). As in WTC, Cloverfield and I Am Legend, the attacks serve to collapse battlefield and ‘America’, albeit less directly.\(^\text{304}\) However, Carter and Dodds partially misread the full implications of montage in this scene, for although it connects and shows how the foreign impacts America, it also ‘Orientalises’ the space as utterly foreign. That is, this crosscutting establishes the link between the two spaces through the sons, yet also contrasts the two spaces and by implication, the two ‘fathers’.

The crosscutting thus communicates – and perhaps reinforces – difference, as ‘foreign’ violence disrupts the everyday and ‘American’ security. On the rooftop, the terrorist leader calls his grandson to his side and puts his arm around him. Hamza gives the boy the binoculars, introducing him to the ‘terrorist perspective’, defined and guided by the terrorist’s interpretation of what the boy witnesses. Directed to watch the softball field, the succeeding binocular shot represents the boy’s point of view. After the suicide bombing, the boy tries to avert his gaze from the carnage, but the ‘father’ forces him to continue watching, repeatedly using his hand to redirect and return the son’s look to the field. After the attacks end, The Kingdom again cuts directly from one ‘son’ to another, as news of the atrocity disrupts Fleury’s visit to his son’s school. Significantly, before he takes the phone call, Fleury excuses himself from the ‘children’s space’.\(^\text{305}\) Fleury seeks to protect and shield his son from violence (spatially, by talking on the phone elsewhere, and through euphemism in describing the atrocity), whereas the terrorist-father not only allows his grandson’s presence, but compels his involvement through watching and later filming. Thus, although the spaces are brought closer and linked, The Kingdom demonises the terrorist-father (and, through him, ‘Arab/Muslim’ societies) on the inappropriate presence and involvement of sons in violence and atrocity. Also tellingly, Fleury is symbolically shielded, only holding a restricted perspective of the spectacle of the attacks, like the protagonists in WTC, Cloverfield and even I Am Legend (the traumatic moment withheld). The Kingdom, the ‘terror threat’ film least connected to 9/11 and New York, is the only one that fully represents the spectacle of terror for its

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\(^{304}\) While Carter and Dodds note how the film connects the Saudi/‘war on terror’ to America – the ‘frontier’ to the ‘home’ – they at times forget they characterise this as a pre-9/11 trend, one perhaps only solidified by the attacks of 9/11.

\(^{305}\) During the phone conversation, Fleury is alone in a hall, a symbolic transition space, when his son appears and overhears his conversation. Speaking at the boy’s level, Fleury euphemises the events, verbally/linguistically shielding his son by mirroring the son’s terminology, e.g. ‘bad’ people and ‘bad’ things. Talking later on the phone from Riyadh (in the ‘American’ space of the gym), Fleury again shields his son, telling him he has seen Fran but omitting that it was his casket.
audience – both terror and cinema similarly interested in spectacles of violence. Creekmur (2010, p.91) claims that an online video of the attacks confirms them as “an event staged for a camera and given a ‘new’ soundtrack [of prayer and chanting] at least as troubling as its more realistic, ‘original’ sounds”. Yet while the attacks become horrifically ‘real’ when watched on screens – in the first briefing and later when the team watches an online video – their horror is symbolically contained and managed within a screen, just as in WTC.

While lauding the American father, who both actively participates in his child’s life but also shields him from terror, the schoolroom scene also depicts how the male protagonist-hero is symbolically confined in an uncomfortable, distant space at the time of the attacks. When the film introduces Fleury in the schoolroom, clearly coded as a feminine (and children’s) space, he is clearly uncomfortable and confined. Sitting in a too-small chair, he is marginalised to the side of the screen as his son describes his family poster to the class. Again, the protagonist-hero is marked as immobile and aligned with females upon the advent of terror, not unlike Rob in Cloverfield, and accordingly unable to effect events. Showcasing both the son’s voice – the Arab ‘son’ is notably mute until film’s end – and the prominent, questioning female voices of his teachers, Fleury must be cajoled into speaking to the children. Wearing the suit he will wear in his early FBI briefings, his story of his son’s birth, while much different to the female experience, is likened to ‘search-and-rescue’. This designates his paternal relationship via life (and birth), in contrast to the terror-father’s relationship via death (and mass murder).

However, perhaps more significantly, and as in WTC and I Am Legend, his description immediately links his paternal and professional identities. This is partially reiterated when he takes the phone call from the site of the attacks, although he attempts to separate the two identities and shield his son (and

306 Spielberg’s camera in Munich visualises cinema’s role in the transmission of terror, it literally spattered and sprayed by the blood of an Israeli athlete during the reconstruction of the hostage taking. The perversity of recording images of victims is also punished in The Missing, the photographer literally blinded before death.

307 Schmidt fears recorded images – “Were there any pictures taken?” – presumably because they would make the FBI’s presence at the raid ‘real’. The fear and terminal threat or danger of recorded images is earlier emphasised when Schmidt tells Fleury: “I’ll tell you why this is a win. You documented it and you’re still alive”.

308 Fleury’s arm around his son as he speaks of his birth connects the space to life, while Hamza’s arm is associated with death. Hamza also praises God after the attacks, establishing a negative association between the suicide bomber and Islam, but also throwing the ending of I Am Legend into new light.

309 Šakota-Kokot (2010) misinterprets his description as akin to “a place of combat”.

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America) by moving to a third space, the hall. Nonetheless, his son’s sudden appearance highlights how he is unable to ‘keep out’ the reality of terror, as in WTC, and signals the perceived permeability and vulnerability of America to foreign, distantiated threats.

Masculinities at Home: Professional Identity & Immobility

An idea of work runs throughout the ‘terror threat’ films, in which the destabilisation or loss of professional capacity, caused by terror, threatens masculine identity. In particular, WTC and I Am Legend, like The Kingdom, articulate this anxiety and its threat for the nation, by linking professional and paternal roles within masculine identity. Indeed, Fleury, like the protagonists in WTC and I Am Legend, is marked first as father, although his professional role is connoted in his story and finally intrudes and overwhelms as he is informed about the attacks. Fleury’s “identity as both father and FBI agent is critical […] to resolve the need to use extreme violence to preserve social order” (Carter & Dodds, 2011, p.106, emphasis added) and “the role of the father figure […] is critical in cojoining national and familial security” (p.110). Moreover, and tied to the film’s pseudo-documentary aesthetic, subtitling the main characters’ first appearance with their names and professional speciality defines their identity through their profession; with name and identity specifically sheathed in their professional role, as for the young officers in WTC. Tellingly, the only exception to this subtitling is the attackers, who are not titled by name or ‘role’. This exception implies the titles not only validate a character as ‘authentic’, but legitimise a type of role or profession. By omitting such identification, the film withholds any audience sympathies, signifies their ‘non-combatant’ status and thereby facilitates audience support for their final annihilation, as is the case for the Darkseekers in I Am Legend.

Nevertheless, following the attacks, the exercise of this professional (and personal) identity is thwarted by Saudi unwillingness and then by State Department refusal to allow them to go to Riyadh to investigate. The initial post-attack briefing ends with confirmation that the State Department accepts Saudi demands for sole jurisdiction, a

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310 And while Leigninger (1998) claims few heroes are simultaneously husband-fathers and professionals in westerns, Fort Apache also foregrounds hybrid, often conflicting, male identities for Col Thursday and Sgt O’Rourke as officer/soldier-fathers.
submission the FBI Director expressly resists as a wilful emasculation through submission to the ‘Arab/Muslim’ Other: “We try not to say uncle”. Thus, such submission destabilises the agents’ identity by prohibiting them from fulfilling their professional role. While western and ‘frontier’ masculinities are frequently about movement, with the hero associated with mobility and open space (Movshovitz, 1984), The Kingdom is about reversing immobility, constraint and impotent resistance (within the compound, and by virtue of US political and Saudi controls). Figure 4.4 shows how this ambivalence is signalled prior to the attacks when Fleury is first on-screen, sitting in a small chair in his son’s classroom with his two female teachers, as opposed to emerging from the ‘wilderness’ like Ethan in The Searchers or the Ringo Kid (John Wayne) in Stagecoach (Ford, 1939), for example.

**FIGURE 4.4**

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While Fleury is equally and distinctly uncomfortable in a gendered ‘domestic’ space, masculine immobility is reiterated following the attacks with the FBI Director telling Fleury before that, “Everyone’s terrified, so nobody moves” – “You aren’t going anywhere”. In response, Fleury’s (professional) immobility and stasis is countered in/by the film, by representing his resolute, persistent motion in spite of the constraints seemingly placed upon his response to the attacks. In multiple sequences, Fleury is depicted moving from one place to another. Walking, to the post-attack briefing, to the State Department and to Fran’s house to visit his orphaned son, Fleury remains mobile – delineating him from the rest of Washington. Fleury must act outside official channels, akin to Karnes in WTC, to counter bureaucratic constraints and unwillingness to respond, initiating informal ‘negotiations’ to exert pressure and convey ‘veiled’ threats to obtain entry into Saudi Arabia. In line with Price (2008), The Kingdom’s ‘critique of power’ centres on ‘rule-bound’ bureaucracy (and corrupted officials) in order to highlight Fleury’s ‘heroic agency’. Moreover, as is

311 An informal American expression indicating submission, admitting defeat and/or crying for mercy.
312 Although Movshovitz fails to note that this also often means the hero cannot be incorporated into ‘civilisation’.
313 Washington is pejoratively (visually) coded in The Kingdom as distant, disconnected and anonymous (but nonetheless powerful), as in Syriana, Lions for Lambs (Redford, 2007) and Rendition, the latter, for example, which nonetheless only critiques a ‘fragmented part’ of the power structure, demonising one character rather than the system.
typical in westerns and action films, *The Kingdom* immediately establishes a wide discrepancy between bureaucratic (or diplomatic) and ‘frontier’ (or field) knowledge, garnered through experience and knowledge of the context or environment.\(^{314}\) The efficacy of Fleury’s informal dealings and a sense of mobility (and thus a resistant masculinity) are even articulated through elliptical editing. In his ‘negotiation’ with the Saudi Ambassador, Fleury demands ‘immediate’ access. A subsequent straight cut from these negotiations in a Saudi diplomatic car to the team’s imminent departure from Andrews Air Force Base strongly connotes movement, reiterated when Fleury is again shown on the move, walking from hangar to plane.\(^{315}\) This further implies that professional identity is tied to notions of mobility (or the lack thereof) – a structuring device for masculinity in the film – as the interplay of immobility and mobility throughout visualise the current state of Fleury’s team’s identity.

**Masculinities Abroad: Submission, Disarmament & Containment**

The FBI’s initial impotence and immobility is echoed when Fleury’s rapid response team lands in Saudi Arabia. On landing, the Saudis take the team’s passports (markers of national identity and protection) and Fleury and Sykes (Chris Cooper) – the film’s most conventionally masculine characters – must surrender their weapons; the team dis-identified, disarmed and soon to be disempowered.\(^{316}\) American masculinity abroad (and outside the ‘American’ space of the gym) is constituted initially via submission, inaction and impotence. Again, as in *WTC*, identity is not only equated and linked to a professional role, but destabilised upon its disruption or cessation as a consequence of the actions of the ‘terror-Other’. The team’s investigation, and thus their professional identities, is circumscribed, inhibited and limited, presented with numerous rules, controls and prohibitions by their Saudi escort. The Saudi prince additionally constrains the team by defining (away) their role, consigning them to a

\(^{314}\) This discrepancy is often visualised through dress/uniform and slavish adherence to rules/regulations, although *Fort Apache* and *Fort Apache: The Bronx* (Petrie, 1981) ultimately, and critically, also recognise the ambivalent necessity of both.

\(^{315}\) *Major Dundee* is also about entering the territory or space of the Other (Mexico), a prohibited space without official backing, and an incursion motivated by the need to retrieve children.

\(^{316}\) Despite representing Colonel Al Ghazi’s request as an unreasonable constraint, Berg (DVD Director’s Commentary) admits that FBI agents always have to surrender their weapons when they enter a foreign country. Berg also acknowledges that entry to Saudi Arabia is prohibited for anyone with an Israeli stamp in his/her passport, further implying the team’s chauvinism in choosing a member whose travel history is in clear contravention of this requirement.
bureaucratic rather than policing role: “We brought an American team […] not to make arrests, but to give advice and reports”. Colonel Al Ghazi (Ashraf Barhom), the team’s chaperone, adds that the prince also said ‘there are more rules’ and the team cannot touch evidence, question anyone without his presence, touch a dead Muslim or leave his sight at any time. This sense of impotence or emasculating ‘rules of engagement’ (by bureaucracy and the Other) is not unusual in ‘frontier westerns’. For example, the opening of Black Hawk Down highlights the restrictions or withholding of permission to act in the space of the Other confronting US soldiers. Subsequent scenes, reminiscent of the ‘stealth’ investigation the FBI team undertakes early after their arrival in Saudi Arabia in The Kingdom, immediately counter this perception of impotence, showing soldiers detain a suspect and firing wildly at the training range.

This sense that Fleury’s team remains under the control of others is reinforced when they are escorted to their accommodations, further disempowered by being ‘locked down’ by the Saudis, whose control of American movement further threatens professional identity. The Saudis not only lock them down at night but even ‘control’ or define the time of day, emphasised when Col Al Ghazi replies to Fleury’s repeated questions on the exact time of sunrise (when they will visit the bomb site): “When I open this door”. Tellingly, Al Ghazi closes the door on Fleury, who is walking behind him, symbolically disrupting and halting the perpetual mobility that had countered his professional immobility. In another instance where the American experience inside the compound is likened to prison, the camera is similarly ‘locked down’ inside the gym, ensuring audience sympathy and identification with the team, similarly rendered immobile (and under foreign control).317 The gym is a site of compelled confinement, containment and inaction. Fleury’s team are only allowed to leave the gym with Saudi assent, and only to visit compound homes, that is, other ambivalently marked ‘American’ spaces. The gym is also marked as ‘American’ through Mayes’ body. Immediately after being asked to ‘cover up’ when she meets the Prince, a shot of Saudi police and guards in prayer at the bombsite cuts to Mayes, now in a singlet top, playing basketball with Fleury in the gym. Unlike spaces marked as foreign, as the

317 The gym accommodation reiterates the representation of the threatening potential of the everyday and everyday spaces and objects as uncanny and holding dual potential for terror is notable throughout the film, just as in I Am Legend. By planning and conducting terror from everyday spaces (e.g. the home), the ‘terrorists’ reposition them as sites of violence, reworking everyday objects for violence (e.g. the use of mobile phones and inclusion of children’s marbles, nails and concrete in bombs and cars and ambulances as bomb delivery devices).
prayer implies the compound has become in the wake of the attacks, the gym represents a space for female freedom, inclusion and incorporation.

When Mayes is asked to cover up at the bombsite before the prince arrives, *The Kingdom* cements Fleury’s masculinity in contrast to corrupted American official, US embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, Damon Schmidt (Jeremy Piven). Fleury’s persistent resistance, however impotent at this stage, and preference for action over speech (or speech that leads directly to action) is seemingly heroically contrasted with Schmidt’s willingness to not only bow to Saudi cultural and political demands, but embody and express (supposedly) Muslim attitudes. As Tasker observes (2002, p.212), military masculinity is commonly defined not only in opposition to the ‘enemy’ but the world of politicians and news media – and perhaps evident in *I Am Legend*’s blaming of the female scientist, Dr Krippin. *The Kingdom* similarly portrays Schmidt and the Attorney General, as the “true villains of the piece” (Lane, 2007), or at least as villainous as the terrorist leader. Schmidt is most demonised in the film, as being corrupted by (association with) the Other – as opposed to Washington’s corruption of the ‘Indian-Other’ in *Fort Apache*. Schmidt is demonised for his wilful submission to foreign cultural and political demands and his embodiment of foreign behaviour in his preference for incessant talk and his attitudes to women. Schmidt is impugned in his desire to ‘spin’ both the FBI presence and the success of their seemingly final raid on a suspected terrorist command centre, in contrast to the FBI team’s desire for real results through action. In line with Price (2008), ideal masculinity is marked as inexpressive in *The Kingdom*. Fleury’s silence throughout his first ‘conversation’ with Schmidt privileges measured speech over talking incessantly – “You talk a lot. A little too much” – and marks Schmidt’s ‘volubility’ as effeminate. That said, Price’s characterisation fails to acknowledge that while such inexpressiveness may be deemed heroic it is also historically and ambivalently marked as debilitating, as is evident in *Fort Apache* for Thursday and *The Searchers*.

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318 Typically, *The Kingdom* also lionises field or war experience over government officialdom and ‘Washington’. This is most evident in the FBI Director’s encounter with the Attorney General, where the Director quietly endures the Attorney General’s threats before offering wisdom gleaned from his service in Vietnam under General Westmoreland.

319 Audience understanding of his character is also shaped by Piven’s seminal role as a slippery, amoral talent agent in *Entourage* (2004-2011).

320 While Fleury considers the militants killed in the raid as ‘teens’, ‘kids’ and ‘insignificant’, Schmidt again aligns himself unfavourably with the Prince in his advocacy of ‘spin’ and PR: “This will be pitched as a stunning Saudi counter punch, killing those responsible”.

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318 319 320
for Ethan. Nonetheless, in implying that Schmidt’s shared preference for ‘spin’ effectively marks him as become Other, Schmidt’s lecherous demand that Mayes “dial down the boobies” not only sexualises Mayes’ body but permits The Kingdom to present—but-displace supposedly ‘Orientalist’ Saudi attitudes to women onto an ‘ugly’ American.

Orientalism, Oriental(ist) space & Hollywood masculinities

In a sense, with Fleury’s masculinity destabilised through enforced submission, disarmament and immobility at the hands of ‘Arab/Muslims’, The Kingdom must (re)define and restore threatened identity in opposition to the foreign Other. The FBI team’s experience echoes American experience following 9/11, which Nayak (2006, pp.42-43) argues necessitated the conscious, concerted ‘coding’ of “constitutive differences between Self/Other” to “resurrect a strong, impenetrable” America. Moreover, by infantilising, demonising and dehumanising the Oriental Other – often re-purposing a vocabulary reminiscent of “centuries of stereotypes of Indian combat” (Hannah, 2005, p.555), of a cowardly enemy opposed to civilisation itself – Nayak (2006, p.48) claims the West could ‘strongly justify’ military action. Thus, The Kingdom too seemingly counters reversed positions of dominance and subordination by instantiating an American Self defined in contrast to the ‘Arab/Muslim’ Other, already implicit in Fleury’s initial confrontation with the ‘Othered’ Schmidt. And the small amount of scholarly opinion on the film routinely characterises its (and the team’s) representation of Saudis and Saudi society as ‘Orientalist’ (see Shaheen, 2008; Aguayo, 2009; Williams & Linneman, 2010). That is, The Kingdom supposedly uncritically invokes Hollywood’s persistent stereotyping of ‘Arab/Muslims’ through long-established ‘Orientalist’ conventions and shorthand visual codes. It conflates Arabs, Muslims and terror and represents ‘Arab/Muslims’ as culturally and technologically inferior, barbaric and violent, and irrational and anti-modern. It also seemingly installs the Orientalist ‘fantasy’ of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ‘Orientals’.

In this respect, The Kingdom is arguably connected to earlier ‘colonial outpost’ films, such as Gunga Din (Stevens, 1939) and The Lost Patrol, which, although putatively set in the ‘Orient’, were also filmed in Arizona and share an ideological outlook
towards the Indian/Arab Other. Indeed, the apparent similarity of *The Kingdom’s* representation of ‘Arab/Muslims’ with long-established ‘Orientalist’ stereotypes supports Sardar and Davies’ (2010, p.248) assertion that the contemporary terrorist on film “emerges less from the world of political reality than […] the western imagination”. Sardar and Davies (2010, p.247) also briefly link ‘colonialist’ films to cinematic representations in westerns, detailing that *Beau Geste* (Wellman, 1939) features a “lone and beleaguered outpost of a fragile and imperilled civilisation that must fight for its very existence against an implacable barbaric enemy”. That said, perhaps the ‘frontier western’ more accurately describes *Gunga Din* (as a ‘boy’s own’ western) and *The Lost Patrol* – and explicitly links western ‘outposts’ and ‘frontiers’ with colonialism and Orientalism. Yet while *The Kingdom’s* representation of ‘Arab/Muslims’ superficially reproduces Orientalist constructions, it is more complex and uncertain than critical responses acknowledge. Indeed, the film’s representation of the FBI team’s attitudes is a pointer to the film’s overall ambivalence, highlighting their prejudices towards ‘Arab/Muslims’ – with their chauvinism and bombast routinely contrasted critically with Al Ghazi’s stoicism and dignity – and through the mirroring function of supposedly disreputable ‘Arab/Muslim’ methods as ‘dark fantasy’.

Orientalism in Hollywood, including the representation of Indians in most westerns, is shaped by political context, generic expectations and mainstream film structure, including the necessity for a clear antagonist. Yet it potentially has material effects on audience beliefs and (support for) foreign policy. Tellingly, despite provocatively (re)historicising the attacks of 9/11, the opening credits sequence also somewhat ambivalently establishes an Orientalist construction of Saudi society, a construction (as ‘Arab/Muslim’ rather than specifically Saudi) reiterated throughout the narrative. The representation of Saudi masculinity broadly conforms to Orientalist notions, as

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321 An interesting connection but fails to recognise either the ambivalence of *Fort Apache* and its acknowledgement of white America’s complicity in the escalation of violence, or the unsavouriness of *Beau Geste’s* so-called ‘defenders’ of civilisation.
322 Ford’s final film, *7 Women* (1966), conflates Orientalist representations of the Other with ‘western’ tropes and style, such as the isolated ‘western’ ‘outpost’.
323 Moreover, the material effects of the cultural ‘Othering’ of ‘Arab/Muslims’ are arguably exacerbated when defined, even if loosely, as historical representations/figures. And the deployment of Abu Hamza in *The Kingdom*, compounded by the credits sequence and early documentary aesthetic, mirrors that of Cochise in *Fort Apache*. Indeed, Nolley (2010, pp.76-77) argues “the conflation of history and myth” in the ‘cavalry’ western, aggravated by a lack of general knowledge, contributes to the possibility the ‘constructed vision’ would “assume the status of historical truth”.

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241
the sequence signals the despotism, hypocrisy and corruption of royals (shaping our later response to the narrative’s princes), and stokes fears and (mis)perceptions of strict religious observance, the oppression of (always veiled) women and fundamentalist willingness to “hold the western world hostage” by stopping oil exports. The mutually corrupting consequences of the Saudi-US oil relationship are suggested by intercutting a succession of presidents and Saudi royalty with images of money, gambling, dancers and horse racing.324 And while a subsequent title declares, “The Saudi monarchy quickly condemned the [9/11] attacks”, the use of current affairs television techniques – a series of ‘step-ins’ and a sudden shift to a black-and-white image of the Saudi spokesman – creates a sense of the manipulative duplicity of such PR (see Figures 4.5-4.7).325

FIGURE 4.5
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FIGURE 4.6
Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access

FIGURE 4.7
Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access

The credits sequence also presents Saudi society as socioculturally backwards and schizophrenic, with a series of negative images of Saudi society following 9/11 rapidly depicting “a nation where tradition and modernity are in violent collision”, showing the oppression of women wearing the full abaya (and only seen from behind) at a shopping mall, juxtaposed with shots of money and exclusive designer brands. It similarly invokes contemporary American fears of the ‘Arab/Muslim’ Other and

324 This corrupting influence of (oil) wealth and western influence, and their deleterious effects on Saudi royalty, is later reiterated by Sykes, whose suggestion that royal palaces are paid for by “Exxon, Chevron…” This also echoes the earlier title implying this resulted in “lost credibility and respect among religious conservatives”, which subtly shifts responsibility for Islamist attacks onto corrupt Saudi leaders rather than the US presence.

325 This tendency for manipulation and double-meaning is reinforced in the prince’s repeated association with ‘spin’ and photo opportunities, with his pet falcon symptomatic of royal excess and brutality.
Islamic terror, conflating religion and violence. While the Saudi Kingdom’s noble origins rest in warrior battles for independence are suggested early in the credits sequence, later images imply its establishment by an army of “anti-western” Muslim warriors, massed in war and prayer, with a history of violent division and undemocratic practices. Most significantly, the credits sequence foreshadows the narrative’s more explicit Orientalism. Thus, technological inferiority suggested in the (pre-)Gulf War section – pejoratively contrasting the US army and the mujahadeen – is particularly reiterated in the assumed superiority of the FBI (read: American) team’s investigative methods. And when, in an emblematic scene, Fleury’s progress is temporarily (and symbolically) halted, he (and the camera, approximating his point-of-view) focuses first on a petrol pump, and then on women in full abayas, before finally settling on the ‘cause’ of the stoppage, a petrol tanker.

‘Arab/Muslim’ Threat: Barbarism & Veiling

Yet it is most typically the Othering of the ‘Arab/Muslim’ as monstrous that satisfies Orientalist constructions and serves to contain his threat to nation and (American) masculine identity, especially within genre and narrative structure. And while Christiansen perhaps contentiously labels the Cloverfield monster a perfect ‘personification of evil’ for western society, the terrorist leader in The Kingdom, Abu Hamza, certainly fits his description. Indeed, Hamza’s monstrosity is not only apparent in his actions, but in his literal (and monstrous) disfigurement, a consequence of his bomb making. Through Hamza and his terrorist group, The Kingdom can foreground the barbarism and treacherous deception of the Arab/Muslim, conveniently equating Arabs, Islam and terror. Likewise, the FBI team’s multi-ethnicity – comprising a black, Southerner and, provocatively, a female and Jewish agent – “rehearses the standard World War II cinematic trope of interethnic unity against the national enemy” (Wilkins & Downing, 2002, p.427; see also Scott, 2007), across race, religion, ethnicity and class. Their multi-ethnicity

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326 I similarly utilise Nayak’s (2006, p.58) employment of ‘Arab/Muslim’, “to politicise and denote the conflation […] into a singular entity” of Arab and Muslim.
stands as a laudatory marker of cultural difference in contrast to the seemingly undifferentiated, malevolent Other.  

The opening attacks in *The Kingdom* clearly connect terrorist violence with Islam, which is also swiftly conflated with Arab cultural costume-dress signifiers. Both Hamza and the suicide bomber invoke Allah in relation to the violence and all of the attack’s coordinators wear recognisable Arab dress. Thus, in line with Wilkins’ (2006), *The Kingdom* seemingly not only conflates Arabs and Muslims, but Islam and terrorism. Nayak (2006) argues that, by coding particular acts as Islamic and fundamentalist, films equate religion and ideology – “the collective myth of the Arab – who is *always Muslim*” (Aguayo, 2009, p.44; see also Sheehan, 2008). Williams & Linneman (2010, p.199) contend that despite detailing the complexity and long-standing US relations and vested interests in the Middle East, post-9/11 films like *The Kingdom* and *Syriana* nonetheless portray Arabs as untrustworthy, crude and uncivilised, and identify them as Islamic extremists (see also Aguayo, 2009). In *The Kingdom*, Hamza’s barbarism is confirmed when his first attacks target women and children, which Nolley (2010) claims is a prominent western trope to justify ‘cavalry’ military action. In particular, the attackers gun down a symbolic ‘father’ as he desperately runs towards a small boy with a grey cap on a tricycle, further connoting the compound’s innocence, as bullets strafe towards him. Moreover, his death is (disingenuously) connoted through a close-up of a small grey cap, which, viewed from Fran’s disconsolate perspective, becomes a cipher for Hamza’s ‘evil’: “How old were you when your hat was this small?” Such barbarism in *The Kingdom* seemingly fulfils Price’s (2008, p.64) assertion that “the pathological

327 All Saudi authority figures are also princes, reinforcing difference (a monarchy, not a meritocracy). The film’s title too contrasts Saudi Arabia to America’s democratic structures

328 This tendency extends beyond the portrayal of Arabs, with *Black Hawk Down*, likewise, conflating Islam and violence – a man immediately picks up his automatic weapon after concluding Morning Prayer on the beach – and confirming African barbarism when they strip and carry the dead American soldiers’ bodies through the streets. In *Black Hawk Down* – and playing on ideas of the Vietnam conflict – all locals are figured hostiles, especially from aerial perspective, seen only through extreme long shots, in which they seem to scurry like rats.

329 While Berg (DVD Director’s Commentary) insists he lessened the carnage shown for the final cut, a baby’s cry – a mother is earlier shown feeding – can be heard in the aftermath of the bombing, overlaid over images of the dead and injured. Later, Mayes finds a destroyed doll amongst the bomb debris – similarly impugning the barbaric Other.

330 Only frame-by-frame analysis confirms the boy is saved by Sergeant Haytham’s intervention. The succeeding large-scale bombings that kill the two FBI agents – delivering the bomb via an ambulance – reaffirm their barbarism: “Now that is nasty, low down!”
aggression of the villain and the morally justified violence of the protagonist” must be established by an event that “confirms their relative positions”. However, Fleury’s (and America’s) distinction from the savagery of the Other is uncertain. For while the film defines Fleury (and ‘America’) in opposition to Saudi use of torture, the ‘uncivilised’ Other also represents a ‘dark’ mirror or fantasy, both that which he desires and that which he despises about the self. As Nayak (2006) argues, the violent Other represents America’s ‘dark’ fantasy – and a common trope in westerns like The Searchers (Scar and Ethan) – and even signposts its post-9/11 reality of displaced, sub-contracted torture. After the initial FBI briefing concludes with the agents’ anger over their enforced impotence through bureaucratic acquiescence to Saudi demands, the Saudi interrogation/torture of Sergeant Haytham (Ali Suliman), who saves numerous lives in the first attack, both defines Saudi methods as backwards and brutal and reflects American desire for revenge, a dark wish fulfilment that enacts-but-displaces desired savagery onto the body of the Other.

The ‘terror-Other’, just as in WTC, Cloverfield and I Am Legend, is equally associated with invisibility and concealment, and (morally) coded as mendacious, despicable, treacherous and ‘unmanly’. Such a tendency is remarkably stable in Hollywood and across genres, ranging from depictions of attacks in westerns, WWII combat pictures and Vietnam War movies. Indeed, the reformed bomb maker’s description of Hamza as “like a ghost” echoes the opening titles and character dialogue in Lost Patrol seven decades earlier. It seems the ‘facelessness’ often associated with modern terrorism reworks ‘Orientalist’ descriptions for contemporary audiences. The first time Hamza appears he is concealed on the rooftop, hidden from his vulnerable, unwitting victims. His face is also veiled, not only treacherously concealed (even from the camera) but evocative of representations of ‘Oriental’ women. Hamza continues to conceal his face in his video messages, and even when he briefly appears unveiled on the monitor he again conceals his face before beginning his final recording. Admittedly pragmatic, to evade possible identification, in the context of his initial concealment on the rooftop, this nonetheless signals Hamza’s duplicity, deception and ‘Oriental’ effeminacy. That said, he cannot hide his monstrosity from the camera, and his disfigurement – he has lost two fingers – betrays his identity, as it does at film’s end.

331 The Other as the hero’s ‘dark mirror’ is also a typical trope in ‘superhero’ or ‘spy’ movies, and particularly resonant recently in films like The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008).
During the final shootout, when Fleury’s team enters the terrorist’s group building – similarly mendaciously veiled as an apartment building – Hamza uses the women and children in his family to shield himself from identification; just as the ‘hostile natives’ in *Black Hawk Down* treacherously take advantage of supposed American unwillingness to avoid harming innocents by blending themselves amongst women and children. Even more questionably, the terrorist ‘father’ literally masquerades as helpless and infirm, consigned to the space of women and children, concealing his identity and weapon. The film’s initiating attacks are also committed by attackers posing as police officers, a monstrous masquerade completed when an ‘officer’ becomes a suicide bomb(er) – unveiling what the uniform temporarily concealed, and perhaps further complicating Neville’s final status as a saviour cum suicide bomber in *I Am Legend*. Such instances also highlight the FBI team’s (and American) inability to decipher ‘good’ and ‘bad’ or read this hostile, alien space.

**Conquering the Space of the Other & American Vulnerability**

In *The Kingdom*, all space beyond or outside the compound ‘outpost’ is alien and hostile. When Fleury looks out from the safety of compound ‘green zone’, his request to visit a building in the near distance is refused because “it’s outside the walls”; the compound again both fort and prison. In *Fort Apache*, the hostility towards and fragility of white presence is marked by how communications and travel are equally fraught. The hostile, alien space of the Other in westerns is both a coveted source of fascination and feared – “the terrifying attraction of open spaces” (Borden, & Essman, 2000, p.35). Although generally dismissive of the Indian threat, Colonel Thursday immediately panics when he learns his daughter is out riding with a cavalry suitor:

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332 When Mayes returns to the group of women, children and elderly after the final shootout, the camera’s movement into the room and pan right approximates Mayes’ point-of-view. Hamza again conceals himself, positioning himself behind a woman to keep himself from the FBI’s view (and the camera’s eye).

333 At the compound checkpoint, as Al Ghazi details the presence of multiple (often conflicting) security agencies, the scene’s final shot racks focus onto the eyes of a National Guard Special Forces soldier in the foreground, his veiling beneath a balaclava and look at the camera communicating not only duplicity and mendacity but also that Hamza has ‘eyes’ within; the threat both external and internal. In the film’s action-filled final sequence, attackers also masquerade as officers in the FBI team’s escort.

334 Similarly, the view off the rooftop where the attacks were orchestrated highlights how the compound is separated spatially from ‘downtown’ Riyadh, as if the compound’s flatness and isolation is another space or world to that of the Saudi capital and its urban density and verticity. The view, off a set in Arizona, shows a CGI reconstruction of downtown Riyadh, another layer of spatial separation between America and Saudi Arabia, an instance of ‘being there’ while not there, akin to rear projection.
“This country’s not safe!” Ford’s camera similarly communicates this perception, and rarely ventures outside or away from (tenuously) protected, controlled spaces, like the cabin of the stagecoach, the cavalry escort or the fort. Travel through open space is frightening and uncertain, and their cramped stagecoaches mimic the claustrophobic confines of the ‘outposts’ or homesteads: “the travellers squeeze themselves into a small space, isolated from the outside” (Movshovitz, 1984, p.68). The Kingdom too repeatedly mimics this frightening stagecoach experience, the team unsafe and vulnerable when travelling outside ‘America’.335 For example, in the opening escort convoy ride from the airport, in which the team must move through open space rapidly and in numbers to avoid detection, the camera wanders nervously, warily after suspicious vehicles – its ‘eyes’ approximating the passenger point-of-view – in stark contrast to the fluidity, control and ‘safe’ distance of aerial shots.336

Aural and visual Orientalist codes establish ‘Oriental space’ as threatening, dangerous and alien in The Kingdom, the film as fascinated by the exotic and chaotic claustrophobia of the Arab city as much as fearing open, hostile space. In Black Hawk Down, such space is also utterly Other, evinced in the film’s exotic soundscape and ‘uncivilised practices’, like selling automatic weapons in the market. It is also a Muslim space, with the featured day shaped (and influenced) by morning and dusk calls to prayer. The urban soundscape of The Kingdom, while perhaps not so outrageously exotically the ‘Oriental’ city, is nonetheless replete with utterly ‘foreign’ sounds, voices and noises. Creekmur (2010, p.84) defines the “limited, repetitive repertoire” of the ‘war on terror’’s sound in film as a sort of ‘aural Orientalism’, identifying how the Middle East is safely contained via a limited repertoire of sound, such as the ubiquitous use of pseudo-Oriental music and the call to prayer to establish place and cultural difference. More than this, “it is employed as a sound of dread” and threat, with prayer equated with political violence: “Muslim prayer has become the sound of Islamic fundamentalism […]; it anticipates political violence while masquerading as religious ritual” (p.87). Indeed, even before the team departs for Saudi Arabia, it is repeatedly described as alien. Before they board the

335 Berg (DVD Director’s Commentary) reinforces they are “very vulnerable when they are out in the open like this”. The freeway scenes of SUVs travelling apace were filmed in Abu Dhabi, but combined with stunts and interior scenes shot in Arizona.

336 In Black Hawk Down, the General describes the whole area as hostile: “We’re fighting the entire city”, and similar to The Kingdom’s ‘stagecoach’ SUVs, they are especially vulnerable when driving through the gauntlet-like urban space.
plane for Riyadh, Sykes tells Leavitt (Jason Bateman), whose inexperience and lack of knowledge define him as an audience cipher but perhaps also permits his persistent emasculation, that Saudi Arabia is “a bit like Mars”. Mayes further adds that she “will be looked at with disdain pretty much the whole time”. Her subsequent deflection onto Sykes’ Southern ‘Otherness’ – “… kinda like South Virginia” – fuses cultural and geographical Otherness and domesticates foreign space, particularly significant given Saudi jurisdiction now marks the compound foreign space. This ‘alienness’ is reiterated when the team arrives at the compound, as the film establishes the rules of engagement – “Use of lethal force authorised beyond this point” (in Arabic and English) – that will rule both spatially, in Saudi Arabia, and temporally, ‘beyond this point’ in the film’s narrative. Yet these security measures less reassure and more emphasise the fragility of the ‘outpost’ and lionise the threat beyond. Akin to I Am Legend, the hostility of the space of the Other, beyond the compound (and even within it, given infiltration by the terrorist group and continued surveillance) is communicated by the camera’s persistent ‘suspicion’ and ‘wariness’, a fearfulness the camera desires to overcome.

Just as The Kingdom seeks to shore up Fleury and the team’s destabilised masculinities through the ‘orientalist construction of ‘Arab/Muslims’, so too does it seek to contain the threat and menace of ‘Arab/Muslim’ space in the representation of space. Khatib (2006) is representative of this sentiment and claims that Orientalism – marked by a desire for mastery – structures the Hollywood camera, evident, for example, in the preference for aerial coverage of ‘Arab/Muslim’ spaces, such as the prince’s palace in The Kingdom. While Katib fails to note that such ‘structures’ are routine aspects of film grammar, that is, to establish place, and also pragmatically about ease-of-access to locations and the economic benefits associated with second unit filming, perhaps such ‘desire for mastery’ may be even more significant in The Kingdom. During the opening terror attacks, the film builds the impression that the ‘terrorist perspective’ precedes and structures the film-camera, as if the film must ‘catch up’, and orient itself to an unfolding spectacle known and orchestrated only by the ‘terror-Other’. It is the rooftop leaders who initially orient the camera, both the binocular and video camera points-of-view repeatedly identifying upcoming phases in the attacks, to which the film-camera then responds. Thus, the film, like the attacks, is in a sense being directed by the ‘terrorist perspective’, whether directing the audience
to the two ‘officers’ that begin the attack or later to the ‘officer’-cum-suicide bomber walking onto the softball field. Yet this persistent re-orientation of the film-camera’s perspective to that of the terrorists’ does more than build an impression of a lack of control. It also signals how the film manages the attacks and reassumes control, particularly apparent given the opening ‘terror perspective’ is both never revisited and preceded by the credits sequence. The Kingdom seeks to contain the ‘terror-Other’ through location as well as the camera. By using Arizona to recreate Saudi Arabia, the compound and the terrorist’s apartment block hideout, the film not only ties it to an ‘idea’ of the cinematic space of the western, but enacts the spatial containment of the Other, with American space masquerading as Other, able to represent anywhere and appear as if Other.

Finding a ‘Good Indian’ & ‘Interracial Buddy’

Repeated, undetected infiltration of the compound by Hamza’s group underscores the uncertainty of intention or allegiance and Fleury’s need to find a ‘good’ Other. The ‘good’ Other, or ‘good Indian’, is an ambivalent figure in Hollywood history. Often ‘scouts’, informants or locals represented as backwards and inferior (even acquiescing to this descriptor), their knowledge and capacity to ‘blend in’ are coveted but they are never fully trusted, and their intelligence and allegiance perceived as both unreliable and uncertain. Their persistent use in westerns and war movies suggest the ‘good Indian’ is a typical characteristic of ‘frontier westerns’, such as Major Dundee, Black Hawk Down and The Missing (Howard, 2004). Wilkins and Downing’s (2002, p.426) observation that The Siege (Zwick, 1998) explores “the hoary western movie dilemma of whether particular ‘Indians’ can be trusted” similarly highlights how the convention has transferred to the representation of ‘Arab/Muslims’. Yet just as the Orientalist representation of ‘bad’ Others in The Kingdom is complicated by Fleury’s own ‘dark fantasies’, the representation of the ‘good Indian’ reproduces-but-

337 This (re-)orientation also displaces responsibility for the spectacle of atrocity onto the ‘bad’ Other.
338 That said, being able to film in Saudi Arabia would discount The Kingdom’s core point about the (im)possibility of ‘working’ in and dealing with the Saudi kingdom.
339 In The Missing, Happy Jim (an Apache scout) and the turned Apache scouts - loyalty is uncertain, they are distrusted and Samuel Jones’ (Tommy Lee Jones) character even accuses Happy Jim in the manner Sgt Haytham is accused by another state policeman for working for the Americans.
complicates the supposed, hierarchical ‘Master/Slave’ relationship. Not only is Fleury’s masculinity constructed in relation to multiple others, including his team, the Attorney General and Al Ghazi, but Al Ghazi’s stoicism and dignity (as the ‘good Indian’) stand in contrast to the American team’s chauvinism and bombast, and point to the film’s overall ambivalence.\footnote{Critics frequently mocked the team’s chauvinism and wilful ignorance; Leavitt even reads the ‘Idiot’s Guide to the Koran’. Ashraf Barhom’s performance as Al Ghazi was routinely lauded, which perhaps elevates his character within the narrative.} That is, in contrast to Shaheen’s (2007) claim that the inclusion of ‘good’ Saudis in The Kingdom is “mere tokenism”, the film implicitly critiques as much as celebrates (and often reproduces) the team’s cultural ignorance and chauvinism, a point underscored by a short lyrical sequence depicting the home life of the film’s ‘good’ ‘Arab/Muslims’.

Moreover, in line with Berg’s stated intention, Fleury and Al Ghazi’s relationship mimics the structure of an ‘interracial buddy’ relationship.\footnote{This observation is also briefly made by Cieply (2007) and Johnson (2007).} Fleury and Al Ghazi’s relationship begins with initial antagonism, before a ‘buddy’ relationship is (generically) ordained through a physical altercation – bonding through violence – with a National Guard officer, where Fleury comes to Al Ghazi’s aid when he is beaten.\footnote{Fleury’s first physical intervention to protect Al Ghazi is a block – upholding the notion ‘American’ violence is (self-)defensive.} The establishment of commonality and shared values, or rather the erasure of difference, much as in WTC, affirms their allegiance and developing (earned and mutual) respect. This typically leads to a violent unity and the very merging of the men’s perspectives and actions – and a sort of love, although often only in sacrificial death. Late in the climactic shootout, shooting in unison, the two men turn together, ending in a close-up of their weapons, pointing in the same direction – their bodies and weapons perfectly aligned. The men’s violent unity is later curiously reiterated in the film; twinning a bandage Fleury wears on the right of his neck with similarly located Al Ghazi’s fatal wound.

The men’s adversarial relationship is established when Fleury lands in Saudi Arabia – he and Al Ghazi are set in mirrored-but-oppositional stances. Indeed, Fleury is silhouetted when seen from Al Ghazi’s perspective – his blackness literally ‘invisible’ to Al Ghazi – as in I Am Legend, race is ‘invisible’, even ‘unrepresentable’.\footnote{Only once in the film is race mentioned in relation to American society, and only to make a disparaging remark about Saudi}
the two men are spatially separated, the similar perspective each man holds, communicated in contiguous shots, invokes their equivalence and likeness. In the convoy escort from the airport, the film establishes the men’s adversarial relationship through a series of shot-reverse shots. However, Al Ghazi finally dominates these shots, establishing his precedence in this new place. Al Ghazi exposes and resists the team’s persistent and patronising chauvinism, and numerously reacts against it in a stoic and dignified manner. He also observes that the FBI team do not understand the dangers beyond the compound, and stands up to Fleury, unwavering and unflinching: “There is me telling you what you may or may not do, and there is you doing it”. While Al Ghazi’s dominance, which reinforces the team’s loss of professional agency, must be undermined or overturned by Fleury in order to re-establish his threatened masculine identity, this nonetheless complicates Orientalist readings.

Al Ghazi similarly mirrors Fleury’s besieged, beleaguered (professional) masculine identity. While Al Ghazi is initially derided because and as merely a ‘babysitter’, derision converts into empathy as Fleury recognises he and Al Ghazi are similarly disempowered – and so must cooperate – when he explains the competing agencies he must negotiate and admits his like impotence under the control of the National Guard General, the hyper-masculine ‘dark’ mirror of the effete American Attorney General. Greenen likewise notes how the film “underscores the lack of agency each man” (2008, p.95). Indeed, the dysfunctional institutional structures in Saudi Arabia mirror those in Washington, similarly marked by inter-agency conflict and distrust. The film thus begins to reframe Al Ghazi’s character, from adversarial to ‘buddy’, a shift furthered through the identification of shared values.

‘Americanising’ & (Then) Sacrificing the ‘Good’ Other

Through the expression of shared values, ‘interracial buddies’ not only affirm their allegiance and build mutual respect, but seek to erase or resolve difference as an impediment to their success. Yet while Williams and Linneman (2010, p.202)
correctly identify that “the noble traits displayed by Al Ghazi are not connected to Arab culture, but are norms shared by Americans and Saudis, namely heroism and love for family and country”, his ‘nobility’ is also quite clearly linked to Islam through familial prayer. More significantly, they fail to recognise that Al Ghazi and Fleury’s relationship is importantly established through American (global) popular culture, when Al Ghazi describes for Fleury how he wanted to become a cop as a child because of the ‘green beast’ (the Hulk) on television. As in WTC for the trapped McLoughlin and Jimeno, bonding via American popular culture serves not only to erase otherwise troubling cultural and ethnic difference, but to reestablish threatened American masculinities. Thus, Al Ghazi is not so much humanised through universal values, but incorporated through American popular culture. In this respect, the erasure of cultural difference through Al Ghazi’s assumption of American culture (and the values it articulates) in The Kingdom seems more akin to the overtly ‘colonialist’ Gunga Din, whose titular character openly aspires to the virtues and values of the ‘Master’.

This erasure or collapse of difference is reinforced when Al Ghazi admits his concealed desire for vengeance (as opposed to merely safeguarding Fleury’s team): “When we catch the man who murdered these people, I don’t care to ask even one question. I want to kill him”. In this regard, Johnson (2007) mistakenly alleges the pair’s ‘buddy’ relationship is based on a desire for justice and ‘shared humanity’. Again related to the Hulk, whose transformation into the ‘green beast’ is fuelled by rage and who has limited control over his actions (often likened to adolescent rage), Al Ghazi’s admission articulates that which Fleury cannot, and perhaps appropriately (and disconcertingly) reflects America’s violent duality and the ultimately deleterious effects of uncontrolled rage (and vengeance).346 Thus, Al Ghazi not only shares Fleury’s values, derived from American popular culture, but the Other again ambivalently functions as a ‘dark fantasy’ for Fleury. Moreover, it is only after he speaks about family, American popular culture and a (shared but unstated) desire for vengeance that Fleury asks Al Ghazi for his first name.

345 Along with The Incredible Hulk (1978-1982), he also mentions The Six Million Dollar Man (1978-1982). Such a role for popular culture in male bonding is also a feature in Quentin Tarantino’s films; scenes which likewise erase racial and class differences.

346 The relation of the Hulk to Fleury is also discussed later in the chapter.
In this respect, however, and compounded because his earlier dominance further threatens Fleury's masculine identity, the ‘good Indian’ must sacrifice himself – and be annihilated. The ambivalently viewed ‘good Indian’s’ fidelity is only truly confirmed through sacrificial death, as in *Major Dundee*, *Gunga Din* and *The Missing*; the Other’s ‘goodness’ requires sacrifice, and often death, as a performative display.347 Only Al Ghazi is ‘sacrificed’ in *The Kingdom*, and it is only after he is fatally wounded that Fleury again uses his first name, cradling Al Ghazi and telling him they killed Hamza. It is possible for the ‘good Indian’ to become ‘friend’, but only in death. However, Al Ghazi’s death also marks the death of the ‘Americanised’ Other – a death also symbolically precipitated by American intervention. One unsettling, conservative implication of this implies that it is impossible to be the much-heralded cultural and political moderate. That is, to be both Arab and (pro-)‘American’, to be caught in-between in a sense, is fatal.348 The necessity of such sacrifice also implies the intrinsic duality of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (also noted by Williams & Linneman, 2010), a duality often explicitly visualised through physical struggle. Thus, at the end of *The Kingdom*, Al Ghazi’s face darkens when he realises Hamza may be present, and a series of shot-reverse shots shows Al Ghazi and Hamza ‘reading’ each other, before Al Ghazi forces Hamza to ‘unveil’ his monstrosity, to reveal his missing fingers. Unsettlingly, the ‘good Indian’ cannot be divorced from the ‘bad’ and must also die in the cause of destroying the ‘bad’.349

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347 Ultimately, *Gunga Din* is about valorising, militarising and institutionalising the ‘good Indian’, who sacrifices himself for the ‘Empire’ and is accepted only in death; Gunga Din’s eulogy also a symbolic promotion, in finally receiving the uniform and thereby becoming soldier and more-than colonial subject.

348 Wilkins and Downing (2002) similarly note that CIA operative Elise Kraft (Annette Bening) also dies (literally) caught between the ‘terrorist’ and African-American officer in *The Siege*.

349 The Missing, in particular, visualises the connection between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Other as an inner or internal struggle, symbolizing the confused, even schizophrenic, identity of the ‘good Indian’. In the film’s finale, Samuel Jones/Chaa-duu-ba-its-iidan (Tommy Lee Jones) and the malevolent medicine man, die together locked in violent, entwined struggle. There is no place for the ‘good Indian’, who can only be redeemed and return home in death; ultimately death erases the ‘Indian’, leaving only the father.
Inculcating ‘Sons’ into Violence: ‘Looking’ & ‘Playing’

The Kingdom visually and thematically links American and Saudi sons (and thereby fathers) throughout to explore their dual incultation into violence by fathers and the (potential) intergenerational consequences of fathers’ actions on sons, and thereby serves as a partial critique of paternal redemption. Indeed, following Al Ghazi’s death, Fleury assumes figurative responsibility for the Other’s son as he has for Fran’s. When Fleury visits the Colonel’s apartment he pays his respects to Al Ghazi’s father, but only meets his son, even though Al Ghazi also has two daughters: “Your father was a good friend of mine”, mirroring the sentiments earlier expressed to Fran’s surviving son. Lane (2007) suggests this attempt to link American and Saudi (or Fleury and Al Ghazi) through a ‘sons and fathers’ theme is not wholly convincing. However, this overlooks the theme’s repeated use throughout the film to connect and contrast Fleury, Al Ghazi and Hamza (through his two youngest ‘sons’) as fathers.

A short, lyrical scene mid-film also establishes the film’s central concern with the relations of fathers to sons. This ‘softer scene’ “went in and out of the movie several times” but was finally retained to avoid accusations the film was anti-Muslim (Cieply, 2007). While this could be considered cynical, the scene “offers a portrayal of Saudi domestic life” and Islam as “embedded in everyday life”, with prayer familial rather than male-only (Dodds, 2008, p.1628), and functions in a wider sense. The scene repeatedly links sons and fathers, showing Al Ghazi at home playing with his children, before panning down and left from Al Ghazi to his son, both in prayer. Most poignantly, however, the scene shows another father-son relationship, as Sergeant Haytham returns home to his aged father. Yet, subverting audience expectations, it is the distraught Sergeant, recently interrogated and beaten, who weeps and becomes son-again, comforted by his visibly frail father. A straight cut to Fleury on the phone with his son not only reinforces the shared import of family, but connects Fleury and Al Ghazi as fathers.

350 Fleury’s also shares perceived (indirect) responsibility for each father’s death: He left Al Ghazi’s back exposed to attack and had Fran reassigned to Riyadh to save his career.

351 When they arrive neither Haytham nor Fleury immediately stir from the car, Fleury again immobile. The camera consciously moves to the old man’s hands, showing he has all of his fingers and positioned as ‘good’ Other.
Yet ‘father figures’ also inculcate their ‘sons’ into violence, an inculcation that superficially reproduces but again partially destabilises simplistic Orientalist discourses. Throughout the film, and as in Cloverfield, ‘mediated looking’ at terror occurs at a distance through binoculars or the camera, which simultaneously brings the watcher closer while marking a separation from what is watched. Yet unlike in Cloverfield, ‘mediated looking’ is also integral to building a capacity and willingness to watch scenes of violence, and significantly correlates in the film to a building sense of hatred towards American presence. The Kingdom suggests a ‘gateway’ structure in relation to the inculcation into terror – looking (through binoculars) leads to filming and finally active participation in terrorism (see Figures 4.8-4.10). The path on which Hamza has set his youngest grandson, the symbolic Arab ‘son’, is evidenced as the camera pans from him to his fifteen year-old grandson, calmly recording the attacks on video even after the suicide bombing. This is reinforced when the teenager, inculcated into the ‘terror perspective’, is shown actively involved in preparations to attack Fleury’s team; implying ‘Arab/Muslim’ culture quickly transforms a child’s desire to look away into a teenager’s pleasure in not only watching but participating in violence.352 The Kingdom thus links bomb making and Hamza’s video recordings spatially, but Hamza’s video address celebrating the attack’s success also reinforces the film’s interest in the impact of ‘fathers’ on ‘sons’ (see Figures 4.11-4.12).353 The

352 This is reiterated in the film’s final shot of the youngest ‘son’, discussed at the end of the chapter. This inculcation into violence is further suggested when Fleury and Al Ghazi enter a Riyadh games parlour to question an informant, a reformed former bomb maker and (another) father figure in (another) male-only Saudi space. While perhaps emphasising how transferable antagonists and protagonists are in these shooter games, the aggressive pleasure Saudi youth in American-style dress exhibit when they shoot Marines during gameplay visualises divisions within Saudi society and the Other’s inner struggle.

353 By linking bomb making and the recordings, the film thereby defines the recording as also an act of terror. While also
film here offers Hamza’s point-of-view, but significantly, his teenage ‘son’ is the central focus of his psychological perspective, as if he is communicating with him rather than (or as much as) the camera.

**FIGURE 4.11**

*Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access*

**FIGURE 4.12**

*Third-party copyright work removed for full-text access*

However, *The Kingdom* also establishes the shared significance of fatherhood and gender socialisation for the inculcation of American ‘sons’ as well as ‘Arab/Muslim’ ones into cultures of violence and militarism. That is, as much as Saudis instruct and involve ‘sons’ in bomb-making, weaponry and terror, American ‘sons’ in the film are likewise introduced into a culture of violence, militarism and ‘father worship’ through toys and games, an aspect described by Greenen (2008, p.97) as a “renunciation of gentleness”. However, while recognising the negative impacts of such gender socialisation, Greenen (2008) fails to critique the use of toys (and, by implication, all popular culture, including Hollywood film) to normalise militarism and masculine violence for American boys. Following Fran’s death, Fleury visits his surviving son, who plays with a model of a military chopper (presumably built with his father) throughout his conversation with Fleury, as military toys and photos of he and his deceased father fill the bedroom. Indeed, Fleury’s arrival at the boy’s house is briefly offered the boy’s perspective, watching Fleury’s arrival through curtained windows from the confines (and protections) of the home. The boy’s physical resemblance to the compound boy with the grey cap further links ‘America’ abroad to the American home, but is also reminiscent of *WTC*, demonstrating the fear of news from ‘outside’ – news always implicitly connoted as ‘bad’ – and the impossibility of functioning to establish that Hamza is more than a distantiated figurehead, this also relates to the use of communication technologies in creating and perpetuating figures of terror, as in bin Laden’s videos and recordings. Hamza also praises his ‘sons’ in the address, including those sacrificed. By extension, *The Missing* also highlights the perversion of keeping recorded images of victims, with the scarred Indian witch wearing photographs of all of his female victims around his neck, figuring the possession of others as trophies (and particularly odd given this is conventionally signified by scalps). Like his later visit to Al Ghazi’s son, this scene was included in the final cut only at the last minute, emphasising the significance of symbolic father-son relations in the film.
shielding the home from terror. This, however, also suggests a certain ambivalence, as if the American son’s innocence is equally threatened by his like inculcation into a culture of militarism and violence tied to paternal relations.

Regaining Control: Reterritorialisation, Reskilling & Re-Arming

In order to reverse the loss of control, of the compound-space as ‘American’ and of professional agency, destabilised by the attacks and subsequent assertions of Saudi jurisdiction, Fleury’s team must ‘remasculinise’ and re-territorialise ‘foreign’ space via the restoration of professional agency and, finally, re-arming. Indeed, the film-camera’s re-orientation (away from the ‘terrorist perspective’) during the opening attacks foreshadows Fleury’s team’s like struggle to reassume control and thereby to remasculinise, the film’s efforts to master ‘Arab/Muslim’ space repeated by the FBI characters in re-establishing the compound and investigation as ‘American’. In this respect, The Kingdom reiterates Hannah’s (2005, p.554) assertion that the myth of the frontier is tied up with ideals of masculinity and national identity through ‘domesticating the natural world’ for civilisation. Firstly, the use of FBI investigators rather than the CIA or military not only depoliticises and demilitarises, but redesignates the compound-bombsite as both domestic and international, as ‘America’ abroad.355 The FBI presence, routinely connoted as a domestic organisation, seeks to governmentalise and ‘Americanise’ the space, particularly following Saudi assertions of jurisdiction.356 The team will also (re)claim and effectively re-territorialise the bombsite and thereby the compound as ‘American’ through the imposition (and implicit supremacy) of ‘American’ investigative methods and practices. Thus, while Dodds (2008, p.1633) recognises the Middle East is often “a site for US personnel to demonstrate their superior skills and technical expertise” in film, the significance of it becoming such a ‘site’ in The Kingdom is more telling, facilitating the restitution of destabilised identities sheathed in (the performance of) professional roles.357

355 The duality of space is foreshadowed in the credits sequence via the famed post-9/11 satellite shot of the rising black plumes of smoke from the collapsed towers – echoing Stone’s brief-but-unpursued pull back in WTC – signalling the global visibility and significance of the attacks; ‘America’ and/but global. 356 The FBI’s little-known role following foreign attacks on US citizens is confirmed in the DVD Bonus materials, which note that FBI investigators were also on the ground in Saudi Arabia after attacks/bombings in 1996 and 2003. 357 The FBI team’s ‘rainbow’ composition already implies American values are ‘universal’ and trump cultural sensitivities and
By identifying a loophole in the Saudi rules – that he can interview compound inhabitants – Fleury reprises his talents for negotiation and persuasion and begins to re-establish the space as ‘American’. Moreover, signifying its material importance in his identity and countering his enforced immobility, Fleury is shown not only walking towards a compound house, but leading Al Ghazi. This symbolic re-territorialisation through professional agency is confirmed – and once again invokes the hero’s willingness to transgress – when Fleury resists being positioned as ‘a subject’ in the palace meeting with the Prince. By ignoring cultural sensitivities and Al Ghazi’s advice, Fleury obtains Saudi acquiescence to continue the investigation through ‘American’ methods: “America’s not perfect, […] but we are good at this”. Each team member’s subsequently demonstrated return to performing their professional role re-establishes identities destabilised on their arrival in Saudi Arabia – Fleury as leader-negotiator, Mayes as forensics examiner and Sykes as bomb technician. In so doing, they transform the investigation and bombsite through performance rather than mere presence. The gymnasium is thereafter transformed into a mini-investigation headquarters, reversing its previously ambivalent signification as both ‘American’ space and a site of immobility, constraint and inaction.

This renewed sense of American control via the resumption of their professional roles is exemplified in the autopsy scene. Aguayo (2009) claims this scene reinforces Orientalist discourses of the Other as scientifically backward and culturally primitive, especially through their treatment of Mayes. Yet Aguayo misreads the import of Mayes’ relationship with Sergeant Haytham, when her professional expertise enables her to reconstruct and ‘see’ his earlier efforts to kill the first ‘officer’-attackers. And diplomatic requirements.

358 Although their cooperation has been mutual to this point, Fleury’s words also ‘liberate’ Al Ghazi, invoking Orientalist discourse of the active west and passive east. The exchange highlights that the ‘good Arab/Muslim’, unlike Fleury, is unable to bypass bureaucratic structures and rules; he must be ‘saved’ the American hero, who thereby ‘re-mans’ himself (see also Dodds, 2008).

359 With the exception of Leavitt, whose analyst role is less ‘visual’, which may be why he can be abducted. Mayes and Sykes concurrently reassemble the attack’s components: Mayes a marble from shrapnel embedded in non-Muslim victims and Sykes the ambulance gurney from parts found in the bomb crater.

360 The Saudi General and his investigation headquarters, which was off-limits to the team, are excised entirely from the film thereafter. The long-held cinematic will to re-territorialise space is similarly apparent in The Lost Patrol, as Sanders (Boris Karloff) stakes the ground of the Other with a crucifix, staging a Christian return in the ‘heathen’ space, and in Bataan’s (Garnett, 1943) crosses for the platoon’s dead men.
more specifically, when another officer is angered when Mayes touches a dead Muslim during the autopsy, the Sergeant acts as her surrogate, an appendage who follows her instructions. Thus, the autopsy is rather about the transformation of ‘Arab/Muslim’ cultural attitudes and acceptance of ‘universal’ American values through the establishment of (white) female professional control of the ‘Arab/Muslim’ Other, with Saudi males performing American methods under female instruction.

Taking Up Arms: Female Masculinity & Gender Reversal

While *The Kingdom* incorporates women, along with multi-ethnicity, into public/professional roles to mark American difference, Mayes is also arguably coded as (female and ‘American’) masculine via the restoration of her professional agency, control of the ‘Arab/Muslim’ male, her taking up of arms and her rescue of Leavitt. While Tasker (2002) observes that masculinity is not necessarily culturally aligned to men, Mayes is the first female character in the ‘terror threat’ films whose assumption of ‘masculine’ traits, roles or positions is seemingly not punished or demonised, as Beth and Marlena are in *Cloverfield* and Dr Krippin is in *I Am Legend*. And although she erroneously suggests Mayes is a mere ‘token’, Greenen (2008, p.96) nonetheless notes the significance of her duality: “She both obeys and defies traditional female gender stereotypes – she alone cries”, but is also competent in street warfare. However, while femininity is not coded as negative or weak in *The Kingdom*, it is ambivalent. Mayes is more intuitive, but the film numerosely and pejoratively marks her difference from her team. She persuasively embodies military masculinity – coded not only as possessing agency but being tough, resourceful and competent with weapons (Tasker, 2002) – but is represented as less resilient and male pain and suffering is numerosely displaced onto her body. Moreover, the least conventionally masculine team member – Leavitt – is arguably ‘feminised’ via his abduction, bound and need to be rescued.

361 Given the entire team, and not only Mayes, is told they cannot touch dead Muslims, this again signals the team’s cultural insensitivities and chauvinism.

362 When the team departs Riyadh, the Sergeant’s open handshake with Mayes reiterates this and confirms their relationship mirrors the ‘buddy’ trajectory of Fleury and Al Ghazi, from antagonism to professional understanding to allegiance and friendship.
The Kingdom ambivalently and repeatedly emphasises Mayes’ difference to that of her male colleagues. In her first appearance in the FBI briefing room, Mayes is the only agent to cry when Fleury reports Fran deceased. Fleury chokes back his tears, tears subtly displaced onto Mayes, as he also draws attention to her crying by momentarily – and somewhat theatrically – halting his briefing to whisper in her ear. Ambivalently, while appearing to comfort her, Fleury here actually initiates the process of incorporating Mayes into military masculinity in the film. Moreover, it is only when she subsequently speaks in her professional capacity in the briefing that she is titled (by name and area of expertise). Thus, while her identity is similarly tied to her professional role, it is seemingly prefigured by her ‘feminine’ response. Mayes’ admittedly ambivalent combination of femininity and masculinity is particularly evident when she intuitively and actively (visually) reconstructs sites/sights of violence, nimbly assembling details of Sergeant Haytham’s disruptive intervention in the opening attacks, such as bullet casings, blood patches and collision points.363

Unsurprisingly, Mayes’ supposed difference is amplified in Saudi Arabia, although making an explicit issue of her body and presence is equally marked as culturally misplaced, even perverse.364 Mayes laughs off Saudi attempts to clumsily create a ‘feminine’ space in the gym for her, when Al Ghazi announces they were not able to find her a pink screen. Yet her body is the only one sexualised, by Schmidt (in the name of the prince), and preparations for another terrorist car bomb attack prominently display an individual surveillance photo of Mayes. The perversity of the exaggerated focus of the ‘terrorist perspective’ on Mayes is further reinforced in the final shootout when the teenage ‘son’ raises his gun sideways at Mayes rather than forwards at Fleury, who has him in his sights. Yet while the film derides such cultural

363 While inhibitions on female presence and witnessing in Ford’s ‘cavalry’ westerns are common – and probably historically accurate – attempts to establish male-only space and male-only subject matter are routinely unsuccessful. For example, in Fort Apache, Lt. O’Rourke unsuccessfully prevents Thursday’s daughter from entering the ‘space of atrocity’, and ‘seeing’ the abused troopers.
364 Neither Al Ghazi nor Fleury is willing to inform Mayes she cannot attend the palace dinner, but Fleury’s deferral indicates the respective power dynamics. Aguayo (2009, p.50) claims Al Ghazi is compelled to be “a conduit through which western modernity […] is transmitted”, forced to “articulate the gender-biased traditions of Islam to a white western woman” (Aguayo, 2009, p.50). However, Aguayo ignores that, given Al Ghazi too defers responsibility for informing her (as the film also does in not showing such a scene). Greenen (2008, p.95) fails even to acknowledge Fleury’s (western) deflection of responsibility onto Al Ghazi.
attitudes, it continues to mark her body as less resilient and more liable to suffer. However accurate and appropriate her response, Mayes is the only agent felled when a jeep-mounted machine gun is fired into the air after the altercation between Fleury and the National Guard officer (who fells Al Ghazi), again conveniently displacing male pain and suffering onto the female body.

Nonetheless, Mayes’ dual embodiment of female and military masculinity develops over the course of the film, and is hinted at when she re-genders the gym’s space, displacing ‘pink’ onto Leavitt: “Don’t cross this: pink line”. Leavitt, as the inexperienced audience cipher and soon-to-be abductee, is seemingly aware of this: “You’re real butch after a long flight”.365 The wife of one of her men also pejoratively describes Walden (Meg Ryan) as ‘butch’ in Courage Under Fire (Zwick, 1996), but is framed as an outsider and visually marginalised when the husband concurs, though positively, and Serling (Denzel Washington) subsequently smiles (Tasker, 2002). Tasker (2002, p.212) argues Walden is ultimately both masculine-coded and normalised, the film establishing the “coexistence of her military masculinity” and “her status as a military woman”. Yet military masculinity is also about star persona, clothing and appearance (Tasker, 2002). In this respect, Mayes is more persuasively normalised through discourses of military masculinity.366 While Aguayo (2009, p.52) identifies that Mayes’ clothing (military pants and tight t-shirt) seeks to both “masculinise her body while still show[ing] her female curves, with specific emphasis on her breasts”, she highlights Garner’s supposed “hypersexual star status” – which is, moreover, debatable – and ignores other aspects of her star persona, and particularly her action pedigree as the star of Alias. Mayes’ female masculinity, unlike Walden’s, does not require becoming ‘mother’ or militarising motherhood and is not problematised by a lack of action genre pedigree.

365 Leavitt serves a predominantly expository role early in the film and learns Fran was sent to Riyadh for breaking the jaw of a man who insulted Mayes when they celebrated graduation together, perhaps in relation to gender (that is, being ‘butch’).

366 This designation, unlike her status as mother, is long in doubt, contested and eroded in multiple ‘versions’ of her final military actions, each perhaps slightly weakening the truth-value of the ultimate ‘reveal’ of her military masculinity. Tasker fails to address how Ryan’s performance was critically panned, as unpersuasive and unconvincing. While Tasker (2002, p.217) claims “becoming ‘butch’ is insistently not about becoming male”, Walden’s female masculinity is repeatedly contested and relies on militarising motherhood – she compares being shot to childbirth and her father describes her motherhood as also a duty. In her father’s imagining, Walden (Ryan) as Captain and mother is both doting and militaristic – she is a ‘militarised’ mother who does push-ups in fatigues at play with her daughter.
Mayes’ embodiment of female military masculinity is literalised when the team’s convoy is attacked and Leavitt abducted. Without sanction, the remaining team members promptly (and seriously!) arm themselves. While Fleury and Sykes’ re-arming, after being disarmed on arrival, becomes a key plank in reasserting their masculinity, Mayes’ taking up of arms symbolically aligns her with military masculinity. However, her embodiment remains uncertain and, initially, in Hamza’s apartment block hideout, she merely takes cover in the hall when explosions and bullets rip through the walls, while Al Ghazi and Fleury clear out the rooms. Again the hall represents a significant transition space in the film, earlier marking the moment terror figuratively enters ‘America’ in the film, but here marking Mayes’ complete militarisation. Thus, after stumbling upon a room of frightened women and children, she resolves to act (as action hero), and soon thereafter kills Leavitt’s would-be executioners. In a final, frenzied kill scene, she finally also shoots and – cue symbolism – stabs ‘officer’-terrorist in the groin a militarised ‘final girl’; her knife both penetrative and ‘unmanning’. Indeed, in a form of gender reversal, she rescues Leavitt – an armed, militarised woman rescuing an unarmed (and bound) man. While women have been represented ambivalently in the ‘terror threat’ films, Mayes’ armed rescue of Leavitt complicates Faludi’s claim that ‘captivity narratives’ have been revived post-9/11 to not only demonstrate the enemy’s brutality, but prefigure women as passive and fragile victims and (re-)inflate the role of their male rescuers. While the rescue certainly ‘remasculinises’ ‘American’ masculinity, it also confirms suspicions of male insufficiency and presents ‘remasculinisation’ as (also) female.

While Leavitt’s persistent emasculation and impotence is reinforced by his abduction it offers him the opportunity to partially ‘remasculinise’. Taken into a room with a video camera inside Hamza’s hideout, Leavitt’s panicked apprehension of the mise-en-scene of the typical execution video, communicates the sense that recording not only makes an event ‘real’, but is ultimately to record death. When the spotlight

367 It is not clear where these weapons originate, given they were expressly disarmed on arrival, another pointer to the film’s ‘magical’ transformation of genre.

368 A speedy montage after one abductor says, “Start the camera”, of the reading a missive of declaration, accusation and judgement, the spotlight, the knife shows its familiarity in popular discourse. The scene also represented the greatest discomfort for critics, considered too reminiscent of Daniel Pearl and other beheading victims. Events must be recorded to index their existence and communicate terror to others – therefore, what is filmed must then be distributed to become real. The terrorists film the first attacks and later post them on the Internet, to both terrorise and communicate their success to sympathisers. In Munich,
falls on his face, he stares fearfully/fitfully into the camera, as a slight zoom from his point-of-view signifies how this ‘apparatus of death’ hypnotises and drags him in. Roused from his trance by gunfire – marking the arrival of the ‘cavalry’ – his resistance is re-activated, and his subsequent toppling of the camera tripod forestalls his death; absent recording he cannot be executed. More than this, Leavitt’s ‘remasculinisation’ lies in averting spectacle, in not being made the object of the ‘monstrous’ ‘terror threat’, as occurs to the male camera operators in *Cloverfield*. In a sense, his vulnerability and need to be ‘saved’ is in part countered by his resistance and assistance of Mayes, but is compromised also, as he remains bound and does not take up arms after his rescue is effected.

**Genre ‘Schizophrenia’: the Impossibility of Concealing Vengeance**

Following a raid that Fleury’s team orchestrates (that precedes Leavitt’s abduction), however, the team’s – and the film’s – ‘procedural’ response grinds to a halt. Their criminal investigation simply stops, Hamza remains unpunished and the team, informed by Schmidt they are leaving Riyadh immediately, is again immobile and constrained. In response, *The Kingdom* abruptly shifts from a ‘crime procedural’ film into an over-the-top action-war film in its final act, submitting to the repressed desire to exact violent revenge and opening an avenue for sustained comparison with Spielberg’s *Munich*. Lumenick (2007) decries the suddenness of this morphing from ‘police procedural’ into revenge fantasy; character and film alike finally driven by vengefulness rather than justice (Lane, 2007) – or rather justice as vengeance.369 While seemingly fitting Holloway’s (2008, p.83) description of the ‘intrinsic aesthetic and narrative fragmentation’ of films commercially constructed for multiple audiences, the jolting subgeneric shift – more a discarding of one genre for another mid-film than a mixing of genres – is symptomatic of the generic and narrative incoherence evident in all of the ‘terror threat’ films. *The Kingdom’s* shift reinstates ‘the logic of the showdown’, with an avenging hero who will not yield, rest or relent.

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in exacting revenge (Hannah, 2005); merely restoring professional agency and re-territorialising space is ultimately insufficient.

*The Kingdom* repeatedly masks and displaces Fleury’s thirst for vengeance; an absence only ‘unveiled’ at film’s end, but one that potentially compromises and undermines their project of ‘remasculinisation’ through violence.370 Only the Attorney General explicitly identifies the FBI desire to go to Saudi Arabia as a “variation on vengeance”, and numerous deleted scenes (included as DVD Bonus materials) indicate the film consciously works to conceal how Fleury’s primary motivation is vengeance. In one, the FBI Director elicits an admission he ‘just wants to hit somebody’, and in the scene where Fleury speaks to Fran’s son, two surrounding (but deleted) conversations with the boy’s mother not only excise female maternal presence, but conceal Fleury’s motivation, promising the boy’s mother he will “make ‘em pay”.371 In the theatrical release, the team numerously mask Fleury’s (and their own) desire for vengeance. Before arriving in Saudi Arabia, Mayes evades telling Leavitt what Fleury whispered in the briefing, and Fleury and Sykes also dance around enunciating Fleury’s motives, although Fleury admits he has a “beast in [his chest]”, perhaps unintentionally revealing his true motivation, again symbolically connected to the Hulk and the uncontrollable rage of the ‘green beast’.372 Fleury’s desire for vengeance is also displaced onto the ‘good Indian’, solemnly concurring with Al Ghazi’s vow: “I just want to kill him”, perhaps articulating America’s own violent duality, and how it desires to subsume or conceal its ‘dark fantasy’ within the Other.

Yet Fleury’s revelation in the film’s coda that he “told her we were gonna kill them all”, finally admits the driving centrality of vengeance. Vengeance – “a crucial dynamic in movie history” and key western trope (Thomson, 2006, p.28) – and the action-war ‘turn’ offers the team the wished-for opportunity to remasculinise through a ‘showdown’. *The Kingdom*’s spectacular – and plainly absurd – shootout finale

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370 Berg (DVD Director’s Commentary) acknowledges Fleury’s relationship to Fran is clearly a “not insignificant motivator”.

371 In *Munich*, Avner has difficult, ambivalent relationships with his mother and mother nation. Neither wishes to share the burden of what he did, of how (adapting the Israeli Prime Minister’s words) he had to ‘compromise his own values’.

372 Fleury and Mayes’ response to the caskets of the dead FBI agents perhaps also reveals their primary motivation. All else fades as they stare at the caskets, and a series of shot-reverse shots offers their point-of-view and establishes a sort of dialogue with and promise to the dead agents. It also symbolically counters the Bush Administration’s ban on such photographic images.
recreates the siege experience of the ‘outpost’ in ‘frontier westerns’ like *Fort Apache*, *Gunga Din* and *Black Hawk Down*.\(^{373}\) While a siege experience is similarly represented in recent ‘frontier westerns’ *The Alamo* (Hancock, 2004) and *300* (Snyder, 2006), the absence of either overwhelming enemy numbers or clear boundaries that mark the ‘war on terror’ partially explains the relative lack of post-9/11 ‘outpost’ films.\(^{374}\) The symbolically re-armed team, with their ‘good Indians’, follows Leavitt’s abductors into Suwedi – mirroring the ‘entirely hostile district’ in *Black Hawk Down* – ‘riding’ into an ambush within the ‘unreadable’ space of the Other, surrounded by overwhelming numbers and attacked from a high vantage point.\(^{375}\) The duplicitous ‘terror-Other’ has also transformed the apartment block ‘home’ into a terror space – its holes and tunnels evoking typical representations of Arab cities “as dark, exotic, labyrinthine and structureless places” (Graham, p.256, cited in Dodds, 2008) – masquerading as civilian.\(^{376}\) Graham similarly notes Arab spaces thus “need to be ‘unveiled’ for the production of ‘order’”– and become mere ‘terrorist nests’ and ‘killing fields’. In this sense, Fleury’s team’s incursion mirrors the post-9/11 American foreign policy’s invocation of ‘frontier’ masculinity, articulating the need to not only uncover ‘hidden’ targets but the assumed right to violate boundaries, legal, official and spatial, in doing so (Hannah, 2008). More than this, their incursion demonstrates the team’s need to ‘unveil’ the ‘terror-Other’ \(\text{and}\) signify any breach as also self-defence – Leavitt’s rescue strangely mirrors Fleury’s earlier description of his son’s birth.

However, Fleury’s concealed motivation also renders an uncertain moral figure and colours the team’s investigation – like Ethan in *The Searchers*, he is motivated (only/truly) by vengeance. More significantly, it is not the targeting of women and

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373 While it is not unusual for an inordinate numbers of ‘Indians’ to be killed, this is not the case from positions of weakness or disadvantage – the FBI team, although trained in automatic weapons, displays weapon skills that neither the film nor their professional roles explains. In this respect, *The Kingdom* resembles contemporary action cinema and the ‘boy’s own’ colonial world of *Gunga Din*; the inferior Other easily routed when their treacherous concealment is exposed.

374 It also partially explains the recent resurgence of zombie films, which better communicates the ‘feeling’ of being besieged. Many SF alien films also do this, although (technological) superiority is typically reversed.

375 In *Fort Apache*, Thursday cannot distinguish the Apache from the landscape (so concludes they are not there) and proceeds on his calamitous charge into a fatal ambush. Like Thursday, the team cannot ‘read’ the space or distinguish ‘good’ from ‘bad’, and it is only a veiled women’s covert warning – an instance of ‘quiet’ agency or reversed ‘saving’ – that ensures their survival of the ambush.

376 The building mirrors modern terror’s networked structure and imply terror’s cultural ‘embeddedness’ in everyday Arab life, reinforced by the use of everyday objects (e.g. fridges) to conceal or hide terror.
children but the abduction of a male agent that ultimately overwhelms Fleury’s repressed desires and transforms him (and the team) into ‘the beast’. It seems that, adapting Slotkin (2001), when American ‘manhood’ ‘feels profoundly threatened’ the desire for ‘savage war’, which “rationalises a limitless, ruthless, and perhaps irrational use of force”, overwhelms the commitment to ‘good war’. Leavitt’s abduction also initiates The Kingdom’s like final-act generic transformation into an over-the-top action-war film, the quest for criminal justice abruptly and disconcertingly morphing into vengeful war, all the more troubling – like American foreign policy post-9/11 – for its concealment and displacement. Haar (2007; see also Corliss, 2007) here describes the film as “schizophrenic”, both implying the Middle East cannot solve its problems without America’s superior knowledge/methods and then “erasing a good deal of what came before” in its coda. 377 Zacharek (2007) too acknowledges the film’s ‘schizophrenia’, but observes that, while perhaps catering too easily to audience taste for non-stop action, it resists jingoism and signals that the team learns it cannot fix the Middle East. Thus, far from offering (generic) resolution, The Kingdom’s generic ‘schizophrenia’ rather ends on an unsettlingly uncertain future, and suggests retributive violence not only fails to ‘remasculinise’ the team, but may make matters worse.

Becoming the Avenging (Action) ‘Hero’: Hollowness & Blowback

A consideration of three codas – in The Kingdom, Munich and Fort Apache – underscores the inadequacy of vengeance, both in terms of its negative consequences for avenger and avenging nation alike. In the end, The Kingdom not only confirms the perceived hollowness of vengeance but marks it as counter-productive. Retributive violence in The Kingdom is cyclical, intergenerational and blows back. While blowback – the unintended and unwanted adverse repercussions of political or military action – is an important trope in recent cinema, evident in numerous post-

377 Berg admits that in a test screening in Sacramento, the audience cheered when Mayes kills the would-be executioners. However, he interprets this – following a similar response in London, with 25% of the audience self-identified ‘Arabs’ – as a neither political nor religious sentiment but ‘universal’ desire to see extremism eliminated/punished.
9/11 films, including *Rendition*, *The American* *The Missing* and *Munich*, it is relatively unacknowledged critically.\(^{378}\)

Of the three, *Munich*, from a book entitled *Vengeance*, perhaps most fully explores the hollowness and scarring consequences of vengeance – where “the excitement of achievement turns poisonous” (Thomson, 2006, p.30). Although ostensibly about Israel’s experiences after the Black September attacks in 1972, *Munich* is an American film *about* America (as much as Israel), particularly by virtue of its director and its final scene, in which the camera pointedly looks across towards Manhattan Island. In this scene, Avner’s final meeting with his government handler, Avner (Eric Bana) explicitly questions the value of Israel’s violent retribution given the subsequent/consequent escalation of terror: “If they committed a crime, why not arrest them” – “there’s no peace at the end of this, you know this is true”. Even more explicitly, after Avner walks away alone, spurned by handler (and country), the still-extant Twin Towers stand silently in the background in a shot, held over end titles and the credits, that links his words to the blowback America would experience on 9/11 and following the ‘war on terror’. Vengeance changes Avner: following his mission, he is persistently silent, unresponsive to congratulations, scarred psychologically and seemingly empty. Sánchez-Escalonilla (2010) argues the scene demonstrates how fear and violence finally ‘undermine the home’. Indeed, Avner is forced into an exile that is as much an expression of not having an unsullied ‘home’ or place of return as about his fears of reprisals.\(^{379}\)

While *The Kingdom* seemingly charts the opposite trajectory, and is certainly a less developed articulation of the consequences of vengeance, the killing of Hamza nonetheless ambivalently fails to afford the FBI team satisfaction or resolve destabilised professional, national and gender identities. While Corliss’ (2007) claim

\(^{378}\) In *The Missing*, the Apaches were US cavalry scouts “formerly on Uncle Sam’s payroll” – they continue to wear the uniform – who, also under the thrall of a charismatic (witch) leader, jumped the reservation after the cavalry hang a chief. In *The American*, the American, as representative (but also as one type), faces an attempted assassination with a gun he had been commissioned to build. He cannot escape the consequences of (his) past, as the Italian priest observes, “You’re an American. You think you can escape history”.

\(^{379}\) In *Munich*, Avner also seeks to redeem paternal absence (becoming father again and returning home): His contact’s father believes Avner is motivated as a father – “… you did what you had to do to feed your family”. Blowback (a CIA term coined in relation to the 1953 Iran coup) is also foreshadowed when Avner’s bomb maker similarly observes, “All this blood, comes back to us”, and is soon thereafter blown up by a bomb hidden in one of his own toys.
The Kingdom is finally “a retro-fantasy […] culminating in politico-military triumph” is representative, the film’s action-war ‘turn’ ultimately marks vengeance as neither redemptive nor reassuring. Ansen (2007) claims the film “whip[s] the audience into a bloodthirsty frenzy” – both he and Shaheen (2007) decrying applause during the shootout – before a “discordant and disingenuous” coda attempts to suggest the error of such bloodlust (see also Puig, 2007; Bradshaw, 2007; Rainer, 2007). On the other hand, precisely because of audience cheers when Mayes stabs the final ‘officer’, Johnson (2007) interprets the subsequent coda as ‘shaming’. Dodds (2008, p.1633) too first asserts The Kingdom, in line with action genre expectations, “offers an unambiguous conclusion” before finally, albeit briefly, acknowledging the “generational shift of hatred” and the film’s ultimate “ambivalence about a war which […] does not seem to have an obvious closure date”. Thus, rather than inspiring the ‘catharsis’ of revenge fantasy, as Shaheen (2007) claims, The Kingdom’s conclusion arguably only deflates. Vengeance is hollow, incomplete, uncertain, and corrosive on the avenger, it causes literal and symbolic scarring and disfigurement.380 In the end, ‘remasculinising’ through the taking up of arms and retributive violence is recognised as inadequate, and even ‘monstrous’.

The team’s casual lounging and jocularity while amongst the bodies of those killed in the first raid – all the more disturbing amongst bodies Fleury describes as ‘teens’ and ‘kids’ – foreshadows the marked difference between watching violence at a distance and doing violence. While the film mocks and emasculates Schmidt when he is visibly sick on seeing the corpses, this sequence again signals the film’s ambivalence, not entirely persuaded the opposite is commendable.381 Indeed, their flippancy highlights not so much the team’s capacity to dehumanise the Other, but that they have yet only watched killing at a filtered distance – like moviegoers, their hands remain unbloodied. Yet when their hands are finally bloodied they are left shocked and cradling the dead, as the long-held shot of Al Ghazi’s dead, staring eyes overwhelms Fleury’s repeated invocations of “we got him”. The film’s style registers this change, and the slow-motion device that previously signified mobility and investigation momentum is now associated with immobility, grief and fragmentation.

380 All of the soldiers in Courage Under Fire are physically and psychically scarred, with hollow, vacant stares; all altered by combat (and typical of the genre).
381 Viewed as corrupted or tainted by the Other, Fleury also refuses to shake Schmidt’s hand, as he had done upon meeting.
The slow-motion aesthetic employed throughout Fleury’s visit to Al Ghazi’s grieving family bleeds unsettlingly into the team’s departure, and the extreme close-ups fragment their faces, their thirst for revenge not only emptied but deflating, empty, even monstrous.

This deflating emptiness is reinforced in The Kingdom’s coda, when the team, visibly bruised and scarred, regathers in the FBI offices. While their director tells them they ‘did outstanding work over there’ – both harkening back to and ‘playing out’ Karnes’ final words in WTC – and should ‘hold their heads high’, the team are immobile, silent and stare blankly into off-screen space. Mayes, for one, cannot “even bring herself to look at him, let alone raise her head” (Zacharek, 2007), her incorporation into military masculinity now of ambivalent significance. As film style is flipped, so too are earlier signifiers of masculinity. Inexpressiveness now connotes uncertainty rather than ideal masculinity and mobility is without purpose, as Fleury, after revealing what he whispered, turns and walks back(wards) from whence he came – and completely out of focus.382 Thomson (2006, p.30) asserts that cinema can “distil and tame the rage for mere vengeance”, in which – as in The Searchers – “the immense build-up and need for getting one’s own back collapses in the face of abiding kinship”. However, in The Kingdom, revenge collapses not ‘in the face of kinship’ but in on itself. Dodds (2008, p.1628) suggests American soldiers in action films in part “consolidate their militarised identities and institutions” and secure America through violence. Yet while the generic shift from crime-procedure to action-war in The Kingdom admits the otherwise concealed thirst for vengeance that motivates Fleury’s team, there is no such ‘consolidation’. Despite being just what the team (and the audience) craves, vengeance neither secures America nor persuasively ‘remasculinises’. More than this, it even invites blowback.

Blowback in The Kingdom is both literal and projected uncertainly beyond the film’s narrative. Like the Winchesters unscrupulously provided to Indians in Fort Apache and the toys/bombs that kill the ‘toy maker’ in Munich, the military detonator used in the opening attacks is identified as American-made.383 The bomb’s origins are re-

382 This mirrors Ethan’s exclusion from both the ‘idea’ and concrete, lived reality of ‘home’ in The Searchers. He cannot be incorporated because of what he has done (often in its name), and walks away alone, as the camera ends safely ensconced within.
383 Although how it was obtained is deflected.
signified when the former bomb maker explains his lost two fingers: “Every bomb maker at some point gets bitten by his own work”. Hamza too reveals a similar loss in a video recording, symbolising the deleterious consequences of violence and hatred on the body. Yet the words are equally attributable to the FBI team – and indeed America, for its lead role in arms trade and Middle Eastern presence and actions. However, the coda projects the likelihood of blowback beyond the narrative when the director’s declaration Fleury’s team ‘did outstanding work’ overlays an image of Hamza’s surviving Arab ‘son’, in tacit acknowledgement that the team (and America) cannot control the response to its actions. By intercutting Leavitt’s and the Arab mother’s questions about what Fleury and Hamza respectively whispered, The Kingdom visually connects distantiated spaces and thematically connects the film’s opening to its ending. The likelihood of blowback is amplified when the ‘son’ unsettlingly repeats Fleury’s words, in detailing his grandfather’s dying words: “We are going to kill them all”. Williams and Linneman (2010, p.202) are suitably struck by the “similarities between heroic Americans […] and violent terrorists”. Yet while the FBI team is chastened by its encounter with the ‘terror-Other’ and the corrosive consequences of vengeance, the vengeful sentiment survives in the Arab ‘son’.

The film’s final shot, an extreme close-up of the surviving Arab ‘son’, uncertainly probes his eyes, mirroring the extreme close-up of his panicked eyes that concludes the opening attacks scene. Shaheen (2007) claims “the boy’s threatening eyes” signal those of a future terrorist. Although he initially resists the ‘terror perspective’, desperately trying to avert his gaze, he progressively ‘puts on’ Hamza’s terror-signified clothing, and is only shown wearing the red ghutra headscarf after Hamza is shot and the white thobe robes in the coda. The ‘son’s inculcation into the ‘terrorist perspective’ is seemingly confirmed by his purposeful, controlled stare and first spoken words in the film, transmitting those of the dying Hamza. However, the coda similarly links American hatred to his possible inculcation into violence. A slight zoom – another attempted re-orientation – concludes the extreme close-up, as if

384 After the raid, the team find photographs that justify the raid and connect to ‘real-world’ blowback: “the Coalition - all these countries have troops in Iraq”. Moreover, in the original draft of the final airport scene, Haytham, whose brother was killed in Iraq and who was tortured early in the narrative (thereby displacing responsibility onto the barbaric Other), emblematises the inner conflict of the ‘good Other’; detonating a suicide bomb vest and killing the entire team.

385 While Fleury’s son has a voice in the opening, the Saudi ‘son’ does is spoken to and directed, and does not speak until the coda. The grandson, unlike his teenage brother, is the only player not credited in the film (as is Dr Krippin in I Am Legend).
the camera vainly attempts to ‘read’ the ‘son’s eyes, to know his future; which is also America’s (and Fleury’s son’s). More than an Orientalist representation of the ‘inscrutable Other’, The Kingdom ends unsure about the ‘son’s’ perspective to reflect the team’s uncertainty; Hamza’s (and Fleury’s) hatred are symbolically transmitted, even amplified, rather than extinguished, by retributive violence.

Fort Apache’s famously ambiguous coda too implies a notion of blowback, after Thursday’s duplicity in breaking Yorke’s word results not only in the massacre of his command but a ‘campaign’ by the previously peripheral Geronimo. Thursday’s legacy is fame and discipline – articulated through the uniform – but his chauvinism and ignorance provoke an escalated cycle of intergenerational war. Thus, in likewise exploring the ‘frontier’ struggle between ‘savagery’ and ‘civilisation’, Ford “provokes a thoughtful uneasiness about the very myths the films present” in Fort Apache, including “a profound ambivalence toward the possession of power”, civilised only in appearance (Heffernan, 1999, p.147). Yet while – as in The Searchers – Fort Apache “acknowledges a need for heroes while undermining the notion of heroism” (Kehr, 2012), Thursday becomes a ‘mythic figure’ (despite the dishonourable reality of his death) and Yorke remains representative of ‘good’. The coda, however ambivalent, even ends hopefully, announcing a secure(d) future in Thursday’s daughter’s union with Lt. O’Rourke as much as lamenting the passing of an era and particular sense of history. A repeated shot shows the fort’s women again watching from a balcony as another ‘campaign’ begins, but the presence of the new wife and young son implies the embedding of a sense of ‘home’, one created and defended through paternal sacrifice.386 In The Kingdom, conversely, like Munich, the future of ‘America’ is uncertain, even endangered, without the surety of knowing ‘how this all ends’, as a direct consequence of paternally aligned violence; the professional and paternal linked in Fleury’s identity from the film’s opening. Although ‘Arab/Muslim’ space and its Others are transformed and (re)‘Americanised’ through the symbolic return of American methods and ‘values’, its status as ‘American’ can only be temporary, tenuous and uncertain.387 In The Kingdom’s uncertain ending, violent action, the

386 Failed officer, but redeemed father: Despite the massacre of the cavalry, the future or ‘home’ is ensured through the shielding of Lt. O’Rourke (and paternal sacrifice), with marriage, children and the safeguarding of ‘civilisation’ foreshadowed.

387 While Al Ghazi’s wife is consistently veiled, turned from the camera or confined to separate rooms – glimpsed only briefly and through frame of door – as when Fleury visits Al Ghazi’s house after his death, her blank stare is haunting. The camera,
traditional masculine and generic response to emasculation and threat, resolves neither the gender nor the terror ‘problem’ – and indeed seemingly leads only to further violence.\textsuperscript{388}

**Conclusion: Monstrous ‘American’ Masculinity**

As in the previous ‘terror threat’ films, *The Kingdom*’s project of ‘remasculinisation’ – including that of female FBI agent Mayes – is particularly ambivalent, with violent redemption hollow, uncertain and even monstrous. Even killing the previously elusive ‘terror-Other’ disconcertingly fails to satisfy: vengeance cannot reassuringly resolve or extinguish the ‘terror threat’ and may even exacerbate it via blowback, connoting the ongoing vulnerability of American ‘outpost’ and nation alike. Despite being critically received as reactionary and jingoistic, *The Kingdom* troubles the action genre’s capacity to satisfyingly facilitate ‘remasculinisation’. Indeed, neither Orientalist containment, nor ‘remasculinisation’ through the restoration of professional agency, the re-territorialisation of space or the ‘taking up of arms’ is ultimately recuperative. *The Kingdom* conceals Fleury’s (and the team’s) desire for revenge until its ‘subgeneric shift’ to action-war, but in their own estimation revenge proves inadequate in its very fulfilment, neither securing America nor persuasively ‘remasculinising’ the FBI team. They recognise but cannot communicate – beyond blank, hollow stares – that vengeance renders militarised masculinities monstrous, in mirroring and being the same as the supposedly evil ‘terrorist-Other’. *The Kingdom* indeed ends on “a mournful note” (Zacharek, 2007), in the emptied appetite for violent retribution there is neither victory nor redemption, only exhaustion, uncertainty and deflation. Paternal retributive violence not only fails to satisfyingly resolve destabilised masculinities, but infects succeeding generations of ‘sons’. It neither secures America nor persuasively ‘remasculinises’ the FBI team. Ultimately, despite an action-war ‘turn’, *The Kingdom* ends not as a call to arms or celebration of

\textsuperscript{388} Berg (DVD Director’s Commentary) intended to highlight the “cyclical nature of the violence”, violence that “certainly isn’t solving the problem”. Greenen (2008) also notes the lack of resolution and absence of hope, but fails to explore their significance.
violence, but as another disquieting marker of masculine uncertainty, ambivalence and ‘American’ monstrosity.
Conclusion

This cross-generic study of Hollywood ‘terror threat’ narrative films released between 2005 and 2010 interrogates persistent critical assumptions about the post-9/11 recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ of men and normative masculinities represented as ‘in crisis’. In contrast to dominant critical perspectives, this study demonstrates the uncertainty, ambivalence and incoherence of ‘remasculinisation’ or masculine redemption in narrative films directly and indirectly addressing 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. None of the ‘terror threat’ films coherently or convincingly represent the supposedly “resurgent male triumphalism” (Cineaste Editorial, 2007) claimed by commentators. Indeed, the ‘terror threat’ films perhaps surprisingly function as partial critiques by troubling the supposedly pervasive and systematic assumed tendency (and even capacity) of Hollywood genre films to recuperate masculinity and restore a ‘traditional’ or nostalgic ‘ideal’. Ultimately, this study highlights persistent anxieties, unstable identity constructions, uncertain performances of masculinity, ambivalent redemptions and recuperation, and even masculine monstrosity. Indeed, the films portray persistent breakdowns in performativity, breakdowns that trouble ‘remasculinisation’. Masculine ‘crises’ remain unresolved and unrelieved in encounters with terror either by a restoration to the (head of the) home or return to the uniform in WTC, the rescue of a ‘damsel in distress’ in Cloverfield, the nostalgic post-apocalyptic restoration of the ‘American’ village-nation in I Am Legend, or through the retributive destruction of the reviled ‘terrorist-Other’ in The Kingdom. The ‘terror threat’ films are ultimately unsuccessful in satisfyingly recuperating gender anxieties associated with their ‘troubled men’ or American national identity, despite their apparent redemption, with normative masculinity ‘neither absolute or secure’ (Robinson, 2000).

Superficially, the representation of masculinities in the ‘terror threat’ films appear to recuperate ‘in crisis’ normative masculinities and restore ‘traditional’ gender roles, particularly through the characterisation of the ‘terrorist-Other’ as inhuman and invisible and through the representation of women. In WTC, the ‘father’s’ return to the home supposedly ‘heals’ the vulnerable home and Karnes’ return to the ‘protective’ uniform
seemingly recuperates normative masculinity and American national identity. The failed soldier-scientist is redeemed as sacrificial ‘father’ of the refigured nation in *I Am Legend*, and the return to arms and violent annihilation of the terrorist-Other nominally ‘remasculinises’ American masculinity and ‘(re)Americanises’ foreign space in *The Kingdom*. ‘Remasculinisation’ is also facilitated through numerous narrative and generic structures, like *Cloverfield’s* quest narrative, and intriguingly through the containment of the spectacle of terror. That is, rather than the showing of spectacle, the *not showing* of spectacle dominates, seeking to manage the spectacle of terror by withholding it. In persistently ‘missing the (terror) event’, masculine-institutional failure is both concealed from ‘in crisis’ males and does not overwhelm, facilitating masculinity’s redefinition or its recuperation. Gender and sex are also predominantly aligned, with any misalignment considered an undesirable disturbance the films disavow in *WTC*, efface in *Cloverfield*, reverse in *I Am Legend* and violently erase in *The Kingdom*.

Yet despite seemingly redeeming and recuperating normative masculinity and national identity, discomfiting gaps and fissures destabilise representations of ‘remasculinisation’ after crisis, and link persistent uncertainty and ambivalence to narrative and generic incoherence, including in numerous discomfiting, abrupt ‘generic shifts’ in *WTC, The Kingdom and I Am Legend*. Despite largely conforming to principles of ‘classical’ Hollywood narration, this narrative incoherence and ambivalence troubles ‘remasculinisation’ and the capacity to exorcise the ‘terror threat’. It is also part of (rather than apart from) the historical cinematic representation of masculinities. Yet rather than the ‘muscular’, violent ‘remasculinisation’ reminiscent of Reagan-era 1980s America and action cinema, the ‘terror threat’ films largely cohere with arguments about post-WWII, 1950s SF-horror and 1970s American cinema. The ‘terror threat’ films mimic the relative incoherence associated with 1970s American cinema narratives and post-Vietnam turmoil (see Smith, 1975; Wood, 2003). And, extending Silverman’s (1992) observations on post-WWII war and film noir masculinities at Hollywood’s *margins*, the ‘terror threat’ films signal the persistence of anxieties and instabilities about post-9/11 American masculinities at the *centre* of mainstream representations. In this way, this thesis importantly highlights not only Hollywood’s desire to ‘remasculinise’ or recuperate hegemonic masculinity, but that this tendency is fundamentally unstable, uncertain and troubled. This
promotes more nuanced revaluations of the representation of masculinities in contemporary Hollywood genre, in line with Hantke’s (2011) observations on the now critically recognised complexity and ambivalence of 1950s SF-horror invasion and monster movies.\textsuperscript{389}

Most significantly, this thesis finds that not only is the apparent recuperation of normative American masculinities ultimately undermined, partial or ambivalent, but protagonists are invariably deemed or become ominous in the encounter with terror. In \textit{WTC}, the negotiation of the trapped men’s reworked, non-uniformed masculinity is disavowed by coterminous returns to the uniform, with normativity nevertheless ambivalently restored via self-conscious, conspicuous and undeniably ‘strange’ performance and male masquerade. In \textit{Cloverfield}, the Everyman ‘hero’ is overwhelmed by the excessiveness of the monster and the hand-held camera connoting his enduring vulnerability and inevitable doom. Thus, ‘monstrous’ masculinity is emphasised in the thwarting of the ‘remasculinisation’ quest and effacement of the young, urban Everyman, the film’s ‘real’ monster. In \textit{I Am Legend}, ‘monstrous’ ‘monstrosity’ is literalised in becoming and dying as the ‘monstrous’ ‘terror-other’, with Neville finally an ambivalent ‘saviour’ cum suicide bomber. And in \textit{The Kingdom}, the FBI team learns – though cannot articulate – that retributive violence not only fails to resolve or satisfy, but amplifies and extends the ‘terror threat’ and renders them equally monstrous.

While the ‘terror threat’ films feature a preponderance of ‘fathers’ and ‘protective’ professional roles – ‘protective’ masculinities, akin to Godfrey and Hamad (2012) – across disaster, SF post-apocalypse and the action-‘western’, the thesis also finds a concurrent focus on the overwhelmed and ill-equipped ‘Everyman’. The study also extends the predominant consideration of white masculinities, although it finds that race and ethnicity are ambivalently represented. That is, while difference is erased and race thereby ‘invisible’, the prominence of black heroes underscores the

\textsuperscript{389} There is an uneasy tension in the ‘terror threat’ films between representing normative masculinity in essentialist terms and/or in contemporary theoretical terms, inevitably offering representations of normative masculinities that are more complex, heterogeneous and less stable than routinely claimed. That is, the ‘terror threat’ films ostensibly promote gender as innate, ‘natural’, and tied to sex/biology (conflicting ‘maleness’ and masculinity) and gender roles, but ultimately represent it as plural, hybrid, constructed, fluid and performed. Indeed, although perhaps inadvertently, normative masculinity in the ‘terror threat’ films is contingent, fragmented, negotiated, unstable and performed.
undeniable visibility and irrevocable survival of difference, particularly in *I Am Legend*. Moreover, rather than vigilante professional-fathers, ‘protective’ masculinities in the ‘terror threat’ films are typically associated with *uniformed* roles. Nor are ‘protective’ masculinities tied to validating ‘traditional’ masculinities – often generically linked with paternalism and violence – and instances of the return of ‘traditional’ masculinities or hypermasculinity are strange or ambivalent. Indeed, in *WTC*, hypermasculinity’s overall insufficiency is perhaps underscored by its restoration through conspicuous performance and male masquerade. The ‘protective’ masculinities in *I Am Legend* and *The Kingdom* lead to monstrous ‘redemptions’ and even the action-‘western’, seemingly satisfying the (American) desire for retributive violence, ends uncertainly and melancholically.

Significantly, the ‘terror threat’ films often establish instabilities in masculine performance as *preceding* the advent or depiction of terror. This is particularly apparent in *Cloverfield*, with the repeated ‘unmanning’ of the Everyman ‘hero’ seemingly inviting or inciting terror, both signalling his inadequacy and presenting an opportunity for redress through the rescue quest. In *WTC*, McLoughlin’s pre-dating neglect of the home and his role as husband-father is implied to be symptomatic of the American home’s vulnerability, and implicitly figured as that of the home(land). Indeed, in each of the ‘terror threat’ films, the ‘American’ home is not only an ambivalent space of return, but *remains vulnerable*. In *I Am Legend*, paternal failure is entwined with the apocalyptic moment, in the simultaneous death of Neville’s family and the breakdown of civil society – and the ‘final man’ thereafter emasculated and ‘feminised’ in the succeeding post-apocalyptic terror. And even in *The Kingdom*, FBI agent Fleury is discomfitingly confined in a feminine/children’s space – the classroom – ‘during’ the opening attacks, connected through continuity montage editing rather than temporal simultaneity.

The study also finds that the instability, ambivalence and incoherence of (dominant) ‘American’ masculinities is exacerbated by the ‘terror-Other’ – exposing persistent anxieties *about* Self and *of* Other – despite its characterisation as malevolent, irrational and even inhuman. Interestingly, as 9/11 recedes in time and space in the ‘terror threat’ films, the presence or visibility of the ‘terror-Other’ grows, from wholly absent and unknowable in *WTC* and *Cloverfield* respectively, to vaguely-defined and
fit for experimentation in *I Am Legend*, and stereotypical figuration as ‘Arab/Muslim’ terrorists in *The Kingdom*. Yet while progressively increased representation perhaps seeks to contain, control and demonise the ‘monstrous’ Other, ‘remasculinisation’ in part consistently founders against the ‘terror-Other’s’ *unrelieved* invisibility, elusiveness and ‘uncontainability’. That is, the Other’s ‘absence’ or ‘invisibility’ or under-characterisation not only connotes an unwillingness or incapacity to represent or acknowledge difference, but remains frightening, with relational normative masculinity struggling to reestablish itself against this void or through deflection and displacement. The ‘terror threat’ films thus establish the potency of the invisibility, absence or lack of engagement with ‘terror-Others’, and demonstrate how terror and the ‘terror-Other’ complicates the recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ of threatened masculinities.

Even the representation of women, admittedly presented ambivalently and often problematically, is more complex than the existing scholarship predicts, with women more than merely imperilled or in ‘traditional’ gender roles. Women in the ‘terror threat’ films are commonly absented and the male protagonist acts as (also) ‘mother’ in *I Am Legend* and *The Kingdom*, and ostensibly confined to conventionally gendered spaces and roles in *WTC* and *Cloverfield*. They are punished in *Cloverfield*, blamed for the apocalypse in *I Am Legend*, and male pain is numerously displaced onto Mayes’ body in *The Kingdom*. Yet the female-aligned space of the American home is the place of return for the trapped men in *WTC*, and females assume contest the power of the male look and the camera in *Cloverfield*. In *The Kingdom*, Mayes’ body is repeatedly gendered as ‘feminine’, but she is also incorporated into (female) military masculinity, and rescues a captive and bound male agent. And most significantly, in *I Am Legend*, females finally function as post-apocalyptic redeemers – they repeatedly rescue Neville and symbolically and literally carry the ‘cure’, and thereby found the recuperated nation as much if not more than he.

The findings of the study present significant scope for further research. One potential extension includes an audience study that examines spectator interpretations of the recuperation and ‘remasculinisation’ of normative masculinities in terror-related films. This thesis’ findings could also be examined in a broader study of the cinematic period and a consideration of other types (or genres) of films or other world cinemas,
including beyond a specific focus on the representation of terror. For example, further research could explore how this study relates to broader patterns in contemporary Hollywood film, for example, by analysing representations of the effects of the global financial crisis and economic globalisation on ‘American’ masculinities. 390 Finally, further research could explore a different period or extend the current study, including through the detailed analysis of films like Zero Dark Thirty.

The opening of this thesis observes that Kathryn Bigelow’s Zero Dark Thirty portrayal of the search for and violent destruction of the feared ‘terrorist-Other’ seems to cinematically mark the reassertion of American national identity and the reversal of the emasculation and humiliation linked to 9/11. Yet the film’s deflating, melancholy ending not only extends that which succeeds the supposedly cathartic retributive violence in The Kingdom, but perhaps suggests the persistence of national uncertainty, ambivalence and ‘crisis’. 391 This melancholy is also partly a symptom of situating the ‘crisis’ of the ‘terror threat’, and thereby its remedy through violent ‘remasculinisation’, in a single figure or event. Yet even with Osama bin Laden’s annihilation, American masculinity and national identity is uncertainly recuperated and seemingly unredeemed in Zero Dark Thirty, just as in The Kingdom; the American Self changed irrevocably by the encounter with terror. Even more interestingly, male/masculine redemption and ‘remasculinisation’ through retributive violence depends on the tenacity and perseverance of a young American woman. Finally, it seems America’s ‘own monster’ not only persists, but may be America (and normative masculinity) itself.

390 A list of potential films for analysis includes The Strangers, Up In The Air (Reitman, 2009), Margin Call (Chandor, 2011), Magic Mike (Soderbergh, 2012), Winter’s Bone (Girak, 2010), Killing Them Softly (Dominik, 2012), Cosmopolis (Cronenberg, 2012), The Dark Knight Rises (Nolan, 2012), The Queen of Versailles (Greenfield, 2012). At present only Negra and Tasker’s (2013) forthcoming edited anthology, Gendering the Recession, addresses this area in an extended fashion.

391 Zero Dark Thirty deploys 9/11 as an initiating device, but without the historical context The Kingdom offers in its opening (and then largely ignores, admittedly). Not only is 9/11 again visually ‘unrepresented’, a chaotic cacophony of overlapping, disembodied, anonymous voices over a black screen, but nothing precedes the attacks in the film’s diegesis, barring blackness. In this sense, Bigelow’s Oscar-nominated film is, ironically, less historically complex, in questionably dehistoricising 9/11, than the seemingly base revenge action-‘western’. 
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