

# **Conflict, Culture, Closure: The interaction between politics and popular culture at the end of wars**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I engage with the topic of how popular culture and politics interact at the end of conflict. Using contemporary Hollywood action cinema from 2000 to 2014 and political speeches from the Bush and Obama administrations, I pose the question of how do these seemingly disparate fields forge intense connections between and through each other in order to create conditions of success in the War on Terror. I utilise the end of wars assemblage to argue that through intense and affective encounters between cinema screen and audiences, certain conditions of success emerge from the assemblage. These conditions include American exceptionalism and the values it exemplifies; the use of technology in warfare as co-productive of moral subjectivities; the necessity of sacrifice; and the centrality of the urban landscape and built environment. I then proceed to assess the resilience of the end of wars assemblage and its conditions of success by engaging with cinematic and political artefacts that have the potential to destabilise the assemblage through genre inversion and alternative temporalities. Ultimately, I argue that the assemblage and its conditions of success are strongly resilient to change and critique. The conditions of success that emerge from the assemblage through intense affective encounters can then be politically deployed make a claim that a war has ended or will end. Because audiences have been pre-primed to connect these conditions to victory, such a claim has greater persuasive power.

In this thesis I utilise assemblage theory in order to ascertain how movies and political speech combine to create emergent properties that are more than the sum of the constituent parts. This thesis is at the intersection of conflict studies, war termination studies, and critical International Relations. As such, it makes a contribution to our understandings of how contemporary armed conflicts are brought to an end, the interaction between politics and culture, and it advances the ability of critical International Relations to engage with questions of culture, conflict, and closure.



For Jenine, it would not have been possible without you.



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## Contents

<b>Introduction: Conflict and Culture</b>	<b>1</b>
War Termination	3
Aesthetics and Popular Culture	10
Chapter Outlines	20
<b>Chapter One: Assemblages and Emergence</b>	<b>28</b>
1.1 Introduction	28
1.2 Examples of Assemblages	30
1.3 Emergent Properties	35
1.4 Affect, Intensity, Encounters	37
1.5 Materialist ontology	44
1.6 Non-linearity and lack of Intention	46
1.7 Differences to Intertextuality	49
1.8 Molar, molecular, and the structure of assemblages	50
1.9 Reflective methodologies	53
1.10 Conclusion	60
<b>Chapter Two: War and Action</b>	<b>62</b>
2.1 Introduction	62
2.2 Historical perspective	64
2.3 <i>Bataan</i> : The genesis of genre	66
2.4 <i>Fixed Bayonets!</i> : Continuity and change	69
2.5 <i>Full Metal Jacket</i> : The inversion of genre	73
2.6 <i>Red Dawn</i> : Visual combat, narrative action	77
2.7 <i>Black Hawk Down</i> : Visual action, narrative combat	81
2.8 Captain America: The First Avenger: Action-combat	85
2.9 Conclusion	88
<b>Chapter Three: Shock and Awe</b>	<b>90</b>
3.1 Introduction	90
3.2 The Films	93
3.3 American Exceptionalism	97
3.3.1 X-Men	100
3.3.2 Training Day	104
3.3.3 Spider-Man	107
3.4 Technology	109
3.4.1 Tears of the Sun	113
3.4.2 Spider-Man	116

3.4.2 X-Men	119
3.5 Conclusion	120
<b>Chapter Four: Surges and Endings</b>	<b>123</b>
4.1 Introduction	123
4.2 The Apocalypse and Sacrifice	125
4.2.1 Apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, dystopian	125
4.2.2 Post-apocalypticism in cinema	131
4.3 The City: destruction, salvation, victory	136
4.4 Conclusion	144
<b>Chapter Five: Hope and Change</b>	<b>147</b>
5.1 Introduction	147
5.2 Changing genres	150
5.3 The mask of critique: undermining conditions of success	152
5.3.1 Inglourious Basterds	153
5.3.2 Hancock	156
5.3.3 RED, The Expendables, and The A-Team	161
5.4 Behind the mask: the reassertion of conditions of success	167
5.4.1 Inglourious Basterds	168
5.4.2 Hancock	171
5.5 Conclusions	174
<b>Chapter Six: Linear, recursive time travelling loops</b>	<b>177</b>
6.1 Introduction	177
6.2 Time and International Relations	179
6.2.1 Temporality in the War on Terror	180
6.2.2 Temporality in the end of wars assemblage	183
6.3 The Films: Montage and Confusion	186
6.3.1 Edge of Tomorrow	186
6.3.2 Source Code	194
6.3.3 Looper	197
6.5 Conclusion	199
<b>Conclusion: Cinema and Closure</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>214</b>

## Introduction: Conflict and Culture

*"It's over Johnny, it's over.*

*Nothing is over! Nothing! You just don't turn it off...I did what I had to do to win. But somebody wouldn't let us win."*

*Rambo: First Blood (1982)*

*"Sir, do we get to win this time?*

*This time it's up to you"*

*Rambo: First Blood part II (1985)*

"In Afghanistan, we've broken the Taliban's momentum and will soon begin a transition to Afghan lead" May, 2011.<sup>1</sup> "So this is a momentous day in the history of Libya. The dark shadow of tyranny has been lifted" October, 2011.<sup>2</sup> "There is something profound about the end of a war that has lasted so long" December, 2011.<sup>3</sup> That was Barack Obama speaking, respectively, in Westminster Hall, the White House Rose Garden, and at Fort Bragg announcing the effective end of the conflicts, or at least American involvement in the conflicts, in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. Part of what contributed to Obama's electoral victory was the pledge that he would end American engagement in the costly conflicts of the War on Terror and, formally at least, he did. There are only a handful of U.S. troops left in Afghanistan and Iraq, and only Special Forces and aircraft were ever deployed to Libya. But this raises the question of what actually makes a conflict end? We tend to think of parades in Times Square, victory on the battlefield, a decisive blow to the heart of your adversary, the stabilisation of the area you fought in. But as President Bush made clear in 2007, 'Victory will not look like the ones our fathers and grandfathers achieved. There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship.'<sup>4</sup> President Obama made the same observation in 2013 saying 'Our victory against terrorism won't be measured in a surrender ceremony at a battleship, or a statue being pulled to the

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<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President to Parliament in London, United Kingdom', The White House, 25 May 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/25/remarks-president-parliament-london-united-kingdom>.

<sup>2</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Death of Muammar Qaddafi', The White House, 20 October 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/20/remarks-president-death-muammar-qaddafi>.

<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President and First Lady on the End of the War in Iraq', The White House, 14 December 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/14/remarks-president-and-first-lady-end-war-iraq>.

<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush, 'President's Address to the Nation', The White House, 1 October 2007, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>.

ground.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to add to the discipline and study of International Relations by analysing how popular culture, and cinema in particular, interacts with politics to end a war. Or more specifically, how Hollywood blockbuster action movies from 2000 to 2014 work to create, circulate, and legitimise particular conditions of success that can be utilised to create a sense of ending for conflict. The conditions that will be analysed in this thesis are American exceptionalism and the values embodied in that concept; the moral use of technology and its role as co-productive of subjectivity; the necessity of sacrifice and its redemptive power; and the centrality of the built or urban environment. These conditions emerge from intense politico-cultural interaction, conceptualised here as part of the end of wars assemblage. These conditions are, of course, not the only ones that are deployed when making a claim about the end of a war. There are a myriad of political, social, economic, electoral, and cultural discourses and material practices that go into the end of a war. The lines of flight around the end of a war discussed in this thesis serve as examples of the type of discourse and practice that work to create a sense of ending for conflicts. Contemporary conflicts in the War on Terror such as the War in Afghanistan, the Iraq War, and the NATO Intervention in Libya have all, according to dominant political discourses and popular understanding, ended with a victory for, variously, the United States, the Coalition of the Willing, the International Security Assistance Force, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. However, the political realities in these countries is decidedly different to the simple narrative of “we won” often presented in political speeches, policy documents, and press statements. In this thesis, I investigate how this common-sense understanding of ending and victory is politically and culturally created.

To achieve this, I look at the interaction between popular culture and world politics and tease out the connections that exist between them and what political realities popular culture creates the conditions of possibility for with regards to the ending of conflicts. What will be demonstrated throughout is that popular culture and political discourse forge intense and affective connections to create and legitimise these specific conditions of success that can then be deployed to create this sense of ending. I use the assemblage theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to understand how these connections function and present the end of wars assemblage as a theoretical tool and model that can allow for a fuller understanding of how

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<sup>5</sup> The implicit critique of President Bush is clear here with the reference to statues being pulled down. Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President at the National Defense University’, The White House, 23 May 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>.

these interactions take place. The conditions of success discussed in this thesis can be said to be emergent properties of this assemblage. The end of wars assemblage functions in multiple ways through a diverse range of political discourses, cultural artefacts, and other factors and has numerous emergent properties. No single work can discuss the breadth of artefacts that participate in this assemblage nor the variety of effects that this interaction produces, therefore in this thesis I investigate one aspect of it - contemporary Hollywood action movies between 2000 and 2014 - and use this as a case study for understanding how particular conditions of success emerge. Tracing links between popular culture and world politics at the level of tropes, narratives, imagery, language, technique, and affect I argue that the films discussed here ultimately create a political space where conflicts in the War on Terror can be assigned the label of ended by the United States and, simultaneously, how this politico-cultural interaction can also allow for ongoing practices of political violence.

### **War Termination**

Why study how wars end rather than how they begin? It can be argued that going to war is the most important or fateful decision that a country can take and thus should occupy the most prominent position in the study of International Relations, indeed this is what Kenneth Waltz proposes as the central question of international political theory: ‘Where are the major causes of war to be found?’<sup>6</sup> War termination, for various reasons, is generally not as prominent in the study of conflict as war initiation. The beginnings of war are certainly an important site for critical academic study given the capacity for mass violence, death, instability, atrocity, and chaos that wars cause, as Waltz notes. However, the other side of conflict - how they are brought to an end - is an equally important aspect of conflict that requires much further critical interrogation within the discipline. Once the violence, death and destruction of war has been unleashed, it is necessary to understand how it is brought under control and how stability, peace, and reconciliation can be brought about. In this thesis, I do not present an argument for how the various conflicts of the War on Terror were ended on the ground, as it were, as it is clear that they are ongoing, albeit without the mass involvement of foreign troops. This thesis is not a military history or a strategic manual. Rather, the argument presented herein is designed to address the question of how endings in conflict are shaped by popular culture and how certain movies participate in the shaping of conditions of success for these conflicts. Furthermore it is also intended to demonstrate that popular culture is a useful and important site of critical enquiry in the fields of International Relations, conflict studies, and war termination studies.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 12.

Popular culture provides a unique and useful insight into how political discourses are articulated, how they are legitimised, and how popular culture works to affectively connect the reservoir of tropes, narratives, and imagery of success to political discourses of victory. Not only does popular culture recirculate political narratives of conflict, but it creates and co-constitutes those narratives. The role that the selected cultural artefacts play in the ensuing chapters is not one of critique, or of speaking truth to power, or of challenging these discourses but rather one of mutual constitution, support, and legitimisation. Given that the major ground and air wars, conflicts, insurgencies, interventions (and official statements about these conflicts use all of these at various stages) of the War on Terror have drawn largely to a close, such a study is timely and may prove useful as other interventions are mooted, argued for, and carried out. As such, this research presents a critical and timely intervention in war termination studies, the study of popular culture and world politics, and the broader discipline of International Relations taking, as it does, ambiguously concluded conflicts and popular culture as its major sites of enquiry.

The historic and ongoing lack of attention to war termination is identified as early as 1970 by William Fox who explains that during the Cold War political scientists were more concerned with war avoidance, deterrence, and ‘pervasive doubts that thermonuclear war can be kept from running its full course.’<sup>7</sup> This disregard for an understanding of the processes by which wars end was, however, not confined to the Cold War period. Writing in 2001, Heikki Patomäki suggests that peace research is also declining in the post-Cold War era suggesting that ‘Western funders do not appear enthusiastic; peace research conferences are increasingly losing their colour, or disappearing altogether; and in Moscow ideas of peace research have once again been sidelined.’<sup>8</sup> This trajectory has not noticeably been reversed in the intervening years as Joakim Kreutz, introducing the Uppsala Conflict Data Project’s (UCDP) Conflict Termination dataset in 2010, also notes that quantitative data on war termination ‘has largely been neglected and not subjected to the same methodological rigor found in datasets used for the study of war onset.’<sup>9</sup> While the literature regularly identifies a lack of academic interest in how wars are

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<sup>7</sup> William T. R. Fox, ‘The Causes of Peace and Conditions of War’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 392 (1970): 1; See also Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971); and David J. Oberst, ‘Why Wars End: An Expected Utility War Termination Model’ (U.S. Army War College: Defense Technical Information Center, 1992), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Heikki Patomäki, ‘The Challenge of Critical Theories: Peace Research at the Start of the New Century’, *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 729–30.

<sup>9</sup> Joakim Kreutz, ‘How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset’, *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309353108>; Also Tansa George Massoud, ‘War Termination’, *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 4 (1996): 491–96.

brought to a conclusion and how peace is established, as well as an increasing lack of funding of such projects this is despite claims of clear links between how wars end and the much more prominent study of how they begin. As Donald Wittman argues, ‘there is a great amount of symmetry between how a war ends and how a war begins.’<sup>10</sup> To understand this link, as well as how this study contributes to our understanding of how conflicts come to a close, it is necessary to interrogate how war termination studies have typically approached the question of how wars end.

The vast majority of academic studies of war termination have been based on a methodology of rational choice theory or game theory, to the point of being near-hegemonic in the field. Tansa Massoud argued that rational choice models ‘appear to be the dominant tool’ used in war termination studies and that ‘decision-makers are assumed to make rational calculations.’<sup>11</sup> This methodological dominance means that a large number of studies use a rational choice model such as variations on utility theory,<sup>12</sup> cost-benefit analysis,<sup>13</sup> information that decision-makers derive from battles,<sup>14</sup> logic,<sup>15</sup> war termination equations, bargaining processes,<sup>16</sup> and other formal quantitative, logical, and game theoretical methods. It appears that the general aim of the war termination literature is to create a formal and generalisable model to map and understand the conditions that are necessary for limited and conventional wars either between states or between a state and a sub-state group to conclude in either victory, ceasefire, peace agreement, or stalemate. It is based on the assumption that the decision-makers of states and sub-state groups will make logical, rational decisions, informed by the information that is presented to them in the build-up to and battles of a war and that these decisions will be based on a cost-benefit analysis of the utility of the war to their group. If the war no longer has utility, they will end it one way or another, depending on the specifics of the situation. Rational choice theory is not without its problems though. As well as the assumption that leaders will take rational decisions based on a dispassionate account of the information that is presented to them

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Wittman, ‘How a War Ends: A Rational Model Approach’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 4 (1979): 743; See also Francis A. Beer and Thomas F. Mayer, ‘Why Wars End: Some Hypotheses’, *Review of International Studies* 12, no. 02 (1986): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210500114019>.

<sup>11</sup> Massoud, ‘War Termination’, 491; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro also makes this point Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, ‘Quagmires in the Periphery: Foreign Wars and Escalating Commitment in International Conflict’, *Security Studies* 7, no. 3 (1998): 94–144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419808429352>.

<sup>12</sup> Wittman, ‘How a War Ends’.

<sup>13</sup> Taliaferro, ‘Quagmires in the Periphery’.

<sup>14</sup> Kristopher W. Ramsay, ‘Settling It on the Field Battlefield Events and War Termination’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (2008): 850–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708324593>.

<sup>15</sup> Branislav L. Slantchev, ‘How Initiators End Their Wars: The Duration of Warfare and the Terms of Peace’, *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (2004): 813–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00103.x>.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew H. Kydd, ‘Rationalist Approaches to Conflict Prevention and Resolution’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2010): 101–21, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.032108.135916>.

on the basis of utility, there are myriad further issues such as bias in selection despite a “scientific” approach, anomalies being ignored, a lack of empirical success, and other methodological problems.<sup>17</sup> William Connolly takes this critique of rational choice theory further and engages with it ontologically, rather than just methodologically when he refers to a patient with ‘ventromedial prefrontal damage’ whereby the patient has lost access to ‘somatic markers’ (that is, the intersubjective, linguistic, and cultural concepts, beliefs and histories) as akin to a rational choice theorist.<sup>18</sup> To reduce complex decisions down to a cost-benefit, utility, or rational choice therefore is to remove all aspects of decision making that involve the affective, the embodied, the historical, the intertextual, and the cultural contexts in which they are embedded.

R. B. J. Walker makes a similar point when he argues that ‘politics is not reducible to the administration of things, nor to a rational calculus of individual self-interest, no matter how important these have become.’<sup>19</sup> Likewise, David Campbell has argued that because ‘understanding involves rendering the unfamiliar in the terms of the familiar, there is always an ineluctable debt to interpretation such that there is nothing outside of discourse.’<sup>20</sup> Understanding how wars end exclusively through the lens of rational choice models, and variations thereof, is a limiting perspective. It is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the rationality of political leaders, nor to assess the political or strategic logic of decisions to end a war. This research does not engage in a sustained critique of rational choice theory because it analyses a different category of politics - the ways that conditions of success are constructed, presented, and legitimised and how intensive and affective politico-cultural interaction allows for their emergence. Instead of looking at the end of conflicts *per se*, I look at how the conditions of success to be declared are created through politico-cultural interaction. To develop a fuller understanding of the conditions that cause a conflict to be assigned the label “ended,” we must take into account factors beyond the traditional, mainstream, or orthodox understanding of International Relations. Popular culture, and cinema in particular, is one site where such a

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<sup>17</sup> For a much more detailed critique of methodologies in the rational choice literature see Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); For a feminist critique of rational choice theory see Paula England, ‘A Feminist Critique of Rational-Choice Theories: Implications for Sociology’, *The American Sociologist* 20, no. 1 (1989): 14–28, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02697784>.

<sup>18</sup> William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 33–35; David Campbell argues along related lines when he states that ‘We should no longer regard those who occupy the secretive domains of the national security state as being outside of the cultural parameters of the state.’ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> R. B. J. Walker, *After the Globe, Before the World* (London: Routledge, 2009), 84.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell, *Writing Security*, 4.



critical analysis of the conditions necessary to end a war can take place.

While much of the war termination literature takes rational choice theory as its ontological and methodological starting point, in more recent studies of war termination there has been an increase of critically oriented work that rejects the rational choice and formal modelling methodologies that have been dominant, even if these studies have tended to be ‘bracketed and set off from the real projects’ of International Relations and war termination studies.<sup>21</sup> This mirrors the broader critical turn that International Relations, as a widely conceived discipline, and studies of conflict have undergone over the past thirty years, discussed in more detail below. As Michael J. Shapiro has argued, ‘conflict, war, or any domain of human understanding is always-already textualized or shot through with figuration that has a venerable history.’<sup>22</sup> Bruce Cronin argues, as Massoud and Taliaferro do, that most scholars seeking to understand how wars end assume intentionality and rationality on the part of decision-makers. However, Cronin approaches rational choice modelling in a critical fashion arguing that postwar settlements are not intentionally created by rational actors working on a cost-benefit utility analysis but rather ‘by the type of discourse among the principal political leaders concerning postwar reconstruction.’<sup>23</sup> He argues that this discourse is, in turn, defined by the war aims of the parties to a conflict that shift over time to reflect changing realities. Cronin’s use of political discourse is laudable for its move away from formal modelling, but he fails to take into account *where* this discourse emanates from and what factors may impact on it. Rather than being a static entity that always-already-is, it is rather a fluid process that is always-becoming.

Political discourses and actions are ever changing and influenced by myriad factors, popular culture being one of them. Simon Dalby, for instance, notes that ‘movies provide many of the metaphors and the imagined landscapes that are used in political discourse, regardless of the stated intentions of director, actors, or producers.’<sup>24</sup> Ewa Mazierska notes, echoing Shapiro’s point above about human understanding being textualised and imbued with history that,

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<sup>21</sup> Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, ‘Conclusion: Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty in International Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600576>; Although some have attempted to bridge the gap between rational choice theory and critical theory, see for example James Johnson, ‘Is Talk Really Cheap? Prompting Conversation Between Critical Theory and Rational Choice’, *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (1993): 74–86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2938957>.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, ‘Representing World Politics: The Sport/War Intertext’, in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Lexington Books, 1989), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Cronin, ‘Be Careful What You Wish for: War Aims and the Construction of Postwar Political Orders’, *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 6 (2010): 791, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310381621>.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Dalby, ‘Warrior Geopolitics: Gladiator, Black Hawk Down and The Kingdom Of Heaven’, *Political Geography* 27, no. 4 (2008): 443, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2008.03.004>.

‘[c]inema is part of history, namely a discourse on the past.’<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as Jason Dittmer has argued, winning in popular cultural artefacts (he discusses comic books) inscribes legitimacy upon the victor.<sup>26</sup> Rather than a political discourse of postwar reconstruction creating the conditions of possibility for ending a war and victory then, we have a situation whereby these conditions of possibility are culturally as well as politically articulated. In this thesis, I present a number of conditions of victory that are politically and culturally constructed, legitimised, and strengthened through interaction between political and cultural artefacts. These conditions are, again, the values inscribed in American exceptionalism, the moral use of technologised political violence, sacrifice, and urbanity.

A discursive approach of any sort however is also always an approach that is fraught with problems as the recent Chilcot Report highlighted. This demonstrated that the UK government did not proceed on a rational and intentional course of action towards postwar reconstruction based on a cost-benefit analysis, but neither was postwar reconstruction based on the political discourse of war aims statically articulated during the campaign against Iraq in 2003. Indeed, the Chilcot Report suggested that there was, at best, very limited postwar planning at any stage leading up to or during the conflict. The executive summary of the report states that ‘the Government was unprepared for the role in which the UK found itself from April 2003. Much of what went wrong stemmed from that lack of preparation.’ Furthermore, the report goes on to argue that all ‘fundamental elements’ relating to the post-conflict period were lacking in the UK’s approach.<sup>27</sup> This is also evidenced by the delay between the invasion of Iraq and the publication of the *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* by the US government thirty-two months later in November 2005.<sup>28</sup> To an extent, the Chilcot report undermines Cronin’s argument about postwar planning being determined by discourse by demonstrating that during the Iraq War there was simply no planning.<sup>29</sup> Although official reports into the 2011 NATO Intervention in Libya have not been produced, the country’s descent into a civil war between rival militant factions also points towards a lack of post-conflict planning.

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<sup>25</sup> Ewa Mazierska, *European Cinema and Intertextuality: History, Memory and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Jason Dittmer, ‘The Tyranny of the Serial: Popular Geopolitics, the Nation, and Comic Book Discourse’, *Antipode* 39, no. 2 (2007): 264, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00520.x>.

<sup>27</sup> John Chilcot et al., ‘The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary’ (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 2016), 134.

<sup>28</sup> National Security Council, ‘National Strategy for Victory in Iraq’ (Washington, 30 November 2005).

<sup>29</sup> For a good account of the failure of post war planning in Iraq see Sultan Barakat, ‘Post-Saddam Iraq: Deconstructing a Regime, Reconstructing a Nation’, *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 4–5 (2005): 571–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500127800>; See also Charles Ferguson, *No End in Sight* (Magnolia Pictures, 2007).

Further in this more critical approach to the question of how wars end is Victoria Carty's article about how anti-war social movements that were mobilised in the build-up to the Iraq War worked to eventually end US involvement. Carty argues that vast networks of various anti-war groups from around the world, both virtual and real, applied pressure, through elections, to politicians to end involvement in foreign interventions.<sup>30</sup> This is an interesting point, and then-Senator Obama made much of his anti-Iraq War credentials in the 2008 Presidential election cycle. However, Carty perhaps overstates the power of the anti-war movement. While US involvement in Iraq did eventually, if not end entirely, then at least diminish significantly, and President Obama formally announced the end of the Iraq War, Carty does not take into account other factors that influence voters at the ballot box, most specifically the economic crisis of 2008. That being said, Gary Jacobson partly supports Carty's view and states that 'the Iraq War was, through direct and indirect pathways, ultimately the single most important contributor to Obama's presidential victory.'<sup>31</sup> While the Iraq War was important to Obama's victory, the relationship between popular opposition and the specific social movements and protest groups is somewhat murkier. Indeed, Carty appears to valorise and ascribe a significant amount of power to what Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams term "folk politics." Srnicek and Williams note that

[m]illions march against the Iraq War, yet it goes ahead as planned, Hundreds of thousands protest austerity, but unprecedented budget cuts continue. Repeated student protests, occupations and riots struggle against rises in tuition fees, but they continue their inexorable advance...Despite the desires of millions for a better world, the effects of these movements prove minimal.<sup>32</sup>

The question that emerges from Carty, Jacobson, and Srnicek and Williams is whether the organised opposition to the Iraq War was the sole or most important cause of Obama formally bringing the intervention to a close, or whether there were also other factors at work. Following on from discussions above, and as will be elaborated on in more detail below and in the following chapters, I argue that to understand how wars are brought to an end requires taking more factors into consideration. It is the argument of this thesis that popular culture, and specifically contemporary Hollywood action movies, forms connections with politics through intensive and affective encounters that is conceptualised as the end of wars assemblage. These encounters then allow particular conditions of success to emerge from that assemblage. These

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<sup>30</sup> Victoria Carty, 'The Coalition of the Unwilling: Contentious Politics, Political Opportunity Structures, and Challenges for the Contemporary Peace Movement', *Peace and Conflict Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): 79–115.

<sup>31</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, 'George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the Election of Barack Obama', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2010.03755.x>.

<sup>32</sup> Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso Books, 2015), 5.

emergent properties can then be politically deployed to make a claim to truth that a conflict has ended or will end.

Before turning to alternative approaches to understanding how conflicts are ended, and my own argument that conditions of victory are created through the intense connections between popular culture and politics forged through the assemblage, it is useful to understand how the endings of contemporary wars are notably different to historic conflicts. As noted in the opening paragraph of this introduction, both Presidents Bush and Obama recognised and made clear that the War on Terror would not end in the “conventional” way, with a surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship as in the Japanese surrender on the USS Missouri in 1945. While much is made in politics of the history and successes of American involvement in wars, particularly World War II, the reference to the ending as radically different is interesting. For instance, President Obama saying to troops at Bagram Air Base in 2010 that ‘you’ve earned your place in American history alongside those greatest generations.’<sup>33</sup> Or President Bush justifying the use of military tribunals in 2001 saying that ‘These are extraordinary times. And I would remind those who don’t understand the decision I made that Franklin Roosevelt made the same decision in World War II. Those were extraordinary times too.’<sup>34</sup> Both presidents were clear that there was to be no official surrender, no ticker-tape parades in Times Square, no historic armistice or peace treaty signed, no open-ended occupation of captured territory. Nonetheless, the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya were assigned the label of ended (at least temporarily) and this assignation was broadly accepted. The question then arises of how this assignation took place, what factors allowed for the label of “ended” to be applied to these conflicts? The rational choice models discussed above, while potentially useful for dyadic inter-state conflicts, have a limited utility in understanding these more amorphous and ambiguous contemporary conflicts. The question is no longer one of cost-benefit, logic, game theory or rationality, but one of how claims to truth are articulated, circulated, and legitimised. Popular culture is one of the fields in which these conditions of success are formed, enter popular imaginations, and become the means through which these claims are made.

### **Aesthetics and Popular Culture**

So far, the factors that have been traditionally used within the field to explain how conflicts end

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<sup>33</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President to the Troops at Bagram Air Base’, The White House, 3 December 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/03/remarks-president-troops-bagram-air-base>.

<sup>34</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Discusses War, Humanitarian Efforts’, The White House, 19 November 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011119-12.html>.

have been based on rational choice theory, game theoretical modelling, formal logic, and social movement studies. But what has been demonstrated above is that none of these approaches can fully explain the complex factors that feed into how an ending for a war, whose end point is open to contestation, is able to register as credible. While they are all interesting, valuable, and valid arguments that, perhaps, can be integrated into a more complete understanding of the end phases of a conflict, as touched upon above there are myriad other factors at work in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields that must also be taken into account. The politico-cultural interactions and how they contribute to the end of wars are the subject of this thesis. To further understand the nature of how conflicts end and to build on the formal modelling described above, we have to move beyond the representational logic that has dominated the field of International Relations for much of its existence. Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker emphasise the need to understand that the discipline of International Relations, or indeed any field of human endeavour, is not about moving ever closer to an objective truth through understanding and creating direct or perfect representations of reality. A central argument of their seminal piece from 1990 critiques the ontological foundation of, in the case of this thesis, game theoretical models of conflict ending. They argue that ‘every representation appears not as a copy or recovery of something really present in some other time or place but as a representation of other representations - none original, each equally arbitrary, and none able to exclude other representations in order to be a pure presence, an absolute origin of truth and meaning in itself.’<sup>35</sup> This question of representation is one that is productive to discuss. This is in part because the crisis of International Relations that they talk about is part of a broader crisis of modernity that is also, in part, a crisis of representation.<sup>36</sup> They rightly argue that representation is not a mirror of some original “reality” but rather just a representation of a representation of a representation and so forth. Instead of taking the ending of a conflict as something that exists “out there” that can be studied from “in here,” wherever the two respective places might be spatially and temporally located, we can instead approach this oft-neglected subject of war termination from a different point of view. If the end of conflict is just one more representation within an endless chain, then how do these various representations interact with one another, and with lived experience, to create something that is (politically, socially, economically, culturally) accepted as an end of conflict? How can this chain of representation be thoughtfully, critically, and rigorously analysed? If we can put it differently, we can ask, how do we break free from the chain(s) of representation?

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<sup>35</sup> Ashley and Walker, ‘Conclusion’, 378.

<sup>36</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso Books, 1992), 209.

To answer this vital question, it first needs to be expanded upon to help us understand what is meant by the chain(s) of representation within the heterodox literature on conflict endings, the field of popular culture world politics more broadly, and within International Relations as a discipline. The ontological assumption that underlies most research on how conflicts end to date has been a predominately representational one. Roland Bleiker discusses the representational aspects of International Relations and suggests that ‘No representation, even the most systematic empirical analysis, can be identical with its object of inquiry.’<sup>37</sup> 27 years earlier, Shapiro made much the same assessment about science and, by extension, the social sciences, arguing that it ‘rests on an idolatrous metaphysics, objectifying phenomena on the basis of a model of certainty of representation...an epistemology of representation connected to a notion of man as a being with a [privileged] viewpoint.’<sup>38</sup> Bleiker takes the critique of a representational logic further however and argues that the aesthetic domain can help to problematise the representational logic that has dominated studies of International Relations. As highlighted above, the game theoretical or logical modelling or utility theory based analyses of how conflicts end are bound up in this representational logic whereby they seek to understand empirically, objectively, and fully, how wars come to an end. In so doing, they are ignoring the influence that aesthetics, culture, society, the academy and their own place within these structures exerts on their own work. A representational logic can also fruitfully be thought of as a mimetic one. Bleiker states that mimetic approaches have dominated the field of International Relations and ‘seek to represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible, aiming to capture world politics as-it-really-is.’<sup>39</sup> Of course it is, to all intents and purposes, impossible to reduce and represent something as complex and complicated as the end of armed conflict as it really is. Rather than accepting the political realities of conflict termination that are created as common-sense, this thesis seeks to embrace the complexity of the end of wars in order to denaturalise the processes, interactions, and discourses that work to create the conditions of success for conflict. This denaturalisation of taken-for-granted assumptions and claims can help us to more critically engage with the termination of wars and can also prove useful in developing a fuller critique of war and political violence more broadly. Building on the understanding that ‘representation is always an act of power,’ this research does not seek to substitute one mode of representation for another.<sup>40</sup> Rather, by engaging in an

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<sup>37</sup> Roland Bleiker, ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 532, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298010300031001>.

<sup>38</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, ‘Literary Production as a Politicizing Practice’, in *Language and Politics*, ed. Michael J. Shapiro (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 216.

<sup>39</sup> Bleiker, ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’, 510.

<sup>40</sup> Bleiker, 514.

assemblage-led analysis of non-representational practices in culture and politics and how they influence one another, this thesis argues that politico-cultural interaction is an important site for the construction, maintenance, and legitimisation of the end of wars. Of course, this does not and should not imply that this is the sole or even most important driver of these processes, but rather that it is a critical and original contribution to a fuller account of war termination.

How, then, do we operationalise the aesthetic in order to problematise, critique, or challenge the dominant representational logic that is at the heart of studies of conflict termination? Using popular culture as both a political and aesthetic site of analysis helps us to challenge the representational epistemology of game theory, logical modelling, and utility analysis. While it is certainly possible to fall into the same representational trap when discussing popular culture and world politics - that is, arguing that how popular culture represents world politics is more useful than how game theory represents it - what we must also try to uncover, and certainly what this thesis intends to uncover, is the methods, modes, and impact of interaction between popular culture and world politics. By understanding how popular culture influences world politics it is not meant to improve upon current representations of the end of war, and nor is it meant to create a new and better representation of it, but it is rather to interrogate, in a critical manner, what factors play into the decisions needed to create the conditions of possibility for the ending of a conflict - how the conditions of success discussed in this thesis are formed, how they circulate, how they are legitimised, and how they are open to challenge and contestation. Rather than creating academic representations based on cultural representations of political events, this thesis is about embracing the complexity of politico-cultural interactions and articulating a language that allows us to interrogate how these encounters between culture and politics help to create a space for certain political realities to come into being.

Much work has of course already been done on the intersection and interaction of popular culture and world politics and the dissident challenge it can present to “mainstream,” “orthodox,” or “traditional” forms of International Relations. As part of the postmodern, the aesthetic, and the cultural turn in International Relations, groups of scholars have put forward the idea that culture broadly, and popular culture in particular, are legitimate, useful, and interesting areas for a detailed and rigorous analysis of contemporary politics and political events.<sup>41</sup> Work on popular culture and world politics has spanned multiple areas of culture

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<sup>41</sup> For a good introduction to many areas of the study of popular culture and world politics see Federica Caso and Caitlin Hamilton, eds., *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies* (E-International Relations, 2015); See also Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, ‘Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture–World Politics Continuum’, *Politics* 29, no. 3 (2009): 155–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467->

including movies, television, music,<sup>42</sup> tourism,<sup>43</sup> video games,<sup>44</sup> art,<sup>45</sup> zombies,<sup>46</sup> comic books,<sup>47</sup> children's literature,<sup>48</sup> science fiction<sup>49</sup> and celebrity culture<sup>50</sup> to name just a few examples. Just as the cultural artefacts that they draw on are diverse, so too are the political situations that they wish to explore through these media.

I should say that studies of popular culture and world politics are not monolithic however. Merely because they share a concern about links between the cultural and the political does not mean that they share ontological, methodological, or theoretical approaches. As such, my own work builds on some of the methodological and theoretical developments that emanate from this literature. Like any sub-field, there are multiple approaches to the study of popular culture and world politics. Some have used zombies or *The Lord of the Rings* to talk about International Relations theory;<sup>51</sup> Kathryn Starnes uses folklore as a method to understand how International Relations theory is made, sustained and challenged;<sup>52</sup> others see the value of pop culture pedagogically, bringing movies, music, and television into the classroom;<sup>53</sup> another theme is using popular culture as a metaphor to talk about foreign policy such as reading Obama's pivot

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9256.2009.01351.x; Jutta Weldes, 'Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 28, no. 1 (1999): 117–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298990280011201>; Klaus Dodds, 'Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror', *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008): 1621–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802528762>; Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'The Frustrations of Geopolitics and the Pleasures of War: Behind Enemy Lines and American Geopolitical Culture', *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2 (2005): 356–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040590946647>; John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177.

<sup>43</sup> Debbie Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone: Entanglements of War and Tourism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Christine Lundberg and Vassilios Ziakas, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Popular Culture and Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Nick Robinson, 'Have You Won the War on Terror? Military Videogames and the State of American Exceptionalism', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 450–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829814557557>.

<sup>45</sup> Alex Danchev and Debbie Lisle, 'Introduction: Art, Politics, Purpose', *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 775–79.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Dittmer, 'The Tyranny of the Serial'.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, *Harry Potter and International Relations* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Jutta Weldes, *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> John Street, 'Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 6, no. 4 (2004): 435–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00149.x>.

<sup>51</sup> Abigail E. Ruane and Patrick James, 'The International Relations of Middle-Earth: Learning from The Lord of the Rings', *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 4 (2008): 377–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2008.00343.x>.

<sup>52</sup> Kathryn Starnes, *Fairy Tales and International Relations: A Folklorist Reading of IR Textbooks* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Cynthia Weber, 'The Highs and Lows of Teaching IR Theory: Using Popular Films for Theoretical Critique', *International Studies Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (2001): 281–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00058>.



to Asia through *Pacific Rim*;<sup>54</sup> audience studies use cultural artefacts to discuss how people use pop culture to create particular geopolitical imaginaries; James Der Derian tracks the link between cultural and military simulation and technology in a similar vein to Paul Virilio;<sup>55</sup> more “dissident” work, in Ashley and Walker’s terms, is Saara Särämä’s cultural and artistic practice of collages to engage with international nuclear politics.<sup>56</sup> As such, the study of popular culture and world politics is not a homogeneous field with a strictly laid out core of what is ontologically, epistemologically, or methodologically valid. The field, while still in the process of developing and establishing itself, is nonetheless too varied and extensive to present a coherent and detailed review of here.

My own work builds on the idea of the popular culture-world politics continuum suggested by Grayson, Davies, and Philpott. Developing a critique of the representational or mimetic approaches to politics and culture, Grayson et al. argue that ‘popular culture should not merely be reduced to a superstructure that reflects a political base.’<sup>57</sup> Rather, they suggest that politics and popular culture are mutually constitutive of one another and engage in a form of symbiotic relationship. In other words, it is not that culture slavishly represents occurrences, events, and discourses from politics but rather that popular culture can itself be a site of political contestation. My position on this politico-cultural interaction is that not only can culture be a site where politics takes place, but is also a site where the conditions for political action are created, circulated, enacted, legitimised, and challenged. The assemblage theory of Deleuze and Guattari, discussed in depth in the following chapter, allows for an understanding of the relationship between politics and culture as one where not only are they symbiotic with one another, creating and shaping discursive and material practices in each field, but are mutually imbricated with one another to the extent that the line between them becomes blurred or non-existent. Narratives and tropes that are uttered in political speeches are cultural, just as the speeches of movie stars in action movies are political. This is also different to an intertextual understanding of politico-cultural interaction where one field is deliberately referenced in another. While still discussing them as separate spheres of influence that interact, the end of wars assemblage allows for this interaction to be seen as a collective. Political discourse is not

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<sup>54</sup> Jan Hanska, ‘Popular Culture, US Security Policy, and the Asian Pivot: Reading *Pacific Rim* as a Justification of American Strategic Involvement in the Asia-Pacific Region’, *Critical Studies on Security* 2, no. 3 (2014): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2014.950086>.

<sup>55</sup> James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (London: Routledge, 2009); Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> Saara Särämä, ‘Feminist Interdisciplinarity and Gendered Parodies of Nuclear Iran’, in *Global and Regional Problems Towards an Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. Vilho Harle and Pami Aalto (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 151–70.

<sup>57</sup> Grayson, Davies, and Philpott, ‘Pop Goes IR?’, 157.

just enacted through popular culture, but rather that interaction itself, conceptualised through the assemblage, creates certain political realities and possibilities as emergent properties of the assemblage: in the context of this thesis, the creation of conditions of victory. It is thus the interaction of these seemingly heterogeneous fields that forms the possibility for these conditions to be formed.

Within this theoretical context, it is my intention to discuss those works that have a direct influence on my own research - namely those that engage primarily with cinema, and those that deploy similar theoretical approaches to understanding the intersection and interaction of popular culture and world politics. The war film has featured prominently in analyses of politico-cultural interaction from World War Two, through Vietnam, and into the War on Terror.<sup>58</sup> Cynthia Weber, for instance, talks about the convergence between official American foreign policy in the early stages of the War on Terror such as the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive strikes with narratives in films that were (re-)released in the year after 9/11, the blurring and blending of real/reel politics, and how cinema helped to construct an idea of “moral America(ns).”<sup>59</sup> Weber’s *Imagining America at War* is an excellent account of cinematic and political attempts to construct an identity and make sense of the events of 9/11 and the early years of the War on Terror. The focus on films that deal explicitly with America’s past wars such as World War Two, Vietnam, and the Bosnian War is most certainly justifiable and Weber provides a fascinating insight into the politico-cultural interaction that occurs when nations go to war.<sup>60</sup> However, in this thesis I do not just look at war films nor the conditions created for states to enter into wars but rather specifically at films that omit any direct mention of specific conflicts and how the interactions that occur between them and politics allow for the conditions of possibility of those wars being ended. The reason for avoiding (though not entirely excluding) films that are about particular wars is expanded upon in some depth in chapter two where I trace the evolution of the combat genre into the contemporary action movie and the justification for looking at the end of wars, in addition to the *prima facie*, is explored above. Movies that are specifically about the War on Terror such as *The Hurt Locker*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, or *American Sniper* are largely absent from this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Susan

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<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, Robert T. Eberwein, ed., *The War Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Daniel Binns, *The Hollywood War Film: Critical Observations from World War I to Iraq* (Bristol: Intellect, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film* (London: Routledge, 2006); The mixture of real and reel is also touched upon in Marcus Power and Andrew Crampton, ‘Reel Geopolitics: Cinemato-Graphing Political Space’, in *Cinema and Popular Geo-Politics*, ed. Marcus Power and Andrew Crampton (London: Routledge, 2007), 6.

<sup>60</sup> I should clarify that Weber does not deal exclusively with war films and includes *Collateral Damage* (2002) and *Minority Report* (2002).

Carruthers has noted, there was a “vanishing audience” for such films as the War on Terror dragged on.<sup>61</sup> As these films are less commercially successful than their counterparts discussed here, their role in shaping conditions of success is more limited as their audience reach was lower than the action genre. Secondly, many films that are set during the War on Terror are neither war movies nor action movies as will be explored in chapter two.<sup>62</sup> For reasons of specificity, this research is focused on one particular genre in order to trace how this style of film contributed to the end of wars assemblage. Thirdly, even though none of the films discussed herein are about the War on Terror, they still contribute to the creation, circulation, and legitimisation of conditions of success in that conflict. In fact, it is precisely because they are not about the War on Terror that analysing them is so interesting and revealing.

Another form of War on Terror cinema is the documentary film, discussed by Pat Aufderheide who admits that such films do not have a very wide appeal but can still shape politics through social media and small scale screenings to interested parties such as military families and anti-war activists.<sup>63</sup> While the impact that documentary cinema can have on audiences is interesting, again the small scale effect of such films renders them less useful for the ensuing analysis. Rather than discussing how specific films about the War on Terror can help shape public discourse about that war, in this thesis I argue that the films themselves, through the affective encounters they produce and the other artefacts they interact with through the end of wars assemblage, can have an effect on politics and help to forge the conditions of success that can then be politically deployed to end a war. As such, looking at films with the greatest reach (and therefore the greatest capacity for affective encounters) allows us to explore the dominant cinematic genre and the effect it has on political reality. This idea that cinema itself, rather than the effect that it can have on audiences to vote, as Aufderheide argues, is explored by Shapiro as he argues that movies screened ‘both [at] film festivals and in movie theatres in general articulate resistance to the new violent cartographies. They counter the state’s “truth weapon” with a form of critique, a juxtaposition.’<sup>64</sup> As such, it is cinema itself or the particular movie itself that interacts with political realities. Shapiro’s argument is, for me, a convincing one and in chapter one I utilise Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory to articulate a mode of thinking that can help us analyse how this interaction occurs.

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<sup>61</sup> Susan L. Carruthers, ‘No One’s Looking: The Disappearing Audience for War’, *Media, War & Conflict* 1, no. 1 (2008): 74.

<sup>62</sup> Dodds, ‘Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror’, 1626–27.

<sup>63</sup> Patricia Aufderheide, ‘Your Country, My Country: How Films About The Iraq War Construct Publics’, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 48, no. 2 (2007): 56–65, <https://doi.org/10.1353/frm.2007.0010>.

<sup>64</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2009), 38.

Where I diverge from Shapiro, however, is that my research takes a more pessimistic or critical view of Hollywood cinema. Rather than seeing cinema as a vehicle for critique of dominant political events, narratives, and realities I argue that blockbuster action films actually help to create the conditions of possibility for contested endings to conflicts to be constructed. This divergence with Shapiro's more optimistic argument is perhaps due to the difference in cinematic objects that we engage with. For Shapiro, the film festival, world cinema, and arthouse movies are the dominant cultural artefact while in this thesis I focus on big-budget Hollywood product designed for huge box office returns and mass appeal. As such, their ability to articulate critiques of American political discourse and policy is naturally limited by the constraints of making money. Shapiro's work on cinema as agent in itself rather than cinema as representational or cinema solely as medium is also reflected in Deleuze and Guattari who say that 'the way an expression relates to a content is not by uncovering or representing it. Rather, forms of expression and forms of content communicate through a conjunction of their quanta of relative deterritorialization, each intervening, operating in the other.'<sup>65</sup> We can apply this in light of the above discussion and argue that cinema has a political effect itself, it can create certain of conditions of possibility. None of this is to say that Shapiro is wrong with his argument that certain cinematic artefacts have the potential to critique and juxtapose nor is it to say that audience studies are missing a meaningful point by discussing how geopolitical imaginaries or voting intentions are influenced by culture. It is, however, yet another way of thinking about politico-cultural interaction that interrogates how this interaction takes place and the political realities that it creates the conditions of possibility for.

Addressing the question of how wars are brought to a conclusion by utilising the concept of the end of wars assemblage is particularly useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allows for an elucidation of the roles that non-political artefacts play in bringing wars to a conclusion. In the context of this thesis, that primarily includes popular culture and the contemporary Hollywood action movie. More specifically, it provides a framework in which we can understand how interactions between politics and popular culture allows conditions of success to emerge from the assemblage. It is the ability of these cinematic texts to induce encounters between audiences and movie that allows for politico-cultural interaction that creates these emergent properties. As Audra Mitchell has noted, assemblages explain how 'collective agency can emerge from the confluence of heterogeneous bodies.'<sup>66</sup> The agency to claim that a war has ended or will end,

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<sup>65</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 87–88.

<sup>66</sup> Audra Mitchell, 'Only Human? A Worldly Approach to Security', *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 1 (2014): 12.

then, is not embodied solely in the politician making this claim to truth, but rather in the complex web of connections that made such a claim possible. Secondly, utilising the end of wars assemblage as an object of study allows me to trace how it developed over time. While assemblages are always in a process of constant production and flux and are not static entities, exploring how the end of wars assemblage was shaped in the early stages of the War on Terror and how it was subjected to critical pressures in later years allows us to track its emergence and resilience. In the early stages of the War on Terror initial conditions of success were articulated, but those conditions are always subjected to pressures and critique. How resilient they are to change in later years is an interesting and productive question to ask. As this thesis is constructed chronologically, we see that between 2000 and 2007 there were four main conditions of success that emerged from the assemblage: American exceptionalism and the values it embodies; the moral use of technological superiority; sacrifice; and the geographical location of the built environment. Although politico-cultural interaction is always fluid, the assemblage came under renewed pressures from 2007 and the election of President Obama. In addition to this, processes of critique, genre inversion, pastiche non-linear cinematic temporalities also challenged the stability of the assemblage. Tracing the contours of the assemblage over this time period allows us to assess whether it is stable, how resilient it is, and how it may change and evolve in the future.

Chapter one expands this theoretical approach through a more detailed engagement with assemblages and how they are utilised in this thesis.<sup>67</sup> However, I should note that while I find assemblages to be exceptionally important and useful in the study of popular culture and world politics I am by no means the first to have discovered this.<sup>68</sup> Each interaction and use of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is necessarily different with each taking different interpretations, a necessary part of their work and something that is seemingly intentional on their part. As Jason

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<sup>67</sup> New materialism also has an interesting and useful approach to assemblages for mapping and uncovering the connections that exist between physical objects and how matter is constitutive of politics. For example, Mark B. Salter, ed., *Making Things International 1: Circuits and Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Mark B. Salter, ed., *Making Things International 2: Catalysts and Reactions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–831; Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Caroline Holmqvist, 'Undoing War: War Ontologies and the Materiality of Drone Warfare', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2013): 535–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829813483350>; Peer Schouten, 'Security as Controversy: Reassembling Security at Amsterdam Airport', *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 1 (2014): 23–42; Jolle Demmers and Lauren Gould, 'An Assemblage Approach to Liquid Warfare: AFRICOM and the "Hunt" for Joseph Kony', *Security Dialogue*, 1 June 2018, 0967010618777890, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618777890>; Patrick Weir, 'Networked Assemblages and Geopolitical Media: Governance, Infrastructure and Sites in BBC Radio', *Geopolitics* 0, no. 0 (2018): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1465043>.

Dittmer argues, ‘There is a range of ways of “thinking assemblage”, each with a different lineage and emphases.’<sup>69</sup> Dittmer himself utilises assemblage theory to discuss geopolitical materiality and the emergent more-than-human world.<sup>70</sup> Shapiro uses the related Deleuzian concept of “interference” to argue for a link between cinema and philosophy.<sup>71</sup> Connolly’s reading of Deleuze’s engagement with cinema, in a similar vein to Shapiro’s, is about how ‘we can map more closely the geology of thought in everyday life’ and that cinema has created a ‘subterranean intertext’ between thought and film.<sup>72</sup> Rather than engaging in an intertextual reading of politics and cinema however, I will argue that the saturation of particular tropes and the formal aspects of the cinema - montage, close-up, long shots, lighting, music, editing and so forth as well as their interaction with the narrative and movement of cinematic aesthetic subjects allows conditions of success to emerge.<sup>73</sup> How these techniques affect the ‘visceral registers of viewers’ through the encounter helps shape the political realities that allow for the endings of conflict to be declared.<sup>74</sup> These cinematic techniques, the visual register of movies, their narratives and plots and importantly how these factors induce affective encounters in audiences will all form part of the analysis of the films in the ensuing chapters. The use of these three categories of cinematic analysis is important as they represent major elements of cinema as both art form and economic product. These categories can also help us understand more fully how cinema works within the end of wars assemblage to create, shape, legitimise and potentially critique the emergence of conditions of success.

## Chapter Outlines

Following on from this introduction, chapter one will discuss how assemblages can help to explore and explain how popular culture and world politics interact at the end of conflicts as well as a reflection on methods. This framework, outlined in brief above, theoretically structures the remainder of this thesis as each chapter traces the development and evolution of the end of wars assemblage over time. Ultimately, what will be shown is that the connections between popular culture and politics induced through embodied, intensive, and affective encounters with film open up the political space for the creation of conditions of success in the War on Terror. These conditions can then be deployed politically in order to make a claim about whether wars

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<sup>69</sup> Jason Dittmer, ‘Geopolitical Assemblages and Complexity’, *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 3 (2014): 386, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132513501405>.

<sup>70</sup> Dittmer, 397.

<sup>71</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, ‘A Philopoetic Engagement: Deleuze and The Element of Crime’, *Theory & Event* 18, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>72</sup> Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method : After the Aesthetic Turn* (London: Routledge, 2013), xiv.

<sup>74</sup> Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 96.

have ended or not. Because these conditions arise not only from political speech, but also the cultural milieu in which audiences are embedded, the claims to truth that they represent can be thought of as stronger and more legitimate. Furthermore, these conditions, in a double move, also allow for the ongoing practices of political violence in different and various global conflict zones. While these conclusions may seem mutually exclusive, the complexity of the interactions within the assemblage allows for, and even encourages, both sets of outcomes to come to pass: as one conflict is given the status of “ended,” another one can be given the status of “begun.” As explored earlier in this introduction with reference to war termination studies, how wars end is just as important as how they begin and, furthermore, understanding the conditions of possibility that lead to the ending of a war can help us to understand the conditions of possibility that allow for wars to begin in the first place. At the end of chapter one I describe in more detail the methodological assumptions and processes through which individual films were selected for each chapter. Any method of textual selection must, by necessity, leave other potentials out of the analysis, but demonstrating that these methodologies have a degree of rigour and reflexivity is necessary in the context of social scientific research and this project.

Chapter two performs three important functions within the thesis. Firstly, I make the case that utilising popular Hollywood action cinema is a productive site for analysing how conditions of success that emerge from the end of wars assemblage. This is because I argue that the contemporary action movie has a particular history within the development of cinema and can trace its roots to the World War Two combat movie. Furthermore, because the action genre is one of the most commercially successful genres of cinema, it has a reach and effect on audiences that goes beyond any other style of movie. Simply put, more people watch action movies than any other type so therefore it must have an outsized effect on the politico-cultural emergence of conditions of success. Secondly, I trace the history of the modern Hollywood blockbuster action movie back to its origins with the World War Two combat film. Understanding the history of the action genre, with roots in World War Two, the Korean War, Vietnam, and the Cold War, helps us map contemporary conflict onto the cultural artefacts that are engaged with and also provides an extra layer of analysis. By understanding the antecedents to both contemporary conflict and contemporary popular cinema, we can engage with the conditions of success that emerge from the end of wars assemblage in more detail. This historical grounding of the research is returned to throughout the thesis in order to explore how movies function within their genre and how this effects the assemblage. As I make clear in chapter two, and throughout the thesis, I am not proposing a general theory of what cinema does, always and for ever, in the context of the end of wars assemblage. Rather I am firstly constructing and

supporting an argument of how films, in the context of their genre, through encounters and their interaction with political rhetoric allow particular conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage. Secondly, I am putting forward a mode of articulation to assist in understanding politico-cultural interaction more broadly.

Chapters three to six proceed in a rough chronology from 2000 to 2014. There are multiple possible ways of organising this research - by cinematic theme, conflicts in the War on Terror, presidential administrations, different articulations of support or critique of political violence, and so forth - and the chronological structure of this thesis is not meant to be definitive. The reason for this chronological structure is twofold. Firstly, as explored above, it allows us to trace how the end of wars assemblage has developed during the War on Terror. What I will argue in the following chapters is that between 2000 and 2007 certain conditions of success emerged from the assemblage and then from 2007 to 2014, these conditions were potentially open to change given a new presidential administration and developments within the action genre. The end of wars assemblage, like all assemblages, is subject to multiple processes acting on it simultaneously. Territorialising and deterritorialising, coding and decoding, emergence and erosion all exert force on the assemblage at the same times. Structuring the thesis chronologically allows me to not only trace the contours of the end of wars assemblage over time and demonstrate how it has evolved, it also allows me to analytically separate processes of stabilisation (chapters three and four) from processes of potential destabilisation (chapters five and six). It should be made clear that this is not a teleological view of the assemblage that it progresses from simplistic to complex; from stable to unstable; or from territorialisation to deterritorialisation, but rather a recognition that assemblages are always subject to forces that shape, change, and evolve it. However, separating these two forces of stabilisation and destabilisation allow for a greater focus on them, as well as argumentative clarity. Furthermore, it is not the case that during the Bush administration the assemblage was static while under Obama it was more fluid. Rather, the chronological structure analytically divides assemblage formation from assemblage change in order to address these processes separately while acknowledging that they can be simultaneous. In other words, chapters three and four deal with processes of assemblage stabilisation while chapters five and six deal with processes of (potential) destabilisation. The election of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> president is the moment where the argument shifts from analysing stabilisation to analysing destabilisation and resilience. Obama's election represented the potential to radically reshape the end of wars assemblage through his rhetoric of "hope and change," his opposition to costly military



interventions, and his promise to end the war in Iraq.<sup>75</sup> As will be shown in these chapters, however, this rhetoric and accompanying cinematic movements did not radically destabilise the assemblage. Secondly, by addressing politico-cultural interaction chronologically rather than, say, thematically, this thesis argues that the simultaneity of political and cultural articulations of success is especially productive of affective encounters. As the films under discussion are concurrent with the political rhetoric of the time, audiences can encounter both nearly simultaneously. As such, the audiences that face both politics and culture can take one and apply it to the other more easily. Furthermore, the moment of a movie's release can be particularly productive of intensity. While many movies go on to be watched on DVD, Blu-Ray, or a streaming service, the time it is in the cinema (and particularly the opening weekend), is of greatest importance critically and commercially as well as providing a moment where audiences watch it at the same time. Thirdly, from the point of view of research design, a chronological structure facilitated the research process. By splitting the thesis into sections based on a time frame aided in textual selection processes as well as the writing of the thesis itself. Fourteen years is a long period to trace the end of wars, and dividing this into manageable blocks of time was a useful and productive process. Finally, a chronological structure can be useful for a reader as it breaks up a large time period, multiple articulations of victory, and diverse cultural artefacts into logical sections that will hopefully make for an easier and more enjoyable reading experience.

Chapter three, then, analyses politics and cinema between 2000 and 2003 in order to elucidate what conditions of success emerged during this period. Here, I argue that the values embodied in American exceptionalism and the moral use of technological supremacy are two main conditions of success that emerge from the cultural and political landscape. The specific time frame covers major events in the War on Terror from the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the beginning of the War on Terror, the most bellicose statements of President Bush, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the (in)famous 'Mission Accomplished' speech of May 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 declaring that 'major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.'<sup>76</sup> Cinematically, this chapter uses *X-Men* (2000), *Training Day* (2001), *Spider-Man* (2002), and *Tears of the Sun* (2003) to map how American exceptionalism and the use of technology as a "moral amplifier" helped to shape rhetorical and material understandings of success in the War on Terror from an early stage. Furthermore, they

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<sup>75</sup> The election is a potential 'bifurcation' in DeLanda's terms. Manuel DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 14.

<sup>76</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended', The White House, 1 May 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>.

create an understanding of inevitable victory in what was being constructed as a generational struggle of the War on Terror, a theme returned to in chapter six. Ideas of American exceptionalism and the moral use of technological superiority obviously predate the War on Terror, something that is explored in the chapter, and it is for this reason that three of the films were either released, being filmed, or in post-production before the attacks of September 11th. By selecting films that predate the formal start of the War on Terror, it is emphasised that the themes, narratives, tropes, language and imagery of this cinematic and political moment are not necessarily novel but, like the cinema and politics they are embedded in, have a history that forms part of the resilience of the end of wars assemblage. Nonetheless, in the context of the early stages of the War on Terror, these movies work to intensify exceptionalism and technology as core and powerful conditions of success.

Chapter four deals with the urban and the (post-)apocalyptic, their relation to religious narratives, and to questions of what is necessary in the War on Terror to achieve victory. Chronologically, this chapter starts after major combat operations in Iraq have ended, the development of the insurgency in Iraq and ends around the time of the troop surge of 2007 designed to ensure that ‘We can, and we will, prevail’ in the battle for Iraq.<sup>77</sup> What is analysed in this chapter is the pervasive idea, influenced by a Judeo-Christian theology, of the need for sacrifice in order to achieve redemption. Furthermore, the location of this sacrifice is the urban (built) environment. Announcing the troop surge, President Bush argued that redemption and victory could only come through the sacrifice of American troops and, linking the theme of sacrifice and salvation to the urban, argued that the city is the key site for such events to play out. The focus on Baghdad as the main site for sacrifices to occur is mirrored in cinematic renditions of the (post-)apocalyptic and dystopian sacrifices and urban landscape. Using *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Children of Men* (2006), and *I am Legend* (2007), this chapter traces the connections between cultural and political artefacts through the tropes of the apocalyptic, the dystopian, and the urban. Building on the previous section, and moving through time, this chapter argues that these movies allow for the emergence of sacrifice and urbanity as conditions of success in the War on Terror. Much like in the previous chapter, these conditions are not *sui generis* but have a long history in Western thought, politics, warfare, and culture. However, with the increase in US fatalities in Iraq during this period as well as the focus on Baghdad in the troop surge, these conditions of success do have a particular resonance within this period that contributes to their intensity and emergence. Politically, these conditions can then be

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<sup>77</sup> Bush, ‘President’s Address to the Nation’.

deployed to argue that because sacrifices have been made in an urban environment fighting the enemy that redemption, salvation, and ultimate victory is inevitable. This is supported, enhanced, and actively cultivated by dominant cinematic tropes explored through the three films.

Chapter three and four collectively argue that the politico-cultural aspects of the end of wars assemblage have produced at least four emergent properties: American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity. These four emergent properties are some of the conditions of success that can be politically deployed to make a case that ambiguously concluded conflicts are over and that American political violence was successful. While other conditions emerge from the assemblage before, during, and after these years these four form the basis of subsequent analysis. Chapters five and six analyse the assemblage as it evolves and pose the question of how resilient are these conditions and the assemblage as a whole to change. While chapters three and four discuss the stabilisation of the assemblage, chapters five and six discuss its potential destabilisation. Chapter five analyses a changing political and cultural milieu and argues that even though the political rhetoric and action genre of the time articulated potential critiques of these conditions of success, they ultimately remained intact. Politically, the years 2007 to 2010 saw the election of President Obama on his platform of hope and change and promise to end the conflicts in the Middle East. This had the potential to alter the conditions of the success that emerged from the assemblage by altering the political rhetoric that it is partly conditional on. Likewise, cinematically *Hancock* (2008), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *The A-Team* (2010), *RED* (2010), and *The Expendables* (2010) all offer potential critiques of the previously established conditions of success. These potential critiques are articulated in a number of ways. *Inglourious Basterds* challenges the idea that American political violence is morally superior and thus implicitly critiques American exceptionalism as a condition of success. *Hancock* presents us with a radically different type of superhero who is immoral, destructive of the urban environment, and African-American. As will be explored in the chapter, the superhero is often read as the avatar for American identity and American exceptionalism. By depicting one who does not conform to the norms of the genre and who destroys large parts of LA, *Hancock* can also challenge the idea that exceptionalism and urbanity are conditions of success. *The A-Team*, *RED*, and *The Expendables* all offer a version of the action genre that is based on pastiche. By laying bare the conventions of the genre, these movies have the potential to undermine how other genre movies allow for the emergence of conditions of success through the assemblage. However, I also argue that these critical potentials are unfulfilled. Each movie reasserts dominant genre conventions, exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice and urbanity by

the end of the third act. By reasserting these, the assemblage remains largely unchanged and the conditions of success previously enumerated continue to emerge. Furthermore, because the assemblage and the conditions were subjected to a mild critique, it can be argued that they are even stronger and more resilient as a result. Nonetheless, it is possible that these movies presage a different style of action movie that can articulate a more critical stance to dominant political and conflictual conditions of possibility.

Chapter six continues this analysis of the resilience of the end of wars assemblage to change. While chapter five discussed how specific conditions of success may be undermined politically and culturally, in this chapter I discuss how the nature of time and temporality impacts on the assemblage culturally and politically. The conditions of success analysed throughout this thesis are not only political tools to be deployed once a conflict is over. They also engage in the construction of the War on Terror as a temporally linear and teleological conflict. In other words, the US will inevitably win because of their exceptional morals, their technology, their sacrifices, and their focus on the urban. In chapter six I argue that the War on Terror was inscribed with a linear and teleological temporality from the start. By analysing three films that deploy a non-linear temporality, *Source Code* (2011), *Looper* (2012), and *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), I examine how these cinematic depictions of non-linear time might work to challenge, change, and undermine the linear temporality of the end of wars assemblage. Drawing on the emerging literature within International Relations on the nature of temporality as socially, culturally, and politically constructed, chapter six begins with an exploration of how this has been enacted during the War on Terror and what effect it has on the emergent conditions of success. The chapter then progresses to analyse these three films that deliberately use non-linear time in order to elucidate whether they challenge and critique the temporality of the end of wars assemblage. Through the analysis of style, plot, and affect it will be shown how these films function within the end of wars assemblage to reinforce dominant linear temporality rather than undermine it. Similar to chapter five, I will examine why these films that have the potential to critique dominant conceptions of linear and teleological time through the use of non-linear temporalities, do not fully exploit this possibility and instead conclude with a reinforcement of the dominant construction of linear time. Using the idea that temporality functions within a matrix of sovereignty, I argue that contemporary Hollywood action blockbusters, driven as they are for profit maximisation, perceive critiques of hegemonic discourses of any kind as a risky business manoeuvre for which they may be punished at the box office. This disciplining speaks to a major theme in this research whereby Hollywood “product” does not engage in the critique of ongoing political violence unlike other cultural artefacts that are less mainstream, such as

documentaries, arthouse, or international cinema.

This thesis as a whole argues that the end of wars assemblage is a useful and productive way to analyse how wars are brought to an end. 2000 to 2014 were politically, socially, economically, and culturally tumultuous times. By tracing how the end of wars assemblage was established in the War on Terror, what conditions of success emerged from it, and how these conditions were challenged is an important contribution to our understanding not just of the relationship between politics and culture, but the broader question of conflict in International Relations. This thesis does not seek to analyse how these conditions of success were politically deployed, rather it presents a case for how they emerged as potential political tools. Similarly, I do not want to argue that popular culture and the action genre in particular are the only or most important aspects of the end of wars assemblage. The assemblage is necessarily composed of a multitude of things both material and discursive from elections, military strategies, and armaments to the economy, international relations, and the experiences of those living in conflict zones around the world. Nonetheless, it is argued that popular culture represents an important site where political ideas, meanings, and actions are created, shaped, challenged, and enacted. As such, the following chapters represent a necessarily limited, but novel and important approach to the understanding of the mutual constitution of world politics and popular culture. The end of wars assemblage and the conditions of success that are its emergent properties are deployed here in such a way as to help articulate how contemporary Hollywood action cinema works to create conditions of political possibility in the War on Terror that can then be politically deployed as powerful discursive and material devices. I use cultural and political artefacts from 2000 and 2014 to trace how the assemblage was formed, how certain conditions of success emerged, and how these were challenged over time. Through such an understanding it becomes more possible to critically engage not just with politico-cultural interaction at the outset of wars and how culture and politics intermix to create support for these wars but also, crucially, how that support is mobilised to create the conditions whereby those wars are thought of as concluded. Understanding how wars are brought to an end, however arbitrary that end might be, can provide us with the tools necessary to critique these endings, and to hold future beginnings and endings to greater scrutiny.

## Chapter One: Assemblages and Emergence

“Avengers...”

*Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)*

### 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. Orientating this research towards an understanding of the end of wars as an assemblage has a number of advantages. Firstly, it allows for an understanding of how conditions of success emerge from politico-cultural interaction rather than solely political discourse, rational choice, or intertextuality. Secondly, it allows for an engagement with questions and processes of affect which helps us to understand the power of popular culture within politics. Thirdly, it allows for a chronological approach to the changing nature of the end of wars by understanding how the structures of the assemblage emerged, evolved, and are subjected to forces that may alter it. Finally, it presents a novel approach to the study of how wars end by moving the debate beyond rational choice theory, political discourse, and securitisation.

The interactions between popular culture and politics take place on multiple levels, have been conceptualised in different ways, and are characterised by complexity. Films are important sites of political, cultural, and societal expression, debate, and contestation. They allow audiences to engage affectively with cultural and political artefacts, narratives, imagery, and tropes that allow them to interact with the geopolitical world. There are many interpretations of how politics affects culture and how culture, in turn, influences politics. For example, audience studies seek to learn how people craft their own political orientation from their interaction with cultural artefacts such as superheroes, Homeland, or James Bond.<sup>78</sup> People have used cultural artefacts in a pedagogical way to teach students of international politics about the theories of IR.<sup>79</sup> Some think that culture’s utility in understanding politics is in its representational quality.<sup>80</sup> But more importantly in the context of this thesis, films can also function through intense and affective encounters and resonate strongly with political imagery, political narratives, political

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<sup>78</sup> For example Jason Dittmer and Klaus Dodds, ‘The Geopolitical Audience: Watching Quantum of Solace (2008) in London’, *Popular Communication* 11, no. 1 (2013): 76–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2013.747938>; Klaus Dodds, “‘Have You Seen Any Good Films Lately?’ Geopolitics, International Relations and Film”, *Geography Compass* 2, no. 2 (2008): 476–494, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00092.x>; Louise Pears, ‘Ask the Audience: Television, Security and Homeland’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 9, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 76–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2016.1147774>.

<sup>79</sup> Most notably perhaps Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2014); Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*.

<sup>80</sup> Hanska, ‘Popular Culture, US Security Policy, and the Asian Pivot’.

language and political tropes. This resonance allows connections between film and politics to be formed. Conceptualised here as part of the end of wars assemblage, these conditions shape, circulate, and legitimise the conditions of success necessary to conclude conflicts in the War on Terror. This resonance, as William Connolly puts it, is

when causality, as relations of dependence between separate factors, morphs into energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements *fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other*, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation.<sup>81</sup>

Applying this to the end of wars assemblage, we can use the concept of resonance to explain how these seemingly unconnected spheres of politics and cinema can merge into a collective machine through the simultaneity of their themes, the commonalities they share; and the affects they produce in audiences that confront both politics and cinema. While the audience for action movies is global, the geographical focus in this thesis is on American political rhetoric, American movies, and American wars. As such, we can productively think of the audiences here as American. This machine or assemblage, that functions through resonance and affective encounters can then allow for the emergence of conditions of success in the War on Terror that are irreducible to the component organs.

It is true that politics and cinema have had multiple interactions since the advent of film from the Spanish-American war of 1898 that saw the first use of Edison's motion picture camera in war up to the US Department of Defence supporting films such as Michael Bay's 2012 film *Battleship*.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, to claim that popular culture and politics can be conceptualised as two components of a larger machine that contributes to the ending of wars may, at first glance, appear strange. What an assemblage-led approach to the study of conflict termination allows us to do, however, is to think about film and politics merging, blending, interacting, and strongly influencing each other affectively and in an unintentional and non-linear way which differentiates this approach from a purely discursive or intertextual one. As explored in the Introduction, it is not the approach of this thesis that culture slavishly represents politics, nor is it that politicians deliberately appropriate cultural tropes. Rather, it is a non-linear relationship whereby the two seemingly separate fields interact through an assemblage to allow certain

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<sup>81</sup> William E. Connolly, 'The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine', *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 870.

<sup>82</sup> 'About This Collection - The Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures - Collections', web page, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed 1 February 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/collection/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/about-this-collection/>; Georg Löfflmann, 'Hollywood, the Pentagon, and the Cinematic Production of National Security', *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 3 (2013): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2013.820015>.

conditions of success to emerge.

This chapter proceeds through six stages. I will start with an exploration of some examples of assemblages in order to introduce the concept. Following this, I unpack how the end of wars assemblage functions through intensive, affective encounters in order to produce conditions of success as its emergent properties. Thirdly, I engage with the material and discursive, process-oriented, and non-linear nature of assemblages. Fourthly, I lay out why an assemblage-led approach is different to an intertextual one both conceptually and practically. Fifthly, I engage with the structure of assemblages and how we can understand some of the forces that act on it. Finally, I lay out my methods and discuss their implications and limitations. What will be demonstrated in this chapter is that understanding the end of wars as an assemblage rather than a political fact allows us to analyse how politico-cultural interaction, affect, and encounters create, shape, and challenge how political claims to truth around the end of a conflict are established, circulated and legitimised. This is referred to throughout as the conditions of success of the end of wars assemblage. Following this more theoretically focused chapter, the ensuing empirical section of the thesis will engage with specific cultural artefacts and analyse in depth how the affective encounters they can produce shape and challenge the assemblage and how they work with concurrent political narratives to produce conditions of success.

## **1.2 Examples of Assemblages**

Many things can be thought of as assemblages but perhaps one of the more obvious, and most illustrative, examples is the internet. The internet is made up of various types of material object (computers, tablets, smartphones, wearable tech) that connect with one another through various media (Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, copper wires, fibre optic cables). They exchange discursive content that is created by machines, algorithms, massive corporations, governments and individuals.<sup>83</sup> Although initially a military project it has been used for many different purposes from organising protests against governments to mass data surveillance by states. It is managed by a complex arrangement of companies, non-profits, servers, and data centres as well as the nodes and content creators that make and consume it.

The internet can be readily identified and understood as a ‘thing’ made up of unconnected elements (what else brings together the US Department of Defence, your smartwatch, a telephone cable, and cats?) which combine - along with people who make content, design, build, and manage hardware and software, and those of us who browse it – in strange and

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<sup>83</sup> Though mostly cats.



unpredictable ways to forge something that is so much more than the sum of its constituent parts. The connections between these material and discursive, organic and inorganic components allow for certain possibilities but also the capacity to forge new forms of politics and identities and at a speed not seen before. These potentials and possibilities are positive and negative, progressive and regressive. The assemblage of the internet in itself is not necessarily good or bad, though it allows for the organisation of protest and mass government surveillance; drone strikes and art that critiques those strikes; misogyny and equality; love and hate.<sup>84</sup> Thinking of the internet as an assemblage allows us to understand how the possibilities it generates are more than the sum of its parts and are forged through the interaction of material and non-material components.

Although I refer to the end of wars assemblage in the singular throughout the thesis, it is important to note that these are always assemblages of assemblages, or inter-assemblage assemblages. What is meant by this seemingly minor distinction is that all assemblages are made up of other assemblages, themselves made up of various other assemblages. Indeed, DeLanda claims that ‘Although each assemblage is a unique historical entity it always belongs to a population of more or less similar assemblages’ as a result of its assembly processes being regular and persistent.<sup>85</sup> To illustrate this let us consider the assemblage of ‘popular culture.’ Obviously, popular culture is more than cinema which is what is discussed most in this work, but also includes music, literature, television, video games, and internet culture. Each of these has their own genres, formats, styles, categorisations, and fascinating histories that connect with other aspects to form their own assemblage – the assemblage of music, of television, of cinema and so forth. Increasing the specificity, we can say that each individual artefact is itself an assemblage – the assemblage of a song, of a television show, or of a movie. Taking this last example in more detail as it is films that are the subject of this thesis a movie is an assemblage of shot, editing, lighting, sound, narrative, script, direction, acting, production, finance, distribution and a thousand other factors that go in to making a multi-million dollar film. Directors, editors, scriptwriters, cameramen, actors, executives, marketers, grips and foleys all contribute to the making of a movie. All of these inputs, factors, and actors then have their own particular history and meaning and connect with each to make a movie. The final product is therefore an assemblage of all these parts, but yet is irreducible to them. A movie is more than the frame, the acting, the soundtrack, or the script because each component adds something

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<sup>84</sup> Though, again, mostly cats.

<sup>85</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (London: Continuum, 2011), 186.

extra to our understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of watching a movie. There is also the genre that it is part of, the time it was released, audience expectations based on a director's past form or the trailer. Deleuze talks about movies as an assemblage and their indivisibility or irreducible nature in his books on cinema:

The divisibility of content means that the parts belong to various sets, which constantly subdivide into sub-sets or are themselves the sub-set of a larger set, on to infinity. This is why content is defined both by the tendency to constitute closed systems and by the fact that this tendency never reaches completion. Every closed system also communicates... But it is certainly not a "whole" although this plane or these larger and larger sets necessarily have an indirect relationship with the whole.<sup>86</sup>

A further important point that Deleuze makes here is that this process of interaction works both ways. Not only do "larger" assemblages act on "smaller" ones (such as the assemblage of cinema influencing specific movies) but also that the "smaller" assemblages act on "larger" ones (so the assemblage of cinema is also remade through the individual film). As Sean Carter and Derek McCormack note, this understanding of film as a multiplicity of factors 'encourages us to think of film itself as a kind of intervention into multilayered fields of affect, or more accurately, as an assemblage of techniques and technologies of affective event amplification.'<sup>87</sup>

We can also think of politics as an assemblage along the same lines. Politics is made up of multilayered fields such as elections, legislatures, presidents, law, international organisations, alliances, and rhetoric.<sup>88</sup> All of these factors shape this phenomenon we call politics, but are also shaped by each other and what we consider politics to be. Political meanings can also be embedded in material places such as the White House, Houses of Parliament or Tahrir Square such that a political speech given in the Rose Garden carries a certain weight that one made at Mar-a-Lago may not. Political speech, such as that of US presidents discussed throughout the thesis are both components of the assemblage of politics and themselves assemblage-like in nature. Increasing our specificity further, we can look at the various components that make up a speech of a US president: the opening bars of "Hail to the Chief," the autocue, the bulletproof glass, aspects of the speech that are specific to time or place, elements that are part of a politician's stump speech and bits that are new. Each of these have a specific history and meaning yet we cannot reduce a State of the Union address to just these, or any other, factors as they combine to become more than the sum of their parts. All of these elements and more

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<sup>86</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>87</sup> Sean Carter and Derek P. McCormack, 'Film, Geopolitics and the Affective Logics of Intervention', *Political Geography* 25, no. 2 (2006): 230, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.11.004>.

<sup>88</sup> Though mostly Brexit.

merge and blend together to form that particular assemblage of presidential speech, which is itself an aspect of the assemblage of politics. These two assemblages – cinema and presidential speech – are not necessarily distinct from one another as they themselves merge, blend, and combine together through the end of wars assemblage as well as acting on one another. Nonetheless, they interact and combine in non-linear ways to help construct and shape conditions of success that emerge from the end of wars assemblage.

Thinking of the end of wars as an assemblage rather than a political fact, a consequence of political discourse, or the outcome of a cost-benefit analysis by a rational actor allows us to analyse how wars end not just through the lenses of strategy, discourse, or rational choice theory but rather as an outcome of a process that takes the discursive, the material, the political, and the cultural into account. Not only does this provide us with a stronger understanding of this important political issue, it is also a novel approach to something that has been under-researched within studies of conflict. In the case of this thesis, the end of wars are analysed from the perspective of politico-cultural interaction through affective encounters in order to show how four conditions of success are culturally and politically articulated. Obviously, political speech and popular culture are not the only things that influence the end of wars assemblage. There are multiple factors that feed into the claim that wars will end or have ended: social questions such as support for a conflict; economic issues including the cost of waging war; electoral calculations on how to position a candidate; moral quandaries about the role of violence in the contemporary world; (geo)strategic problems about balances of power; tactical decisions about the progress being made in the combat zone, and so on. But rather than trying to ascertain what political policies allow claims about a war ending to be made, or whether these claims are justifiable given battlefield conditions or such like, this thesis seeks to understand how these claims and conditions emerge from and are reinforced through popular culture and political rhetoric.

One of the conditions of success to be discussed in more depth in chapter three is American exceptionalism. In that chapter, we will explore how the moralities and values that are exemplified by the concept of American exceptionalism are created and circulated through cultural artefacts. I argue that there are two important sequences in *X-Men* that connect the violation of individuality (a key tenet of American exceptionalism) with negative imagery. Thus, when American exceptionalism is politically articulated as a condition of success in the War on Terror, there is a reaction in audiences that associates exceptionalism with positive connotations, thus strengthening the claim to truth that utilises this condition. Furthermore, in

chapter four I will argue that depictions of sacrifice in *I am Legend* and *Children of Men* work to pre-cognitively reinforce the idea that redemption and victory are achievable only if we make sacrifices. Again this increases the power of sacrifice as a political tool to justify concluding a war because the audiences that confront both the movie and the politics have experienced a cinematic encounter that embed the condition of sacrifice at a pre-cognitive, or affective, level. Having gone “below” the end of wars assemblage to see what partly comprises it, we can also go “above” it to see what this assemblage itself connects with. It connects with assemblages of international relations, of military or geopolitical strategy, of balances of power, of elections, of moral standing and so forth. That is not to say that the chain of causation only goes one way of course. Just as a movie is influenced by the assemblage of politics or war so too the end of wars assemblage can affect how movies are produced and how presidential speech changes. What is important to bear in mind in this discussion is that assemblages are formed of other assemblages and they can all have effects on each other in complex and non-linear ways. Although a focus on action cinema cannot paint a full picture of why or how conflicts end, it is nonetheless part of the complex chain of non-linear causation that shapes political decisions, allows them to be made, and makes them acceptable to audiences. To further justify this focus, Protevi notes that we can design what he calls ‘experiments’ to isolate a particular factor ‘as long as we realise that such experimental design is an abstraction for a particular purpose.’<sup>89</sup> By isolating contemporary Hollywood action cinema and the end of conflicts in the War on Terror, this thesis could potentially be thought of as constituting such an experiment to understand one aspect of the end of wars assemblage.

The major contribution of this work is to add to our understanding of how wars end. By conceptualising the ending of conflicts as an assemblage that is partially predicated upon cinema and political discourse, understanding how the interaction of these two fields creates conditions of success is vital. Intensity and affect are what allow the end of wars assemblage to form and allow conditions of success to emerge. These intense and affective encounters can both stabilise and destabilise the assemblage in regressive and progressive ways, with negative and positive conditions of political possibility being created. Carter and McCormack summarise how these cinematic intensities relate to assemblages when they say that ‘rather than ideological signs, cinematic images become refigured as bodies of affective intensity with the capacity to affect other kinds of bodies...[and] on one level this is most obviously manifest in depictions

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<sup>89</sup> John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 21.

of moments of battlefield intensity.<sup>90</sup> It is vital to bear in mind that intensity in this sense is not representational. What is meant by this is that the key point being made by these depictions that Carter and McCormack identify and that are analysed throughout the thesis is not that they represent or depict an intense moment, but that they induce an intensive, affective encounter with the audience that allows for the emergence of conditions of success from the assemblage.

### 1.3 Emergent Properties

Exploring this idea of intensity producing affective encounters which can then influence the assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari argue that:

An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously... There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders.<sup>91</sup>

What we can read from this is firstly that the intensive and multiple connections between elements of an assemblage function simultaneously with one another and there is neither order nor linear causality in their interfacing. It is not intertextual in that cinema creates tropes, narratives and imagery that are then taken up in the political space by virtue of their popularity; similarly, it is not the case that political narratives and events are slavishly represented by cinema. Secondly, it is not the case that the conditions of success that emerge from the end of wars assemblage are solely exterior to that assemblage, or solely a product of that assemblage but that these conditions are deeply enmeshed within the assemblage and continue to shape it through complex feedback loops and homeostatic processes.<sup>92</sup> Thirdly, the assemblage is the machine, the ‘collective machine of enunciation,’ that brings these multiplicities, intensities, and connections together into something that produces more than, and is irreducible to, the sum of its parts. Finally, it is vitally important to remember, in a self-reflexive way, that my own reading, analyses, writing, and argument are also enmeshed within the assemblage and work to shape, change, and hopefully challenge it in certain ways. As Deleuze and Guattari note, ‘Each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind, and we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name when we produce its statement.’<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Carter and McCormack, ‘Film, Geopolitics and the Affective Logics of Intervention’, 235.

<sup>91</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 6–7.

<sup>93</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 38.

Throughout this thesis, I argue that conditions of success in the War on Terror are properties of the end of wars assemblage that emerge from intensive and affective encounters between audiences and cinema. Related to Connolly's concept of resonance, and important in our understanding of assemblages, is emergence. John Urry has argued that emergence explains how system effects that materialise within complex systems are greater than the sum of the components of that system.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the conditions of success discussed in this thesis can be thought of as the system effects of the end of wars assemblage that is partly predicated upon politico-cultural interaction. Just as Connolly's resonance indicates that seemingly unconnected elements merge to form 'energised complexities' that are difficult to explain in a linear fashion, emergence is understood by Protevi to entail 'reciprocal or circular causality.'<sup>95</sup> Not only is the process of emergence non-linear, properties that are created through this process are not reducible to either the sum of the parts of an assemblage or the interactions between them.<sup>96</sup> Rather, emergence is the 'construction of functional structures in complex systems that achieve a...focus of systematic behaviour as they constrain the behaviour of individual components.'<sup>97</sup> Thus, the process of emergence is not reducible solely to the components of an assemblage but must also take into account how they interact with one another, it is non-linear, and it works to allow for and constrain the possibilities that an assemblage creates. The emergent properties of the end of war assemblage that is under analysis in this thesis, then, are the conditions of success for conflicts in the War on Terror. These emergent properties are irreducible to the component artefacts of the assemblage (the speeches and movies) and the causes of their formation are non-linear. Through this thesis, I explore how the simultaneity, resonance, and intense affective encounters between political and cultural artefacts as well as audiences allow these properties to emerge. For instance, in chapter three I argue that the climactic battle scene of *Tears of the Sun* induces an encounter that directly links American technologies of war to victory in conflict. Through this encounter, the idea that victory is predicated on technology and morality can become embedded at a pre-cognitive level in audiences. Therefore, when a political leader utilises technology and morality to make a claim about the end of a war, it is more readily acceptable to audiences that confront cinema and politics. Furthermore because, as DeLanda states, 'each level of scale retains a relative autonomy and can therefore be a legitimate unit of analysis,' the main analytical unit will be the micro-level of movies and speeches rather than the macro-level of how these conditions of success are materially or actually enacted.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> John Urry, 'The Complexity Turn', *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2005): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405057188>.

<sup>95</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 8–10.

<sup>96</sup> DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 181.

<sup>98</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London:

#### 1.4 Affect, Intensity, Encounters

To understand how these conditions of success emerge from the end of wars assemblage further, we need to elaborate on how political and cultural artefacts interact with one another through audiences and intensity or affect to produce these conditions. In the opening pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write that

As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed.<sup>99</sup>

In other words, the point of an assemblage oriented understanding of the end of wars is not to attempt to elucidate some hidden or deeper *meaning* of a cultural text in order to see how it is appropriated or utilised politically. Rather, the approach is to analyse artefacts with the question of how they display the capacity to affect and be affected, and what other elements, assemblages, machines, and discourses this affect works to produce conditions of success at pre-cognitive levels.<sup>100</sup>

What follows in this work then will not be focused on the political *meaning* of a film or the cultural *meaning* of a presidential speech, but rather an exploration of the linkages between political and cultural artefacts. Mapping the connections between these seemingly disparate areas allows for an understanding of how they merge into a collective and how that collective - that assemblage - then allows for conditions of success to emerge. It is not how a specific movie, or group of movies, or a presidential statement or press conference makes it known that a war will end or has ended but rather how the intense and affective encounters induced by these artefacts allow for particular conditions of success to develop as emergent properties of the assemblage.<sup>101</sup> As Rizzo notes, 'films are not treated as texts to be analysed for a hidden meaning or for their signification.'<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, it is not the inherent or implicit meaning of an artefact that allows them to come together in the end of wars assemblage, but rather the affects they can induce based on their formal elements such as framing, editing, sound, language

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Continuum, 2007), 119.

<sup>99</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> Even though we are 'still classifying entities by a property... this property is never an intrinsic property of the entity being classified but always a property relative to a specific transformation.' Manuel Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005), 17.

<sup>101</sup> Peer Schouten notes in a similar vein, 'securitization is not an individualized and discursive act, but a collective process of performance, whereby agency is distributed over ontological divides.' Schouten, 'Security as Controversy', 27.

<sup>102</sup> Teresa Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2012), 11.

as well as their narrative elements such as plot and dialogue. These can also be thought of as the qualities of a movie that are read by audiences. But, as Brian Massumi makes clear, qualities are not just ‘logical properties or sense perceptions,’ but rather they are a potential to affect and be affected. Importantly, the effect of this potential is developed through an encounter between two or more ‘form complexes.’<sup>103</sup>

As discussed in the introduction, the understanding of politico-cultural interaction that creates these conditions of success as emergent properties operates at a level removed from the representational, mimetic, and conscious. This interaction between culture and politics operates through affect rather than through representation. In other words, where a representational understanding of politico-cultural interaction would focus on the semiotics of particular utterances, an affective analysis works to understand how these artefacts are experienced by audiences and what intensities this produces. Audiences, of course, are active ones and as such I do not want to essentialise the affects or encounters that are experienced. All cultural artefacts have the potential for diverse articulations and alternative lines of flight depending on the cultural, social, economic, and personal qualities of an audience. As such, the affects, intensities, and encounters that are discussed in this thesis are not to be read as definitive or total, but rather probable or possible. They are based on analysis of form, narrative, and experience. Affect, then, is not just the meaning of a text as it relates to itself, the world, or other texts, but is also how that text has the capacity for an emotional, physical, biological, or neurological impact on audiences and what that then allows for. As will be discussed further on in this chapter, this differentiates my approach from an intertextual one. Affect is the ‘product of an encounter’ that is not passive but rather active and pre-cognitive.<sup>104</sup> That is, it is produced not at the level of conscious thought, but rather at a non- or unconscious level. Affect is also a process that can create ideas, opinions, knowledge, and power. Within the context of the political and cinematic dimensions of the end of wars assemblage, affect is that which allows for conditions of success to emerge with neither intentionality nor a conscious process of thought on the part of audiences. As Woodward and Lea remark, ‘affect de-privileges the human as the reservoir of agency in the world.’<sup>105</sup> Rather than the agency to end wars resting solely on the shoulders of politicians then, an affective understanding posits that these endings are allowed for through the interaction of human (politicians, moviemakers, audiences) and

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<sup>103</sup> Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (London: The MIT Press, 1992), 10–12.

<sup>104</sup> Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>105</sup> Keith Woodward and Jennifer Lea, ‘Geographies of Affect’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Geographies*, ed. Susan J Smith et al. (London: Sage, 2010), 157.



non-human (political speech, films, particular forms of cinematic technique) entities.

Within Deleuzian ontology, Brian Massumi has described affect as coterminous with intensity or, as he puts it, affect is ‘the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other.’<sup>106</sup> Being coterminous with intensity means that affective encounters are intensive ones.<sup>107</sup> Protevi has also written on the importance of affect to the formation of assemblages and bodies politic and, despite affect not being ‘the enemy of cognition,’ it indicates that we negotiate our world not solely through representational, cognitive, and conscious practices but also through ‘a feeling of what the encounter... would be like.’<sup>108</sup> In terms of the analysis of movies, both Rizzo and Steven Shaviro argue for a deeper engagement with the affects of cinema.<sup>109</sup> A further important thing to take away from this is that it means that an analysis of politico-cultural interaction cannot be reduced to an analysis of meaning or intentionality on the part of politicians or film-makers. It also allows for the potential for new and exciting forms of political possibility to emerge from the almost accidental or seemingly aimless interaction of these two outwardly disparate fields. As will be discussed in chapter five for instance, there is the potential for a more critically oriented mainstream cinema to emerge that could change the end of wars assemblage as it had been constituted up to that point and so undermine the foundations upon which political violence is legitimised. Furthermore, it prevents this analysis from veering too far into *Wag the Dog* (1997) territory where the White House uses a film to conjure up a fake conflict in the Balkans or a *Team America: World Police* (2004) scenario where actors are hell-bent on using their celebrity status to ban war.

This distinction between the representational and the affective is noted by Dittmer when he states that ‘this concern with the mediation of affects has become an object of study within the previously avowedly representational popular geopolitics, with analyses slowly shifting to incorporate understandings of various media networks.’<sup>110</sup> We understand that culture influences politics in certain ways but, as discussed in the Introduction, to fully understand it we must break free from the representational logic that has been the usual method of

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<sup>106</sup> Brian Massumi, ‘The Autonomy of Affect’, *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446>.

<sup>107</sup> See also Brian Massumi, *Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>108</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 26, 48–49.

<sup>109</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 6–7; Shaviro even suggests that film theory itself should be a theory of affects Steven Shaviro, *Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 156.

<sup>110</sup> Dittmer, ‘Geopolitical Assemblages and Complexity’, 389.

approaching it.<sup>111</sup> This relates to the central problematic of this thesis in a specific way. To understand the politico-cultural interaction that creates the conditions of success at the end of a conflict, we do not just need to look at how endings are presented in cinema and analyse how these narrative techniques map onto political endings. It is not just an analysis of, as Richard Neupert says, the ‘story, or represented level...[and] narrative discourse [as] representational level.’<sup>112</sup> Rather, we must understand how these levels of story and narrative as well as various other aspects of the cinematic mise-en-scène operate at an affective, embodied and intensive level and what conditions of political possibility these encounters allow for.

Part of the way that conditions of success emerge from politico-cultural interactions is through the audience that confronts both politics and cinema and the pre-cognitive intensive affects that are produced as a result. Essentially, the cinematic space is a space of encounter. As Shapiro notes, ‘what constitutes the aesthetics of knowledge from both Rancière’s and Deleuze’s perspectives has to do with the way the encounter leads to an alteration in sensible experience...aesthetics and politics are homologous.’<sup>113</sup> The encounters that allow for conditions of success to emerge are deeply affective ones that have an impact on cinema viewers; this impact creates a political space within an audience that then allows for certain political realities to become possible. To re-iterate, this takes place in a non-linear fashion. Films are not created (primarily at least) for the base propaganda value where audiences are prepared for war, as some World War II films were, nor is there a centralised intentionality to achieve these slowly.<sup>114</sup> Audiences watch movies with certain political events and encounters in their mind and can interpret them in light of these encounters. Similarly, people can observe political events, watch the news, or listen to political speeches with cinematic encounters in mind and interpret the former through the latter. Connolly makes a similar point, saying that as you leave a cinema after a movie, ‘numerous thoughts arrive and depart with lightning speed, faster than they could be spoken. Their shape and texture are triggered by a series of encounters between scenes in the film and affective memories they trigger in you.’<sup>115</sup> Therefore, following

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<sup>111</sup> This desire to move beyond the representational even extends to documentary film as highlighted by Meghan Gibbons, ‘Representing the Real on The Road to Guantanamo’, in *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture: September 11 and Beyond*, ed. Andrew Schopp and Matthew B. Hill (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 103–23.

<sup>112</sup> Richard John Neupert, *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>113</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 30.

<sup>114</sup> Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 57 Though Virilio goes further in his analysis of WWII films, saying that their ‘task was to imbue audiences with fresh energy, to wrench them out of apathy in the face of danger or distress, to overcome that wide-scale demoralization which was so feared by generals and statesmen alike.’; Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 68–69.

this, if audiences encounter affective moments that relate to, for instance, American exceptionalism, the use of technology, sacrifice, or the city then when these conditions are deployed politically at the same time, the cinematic encounter has the effect of pre-priming audiences to accept the claim to truth that is articulated. To quote Shapiro in order to expand on this further, politics is micropolitics ‘based on an ontology of encounter rather than a macropolitical politics based on official institutional dynamics.’<sup>116</sup> Cinema can be read through politics and politics through cinema and both come to realisation through the encounter between them.

Shapiro reinforces this non-linear aspect of politico-cultural interaction when he writes that films ‘develop political implications that exceed the particular moments experienced by the bodies moving across the landscapes.’<sup>117</sup> From this we can see that the political potential of movies are not limited to the particular plot structure or narrative of the film itself, but rather cultural artefacts have potentials that exist beyond the text. The affective encounter that cinema induces is felt long after the viewer has left the theatre. These affective encounters can most readily be associated with the horror genre: hiding behind sofas, physically jumping in your seat, looking through fingers, or other bodily reactions. But they can also be clearly seen in the action genre. Its fast paced movement, explosions, shouting, visceral depictions of violence and quick edits have a strong bodily response in an audience. Speaking of violence in television, James Monaco suggests that a lot of critique of such violence centres around its affective power on viewers.<sup>118</sup> And as Patricia Pisters notes, ‘[w]hat affects the body has an effect in the mind.’<sup>119</sup> The violence we bear witness to in cinemas inflects our response to the violence we bear witness to on the 6 o’clock news. Such affective encounters with cinema must necessarily factor into our affective encounters with political realities. At the cost of being repetitive, it is worth again remembering that this is neither intentional nor directly causal. As Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies and Simon Philpott note, ‘violent films or video games may not cause young men to go out and kill but they may provide one layer in the complex continuum that congeals into deeply seated antagonisms towards particular others.’<sup>120</sup> Films are not designed to desensitise us to violence,

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<sup>116</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *The Time of the City: Politics, Philosophy and Genre* (London: Routledge, 2010), 88.

<sup>117</sup> Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, 13.

<sup>118</sup> James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media and Beyond*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 564 It should be noted that Monaco sees television and film as part of the same continuum, rather than necessarily distinct entities cf p. 381.

<sup>119</sup> Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 56; Whether or not a dualist account of mind and body is useful or accurate is beyond our scope here, but those who work with Deleuzian ontologies suggest that a Cartesian account of the relationship between mind and matter does not engage with the complexity of brain/body interactions. See Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 7–8; Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> Grayson, Davies, and Philpott, ‘Pop Goes IR?’, 156.

and this perceived desensitisation in itself does not permit the conditions of possibility of political violence. Rizzo relates the affective power of cinema to a disagreement with theories of cinematic representation. She states that ‘representational thought produces impoverished and limited concepts,’ and that film theory’s dominant use of representation closes off any serious consideration of film viewing as an affective experience that engages the sense.’<sup>121</sup>

Affective encounters between audiences and cinema are, as noted above, particularly prevalent in the horror genre but can also be perceived in the action genre as well.<sup>122</sup> Likewise, affective encounters can be determined to exist in engagements with political discourse and news media. The role that these affective encounters play within the assemblage is to allow conditions of success to emerge. As discussed earlier, affect is a process that can construct ideas, knowledge and power. Relating this to the end of wars assemblage, I will argue that moments of intensity within the films under discussion can embed ideas such as sacrifice within audiences that then allow them to be utilised politically as conditions of success in the War on Terror. Such an example can be seen in *Children of Men*, discussed in chapter four, where the main character sacrifices himself to allow humanity to survive. The final sequence highlights the idea that sacrifice is necessary to success through the visuals of fog clearing to reveal a ship as a saviour, the use of choral music to sonically emphasise the main character’s necessary death, and the imagery of a person’s life slowly sapping away. The result of this moment of intensity is to pre-empt audiences to accept that victory can only come through sacrifice. Protevi notes that sensory inputs allow the brain to fall into patterns, or ‘basins of attraction,’ that constrain our decision making process. As ‘the affective aspects of the way we navigate our world...are essential’ this means audiences are affectively conditioned to accept sacrifice as necessary for victory.<sup>123</sup> Thus, when a political leader makes the claim that a conflict is successfully concluded because of the sacrifices that have been made, audiences can more readily accept this claim to truth. These affective encounters are, highly importantly, embodied encounters. The embodied nature of cinematic encounters can be both molar and molecular; stabilising and destabilising; encourage being and becoming. As Rizzo notes, ‘what is important when considering the concept of assemblages in relation to the cinematic experience is that they can operate not only as extensive, molar orderings...but also as molecular intensive multiplicities, which produce becomings and bodies in process.’<sup>124</sup> These molecular becomings are produced when audiences are confronted with disruptive or intensive cinematic moments.

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<sup>121</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 37–40.

<sup>122</sup> And will of course exist in other genres as well, though their function and emergence may be different.

<sup>123</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 26.

<sup>124</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 63.

While this can be the technical disruptive power of avant-garde or arthouse cinema, it can also be the disruptive potential of the Michael Bay-esque explosions and violence of the action genre. Such cinematic violence, with all its attendant qualities of bright colours, loud noises, vibrations in your seat, and general sensory overload can produce an affective encounter between the screen and the viewer. While these affective encounters might produce a reaction in the sense that the bodily responses of the viewer can be physically disrupted through light and noise, the effect of this encounter is, quite often, to enhance the nature and power of the violent cinematic object within the assemblage. This becoming is certainly not what Patton calls the revolutionary-becoming, but more often within action genre encounters it is the violent-becoming, or the political-becoming, or the negative-becoming. This becoming, rather than challenging the emergence of conditions of success within the assemblage, serves to reinforce it. This is of course not true of cinema as an art-form in general, and many movies are 'well suited to offer alternative perspectives on what is or could be the case. As Gilles Deleuze suggests, cinema can encourage reflection on and negotiation of alternative perspectives because of the way it functions without a dominant centre.'<sup>125</sup> However, at the end of a violent and cathartic action blockbuster, rather than a visually, temporally, and affectively confusing and disruptive film, viewers can leave the cinema feeling that the particular cinematic conflict has been resolved through the utilisation of the conditions of success that we also find in the War in Terror.<sup>126</sup> The molar being is both unmade and remade through the molecular becoming. Many of the movies to be discussed throughout this thesis will contain themes of corrupt industrialists, cowardly generals, and morally bankrupt politicians. However, despite the critical potential of these lines of flight, I argue that they still largely work to allow the four conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage.

The affective encounter that cinema creates is part of its externality that allows it to connect to other artefacts within the machine of the assemblage. These connections exist rhizomatically and contingently on viewers, bodies, space, time, and other more physical aspects of the place of viewing. They are ever changing and difficult to pin down, but nonetheless, these encounters with certain cultural artefacts create a political space in cinema viewers. The affective nature of political encounters (not discussed as in-depth as their cinematic kin here, but functioning in

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<sup>125</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 48.

<sup>126</sup> A fantastic example of this is the cinema scene in *Jarhead* (2005) where soldiers sing along with, cheer, clap, begin to breathe heavily, and yell during the 'Flight of the Valkyries' scene from *Apocalypse Now* before being deployed to Kuwait for Operation Desert Storm. The movie is clearly a way to 'pump up' the Marines for combat that is, eventually, unfulfilled.

broadly similar ways and driven by the similarity in other forms of externality of the artefacts such as lighting, language, and trope) also creates a cultural space in political viewers. The interinvolvement of these separate factors at an affective and embodied level is one of the driving forces behind the machine of the assemblage that produces the conditions of success necessary to bring conflicts in the War on Terror to a close.

Rizzo goes on to suggest that it is the embodied nature of cinema, and the embodied affects that it allows, that is its true power. This is important when we consider the role of cinema within the end of wars assemblage. Rizzo says that ‘the body, identity and subjectivity decompose and recompose according to different encounters and through different connections. Film viewing could be understood as one of these encounters that produces connections that decompose and recompose the body, identity and subjectivity.’<sup>127</sup> The political possibilities that these affective, embodied, and intensive encounters allow for is something that assemblages allow us to analyse. By examining movies and exploring where, how, and to what ends affective encounters are used, we can understand how conditions of success emerge from the end of wars assemblage and how they accrue political power. It encourages us to think of cinema not as something external to politics, but rather as something that plays an active part in the construction of meaning and processes of subjectivity. Dittmer summarises this non-human or post-human trend in the study of popular culture and world politics: ‘because power is enacted through the assemblage, it must be understood as distributed among the various components of that assemblage, human and non-human.’<sup>128</sup> It is not just political leaders who can declare wars over, nor is the ending of a war purely a product of battlefield conditions or cost-benefit analysis. Rather, the power to end a war is embedded in multiple human and non-human elements – among which are political leaders, audiences, and movies. It is the affective interactions between these components, among others, that allow wars to end.

### **1.5 Materialist ontology**

The previous examples of assemblages as well as the engagement with affect and encounters also serves to illustrate Deleuze and Guattari’s materialist, or process, ontology. As DeLanda has noted, all entities are ‘the product of specific historical processes and whatever degree of identity they have it must be accounted for via the processes which created them and those that

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<sup>127</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 52.

<sup>128</sup> Dittmer, ‘Geopolitical Assemblages and Complexity’, 388–89 This is also connected to new materialism and an engagement with international politics through the physical and embodied aspects of the political. Protevi also discusses the need to examine how political processes, materiality, and society regulate subject production. Protevi, *Political Affect*, 30.

maintain them.’<sup>129</sup> The internet is the product of processes of cable laying, computer building, meme making, and cat cuteness; popular culture is a product of processes of shot formation, movie editing, and music production; politics is a product of processes of campaigning, speech writing, and voting.<sup>130</sup> The end of wars assemblage is thus also the product of political and cultural processes, as well as the process of the affective encounter. While the assemblage of the internet, or any other assemblage, is material and process oriented, it is by no means reducible to this. While Newtonian and Euclidian physics conceives material as inanimate and active only when an exterior force is applied to it, and the legacy of Cartesian dualism indicates that there is an ontological distinction between “dead” material and the *cogito* of thinking subjects, the understanding of materiality utilised in assemblage thought is somewhat different.

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost argue that there is no ontological difference between organic and inorganic or material and discursive but rather that ‘materiality is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable.’<sup>131</sup> Thus, processes, reality, identity, political action and so forth are not reducible to matter in its simplest form but rather are products of complex material and discursive processes at micro and macro levels; or as Protevi notes, ‘our perspective is materialist, but not eliminative.’<sup>132</sup> Tom Lundborg and Nick Vaughan-Williams further explore this relationship between the material and discursive when they argue that the two are ‘fundamentally interrelated and inseparable.’<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, they warn that the New Materialisms literature risks reifying the material and thus losing the contribution of language and discourse to our understanding of human/nonhuman assemblages. Assemblages then are not merely material, but are formed of a combination of material and discourse; human and non-human; animate and inanimate. Therefore, my engagement with, and understanding of, the end of wars assemblage includes both the material and the discursive. The discourses and narratives of popular culture and world politics, but also the physical and pre-cognitive affects that these artefacts create in audiences through the encounter.

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<sup>129</sup> Manuel DeLanda, John Protevi, and Torkild Thanem, ‘Deleuzian Interrogations: A Conversation with Manuel DeLanda and John Protevi’, *Tamara: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science* 3, no. 4 (2005): 65–66.

<sup>130</sup> Of course, there is more to these assemblages than this and they also influence one another. The social media strategies of politicians and movie studios; the music that a candidate plays at rallies; the use of political events for cinematic plots and so forth.

<sup>131</sup> Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 9.

<sup>132</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 31; For further detail on Deleuze’s materialist ontology and its relationship to thought, see Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 158–60; and Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 110–11.

<sup>133</sup> Tom Lundborg and Nick Vaughan-Williams, ‘New Materialisms, Discourse Analysis, and International Relations: A Radical Intertextual Approach’, *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 01 (2015): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000163>.

## 1.6 Non-linearity and lack of Intention

In addition to being both material and discursive, it is important to note that the end of wars assemblage is not intentionally designed in a particular way nor does it progress to a pre-defined goal. Connolly makes the important point that assemblages are not consciously designed but come into being through affinities between their constituent elements, a point reiterated by Mark Salter when he says that ‘assemblages are understood as uncoordinated processes that nevertheless have a concerted effect.’<sup>134</sup> Although Connolly discusses the relationship between capitalism, evangelical Christianity and Republican politics in the US, this lack of intentionality on the part of the assemblage is also applicable to the ending of wars. In this light it is vital to note that this work will not look in detail at how, for instance,

government intelligence specialists have been secretly soliciting terrorist scenarios from top Hollywood filmmakers and writers...to brainstorm about possible terrorist targets and schemes in America and to offer solutions to those threats.<sup>135</sup>

Or more historically, how cinema was used during World War II to, in part, demonstrate how the military functioned and to introduce civilians in movie theatres to weapons and tactics.<sup>136</sup> In addition to not looking at the admittedly fascinating world of co-operation between Hollywood and Washington and the Department of Defence, this thesis will not be a list of how politicians use film to support their political aims or how films convince politicians and publics to think or act in certain ways. Rather, as discussed above, this thesis is about how movies produce affective encounters which, in turn, allow for conditions of success to emerge from the assemblage and become strengthened politically.

Another dimension of assemblages that relates to this is their contingency. They are temporally, spatially, and analytically contingent on certain things. As Manuel DeLanda states, ‘despite the tight integration between its component organs, the relations between them are not logically necessary but only contingently obligatory.’<sup>137</sup> This means that the end of wars assemblage is not a given and nor is it a necessarily inevitable consequence of the existence of the component

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<sup>134</sup> Connolly, ‘The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine’, 869–70; Salter, *Making Things International 2: Catalysts and Reactions*, xi.

<sup>135</sup> James Der Derian, ‘The War of Networks’, *Theory & Event* 5, no. 4 (2001): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2001.0033>; See also Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 80.

<sup>136</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 73–75; Georg Löfflmann presents a more up to date account of the link between the Pentagon and Hollywood in Löfflmann, ‘Hollywood, the Pentagon, and the Cinematic Production of National Security’, 4–5.

<sup>137</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, 12; See also DeLanda, Protevi, and Thanem, ‘Deleuzian Interrogations: A Conversation with Manuel DeLanda and John Protevi’, 68.



organs, but its emergence is dependent upon certain affinities, certain connections, and certain intensities being present. It is not an eternal structure and is certain to undergo change continuously over time. As DeLanda has noted, assemblages are conceived as the result of historical and ongoing processes of formation and maintenance and their identity ‘is not guaranteed by the existence of a necessary set of properties constituting an unchanging essence.’<sup>138</sup> We can also use DeLanda’s terminology to say that the end of wars assemblage is loosely territorialised and lightly coded.<sup>139</sup> However, the *connections* between the elements of this assemblage can be said to exist in an ontological and material sense. Deleuze and Guattari mention that

to the essential properties of the matter deriving from the formal essence we must add *variable intensive affects*, now resulting from the operation, now on the contrary making it possible...then following where it leads by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form upon matter: what one addresses is less a matter submitted to laws than a materiality.<sup>140</sup>

From this, we can deduce that while the assemblage may not be an inevitable structure, the connections and intensities that compose it are and, by following these flows and lines, we can analytically bring the assemblage and its emergent properties under analysis. Protevi expands on intensity in Deleuzian thought by explaining how there is a ‘threefold ontological difference in which the intensive serves as a mediating register between the virtual and the actual.’<sup>141</sup> The actual is, in turn, material and stable and is bound by certain behaviour patterns while the virtual is what Protevi calls a ‘purely differential field.’<sup>142</sup> The virtual and the actual can be thought of as two aspects of reality, as Constantin Boundas notes, they are ‘two mutually exclusive, yet jointly sufficient, characterisations of the real.’<sup>143</sup> The intensive affects that Deleuze and Guattari describe above are what allow for changes to the “actual’s” behaviour patterns and can be considered deterritorialisations, lines of flight, or becomings.<sup>144</sup> Intensive differences and connections between elements of an assemblage, then, are what drive patterns of behaviour. I

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<sup>138</sup> DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 185.

<sup>139</sup> DeLanda, 187–88.

<sup>140</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 408.

<sup>141</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 11; Expanding on this further, Constantin Boundas notes that we commit an error when we ‘think exclusively in terms of things and their qualities’ and do not pay attention to the intensive relations between them. See Constantin V. Boundas, ‘Intensity’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 133.

<sup>142</sup> Elsewhere, Protevi and Bonta describe the actual as ‘the aspect complex systems display when...they are locked into a basin of attraction,’ and the virtual as the ‘modal relation of possibility...for complex systems.’ Bonta and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 49, 164.

<sup>143</sup> However, it is important to note that while the virtual has the potential to bring about the actual it never resembles, represents, or can be identified with it. Constantin V. Boundas, ‘Virtual/Virtuality’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr, Rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 300.

<sup>144</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 11.

have already discussed how affective encounters between audiences and cinema can help to produce the emergent properties of the end of wars assemblage, through the creation of basins of attraction at pre-cognitive levels. Intensity is another way of theoretically understanding this encounter. Furthermore, there is the possibility that these patterns can change if encounters are intensive enough to shock the system.<sup>145</sup> It is this contingency and susceptibility to change and evolution that the structure of this thesis is, in part, designed to analyse. With respect to the War on Terror we can say that end of wars assemblage emerged shortly after 9/11. However, the component artefacts of its politico-cultural dimension do not remain static. As these components change over time, there is the possibility that the assemblage and its emergent properties also change. Chapters five and six engage with this evolutionary process by questioning whether films such as *Hancock* undermine the centrality of American exceptionalism as a condition of success or *Edge of Tomorrow* presents a radically different temporality to the linearity of the War on Terror.

This research develops and advances an understanding of how simultaneous affinities between political and cinematic artefacts interact with one another through affective encounters and what political realities these interactions create the conditions of possibility for. It has been mentioned in passing already in this chapter, but it worthwhile briefly unpacking the non-linearity of an assemblage oriented approach to the end of wars. Rather than the idea that politics influences cultural practice or cultural practices influence political action in the manner of a billiard ball striking another one, thus causing it to move I explore how the simultaneity of political and cultural artefacts allows conditions of success to emerge. As Protevi explains, ‘There is no linear causal chain of input, processing, and output. Instead there is continual looping as sensory information feeds into an ongoing dynamic system, altering or reinforcing pattern formations.’<sup>146</sup> For our purposes of understanding the end of wars as an assemblage, it is important to be clear that there is no billiard-ball style causality where a particular movie or group of movies directly causes a politician to articulate a particular point, or that a political decision is made in audiences at the conscious level as a result of watching particular movies. However, because of the intensity, affective capacities, and resonance of connections between political and cultural artefacts that are to be explored in this thesis, we can talk, as DeLanda does, of a “machine-like” mechanism whereby ‘lower scale entities form the working parts of a larger scale whole, a whole which emerges...by the interactions between the parts.’<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> These patterns are also described by Protevi in terms of ‘basins of attraction.’ Protevi, 18.

<sup>146</sup> Protevi, 18.

<sup>147</sup> DeLanda, Protevi, and Thanem, ‘Deleuzian Interrogations: A Conversation with Manuel DeLanda and John Protevi’, 68.

### 1.7 Differences to Intertextuality

It is also worthwhile making clear the distinctions between this research and an intertextual one. Deleuze and Guattari suggest similarities to intertextuality in their claim that they will not seek the internal meaning of a book but rather, ‘We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed.’<sup>148</sup> There is obvious overlap here with Graham Allen’s argument that ‘Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.’<sup>149</sup> However, they go further in *A Thousand Plateaus* by also saying that an assemblage is semiotic, material, and social simultaneously with no dividing line between them rather than the purely textual approaches of intertextuality.<sup>150</sup>

Intertextual approaches to politics and culture have made a valuable contribution to our understandings of how politics and culture can interact with one another, but it is important to differentiate my approach from a purely intertextual one in pragmatic as well as conceptual terms. Notwithstanding the above discussion on how the two are not as differentiated as they might appear at first, an intertextual approach to the end of wars would involve exploring how, in Lene Hansen’s words, ‘texts build their arguments and authority through references to other texts: by making direct quotes or by adopting key concepts and catchphrases.’<sup>151</sup> Or as Dittmer suggests, the way that ‘authors borrow from, or refer to, other texts to create a totality.’<sup>152</sup> There is, firstly, a conceptual difference as an approach informed by assemblages would conceptualise causality not as a direct cause and effect relationship (such as that between original and referenced text) but as non-linear so that texts can influence each other even without deliberate, intentional, or unintentional reproduction. Secondly, an assemblage-led approach argues that the artefacts themselves can have a degree of agency in shaping conditions of success in the War on Terror whereas an intertextual approach would imply that meaning can only be created through people, text and discourse. Related to this is a more practical difference whereby using assemblages allows for an engagement with affect, as discussed above. The causal link between components of an assemblage is not just at the level of the linguistic or textual but also at the level of (pre-)cognition and feeling. The resultant effect on the research process is that I do not

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<sup>148</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

<sup>149</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

<sup>150</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 22.

<sup>151</sup> Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.

<sup>152</sup> Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 45.

just look at the text of movies and how their quotes, concepts, or catchphrases are taken up and redeployed in political speech. Rather, there is also a focus on the affective power of cinema to shape ideas about politics and war at the pre-cognitive level. The non-linguistic aspects of cinema can thus be integrated into our analysis of the end of wars assemblage. An example of this would be in chapter four where I discuss Alfonso Cuarón's use of a long tracking shot to highlight the urban setting of the climactic scene in *Children of Men*. It is not that this style is adopted in political speech or media representation and so causes the connection to be made. Rather, this tracking shot serves to highlight the centrality of the built environment to sacrifice, thus making an affective and pre-cognitive connection between sacrifice, victory, and urbanity. Similarly, in chapter three the overwhelming sound in the final battle scene of *Tears of the Sun* reinforces the relevance of technology and American exceptionalism to the end of wars. Again, it is not that the sight and sound of military hardware is appropriated by political leaders to cement the idea of American exceptionalism and technology as crucial for success, but the affective encounter that is induced by this scene allows audiences to connect success with exceptionalism at a pre-cognitive level.<sup>153</sup> Instead of establishing a strict dichotomy between the material and the discursive or the intertext and the assemblage though, the ontological tendency of Deleuze and Guattari as well as the substantive focus of this work seeks to, if not reconcile them, then at least to integrate them both into our understanding of politics, the world, and the end of wars. As Coole and Frost argue, 'society is simultaneously materially real and socially constructed: our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural.'<sup>154</sup>

### **1.8 Molar, molecular, and the structure of assemblages**

The affective, embodied and intensive aspect of cinema is related to what Deleuze and Guattari term the molar and the molecular, and the related concepts of being and becoming. The molar and the molecular can also be thought of as related to the arborescent and rhizomatic. Being is that which is reinforced; becoming is that which is encouraged by the affective, intensive, and embodied nature of the artefact that is encountered. Rizzo suggests that the molar plane is that which orders and the molecular plane is that which disrupts.<sup>155</sup> As discussed above, the disruptive in the action genre can be the quick-edit, the shaky cam, the noise and explosions. We can think of molar being as that which strengthens the assemblage and molecular becoming

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<sup>153</sup> I do realise that politicians (and others) utilise the military to cement ideas of sacrifice and exceptionalism, but that is not the overt type of connection that allows for affective encounters and so is not discussed in this thesis.

<sup>154</sup> Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 27; See also Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 'New Materialisms, Discourse Analysis, and International Relations', 24.

<sup>155</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 62.

as that which weakens or disrupts it. But of course, as with much to do with Deleuze and Guattari, it is not that simple. The molar and molecular are not necessarily opposed to one another. As Deleuze and Guattari state quite categorically:

There is no question, however, of establishing a dualist opposition between the two types of multiplicities, molecular machines and molar machines: that would be no better than the dualism between the One and the multiple. There are only multiplicities or multiplicities forming a single *assemblage*, operating in the same *assemblage*.<sup>156</sup>

We can take this lack of a binary opposition to molar/molecular a stage further and suggest that molecular becomings can also strengthen the assemblage, or at least, allow in certain cases, for the creation of the conditions of possibility of particular political realities. It is not the case that the molecular must always destabilise and molar must always stabilise assemblages, and it is also not the case that the molecular is revolutionary and the molar is ordering. Certainly, the molecular has, perhaps, the greater potential for being destabilising and revolutionary. Patton notes this capacity saying that Deleuze and Guattari's 'version of poststructuralist politics remains a tactical rather than a strategic style of political thought, directed at particular or local forms of revolutionary-becoming rather than wholesale social change.'<sup>157</sup> The link between molar as territorialising and molecular as deterritorialising is also something that should be questioned. Such a binary opposition is not in keeping with the thought and work of Deleuze and Guattari, and it is my contention that Hollywood blockbuster action films encourage becomings in an audience through an affective encounter with the cinematic artefact, but that this is one that strengthens the emergence of conditions of success.

DeLanda provides us with a rough schematic of assemblages in a general sense. He argues that they are organised along two main axes: one that defines the roles that the components play – material or expressive – and one that defines the processes in which the components are involved – whether they stabilise or destabilise the assemblage (or, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terms territorialise or deterritorialise the assemblage).<sup>158</sup> Patton argues further that the first axis described above is 'composed of discursive and non-discursive components,' while the second is 'defined by the nature of the movements governing their [assemblages] operation.'<sup>159</sup> Using this schema, what Deleuze and Guattari call a 'trivalent model,' we could

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<sup>156</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 34.

<sup>157</sup> Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

<sup>158</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, 18–19; See also, Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 18.

<sup>159</sup> Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 44.

possibly map out where certain components lie on it.<sup>160</sup> It is important to note that DeLanda also identifies a third, or *z*, axis for this model. This axis defines

processes in which specialized expressive media intervene, processes which consolidate and rigidify the identity of the assemblage or, on the contrary, allow the assemblage a certain latitude for more flexible operation while benefiting from genetic or linguistic resources (processes of coding and decoding).<sup>161</sup>

This axis functions through and because of the other two, and assesses the rigidity of an assemblage, or how resistant it is to the factors identified on the other two axes. This axis is utilised in chapters five and six of this thesis where I assess how stable the end of wars assemblage and its emergent properties are to processes of cultural and political decoding. It is first necessary to establish the material and discursive components that form the assemblage and allow conditions of success to emerge from it. This is the function of chapters three and four. It is not easy then, to identify the position of the *z* axis until more is known about the other two. Indeed, where we might place components on one axis is determined in part by where they might be on the other, making mapping an assemblage a difficult and, as will be shown below, ultimately fruitless task.

Obviously, it is difficult to visually represent where an artefact such as *Spider-Man* (2001), discussed in chapter three, might lie on this potential graph. This is in part due to what Teresa Rizzo identifies as the rigidity of the tetravalent model that ‘cannot account for either the temporal aspect of cinema, or the constant embodied and affective interactions between the film and the viewer.’<sup>162</sup> This temporal aspect of cinema as well as political artefacts also means that their location is, firstly, constantly shifting due to differing readings and connections that are formed and, secondly, that artefacts may display strong material as well as expressive quantities while simultaneously deterritorialising and reterritorializing an assemblage. Jason Dittmer highlights this: ‘any component can be working to territorialize the assemblage at any given moment, and soon thereafter exercise a capacity to deterritorialize it.’<sup>163</sup> Indeed, as will be explored in later chapters, political and cultural artefacts can be engaged in the processes of deterritorialising and reterritorializing the assemblage simultaneously.<sup>164</sup> Understanding territorialisation as a process rather than a property further undermines a static and two

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<sup>160</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 88.

<sup>161</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, 19.

<sup>162</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 9.

<sup>163</sup> Dittmer, ‘Geopolitical Assemblages and Complexity’, 387.

<sup>164</sup> It is also important to remember that, as Parr notes, ‘the relationship deterritorialisation has to reterritorialisation must not be construed negatively; it is not the polar opposite.’ Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 69.

dimensional representation of an assemblage as it suggests that the intensity of these processes changes through time and through differing readings. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that assemblages themselves are never a static entity, but something that is in constant flux.

Although one could perhaps represent DeLanda's axes as a graph with each artefact being given co-ordinates to a point (artefact *a* would be at (x, -0.75, y, +4.6) for example), such averaging of the position of an artefact detracts from the manifold nature of its potential multiplicities, and discounts the possibility that an artefact could conceivably be at all four extremes of such a graph *at the same time*. Furthermore, such a positioning negates the temporal and embodied aspects of artefacts, and it is this nature that allows them, in large part, to connect so freely and easily with other elements in the assemblage. Additionally, mapping artefacts concretely onto such a graph would imply a rigidity of assemblage structure entirely out of keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of it as multiple, fluid, contingent, and subject to not only change, but the continuous process of development. A further problem with such a mapping is that to fully explore the end of wars assemblage, one would need to map *all* of its components on to it, which is clearly beyond the scope of this, or any other single work.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, this tetravalent model is a useful template of how we can understand the forces that act upon an assemblage and the limits that it faces. It is important to note here that the end of wars assemblage that I discuss throughout the thesis can be said to be not very highly territorialised as it has, in DeLanda's words, 'fuzzy and fluctuating' boundaries that include processes, artefacts, identities, and phenomena that go beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>166</sup> A further parameter of this assemblage is that it is reasonably decoded as the political actions it creates possibilities for are determined not only by the components discussed here but various other political, social, economic, cultural, and international factors.

### **1.9 Reflective methodologies**

This chapter has explored how assemblages emerge, function, interact, and create conditions of possibility in some depth, but without many detailed examples of how this functions at the end of wars. Chapters three to six engage with this in much more depth and, as explained in the Introduction, take a chronological approach. In between the theory and practice, it is necessary to take time to explain methods, methodological choices, what these methods and structures allow for, and how they impose constraints and limitations on the research and conclusions. This section proceeds in several parts: firstly, I will explain how particular texts were selected

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<sup>165</sup> Although Deleuze and Guattari do a pretty good job of mapping out feudal society in a single page, Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 89.

<sup>166</sup> DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 187.

for analysis and how that analysis took place. Secondly, the question of why the thesis is structured chronologically will be tackled and how the themes of chapters map and do not map onto this schema. Finally, the benefits and limitations of this periodization will be explored.

Before any analysis took place of cinematic artefacts, the movies themselves had to be selected. There are several aspects to the process of textual selection that should be highlighted. Firstly, there is the question of genre. Part of the argument of chapter two is to lay out a justification for the use of action films throughout the thesis as they can be read as the successor to the traditional combat films of World War Two, thus participating in a long history of politico-cultural interaction. This will be argued through in a chronological fashion from the World War Two era to the present day that traces the evolution of the genre over time following Jeanine Basinger's excellent work *The World War II Combat Film*. Secondly, once the justifications for genre selection have been established, there is the question of specific texts. This thesis seeks to explore how conditions of success emerge from the end of wars assemblage during the War on Terror, as such, the vast majority of films that will be analysed in chapters three through six are from after the events of 9/11 – though some older movies will be touched upon. As Lene Hansen argues, 'the majority of texts should be taken from the time under study, but historical material that traces the genealogy of the dominant representations should also be included.'<sup>167</sup> Notwithstanding Hansen's focus on representation here, this remains a useful and productive approach. Having established the genre of cinema to be analysed, as well as the chronological range in which they were released, I use a range of tools to ascertain which films in this genre are best suited to analysis.

Between 2002 and 2015, the British Film Institute (previously the UK Film Council) states that there were a total of 6,221 films released in the UK (for a week or more), averaging 518 films a year, a number that has been steadily increasing over the past decade.<sup>168</sup> The BFI define films partly on the basis of their genre. While they admit that their categories are imprecise, if we take a broad approach to the action genre (including the BFI's categories of action, thriller, and adventure) it is clear that the films I analyse in subsequent chapters make up a significant proportion of releases and box office revenue. Between 2002 and 2014, the broadly conceived action genre made up an average of 18% (1,143) of total releases and 25.4% of box office

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<sup>167</sup> Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 82.

<sup>168</sup> 'Statistical Yearbook', British Film Institute, accessed 14 July 2016, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/education-research/film-industry-statistics-research/statistical-yearbook> I have not used the BFI Statistical Yearbook to determine which films to analyse because it does not take into account international audiences or box offices, nor does it collate reviews by critics and viewers.



revenue (£3.2 billion). Indeed, the BFI's own narrower categorisation of action was in the top three genres by box office revenue for eleven of the thirteen years (fourth in 2005 and 2010), making it a relevant study subject. It is necessary to have a process whereby the large number of films released during these years are winnowed down to a more manageable number for analysis. *iMDB*'s "MovieMeter," *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Metacritic*, and *Box Office Mojo* are some of the websites that collate professional reviews, viewer ratings, and box office success often resulting in a score out of 10 or 100. While these are undeniably crude tools for determining which films are useful for analysis, they allowed me to consider audience and reception. While it would be possible to undertake a large-*n* study of the action genre in the twenty-first century and use this corpus to analyse dominant themes, tropes, narratives and so forth it would not allow me to investigate the potential affects that particular moments of cinematic intensity induce and their political impacts. Such a study may prove to be illuminating and interesting but it would require a radically different research design involving different theories, methods, questions, and arguments.

Despite using the metrics provided by these websites, the BFI's data, and the demands of academic study, it is still necessary to watch a large number of films for each chapter as detailed in the filmography. Over the course of my research I analysed in depth over one hundred films specifically for the thesis, as well as innumerable others that I watched in less detail for both professional and personal reasons. Furthermore, it is inevitable that a degree of selection bias and personal preference are inherent in any decision regarding the selection and analysis of artefacts. It is useful to explain my approach to watching a large number of films for each chapter and how I select those to be explored in depth. As outlined earlier in this chapter, it is about exploring how film works to produce affective encounters with audiences that allow for conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage. Using the metrics outlined above, I watch a number of films (usually somewhere between ten and thirty) for each time period and keep detailed notes on plot, imagery, language, and tropes. I also utilise the film studies literature in order to assess cinematic techniques such as colouration, shot composition, montage and so forth in order to ascertain what role particular directorial choices might be playing in order to induce affects and encounters in audiences. In social scientific terms, I "code" the films according to these categories.

I had decided to structure the thesis chronologically early in the design process, and the research proceeded sequentially – beginning with the history of the combat and action genres in chapter two through 9/11 to the Iraq troop surge in chapter three and so forth. For each chapter, once

the large number of films from the period under discussion were collected, viewed, and coded, it was necessary to narrow down the number even further. As mentioned above, and explored earlier in this chapter, the approach of this thesis is to ascertain what potential affects moments of cinematic intensity induce and how these affects produce particular conditions of success as emergent properties of the end of war assemblage, not a corpus analysis of Hollywood cinema. Within each group of films identified, some movies were more similar than others and as such could “hang together” as a coherent group. This similarity was usually along lines of plot, mise-en-scene, visuality, and potential affects and allowed for the thematic profiles of each chapter to emerge: American exceptionalism, technology, urbanity, sacrifice, genre inversion, and temporality.

These themes arose from the viewing of movies released during the period, which provided the conditions of success discussed in this thesis. In other words, I did not start the research process with a pre-determined list of conditions that were important to the ending of war and select movies to fit these themes, but vice versa. That being said, each of the themes analysed, in chapters three and four in particular, does conform to historically important aspects of US foreign policy and warfare that makes them relevant to the end of wars assemblage. For example, the discussion of urbanity in chapter four mirrors the urban focus of the troop surge in Iraq at the time. These themes represent some of the conditions of success that emerge from the assemblage, but are not exhaustive. I am not presenting a definitive list of conditions of success either from the time under discussion or generally, neither am I approaching these conditions as *a priori* to the cinematic analysis, and nor am I suggesting that these conditions were the only significant ones in these particular time periods. Rather, I am exploring how movies within a certain genre and from a certain time contribute to the emergence of conditions of possibility that allow wars to be brought to an end.

Once the movies for a particular time period had been viewed, analysed, roughly categorised, and their affects traced I analysed how they resonate with contemporaneous political speech. To do this I analysed over four hundred speeches, press releases, statements, and press conferences of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama from 9/11 until 2014. While there are many more political sources that could be analysed, the focus on presidential speech is for similar reasons to the selection of the action genre: presidential speeches and statements reach a lot of people; are prominent in culture, politics, and the news media; and often have the most important consequences for direction of US foreign policy. As Jeffrey Cohen notes, ‘Mere presidential mentions of a policy area seem to elicit a public response, thus, presidents do not

have to resort to substantive arguments to sway public opinion.’<sup>169</sup> In other words, Presidential speech has an outsized effect on public opinion generally and within the context of this thesis, the focus that presidents place on articulations of success in conflict can stabilise or destabilise their emergence and the assemblage. Presidential speech was analysed to ascertain whether the themes that emerged cinematically were resonant with political discourses. Again, the starting point for the thematization of the chapters was the movies – not the political actions or discourses. However, had themes been identified that were absent from political discourse (say, the cliché romantic love interest so common in the action genre) then their relevance for the end of wars would necessarily be much less.<sup>170</sup>

As mentioned above, I had decided to structure the thesis and research chronologically early on in the process and this has necessarily shaped the structure, meaning, and reading experience of the final product. The periods under discussion in each chapter are not, however, entirely arbitrary but track important events and campaigns in the War on Terror. Chapter three begins from just before 9/11 and concludes with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The period under discussion in chapter four tracks the post-invasion situation in Iraq until the troop surge of 2007. Chapter five begins with the election of Barack Obama to the White House and the challenging of theretofore dominant political discourses. Chapter six takes the thesis from NATO Intervention in Libya until the beginning of Operation Inherent Resolve (the US-led campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria) and the reframing of the War on Terror away from Al-Qaeda and towards ISIS.

The themes discussed in each chapter – American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, urbanity, inversion, and temporality – do not necessarily map neatly on to the time period under discussion and neither are they meant to. It is not that American exceptionalism was only prevalent, popular, or pertinent between 2001 and 2003 or that a linear temporality only came into being from 2011 to 2014. American exceptionalism has been part of US culture and warfare from Winthrop’s sermon to Mayer’s “The Awakening” to *Captain America*. And as Thomas Mahnken notes, ‘American strategic culture was...imbued with exceptionalism...and

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<sup>169</sup> Jeffrey E. Cohen, ‘Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda’, *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (1995): 87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111759>; See also Kathleen M. McGraw, Samuel Best, and Richard Timpone, “‘What They Say or What They Do?’ The Impact of Elite Explanation and Policy Outcomes on Public Opinion”, *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (1995): 53–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111757>; And James N. Druckman and Justin W. Holmes, ‘Does Presidential Rhetoric Matter? Priming and Presidential Approval’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2004): 755–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2004.00222.x>.

<sup>170</sup> Though not necessarily entirely irrelevant either.

technology-intensive approaches to combat' from its earliest days.<sup>171</sup> The linear framing of the War on Terror discussed in chapter six was happening from 9/11. Urbanity as discussed in chapter four was part of political discourse right through the War on Terror – from New York and Kabul to Baghdad and Benghazi. Similarly, these themes and tropes were not necessarily cinematically *sui generis* at these times: sacrifice for instance is a common trope in World War II combat movies, as discussed in the next chapter and has a long history in Western culture.<sup>172</sup> Genre evolution and inversion, as discussed in chapter five, is always part of the formation of cultural categories.<sup>173</sup> Again, sometimes these themes resonate more deeply with the time under discussion such as urbanity and the troop surge,<sup>174</sup> or exceptionalism in the aftermath of 9/11 and the post-apocalyptic cinema analysed in chapter four was perhaps more common in those years than previously or subsequently.

But not only are these themes not necessarily unique to the time under question, the chronological periodization of the thesis is not a reflection of the end of wars assemblage's progression. It is not that the assemblage moves from simple to complex, or from stable to unstable, or from low entropy to high entropy.<sup>175</sup> As noted above, the themes under discussion in each chapter are acting on the assemblage through the same and different artefacts right through the entire period that the thesis covers, as well as before and after. Similarly, forces of stabilisation and destabilisation are simultaneous and, again, may emerge from the same artefact – a movie like *Inglorious Basterds*, discussed in chapter five, is both stabilising and destabilising, sometimes in the same scene.

There are several reasons for the periodization of the thesis. As discussed earlier, it was built into the research design and aided in the research process by narrowing down potential artefacts from the thousands to the dozens and it was also hoped that it would make the reading experience clearer and more coherent. Furthermore, analysing movies chronologically is an established method within film studies as genre is an evolving category and filmmakers can

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<sup>171</sup> Thomas Mahnken, 'U.S. Strategic and Organizational Subcultures', in *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, ed. Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 69–70; For a strategic debate on whether technology is crucial to victory see Chris Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), 106–8.

<sup>172</sup> Militarily, the focus on full-force protection in contemporary US warfare might also highlight the extra import given to sacrifice. See Antulio J. Echevarria, *Reconsidering the American Way of War* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 148.

<sup>173</sup> As Neale notes, films 'frequently hybridize and overlap, thus blurring the boundaries of the genres concerned.' Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

<sup>174</sup> See, for instance, Echevarria, *Reconsidering the American Way of War*, 156.

<sup>175</sup> For a discussion of the difference between theoretical entropy increases and practical concerns in both thermodynamics and assemblages see Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 58–60.

reflect on, build upon, and develop ideas in movies that appeared beforehand.<sup>176</sup> Within the literature on assemblages, affect, and emergence, John Protevi's *Political Affect* and Manuel DeLanda's *Philosophy and Simulation* follow broadly chronological or evolutionary paths. Even DeLanda's avowedly nonlinear *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* has a broadly chronological structure. DeLanda poses the question of whether this contradicts his goal of exploring the possibilities of nonlinear history and answers that 'a nonlinear conception of history has absolutely nothing to do with a style of presentation, as if one could truly capture the nonequilibrium dynamics of human historical processes by jumping back and forth among the centuries.'<sup>177</sup> None of these works make the case that the object under analysis progresses towards an ultimate end or that their evolution is strictly linear and nor should this thesis be read as such. However, the structure does have limitations and drawbacks as will be discussed momentarily.

The main reason, however, was to analytically divide processes of stabilisation from processes of destabilisation while acknowledging that they are, or at least can be, simultaneous with one another. As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, I argue that four conditions of success emerged from the assemblage between 2001 and 2007 which is what chapters three and four analyse. These are not the only possible conditions of success, but they are the ones identified from the corpus under analysis here. Between 2007 and 2014 it is certainly probable that other conditions of success emerge from the assemblage, but the purpose of chapters five and six is not to trace what they might be, but rather to assess the resilience of the previously enumerated conditions of success to processes of destabilisation and change. 2007 is taken as the point of potential bifurcation primarily because of the campaign and election of Barack Obama. Campaigning as he did on "hope and change," and with his oft-touted opposition to the Iraq War, it was certainly possible that this could resonate with popular culture in such a way as to destabilise the assemblage and the conditions of success that are its emergent properties. As DeLanda notes, 'when a system switches from one stable state to another...minor fluctuations may play a crucial role in deciding the outcome.'<sup>178</sup> As these chapters will demonstrate, however, this was not the case and both cinema and Obama's political rhetoric functioned to reassert the four conditions of success and perhaps even stabilise and strengthen them further.

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<sup>176</sup> See, for instance, Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003; Binns, *The Hollywood War Film*; Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London: IBTauris, 2000); Timothy Corrigan, *American Cinema of the 2000s: Themes and Variations*, Screen Decades (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Prince, *Firestorm*.

<sup>177</sup> DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, 14–15.

<sup>178</sup> DeLanda, 14.

Despite these caveats, it is inevitable that the research design and subsequent structure will have some drawbacks. There is the potential that the stabilisation and destabilisation processes that are analytically divided here will be read as singular and chronologically determined forces rather than as multiple. This is the possible implication that stabilisation and emergence needs to occur before destabilisation, critique and decoding can work. Or, within the language, that an assemblage needs to be fully territorialised before it can be deterritorialised. Rather than this, assemblages are based on interconnecting multiplicities of forms, forces, objects, practices, and processes and are not a static entity but always in a process of flux and change. Instead of a stable being, it is a fluid becoming. There is also the limitation that it might appear that the themes discussed in certain chapters are specific, unique, or particular to that time period. While, as discussed above, it may be the case that there may be certain temporal resonances at play these themes will always play out across the entire time period discussed in the thesis as well as historically and in the future. The themes analysed herein emerged from the movies under analysis rather than from any pre-determined sense of what would be appropriate conditions of success within the War on Terror. Each condition of success does, however, speak to relevant issues within contemporary warfare, and particularly within contemporary Western-led counter-insurgency warfare. The fact that these themes were identified firstly from movies speaks to the enduring power of popular culture, and cinema in particular, to reflect, shape, and co-constitute the reality of International Relations.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

Building on the idea that the end of wars can be productively thought of as an assemblage, this chapter and thesis seek to develop an understanding of how this assemblage allows certain conditions of success to emerge through politico-cultural interaction. The connections that exist between political and cultural artefacts can be thought of as contingent, non-linear, material and discursive, and formed through intensive affective encounters. The affective encounters inculcated by cinematic artefacts work with concurrent political narratives around conflict in order to produce the four conditions of success that are to be analysed in this thesis: American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and the city. These conditions are not, however, static and unchanging. They are they product of particular affective processes and are subjected to forces that strengthen and weaken them. The chronological structure of this thesis is designed, in part, to trace the contours of the assemblage in order to ascertain how resilient it is to change while accepting that these processes are concurrent with its formation. The affective encounters that are induced by cinema and politics are products of both the internalities of the artefacts in a particular sense (shot, lighting, editing, trope, language, narrative etc.) but they are also the

externalities that allow for their connection between, across and through each other. The important distinction to bear in mind is that the connections between politics and culture are not dependent on the cultural meaning of political artefacts or the political meaning of cultural artefacts as they might be defined by an analyst. As such, this research takes a different conceptual and practical path to an intertextual one. The affective encounters between screen and viewer are embodied, contingent, and highly intensive. Encounters such as that between cinema and cinema viewer or political speech and 6 o'clock news viewer can create affective responses that allow for conditions of success to emerge and their political enactment to be accepted. In line with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of being and becoming, I argue that these political becomings do not necessarily allow for revolutionary potential but in fact work to stabilise, or territorialise, the assemblage that is formed through politico-cultural interaction and forges the conditions of victory in the War on Terror.

This is because the assemblage, while being composed of the various parts that constitute it, also has the effect of being able to take these various components and make something that is more than the sum of their parts. In the case of the end of wars assemblage that I am analysing in this thesis, it is my contention that the political possibility that emerges from its assembling processes are the conditions of success necessary to conclude conflicts in the War on Terror. Being even more specific than this, I would argue that the effect of the assemblage is so strong that it allows for these conditions to become highly resilient. Before moving into an exploration of how these conditions of success emerge from the encounters between audiences and cinema, the following chapter will position the action genre within a broader historical context that traces its roots back to World War II.

## Chapter Two: War and Action

*“What do we do now?  
We start all over.”  
The Green Berets (1968)*

### 2.1 Introduction

Before we come to an analysis of the end of wars assemblage, and how its conditions of success emerge from affective cinematic encounters during the War on Terror, it is first useful to situate the analytical objects of this thesis – action movies – within their cinematic and genre history. By tracing the evolution of the contemporary Hollywood action genre and how it shares certain affinities with the older combat movie we can engage more fully with the modern cinema that I analyse through the remainder of the thesis. Understanding the historical antecedents to current phenomena is a useful way to critically engage with and analyse those phenomena. When we consider the long history of direct cooperation and mutual influence between politics and cinema, from Nazi propaganda in the 1930s to the very close cooperation between Washington and Hollywood in *Zero Dark Thirty*, an understanding of how cinema and politics have interacted and mutually shaped both one another and our understanding of conflict historically is a useful way to contextualise and situate this thesis.<sup>179</sup>

Furthermore, by engaging with cinematic history and film theory, it should be possible to deepen our understanding of the contemporary end of wars assemblage. It is important to bear in mind that the resonance between culture and politics, or cinema and conflict in particular, is not confined to the contemporary era of the War on Terror, but as this chapter will show it has existed in various forms since at least World War Two. As such, the contemporary end of wars assemblage is the product of historical processes that this chapter will help, in part, to trace. Just as Sara Ahmed notes that a table is a form of assemblage itself with emergent properties (commodity, function, tool for writing and so forth) that are the products of historical processes and must be understood in this frame; so too is the end of wars assemblage a product of historical processes that help to forge its emergent properties – in our case the creation of conditions of success.<sup>180</sup> Perhaps more interestingly, the affinities between the films analysed in this chapter and the politics of their contemporaneous conflicts match the thematic typologies

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<sup>179</sup> Joshua Keating, ‘Is “Zero Dark Thirty” Propaganda?’, *Foreign Policy Blogs* (blog), 28 August 2012, [http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/28/is\\_zero\\_dark\\_thirty\\_propaganda](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/28/is_zero_dark_thirty_propaganda).

<sup>180</sup> Sara Ahmed, ‘Orientations Matter’, in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 239–43.



that subsequent chapters discuss: American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity. While the conditions of success outlined in this thesis were not pre-determined before the research commenced and emerged from the cinematic space, they all have longer histories than is perhaps implied in subsequent chapters. This is one aspect of their emergence that might contribute to their resilience when subjected to forces of destabilisation as discussed in more detail in chapters five and six. In order to explore this further, this chapter will proceed in two parts. Firstly, I will expand upon the necessity of a brief historical positioning in order to contextualise the remainder of the thesis within the lineage of a genre. Secondly, I will offer an outline of how the genre of the war film has developed since World War Two until the present day. The core argument being made throughout is that the resonance between cinema and politics that the remainder of the thesis discusses with reference to the War on Terror and the contemporary action genre are not *sui generis* but rather are part of an ongoing process of interaction. The historical existence of these resonances contributes to the intensity of connection that shapes the end of wars assemblage and its emergent properties today. Furthermore, this chapter also traces how contemporary action cinema draws on elements of the historic combat film thus maintaining the intensity of connection that has been developing since at least the Second World War. Ultimately, this chapter will demonstrate that understanding genre, cinematic history, and how resonant intensity has a particular past aids in our understanding of how the end of wars assemblage functions during the War on Terror. Furthermore, how genre functions within that assemblage and how the historical nature of the politico-cultural interaction will be shown to contribute to our understanding of what follows in subsequent chapters with relation to the endings of conflict.

Charting the development of such texts, being aware of their particular histories, their particular genre lineage, and their antecedents as well as the history of the end of wars assemblage will help to illuminate and allow us to engage with modern contexts with more historical depth than would otherwise be allowed. What I hope to highlight through this brief overview of the history of the war film is that analysing cultural artefacts in temporal isolation, unaware of their historical legacies, leads to a situation where those cultural artefacts are not exploited to their full potential. While Deleuze and Guattari call the rhizome an ‘antigenealogy,’ being aware of the conventions of genre, as well as their variations, will help those interested in the interactions of cinema and politics to better understand, examine, and critically analyse cultural artefacts.<sup>181</sup> Given that this phenomenon of politics being influenced by popular culture is not a recent one,

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<sup>181</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

a historical perspective on the resonance between these two sites will not only ground my research historically, but will also function to aid in exploring how the end of wars assemblage functions in contemporary cinema and conflicts. Ultimately this will aid in the exploration and development of an understanding of how culture and politics interact to allow conditions of success to emerge.

## 2.2 Historical perspective

Basinger, in her seminal book on the World War Two combat film, suggests that politico-cultural interactions are more symbiotic than many imagine:

A famous newsreel of World War II shows General Eisenhower going among his troops on the eve of D-Day, talking to them, laughing with them, just being one of them. Did he learn to do that at West Point? From reading *The Red Badge of Courage*? From his natural instincts as a born leader of men? Or did he learn it from going to the movies? <sup>182</sup>

Beginning the more empirical section of this thesis with a historical overview of the development of the action genre is useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps to advance the argument that the action genre is an important and useful site of political analysis. As will be argued throughout this chapter, action movies are not just a dominant genre by box office receipts, as noted above, but emerge from and draw upon the tropes of the combat film. As Tzvetan Todorov noted in 1976, new genres emerge from old ones: ‘A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination...it is a system in continual transformation, and the question of origins cannot be disassociated, historically, from the field of the genres themselves.’<sup>183</sup> Given the impact that war films may have had on politics, exemplified by the Basinger quote above, it can be argued that action movies have the same potential to create conditions of possibility for certain political actions today. Secondly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the end of wars assemblage did not just come into being after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 but rather has a history, development, and emergence as a product of particular processes. As Patton notes when discussing the application of Deleuze and Guattari to political philosophy, ‘Concepts have a history...[which] therefore includes the variations they undergo in their migration from one problem to another.’<sup>184</sup> Thus, there is no single and unchanging assemblage of the end of wars but rather an ongoing development of it. Understanding the history of the cinematic aspect of this

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<sup>182</sup> Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>183</sup> Tzvetan Todorov and Richard M. Berrong, ‘The Origin of Genres’, *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1976): 161, <https://doi.org/10.2307/468619>.

<sup>184</sup> Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*.

assemblage is the purpose of this chapter.

Furthermore, as well as being able to trace the historical processes that allow for the contemporary emergence of conditions of success, understanding how the action genre itself has developed helps us appreciate the genre more both analytically and personally. Indeed, genre itself could be considered as an assemblage in its own right. While still an ‘individual singularity,’<sup>185</sup> it nonetheless connects with other assemblages – assemblages of popular culture, of particular movies, of shots, techniques, styles, and narratives. As DeLanda notes, ‘Although each assemblage is a unique historical entity it always belongs to a population of more or less similar assemblages.’<sup>186</sup> Thus to trace the evolution of the action genre as assemblage is to trace part of the evolution of the end of wars assemblage. Exploring the history, development, and assemblage of genre is not just an interesting detour – though hopefully it will also be that – but it serves an important purpose in the context of this thesis. It further strengthens the argument that the production of emergent properties through politico-interaction is not *sui generis* although what those emergent properties are have changed over time. It also helps us to understand the historical context in which contemporary cinema functions as popular culture and art form. Furthermore, arguing that politico-cultural interaction has a history supports the central point that contemporary cinema has a political effect.

It is true that taking a large number of texts from the past eighty years of film to trace its history and current implications comes with issues such as diluting our understanding of how politics and film interact in the post-9/11 world as well as providing a tendency towards attempting to formulate general rules. In order to avoid this scenario, I am basing my selection of historical texts on the excellent filmography provided by Basinger in *The World War II Combat Film*. Rather than examining the vast number of combat films made between 1939 and the present day, I have chosen to focus on a small number of films that Basinger has identified as key texts in the genre’s development, as well as supplementing this with some of my own choices.<sup>187</sup> What I hope to achieve is a close reading of cinematic and political texts that is constantly informed by their history. Inevitably I, as a socialised, historicised, and encultured person can never fully step outside my particular time and history to examine texts entirely objectively. Thus, some degree of synthesis between understanding historical texts as artefacts with

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<sup>185</sup> DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, 28.

<sup>186</sup> DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 186.

<sup>187</sup> Perhaps somewhat selfishly, this will also allow me to avoid at least some of what Basinger calls the ‘donkey work’ of ‘viewing a great many lousy and often irrelevant films.’ Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 11.

connections in their own rights and of their own time as well as part of the process of assemblage formation that has led to our current moment must be achieved.

Having explored why a historical perspective is useful for my own research project and discussed the methodologies that will be used in such an approach, I will now explore the history of the action genre through a number of films. What follows is a discussion of five films that serve as useful mile markers in the evolution of films about war and mirror the progression of US military action over the past seventy years. They deal with World War Two, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the later stages of the Cold War, and the liberal interventions in the post-Cold War era. As will be further demonstrated, in the current period of the War on Terror, the action movie has taken on the mantle of the combat film rather than films about the war itself. The films under study are as follows: for World War Two, *Bataan* (1943), for Korea *Fixed Bayonets!* (1951), for Vietnam, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987),<sup>188</sup> for the late Cold War *Red Dawn* (1984)<sup>189</sup> and for the post-Cold War, pre-War on Terror era we have *Black Hawk Down* (2001). What I hope to demonstrate is that historical politico-cultural interactions have shaped the modern political and cultural landscape and the interactions between them. Furthermore, by exploring the conventions and politics at work in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) in the final section of the chapter I hope to explain and further justify my choice of using action films rather than war films for the contemporary chapters of my thesis. It is important to note here that this chapter is a contextual and historical one that has addressed questions of textual selection, traces the evolution of genre, justifies the selection of texts and does not necessarily engage with the films discussed here to map their contemporaneous connections to politics to understand the creation of the conditions of victory necessary for ongoing political violence and the end of conflicts.

### **2.3 *Bataan*: The genesis of genre**

*Bataan* tells the last-stand story of a group of American soldiers ordered to hold a bridge in the Philippines against the Japanese in order to buy time for the retreat of US and allied forces. While many of the conventions that this film establishes such as ‘a mixed group of types, a

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<sup>188</sup> It should be noted that *Full Metal Jacket* was not released during the Vietnam War but critics almost universally panned films released during that conflict that dealt explicitly with it (for example, *The Green Berets*). Furthermore, movies about Vietnam but set elsewhere (such as *MASH*) cannot properly be seen as Vietnam War combat movies. *Ibid.*, 213

<sup>189</sup> *Red Dawn* might be a bit of an outlier among these films. However, it is an exemplary cinematic representation of late Cold War tensions and fears under the Reagan administration. Furthermore, it is one of the few films made during the Cold War that actually depicts direct combat between the USSR and the US.

person in their midst who is not enthusiastic about the combat, a leader who dies, a hero out of necessity, death of valued members, and much more' existed in various forms beforehand, *Bataan* is the first film to tie them together and essentially establishes the genre conventions of the combat film that then informs subsequent films that I work with through the rest of this thesis.<sup>190</sup> As Basinger writes:

*Bataan* is clearly the seminal film. It marks the point at which a film appears that contains the primary characteristics of the genre – a film totally set in the combat situation, with no escapes or releases of any sort.<sup>191</sup>

Basinger further describes *Bataan* as 'the definition [of the World War Two combat film] clarified, focused, and presented with passion.'<sup>192</sup> Basinger presents us with a typology of the perfect Second World War combat film that includes certain primary elements, though she also takes care to say that such a perfect film does not exist. These central elements and genre conventions are an opening military reference; a military adviser; a dedication (often to the troops); a diverse group of men, led by a hero, who undertake an important military mission; one of the group will be an observer or commentator (a journalist, diary-keeper, letter writer, or narrator); the hero will have leadership thrust upon him through the death or incapacitation of his superior; there is a clear military objective; the narrative alternates between action and repose, or night and day, or safety and danger and so forth; the enemy is revealed; there is military iconography (uniforms, weapons, materiel, chains of command); conflict will break out within the group; rituals are enacted (holidays, funerals, mail calls); there is death; a climactic battle; resolution; and "The End".<sup>193</sup> Clearly *Bataan* is an interesting film in terms of the development of this long-lasting genre, but it is also interesting from the perspective of narrative. There are the obvious sections of the film that deal with the question of 'why we fight,' such as when Sgt Bill Dane (Robert Taylor) explains the objective and why it is necessary to the volunteers; the noble sacrifice of Lt Steve Bentley (George Murphy) who, being mortally wounded, flies a plane load of explosives into a bridge to thwart the Japanese; the conversion of the unwilling, unable, or cranky soldier into an efficient weapon of war such as Pvt Matthew Hardy (Philip Terry) who had enlisted as a non-combatant in the medical corps but in a state of delirium, he realises that he needs to embrace combat and begins throwing grenades at the Japanese who eventually kill him.

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<sup>190</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 42.

<sup>191</sup> Basinger, 37.

<sup>192</sup> Basinger, 51.

<sup>193</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 67–70.

However *Bataan*, as the genesis point of the genre, also points towards deeper political problems and questions than these less subtle, more propagandist segments. The group dynamics of the characters in this film, and many others in the genre, suggest that the individualism of which the US is so proud must be subsumed within the group in the face of existential danger. As Basinger writes on this dynamic:

These men obviously represent the American melting pot, but the representation is not a simple-minded one. Our strength is our weakness and vice versa. We are a mongrel nation- ragtail, unprepared, disorganized, quarrelsome among ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good, and from these separate needs and backgrounds we bring a feisty determination. No one leads us who is not strong, and our individualism is not set aside for any small cause. Once it is set aside, however, our group power is extreme.<sup>194</sup>

It is only when the threat to the nation, or the group acting as a microcosm of it, is existential that we are willing to place our individualism within the context of the broader community. Rather than sacrificing individual freedom, we see that this aspect of exceptionalism finds its greatest articulation in the structure of a group. This is a similar trope to *Spider-Man*, discussed in the following chapter, where Spider-Man himself becomes more powerful when working with the support of New York. There also appears to be a strong didactic element to what we see in *Bataan*: what is shown on screen can be read as propagandist in nature. Given that *Bataan* was released as the Second World War was ongoing, it seems reasonable to infer that it articulates a particular propagandist vision of what the correct response is to a global conflict and national emergency. This is articulated through a letter writing scene where Sgt Dane dictates “we figure the men who died here may have done more than we’ll ever know to save this whole world...it don’t matter where a man dies, as long as he dies for freedom.”<sup>195</sup> This is strengthened by the racial element of the conflict in the Pacific through racism towards the Japanese (“You better know that those no-tail baboons out there are itching [for us],” and the epithet “dirty dirty dirty dirty.”).<sup>196</sup> This is a theme that can be tracked through other conflicts and films within the combat genre.<sup>197</sup> However, in the post-9/11 cinematic landscape that the rest of this thesis works with, these motifs of overt didacticism largely do not appear in films that are set within the War on Terror, nor within the action genre. However, as this chapter demonstrates, the action film can be thought of as functioning in a similar way vis-a-vis the

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<sup>194</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 51.

<sup>195</sup> Tay Garnett, *Bataan* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943).

<sup>196</sup> Garnett.

<sup>197</sup> The Chinese who shoot American medics in *Fixed Bayonets!*, the “gooks” of *Full Metal Jacket*, the “skinnies” of *Black Hawk Down*, or the “Hajis” in *The Hurt Locker* are all examples of racist elements in the combat genre.

War on Terror as combat films functioned in relation to the particular conflict they depict rather than films that are set in contemporary combat zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. That being said, the action genre that I engage with through the rest of the thesis does not necessarily have the same propagandist or racist nature to it, or at least it does not explicitly present us with one. Nonetheless, action movies can arguably trace their history to *Bataan*. But if they are not “pure” combat films, how do they function within the end of wars assemblage and what do the narrative and genre tropes that they exhibit work to do? As will be shown through the majority of this thesis, the contemporary heirs to the World War Two combat film work through affective encounters to allow for the emergence of conditions of success. While not necessarily employing the tropes of “why we fight,” the strengthening of an assemblage that allows such combat to take place is still there. Looking back at a historical film such as *Bataan* and the genre it created, then, allows us to pose more and different questions than if we took contemporary films at face value, without the benefit of their historical lineage.

#### **2.4 *Fixed Bayonets!*: Continuity and change**

Obviously, the next major war that the US experienced after World War Two was the Korean War. Coming hot on the heels of World War Two, it is not surprising that the film studios reworked the same plots, characters and settings, as well as imagery and tropes from their successful World War Two films. As Thomas Schatz notes, ‘the World War II combat film would remain a significant Hollywood genre for decades to come, utterly dominating war-film production through the Korean and Vietnam wars.’<sup>198</sup> This is further reinforced by Monaco who uses the studio system of Hollywood’s Golden Age whereby studios were ‘operated as efficiently run factories’ to explain that they produced very few unique films but rather particular ‘types, patterns, conventions, and genres.’<sup>199</sup> Films, then, were commodities to be sold rather than art to be created and, having invested thousands or millions of dollars in the production of many World War Two combat films that sold well, studios saw no need to change the production line to make something new and untested. There are only two major differences between a film such as *Bataan*, discussed above and *Fixed Bayonets!* which was described at the time as ‘the best war movie since *Bataan*.’<sup>200</sup> One is that the Americans are fighting against Chinese Communists (interestingly, the North Koreans are either not a threat in Korean War films made during the conflict, or they are rapidly replaced by the Chinese who are presented

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<sup>198</sup> Thomas Schatz, ‘World War II and the “War Film”’, in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 124, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08139>.

<sup>199</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 267–72.

<sup>200</sup> Manny Farber, ‘Fixed Bayonets!’, *The Nation*, 5 January 1952, 19.

as more sinister and capable than their neighbours) rather than Japanese imperialists or German Nazis. The other is that the nature of leadership becomes an increasingly important narrative device in the development of both character and plot. Both these similarities and differences can tell us a lot about this phase in the development of the war film genre, and can also help us to further interrogate cultural artefacts that are more contemporary.

Starting with the similarities between Korean War films and those of World War Two it is useful to bear in mind Basinger's description of the Hollywood studio system as being a place of thrift, conservation, and recycling:

Hollywood was, contrary to popular opinion, a frugal place. Plots and characters and events were re-used. Audiences presumably were glad enough to see old friends back on the screen doing the old familiar things...Useful things were – tough sergeants, raw recruits, old veterans, diary-keeping writers, colourful immigrant types; mail calls, Christmas celebrations, barroom brawls; “dead men” crying out to be brought in, and, when rescued, dying anyway; brave men going up in planes to sacrifice themselves. The list is long, but the important thing is the context in which the conventions are used. From the most successful films, producers, writers, directors et al. took the most memorable parts and brought them forward for the new war.<sup>201</sup>

While the quote above is referring to how the World War Two combat genre was forged from the films of World War I and the interwar years, it is interesting to note that, with a few exceptions (a diary-keeper, mail calls, Christmas, brawls, and aerial sacrifice), most of the tropes and devices that Basinger refers to here are also present in many films of the Korean era. We have a group of men ordered to perform a rear guard action while the regiment retreats across a bridge; the officer commanding the squad is killed early in the film leaving the Sergeant in command; the weather, elements, and terrain are as much of a problem as the enemy; and there are sacrifices and death – all of which are present in *Bataan* as well as many other World War Two films. We can first take from this that Hollywood does not like change, especially when it might lose money by potentially alienating audiences, and that genre is a living entity more prone to gradual evolution than radical shifts and departures. This gradual evolution of genre over time and its effect on the end of wars assemblage is further explored in chapter five through the inversion of *Inglourious Basterds* and *Hancock* as well as the pastiche of *RED*, *The Expendables*, and *The A-Team*. We can perhaps also infer from *Fixed Bayonets!* that the Korean War was largely seen by the Hollywood studios as a remake of World War Two rather than a sequel. By this I mean that the major plot elements, characters, narrative devices, tropes, and imagery are all largely the same but there are subtle variations in order to ‘update the franchise’

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<sup>201</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 50.



of the World War Two film. These differences, rather than the similarities, tell us more about both the evolution of the genre and the slowly changing nature of warfare that will encroach upon Vietnam and beyond. Furthermore, as Geoff King notes, these similarities can explain aspects of contemporary action cinema as well. He suggests that more modern war films such as *Saving Private Ryan* repackage the spectacle of action movies in a more “serious or respectable” way, thus demonstrating that the overlap between action and war cinema, and the genre lineage of the films under discussion here leads towards the style of cinema that will be engaged with in the remainder of this thesis.<sup>202</sup>

Despite the similarities between *Fixed Bayonets!* and *Bataan* it is clear from the outset that they do not deal with the same war. Other clues to the nature of the conflict being depicted are also peppered throughout the film such as the question ‘They told me this would be a police action,’ followed by the reply ‘Why didn’t they send the cops?’<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, while films from Korea and World War Two share many of the same plot devices and narrative structure, one element of *Fixed Bayonets!* that is new for Korea is Corporal Denno’s (Richard Baseheart) absolute reluctance to lead. This reluctance to lead in wartime is also seen in *Retreat, Hell!* (1952) when the main character, Captain Paul Hansen (Richard Carlson) is reluctant to be in command of a company rather than a platoon. Furthermore, when he asks his commanding officer permission to visit his family at night he argues that: ‘I’m just a family man,’ to which the Lt. Colonel replies ‘You’re a marine, Captain Hansen, and don’t you forget it.’<sup>204</sup> While command was often thrust on characters, mostly Sergeants, in World War Two films, it was taken stoically and even with a hint of pride and duty, rather than being something to avoid at all costs. Indeed in *Bataan* the Captain voluntarily delegates authority to Sgt Dane saying ‘Anytime you got an idea while we’re together on this job, give your orders to the men. You don’t have to waste time asking me first, trying to make me look good. And any time I give an order that sounds wrong to you, tell me why.’<sup>205</sup> This motif of leadership as something to be avoided is developed clearly in *Fixed Bayonets!* with the opening dialogue dealing with the burdens of command: ‘It takes more than brains to be a general. You’ve got to have the guts to lead.’<sup>206</sup> The platoon that is left behind on rear guard duty consists of Lieutenant Gibbs (Craig Hill), two Sergeants – Rock and Lonergan (Gene Evans and Michael O’Shea respectively), Corporal Denno, and various Privates.

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<sup>202</sup> King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 119.

<sup>203</sup> Samuel Fuller, *Fixed Bayonets!* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951).

<sup>204</sup> Joseph H. Lewis, *Retreat, Hell!* (Warner Bros., 1952).

<sup>205</sup> Lewis.

<sup>206</sup> Fuller, *Fixed Bayonets!*

It is clearly obvious from early on in the film that Cpl Denno is both unwilling to lead and that he is nevertheless going to have it thrust upon him.<sup>207</sup> It is established that, while he can attack a group, he finds it difficult to kill an individual; that he went to officer school but flunked out due to a training accident where he accidentally sent men to their death; and that there are only three people of higher rank in the platoon. As Sgt Rock says ‘It would only take three bullets to make him leader.’ Within twenty minutes of the opening credits, the Lieutenant is killed and mourned with what will become a sort of mantra for the platoon: ‘Strip him of anything we can use, roll him in a blanket, bury him, and mark him.’ Sgt Rock’s words are replayed to again drive home the unwillingness of Cpl Denno to lead. Denno’s desire to avoid leadership at all costs continues when Sgt Lonergan is trapped and wounded in the minefield. Denno volunteers to get the Sergeant, ostensibly to retrieve the map of the minefield, but in reality to avoid only having one man above him in the chain of command. While Denno rescues Lonergan, by the time he makes it out of the minefield the Sergeant is already dead. Shortly after this, Sergeant Rock is killed by a ricocheting bullet, leaving Denno in command. Although still unsure of his capabilities as a leader, Denno assumes command and enforces discipline through threatening another soldier who wishes to desert the position. Eventually, through an attack on a tank and Denno’s successful killing of an individual, he becomes accepted by the men and by himself as being capable to lead. Returning to the regiment after a successful rear guard action, we hear Sgt Rock’s voice over the platoon wading across the river: ‘Ain’t nobody goes out looking for responsibility, sometimes you get it whether you’re looking for it or not.’

We can learn several things from this narrative structure of the unwilling leader. Basinger describes Cpl Denno as ‘the cowardly corporal’ who redeems himself by rescuing Lonergan.<sup>208</sup> However, I would argue firstly that Denno redeems himself not through that rescue, but only when he is able to kill the individual Chinese soldier and that rather than Denno being the cowardly character, he functions politically as an avatar for a popular American uncertainty about using its power to reengage with world affairs after the brutality of World War Two. As Binns argues, Korean War movies are ‘imbued with the same sense of unease, confusion, and frustration’ that permeated American society.<sup>209</sup> While it is clear that Denno is brave and smart – risking his life for Lonergan and explaining situations to comrades – it is his own confidence in his abilities as a leader that is in question. We can also see a similar popular unwillingness

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<sup>207</sup> As Daniel Binns notes, the central character of Korean War movies tended to be tragic or flawed. Binns, *The Hollywood War Film*, 56.

<sup>208</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 186.

<sup>209</sup> Binns, *The Hollywood War Film*, 56.

to engage in military action and allow it to affect domestic life at the beginning of *Retreat, Hell!* when Captain Hansen takes his family to training camp with him and protests at his enforced separation from them during training. This uncertainty about, and discomfort with, military action and leadership is reinforced by the lack of a ‘why we fight’ didactic element in either of these two major Korean War films: there is no reference to defending democracy, or why we’re better than the ‘Reds’, or why they are brutal and cowardly while we are virtuous and brave. All of these themes presage what is going to happen in the next major instalment of the war film and of American overseas intervention: Vietnam. By realising that films do not exist in a temporal vacuum and are strongly influenced by previous developments in cinematic and genre history, we can begin to see how major themes are developed, what references filmmakers use and why, and understand that what may seem radical in a film such as *Full Metal Jacket*, discussed below, is actually the result of a gradual development over the course of many years. Similarly, it may help to explain or place in context the contemporary movies that are analysed in later chapters that may appear radical but fall short of their critical potentials. I am not, however, suggesting that it is necessary to understand or be aware of the particular genre, artistic, and economic history of every film in order to interrogate how it functions within the end of wars assemblage. Rather, I am suggesting that an understanding of the processes that led to contemporary cinema can help us explore artefacts for a much fuller appreciation of what political possibilities they may allow for.

## **2.5 *Full Metal Jacket*: The inversion of genre**

Moving on to the next major phase in the development of the war film, we can begin to see what role the Vietnam War played in the development of the genre, and what questions can be posed about contemporary cinema through a reading of one of the classic Vietnam films, Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*. Although Basinger does not deal with many Vietnam films in her book, the genre link between World War Two and Vietnam is clearly established by Doherty both in terms of the cinema they produced and the wars and those who fought them:

The blood ties between the traditional combat film and its Vietnam descendent cut deeper than the usual anxiety of generic influence...A true son of Hollywood and television, the Vietnam soldier was weaned on mass-mediated fantasies of World War II combat. Never far from his consciousness are films like *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Halls of Montezuma* (1950), and *To Hell and Back* (1955).<sup>210</sup>

*Full Metal Jacket* conforms to several of the conventions of the combat film outlined above in

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<sup>210</sup> Thomas Doherty, ‘Full Metal Genre: Stanley Kubrick’s Vietnam Combat Movie’, *Film Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1988): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1212619>.

the discussion of *Bataan*. These include opening with the oblique military reference of the recruits having their heads shaved while “Hello Vietnam” by Johnny Wright plays; the mixed group of recruits from various areas and ethnic backgrounds; there is a commentator in the group in the figure of Pvt Joker (Matthew Modine) who occasionally acts as a narrator; Sgt “Cowboy” Evans (Arliss Howard) has command of the platoon thrust upon him by the deaths of his two superiors; the film is replete with military iconography specific to the conflict including the near constant buzz of helicopters; once the platoon realise they are lost, Sgt “Animal Mother” (Adam Baldwin) challenges Cowboy’s command thus adhering to the intra-group conflict trope; there is much death and destruction; and a climactic battle.

However, *Full Metal Jacket* also begins to invert and subvert several of the key conventions of the combat genre.<sup>211</sup> For instance, rather than embarking on an important military mission, Joker joins the combat to get a story for the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. Furthermore, rather than concluding with a definitive resolution and grand epiphany about the point of conflict, Joker’s final narration is “I am in a world of shit, yes, but I am alive and I am not afraid.” Doherty also makes the point that the drill instructor in boot camp, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Erney) ‘is the most impersonal of cinematic DIs.’<sup>212</sup> In portraying the drill instructor as such, ‘Kubrick departs radically from the Marine Corps indoctrination film of classical Hollywood, a form that consistently subordinated battlefield action to melodramatic revelation, that stripped away layers of military insulation to get to the warm human core beneath the officer corps.’<sup>213</sup> Further undermining the central and respected character of the Sergeant is that for the training section of the film, there is very little dialogue or camaraderie among the recruits.<sup>214</sup> The focus is on the training process as instilling an absolute acceptance of authority rather than developing a respect for one’s comrades or unit cohesion. Another example of this subversion of genre devices comes towards the end of the action. While a large part of the film presents a *Lost Patrol* (1934) style plot of a group of soldiers being isolated and wandering in hostile territory, it does not end with their eventual rescue or epiphany moment where they realise the necessity of combat and sacrifice themselves for a noble or higher cause. This is a staple plot device of the genre which often goes beyond the war itself, and *Full Metal Jacket* embraces it while excellently subverting it.<sup>215</sup> The platoon has found a certain rationality in their

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<sup>211</sup> Binns argues that the ensemble cast is ‘where the similarities with Hollywood cinema about the World Wars ends.’ I think there are more aspects of Kubrick’s movie that draw from the combat genre. Binns, *The Hollywood War Film*, 70.

<sup>212</sup> Doherty, ‘Full Metal Genre’, 27.

<sup>213</sup> Doherty, 27.

<sup>214</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 330.

<sup>215</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 47.

existence and a group mentality, but rather than being expressed through the last stand, it is instead expressed as:

M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E  
We went there and we worked hard and we're in harmony,  
M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E  
Mickey Mouse (Mickey Mouse),  
Forever led us home with our banner high (high high high),  
Boys and girls from far and near you're welcome as can be,  
M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E  
Who's the leader of the club that's made for you and me?  
M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E  
Who is marching coast to coast and far across the sea?  
M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E  
Mickey Mouse (Mickey Mouse),  
Forever led us home with his banner high (high high high),  
Come along and sing our song and join our family,  
M-I-C-K-E-Y-M-O-U-S-E <sup>216</sup>

Basinger argues that in early combat films, the armed forces are created as a substitute family, complete with their traditions, songs, jokes, and rules. Indeed, the training section ends with Hartman saying "Today you are no longer maggots. You are part of a brotherhood from now until the day that you die. Wherever you are, every marine is your brother...the Marine Corps lives forever and that means you live forever."<sup>217</sup> In the background, the Marine's Hymn is heard. Not only is Hartman creating a substitute family, but also a substitute religion, especially considering his Christmas day remark that "God has a hard on for Marines." However, at the conclusion of the film, rather than the characters revelling in their membership of the Marine Corps family and singing the 'Halls of Montezuma' they instead opt for the 'Mickey Mouse March,' itself replete with familial and quasi-militaristic language, and a rejoicing in merely being alive. This stands in stark contrast to John Wayne's earlier Vietnam War film that had a much more positive view of the conflict, *The Green Berets* (1968), which opens and closes with "The Ballad of the Green Beret." Kubrick's subversive choices remain within the spirit of the genre conventions, if not the letter. The visual aspect of this final act also lends further power to the subversion of genre. The film is replete with such subversions of standard genre conventions, such as 'falling in' to get a, often motivational, talk from the Sergeant instead becoming a masochistic routine with Gunnery Sergeant Hartman which also functions to undermine the melting plot convention ('I am hard but I am fair. There is no racial bigotry here. I do not look down on niggers, kikes, wops or greasers. Here you are all equally

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<sup>216</sup> Stanley Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket* (Warner Bros., 1987).

<sup>217</sup> Kubrick.

worthless.<sup>218</sup>).<sup>219</sup>

A further visual difference between *Full Metal Jacket* and the previous two films is the sheer scale of the conflict. Until the final act of the film when the platoon is lost, the combat footage is always busy. There is the constant sound of helicopters overhead, shots with troops and tanks in the background, panning shots that highlight the scale of the American war effort. Rather than depicting a single platoon holding a strategic point, as *Bataan* and *Fixed Bayonets!* do, *Full Metal Jacket* attempts to engage in a depiction of the entire conflict. There is also Kubrick's use of slow motion to highlight death and injury to main characters such as Cpl "Eightball" (Dorian Harewood). While the films discussed above had elements of mourning for the dead, the visual representation of their death is much less involved. Cinematic and political constructions and depictions of certain temporalities is a theme that will be returned to in much more depth in chapter six.

This challenging of the norms of the genre forces the viewer to revisit and reinterpret the history of the war film. An audience more used to the films of John Ford, Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh would find the instances of a sergeant and his men, or redemption found through conflict very familiar, but the visual and textual ways that these are portrayed would be quite challenging. Again, like the move from World War Two to Korea, we see that cinematic genre is ever-changing, but always in minor ways. *Full Metal Jacket* retains many elements of older war movies, but makes subtle changes in their use, emphasis, or visual style. Looking at a film such as *Full Metal Jacket* as part of the process that leads to the contemporary action movie accomplishes several things. It further increases our knowledge of where plot devices, tropes, and techniques come from, it helps us chart how their meanings have been subverted and changed over the years, and it poses questions that are relevant today such as what makes a film anti-war.<sup>220</sup> Or indeed, what makes a film that is set in war a 'war film'? Or what makes a film set during wartime relevant to the study of that war? Or, more specifically, how might an action movie draw on genre history in order to induce an affective encounter with the audience? These

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<sup>218</sup> Kubrick.

<sup>219</sup> It should be noted that this is entirely a self-conscious subversion on the part of Kubrick. The numerous references to John Wayne (a hero of World War Two and star of *The Green Berets*) by Pvt Joker such as 'Is that you John Wayne, is this me?' and 'Listen up pilgrims' make this abundantly clear.

<sup>220</sup> Gilbert Adair is particularly strident in his criticism of so-called anti-war films saying 'It is surely time that film-makers learned that the meticulously detailed aping of an atrocity is an atrocity; that the hyper-realistic depiction of an obscenity cannot avoid being contaminated with that obscenity; and that the unmediated representation of violence constitutes in itself an act of violence against the spectator.' Quoted in Tania Modleski, 'Do We Get to Lose This Time? Revising the Vietnam War Film', in *The War Film*, ed. Robert T. Eberwein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 155.

are the films that I will engage with through the rest of the thesis, and the 1980s prove to be an important point in the moulding of the action genre out of the combat film of World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam and it is to this, again subtle and gentle, shift that we now turn.

## **2.6 *Red Dawn*: Visual combat, narrative action**

Films that employ the tropes, narratives, and genre conventions of war films but are not set in warfare, or set in a war that is fantastical, futuristic or plain absurd became increasingly common in the late 1970s and 1980s through actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Commando* (1985)), Sylvester Stallone (*Rambo: First Blood* (1982)),<sup>221</sup> Jean Claude van Damme (*Universal Soldier* (1992)), and Bruce Willis (*Die Hard* (1988))<sup>222</sup> as well as directors including James Cameron (*Aliens* (1986)) and Ridley Scott (*The Terminator* (1984)). As will be shown, this type of film incorporates aspects of the genre of the war film, and it is thus important and useful to include a transitional example here. *Red Dawn* (1984), as well as being fantastically absurd, provides a useful segue between the pure combat film of World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam and the action films that have become more prominent over the past thirty years. Essentially, *Red Dawn* is visually combat but narratively action. It is set during an invasion of the mainland USA by Cuban and Soviet forces and features a group of high school kids who form a guerrilla resistance movement - the “Wolverines”. Thus, it functions as a combat film replete with military iconography, a definite enemy in the Soviets and Cubans who are organised along clear military lines, wear uniforms and so forth; there is a clear alternation between action and repose; and the combat takes place between two known enemies. However, in terms of narrative and style it also has aspects of the more abstracted action genre. By abstracted I mean that, unlike the previous films discussed above, *Red Dawn* is not set in a factual historical or ongoing conflict but in a radically alternative present. *Red Dawn* is an exemplary case-study of late Cold War tensions and fears under the administration of Ronald Reagan and one of the few, if not the only, films made during the Cold War that depicts direct, full, conventional warfare between the US and communists.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, the fact that *Red Dawn* was remade in 2012, featuring an even more implausible North Korean invasion of mainland America, suggests that the key themes of the original are still relevant today.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Conventions include military iconography; a perceived military objective; a climactic battle; alternation between action and repose, night and day, safety and danger; and a military resolution with Col Tratuman (Richard Crenna)

<sup>222</sup> Conventions including John McClane having leadership thrust upon him; quasi-military objective and iconography; an enemy that is eventually revealed; a climactic battle; and a definitive resolution.

<sup>223</sup> Although I should point out that the main invasion force seen in the film is Cuban and the war opened with (unseen) tactical nuclear strikes on US missile silos in the Dakotas.

<sup>224</sup> Although the critical and commercial reception of the remake was much less favourable than the original.

Leaving the remake to one side, partly because it does not particularly pertain to the late Cold War era and partly because it does not fit into the chronological structure of this chapter, we can begin to examine the original *Red Dawn* both for its political value and for its status within the development of the genre. *Red Dawn*, much like *Black Hawk Down* that will be discussed below, acts as a bridge between the pure combat film of the 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s and the more modern action films of the 80s, 90s, and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>225</sup> It contains elements that are particular to both genres, as well as unique components that are specific to its own plot and narrative structure. Politically, as well as the obvious late-Cold War tensions that it deals with, questions of leadership, group dynamics, and civilian-military relationships are explored. Importantly, these dynamics that unfold within the plot of the film are not to be seen as a reading of the internal meaning of the artefact, but rather how the movie functions within, and itself shapes, the assemblage of genre.

Beginning with the more formal aspects of the film, and how it relates to previous films in the war genre, we can see how the conventions of genre have been utilised. As Jeremy Arnold says in the updated filmography in the second edition of Basinger's *The World War II Combat Film*: 'Combat conventions of group, hero, [and] objective are all present, melded to teen film issues.'<sup>226</sup> We have the leader who has had responsibility foisted upon him by his father; the military iconography that one associates with conventional combat; a climactic battle with the Cubans; a dedication of sorts at the end of the film at "Partisan Rock;" there is an important military objective; and the mixed group of individuals. The mixed group however, is not the conventional melting pot idea where we have an immigrant, a kid from Brooklyn, a Irish-American, a native American and so forth but rather that of 'jocks' and 'nerds,' as well as boys and girls, which more closely relates to the teen issues that are also developed, somewhat clumsily, in the film. Furthermore, like the films discussed above, the main action and plot elements are set up rapidly, within the first twenty minutes, allowing the majority of the film to take the form of short episodes of pure combat, interspersed with periods of rest. As Basinger notes, this is one of the key conventions of the war film genre: 'As they go forward, the action unfolds. A series of episodes occur which alternate in uneven patterns the contrasting forces of night and day, action and repose, safety and danger, combat and noncombat, comedy and tragedy, dialogue and action.'<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Though of course there are important differences and variations among these genres and between the decades.

<sup>226</sup> Jeremy Arnold in Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 326.

<sup>227</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 74.



Clearly, *Red Dawn* is situating itself within the tradition of the war film. This is further supported by a direct reference to *The Longest Day* (1962), an epic war film depicting the D-Day landings. One of the code phrases that the Wolverines pick up on the radio is ‘John has a long moustache,’ the same code used in *The Longest Day* to signal the French resistance that D-Day was imminent. Furthermore the leadership of the group is given to Jed (Patrick Swayze) under dire circumstances, itself a convention of the combat genre, but what is interesting about this is that when the group have retreated to the hills some of them attempt to challenge Jed’s leadership by holding a vote on whether they should stay outside the town or return:

ROBERT:	As Calumet student body president, I forward the motion that we give ourselves up.
DANNY:	I second that motion...
JED:	Sit down Danny, you’re not going anywhere, it’s too dangerous to go in to town.
ROBERT:	I say we vote on it.
JED:	No. <sup>228</sup>

Such intra-group conflict is itself part of the genre conventions as established by Basinger. We see it when command falls to Cpl Denno in *Fixed Bayonets!* Or to Pvt Cowboy in *Full Metal Jacket* above and indeed, in both instances, it is only resolved when violence is threatened or occurs. But the recourse to, and subsequent denial of, a democratic process is somewhat different. Much like the importance of the group over the individual as discussed with *Bataan*, this appears to be a form of pop culture securitisation: there is an existential danger to the group and therefore the normal laws and procedures of a democracy are suspended in favour of, in this case, a benign dictator in the person of Jed. Something that sets *Red Dawn* apart from other, more traditional, combat films is that the group are civilians, and mostly of high school age. However, they very quickly fashion themselves along military lines and, as the film progresses, their level of equipment, dress, and prowess become increasingly military – jeans are swapped for combat fatigues, tactics progress and communications are improved. This is an example of how the movie bridges the divide between previous combat films and the action genre. In *Bataan* and *Fixed Bayonets!* all the characters are in the military while the only non-military characters in *Full Metal Jacket* are a camera crew in military fatigues and Vietnamese sex workers and “half these whores are serving officers in the Viet Cong.”<sup>229</sup> Nonetheless, the Wolverines do encounter military personnel, both Soviet/Cuban and American. An American

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<sup>228</sup> John Milius, *Red Dawn* (MGM, 1984).

<sup>229</sup> Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket* And another important aspect to this is that *Red Dawn* is the first film to feature women in a combat role.

F-15 pilot is shot down near to them and quickly becomes assimilated in to the group. Rather than conflicting with the civilians/child-soldiers of the Wolverines, the Air Force officer Lt. Col. Andrew "Andy" Tanner (Powers Boothe) becomes almost like a surrogate father to them, helping them with tactics and training. Interestingly, this is an inversion of the normal convention of the genre. Instead of the officer being killed forcing a Sergeant to take command, an officer is literally parachuted in to become a joint-leader with Jed.

What *Red Dawn* does within the history of the genre is to both reference and develop some of the key characteristics of both action and combat. For instance, although "home front" movies were common in World War Two, many combat films focused exclusively on the direct actions of the war and/or preparations and training for it. Furthermore, *Red Dawn* consciously places itself within a tradition of the combat film, but is also conscious that it is somewhat different. For example, when Tanner is found by the Wolverines, Toni (Jennifer Grey) asks him what the capital of Texas is, when Tanner answers Houston she says "wrong Commie, it's Austin" to which he replies "you've seen too many movies."<sup>230</sup> Many World War Two combat films used the trope of asking pop culture or geography questions to suspected enemies and when the person knew who won the last World Series, for instance, they were accepted. *Red Dawn* therefore positions itself within the history of the combat genre, but does so through deliberate references to that lineage. What *Red Dawn* achieves more than anything within the history of the genre though, is begin to shift the focus of war films from one that is 'totally set in the combat situation' to one that is more aligned with our current conceptions of what an action movie is.<sup>231</sup>

By largely removing the (US) military presence from the film, while still adhering to many of the conventions of the genre, it becomes easier for filmmakers to exploit these narratives, tropes, imagery, and language in settings other than an actual historical conflict. *Red Dawn*, through its narrative similarities to other teen movies of the 1980s, combines the combat visuals of a World War Two film with the love-interest, coming of age, and unlikely hero narratives of contemporaneous action cinema. While *Red Dawn* may draw cues from previous combat movies, it engages in exaggeration and visual hyperbole more closely affiliated to a blockbuster action movie. For instance, the scene with Soviet helicopter gunships attacking the Wolverines on horseback; the attack on the "re-education centre" where they destroy most of an airbase; ambushes of armoured columns; and the climactic battle where Jed and Matt Eckert (Patrick

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<sup>230</sup> Milius, *Red Dawn*.

<sup>231</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 37.

Swayze and Charlie Sheen) wreak destruction on the forces occupying Calumet. The melding of combat film tropes, conventions, and visuals with the exaggeration and fantastical narratives of an action movie combine the two genres effectively. This link between combat and action is explored further below. If *Red Dawn* is a visual combat/narrative action movie then *Black Hawk Down* can be thought of as a visual action/narrative combat film.

### **2.7 *Black Hawk Down*: Visual action, narrative combat**

At first glance, it would appear that *Black Hawk Down* is an entirely different sort of film to *Red Dawn*. Rather than being set in an entirely fictional and absurd conflict, it is rooted in reality. However, despite this, admittedly quite large, difference it shares a lot of characteristics with *Red Dawn* and demonstrates more fully the shift from war to action. *Black Hawk Down* is, on the surface, a pure war film: the setting is one of brutal urban combat; it combines both last stand and lost patrol elements; and the characters are marines, perhaps the most common branch of the armed forces to be depicted on film. *Black Hawk Down*, when taken as an entire unit however, challenges the traditional conception of the war genre. This challenge brings *Black Hawk Down*, despite its military and combat elements, closer than any other film discussed so far to a true action movie. It can be seen as the culmination of what *Red Dawn*, and other films such as the *Rambo* franchise, did when they began to blur the boundaries between war and action. As well as the obvious political sentiments that can be easily read into *Black Hawk Down*, this shift itself perhaps tells us something about both the post-Cold War landscape and the political situation after the imminent attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.<sup>232</sup>

To take the form of the film, and its place within the genealogy of genre, before discussing its political implications it can be argued that *Black Hawk Down* is a film with one foot firmly in combat, and the other in action. As Arnold notes:

The film begins firmly in the combat tradition, but as the mission descends into chaos, it cleverly deconstructs its own generic elements. For both the audience and the characters, the rules disappear. For instance, the iconography is unfamiliar; the enemy does not wear uniforms, but civilian clothes; women and children are combatants; the enemy is not a trained, organized force but a ruthless mob, etc.<sup>233</sup>

The iconography that he refers to is part of the visual shift from action to combat, more fully developed in *Captain America* in the following section. Rather than having a well-defined and

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<sup>232</sup> I should add that *Black Hawk Down* was in production long before these attacks. In fact, principal photography ended on June 29th, 2001. See 'Black Hawk Down: Production Notes', Cinema.com, accessed 10 September 2013, <http://cinema.com/articles/732/black-hawk-down-production-notes.phtml>.

<sup>233</sup> Jeremy Arnold in Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 339.

clearly demarcated enemy as in all the previous film discussed here, even *Red Dawn*, the visual representation of the enemy does not fully conform to the convention of the revelation of an enemy presence. Rather, everyone is a potential enemy (“Bakara market is the Wild West. But be careful what you do shoot at. People live there”) although who is a civilian and who is a threat is left to the discretion of the Marines.<sup>234</sup> That being said, the depiction of the enemy in *Black Hawk Down* does share some similarities with the Second World War and Korean films from earlier in the chapter. This is particularly the case when the second helicopter crashes and the wounded pilot is defending the site. We see hordes of Somalis rush at the Black Hawk and the pilot fends them off with a sub-machine gun. While the enemy does not wear uniforms and blends in with the civilian population, the depiction of them is as faceless as the Japanese charge in *Bataan*. However, Arnold’s point alludes to an interesting aspect of *Black Hawk Down* that is the major plot elements, characters, narrative structures and language all position it within the combat genre. However, the iconography and visuals of the film place it somewhere else.

Rather than reading the meaning of the film and what it says about the 1993 intervention in Somalia or America’s role in the world, these elements and their impact on the genre will be the focus for this section. Doherty has also noticed these visual and iconographic differences between *Black Hawk Down* and traditional war film when he says that ‘the made-in-the-USA haute couture surely enlivens the dreary knock-offs designed by the locals.’<sup>235</sup> While the traditional generic war film features the hardware of warfare and often demonstrates its operation, Ridley Scott makes moves to seemingly fetishize this apparatus to an extent not before seen. Rather than being purely the tools of a soldier, Scott elevates guns, ammunition, Humvees, and helicopters to the status of aesthetic icons. This is clearly demonstrated in a beautifully shot scene at the climactic point of the film. Such visual fetishization of military hardware is a convention that is much more closely related to action films than military ones. Therefore, *Black Hawk Down* can be read as a visual action film and a narrative war film. Such synthesis of the two genres is not particularly surprising given the clear connections of masculinity, technology, violence, sacrifice, and morality that are more fully explored in later chapters.

*Black Hawk Down* is an intensely political film and can be read from many different perspectives. Doherty suggests that *Black Hawk Down* (and *We Were Soldiers* (2002)) is a film

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<sup>234</sup> Ridley Scott, *Black Hawk Down* (Columbia Pictures, 2001).

<sup>235</sup> Thomas Doherty, ‘The New War Movies as Moral Rearmament: “Black Hawk Down” and “We Were Soldiers”’, in *The War Film*, ed. Robert T. Eberwein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 217.

that encourages an audience not to ask too many political questions:

Being so locked and loaded onto the target of military brotherhood, neither picture brings into focus the Big Picture. Better not inquire too deeply into why American soldiers must be helicoptered into the killing fields of a sundrenched African desert or a Southeast Asian jungle...In the Somalia of *Black Hawk Down* and Vietnam of *We Were Soldiers*, American soldiers are creatures of Alfred Lord Tennyson, not Wilfred Owen: theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die.<sup>236</sup>

Furthermore, following on from the shift seen in *Red Dawn* above from a conscript armed forces to a professional and voluntary one, the genre conventions that *Black Hawk Down* presents can also perhaps be read as depicting and participating in the changing nature of political violence. As wars become more technological and involve less and less boots on the ground, there is less need for the didactic “why we fight” or weapons instructions tropes that were common in World War Two and Korea. Supporting this, and despite their assertion that some people saw the film as ‘simply another form of Hollywood propaganda used to justify a new American imperialism and secure American interests and ambitions overseas’ Lisle and Pepper explore how the film ‘animates, and is animated by, a variety of power formations that exceed the scope of the nation state and transform the conceptual and material terrain within which sovereignty now operates.’<sup>237</sup> In addition to these readings, *Black Hawk Down* highlights several thematic elements of the end of wars assemblage that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. These include the exceptional nature of American political violence (“Behind a force of 20,000 U.S. Marines, food is delivered and order is restored.”<sup>238</sup>); technological superiority being predicated on the moral nature of the violence it inflicts and the character of the human who operates it; the use of cinematic technique to highlight particular temporalities; and the necessity of comradeship and sacrifice. Furthermore, while depicting the violence of Mogadishu in an often-brutal fashion, Scott also uses colour to distance one from the background and highlight the combat itself. For instance, as the film opens we see the dead and dying filmed through a blue filter; when Sgt Shughart rings his wife (incidentally, the only female speaking role in the film, though it goes uncredited) before the mission, her home is vaguely coloured and washed out; a similar desaturated effect is used as a Somali walks past the convoy carrying a dead child in slow motion; meanwhile, scenes in Mogadishu are vibrant to the point of being over-saturated. The effect of this might be to draw our attention to particular aspects of the film, such as the human cost for Americans and Somalis, while visually highlighting the combat scenes and

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<sup>236</sup> Doherty, 220.

<sup>237</sup> Debbie Lisle and Andrew Pepper, ‘The New Face of Global Hollywood: Black Hawk Down and The Politics of Meta-Sovereignty’, *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 2 (2005): 166–67.

<sup>238</sup> Scott, *Black Hawk Down*.

increasing their importance. While the visual focus is given to combat, the techniques used to do this are not conventional within the combat genre. More usually, combat is left to speak for itself rather than being specifically highlighted through cinematic techniques. Another important aspect of the narrative arc and how it differs to previous combat films is the leadership roles that are discussed are not as ambiguous or challenging as those in *Fixed Bayonets!* or *Red Dawn*.

Our introduction to one of the main characters, Sergeant Eversmann (Josh Hartnett), is that he ‘likes the skinnies [the derogatory terms that the marines have from Somalis]’ and that he is an ‘idealist.’ When challenged about whether or not he was trained to fight, Eversmann replies that he thinks he ‘was trained to make a difference.’ Eversmann can be read as the personification of the liberal interventionist programme that caused the mission in Somalia to take place. Even his name, although historically accurate, suggests that his views are common sense and shared by all. This notion that the military is there to ‘make a difference’ is echoed when one of the convoys is ordered to go back in to the city and a Private refuses to go back out. His Sergeant tells him that ‘everyone feels the same way you do. It’s what you do right now that makes a difference. It’s your call.’<sup>239</sup> This, naturally, convinces the Private to go back in to the city with the convoy. In addition to being sure of the morality of the mission, Eversmann is sure about the command that is thrust upon him after his Lieutenant has an epileptic seizure and is removed from command:

SIZEMORE:	I’m putting you in charge of his chalk, you got a problem with that?
EVERSMANN:	No, sir.
SIZEMORE:	It’s a big responsibility. Your men are gonna look to you to make the right decisions. Their lives depend on it.
EVERSMANN:	...
SIZEMORE:	Alright.
EVERSMANN:	Rangers lead the way sir.

Given how characters have handled the responsibility of leadership in *Fixed Bayonets!* and *Red Dawn*, Sgt Eversmann is surprisingly calm and confident in his abilities to make the right decisions. Just as Eversmann appears to function as a personification of the morality of the mission, he also functions as an avatar for American confidence in its leadership, and a sense of American exceptionalism after the end of the Cold War, almost like an inverted-Denno. This is again a gradual evolution in genre conventions and one that Susan Jeffords links to the failure of the ‘hard-bodied’ Rambo-esque action hero of the Reagan era to live up to the American

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<sup>239</sup> Scott.

hype around hyper-masculinised warfare.<sup>240</sup> Instead of the ‘go it alone’ hero of Rambo or the Terminator, Sgt. Eversmann is more human and a character that one could conceivably relate to, despite the decline in military participation among an audience. In terms of narrative, and despite the evolution of the role of leadership since World War Two, *Black Hawk Down* is firmly rooted in the gradual evolution of the conventions of the combat movie.

Clearly, *Black Hawk Down* straddles the combat and action genres. The over-saturated, highlighted visual aesthetics of military hardware; the challenges posed by non-conventional enemies; and the unquestioned way that the hero accepts his leadership all point towards both the combat and action genre. Despite this, *Black Hawk Down* is still a film firmly rooted in the war genre: it depicts a real life event, its plot follows the last stand and lost patrol formats, it features marines and thanks the military for their cooperation. Given that this move from war to action has been developing from at least the 1980s through *Red Dawn*, *Rambo: First Blood*, and *Black Hawk Down* with each step taking the genre further from war and closer to action, it seems logical that the next step is a film that is firmly rooted in the action genre, but with references to the war films that preceded it. Thus, the focus shifts from a war film with tendencies towards action to an action film with tendencies towards war.

## **2.8 Captain America: The First Avenger: Action-combat**

Carter and Dodds state that while ‘there has been no shortage of “Hollywood product” that takes either the events of 9/11 or the subsequent war on terror as its starting point’ these films proved to be commercial and/or critical flops.<sup>241</sup> This has also been echoed by Simon Philpott who suggests that this is to do with the reluctance of British and American audiences to bear witness to the war.<sup>242</sup> Similarly, Susan Carruthers partly attributes the paucity of War on Terror themed cinema to the failure of the Iraq War to ‘puncture the surface of everyday life in the USA.’<sup>243</sup> This points towards a definite shift away from films that portray actual combat that is representative of specific and ongoing wars and toward films that still depict combat and conflict, but within a setting that is more removed from reality. While audiences for films about the War on Terror declined, the appetite of moviegoers for violence, blood, and death was not going to be sated by buddy movies or romantic comedies. As such, films that dealt with conflict

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<sup>240</sup> Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 112–16.

<sup>241</sup> Sean Carter and Klaus Dodds, ‘Hollywood and the “War on Terror”: Genre-Geopolitics and “Jacksonianism” in The Kingdom’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011): 102.

<sup>242</sup> Simon Philpott, ‘Is Anyone Watching? War, Cinema and Bearing Witness’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2010): 327.

<sup>243</sup> Carruthers, ‘No One’s Looking’, 71; See also Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 67.

and war were still popular, but the important difference between these films and war films was that the conflicts and wars portrayed were not based on possible reality. Superhero franchises like *The Avengers*, *Batman*, and *Superman* have been critical and commercial hits. The *Transformers* series has boomed. *Die Hard* and *Mission: Impossible* have been ‘re-booted’ to tap into the desire to see bloodshed without the associated aggravation that war films might entail. In the end, ‘violence sells and attracts audiences.’<sup>244</sup> But the violence depicted in these action movies is somewhat more distant, slightly cleaner, more sanitised than realist depictions of the combat fronts of World War Two, Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, the Cold War, or the War on Terror. As such, audiences can watch these, often grisly, films with a sense that the events portrayed will never happen as they are too fantastical, too incongruent, or (sometimes) just plain silly. Dodds has previously looked at *In the Valley of Elah*, *Lions for Lambs*, *Rendition*, and *The Kingdom*, all from 2007 and although these films are ‘explicit in their consideration of the war on terror as opposed to being allegorical’ they are nonetheless not the heirs to the combat films that Basinger has outlined, a point that Dodds acknowledges.<sup>245</sup> Rather these films are either personal quest (*In the Valley of Elah*), political intrigue (*Lions for Lambs* and *Rendition*) or action-thriller (*The Kingdom*). Therefore the question of what the establishment, evolution, subversion, and appropriation of the genre conventions discussed above have led to remains open.

For me, it appears clear that the action genre has proved to be the heir apparent to the genre heritage of the combat movie. Such a cinematic shift from specific ‘war’ to general ‘action’ both mirrors and affects political space. This will be a view that is much more fully explored in later chapters, however it is perhaps useful to presage such a discussion by bringing up a brief point on contemporary political terminology that reflects the shift from war to action. While the War on Terror was declared as such, it was also qualified as not ‘like the war against Iraq a decade ago...[or] like the air war above Kosovo.’<sup>246</sup> More direct was the start of the Iraq War, originally described merely as ‘military operations to disarm Iraq.’<sup>247</sup> Further, the NATO airstrikes on Libya in 2011 were officially described as a ‘military action/effort/mission/involvement/operation/activity’ intentionally to avoid the term war, combat, or conflict.<sup>248</sup> To paraphrase Basinger’s quote at the start of this chapter: did the change

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<sup>244</sup> Etienne Augé, ‘Hollywood Movies: Terrorism 101’, *Cercles* 5 (2002): 149.

<sup>245</sup> Dodds, ‘Hollywood and the Popular Geopolitics of the War on Terror’, 1626–27.

<sup>246</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Bush Addresses the Nation’, *The Washington Post*, 20 November 2001, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html).

<sup>247</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Bush Addresses the Nation’, *The White House*, 19 March 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>.

<sup>248</sup> ‘United States Activities in Libya’, 15 June 2011,



from war to action come about because Presidents are adept politicians, or did it come from going to the movies? In order to explain why the action film is the heir to the combat genre, I will turn to a somewhat different film than the ones discussed earlier: *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Unlike most action films that function either as solely allegorical sites for the discussion of current or historical conflicts, attempt to ignore those conflicts, or are set against the backdrop of, for example, the War on Terror, *Captain America* begins in the historical reality of World War Two (although it does quickly move on and enter a fantasy realm) where Captain America (Chris Evans) begins his career as a poster boy for war bonds. These sequences even contain the lyrics ‘Who’ll hang a noose on the goose stepping goons from Berlin?’ and Captain America socking Hitler in the jaw.<sup>249</sup> As such, *Captain America* is more firmly situated within the established canon of the war film that traces its own roots back to World War Two. To be sure, if we remove the supernatural from the film, it could almost play as a standard combat film that would be as familiar to audiences of the 1940s as the audiences of today. This is because *Captain America* contains a number of the genre conventions that made the combat film what it was: the true enemy (Hydra) is gradually revealed; military iconography specific to both World War Two and the Marvel universe; a climactic battle; a scrawny guy who has a leadership role thrust upon him; a noble sacrifice in a plane; and a diverse group of men, led by a (super)hero, who set out on an important military mission. In this group we have a strongman, a British officer (played in the David Niven style, complete with moustache), a Japanese-American, a French commando, and an African-American. Captain America himself is ‘just a kid from Brooklyn’, a place that, according to Basinger, is nearly a state unto itself in the canon of the combat film.<sup>250</sup>

Clearly, *Captain America* is appropriating elements, tropes, and conventions from the long history of the war film, but equally clearly, it cannot be considered a war film at all because the hero has superpowers, the main villain has a red skull, the objective is to control an object from Norse mythology, and the technology belongs more in a science fiction film than anywhere else. Much more so than *Red Dawn*, *Captain America* is an action movie that draws on the cultural and genre heritage of the combat film while being something entirely different. In terms of genre conventions there is little internal group conflict and Captain America wishes for an expanded leadership role beyond being a poster boy. Furthermore, the combat depicted is unrealistic in both terms of technology used and how it is portrayed on screen. *Captain America*

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[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp\\_uploaded\\_documents/110615\\_United\\_States\\_Activities\\_in\\_Libya\\_--\\_6\\_15\\_11.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/110615_United_States_Activities_in_Libya_--_6_15_11.pdf).

<sup>249</sup> Joe Johnston, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Paramount Pictures, 2011).

<sup>250</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 73–75.

has the exaggerated combat sequences of *Red Dawn*, but shot in a similar way to *Black Hawk Down*. The use of saturated and warm colours for instance, the visual focus given over to Captain America's physical transformation; montage sequences which highlight through focus and slow motion the iconic shield. The focus on the film is less on the conflict between Hydra and the Americans and much more on the person of Captain America (albeit a personification of America). Furthermore in the action vein, Captain America has superhuman powers, the weapons of Hydra shoot blue energy blasts, their technology is far in advance of the World War Two era and so forth. But the film still retains a certain affinity to the combat genre that precedes it with the scenes featuring American troops being (broadly) historically accurate in terms of uniform, training, and materiel and, again, the setting is very clearly the 1940s. Additionally, the climactic battle is set aboard Hydra's long range bomber plane and features a fight between Captain America and Hydra troops on kamikaze bombs with cities marked on them in a font and style of the era. Thus, *Captain America* more completely appropriates visual and narrative elements of the combat film in service of a modern, big budget, blockbuster action movie. Nonetheless, compared to what might be thought of as more 'conventional' war films that deal with the War on Terror such as *Rendition* (2007) or *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Captain America* adheres to the tried and tested formula of the war film much more closely. *Captain America* is therefore a much more complicated film in terms of both its genre heritage and the political questions that can be posed from a close reading of it.

## 2.9 Conclusion

Looking at the genesis, evolution, and adaptation of a genre can clearly enrich our experiences and analytical positions on modern cultural artefacts and the interactions that occur between them and politics. In a way, analysing films is much like enjoying them: it is not necessary to know about *The Lost Patrol* in order to interrogate *Full Metal Jacket* about its subversive message; or to be familiar with *Bataan* to analyse *Captain America*. But, through this knowledge of, and engagement with, cinematic history we are able to question in much more detail how, why and to what end directors, screenwriters, editors, and actors use genre conventions and what political questions can be posed, and possibly even answered. Furthermore, if we are aware of the historical conflicts that influenced current foreign policy decisions, why not also, as scholars of culture and politics, be aware of the historical films that influenced contemporary cinema? If we are able to progress in the field of Popular Culture and World Politics armed with an understanding of the histories, conventions, styles, and formulae of both sides of the name, then we can advance our understanding of cultural artefacts, political realities and the conditions of political possibility they produce.

This has been an admittedly brief gloss on the history, evolution, and current state of one cinematic genre, and much more work can be done to elicit the history of politico-cultural interaction as it relates to wars. Such a work would take at least an entire doctoral thesis to accomplish: one would need to look in more depth at economic factors, changes in personal style of major filmmakers and studios, shifting public attitudes to war and cinema, advancing technology, distribution networks and a host of other material and discursive factors over a substantial period of history. But it does demonstrate that an understanding of the history of what we study solidly grounds the arguments that we make temporally, it can provide a useful and powerful analytical insight into both popular culture and world politics, and it can help us establish some of the processes that contributed to contemporary interaction between these fields. However, it seems that this chapter has created more questions than it sought to answer: If Eisenhower was influenced by the movies to talk to his men, what effect does the evolution and present state of this key cinematic genre have on today's politicians? Does the shift from war to action make it easier to justify military operations overseas and at home? How do changing political behaviours influence shifting genre conventions, or more interestingly, how does a changing genre influence a politics constantly in flux? Most importantly for the purposes of the remainder of this thesis is the question of how politics and culture interact in order to allow for the emergence of conditions of success from the end of wars assemblage? This chapter allows us to ground all these arguments within a historical framework and the argument presented here about the history of the genre will influence and inform my analysis of contemporary cinema that follows.

## Chapter Three: Shock and Awe

*“With great power comes great responsibility”*

*Spider-Man (2002)*

### 3.1 Introduction

Building on the exploration of the history of the war film and how the genre has evolved from direct representations of historical conflict to a more action-oriented form of contemporary Hollywood blockbusters, it is necessary to now shift our attention towards the contemporary cultural and political space. The previous chapter made clear that an understanding of the cultural and political antecedents to contemporary politico-cultural interaction is both important and useful and will inform the rest of this thesis as well as situating it historically. However, in order to understand how the end of wars assemblage functions during the War on Terror, what forces shape it, and what emergent properties arise from these forces, it is necessary to look at more contemporary cinema. This chapter will analyse films and political speech from 2000 until around the time of the Invasion of Iraq to explore how conditions of success emerged, were circulated, and legitimised in the early stages of the War on Terror. The two conditions of success identified from this time period and discussed herein are American exceptionalism and the use of technology. As outlined in the methodology section of chapter one, these conditions of success do not just appear during this time but have a much longer history in popular culture, cinema, politics, presidential rhetoric, and American warfare. While American exceptionalism is perhaps particularly resonant in the aftermath of 9/11 it is by no means confined to the specific period under discussion in this chapter but can be seen in previous and subsequent periods – in the battle at the end of *War of the Worlds*, the restitution of Hancock as a superhero, or the determination of Colter Stevens in *Source Code*. Similarly, the use of technology as a moral amplifier of violence has long roots in warfare including the Gulf War and can be seen cinematically in movies such as *Edge of Tomorrow*.<sup>251</sup>

American exceptionalism, the grand monomyth of American identity and destiny, has a long history at least as far back as the seventeenth century. It has been deployed as a condition of success in the Westward expansion of the US, World War One and Two, the Cold War era, interventionism in the 1990s and throughout the War on Terror. In the period under discussion

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<sup>251</sup> See, for instance, Bradley Jay Strawser, ‘Moral Predators: The Duty to Employ Uninhabited Aerial Vehicles’, *Journal of Military Ethics* 9, no. 4 (2010): 342–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2010.536403>; Chamayou is heavily critical of this idea. See Gregoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory*, trans. Janet Lloyd (London: Penguin, 2015), 135–39.

here it emerges as a stabilising condition from the end of war assemblage that will influence the shape and properties of that assemblage throughout the conflict. The movies discussed in this chapter induce affective encounters in audiences that work to embed the idea that victory in armed conflict is ensured provided that violence is enacted in the name of values, beliefs, and morality. In other words, if ideas of American exceptionalism manifest themselves politically and culturally through violence, then ultimate success is guaranteed. Similarly, ideas of technological supremacy are articulated not in the context of overwhelming military might and force, but rather as an extension of these values, beliefs, and morals. Much like the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not only awesome displays of power but were also seen as tools to achieve the moral ends of the US, technology in these movies is the tool that acts as an amplifier or force multiplier for these values to be defended and advanced successfully.<sup>252</sup> Therefore, in this chapter I will argue that American exceptionalism and the moral use of advanced military technology emerge as vital conditions for success in the War on Terror from its early stages, through the Invasion of Iraq, and continue to be important as the War on Terror progresses. These conditions are not specific or unique to the time period under discussion here but have a history and future that is shaped by and in turn shapes the end of wars assemblage. This articulation takes place simultaneously in political and cultural artefacts and the affinities and intense connections that these share work to co-constitute these conditions through the end of wars assemblage to forge a consensus on what is deemed necessary to ultimately succeed in the War on Terror.

The period from 2000 to 2003 was an important time for the development of contemporary cinema and a turbulent time in international politics. Cinematically, the early 2000s saw the rise of the superhero film starting from the (critically and commercially) successful film *X-Men* (2000) which has spawned entire cinematic universes based on the comics from the two major comic book publishers, Marvel and DC. These four years also saw the ongoing decline of the traditional war movie, as discussed in the previous chapter, with this genre being increasingly replaced by films that take more from action, such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), than from the combat genre. Furthermore, there is a distinction between war movies made after the event, such as most Vietnam films, and those made while the conflicts were ongoing such as, for instance, *The Hurt Locker* (2008) or *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). It may be the case that there needs to be a critical distance between conflict and cinema for successful war movies to be made about it. Political developments were obviously much more dramatic than those in the

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<sup>252</sup> A myth nicely debunked here: Rufus E. Miles, 'Hiroshima: The Strange Myth of Half a Million American Lives Saved', *International Security* 10, no. 2 (1985): 121–40.

cinematic space. The election of George W. Bush, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and the beginning of the War on Terror reshaped the American and international political landscape.<sup>253</sup> As such, this chapter will ascertain how the end of wars assemblage stabilised during this period and what conditions of success emerged from intense politico-cultural interaction. I will conduct a detailed analysis of some of the most popular and successful action films from 2000 to 2003: *X-Men* (2000), *Training Day* (2001), *Spider-Man* (2002), and *Tears of the Sun* (2003).<sup>254</sup> These four films will allow me to explore how American exceptionalism and technological morality were stabilised as emergent properties during these years.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. Firstly, I introduce the four films being discussed and engage in a preliminary discussion of how they relate to one another, how they explore ideas of American exceptionalism and technology. Following this, I consider American exceptionalism through a brief literature review and draw out two strands that are particularly present in political and cultural artefacts of the time: a distrust for authority and governmental figures in particular and a strong sense of individualism. Relating these two strands of American exceptionalism to the films and politics of the early War on Terror, I argue that this valorises the human (in terms of agents of American violence) element of contemporary conflict. Thirdly, I argue that understandings of the role of technology in modern conflict tend not to take into account how technologised warfare is articulated in cinema and politics. Rather than being depicted as more important than the human, or taking the human element of conflict out of the equation, I show that cinematic depictions of technology work to again valorise the human, individual element of conflict and act as a moral amplifier for that political violence. In other words, when technology is deployed in the pursuit of moral (American) ends, it is successful while when it is used for immoral (non-American) ends it fails. Cinematic understandings of American exceptionalism and the role of technology, coupled with concurrent political articulations of values and morals are mutually reinforcing. The political and cultural saturation of such narratives, tropes, and affects allows for these conditions of success to emerge through the affective precognition of audiences that encounter them. Thus, they emerge as conditions of success from the end of wars assemblage and can be utilised as political tools to demonstrate that the war is progressing and will ultimately succeed.

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<sup>253</sup> See, for instance, Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror*; Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics, and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Andrew Schopp and Matthew B. Hill, eds., *The War on Terror and American Popular Culture: September 11 and Beyond* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

<sup>254</sup> *Tears of the Sun* was not particularly successful, but given the genre and the narrative, I feel that it is worth including.

### 3.2 The Films

*X-Men* was a major cinematic hit for Marvel comics. With an estimated gross of over \$157 million, and an average score of 64/100 on *metacritic.com*, we can safely say that this was a critically and commercially successful film. *X-Men* was also the first of many hits for the cinema arm of Marvel comics. While *Howard the Duck* (1986) and *Blade* (1998) predate *X-Men*, neither was particularly well received commercially or critically (although *Blade* has gone on to be something of a cult classic). After *X-Men* we can see an entire universe constructed around characters from the Marvel comic books. A total of forty-eight Marvel films have been released since 2000 with at least seven in development making it one of the most successful film franchises of all time.<sup>255</sup> I argue that *X-Men* functions within the end of wars assemblage to allow conditions of success to emerge through the affective and discursive potentials it inculcates. Specifically, its focus on the troubles and discrimination facing mutants almost exclusively in the US, as well as how their superpowers can be used for good, allows audiences to encounter this as a cultural articulation of American exceptionalism and the use of power for good in the world. Furthermore, the focus on the individuals that comprise the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Mutants serves to strengthen the pre-eminent myth of American exceptionalism that emerges from the assemblage as an important condition of success in the War on Terror. Furthermore, the debates around the role and utility of technology within *X-Men* that focus on technologies as a tool that amplify inherent values and talents rather than as a panacea will be elaborated on.

September 11<sup>th</sup> had a profound effect on Hollywood in a number of ways. Films that were already in production and slated for release after 9/11 were altered to remove images of the World Trade Centre. As Stephen Prince argues, ‘imagery of the World Trade Center became taboo’ as studios feared that such pictures would wrench audiences out of the imaginary story of the movie.<sup>256</sup> For example, the original trailer for *Spider-Man* had to be axed because it prominently featured the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre.<sup>257</sup> The release of other films such as *Behind Enemy Lines*, were rushed forward in order ‘to take advantage of a surge of American nationalism in wake of the 11 September (‘9/11’) attacks and the US-led retaliatory

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<sup>255</sup> This includes the Marvel Cinematic Universe of twenty films released as of August 2018 as well as other films based on Marvel characters such as *X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, *Punisher*, *Deadpool*, *Blade* and so forth but does not include the short films, TV series, or animated movies.

<sup>256</sup> Prince, *Firestorm*, 79.

<sup>257</sup> Though after 9/11 and before the trailer was pulled, Drew Grant says that audiences cheered when they saw the Twin Towers. Drew Grant, ‘10 Year Time Capsule: “Spider-Man” and the Erasing of the World Trade Centers’, *Salon*, 10 May 2011, [http://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/10\\_year\\_time\\_capsule\\_spiderman\\_wtc/](http://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/10_year_time_capsule_spiderman_wtc/); The original trailer can be seen here: *Spiderman Twin Towers Teaser*, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-r7qymfa0Q>.

attack against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.<sup>258</sup> A further effect was that, shortly after 9/11, the White House attempted to influence the way that terrorism, America, and American foreign policy were portrayed on screen in ways that would discredit the former and promote the latter. Despite the claim that ‘the industry viewed 9/11 as a kind of box office poison,’ the attempt by the White House to influence the medium is a stark reminder that many politicians clearly see the political value, importance, and influence of popular culture.<sup>259</sup> For instance, Karl Rove attempted to enlist Hollywood to help construct a narrative for the War on Terror in the so-called Beverley Hills Summit in November 2001.<sup>260</sup>

*Training Day* is a very different film to *X-Men*. Although it contains scenes of violence and action it is difficult to place it firmly in the action genre as it also draws on the tradition of the cop film. However, links can be made between *Training Day* and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979).<sup>261</sup> Both represent a descent into a jungle (urban jungle in the case of *Training Day*) and both are concerned with morality, authority, and conflict. As such, *Training Day* contains elements that can be analysed within the action genre and how this style of movies works within the assemblage. The unilateral use of force in this film is dealt with in an interesting way. When used for immoral purposes it is doomed to failure but when it is used for moral aims it is successful. For instance, when Harris uses his position as a detective to extort money, murder people, and exploit those less fortunate he is ultimately defeated. But when Hoyt faces off against Harris at the climax of the movie, he is successful and Harris is killed. Both men use unilateral force, Hoyt does not report to Harris to internal affairs for instance, yet the two men have radically different outcomes. This again shows how cinematic depictions of technology focus on their role as moral amplifiers. The relationship between morality and conceptions of American exceptionalism is also explored. Essentially however, the film deals with the use and abuse of institutional power, concepts of masculinity, and a conflict between idealism and realism. The main protagonists are Hoyt (Ethan Hawke), an idealistic rookie who says that he wants to be a narcotics officer because he wants to ‘serve my community by ridding it of dangerous drugs,’ and Harris (Denzel Washington), a highly corrupt veteran police officer who feels he can ‘do what the fuck we want to do.’<sup>262</sup> The interactions between Harris and Hoyt

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<sup>258</sup> Ó Tuathail, ‘The Frustrations of Geopolitics and the Pleasures of War’, 356; As were *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* Susan L. Carruthers, ‘Bringing It All Back Home: Hollywood Returns to War’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14, no. 1 (2003): 171.

<sup>259</sup> Prince, *Firestorm*, 80.

<sup>260</sup> Marc Cooper, ‘Lights! Cameras! Attack! Hollywood Enlists’, *The Nation*, 21 November 2001, <https://www.thenation.com/article/lights-cameras-attack-hollywood-enlists/>; See also Prince, *Firestorm*, 80.

<sup>261</sup> For more about this link see Stephen Humphries, ‘“Training Day” Upends Buddy-Cop Formula’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 October 2001, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1005/p15s2-almo.html>.

<sup>262</sup> Antoine Fuqua, *Training Day* (Warner Bros., 2001).



speak to two main strands of American exceptionalism to be discussed below: one being a distrust of figures of authority and the political classes and the other being the triumph of individualism.

*Spider-Man* brings us back to the Marvel universe, and given the setting (New York), and the time (2002), it is well situated to shape the end of wars assemblage. *Spider-Man* continues the popular and successful series of Marvel comic-book adaptations, with *Spider-Man* in its own right being the 9<sup>th</sup> most commercially successful film franchise of all time.<sup>263</sup> The plot is a familiar one, as well as being about an extraordinary superhero, it is also, ‘like any story worth telling...all about a girl.’<sup>264</sup> Much like *Red Dawn*, discussed in chapter two, despite the familiarity of the plot – part superhero, part teenage drama – *Spider-Man* allows for two important and interesting political connections: one is the people, location, and time-period of New York post-9/11 where we can see ideas of populism and individualism interacting, as well as providing a congruence between the cultural space of film and the political space of support for troops. The other important aspect is the role, uses, and dangers of technology in a conflict setting which mirrors what will be discussed in relation to *X-Men* which is that technology can be seen as enhancing one’s own moral code. Victory is not gained through technological superiority alone, but by using technology for moral purposes.

*Tears of the Sun* was not as critically or commercially well received as the other three films under discussion here. It has received a score of 48/100 from film critics on *metacritic.com*, while users have rated it as 6.6/10.<sup>265</sup> Despite this, *Tears of the Sun* deploys tropes from the early war films that were discussed in the previous chapter as well as elements of the modern action movie again signalling the confluence of the two. Bruce Willis in the lead role also confirms its standing as a solid action movie. Indeed, Roger Ebert has described it as ‘a film constructed out of rain, cinematography and the face of Bruce Willis.’<sup>266</sup> Much like *Training Day*, also directed by Antoine Fuqua, *Tears of the Sun* has a similar feel to *Apocalypse Now* (or, more accurately perhaps, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) and engages in comparable racialized discourses, this time with Nigerian refugees. As well as employing the tension of war films and the spectacular explosions of action movies, *Tears of the Sun* speaks to American exceptionalism. A Navy SEAL unit tasked with extracting ‘critical personalities’ from Nigeria

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<sup>263</sup> ‘Movie Franchises and Brands Index’, Box Office Mojo, 6 November 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/?view=Franchise&sort=sumgross&order=DESC>.

<sup>264</sup> Sam Raimi, *Spider-Man* (Columbia Pictures, 2002).

<sup>265</sup> ‘Tears of the Sun’, Metacritic, accessed 9 April 2014, <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/tears-of-the-sun>.

<sup>266</sup> Roger Ebert, ‘Tears of the Sun Movie Review (2003) | Roger Ebert’, 7 March 2003, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/tears-of-the-sun-2003>.

during a civil war is ordered to leave behind ‘native personnel’ but Lieutenant A.K. Waters (Bruce Willis), after a bout of conscience, decides to help try to save them instead. The encounter induced by the film becomes apparent towards the end in an extended conversation between the Lieutenant on the ground and the Captain of the aircraft carrier as well as in the climactic battle scene.<sup>267</sup> The potential of this sequence to induce an encounter, in part because of the dialogue that precedes it and in part because of the overwhelming nature of the visuals, sounds, and movement on the screen is quite powerful and can be seen as helping to create emergent properties of the assemblage. When read in the context of technology and American exceptionalism, and alongside political rhetoric from the same time period, an effect of this intensity is to link these tropes with victory in the mind of an audience. The use of explosions, guns, air strikes, and other such tropes of the action genre work to assert American military dominance, exceptionalism, and altruism and clearly connect them with victory. Protevi argues that there should be an emphasis in this type of research on ‘unconscious affective evaluations that precede and color representations and the calculations performed thereupon.’<sup>268</sup> In the climactic battle sequence of *Tears of the Sun* audiences witness US military might deployed in the service of exceptional and moral ends. The sound and the fury of this sequence with the explosions, loud noises, quick edits, and camera movements work to pre-cognitively prime audiences to relate such visualities to exceptionalism and victory. Thus, when exceptionalism is politically deployed in the context of the War on Terror, and especially when it is accompanied by visuals of air strikes and special forces and so on, audiences can automatically relate the affects they experienced in the cinema to the affects they experienced watching the news. As such, we can talk of American exceptionalism and technology emerging as conditions of success from the complex interactions between audiences, politics, and cinema. In many ways, *Tears of the Sun* feels like *Black Hawk Down* with a happy ending. The importance of the individual, as well as support for troops, distrust for people in positions of power, and the necessity of equality of opportunity are all strong themes in this film and all are related closely to the various manifestations of American exceptionalism. What will be discussed most in relation to *Tears of the Sun*, however, is the how advanced technology is deployed. Once again we see how it is cinematically deployed as a moral amplifier. The Navy SEALs use technology to save refugees while their pursuers use it for killing. *Tears of the Sun* also provides a graphic account of how technology can amplify immoral values and behaviours.

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<sup>267</sup> Antoine Fuqua, *Tears of the Sun* (Columbia Pictures, 2003).

<sup>268</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 25.

### 3.3 American Exceptionalism

Looking at how American exceptionalism emerged during these years as a condition of success highlights the importance of understanding politico-cultural interaction. Conceptualising this interaction as the end of wars assemblage helps us understand how American exceptionalism became embedded in political rhetoric and action during the War on Terror. Asserting that the US has a special destiny and place among the nations in cultural artefacts, as will be discussed in this section, supports political discourses that function in a similar way. The resonance between cinematic and political discussions of American exceptionalism work to generate emergent properties from the assemblage that can then be deployed as conditions of success in the War on Terror. Through its depiction of American political power and violence in ways that are positive and allow for an affective encounter between audience and cinema, contemporary Hollywood action cinema works to co-constitute these discourses, possibilities, and practices.

American exceptionalism is somewhat of an amorphous and contested concept. Like many concepts that deal with nationhood, it means many things to many people and can come in many guises: economic, military, political, and religious (or combinations thereof) depending on a particular individual's perspective. Nonetheless, what is common to these differing conceptions of what makes America 'exceptional' is that it is a shining example to the world of how to function in various aspects of nationhood. Robert Patman describes it as 'an informal ideology that endows Americans with a pervasive faith in the uniqueness, immutability and superiority of the country's founding liberal principles, and also with the conviction that the USA has a special destiny among nations.'<sup>269</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset identifies five key words that are the key to American exceptionalism: 'liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire.'<sup>270</sup> It has also been thought of as the neo-conservative support of rampant global liberalism, though whether this is something that is uniquely American is a somewhat unresolved issue.<sup>271</sup> While there are many facets to American exceptionalism, in the films discussed here two strands are highlighted more than others: a distrust of the government and people in positions of power and the importance of the individual.

The distrust of, and scepticism towards, government and individuals with power is a strong feature of American political life. Lipset argues that that this derives from the American

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<sup>269</sup> Robert G. Patman, 'Globalisation, the New US Exceptionalism and the War on Terror', *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (2006): 964, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659060086904>.

<sup>270</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 31.

<sup>271</sup> Sukanta Acharya, 'American Exceptionalism A Neo-Conservative Face to Future', *International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2006): 185–202, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002088170504300203>.

Revolution and ‘has been institutionalized in the unique division of powers that distinguishes the United States from parliamentary regimes.’<sup>272</sup> Not only is distrust part of a popular American psyche, but is constitutionally provided for by the series of checks and balances that make up the separation of government powers. Indeed, the Constitution itself is seen as ‘an exceptional document’ in its own right.<sup>273</sup> Lipset goes on to argue that while ‘Americans are the most antistatist (Whig) population among the democratic nations,’ they ‘now favour a lot more government than [Thomas Jefferson] did.’<sup>274</sup> However, the current strand of American distrust of government is still strong, as evidenced by the highly successful cultural artefacts discussed in this chapter which play to this aspect of American exceptionalism.

While there may be more support for a larger government than there was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the American citizenry ‘is increasingly distrustful of its political leaders and institutions.’<sup>275</sup> Lipset argues that confidence in the institutions of US government has been in steady decline since the 1960s, driven then by anti-Vietnam sentiment, the civil rights movements, and other social problems. The US not living up to its democratic and egalitarian principles are seen as the root causes of discontent.<sup>276</sup> It can also be argued that such cynicism towards figures of authority is presaged in combat films with Korean War movies such as *Fixed Bayonets!* Such films present ‘stories which frequently question military leadership and which often represent weak, frightened, or unreliable people in command of troops.’<sup>277</sup> A separate but related factor that Lipset claims increased distrust in, and scepticism towards, governmental institutions is the rise of television coverage of scandals and wars, which dates again from Vietnam: ‘The impact of the prolonged war on American opinion was to a considerable extent a function of pictorial reportage.’<sup>278</sup> Taking this further, Paul Virilio has argued that television, rather than being just a means of pictorial reportage, is in and of itself, a weapon:

How can we fail to recognize, after a month of standoff, that the true *intervention* force in the Gulf is television? And more precisely, CNN, the Atlanta network. Saddam Hussein, and George Bush, certainly, but also Ted Turner, the owner of Cable News Network. Henceforth, diplomacy is effective only through *interposed images*.<sup>279</sup>

Just as CNN was an intervention force in the Gulf War, cinema is also part of the force of

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<sup>272</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 39.

<sup>273</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 34.

<sup>274</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 46.

<sup>275</sup> Lipset, 281.

<sup>276</sup> Lipset, 282–84.

<sup>277</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 161.

<sup>278</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 286.

<sup>279</sup> Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2002), 16.

intervention and occupation in the War on Terror through its effects within the end of wars assemblage, though perhaps more subtly than the nose mounted television cameras of the “smart bombs” and “surgical strikes” of the Gulf. In their discussion of ‘in/visible war,’ Simons and Lucaites argue that ‘the US has become assimilated to a war culture that is no longer recognisable as such,’ as imagery of actual war has been displaced from the public’s consciousness through film, video games, and television.<sup>280</sup> Cinema then, along with other cultural media, becomes the dominant paradigm through which audiences experience war. Distrust of governmental institutions is clearly a strong, if somewhat paradoxical, element of American exceptionalism. It is driven by the constitutional underpinning of those very institutions as well as an increase in visual media as communication and co-productive of political realities. If the visual nature of warfare, either as reportage, weaponry, or affect helps to contribute to a sense of American exceptionalism, then cinema, with its often visceral depictions of the failings of authority figures, is an excellent site to critically engage with its implications.

Individualism is also constitutionally enshrined, and much more obviously than a distrust of authority and centralised government. The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the constitution, ‘not only guaranteed important civil and human rights by law...a culture of rights prevailed...and the scope of those rights expanded steadily.’<sup>281</sup> Individualism is deeply embedded in American culture and society where ‘the ultimate source of action, meaning, and responsibility is the individual.’<sup>282</sup> This is exemplified by Hollywood cinema and the star culture where one actor plays a lead role and the majority of screen time is given over to their face and words. This is perhaps more influential in the action genre dominated as it is by male actors such as Schwarzenegger, Willis, Stallone, Statham, and van Damme who make the key decisions and responsibility ultimately lies on their shoulders. Obviously not all films follow this convention and many action and war films incorporate a group of people who are geographically, racially, and educationally distinct. This tension, explored as well in chapter two through Korean War films, between individual and community points towards the paradox in this strand of American exceptionalism where ‘the achievements of individualism are

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<sup>280</sup> Jon Simons and John Louis Lucaites, eds., *In/Visible War: The Culture of War in Twenty-First Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 3; Mirzoeff can also be read as diminishing the role of the news media in contemporary war and its displacement by popular culture when he writes that what was remarkable ‘about this mass of material [produced during the invasion of Iraq] was the lack of any truly memorable images.’ Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon*, 67.

<sup>281</sup> Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*, 13.

<sup>282</sup> Claude S. Fischer, ‘Paradoxes of American Individualism’, *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 2 (2008): 364, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00066.x>.

dependent on community participation, and that community, in turn, can be enriched through individual expression.<sup>283</sup> Individualism as American exceptionalism therefore, should not be treated as a simple triumph of discrete and isolated characters, but rather how their own personalities and traits are presented and find their fullest potential in the context of a larger community. This strand of exceptionalism is also a common trope and motif in political discourse, with President Bush asserting in April 2003 that ‘This country believes that freedom is God’s gift to every individual on the face of the Earth.’<sup>284</sup> The importance of the American soldier not just as a heroic individual, but as a person within and with the support of a broader community is also prominent, for instance when President Bush announces a website that the Department of Defense has set up to allow people to support the troops within their own community, saying that ‘In this time of testing, our troops can know: The American people are behind you.’<sup>285</sup> The paradox of individualism and distrust of authority are important sites of political and cultural simultaneity, connection, and emergence.

American exceptionalism, as stated above, can come in many guises and can be manifested visually as well as linguistically. Manifestations of such exceptionalism are spread throughout the cinematic landscape, especially in the films that were made after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, as discussed below. However, imagery and narratives of American exceptionalism in popular culture are not new. Godfrey Hodgson suggests that popular music from the 1920s, 30s, and 40s as well as classic Hollywood cinema ‘endowed the nation and the world with its rich treasury of “standards,” many of them as explicitly patriotic as Irving Berlin’s beloved “God Bless America”,’ and ‘have as a constant, uplifting theme the “only in America” saga of immigrant success.’<sup>286</sup> Popular culture, and film in particular, is a suitable site to analyse how American exceptionalism emerged as an early condition of success in the War on Terror.

### 3.3.1 *X-Men*

Jason Dittmer argues that superhero films experienced a boom after 9/11 because they ‘articulate a particularly American geopolitical vision and sense of self, which is often shorthand as American exceptionalism.’<sup>287</sup> Although *X-Men* was released in July of 2000,

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<sup>283</sup> Bryan R. Warnick et al., ‘Student Communities and Individualism in American Cinema’, *Educational Studies* 46, no. 2 (2010): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131941003622211>.

<sup>284</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio’, The White House, 24 April 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/04/20030424-6.html>.

<sup>285</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror’, The White House, 28 June 2005, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html>.

<sup>286</sup> Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*, 173.

<sup>287</sup> Jason Dittmer, ‘American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 1 (2011): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d4309>.

ideas of American exceptionalism are still prominent within this film and, as discussed above, ideas of American exceptionalism have a long history. Superheroes in general (and supervillains of course) gain their strength and power in various ways such as being an alien (Superman and Thor), money (Iron Man and Batman), a freak accident (Spider-man and the Hulk), or experiments (Captain America and Wolverine (his claws at least)). But the ‘mutants,’ superheroes in all but name, in *X-Men* gain their powers through naturally occurring processes. As Professor X (Patrick Stewart) says in the introduction to the film:

Mutation: it is the key to our evolution. It has enabled us to evolve from a single celled organism to the dominant species on the planet. This process is slow, normally taking thousands and thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution leaps forward.<sup>288</sup>

Although the opening scene takes place in Poland in 1944, a point to which I will return in a moment, the rest of the film takes place in the US with no reference to mutants in other countries.<sup>289</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that the natural mutation that creates the X-Men is something that is, if not peculiar to America, then at least the US is where it finds its greatest expression. Similarly, American exceptionalism preaches that while democracy, liberty, and capitalism are present in the rest of the world, it is in the US where they achieve their highest potential. Professor X’s ‘School for Gifted Youngsters’ is presumably the only school for mutants in the world as well as being the base for the X-Men’s military machinery, such as the Blackbird (itself heavily modelled on the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane of the US Air Force) and is located in a fictional town in upstate New York. Although the opening narration that discussed leaps in evolution would refer to a world-wide anthropocentric phenomenon, the focus is clearly the US. Even when Rogue (Anna Paquin) runs away from home after discovering her mutation and has a chance encounter with Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) in ‘Northern Alberta, Canada’ the X-Men intervene in order to return them to the base in the United States. Thus the central geopolitical and personal location for mutants and mutation is in the US.

It can be argued that this is an unimportant point as many films follow this US-centric approach because of the dominance of Hollywood in international cinema and the importance of the domestic box office to profit margins: aliens contact the US (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)), disaster strikes the Eastern Seaboard (*The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)), zombies

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<sup>288</sup> Bryan Singer, *X-Men* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 2000).

<sup>289</sup> I should mention that while Wolverine is Canadian, he appears to be the only non-American and also spends the majority of the film in the US.

roam across the mid-West (*Dawn of the Dead* (1978)), and so forth. However, to dismiss this would be to ignore a key component of Hollywood cinema which is precisely its very American-centric approach. Giving the US such a central role in story, imagery, and narrative creates a popular cultural worldview in which the US is the central actor and where important events happen, often with massive, unforeseen and sometimes catastrophic consequences in other parts of the world. It also reinforces American exceptionalism as a condition of success within the end of wars assemblage that is itself centred on America. This US-centrism in Hollywood cinema is a central way through which ideas of American exceptionalism are constructed and propagated. Even the opening scene, taking place in a concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, helps to cement the centrality of the US to global affairs. Hodgson suggests that the Holocaust was an important event for conceptions of American exceptionalism from the 1960s onward: 'the Holocaust became for many Americans, Gentiles as well as Jews, a powerful myth of redemption, in which the United States was cast as the redeemer.'<sup>290</sup> The story of Magneto (Ian McKellan) becomes then what Hodgson identified as the 'only in America' plot of classic Hollywood cinema.

*X-Men* also contains within it elements that strengthen the strand of American exceptionalism that deals with a distrust of authority figures as well as a celebration of individualism. For example, although Wolverine's mutation allowed him to heal and regenerate, it was the military (admittedly the Canadian military) that implanted his 'adamantium' skeleton giving him his iconic claws. Furthermore, the most prominent politician in the film is Senator Robert Kelly (Bruce Davison) who is portrayed in an almost entirely negative light, and given a particularly gruesome death. These two elements in the movie might appear to function as a critique of American power and policy however, as discussed above, it is more appropriate to regard them as aspects of American exceptionalism. It is perhaps useful here to mention part of the discussion in chapter one reiterate that this thesis is not about the internal *meaning* of a text but rather about what encounters the movie can induce. These encounters are formed through the dialogue and imagery of the movie as well the effects that pivotal scenes produce. As Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams argue, 'language and materiality are inextricably inseparable.'<sup>291</sup> If we look at the scenes where Wolverine's claws are implanted and Senator Kelly's imprisonment and death for instance, we can see that they can work as moments of intensity within the film. In the case of Wolverine's claws, these scenes are indistinct flashbacks with a limited colour palette but high saturation. The camera movements are jerky and uncertain while the people

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<sup>290</sup> Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*, 26.

<sup>291</sup> Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 'New Materialisms, Discourse Analysis, and International Relations', 6.



performing the procedure are clad in ominous gas masks. The dominant sound is that of Logan crying in pain as he is submerged in a tank of liquid and there are shadowy figures who are seen discussing the operation. Clearly, this is designed to produce a particular affect in audiences that links the violation of individuality with figures of authority who are interfering with his body. It is notable that these have both been identified as important aspects of American exceptionalism.

The scene with Senator Kelly after he acquires his mutant abilities are also deeply affective moments in the movie. In order to escape from the Brotherhood of Mutants' camp, Kelly uses his abilities to squeeze through the metal bars of his cell.<sup>292</sup> There is a distinct discomfort in watching a person's head stretch in such a way and the director, Bryan Singer, capitalises on this with the use of a close-up as he is experimenting. The gruesome nature of Kelly's mutations are also seen in the subsequent scene where he emerges on a beach. Finally, in the scene where Senator Kelly dies by dissolving into water we see Storm (Halle Berry) repulsed by the process and the actual death is vividly and macabrely portrayed. As with Wolverine's flashbacks, these scenes are powerful moments in the movie and serve to highlight the loss of personhood that Kelly has underwent. While Wolverine's was because of the military and Kelly's because of Magneto, the disturbing nature of these sequences serves to reinforce individualism.

The affective connection between loss of identity and grisly visuals thus allows this strand of American exceptionalism to become embedded as important at a pre-cognitive level in audiences. Within the end of wars assemblage, this affective and pre-cognitive connection between the denial of individuality (and thus American exceptionalism) and morbid images means that exceptionalism becomes more effective as a political tool. In other words, when exceptionalism is deployed as a reason why wars will be successful, that is as a condition of success, this affective moment is re-triggered in audiences thus strengthening the particular claim to truth that is being articulated. While popular culture, much less *X-Men*, is certainly not the only factor that goes into such a claim being accepted, 'assemblages represent complex ecologies of subjectivity in which the subject emerges as a consequence of the distinct articulation of a number of heterogeneous elements,' of which popular culture and these scenes are part.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> This is also perhaps a reference to *The Fugitive* (1993).

<sup>293</sup> Martin Coward, 'Between Us in the City: Materiality, Subjectivity, and Community in the Era of Global Urbanization', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 3 (June 2012): 473, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d21010>.

### 3.3.2 *Training Day*

Incidents of abuse of power by Harris, and Hoyt's discomfort with it, are prominently featured in *Training Day*. Falsifying warrants, stealing money, brutality, extra-judicial murders, corruption, and connivance with drug barons are just a small selection of the darker side of Harris's career. This is despite Harris's assertion that the Los Angeles Police Department no longer engages in 'that old school, hard charging, beat up everything that moves, Rodney King shit.'<sup>294</sup> Such blatant abuse of power by a figure of authority and a police officer can also induce an affective encounter between the movie and audience. Despite historical and ongoing corruption and brutality in American police forces, Dittmer notes that the hegemonic depiction of the police in American popular culture is as 'a protective force whom you would ask for help in any situation,' despite the experiences of many African-Americans and with a few exceptions such as *Training Day*.<sup>295</sup> Given that such depictions are hegemonic, what we see in *Training Day* is a darker side to the police and authority figures in the US. As such, Harris's role and Hoyt's rejection of it could serve to affect audiences in such a way as to associate the individualism, or the going-against-the-flow nature of Hoyt with the "true" image of the police that has been established by popular culture as public servants and defenders. In other words, there is a disjuncture between the audience's expectations of a police officer and the on-screen portrayal that is generative of an affective encounter. The force of individualism that Hoyt embodies can also be read as a motif of American exceptionalism: the brave individual standing up to corruption and evil in society, no matter the odds or danger. Again, this affect is encouraged by the way in which the characters, mostly Harris, are depicted. Just after our first introduction to Harris, it is clear that he is an unconventional police officer, jaywalking across the road to his car which Hoyt notices is not from the motor pool. Rather, it is a lowrider Chevrolet Monte Carlo, complete with hydraulics. While it may appear that Harris is being set up as a "loose cannon who gets results" style of police officer, it becomes increasingly clear that he is engaged in far more dishonest practices.

Much of the first act is conversation between Harris and Hoyt in the car. Here we see a friction between the idealistic, and naïve, Hoyt and the hardened, cynical, and violent Harris. Both outlooks embody what Gearóid Ó Tuathail has called the Jacksonian geopolitical culture in which 'solutions are simple and direct,'<sup>296</sup> and one might need to take masculinised unilateral

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<sup>294</sup> Fuqua, *Training Day*.

<sup>295</sup> Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, 138.

<sup>296</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "'Just Out Looking for a Fight': American Affect and the Invasion of Iraq", *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 862, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2003.00361.x>.

action in order to ‘get the job done.’<sup>297</sup> After Hoyt intervenes to stop a rape despite being high on PCP and Harris’s reservations, the following dialogue takes place:

HARRIS: To protect the sheep you gotta catch the wolf, and it takes a wolf to catch a wolf, you understand?  
...  
No matter what I say, you did you the right thing... I noticed that you applied that, eh, that choke hold though, huh? I thought that was a no-no procedure boy.  
HOYT: I was getting my ass kicked  
HARRIS: And you did what you had to do, right? You did what you had to do. That’s what a wolf does.<sup>298</sup>

Here we can see a certain strand of American exceptionalism which emphasises a unilateral approach using maximum force in order to do the right thing. Harris’s corrupt and duplicitous nature is revealed to the audience over the course of the second act, and the climax of this is the murder of Roger (Scott Glenn), a former criminal supposedly under Harris’s protection. Harris tells Hoyt to shoot Roger, and although Hoyt initially treats it as a joke, Harris murders him. The closing of the blinds in the house, the close up of Harris’s face and the then muzzle of the shotgun as it fires is still, despite his previous misdeeds, a shocking moment. The slow death of Roger, coupled with Harris telling him to breathe so the blood fills his lungs, is a moving and disturbing sequence. Much like the implantation of Wolverine’s claws and Senator Kelly’s death discussed above, one of the effects of these sequences is to establish a link between the violation of certain aspects of American exceptionalism (particularly individualism and distrust of authority) with negative affects at a pre-cognitive level. As Protevi notes, situations when we are thrown “off-kilter” cannot be understood, but only felt and they point towards ‘a differential field beyond normal sense-making...In other words, an intensive encounter.’<sup>299</sup> Thus, when these conditions are deployed as political tools used to justify the claim of victory in a war, audiences can draw on their repertoire or reservoir of cultural imagery in order to link the positive aspects of American exceptionalism with success and victory. Brian Massumi argues that thinking-perceiving bodies, in our case the audience, interact with other bodies and their affects, in our case the movie, and then ‘translate them into a form that is functional for it (qualities it can recall)...From there it enters new circuits of causality.’<sup>300</sup> Thus we can argue that the encounter induced by these scenes in *Training Day* and their connection to the individualism and distrust of authority that contribute to the emergence of American exceptionalism as a condition of success in the War on Terror. The final denouement of the

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<sup>297</sup> Ó Tuathail, ‘The Frustrations of Geopolitics and the Pleasures of War’, 361.

<sup>298</sup> Fuqua, *Training Day*.

<sup>299</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 54.

<sup>300</sup> Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 36.

movie also presents an opportunity for affective moments to be created by Fuqua and connections to American exceptionalism to be forged.

Hoyt's eventual success in stopping the malevolent Harris serves a similar purpose to the X-Men triumphing over the Brotherhood of Mutants which is to strengthen the connection between the narratives and affects of these movies with the idealised concept of American exceptionalism. The consequence of this is that when American exceptionalism is deployed as a political trope to justify the use and success of American political violence, the claims is strengthened by the affective encounters that audiences who confront both cinema and politics have been exposed to and have, to paraphrase Massumi, transformed into something that is useful for understanding contemporary conflicts and their endings. So when President Bush stated that 'in order to overcome evil, the great goodness of America must come forth and shine,' audiences can parse this through the cultural affects that relate to this idea of American goodness that they have encountered.<sup>301</sup> The effect of this is to strengthen the claim that through this goodness, and therefore exceptionalism, American victory will be ensured. American exceptionalism can thus be seen as an emergent characteristic of the end of wars assemblage. While this victory claim is not reducible to *X-Men* or *Training Day*, they do form part of the complex web of causality that grants such a claim additional force.

As well as inducing affective encounters that contribute to the emergence of American exceptionalism as a condition of success, *Training Day* also has an implicit racial politics that underlies the distinction between Harris's and Hoyt's means-ends relationship. Jared Sexton captures this well when he writes that Harris

veritably embodies the dark side of contemporary urban law enforcement, cast as an unscrupulous rogue cop whose singular ferociousness and ultimately incompetent scheming seems to absorb the corruption of the entire Los Angeles Police Department, highlighting and absolving a racist city power structure in one breathtaking gesture.<sup>302</sup>

Although *Training Day* was not released in response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, it can still illuminate tensions and distinctions at the heart of the conception and deployment of American exceptionalism. While American exceptionalism is considered to be defined by ideals such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Sexton addresses the racial realities that

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<sup>301</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Directs Humanitarian Aid for Afghanistan', The White House, 4 October 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011004.html>.

<sup>302</sup> Jared Sexton, 'The Ruse of Engagement: Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing', *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.0.0057>.

underpin this idea.

### 3.3.3 *Spider-Man*

While the setting of *Spider-Man* in New York is in line with the comic book canon, and the filming commenced prior to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the location is still charged with political meaning, especially after the attacks on the Twin Towers. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the original trailer had to be pulled because of the prominent depiction of the World Trade Centre even though apparently ‘many audiences cheered when they saw the towers; it was a reminder that history couldn’t be neatly wiped off the screen.’<sup>303</sup> Bearing in mind the precaution about reading the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> into films that may not have included references to it deliberately, it is still interesting to see how New York and New Yorkers are depicted in the film. During one of the climactic scenes, when the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe) forces Spider-Man (Toby Maguire) to choose between the love of his life and a cable car full of children, the citizens of New York come to his rescue by throwing garbage and tools at the villain saying ‘I got a little something for you. Leave Spiderman alone, you’d pick on a guy trying to save a bunch of kids? You mess with Spidey you mess with New York. You mess with one of us; you mess with all of us.’<sup>304</sup> In terms of Lipset’s conception of American exceptionalism, this scene ties in with an idea of both populism and individualism. Spider-Man is an individual, although one who is endowed with superhuman powers and clearly appeals to the people of New York in the guise of the classic ‘friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man.’ Furthermore, given the political salience of the moment this film was released as well as its setting, this scene serves to induce an affective encounter between audiences and the movie which allows for American exceptionalism to emerge and be deployed as a condition of success within the War on Terror. *Spider-Man* therefore becomes part of the cultural milieu in which this condition functions and in light of which it is articulated.

As discussed above, this section in *Spider-Man* engages in the paradox of individualism where the individual is seen to achieve their greatest potential when acting as part of a collective. The previous chapter discussed how World War II films such as *Bataan* contained the message that when the nation is in existential danger, the individual must be subsumed within the collective. However, this American style of subsuming individuality is based on an individual’s particular characteristics, so we see a team that is built based on geographic origin, ethnicity, skills, and weaknesses and so forth. Although *Spider-Man* does not contain elements of a group coming

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<sup>303</sup> Grant, ‘10 Year Time Capsule’.

<sup>304</sup> Raimi, *Spider-Man*.

together, the section with the cable car and the New Yorkers includes the theme of individuals banding together to protect a hero and confront an enemy. This section also places the hero within a socialising context. Rather than carrying the burden of saving New York solely on his own shoulders, Spider-Man draws support from ordinary people in order to resolve the conflict with the Green Goblin. Similarities to discourses surrounding the support networks of soldiers is clear such as Obama's speech at Fort Bragg marking the end of the Iraq War: 'let us give a heartfelt round of applause for every military family that has carried that load over the last nine years. You too have the thanks of a grateful nation.'<sup>305</sup> It is not only the powerful individual who will secure victory in the War on Terror, but the community that that individual is part of, the support they receive, and the morals and responsibilities that they stand for. Thus, it is not necessarily the individual that matters, but the community that the individual represents. Success and victory in both cinema and politics, therefore, are not just about the force of a single person, but how that person is the embodiment of a community and the virtues that they possess. While Dittmer argues that the superhero 'always refrains from integration with the political community in which the hero has just intervened,' this sequence on the bridge in *Spider-Man* suggests that this 'friendly neighbourhood' superhero is doing something different namely expressing the morality of the political community and doing so with the physical and moral support of it.<sup>306</sup> Successes are constructed as due to individuals who express the perceived values of a community while failures are constructed as due to lone individuals with no support. As the success of Spider-Man is predicated on him embodying American exceptionalism, the emergence of this as a condition of success from the assemblage becomes clearer.

The relationship between the individual and the community is further explored in *Spider-Man* through the character of Norman Osborn/the Green Goblin. Norman Osborn is the CEO of a large company OSCORP which, among other things, produces material and technology for the military. After OSCORP is visited by a delegation of high-ranking US military personnel and the board of directors who threaten to transfer funding to a competing company, Osborn is forced to take their experimental research in to his own hands and, after trialling a new drug on himself, creates the alter-ego of the Green Goblin. While the generals and board of directors are not cast entirely in a positive light it is clear that Osborn creates and is consumed by the evil of the Green Goblin on his own initiative. Much like the prisoner abuse at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan was not reflective of the values of America, or the actions of Harris delegitimises the police force, Norman Osborn is simply a "bad apple" who goes rogue. Rather than

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<sup>305</sup> Obama, 'Remarks by the President and First Lady on the End of the War in Iraq'.

<sup>306</sup> Dittmer, 'American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom', 115.

functioning as an implicit critique of American power and exceptionalism (not to mention neoliberal capitalism), we can see how these figures are eventually absolved of their pressure and complicity in the creation of the Green Goblin, thus reinforcing the idea that success is brought about through an individual embedded in a community and failure is the responsibility of the aberrant individual. The conflict is then resolved by a single heroic or exceptional individual working within a community: Spider-Man. While the previous two films induced affects that can be construed as negative associations with the violation of aspects of American exceptionalism, in *Spider-Man* we see positive associations of individuality and community. However, all three films function to induce encounters between the movie and the audience that strengthens association between American exceptionalism and victory at a pre-cognitive level. This allows for it to emerge as a condition of success from the end of wars assemblage. The political effect of this is that when the concept is deployed to justify violence or make a claim about victory, affect has, in Connolly's words, a critical role in the 'consolidation of culturally imbued habits and regularities.'<sup>307</sup> Individuality, community, and exceptionalism do not stand as discrete conditions or concepts though. They are aided, strengthened, and multiplied by a myriad of other factors and questions of the relationship of exceptionalism and power hinge on technology and its relationship to values, morals, and American exceptionalism itself.

### 3.4 Technology

As the use of technology also emerges as a condition of success from the assemblage during these years it is fruitful to begin our analysis with a discussion of the apparent disjuncture between academic, cinematic, and political understandings of technology. What we see is disconnect between how academic understandings and politico-cultural articulations engage with technology and warfare. Cristina Masters argues that the contemporary mode of warfare has changed hardware, software, and wetware from the physical body; the habits, skills, and discipline; and the mind and hormones of the individual soldier respectively to a situation where 'the hardware has now come to represent the whole range of advanced high-tech weapons, the software represents information and communication technologies and the wetware represents the embodied human soldier and, significantly, the weakest link in the triad.'<sup>308</sup> This builds upon Donna Haraway's theorisation of cyborgs as 'a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and

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<sup>307</sup> Connolly, *Neuropolitics*, 71.

<sup>308</sup> Cristina Masters, 'Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7, no. 1 (2005): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324718>; Marcus Power also suggests that there has been a shift in video games from a question of "why we fight" to one of "how we fight." The increasing use of highly technologised warfare in video games is an interesting parallel to my own argument. Marcus Power, 'Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence', *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007): 273, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010607078552>.

organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.’<sup>309</sup> This denigration of the human element in favour of the mechanical/technological took place during and after the Gulf War. Before this, ‘it was soldiers who ultimately won wars in the eyes of the American body politic.’<sup>310</sup> What we see after the Gulf War is that ‘the body of the soldier is no longer representative of American identity, technology has instead become the productive site of identity and the nexus of power and knowledge within American techno-scientific discourses.’<sup>311</sup> Virilio traces the ‘disintegration of the warrior’s personality’ back even further through Vietnam and towards World War II.<sup>312</sup> Writing in reference to a US Air Force pilot who flew in Vietnam, Virilio says that ‘Tied to his machine, imprisoned in the closed circuits of electronics, the war pilot is no more than a motor-handicapped person temporarily suffering from a kind of possession analogous to the hallucinatory states of primitive warfare.’<sup>313</sup> It should also be noted that the role of modern technology in warfare is not new. Ernst Jünger, along similar lines to Virilio, suggests in a 1930 article on war photography during World War I that

A war that is distinguished by the high level of technical precision required to wage it, is bound to leave behind documents more numerous and varied than battles waged in earlier times, less present to consciousness. It is the same intelligence, whose weapons of annihilation can locate the enemy to the exact second and meter, that labors to preserve the great historical event in fine detail.<sup>314</sup>

Despite Virilio’s more historical approach to this in *War and Cinema*, and Jünger’s account of photography in World War I, the Gulf War does seem to be a dividing point where military technology finally surpassed the human. However, in the opening phases of the Iraq War in 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney suggests that the development of military technology has increased even further in the intervening twelve years saying that ‘Having been involved in planning and waging the Persian Gulf War in 1991 as Secretary of Defense, I think I can say with some authority that this campaign has displayed vastly improved capabilities, far better than we did a dozen years ago,’ listing advancements in laser guided weaponry, real-time imaging, the B-2 stealth bomber and other technological marvels.<sup>315</sup>

Shapiro, echoing Baudrillard, says that for the advanced militaries the Gulf War marked the

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<sup>309</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women : The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

<sup>310</sup> Masters, ‘Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities’, 115.

<sup>311</sup> Masters, 115.

<sup>312</sup> Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 105.

<sup>313</sup> Virilio, 106.

<sup>314</sup> Ernst Jünger, ‘War and Photography’, trans. Anthony Nassar, *New German Critique* 59 (1993): 24.

<sup>315</sup> Dick Cheney, ‘Vice President Cheney Salutes Troops’, The Whitehouse, 9 May 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/04/20030409-4.html>.



time when war became not a ‘violent engagement between antagonistic bodies,’ but rather ‘a clinical slaughter in which one side’s technological superiority insulates its warriors from the traditional vulnerabilities of direct combat.’<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, American success in the Gulf ‘did not make the same “mistake” of constructing American identity embodied and represented in the white male *human* body.’<sup>317</sup> From this it can be argued that the Revolution in Military Affairs post-Gulf War sees the machine as displacing the human, as being valorised over the human, and as a more important subject in politico-cultural discourses than the human. However, Haraway suggests that taking responsibility ‘for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics [and] a demonology of technology.’<sup>318</sup> While the films discussed below do stand in opposition to academic discussions of the subsumption of the human into the machine by valorising the human element over the technological, none of them refuse the role and power of technology. Cinematic treatments of technology are not, on the whole, a form of Neo-Luddism. In a film such as *RoboCop* (1987), where the cyborg is an ‘illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism,’<sup>319</sup> Murphy (Paul Weller) can be seen as illegitimate precisely because it is total subsumption of the human into the machine. Indeed, other less intrusive forms of technology (such as the anti-tank gun used to destroy the military robot guarding OCP headquarters) are actively celebrated in the movie. In films then, what we see in films is the use of technology as a moral amplifier.

To take the *RoboCop* example further in this regard Murphy, as a character with strong morals of law enforcement, uses his technological advantages to trap and then kill Dick Jones (Ronny Cox) while Jones is himself the victim of the technology that he uses for immoral ends, namely taking over OCP and replacing the Detroit police department with his own robot.<sup>320</sup> Rather than being the weakest link in the chain of contemporary cyborg-warfare, the human body of the soldier is cinematically inscribed with all the power, tenacity, and determination that soldiers are thought to represent. This is visually evidenced when RoboCop/Murphy removes his helmet to reveal his face. Furthermore, rather than being subsumed within the technology that makes modern warfare destructive, pervasive, and fast, the human body in these films becomes the master of technology and it is used to amplify their own intrinsic moral code. So we see Lt. Waters in *Tears of the Sun* use satellites to stay ahead of the chasing Nigerian soldiers; Spider-Man use his powers for good given the ringing of his Uncle Ben’s dying words in his ears; and

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<sup>316</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 142.

<sup>317</sup> Masters, ‘Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities’, 120.

<sup>318</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 181.

<sup>319</sup> Haraway, 151.

<sup>320</sup> Paul Verhoeven, *RoboCop* (Orion Pictures, 1987).

the X-Men use their Blackbird and spandex suits to save world leaders from being mutated. On the villainous side of these conflicts the chasing Nigerian soldiers are attacked by their own technology; the Green Goblin's suit and enhancements intensify Norman Osborn's greed and lust for power; and Magneto's machine leads to his incarceration within his plastic prison. This cinematic motif of human mastery over technology and its value as co-productive of particular moral subjectivities is strongly echoed by President Bush when talking about the early progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom. While, as mentioned above, Vice President Cheney places a focus on the technological advances since the first Gulf War as major difference between the two conflicts, President Bush goes further saying that 'By a combination of creative strategies and advanced technology, we are redefining war on our terms.' Importantly though, President Bush also makes the link between this technological superiority and the moral code of America abundantly clear, arguing that it is used to protect the lives of American soldiers and innocent civilians, that 'we can target a regime, not a nation.' The precedence of morality over technology is further highlighted when, just after discussing technology, President Bush says,

In any conflict, however, this nation's greatest single asset is the kind of men and women who put on the uniform of the United States. The methods of war have changed, but the need for courage has not...The character of our military reflects the character of our country...we value the lives and liberty of the Iraqi people.<sup>321</sup>

This clear connection between the cinematic treatment of technology and its value as an force multiplier of moral violence and the political discourses surrounding the changing technology of actual war serves to highlight how popular culture, and the action genre in particular work to produce emergent properties of the assemblage that can then be deployed politically. Both cinematic and political discussions of technology in warfare suggest that while we are using awesome power, we are doing so for a just end, for protection of innocents, and for the moral cause of the fight.

It is also important to bear in mind the close linkage between military and cinematic technologies. What Jünger interestingly hints at above is that it is the same technology that is used to locate and destroy the enemy that is also used to document and represent it. Virilio's concern with 'the osmosis between industrialized warfare and cinema' is also relevant here.<sup>322</sup> Because 'cinema became associated with battle in the same way that telescopic sights were

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<sup>321</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom', The White House, 16 May 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/04/20030416-9.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 73.

attached to rifles or the cine-machine-gun to aerial warfare,<sup>323</sup> ‘war has made an essential contribution to the rise of projection equipment.’<sup>324</sup> James der Derian also discusses this link between the military and entertainment industries and expands the idea to become what he calls MIME-NET (the military-industrial-media-entertainment network) which ‘represents a convergence of the means by which we distinguish the original and the new, the real from the reproduction.’<sup>325</sup> Once we begin to understand that actual violence and cultural portrayals of it are intrinsically linked then film becomes an increasingly important site where the political meaning of technologized warfare and its role as condition of success are created and circulated.<sup>326</sup> By understanding how technology is depicted in contemporary cinema, how it is used to induce cinematic encounters and embed the idea that it is a force multiplier for moral ends, we can then reach conclusions about the role it plays as a condition of success in the end of wars assemblage. By engaging with how technological militarism is depicted in cultural artefacts, we can elucidate what potential this has in the political sphere. How does technology and specifically military technology in cinema induce affective responses in audiences and how might these responses function politically through the end of wars assemblage? What forces does it exert on claims to victory that are politically articulated? And what conditions of political possibility does it allow for?

### **3.4.1 *Tears of the Sun***

Jeanine Basinger notes that in World War II combat films, technology played not just an important cinematic role, but an important didactic one too as ‘military iconography is seen, and its usage is demonstrated for and taught to civilians.’<sup>327</sup> It is clear that in modern action films, military hardware is not paraded so that civilians can learn how to use it. Partly this is due to the professional and voluntary nature of the modern US military as opposed to the conscript armies of World War II, itself linked to the character of the military as President Bush often makes clear when he remarks on people who voluntarily re-enlisted to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>328</sup> It is also partly because modern military hardware has become so complex that it would be impossible to demonstrate how to use it in a film.<sup>329</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>323</sup> Virilio, 92.

<sup>324</sup> Virilio, 100.

<sup>325</sup> Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, xxxvi.

<sup>326</sup> Simons and Lucaites, *In/Visible War*, 2.

<sup>327</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 74.

<sup>328</sup> For instance, ‘Ours is a remarkable country when people volunteer to serve our country in a time of war... The government didn’t say, you have to do this, you chose to do it on your own... I’m proud to be the Commander-in-Chief of such decent people, such honorable people, and such noble people.’ George W. Bush, ‘President Bush Visits with the Troops at Fort Irwin, California’, The White House, 4 May 2007, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070404-6.html>.

<sup>329</sup> This however may not actually be the case as controllers and technology from video game consoles is being

depictions of technology and military hardware form a key element of the visual landscape of contemporary popular cinema. *Tears of the Sun* presents us with depictions of modern special operations warfare, a liberal interventionist agenda, and most importantly for this section affective depictions of technology as co-productive of subjectivity.

When the Navy SEAL team is inserted into Nigeria in order to recover “critical personalities” from the midst of an ongoing civil war, the team at first appear to rely on their own skills as special operations forces: stealth, professionalism, and a dedication to the mission. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that they have the full spectrum of communication and intelligence apparatus at their disposal. This stands in contrast to the last stand format that was favoured during World War II and Korea through films such as *Bataan* and *Fixed Bayonets!* that were discussed in the previous chapter and present us with a group of soldiers almost entirely cut-off from the larger army. Such communications equipment embody what Haraway calls ‘a cyborg orgy, coded by C<sup>3</sup>I, command-control-communication-intelligence.’<sup>330</sup> The constant link to the Captain of the aircraft carrier where the team is based makes for the central plot of the film where the value of human life is valued by the Lieutenant and not (initially) by the Captain (‘I can’t under good conscience do that [finish the mission as planned] without escorting these people to safety’<sup>331</sup>). What their technology allows the Special Forces to achieve is to complete the mission and bring the refugees to safety thereby successfully using technology to amplify their moral behaviour.

The Navy SEALs use their technological advantage to protect their own comrades and the innocent civilians they are rescuing, the same use that President Bush highlights in his speech of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2003 mentioned above. However, the pursuing Nigerian soldiers also have technology (albeit much less advanced than that of the Navy SEALs) at their disposal as one member of the refugees is carrying a radio which relays the position of the group to the soldiers. However, in much the same way as the spy satellite amplifies the moral abilities of Lt Waters allowing him to rescue all the refugees, this radio amplifies the immoral character of the spy and the pursuing soldiers. When discovered by the Navy SEALs, the spy is shot, mortally wounded and then left to bleed out. When the Nigerian soldiers find his body with the radio

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used in conflict situations. However, it may be the case that as the technology that underpins such weapons systems is increasingly advanced, that there may be a desire to present it as complex, futuristic, and difficult to use. See David Hambling, ‘Game Controllers Driving Drones, Nukes’, *Wired*, 19 July 2008, <https://www.wired.com/2008/07/wargames/>.

<sup>330</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 150 Indeed, this has been superseded by C4ISR which stands for ‘command-control-communications-computers-intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance.’

<sup>331</sup> Fuqua, *Tears of the Sun*.

around his neck, one of them lifts the radio and sets off a booby trap bomb killing numerous soldiers. The death of the spy is a moving sequence, in a similar vein to the murder of Roger in *Training Day*, partly because he is spying to save his family and because the SEALs decide to let him bleed to death. Furthermore, the use of the radio to effect an ambush on the pursuing soldiers comes as a shock as not only is it loud and sudden, but also marks the first time that the Navy SEALs are able to strike back against their pursuers. The encounter here serves to connect technology and its moral use with victory. The cinematic use of technology as a way to amplify the moral or immoral values, beliefs, and motives of characters stands in contrast to the theorisation of modern warfare where the human is the weakest link in the chain and where technology is valorised over innate human abilities. While *Tears of the Sun* does present ‘the twenty-first century land soldier [as] outfitted with technology that in essence replaces his “senses” through technological prostheses that replicate biological sense while circumventing human biological limitations’ the submission of the biological to the technological does not take account of the moral dimension of cinematic conflict.<sup>332</sup>

The movie reaches its climax as the Navy SEALs and refugees near the Cameroonian border. The final battle sequence harks back to the last stand format of the World War II combat movie where waves of barely humanised enemy troops rush at the retreating forces who try to hold them long enough for the rear-guard action to succeed. Not only does this illustrate ‘the classic pattern of “last stand” American heroism,’ and allow for the use of pyrotechnics, aircraft, noise, and death it also allows for audiences to connect technology with victory at an affective level.<sup>333</sup> As Deleuze notes, genre movies present ‘not only action-images, but also an almost pure perception-image; it is a drama of the visible and of the invisible as much as an epic of action.’<sup>334</sup> Thus, the subjective perception-image of this climactic battle scene that is encountered by an active audience serves to viscerally connect technology, victory, and the moral character of American political violence to one another at a pre-cognitive level. These affective encounters are induced by the sonic, visual, and physical aspects of the movie, and this sequence in particular, rather than the dialogue that accompanies it. The noise of a plane launching from an aircraft carrier, the sight of explosions, blood, and sweat, and the physical sensation of awe at overwhelming military might used in the service of seemingly moral ends.

The relationship between technology, the moral character of American political violence, the

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<sup>332</sup> Masters, ‘Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities’, 122.

<sup>333</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 164.

<sup>334</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 70.

human figure of the soldier, and claims towards victory were clearly articulated during President Bush's surprise visit to troops in Baghdad on Thanksgiving 2003. Here, President Bush focused on the human soldiers that 'liberated' Iraq and the moral codes and values that they fought for rather than the techniques of shock and awe which by implication then become a tool for amplifying that 'just cause.'<sup>335</sup> The moral character of American political violence, then, is co-produced by the people that enact it and the technology that allows them to act in certain ways. This is explicitly linked to victory when President Bush concluded that

if force becomes necessary to disarm Iraq and enforce the will of the United Nations, if force becomes necessary to secure our country and to keep the peace, America will act deliberately, America will act decisively, and America will act victoriously with the world's greatest military.<sup>336</sup>

With the link between moral violence, technology, and victory already embedded in the minds of audiences through the affects they encounter in movies such as *Tears of the Sun*, claims that link victory with these factors is thus more easily accepted. Technology as a condition of success is a powerful political tool. Much like how tropes of American exceptionalism were entrenched in audiences through the affects they confront in movies making victory claims that rely on the concept more appealing, technology and morality function in similar ways. It is through the end of wars assemblage that these affects combine with political statements to allow conditions of success to emerge and be operationalised politically. The link between technology, biology, and morality is also explored in *Spider-Man* through the Green Goblin, the product of human augmentation experiments for the military and Spider-Man, the result of genetic experiments on spiders.

### **3.4.2 Spider-Man**

As discussed in the section on American exceptionalism, the character of Norman Osborn becomes the Green Goblin by trialling a new strength enhancing drug on himself because the military threatened to give his funding to a competitor and Peter Parker becomes Spider-Man because a genetically engineered spider bites him. Both therefore, can be seen as products of

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<sup>335</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Meets with Troops in Iraq on Thanksgiving', The White House, 27 November 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031127.html> This speech is replete with references to 'you,' 'your,' and 'you are' as well as many mentions of how the soldiers themselves were performing moral actions. While this is partly down to the occasion, it still makes a powerful political statement about the importance of the individual human soldier.

<sup>336</sup> George W. Bush, 'Presidential Remarks', The White House, 13 February 2003, <https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/200302134.html>.

America's scientific, research, and industrial sectors. However, the way they use their power and technology that is available to them is strikingly different. What is interesting about Norman Osborn/the Green Goblin is that they are two distinct characters inhabiting one body. Norman Osborn, despite being the wealthy owner of a massive corporation and driven by ambition, is still an agreeable man. He treats Peter like family, wants to help him in a career, and gives him advice. However, as the Green Goblin, a product of a militarised technology, he is evil. One could argue that the technology that created him is thus co-productive of his subjectivity. The Green Goblin brings Norman what he has always wanted, 'power beyond your wildest dreams.'<sup>337</sup> Peter Parker, either in his own character or that of Spider-Man, always remembers that 'with great power comes great responsibility.' Despite the differences in outcome that Norman Osborn/the Green Goblin and Peter Parker/Spider-Man receive from their technologically endowed enhancements, there is a similarity in that the technology enhances their inherent moral code. While Osborn is an affable character, there is an underlying character trait that drives him forward for profit as evidenced by his willingness to test his products on himself to secure funding for his corporation. Peter Parker however, is driven by the last words of his uncle Ben that are repeated throughout the film.<sup>338</sup> Clearly, the differing outcomes in the use of technology by these two characters are due to their moral code. Once again, we can see technology working to co-produce particular moral subjectivities in cinema rather than anything that consumes or subverts the human element. Although Osborn becomes increasingly enmeshed with the Green Goblin, the scene where the two are talking to each other in the mirror suggests that it is a voluntary submission of the human within the alter-ego rather than the human element becoming consumed by the technology.

While it could be argued that Bruce Wayne/Batman and Tony Stark/Iron Man also do not keep their identities distinct and one blurs into the other, the reasons for them gaining their technological superiority is clearly explained in moral terms: Bruce Wayne became Batman because of the murder of his parents and Tony Stark became Iron Man in order to escape imprisonment by Afghan fighters.<sup>339</sup> Furthermore, Batman relies less on technology than on his own innate skills as a fighter and detective and Iron Man, because he built the suits, is able to exert total mastery over them.<sup>340</sup> Much like how politicians discuss the relationship between technology and soldiers, it appears that technology is not cinematically depicted as corrupt in and of itself, and neither is technology the defining characteristic of cinematic warfare but what

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<sup>337</sup> Raimi, *Spider-Man*.

<sup>338</sup> Raimi.

<sup>339</sup> At least in the cinematic version of events.

<sup>340</sup> In addition, *Iron Man 3* sees Tony Stark taking on The Mandarin largely without the aid of his suit.

matters is exerting mastery over it and using it to amplify one's own moral values, behaviours, and codes. As Dittmer argues in relation to *Iron Man* (2008), 'Rather than resting on divine intervention, the United States is portrayed as unique through its *moral use* of technological superiority.'<sup>341</sup> President Bush echoes this when he stated that 'This great, powerful nation is motivated not by power for power's sake, but because of our values.'<sup>342</sup>

As well as parallels with American exceptionalism as discussed above with regards to *X-Men* and *Training Day*, what can be read into this, as well as into *Spider-Man*, is that it is not the technological superiority that brings a country victory, but using it as a tool to amplify one's own moral code. This is further reinforced when we analyse President Bush's statements around technology potentially falling into the hands of perceived enemies. Indeed, this was the key justification for the Iraq War in 2003, with President Bush saying in his 2002 State of the Union address that the US will work to 'deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction,' and in October 2002 saying that Saddam Hussein 'would be in a position to pass nuclear technology to terrorists.'<sup>343</sup> Clearly, the possibility of advanced military technology falling into the "wrong" (immoral) hands was constructed as an existential threat to the US and global security while, as discussed above, the moral use of advanced military technology was used to protect lives in the ensuing war. The affective potential that these cultural narratives of technology can have on an audience, especially when understood in the context of ongoing political discourse, is to associate the successes of militarised technology with the successes of a strong moral code and "American values." If America is succeeding in the War on Terror because of its advanced military technology, this must be because of the righteous character of that violence. Therefore, if claims to the moral character of the war (constructed through the use of American exceptionalism) are accepted then the use of advanced military technology must also be accepted. The affective association between American exceptionalism, technologized warfare, and success can then be seen as an emergent property of the assemblage that allows for the solidification of exceptionalism and technology as conditions of success. By making these political claims, audiences can draw on the cultural milieu that creates and circulates affective

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<sup>341</sup> Dittmer, 'American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom', 122 My emphasis.

<sup>342</sup> George W. Bush, 'Excerpts on Iraq from Grand Rapids Speech', The White House, 29 January 2003, <https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/200301292.html>.

<sup>343</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Delivers State of the Union Address', The White House, 29 January 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>; George W. Bush, 'President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat', The White House, 7 October 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>.



responses to the concepts that are deployed when conflicts conclude.

### 3.4.2 *X-Men*

*X-Men* explores similar technological issues as *Spider-Man* concerning the morality of using technology and, to a lesser extent, the relationship between technology and man. Wolverine provides an interesting counter-point to the Green Goblin for the latter. One might ask why the two turned out differently despite both being the product of militarised technological experiments. There are two possible explanations to this: one is that Logan/Wolverine was subjected to the experiment while Norman Osborn consented, and indeed insisted, and the other is that Logan is a moral character while Osborn is immoral. While this relies rather heavily on the comic book distinction between hero and villain which comes with its own problems of over-simplifying complex moral dilemmas, it is exactly this over-simplification of complex moral problems surrounding the use of technology in warfare that gives this condition its affective power within the assemblage to construct technology in the role as neutral moral amplifier. It is also interesting to note that Norman Osborn, when not the Green Goblin, is a pleasant man while Logan, when not Wolverine, is somewhat hostile. However, affability and unfriendliness are personality traits and not the moral attributes given to these characters. Indeed, Osborn's friendliness and Logan's antagonism mask their true identity in traditional comic book fashion.

The central depiction of technology in *X-Men*, however, is Magneto's device that forces mutations on normal people. Magneto is pushing for a radically egalitarian overhaul of the international system where 'the worlds powerful will be just like us.'<sup>344</sup> As well as being an inversion of post-Gulf War modern warfare 'in which one side's technological superiority insulates its warriors from the traditional vulnerabilities of direct combat,'<sup>345</sup> by directly attacking the world leaders who hold the fate of all humanity in their hands, this event ties together the two strands of this chapter. While Magneto's aim of forcing equality on the world can be seen as a progressive ideal, it comes into conflict with egalitarianism being equality of opportunity rather than of outcome in discourses of American exceptionalism.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, if we take the argument given above that technology functions cinematically as a neutral device that co-produces particular moral subjectivities, then Magneto is condemned to fail from the start. In other words, technology and, by extension, the political violence it allows for is only

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<sup>344</sup> Singer, *X-Men*.

<sup>345</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 142.

<sup>346</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 238.

successful when used for moral ends. Therefore, if technology is successful it *must* have been used for moral ends. You cannot be successful in the deployment of technological political violence without a good morality. President Bush also makes this link between failure and immorality when he asserts that:

these terrorists will fail. They will fail, because the Iraqi people will not accept a return to tyranny. They will fail because of the resolve of America and our allies will not be shaken. And they will fail because of the courageous men and women like you who are standing in their way...by acting in the best traditions of duty and honor, you're making our country and your Commander-in-Chief very proud.<sup>347</sup>

Thus the success of technological political violence is linked to morality but also to the exceptional character of America as discussed in the previous section. Not only will America succeed and prevail in the War on Terror because it is fighting the good fight against evil, as President Bush might formulate it, but also because it is fighting for those ideals that make America exceptional in the first place. The corollary of this is that the terrorists will fail because they do not share these values, they are not exceptional, and they are opposed to the perceived moral character of American violence. Thus, technology is not just another interesting connection or parallel between popular culture and world politics, but it is a fundamental condition of success that is necessary to present the War on Terror as a conflict in which America's victory is assured and inevitable. The encounters that are induced by the movies under discussion in this chapter, and the contemporaneous deployment of the concept of American exceptionalism and moral use of technology, can be conceptualised as emergent properties of the end of wars assemblage. Their emergent effect is to legitimise the claim that conflicts in the War on Terror will be, or are being, won. These effects are not reducible to the components of the assemblage, but work through an affective register to make these claims possible.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has built on the previous two to further support the central argument of this thesis - that popular culture and politics are mutually imbricated with one another in the process of creating and legitimising the conditions necessary for success in the War on Terror. How the end of wars assemblage is stabilised during these years and how particular conditions of success emerge, are the questions under analysis. The four films discussed in this chapter, alongside the political speeches that have been analysed make it clear that two of the key conditions of success

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<sup>347</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Salutes Soldiers in Fort Lewis, Washington', The White House, 18 June 2004, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040618-1.html>.

in the War on Terror are the values that are encapsulated in American exceptionalism and the moral righteousness that comes from the use of advanced military technology to uphold and defend these values. The end of wars assemblage through which these disparate artefacts can be said to function, is the model through which we can conceptualise the intensity of connection between culture and politics and argue that both work together and through each other to create these particular conditions of success. What we have seen is that these movies can induce affective encounters between the screen and the audience that allow the moral use of technologized violence and concepts of American exceptionalism to become embedded at a pre-cognitive level. Conceptualising these as 'basins of attraction,' in Protevi's terms means that when politicians deploy the same or similar tropes, narratives, and language to justify victory in wars, this claim is more persuasive to the audience that confronts both politics and popular culture.

American exceptionalism and the role of technology have long been key themes in both cinema and politics and clear linkages have been identified between these two areas throughout this chapter. Concepts of American exceptionalism such as a distrust of government and figures of authority, the importance of individualism and individualism exercised within a community, an equality of opportunity and a belief in the very exceptional nature of the US itself are clearly articulated in political discourse. Similarly, these motifs can be identified in popular cultural narratives. Not only does the concurrence of these motifs in politics and culture serve to reinforce them, but the ways in which they are portrayed in cinematic artefacts allows for affective encounters to be stimulated in audiences that makes the claim to victory that relies on these motifs more powerful. While identifying causal links between popular culture and politics is both fruitless and largely pointless given the non-linear causality outlined in chapter one, it is clear that the simultaneous nature of these motifs, tropes, and narratives serves to strengthen their importance when it comes to making a claim about the victorious nature of ambiguous wars. Values, morals, beliefs, and the exceptional nature of the superhero and American political violence are all key to the success of both the characters in the films and are constructed as being key to eventual American victory in the War on Terror. This can also be seen in how technology is portrayed in both politics and popular culture. What is clear is that technology is depicted as co-productive of moral subjectivities. Cinematic depictions of technology therefore stand in opposition to theorisations of techno-scientific warfare post-Gulf War where the human is subsumed by the technology and is the weakest link in technological warfare.

Furthermore, for technology, militarised or otherwise, to be successfully used it has to be

deployed by a person that has a strong moral code and uses it for exclusively moral purposes be that the rescue of Nigerian refugees, the defeat of a rampant capitalist in the form of the Green Goblin, or the salvation of an idealised American ideology. Likewise, in political speech, such as that used by President Bush on his Thanksgiving trip to Baghdad in 2003, the emphasis on the individual soldiers and their networks of support gives prominence to the human, rather than technological, aspect of contemporary warfare. In addition to technology being usable only for a moral end and by moral actors, culturally we can see that it can also be successfully deployed if in defence of dominant ideology. When all that remains, as in the case of Magneto's Brotherhood of Mutants, 'was the possibility of using an aggressor's own technology of domination against itself' then failure is guaranteed. Once again, this resonates with political discourse about how American force of arms succeeds not because it is vastly superior, but because it is used in defence of the ideological goals of the US. American exceptionalism and technology are not only embedded in cultural and political space in their own right, but are also deeply embedded with one another. The mutually constitutive nature of American exceptionalism and technology - as well as the mutually constitutive nature of popular culture and world politics is the core problematic of this thesis. This chapter has demonstrated that, through the affective encounter between audiences, cinema, and politics, American exceptionalism and the moral use of technology emerge as conditions of success.

## Chapter Four: Surges and Endings

*"Haven't you heard Mr Beckett? The world is coming to an end."*

*Pacific Rim (2013)*

### 4.1 Introduction

Following on from chapter three that explored how American exceptionalism and technology emerged as important conditions of success in the War on Terror between 2000 and 2003, this chapter will look at further stabilising processes in the end of wars assemblage between 2004 and 2007. This time period covers the increase in violence in Iraq until the 'troop surge' of 2007 as well as George W. Bush's re-election and second term. Just as the previous chapter explored how American exceptionalism and the use of technology emerged as conditions of success through cinematic encounters, this chapter explores how sacrifice and the built environment emerged from post-apocalyptic cinema. As this thesis is about the end of war, it seems fitting that one of the themes under discussion is the Apocalypse. This will allow me to touch upon several key factors politically, culturally, and academically such as the role of sacrifice, the centrality of the built environment to sacrifice and victory, and the prominence of apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian visions in popular culture. These themes will contribute to our understanding of how cinematic encounters and the end of wars assemblage allow for conditions of success to emerge during the War on Terror. A good way to discuss these endings is through a discussion of The Ultimate End.

The chapter analyses *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Children of Men* (2006) and *I am Legend* (2007) and will progress by a review of the literature on apocalyptic imagery in contemporary culture and why it is a useful site of analysis. This will allow for an analysis of how sacrifice emerges from the end of wars assemblage as a condition of success. Secondly, I will discuss how the urban landscape plays a prominent role in contemporary conflict and film and how this can contribute to urbanity as a condition of success emerging from the assemblage. Finally, the conclusion then brings these strands together in a detailed analysis of cultural and political artefacts in order to elucidate how cultural depictions of The End resonate with political discussions on the ending of wars. The argument of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, the themes of sacrifice and redemption in both politics and popular culture are deeply woven together. Sacrifice and redemption obviously have a long history in Western culture, politics and warfighting dating from at least Pericles reminding Athenians that 'this is the city for which these men fought and died. They were nobly determined that she should not be lost: and all of

us who survive should be willing to suffer for her.’<sup>348</sup> The connection between sacrifice, redemption, and Judeo-Christian belief systems further strengthens their ability to emerge as conditions of success in the War on Terror. This theme of salvation through redemption works to strengthen the political claim that if we make sacrifices in Iraq that redemption, or victory, is assured. The second aspect of this chapter’s argument, echoing Pericles, is that the central cultural and political location of the redemption through sacrifice narrative is in the urban built environment - be that the post-apocalyptic landscape of New York in *I am Legend* or the actual city of Baghdad. These conditions are not the only ones to emerge either during this period or the entire course of the War on Terror, but rather emerge from the particular texts selected for inclusion here. For example, the city or built environment has been the central location of cinematic and political violence since at least Vietnam and probably before and is therefore not confined to this particular moment in the War on Terror. As Stephen Graham argues, ‘cities, warfare, and organized political violence have always been mutual constructions.’<sup>349</sup> In this thesis we have already seen it in *Spider-Man* and will see it again in *Hancock* and *Source Code*. That being said, these movies do resonate particularly well with the time period under discussion. The increase in US fatalities in the Iraqi insurgency and the focus of the surge on urban environments – particularly Baghdad – contributes to the intensity of the cinematic encounter and therefore stabilises both their emergence and the assemblage as a whole. The connection between the cinematic and the political that this chapter seeks to analyse is that audiences can, through affective encounters, be pre-cognitively primed to associate certain patterns of thought with one another. Thus, if common cinematic visuals and tropes (in this chapter, sacrifice and urbanity) are connected to victory in the cultural realm, then audiences can more easily associate sacrifice and urbanity with victory in the political sphere. Affective encounters, mediated through the end of wars assemblage, allow for political articulations of victory that use these conditions to become more readily legitimised and accepted in audiences through the circulation of visuality, meaning, and affect. In other words, by pre-priming audiences to cinematically associate sacrifice and urbanity with victory, the sacrifices of American troops in Baghdad has a greater persuasive power. Therefore, we can say that sacrifice and urbanity emerge as conditions of success from the end of wars assemblage through cultural encounters.

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<sup>348</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Martin Hammond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.41.

<sup>349</sup> Stephen Graham, ed., *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 1.

## 4.2 The Apocalypse and Sacrifice

### 4.2.1 *Apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, dystopian*

Film can be thought of as ‘the best medium for presenting the fantastic visions and imagery that often accompany the apocalyptic genre.’<sup>350</sup> This is because, not only do computer generated images, surround sound, a darkened theatre, and a large screen make the apocalyptic vision highly affective (and often highly profitable) for movie studios but also because film has ‘replaced the novel in art’s traditional function of illustrating the characteristics of the society in which it is produced.’<sup>351</sup> But what makes a film apocalyptic? What is the difference between an apocalyptic film and a post-apocalyptic film? Or between a dystopian film and a (post-) apocalyptic one? Where do the films that are under discussion here fit in to such a categorisation? To answer these questions, it is useful to break down categorisations of what might be termed ‘apocalyptic film’ into three oppositions: religious v. secular apocalypticism; apocalyptic v. post-apocalyptic; and (post-) apocalyptic v. dystopian. I am not suggesting that these are simple binary opposites, but they provide a useful way to not only analyse the films under discussion in this chapter. The purpose of breaking down the ‘apocalyptic film’ into various categories is to allow for a closer analysis of what affective potentials the films have, how they might be productive of encounters, how they contribute to the end of wars assemblage, and what sort of politics they allow for. James Combs has argued that ‘establishing anything definite and worthwhile about the “politics of the movies” is indeed like nailing the proverbial jelly to the wall.’<sup>352</sup> This is true, and part of the argument of this thesis is that it is not the internal meaning of a text that is important, but what it connects with, what affects it produces, and what politics these affects create the conditions of possibility for. While we are in the process of breaking ‘apocalyptic’ down into various categories we should be aware that,

The notion of “apocalypse” has been bastardized and appropriated across many fields in contemporary Western thought, especially in popular culture during the latter half of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century. It is a term used indiscriminately to connote and conflate, among others, notions of “anarchy,” “chaos,” “entropy,” “nihilism,” “catastrophe,” and “doomsday,” yet by removal from its original mytho-religious association it assumes a randomly clichéd definition.<sup>353</sup>

While this is important to remember when discussing the apocalyptic, Broderick makes no

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<sup>350</sup> Conrad Ostwalt, ‘Apocalyptic’, in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. John Lyden (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 368.

<sup>351</sup> Christopher Sharrett, ‘Introduction: Crisis Cinema’, in *Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film*, ed. Christopher Sharrett (Washington: Maisonneuve, 1993), 1.

<sup>352</sup> James Combs, ‘Pox-Eclipse Now: The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Popular Movies’, in *Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film*, ed. Christopher Sharrett (Washington: Maisonneuve, 1993), 17.

<sup>353</sup> Mick Broderick, ‘Heroic Apocalypse: Mad Max, Mythology and the Millennium’, in *Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film*, ed. Christopher Sharrett (Washington: Maisonneuve, 1993), 252.

attempt to create a typology of what *does* define the apocalypse. What is important to bear in mind here is that cultural portrayals of the apocalyptic are, like the genre that was discussed in chapter two, ever changing.

It can be argued that all texts are in some sense apocalyptic as ‘the classic narrative structure, rising action > climax > denouement, seems to have been modeled [*sic*] on the apocalypse.’<sup>354</sup> Indeed, Teresa Heffernan goes further to suggest that all ‘end-driven narratives...have been inspired by the Genesis to Revelation model.’<sup>355</sup> But the very notion of apocalypticism is, at its core, a religious idea. According to Conrad Ostwalt,

The essential element that technically makes a drama an apocalyptic one is that the dualism, the visions, the symbols, and even the end are controlled by a divine power, not by fate, by human intervention, or by accident but by design – the end is controlled by divine prerogative that thwarts the nihilistic and fatalist visions.<sup>356</sup>

It is interesting and important that the etymology of ‘apocalypse’ comes from the Greek *ἀποκάλυψις* meaning to un-cover. In Judeo-Christian thought, this is interpreted as the uncovering of a divine will and the intercession of divinity and divine power into a battle between elements that are essentially good and evil. Thus for a film to be apocalyptic in the strict Judeo-Christian sense, it must include a revealing or unveiling of a divine power. As such, none of the films to be discussed here are in this sense strictly apocalyptic. There are certainly films that fit this category however. The *Left Behind* series of books have been adapted into three films (*Left Behind* (2000), *Left Behind: Tribulation Force* (2002), and *Left Behind: World and War* (2006)) and would most certainly be classified as apocalyptic in the traditional sense. Despite the success of the books on which these movies are based, they were critical and commercial disasters, hence their exclusion from this research.<sup>357</sup> While their failure may be due to incredibly low production values, poor scriptwriting, and mediocre-at-best acting, it may also be because they did not satisfy audience demand for either large scale destruction or the success of human agency.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Douglas Robinson, ‘Literature and Apocalyptic’, in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Stephen J Stein, vol. 3 (New York: Con, 2000), 360.

<sup>355</sup> Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>356</sup> Ostwalt, ‘Apocalyptic’, 369.

<sup>357</sup> For a critical analysis of the books from a popular geopolitics perspective see Jason Dittmer and Zeke Spears, ‘Apocalypse, Now? The Geopolitics of Left Behind’, *GeoJournal* 74, no. 3 (2008): 183–89, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-008-9219-8>.

<sup>358</sup> I should note that *Left Behind* has been re-made with a bigger budget, major studio backing, and Nicholas Cage starring in the main role. Although it drops the UN as a one world government under the rule of the Anti-Christ, it has still become a critical and commercial flop.



It is this latter point of the success of human agency that Ostwalt identifies as one of the main characteristics of the ‘secular apocalypse’ film. For Ostwalt, The secular apocalypse differs from the traditional in four main ways: first, while it borrows imagery such as war and cataclysmic events from the traditional apocalypse, the supernatural element of the unveiling of divine will and power is missing; second, secular apocalypse films ‘often contemporize evil through the genre of science fiction so that the sources of potential destruction are ones familiar to contemporary audiences’ and ‘evil’ – be that nuclear war, disease, climate change, aliens, or natural disaster – not God, is the harbinger of destruction; third, the end of civilisation and/or humanity is avoided through a hero which is ‘a complete reversal of the traditional apocalyptic drama’s fatalistic acceptance of the end by supernatural causation’; fourth, ‘the secular apocalypse is also a humanistic or anthropocentric apocalypse. God has been replaced by human effort.’ The classification therefore does not rely on the means of the end (nuclear weapons, climate change, asteroids, disease etc.) but rather on the secularisation of the apocalypse: ‘the traditional apocalypse retains an “unveiling” of divine agency while the secular apocalypse replaces that with an “uncovering” of human ascendancy and heroism.’<sup>359</sup>

The first difference that Ostwalt highlights is important to bear in mind when reading the films under discussion here. Although *Children of Men* and *I am Legend* draw on religious imagery such as the birth of a saviour who must go into exile and a hero who must sacrifice himself to save the rest of humanity, they are not religious apocalypse films. As Ostwalt says, ‘Just because a film has a sacrificial character this does not necessarily make that character a Christ-figure, and just because a film has an end-of-the-world scenario this does not make that film an apocalyptic film.’<sup>360</sup> Nonetheless, these films can still usefully be thought of as apocalyptic scenarios, albeit not in a theological sense with the intercession of a divine will. While this argument about the strict definition of the apocalypse may seem to be tangential to this chapter, it is important to place these films within a religious framework as films ‘may project a world-view which functions much like a religion in our culture’ and ‘can be considered both forms of viable religion, and ideology.’<sup>361</sup> But if a film does not need to conform to the religious idea of revelation, what then makes it apocalyptic? And, rather more importantly for our purposes here, how does this style of film influence the end of wars assemblage? Similar to what was argued in the previous chapter, what will be shown here is that the movies under discussion in this

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<sup>359</sup> Ostwalt, ‘Apocalyptic’, 376.

<sup>360</sup> Ostwalt, 371.

<sup>361</sup> John Lyden, ‘To Commend or to Critique? The Question of Film and Religious Studies’, *Journal of Religion and Film* 1, no. 2 (1997).

chapter work to pre-cognitively embed sacrifice and urbanity as conditions of success that can then be politically deployed and popularly accepted and legitimised.

It appears as if the movie *Armageddon* (1998) has replaced the biblical battle site Armageddon in the popular consciousness of what constitutes the apocalyptic scenario. As such, any film that deals with situations where the entire planet, all of humankind, or even a civilisation is existentially threatened can be categorised as apocalyptic. What is interesting to note about this secular recalibration of the sub-genre is that since the 1970s, disaster films have been based largely not on external threats such as alien invasions or divine providence, but rather based on the idea that ‘the socio-logic inherent in the development of the system itself will lead to a catastrophe that is internally-induced.’<sup>362</sup> Furthermore, the iconography and imagery that is taken from the Judeo-Christian canon will be interesting given the aforementioned links between the presidency of George W. Bush and the evangelical Christian movement in the United States. As Connolly states, ‘no political economy or religious practice is self contained.’<sup>363</sup> While the years under discussion here perhaps had a greater prevalence of post-apocalyptic movies, it is clear that they are in conversation not just with simultaneous political rhetoric, but also the well-established evangelism of the Bush administration. This discussion about the differences between the religious and secular apocalypses raises the further interesting question of where the break between the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic takes place.

This question of (post-) apocalypticism may seem an easy question to answer: apocalyptic cultural artefacts deal with the approach to The End and its destruction or avoidance while post-apocalyptic artefacts are to do with life after the cataclysmic event. Some works such as Nevil Shute’s 1957 novel *On the Beach* or Cormac McCarthy’s 2006 novel *The Road* clearly fit the bill of being post-apocalyptic as neither depict the events of the (near) destruction of mankind, are set entirely after the cataclysmic event, and do not offer us much hope for our salvation either. Indeed, in *The Road*, the events that led to the end of life as we know it are deliberately left vague.<sup>364</sup> But where does a film like *I am Legend* or *Children of Men* fit into this category? Both take place after a cataclysmic event – a plague that kills or mutates most of the species and a sudden end to reproduction – but these films, while set entirely after their respective apocalyptic events (with the exception of flashbacks), present a narrative that offers audiences

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<sup>362</sup> Combs, ‘Pox-Eclipse Now: The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Popular Movies’, 24.

<sup>363</sup> Connolly, ‘The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine’, 870.

<sup>364</sup> The difference in the endings to the apocalyptic drama in literature and film are quite interesting though unfortunately beyond the scope of this piece. Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, 3.

some degree of hope that we will, as a species, survive.

But post-apocalypticism is inherently oxymoronic: ‘Before the beginning and after the end, there can only be nothing. At the beginning, something begins; and at the ending, it ends.’<sup>365</sup> The challenging nature of classifying anything as post-apocalyptic also leads me to reiterate that ‘genre is alive,’ and as such can be a slippery thing to define.<sup>366</sup> If Combs, quoted above, thinks that political readings of films are difficult, he should try genre definition! Yet despite the difficulties in coming to terms with what exactly constitutes a post-apocalyptic scenario, and bearing in mind Broderick’s caution above, we can perhaps agree on a working definition that it refers to events that take place after a cataclysmic event. This is still not entirely clear cut though. Are the *Left Behind* films apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic? It depends on what you take by the cataclysmic event in these films: it could be the rapture, it could be the creation of the Global Community under Nicolae Carpathia (Gordon Currie); or it could be the Tribulation and second coming. Likewise with *Children of Men*: it depicts the ongoing struggles during the catastrophe of reproduction. Is the impossibility of reproduction the apocalyptic event, thus making the film post-apocalyptic? Does it depict the slow decline of humanity, making it apocalyptic, or does the end of the film show us that the apocalypse has been averted, making the film neither apocalyptic nor post-apocalyptic? Do the scenes at Bexhill refugee camp and totalitarian-style advertisements in the film suggest a more dystopian theme?

Despite these concerns, it is evident that ‘the visions of the End that Frank Kermode analysed in terms of a sense of an ending have increasingly given way to visions of after the end, and the apocalyptic sensibilities both of religion and of modernism have shifted toward a sense of post-apocalypse.’<sup>367</sup> Berger identifies this shift towards post-apocalypticism in Reagan who ‘saw the Cold War, and the apocalypse, as already over,’ because ‘once the prophetic words have been uttered, the event may as well have occurred, for it must occur. In the mind of the believer, it *has* occurred.’<sup>368</sup> Following on from the religious-secular ideas of the apocalypse and questions about where the post- in post-apocalypse begins, the usage of parenthesised prefix (post-) in (post-) apocalyptic here can be taken as having a double meaning. It refers first to the

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<sup>365</sup> James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xi.

<sup>366</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 5.

<sup>367</sup> Berger, *After the End*, xiii.

<sup>368</sup> Berger, 138 It could be that this shift to post-apocalypticism be a symptom of the end of the Cold War. The lessening threat of mutually assured destruction could mean that our cultural artefacts have moved beyond *War Games*, *On The Beach*, or *Dr Strangelove* to instead imagine what life will be like after these events rather than what it is like in the days and months leading up to them?

chronological setting of the film as after an apocalyptic or cataclysmic event, but it can also refer to the film depicting a secular rather than a religious apocalypse.

Following on from the concerns around what makes a film apocalyptic if it does not depict the end of humanity and the intervention of a divine will, we can also ask the question of what makes a film like *Children of Men* apocalyptic and not dystopian. These two genres of film and literature are not mutually exclusive and one can, and often does, contain elements of the other. Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Suvin define dystopias in terms of authorial intention and audience reception. That is, a dystopia is a society that is created by an author who intends it to be read as somewhere that politics, society, and inter-personal relations are not as perfect as they are in the society of the reader.<sup>369</sup> Tom Moylan points out that this then ‘leaves the judgment of utopian or dystopian quality up to a reader or critic who undoubtedly works from a particular standpoint (with particular affiliations and principles) in order to decide whether a given fictive society is *worse* or *better* than the author’s or the reader/critic’s.’<sup>370</sup> Given that, as discussed in chapter one, authorial intentionality is impossible to ascribe, especially in film, and this thesis deals less with audience reception and more with the affects that active audiences can encounter in film, this is a potentially problematic definition. As dystopia is a subjective judgement for a reader/viewer to decide, then the films under study can be seen as dystopian. Political, social, economic, and cultural institutions are less ideal than those in our society (however poor those might be) and inter-personal relationships are more difficult and of lower quality. However, categorising the films under discussion here simply as dystopias somewhat undermines their eschatological themes and motifs.

In addition to the explanations of apocalypse given above, Frederic Jameson claims that an apocalyptic drama ‘includes both catastrophe and fulfilment, the end of the world and the inauguration of the reign of Christ on earth, Utopia and the extinction of the human race all at once.’<sup>371</sup> While it is clear, following Ostwalt’s comment about Christ figures above, that the first child born to the human species in 18 years (in *Children of Men*) is not necessarily the saviour, it is still clear that although these three films follow some of the logics, imagery, and themes of dystopias such as presenting a society that is much less ideal than ours (because of no reproduction, species-threatening plague, or alien invasion) they fall into the (post-)

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<sup>369</sup> Quoted in Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 155.

<sup>370</sup> Moylan, 155–56.

<sup>371</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 199.

apocalyptic category. As authorial intentionality is invariably impossible to ascertain in films, especially given the large number of people that contribute to a film (directors, scriptwriters, actors, producers, studios, editors, and so forth), and audience reception data being outside the scope of this thesis it is difficult to categorise these films purely as dystopias. Once again though, it should be noted that these films, like all cultural artefacts, blur boundary lines between genres taking in Action Thrillers, Science Fiction, Apocalyptic, Dystopian, and Western themes to name a few. And while trying to avoid a reductionist pigeon-holing of films into a particular form, it is clear that they follow the themes and imagery of a secular apocalypse that celebrates the triumph of humanity.

Taking all the above points in to account, we can establish that the (post-) apocalyptic film is one where the majority of the action takes place after a cataclysmic event of some kind; it depicts the triumph of humanity over adversity through luck, ingenuity, or determination and in so doing, eliminates the religious elements of apocalypticism (though it may draw imagery from the religious); and it presents a world that is much less ideal than the one we currently live in, although this is an effect, rather than a cause, of the apocalyptic event. Clearly therefore *War of the Worlds*, *Children of Men*, and *I am Legend* fit this definition of (post-) apocalyptic movie. Having established some of the genre conventions of a (post-) apocalyptic movie, explained what makes these three films fit with one another besides being contemporary, and explored the nature of The End in more detail, it is necessary to ascertain how exactly these films function within the end of wars assemblage and how they allow sacrifice and urbanity to emerge as conditions of success. The following analysis will examine how the (post-) apocalyptic setting of these films allows for sacrifice and redemption to be constructed as a condition of success and how the location of that sacrifice in the built environment mirrors the geographic situation of the War on Terror. These themes will allow an exploration of several politically salient points including the political and conflictual aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, the presidency of George W. Bush, and how the ending of conflict is presented.

#### ***4.2.2 Post-apocalypticism in cinema***

To begin with, we can talk about the religiosity of the films and how this contributes to the emergence of sacrifice as a condition of success. Although Ostwalt's comments about reading too much in to Christ-like figures is noted several times above, it has to be acknowledged that these films do attempt to present a degree of salvation, though secular and anthropocentric, in the terms and imagery associated with the Christian eschatological tradition. *Children of Men* is the clearest example of this. Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey), the first pregnant woman on Earth

for 18 years is an illegal immigrant (a ‘fugee’) and it is intended by others that her pregnancy will be used by a political group (‘The Fishes,’ their name perhaps being an allusion to the Christian ichthys symbol) in order to rally support for a revolution. Furthermore, the scene where her pregnancy is revealed is highly reminiscent of the nativity, taking place in a barn. This link appears to be deliberate as later, after they escape from The Fishes, Jasper (Michael Caine) talks about how Kee’s baby is ‘the miracle the whole world has been waiting for’ and Kee jokes that she is a virgin.<sup>372</sup> Additionally, the escape from The Fishes, birth of the child in Bexhill refugee camp, and flight from both army and armed groups to The Human Project’s boat is a similar trajectory to the biblical massacre of the innocents and flight into Egypt. The strong influence of Judeo-Christian thought and imagery helps to cement this movie within the Genesis to Revelation model of apocalyptic culture.

Cuarón’s use of Christian narratives and symbolism is clearly deliberate. The novel on which the movie is based, *The Children of Men* by P.D. James, deals explicitly with questions of religion; Cuarón has said that he did not want to ‘shy away from spiritual archetypes’; and the movie was even released on Christmas Day in America.<sup>373</sup> The deliberate use of religious iconography, narratives, and symbolism immediately allows audiences to approach the movie with biblical stories in mind despite the lack of overt Christian symbols. As the central story of the New Testament is the sacrifice of a man to save humanity, the connection between sacrifice and some form of victory is established early on in the minds of audiences. The encounter that this induces has the effect of allowing audiences to fall into patterns of thought that associate sacrifice with redemption, even without the explicit religious iconography that is associated with this narrative. The implication of this is to induce in audiences a feeling that a sacrifice will inevitably be necessary to complete this journey and redeem humanity, much as the biblical journey is completed with Christ’s crucifixion. Through the narrative arc of a sacrifice by a non-religious character in service of quasi-religious ends the idea that victory can only come about through sacrifice is embedded.<sup>374</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, the actual moment of sacrifice is also a powerful encounter.

Similar Judeo-Christian eschatological themes can be seen in *I am Legend* where (in the

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<sup>372</sup> Alfonso Cuarón, *Children of Men* (Universal Pictures, 2007).

<sup>373</sup> Anthony Sacramone, ‘Children of Men’, First Things, 11 August 2008, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2008/11/sacramone-children-of-men>; Jason Guerrasio, ‘A New Humanity’, *Filmmaker Magazine*, 22 December 2006, <https://filmmakermagazine.com/4897-a-new-humanity-2/>.

<sup>374</sup> For more on the contested role of religious imagery in popular culture and how it relates to America’s role in the world see Jason Dittmer and Tristan Sturm, eds., *Mapping the End Times: American Evangelical Geopolitics and Apocalyptic Visions*, Critical Geopolitics (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

theatrical release) Robert Neville (Will Smith) must sacrifice himself to ensure the survival of mankind. Although less about a ‘second coming’ of a Christ-like saviour figure than *Children of Men*, the Christian narrative of a chosen person saving humanity from eternal damnation is clearly articulated. This can be seen when Neville encounters other survivors and insists that ‘everybody is dead’ and when he tells the Darkseekers towards the end of the film that ‘I can save you. I can help you. You are sick and I can help you. I can fix this. I can save everybody. Let me save you’<sup>375</sup> the notion of salvation is clear to be seen. However, in the alternative ending that is featured on the DVD version, Neville survives after understanding that the Darkseekers are capable of human emotion and empathy. The narrative of salvation through sacrifice (itself also related to the history of the genre as discussed in chapter two) is much less clear as it is left open ended whether the three reach the survivor’s colony or what the status of the ‘vaccine’ is.<sup>376</sup> That this is omitted from the theatrical release might suggest the cultural power of such a conclusive narrative – that if we sacrifice we must prevail, or that success only comes through sacrifice – something that is prominent in political discourse at the time.<sup>377</sup> The notion of salvation through sacrifice is not only closely linked to the Christian narrative of God’s sacrifice of his only son, but it also clearly related to common wartime narratives about the sacrifice of soldiers and victims. Of course, death and sacrifice are common in war and the necessity to emerge victorious despite them – or because of them – is common.<sup>378</sup> Already in November 2001, President Bush stated that ‘the American people understand that we’ve got a mighty struggle on our hands and there will be sacrifice. After all, some people made the greatest sacrifice possible on September the 11th, and that is those who took the airplane [United 93] down.’<sup>379</sup> In a later speech in 2006 that attempts to refocus attention on Afghanistan, President Bush also says that ‘We live in freedom because of the courage of men like Matthew and Danny [two Navy SEALs killed in action in Afghanistan and awarded the Navy Cross]. And we will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission.’<sup>380</sup> Not only will victory honour the sacrifices of those killed fighting the War on Terror, but sacrifice is here and in other speeches presented

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<sup>375</sup> Francis Lawrence, *I Am Legend* (Warner Bros., 2007).

<sup>376</sup> The alternative ending also explores Neville’s questionable research and experiment ethics.

<sup>377</sup> It appears that if we want to experience an end that is ambiguous and open, we should, according to Heffernan, turn to literature which can offer a vision of a ‘world that no longer offers up narratives with conclusive endings.’ Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, 3.

<sup>378</sup> Again, going back to Ancient Greece, Bosworth makes the case that Pericles’ funeral oration makes the case the ‘possibility of losing such a society justifies the sacrifice of one’s life, and the current batch of dead are seen as consciously embracing death for the community.’ A. B. Bosworth, ‘The Historical Context of Thucydides’ Funeral Oration’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000): 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/632478>.

<sup>379</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Welcomes Aid Workers Rescued from Afghanistan’, The White House, 26 November 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011126-1.html>.

<sup>380</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror’, The White House, 29 November 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060929-3.html>.

as a necessary step towards victory. In other words, it is politically articulated as a condition of success that draws on cinematic, cultural, and religious tropes as well as a long history of sacrifice being crucial to victory in war. Both the cultural artefact of *I am Legend* and the rhetoric of President Bush articulate the importance of sacrifice for ultimate success. The effect of this is that when President Bush makes a claim that a mission will be completed because of the sacrifices of soldiers, he is drawing on a wellspring of cultural (and religious) ideas that relate sacrifice to redemption. Audiences that have been pre-primed through cultural narratives of sacrifice and redemption are perhaps more likely to accept this claim to truth. Much like how *Children of Men* foreshadows the inevitable sacrifice through its use of Judeo-Christian imagery, *I am Legend* cements the necessity of sacrifice through its climactic sequence.

Echoes of such salvation through sacrifice, unambiguous endings, and an anthropocentric narrative that is nonetheless clearly influenced by the Judeo-Christian eschatological tradition can also be seen during the 2007 troop surge in Iraq. During this time, the condition of sacrifice is articulated as if we have sacrificed in Iraq and Afghanistan, then those sacrifices *cannot* have been in vain, therefore, we must and we will prevail. In other words, there is a clear connection made between sacrifice and the claim that we will win, we are winning, or we have won. President Bush, in his speech announcing the surge talks about how the country ‘mourns the loss of every fallen American – and we owe it to them to build a future worthy of their sacrifice,’ and that ‘the year ahead will demand more patience, sacrifice, and resolve.’<sup>381</sup> This motif is of course common to wartime politics in general and President Bush’s speeches often make reference to it, such as in March 2006 when he says that

you’re helping to change this part of the world, and change the world with your courage and your sacrifice. I assure you that this government will of yours will not blink, we will not yield. We’re on the right course, and the world is going to be a better place because of your service.<sup>382</sup>

Or in April of the same year when he said that the American people ‘appreciate the fact that people are willing to make sacrifices,’ and that ‘failure in Iraq is not an option.’<sup>383</sup> This continues through 2008 when he says that ‘we honor our American troops who have sacrificed so that Afghanistan never becomes a safe haven,’ and that ‘You’re making a sacrifice today so that future generations of Americans don’t have to worry about harm coming from a place like

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<sup>381</sup> Bush, ‘President’s Address to the Nation’.

<sup>382</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Thanks U.S. and Coalition Troops in Afghanistan’, The White House, 1 March 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060301-3.html>.

<sup>383</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Meets with Governors Who Traveled to Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan’, The White House, 19 May 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060419.html>.



Afghanistan.<sup>384</sup> Accounts of salvation through sacrifice are deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, historical accounts of war, and manifest in many cultural artefacts (such as the World War II combat film) the concurrence of the political and the cultural, and the affect that influences audiences who encounter both culture and politics is what allows sacrifice to become such a powerful and persuasive political tool.

Although sacrifice has been part of the religious, cultural, and conflictual landscape from antiquity the simultaneity between political and cultural articulations during this period allows for the affects generated by the films to be more intensive and therefore politically salient. As explored in chapter one, the affective encounter that exists between film and audiences and how this is strengthened by political speech is what allows for the end of wars assemblage to produce emergent properties such as conditions of victory for conflicts in the War on Terror. One such condition is that if sacrifices are made, victory will be ensured. This condition is explored in *I am Legend* and *Children of Men* in some detail and there are several sequences in these films that have strong affective qualities. The final scene of *I am Legend*, for instance, firmly establishes the redemption through sacrifice motif. This scene echoes the last stand narrative of combat and other action films as Neville, Anna (Alice Braga), and Ethan (Charlie Tahan) eventually retreat into the lab/basement of the house. Cinematically, the orchestral music serves to heighten the emotional content of the denouement while the sounds of violence are increasingly muted and the limited colour palette (mostly yellow and orange) focuses the audience's attention on the impending sacrifice. Our last glimpse of Neville is charging into the leading Darkseeker before being engulfed in flames. The encounter induced by this sequence in audiences that face political actions combines with the concurrent political prominence of this theme. The effect of this is that both serve to construct, shape, circulate, and legitimise the idea that sacrifice is necessary for success.

In *Children of Men*, we see similar cinematic techniques used to highlight the importance of sacrifice to redemption and success. During the battle in Bexhill refugee camp, discussed in more detail below, Theo, Kee, and her baby descend the stairs of a block of flats being stormed by troops. As the baby cries, the violence begins to slow and stop. There is limited coherent dialogue in this sequence; the music becomes increasingly choral; the sound of gunfire and fighting is muffled; and the sound of the baby's cries are amplified. The affective power of this

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<sup>384</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Meets with General David McKiernan, Commander for NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan', The White House, 1 October 2008, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/10/20081001-7.html>.

moment is to establish the saviour narrative within the film as well as the importance of the sacrifices that have been made to get Kee this far. As they leave the block of flats surrounded by soldiers in awe, kneeling, and crossing themselves, the battle suddenly re-erupts and the reverie is broken. The final scene of the movie has Theo, Kee, and the baby in a rowing boat seemingly lost in the fog. Theo, who has been mortally wounded during the battle, slowly bleeds to death.<sup>385</sup> Just as he collapses, the Tomorrow, the boat of The Human Project, emerges from the fog. The opacity granted by the fog, the image of a man dying to save a baby, the return of the choral music, and the promise of redemption by The Human Project are all powerful aspects of this final sequence. The calm that descends around Kee and her child, the sudden violence of the battle restarting, and the slow death of Theo in the boat all work to code sacrifice and redemption as basins of attraction within the assemblage. As Protevi remarks, ‘decisions are precisely the brain’s falling into one pattern or another, a falling that is modelled as settling into a basin of attraction that will constrain neural firing.’<sup>386</sup> Or, as Connolly suggests, ‘the machine then foments new intensities of solidarity between these constituencies.’<sup>387</sup> Therefore, the effect of the encounter that cinematic sacrifices allow for is to allow audiences to fall into these ‘basins of attraction’ such that they can readily associate sacrifice with victory. Therefore, when this claim is made politically, the encounter that creates this association is re-triggered in audiences, allowing this claim to truth to be more readily accepted. This conceptualisation also accepts that there is no linear cause and effect relationship between movie, political statement, and actualisation but does argue that they are interwoven in complex chains and webs of causality that make, in our case, certain political realities more likely to be legitimised. In addition to the synchronicity of affect between political speech and cinema on the topic of sacrifice and redemption, another striking resonance is the centrality of the urban landscape in these movies and in bringing security to Iraq.

### 4.3 The City: destruction, salvation, victory

One of the most prominent visual motifs of these three films is the destroyed, degraded, or decayed urban infrastructure that constitutes the background of many scenes and helps the viewer place the film as having taken place either during or after a cataclysmic event. One way of approaching these visuals is the label of ‘disaster porn.’ Although originally utilised to refer to news broadcasts of actual war, famine, and natural disasters, ‘one sees after September 11 the expansion of disaster porn terminology to encompass not just news reports of actual

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<sup>385</sup> As an interesting aside, *Training Day*, *Tears of the Sun*, and *Children of Men* all feature characters slowly bleeding to death.

<sup>386</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 18.

<sup>387</sup> Connolly, ‘The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine’, 871.

disasters, but the kind of fictional disaster films that had been uncritically consumed for decades.<sup>388</sup> These films can therefore be seen as disaster porn, albeit with varying degrees of intensity. The immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> may have lessened the appetite for such destruction, something noted by both Recuber, who suggests that Americans were renting movies, just not disaster ones, and Cynthia Weber, who on the Saturday after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, ‘went to my neighbourhood cinema because I sought an escape from catastrophe and a return to calm. There I lost myself in an extravagant production in which – for a full two and a half hours – no one died.’<sup>389</sup> The distance between 9/11 and the release of the films under discussion here may have been required for the public to regain their appetite for this style of film, and the types of disaster depicted (manmade virus, alien invasion, and ambiguous but possibly environmental issues) are far removed from the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. *Children of Men* is perhaps the least stark example of disaster porn, but nonetheless the faded grandeur of Britain is clear: not only are the skies grey (something perhaps unsurprising in the UK), but so too is everything else. With the exception of the government Bentley and the Ark of the Arts, the film is largely devoid of colour and what colour there is is heavily desaturated. *War of the Worlds* presents us with an urban environment in the process of being destroyed by tripods that mercilessly and methodically raze tower blocks to the ground. In *I am Legend* we are shown a built environment that has not been destroyed but one that has been abandoned and left to decay: wild deer and lions in Times Square, New York avenues devoid of cars and life, Robert Neville playing golf on the wing of an A-12 reconnaissance aircraft on the deck of the USS Intrepid museum ship.

What then, does the widespread destruction of the urban or, more generally, built environment tell us about how these films function within the assemblage and what conditions of success they allow for the emergence of? The fact that one of the main visual focuses of these films (especially *I am Legend*) is the urban environment raises questions about the specificity of urban violence and the destruction of urban or built environments. The invasion of Iraq, capture of Baghdad, and the perceived need for the surge of troops to reclaim lost urban territory is a simultaneous connection between the political realities of the War on Terror and the cultural depictions of destroyed urban environments. Both cinematic and political depictions of endings share an urban focus. Not only that, but the urban environment is the site of political and cultural sacrifice and therefore redemption and success. Martin Coward’s work on urbicide is a useful

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<sup>388</sup> Timothy Recuber, ‘Disaster Porn!’, *Contexts* 12, no. 2 (2013): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504213487695>.

<sup>389</sup> Recuber, 31; Weber, *Imagining America at War*, 1.

way to approach the visuality of the destruction of built environments. In addition to Coward's work on urbicide, it is useful to consider what Shapiro calls aesthetic subjects in relation to the cinematic depiction of urban ruin. Developing an association between urbicide, the aesthetic subject, and the visuality of urban destruction will allow us to approach these films in a way that can elucidate the particular encounters that allow for urbanity to emerge as an important condition of success from the end of wars assemblage.

The link between Coward's urbicide and Shapiro's aesthetic subject are clear when we combine the two in order to understand politico-cultural interaction. While 'urbicide, then, is a fundamentally political matter since it represents the violent foreclosure of the possibility of the political,'<sup>390</sup> aesthetic subjects are 'characters in texts whose movements and actions (both purposive and non-purposive) map and often alter experiential, politically relevant terrains.'<sup>391</sup> When those aesthetic subjects are mapped on to an urban (post-) apocalyptic cinematic terrain, strong connections can be made between these two concepts. Coward suggests that urbicide is needed as a distinct category of political violence that goes beyond how the destruction of buildings during conflict is normally seen. These normal understandings of the destruction of the built environment are military (including collateral damage), symbolic, and metaphorical.<sup>392</sup> Coward discusses how these three approaches fall short of understanding how the deliberate destruction of the built environment for its own sake functions as a separate category of political violence and says that 'urbicide could be said to comprise the destruction of buildings *qua* the condition of possibility of a certain type of space (in principle, public space) that is itself productive of a variety of identities.'<sup>393</sup> In other words, the built environment is not destroyed for its military, symbolic, or metaphorical meaning but rather it is destroyed to remove the possibility of specific identities being formed. Furthermore, and importantly for us – especially in relation to *War of the Worlds* – 'urbicide is a viable concept for identifying a distinct form of political violence...regardless of whether such violence occurs in a city, town, village, or farm.'<sup>394</sup>

Having established what urbicide is we must now ask the question of whether it is applicable to film. Coward does not mention film at all in *Urbicide*, but he does conclude that

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<sup>390</sup> Martin Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 43.

<sup>391</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, xiv.

<sup>392</sup> Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, 18.

<sup>393</sup> Coward, 48.

<sup>394</sup> Coward, 53.

The logic of urbicide, set out here, is thus not intended to comprise a universal, trans-historical ontological prescription. That said, I would argue that the relation between buildings and heterogeneity posited here applies globally to instances of widespread and deliberate destruction of cities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>395</sup>

By applying Shapiro's concept of the aesthetic subject to Coward's urbicide, we can more fruitfully utilise the latter to understand the particular affective potential of the narrative and visuality of the movies under discussion here. Understanding how aesthetic subjects move through and affect the urban environments of these films, and how the city is deployed in political discourse, we can map out what conditions of success the city, as site of sacrifice, allows for the emergence of. In this context, *War of the Worlds* provides us with perhaps the best visuals of urban destruction. The alien tripods are seen systematically destroying urban infrastructure through footage shown in a news van. Clearly, such destruction is a form of urbicide as it is wanton destruction that attacks everything regardless of military, symbolic, or metaphorical value. It is clear that the aliens wish to not only destroy humanity, but also remove any possibility of their specific identities or ideologies being formed. This is also reinforced sonically through the loud and fearsome noise that the tripods emit. Much like how the tripods are given prominence within an urban setting, so too is the urban setting of Baghdad in political discussions of the troop surge. In February 2007, President Bush places the central battlefield of the War on Terror in Baghdad saying, 'I made Baghdad the top security priority. In other words, it's important, in order to achieve our objective, that the capital city of this grand country be secure...In the end, I chose this course of action because it provides the best chance of success.'<sup>396</sup> Success within the War on Terror then is geographically rooted in the city. If one is to succeed in the city, then the rest of the conflict is not in doubt. In *War of the Worlds* as the main characters re-enter the city we see the dying remains of the tripods and struggling ones being destroyed by troops firing javelin missiles. The centrality of the built environment not only to military strategy, but also to the eventual success of that strategy, is clear. Therefore securing the urban becomes a key political and cultural tool to achieve victory.

*Children of Men* also provides us with an interesting view on the role of the urban environment in the (post-) apocalyptic setting of Britain.<sup>397</sup> The opening sequence of the film places this

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<sup>395</sup> Coward, 128.

<sup>396</sup> George W. Bush, 'President Bush Discusses Progress in Afghanistan, Global War on Terror', The White House, 15 February 2007, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070215-1.html>.

<sup>397</sup> And the country is very clearly Britain and not the UK. Posters with slogans like 'Report illegal workers: jobs for the Brits' and propaganda messages saying 'The world has collapsed. Only Britain soldiers on' make this unambiguous. The politics of associating the post-apocalyptic UK with the rise of far right groupings like the

(post-) apocalyptic scenario firmly within an urban context. News commentary plays over a black screen discussing the ‘Siege of Seattle,’ the occupation of mosques by the army, a new Homeland Security Bill, the deportation of immigrants, and the death of the youngest person in the world. A long tracking shot of Theo leaving the café lingers on a London scene in 2027 replete with car fumes, massive animated billboards, and piles of rubbish. Suddenly, the café that Theo emerged from is destroyed by a bomb. The sudden noise, the movement of the camera towards the café, and the brief glimpse of a wounded victim carrying her severed arm cuts quickly to a title screen. The effect of all this is to locate the film in time (a dystopian future) and in place (a depressing London) and to connect those two together thereby establishing the urban environment as central to the visuals, characters, plot and affective potentials of the movie. The penultimate scenes also take place in an urban environment, this time Bexhill refugee camp during an uprising. The movement of Kee, her baby, and Theo through this urban environment in the process of being destroyed by the ‘fascist pigs’ of the army, police, and border guards highlights the importance of the built environment to ideas of sacrifice, redemption, and political violence. Furthermore, even though London in 2027 is a depressing place, it has beauty within it such as the Ark of Arts at Battersea Power Station. Opening the film in such a place and concluding it in a radically different one highlights the characters movement through the landscape as well as the centrality of urbanity to the sacrifice and redemption model of the plot structure.

The battle that dominates the ending of the film is striking for a number of reasons. Firstly, Cuarón uses exceptionally long shots, for instance when Theo, Kee, and the baby are moving out of the block of flats which help to emphasise both the quest-like structure of the film and visually highlight the built environment. Secondly, the battle scenes are surprisingly secondary to the central narrative of the film. Despite the lack of narrative dominance given over to the battle, Cuarón’s visual treatment of it forces us to see the destruction of the built environment as something that is central to the film. Rather than let it fade in to the background, it is important to be attentive to visual clues such as shot length and frame composition that a film can present a viewer with. Monaco describes the long tracking shot as ‘the cinematic equivalent of making love’ as it unites the filmmaker with their subject.<sup>398</sup> While we may question his language here, Monaco’s point is that the tracking shot, such as those that Cuarón is noted for, has the effect of bringing a viewer more directly into a scene, acting in a similar fashion to a

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British National Party, Britain First and the English Defence League is certainly interesting, but unfortunately beyond my scope here.

<sup>398</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 230.

first-person narrative in prose work. Thus, the effect of this technique is to highlight the aesthetic subject's movement through the visuals of the movie. As they move through the urban landscape, the quest-like structure of the film becomes more prominent, and the location of the built environment becomes central to the narrative. While Theo's death takes place in a rowing boat and not in the city, Bexhill is the location of his fatal wound. Thus, the built environment of Bexhill becomes central to the sacrifice and ultimate success of his mission. Sacrifice and urbanity thus become intricately woven together in the plot, visuals, and affects of the movie. Similarly and nearly simultaneously within the War on Terror the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq of 2005 highlights the centrality of urbanity to success when discussing the clear, hold, and build strategy:

Significant progress has been made in wresting territory from enemy control. During much of 2004, major parts of Iraq and important urban centers were no-go areas for Iraqi and Coalition forces. Fallujah, Najaf, and Samara were under enemy control. Today, these cities are under Iraqi government control, and the political process is taking hold.<sup>399</sup>

Therefore, while sacrifice and urbanity have been important factors in military campaigns since well before the War on Terror, the intense encounters allowed for by simultaneous political and cultural artefacts allow these conditions to become embedded in audiences at a pre-cognitive level. The result of this is that both sacrifice and the built environment become necessary markers for victory within the War on Terror or, alternatively, allows them to emerge as conditions of success.

Furthermore as the tracking shot is not a traditional technique for the action genre, defined as it is more by quick cuts and "shakycam" footage, this sequence serves to highlight the conflictual and destructive aspects of "real-world" conflict more clearly. While the conflict becomes background Coward, discussing the writing of Slavenka Drakulic, talks about how she suggests 'that it is "life" which is ephemeral and that the "world" must be understood as being constituted by that which was previously thought to be the mere background for activity: buildings.'<sup>400</sup> Shapiro's aesthetic subject might also allow us to push this further and demonstrate how the effect of this destruction is not related to the psychological state of the protagonists or indeed the internal meaning of the film. Shapiro says that 'It is aesthetic modes of apprehension, articulated in artistic texts – films and novels for example – that often provide the most effective analytic.'<sup>401</sup> Shapiro's aesthetic subject, as it is related to the urban landscape discussed above,

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<sup>399</sup> National Security Council, 'National Strategy for Victory in Iraq', 20.

<sup>400</sup> Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, 11.

<sup>401</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 108.

also relates to Coward's take on anthropocentrism in discussions of conflict. As Coward notes, 'the various non-living entities that anthropocentric accounts see as simply the backdrop against which political community is enacted are, in fact, to be seen as constitutive factors. And hence, the destruction of such "material" must be an attack on that political community.'<sup>402</sup> Therefore the literal background scenes of cinema, in this case the urban landscape and its destruction given prominence through the tracking shot, are an important site for the emergence of conditions of victory. As mentioned above the tracking shot, while visually pushing the conflict to the background, actually serves to highlight the importance of the urban setting of this climactic sequence through both the technique of the shot as well as the fact that it is unusual in the genre. Thus, it helps to forge connections between the cinematic artefact and the concurrent political events of the War on Terror, replete as it is with the destruction of the built environment so often pushed into the background but also critical to military success.

It is obvious that the policy of the Iraq surge of 2007 was not uricide in the sense of the deliberate and wholesale destruction of urban environments like those Coward discusses in relation to Bosnia and it should go without saying that the surge was not akin to the alien tripod invasion of *War of the Worlds*, the urban destruction wrought by the 'Krippen virus' in *I am Legend*, or the societal and urban collapse as a result of infertility as seen in *Children of Men*. However, the focus on the built environment is something that is common to both these situations. Announcing the surge in 2007, George W. Bush placed an emphasis on the built environment of Baghdad and the need to bring security and stability to 'sectarian enclaves' in that city.<sup>403</sup> In order to bring this security to the city, Iraqi forces were tasked with 'conducting patrols and setting up checkpoints, and going door-to-door to gain the trust of Baghdad residents.'<sup>404</sup> Considering that 'eighty percent of Iraq's sectarian violence occurs within 30 miles of the capital,' and that the goal of the surge in Iraq in 2007 was to ensure that 'our enemies would [not] have a safe haven from which to plan and launch attacks on the American people' it is very clear that the military strategy of the surge was heavily focused on urban areas. Although the surge was not uricide in the sense that Coward uses it, the focus on the built environment politically and militarily allowed the US government to claim that it is winning because of the emergence of urbanity as a conditions of success.

Focusing on the urban landscape of Iraq was not just productive from a cost-benefit analysis or

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<sup>402</sup> Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, 120.

<sup>403</sup> Bush, 'President's Address to the Nation'.

<sup>404</sup> Bush.



rational choice perspective, it was productive because it tapped into the cultural milieu that positions that urban environment as central to victory.<sup>405</sup> If audiences have become used to witnessing success take place in the built environment of New Jersey, Bexhill, and New York, then it becomes easier to argue that a focus on Baghdad and the Sunni triangle is necessary to victory in Iraq.<sup>406</sup> By controlling that built environment in the context of Baghdad therefore, the US could move one step closer to a condition of victory - securing the major urban centres of population.<sup>407</sup> Referring to the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq, President Bush says numerous times in December 2005 and January 2006 that ‘victory will be achieved when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq’s democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot new attacks against our nation.’<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, the emphasis on the urban areas of the insurgency as the key points that needed to be secured resonates with the focus on the city that is clearly seen in these films. Not only is the site of sacrifice and therefore redemption the built environment, but the urbanity of a particular place is itself an important conditions of success. By positioning urbanity as crucial to success in the War on Terror, political leaders can exploit the already existing pre-cognitive connections that audiences have made between urbanity and victory. The cultural depictions of violence and victory taking place against the backdrop of the built environment works to cement the importance of this environment to *political* violence and victory.<sup>409</sup> Just as exceptionalism and technology can be successfully politically deployed as conditions of success by drawing on already existing cultural depictions and the formation of pre-cognitive basins of attraction in audiences, so too can sacrifice and urbanity.

Much like the resonance between film and politics with regards to religion, discussed above, and technology and American exceptionalism as discussed in the previous chapter, the connection that exists between the destruction of urban identity in cultural and political artefacts

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<sup>405</sup> See, for instance, Graham, *Cities, War, and Terrorism*.

<sup>406</sup> As LTC Craig Collier Says, ‘Nothing we did in Iraq had a more significant impact on reducing the level of violence than killing or capturing those who were committing the violent acts. The best way to do that was through offensive, combat operations.’ Craig Collier, ‘Observations from a Year in the Sunni Triangle’, *Small Wars Journal*, 2008, 7, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/48-collier.pdf>.

<sup>407</sup> Although some argue that it was local militias that secured the area, not the US. See Mark Wilbanks and Efraim Karsh, ‘How the “Sons of Iraq” Stabilized Iraq’, *Middle East Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2010): 57–70.

<sup>408</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Discusses War on Terror and Rebuilding Iraq’, The White House, 7 December 2005, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051207-1.html>; Also in George W. Bush, ‘President Addresses Veterans of Foreign Wars on the War on Terror’, The White House, 10 January 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060110-1.html>; and George W. Bush, ‘President Discusses Global War on Terror at Kansas State University’, The White House, 23 January 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060123-4.html>.

<sup>409</sup> Excuse the pun.

is not a causal one. I am not suggesting that President Bush was encouraged to authorise the surge in Baghdad because he was worried that it might become like New York in *I am Legend*, New Jersey in *War of the Worlds* or Bexhill in *Children of Men*. Likewise I am not suggesting that these films were popular purely because they echoed a political or media driven narrative of Baghdad as a site of violence and destruction that was emerging from Iraq during these years.<sup>410</sup> Rather what I am arguing is that the simultaneous expression of these conditions of urbanity and sacrifice form part of the complex web of connection and causality that allows for political claims of victory to be articulated and accepted. The effect of this concurrence and mutual reinforcement is to allow sacrifice and urbanity to emerge from the end of wars assemblage as conditions of success. These conditions clearly situate the site of sacrifice and success in the city and other built environments, thus co-constituting and legitimising political discourses of the importance of these urban environments to eventual victory in the War on Terror. These politico-cultural connections and the conditions of success that they allow for through the assemblage creates a powerful political force that works to articulate the political necessity of presenting both progress and inevitable conclusions in the War on Terror.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that the eschatological nature of these three films produced cinematic encounters that allowed for sacrifice and urbanity to emerge as conditions of success in the end of wars assemblage. This is achieved through plot structure, imagery, language, and tropes of sacrifice begetting salvation and the cinematic and political location of this being the urban, built, environment. This can be shown to support the central argument of this thesis that cinema works through affect and encounters in order to form pre-cognitive basins of attraction that connect certain elements with victory. These conditions of success can then be politically deployed in order to make a claim to truth that a conflict has ended or will end. Drawing on and developing an understanding of what constitutes a (post-) apocalyptic film - and the shift from a strictly theological understanding of The End to a more anthropocentric one - it has been argued that one of the central aspects of this categorisation is the narrative of redemption through sacrifice. This is demonstrated clearly in the three films under discussion here, where the sacrifices of the main character or someone close to them has resulted in the successful conclusion of the particular conflict they are embroiled in. This is also demonstrated in President Bush's speech announcing the surge in Iraq and the necessity of sacrifice to its success. Not only are these parallel narratives, but the encounter that is inculcated between

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<sup>410</sup> Although that's not to say that it didn't play a role as the above discussion of 'disaster porn' explored. Another interesting and entirely coincidental thing about these films is that they are all based on novels written long before this conflict which may also have contributed to their popularity.

audiences and cinematic or political artefacts provides a way to theorise how the cultural connects with and influences the political. Through these encounters, the connections that are formed, and the machine of the assemblage, these parallel narratives forge links that territorialise the assemblage and allow for particular conditions of success to emerge. Namely, that the endings to conflicts in the War on Terror are guaranteed provided we sacrifice, and that we do so in urban environments. As has also been discussed, these conditions of success or emergent properties are not necessarily *sui generis* but, like American exceptionalism and technology, have a long history. While the periodization of this thesis may imply that sacrifice and urbanity only became central to the War on Terror from 2005 onwards, the case is that they were embedded from the attacks on New York and potentially even earlier given the history of warfare.

These links are further territorialised through the particular geographies of sacrifice and redemption. As has been demonstrated, the key location for these losses is the urban, built, environment. Simultaneous cinematic and political depictions of this again works to allow for encounters between audiences, cinema, and politics that allows for the creation of conditions of success. As Ryan Bishop and Gregory Clancey state,

The Modern City has begun to be subject to a new kind of catastrophic imaginary...the recent intensification and increase in Old Testament-scale images of urban destruction in the convergent realms of journalism, film, military action, telecommunications, government policy-making, computer gaming, and the academic press show no sign of abating...the Postmodern City is now visualized more commonly than before as a site of violent, sudden death writ large and small, a new economy of images that makes the old (modern) one seem tinted and opaque.<sup>411</sup>

What this highlights is that the two thematic strands of this chapter operate at this vital intersection of culture and politics. This chapter has demonstrated, through an engagement with the apocalypse, urbanity, and the connections that these form between culture and politics, that these two spheres are mutually imbricated in one another's constitution and work to allow particular conditions of success to emerge and be politically articulated and operationalised. So far in this thesis I have articulated a theoretical understanding of how culture and politics interact through the end of wars assemblage; drawn a brief history of the genre of cinema being discussed; and demonstrated that American exceptionalism, technology, religion, and the city are key conditions of success that emerged from the end of wars assemblage from 2000 to 2007. In the following two chapters, I analyse whether this assemblage and the conditions of success

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<sup>411</sup> Ryan Bishop and Gregory Clancey, 'The City-as-Target', in *Cities, War, and Terrorism : Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, ed. Stephen Graham (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 64.

that have emerged from it so far are stable given a changing political and cultural landscape. The films discussed hereafter might, at first glance, seem to deterritorialise the assemblage, potentially causing it to change, evolve and produce new conditions of success. As will be shown though, this critical potential is fleeting and the assemblage, conditions of success, and the reality of the War on Terror remain largely intact.

## Chapter Five: Hope and Change

*“You don’t start out a politician, you become one...I want to make a difference. If your little daughter thinks I’m a hero, I’m going to earn that”*

*White House Down (2013)*

### 5.1 Introduction

The American presidential election of 2007/2008 and subsequent inauguration of President Obama in January 2009 had the potential to radically reshape the end of wars assemblage that has been established since 2001. Standing on a platform of hope and change, Obama’s stance against the Iraq War, against the needless sacrifice of American troops there, against the use of torture and Guantanamo Bay prison all had the possibility to undermine the political rhetoric of his predecessor and therefore the end of wars assemblage. Specifically, they could challenge the stability of conditions of success such as sacrifice and redemption, American exceptionalism, the use of technology, and the role of the built environment that have been shown to have emerged from the assemblage in previous chapters. Similarly, the films to be analysed in this chapter all exhibit critical potentials within the context of the action genre and have the possibility to culturally reshape these conditions as well. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to ascertain the stability of the assemblage as it has developed over time. While the processes of stabilisation and destabilisation of assemblages are simultaneous with one another, it is useful to analytically divide them for the purposes of clarity. Having assessed how the assemblage was stabilised and how conditions of success emerged, it is fruitful to explore how they are also subject to challenge and change. However, as will be shown throughout this chapter, these potentials for radically reshaping the conditions of victory in the War on Terror go unfulfilled.

As we have moved through political time from World War Two to 9/11, on through the invasion of Iraq and the Surge that are discussed in the previous chapters to a different era of the War on Terror – one initially defined by the “hope and change” of the newly elected Obama administration, we have also moved through cinematic time. We have seen how the action film developed from combat films such as *Bataan*, *Fixed Bayonets!*, and *Apocalypse Now*; how these films have deployed narrative tropes including the formation of a group and the predominance of American violence; and we have also explored how these films shape and construct some key conditions of success embracing American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and the role of the built environment in conflict. Chapters three and four analysed how exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity emerged from the end of wars assemblage as conditions of

success through cinematic encounters. While the assemblage is always in a process of change, and its emergent properties are not *sui generis*, identifying these four conditions of success allows us to now assess their resilience to change. This chapter builds on previous examples of how popular culture, and the action genre in particular, functions as a node in the end of wars assemblage that then works to articulate a sense of ending in the War on Terror. What makes the films discussed in this chapter highly interesting, compared to those discussed in previous chapters, is that at first glance they apparently produce alternative lines of flight within the assemblage that could work to destabilise it and therefore critique dominant understandings of how endings in armed conflict are arrived at. Combined with the simultaneous challenge of Obama's rhetoric to the political side of the end of wars assemblage, these artefacts have the potential to disturb and destabilise the assemblage, possibly allowing for new basins of attraction to form. In Protevi's terms, this confluence may shock the system to adopt new modes of behaviour.<sup>412</sup> However I argue that despite their critical veneer these films and Obama's policies work to support already established and emerged conditions of success necessary to make a political claim to truth about endings in the War on Terror.

Here, I use *Hancock* (2008), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *The A-Team* (2010), *RED* (2010), and *The Expendables* (2010) in order to explore how seemingly critical mainstream cinema functions within the assemblage. As explained previously, this is in order to ascertain how potentially destabilising forces act on the assemblage as well as to more broadly ascertain the stability and resilience of it. I will argue, however, that these movies – while exhibiting critical *potential* – do not fulfil it but rather work to stabilise the assemblage and previously enumerated conditions of success. Not only because of the structure of their narratives, the tropes and imagery they deploy, or the formal cinematic techniques they utilise but precisely because they use these tools first in a manner to critique then in a manner to support. The double movement of critique then praise is a formidable combination that amplifies similar movements in the political rhetoric of President Obama. This chapter will argue that this ultimately strengthens the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of victory that are articulated through it. This argument is further reinforced by the changing nature of the War on Terror in the years covered by this chapter. Barack Obama's election on a platform of change, pledges to end the War in Iraq, wind-down American involvement overseas, and a pivot to Asia followed by an intervention in the Libyan Civil War, an expanded drone programme, and practices of extra-judicial killing serve to highlight how this political double movement works to strengthen rather

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<sup>412</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 18.

than weaken the end of wars assemblage. I will also show that through the inversion and restoration of genre tropes, and the use of pastiche these movies shape and reinforce the already established conditions of victory. This has the concomitant effect of strengthening the stability of the end of wars assemblage rather than weakening it.

Before we can get to the analysis of these cultural artefacts<sup>413</sup> it is necessary to lay out the route. This chapter proceeds in three major parts. Firstly, a brief elucidation on how genre functions within the end of wars assemblage is necessary to frame both this chapter and to add to the argument of the thesis more generally. Taking, as I do, films that can all be categorised as part of the broad genre of the action movie it is important to ascertain how genre generally and this genre in particular works within the context of the assemblage. This builds on the discussion in chapter two where I laid out a history of the genre from the World War Two combat film to the present day. While I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of these films within the assemblage, they do represent a significant challenge to, inversion and eventual reinforcement of numerous tropes within the action genre, and specific elements within the combat, superhero and spy sub-genres. While processes of destabilisation emerged from cinema and popular culture before the period under discussion here, I want to explore how the simultaneity of cultural and political destabilisations resonate with, and intensify the encounters induced by, each other.<sup>414</sup> Secondly, I will discuss how these inversions of genre tropes wear the mask of a critique of dominant genre and political conventions through the equation of American political violence with that of the Nazis; the challenging of the superhero genre as constructive of the monomyth of American exceptionalism; and humour, pastiche, and hypertextuality. Finally, I argue that these inversions and potential lines of flight are ultimately unsuccessful in undermining the end of wars assemblage. Rather, the inversions are eventually abandoned in favour of dominant tropes presenting films that are somewhat conventional in their approach to genre. The effect of this is that any critical potential to undermine the end of wars assemblage is halted.

As well as the changing nature of cultural artefacts and the action genre in these years, political changes are also apparent. The election of President Obama on the promise of change and the initial rejection then ultimate reinforcement of dominant understandings of political violence and endings in the War on Terror function in a similar way to cinematic genre. Both political

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<sup>413</sup> I hesitate to use the word 'cultural' here, especially with a film written by, directed by, and starring Sylvester Stallone.

<sup>414</sup> For example, Detective Harris in *Training Day* undermining moral expectations of the police, the X-Men acting as an extra-judicial force, the dystopian visuals of *Children of Men* to name a few.

and cultural artefacts in these years have the potential to undermine and reshape the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of success that are its emergent properties. What will ultimately be demonstrated in this chapter is that these movies and political rhetoric work in similar ways to those in previous chapters in that they further strengthen claims of victory that are based on the concepts and categories outlined previously and particularly exceptionalism, urbanity, and sacrifice. The parallel nature of these movies' potential to undermine tropes and conventions of the genre and Obama's potential to undermine the conditions of success utilised under President Bush serve to highlight that a challenge to the structure of the end of wars assemblage is possible. As will be shown, this undermining followed by a reaffirmation of these motifs of genre and victory work together in order to not just re-establish the conditions of success articulated through the assemblage but actually give more power to them by subjecting them to a less than critical analysis, referred to in this chapter as a mask of critique.

## 5.2 Changing genres

Dodds suggests that not enough time has been given in political research on film 'to the question of genre and even subgenre with regard to the manufacturing of geopolitical constructions and identity politics.'<sup>415</sup> This section will engage with genre and how their evolution over time can change certain conditions of political possibility. Cinematic genres are necessarily fluid categories. As Moine points out, 'film genres are always easier to recognize than to define, being often impure, because the mixing of genres invalidates any attempt to achieve a rigorous taxonomy.'<sup>416</sup> Filmmakers have to alter, update, and renew genre conventions in order to maintain the relevance of a style of film in changing times. Political, social, and cultural changes have to be taken into account when working within the confines of a specific genre. While the history of the action film has been traced in chapter two through World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, and into the War on Terror, this does not imply that the genre has remained static since 9/11. All genres of cinema, and indeed all styles of cultural production, are in a process of evolution, even the seemingly static, trope laden, conventional, and *generic* action movie. However, as Basinger makes clear, just because genre conventions change, this does not imply a teleological argument that cinema is moving towards an ultimate ideal form or even that these changes are progressive:

By speaking of "evolution" of a genre I do not imply a sense of progression, a development toward a higher order. I mean only to suggest a state of change...Genres have to change to remain popular. At the same time, they have to stay the same to be genres.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Dodds, "Have You Seen Any Good Films Lately?", 480.

<sup>416</sup> Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre*, trans. Alistair Fox and Hilary Radner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), xv.

<sup>417</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 121.



In the end, the mainstream Hollywood cinema that is being discussed in this thesis is about making money which will always constrain the speed of change and the potential for critique. James Monaco makes the historic distinction between European cinema as art and American cinema as ‘movies: made for money, not aesthetics.’<sup>418</sup> Raphaëlle Moine however suggests that the values inherent in the contrast between auteur and genre cinema can be reversed ‘with a highly inventive, spectacular, and entertaining genre cinema (that draw upon the brand image of American cinema) being contrasted with an off-putting, self-indulgent, soporific auteur cinema.’<sup>419</sup> An example of this discussed here might be *Inglourious Basterds* and indeed Tarantino’s entire oeuvre. Directors and studios are understandably cautious about trying new things that may alienate an audience and affect their bottom line. As such, genre conventions in the big budget movies analysed here change very slowly. However, Monaco has claimed that ‘Despite this unprecedented financial upheaval [in the late 80s and 90s that is dealt with in detail in his book], there has been no discernible change in the product that Hollywood manufactures.’<sup>420</sup> I am inclined to disagree with this however. For example action movies have moved towards more realistic depictions of violence. If we compare the climactic gun battle in two Arnold Schwarzenegger films: *Commando* (1985) made at the height of his career as an action star and *The Last Stand* (2013) made after his post-gubernatorial return to film we can clearly see a marked difference in the nature of the violence. While in *Commando*, Schwarzenegger is topless and firing guns from the hip at hordes of bad guys with scant regard for aiming or ammunition, *The Last Stand* sees the actors use weapons in a much more professional and militarised fashion. This development towards realism in the genre as it has the potential effect to increase audience immersion in the action of the movie and thus to increase the power of affective encounters. If the violence depicted is more realistic, it is more likely that the fourth wall stays intact and the movie can affect audiences in deeper and more long-lasting ways.<sup>421</sup> This is also related to a fetishization of violence and weapons that I discussed in chapter two with reference to *Black Hawk Down* (2001). While the convention of the climactic gun battle has remained, how it is shot has changed dramatically. What we can

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<sup>418</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 242.

<sup>419</sup> Moine, *Cinema Genre*, xiii.

<sup>420</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 257.

<sup>421</sup> Discussing the increase in realism in video games (which may have been an influence on cinema), some have argued that it is related to an increased aggressiveness among players. See Marina Krcmar, Kirstie Farrar, and Rory McGloin, ‘The Effects of Video Game Realism on Attention, Retention and Aggressive Outcomes’, *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, no. 1 (2011): 432–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.09.005> and ; Helen Berents and Brendan Keogh, ‘Virtuous, Virtual, but Not Visceral: (Dis)Embodied Viewing in Military-Themed Videogames’, *Critical Studies on Security* 6, no. 3 (2018): 366–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2018.1432531>.

see then is that while genres have to stay the same to be genres, they also change slowly over time to take into account shifting cultural norms. Not only this, but these changes can have an effect on audiences and the assemblages that these movies are part of.

How these changes in genre influence the end of wars assemblage is an important question to ask. It is this challenging and remaking of genre within films that contributes to their relations of exteriority with other components of the assemblage. As Deleuze and Guattari note, 'contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is a parallel evolution of the book and the world.'<sup>422</sup> Here, 'book' can easily be substituted for 'film' as an alternative cultural artefact laying clear the need for an understanding of how changes in cultural artefacts over time effect changes in the world of political reality. As the action genre is a component of the assemblage, tracing how the genre changes over time allows us to ascertain how the assemblage might change. Having traced how the end of wars assemblage was shaped in the aftermath of 9/11 and the start of the War on Terror, it is vital to understand whether and how it has remained stable in the ensuing years. The cumulative effects of changing culture and politics have the potential to reshape the assemblage and the previously enumerated conditions of success that are its emergent properties. What will be presented in the remainder of this chapter then is an exploration of how these films challenge but ultimately reassert important aspects of the genre, how this parallels with challenges to, and the reassertion of, the rhetoric of the Bush administration and the effect that this has on the stability and resilience of the end of wars assemblage. *Inglourious Basterds* perhaps provides the clearest example of how this selection of films invert, modify, and generally play around with genre conventions that we have come to associate with the action film, how we can map this evolution onto contemporaneous political discourse, and what effect this has on the assemblage.

### **5.3 The mask of critique: undermining conditions of success**

The films discussed from these years all engage, to a degree, in certain forms of deterritorialisation of the end of wars assemblage. Artefacts with deterritorialising aspects can work to disrupt, destabilise, and critique an assemblage and the conditions it allows for. This is achieved by challenging the component organs upon which the assemblage is predicated. If the input (movies) to the machine-like assemblage alters, so too must the output (conditions of success). In this case, the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of victory that are its emergent properties are subjected to a false critique as the nature of genre and political rhetoric

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<sup>422</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11.

changes. The effect of these changes on the assemblage is two-fold. Firstly, we find in these films the possibility of a critique to be articulated against dominant masculinised, historicised, exceptional, and moral narratives of American power and the implications that can have for the stability of an assemblage that works to construct endings. However, elements that exhibit critical potentials are not always continued throughout the movie or implications are not necessarily as critical as first suggested. Thus, the critical potential is not always fulfilled which is why I use the term mask of critique. Once the critical potentials of these movies have been explored it will be shown in section 5.4 that the critical potentials exhibited in these movies ultimately work not to subvert but to strengthen the end of wars assemblage and its previously established conditions of victory, and indeed have a more powerful effect given their mask of critique.

### 5.3.1 *Inglourious Basterds*

Examples of generic inversion and critical potential abound in the films under discussion here. Given that *Inglourious Basterds* is set during World War Two, it is useful to turn to Basinger once again for an idea of generic inversion as ‘turning the former beliefs and truths inside out.’<sup>423</sup> In the first act, *Inglourious Basterds* does exactly this. Tarantino’s films are noted for their visceral and apparently acceptable depictions of violence. Examples include the ‘Stuck in the Middle with you’ scene in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) where Mr Blonde (Michael Madsen) tortures a kidnapped policeman (Kirk Baltz) by, among other things, cutting off his ear. Or in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) when Maynard (Duane Whitaker) and Zed (Peter Greene) rape Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) only to be killed by Butch (Bruce Willis) with a sword. *Kill Bill vol. 1* (2003) sees O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu) cutting off an associates head saying ‘The price you pay for bringing up either my Chinese or American heritage as a negative is, I collect your fucking head. Just like this fucker here.’ Finally in *Inglourious Basterds* Aldo (Brad Pitt) announces the killing of one of the captured soldiers saying ‘I’m calling the Bear Jew and he’s gonna take that big bat of his and he’s gonna beat your ass to death with it.’<sup>424</sup> So we must understand the depictions of violence in these films within Tarantino’s well established style. This style is not without its critics however, Henry Giroux argues that

Tarantino makes no attempts cinematically to rupture or contest the patterns of violence that his films produce or claim to represent. On the contrary, he empties violence of any critical social consequences, offering viewers only the immediacy of shock, humour, and irony as elements of

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<sup>423</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 201.

<sup>424</sup> Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs* (Miramax, 1992); Quentin Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction* (Miramax, 1994); Quentin Tarantino, *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (Miramax, 2003); Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds* (Universal Pictures, 2009).

mediation. And none of these elements get beyond the seduction of voyeuristic gazing so as to demand critical involvement.<sup>425</sup>

What makes the shock, humour and irony of the violence in *Inglourious Basterds* different is that it depicts this violence being carried out by American soldiers albeit for a just and moral cause rather than criminals, hitmen, and gangsters as in the films mentioned above. So while *Inglourious Basterds* does not present a challenge to the conventions of a Tarantino film, it does represent an inversion of the generic tropes of an action film, and certainly those of a World War Two combat film which *Inglourious Basterds* draws upon. World War Two combat films are invariably highly violent affairs, and sometimes this violence is carried out by characters not readily associated with American ideals, such as *The Dirty Dozen* (1967). However, Tarantino's film, especially when read against his other outputs, presents this violence in a much more visceral manner. Following Giroux, the political ramifications of this might be to question Western moral superiority and ideas of American exceptionalism through its equating of American violence with Nazi violence.<sup>426</sup>

Unlike films analysed in previous chapters such as *Tears of the Sun* Tarantino's film appears to undermine the moral superiority of American military violence. An example of this is in the first scene in occupied France in Chapter Two of the film, we see a Nazi sergeant, decorated for bravery, respectfully refuse to betray his comrades only to be brutally beaten to death and scalped by Americans. Depicting the bludgeoning and scalping of soldiers, even Nazis, and talking about how 'they ain't got no humanity...they need to be destroyed' certainly equates the violence meted out by Americans to that carried out by the Nazis.<sup>427</sup> Ben Walters also reads this into the movie saying that 'The Basterds are war criminals, explicitly denying Nazi's humanity, targeting them for summary execution, and desecrating their corpses by scalping.'<sup>428</sup> Furthermore, Basinger's quote above goes on to mention a specific example of inversion, 'such as equating our side with the Nazis, making us their counterparts in evil.'<sup>429</sup> While combat films made during and in the immediate aftermath of World War Two such as *Bataan* depict masses of barely humanised Japanese soldiers being butchered by Americans, these can be seen within

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<sup>425</sup> Henry A. Giroux, 'Pulp Fiction and the Culture of Violence', *Harvard Educational Review* 65, no. 2 (1995): 308.

<sup>426</sup> Another important and novel aspect of *Inglourious Basterds* is that the American soldiers are exclusively Jewish. This adds another layer of complexity to the depictions of political violence. While not a movie exclusively about Jewish revenge on Nazis, it is neither a movie exclusively about violence that is solely American.

<sup>427</sup> Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*.

<sup>428</sup> Ben Walters, 'Debating Inglourious Basterds', *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2009): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2009.63.2.19>.

<sup>429</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 1986, 201.

a historical context of ongoing total war. This is not to excuse their violence, racism, and processes of dehumanisation but rather to align Tarantino's film with earlier racist and dehumanising depictions of World War Two which serves to highlight the inversion of genre that this film exhibits.

What must be kept in mind for the analysis of *Inglourious Basterds* in this context is that the *meaning* of a film is less important than the affects it produces. Discussing the superhero genre, Dittmer argues that 'a focus on the "meaning" (singular) of a superhero film essentializes the plurality of meanings that can be, and are, associated with a film at various points in its circulation.'<sup>430</sup> In this vein, these scenes of violence can be read as well within Tarantino's established style but this does not detract from the visceral, savage, and unvarnished nature of it as depicted. For instance, the close-up of one of the soldiers removing the scalp from a dead Nazi is, as an understatement, rather repulsive. The affective response that this gruesome violence can induce in an audience has the effect of further enhancing the comparison made between Americans and Nazis. Reading the film in this light allows for an argument that *Inglourious Basterds* has the potential to deterritorialise the end of wars assemblage by undermining the moral superiority of American political violence, thus also undermining a central condition of success that was discussed in chapter three. This inversion, or line of flight, was also present in some of the rhetoric of President Obama.

Then-senator Obama, campaigning for the Presidency in 2007/2008 stood on a platform that represented a radical shift in foreign policy designed to restore America's standing in the world. As he said just before the Iowa caucuses, 'If you believe, we can end this war, close Guantanamo, restore our standing, renew our diplomacy, and once again respect the Constitution...That's the future within our reach. That's what hope is.'<sup>431</sup> This would become a common refrain in his political speeches over the next eight years. In a major national security speech in May 2009, he clearly articulated that 'Guantanamo set back the moral authority that is America's strongest currency in the world...Indeed, the existence of Guantanamo likely created more terrorists around the world than it ever detained.'<sup>432</sup> Even in his final State of the Union address he remarked that the prison is expensive, unnecessary, and 'it only serves as a recruitment brochure for our enemies.'<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Dittmer, 'American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom', 118.

<sup>431</sup> Barack Obama, 'Barack Obama: Remarks in Des Moines, Iowa: "Our Moment Is Now"', The American Presidency Project, 27 October 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77026>.

<sup>432</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President On National Security', The White House, 21 May 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-national-security-5-21-09>.

<sup>433</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks of President Barack Obama – State of the Union Address As Delivered', The White

President Obama's frequent remarks on Guantanamo not only serve to distance himself politically from his predecessor, but they also invert the conventional understanding of the conditions of success as utilised by President Bush who in his 2002 State of the Union address says that 'Terrorists who once occupied Afghanistan now occupy cells at Guantanamo Bay.'<sup>434</sup> Rather than being a necessary condition for progress and success in the War on Terror, Guantanamo Bay becomes symbolic of America undermining the very values that it purports to fight for and the values that can be politically deployed as a condition of success. As President Obama continues in the same speech as above, 'The American people...know that we need not sacrifice our security for our values, nor sacrifice our values for our security.'<sup>435</sup> Obama here has engaged in a parallel move to what we have seen in *Inglorious Basterds*. He does not equate Americans with the terrorists in Guantanamo Bay as obviously as *Inglorious Basterds* makes such a comparison but he does question the moral superiority of a country with institutions like Guantanamo Bay. Both Obama's depiction of Guantanamo Bay and Tarantino's portrayal of American violence thus articulate critical and alternative lines of flight within the assemblage that have the potential to undermine American moral superiority questioning the existence of American exceptionalism and its role as a condition of success in the War on Terror. This has the potential to change the end of wars assemblage by making American exceptionalism as a condition of success less important or less politically useful.

### 5.3.2 *Hancock*

Let us now turn to *Hancock* and compare it to the genre conventions of a superhero action movie in order to ascertain where its critical potentials lie.<sup>436</sup> *Hancock* presents a radical departure from the norms of a superhero movie – he's drunk, he's irresponsible, he's destructive, and he has a questionable moral code. It is possible to read the character of Hancock as an avatar for America circa 2008: someone who has lost their way and engages in reckless violence with noble aims but disastrous consequences for the people affected. It is simplistic to

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House, 13 January 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/12/remarks-president-barack-obama-%E2%80%93-prepared-delivery-state-union-address>.

<sup>434</sup> Bush, 'President Delivers State of the Union Address'.

<sup>435</sup> Obama, 'Remarks by the President On National Security'.

<sup>436</sup> Questions of which genre to categorise a movie in are complicated. While the superhero movie may be emerging as a distinct genre given the success of Marvel adaptations, I would argue that it can also be seen as part of the broader action genre. It has a focus on a lone (male) hero who overcomes adversity in order to enact some form of violence on a well-defined villain in order to restore order. The BFI agree, classifying *Deadpool* as the highest grossing action movie of 2017. 'Genre and Classification' (London: British Film Institute, 2017), 3, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-genre-and-classification-2017-06-16.pdf>; Dittmer, on the other hand, argues that comic books – if not necessarily the movies – are part of a broader fantasy genre. Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, 84.

read *Hancock* merely as a mimetic representation of the foreign policy of the Bush administration and Dittmer argues that ‘the superhero genre as a whole resonates with the events of the past decade.’<sup>437</sup> Because of this resonance, analysing a superhero movie that does things differently to others is useful in assessing the resilience of the assemblage to changing cultural artefacts, especially considering that American exceptionalism is inherently bound up with the superhero. Inspired by Shapiro’s concept of the aesthetic subject and how it relates to character, this analysis will focus on the character of Hancock and how he represents a challenge to the norm of a superhero. Tag Gallagher justifies such a focus on characters when he says that it is sometimes ‘more important than narrative, because cinema gives us direct and immediate experience of another person, and an event is more the personality of the doer than the deed that is done.’<sup>438</sup> Shapiro’s concept of the aesthetic subject can be useful in understanding the impact of characters in films. The aesthetic subject is particularly useful in the context of this chapter as Shapiro argues that they mobilise thinking through genre and, rather than revealing the internal mind-set of the character, they can tell us something about the world, and their effect on it.<sup>439</sup> Furthermore, Shapiro argues that there are ‘methodological advantages of turning to artistic texts whose characters serve as aesthetic subject, embodying feelings and actions that deliver the critical insights’ that are central to an analysis.<sup>440</sup> Thus, an understanding of the character of Hancock can help us explore in more depth and detail the implications his actions have on the genre and therefore the effect that this inversion has on the creation and legitimisation of American exceptionalism as a condition of success in the War on Terror.

Jewett and Lawrence identify the superhero as integral to the American monomyth and ‘part of a broad mythic stream that flows through superheroic comics, television programing, films, and video games’ that traces its routes through the myths of the founding of America.<sup>441</sup> As explored in chapter three, part of that American monomyth is the idea that America is an exceptional country with a divine future and excellent morals and that this was one of the conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage early in the War on Terror. As avatars of that monomyth, superheroes should embody these exceptional ideals. Though not always respected (for example, Batman at the end of *The Dark Knight* (2008)), trusted (the Hulk in *The Incredible Hulk* (2008)), or even well liked (Iron Man), contemporary superheroes have often

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<sup>437</sup> Dittmer, ‘American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom’, 117.

<sup>438</sup> Tag Gallagher, ‘Shout-out at the Genre Corral’, in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 214.

<sup>439</sup> Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method*, 11–12.

<sup>440</sup> Shapiro, 110.

<sup>441</sup> Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil : The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. E. Erdmans Publishing, 2003), 28–29.

been read in the role of a guardian of national freedoms and avatars of American exceptionalism.<sup>442</sup> From the outset of *Hancock* though, it is clear that he does not conform to this genre type. However, by depicting Hancock as a reckless hero, the film challenges the notion of the superhero as always embodying these values of American exceptionalism and the film, at first glance, seems to present a serious challenge to this dominant trope.

The film opens with a reasonably standard car chase where (presumably) criminals are being pursued by police while firing automatic weapons. The use of shaky-cam here contributes an element of direct cinema to the sequence, lending a sense of realism and immediacy to the proceedings. It is a quick way to encourage audiences to immerse themselves into the movie and implies a certain aspect of truth-telling to the narrative.<sup>443</sup> Our first shot of Hancock himself is an interesting introduction to this seemingly new type of superhero. The very first glimpse we get of him is of his leg, which is obviously that of an African-American. Already, the film is challenging the conventions of the genre by portraying a superhero as non-white.<sup>444</sup> As the camera pans up, we see a sleeping and unkempt man while the camera switches to an empty bourbon bottle rolling away. Again, this is not what is expected of the avatar of the grand American monomyth. As the shots flick between the car chase and Hancock sleeping, there is also a change in music. During the car chase the music is upbeat rock (almost reminiscent of the Dixie car movies of the 1970s) moving to orchestral while the early shots of Hancock are scored quietly with a blues guitar and drum.<sup>445</sup> Not only is this quite humorous, it also serves to sonically highlight the contrast between expectations of the genre (exciting car chase and upbeat music) and the reality of this particular superhero (quiet, asleep, and African-American). Clearly hungover, a child tells him of the “bad guys” to which Hancock replies “What do you want, a cookie? Get out of my face.” The child calls him an asshole, as does a woman he attempts to harass. Again, the contrast between the ideal of a superhero as noble and aspirational is clearly challenged. All of this is most likely intentional as the bench on which Hancock is sleeping even has the word “dream” on it suggesting the connection between exceptionalism and the American dream. This further serves to contrast visually the American ideal of a superhero, and the reality of this one. As Hancock takes off, he destroys the bench in the process

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<sup>442</sup> Dittmer, ‘American Exceptionalism, Visual Effects, and the Post-9/11 Cinematic Superhero Boom’.

<sup>443</sup> This ‘fly on the wall’ style was originally a by-product of the lack of stable cameras that was solved with the invention of the Steadicam in 1975. Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 322.

<sup>444</sup> I do appreciate that there are numerous African-American superheroes such as Blade, Black Panther, and Storm of the X-Men but feature length movies dedicated to them are still rare.

<sup>445</sup> The use of Delta blues for introducing Hancock might also serve to highlight his status as an African-American rather than white superhero. Indeed, Shapiro argues that the blues ‘is a system of social explanation and a practice of identity-shaping solidarity.’ Michael J. Shapiro, *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, and Genre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 155.



– this destruction of property will be a recurring theme in the first act of the movie. Already within the first three minutes of the film then we see an undermining of the idea of the superhero as avatar of exceptional moral values. This challenge of American moral exceptionalism is portrayed in audio, visual, narrative, and racial terms.

The first act of the film largely follows a similar logic. While Hancock performs noble deeds such as apprehending the criminals in the opening sequence or saving Ray (Jason Bateman) from a level crossing, the way in which he does it is different to the typical superhero that audiences are used to. For instance, he causes millions of dollars' worth of damage to infrastructure and property in LA. When we compare the actions of Hancock to the more mainstream comic book superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Iron Man and so forth depicted in films released around the same time the differences are stark.<sup>446</sup> Although destruction is wrought by the actions of all superheroes, the ways in which it is depicted in this movie are interesting.<sup>447</sup> Firstly, there is a wantonness to the destruction in the first car chase sequence. Nearly hitting a plane, crashing through a freeway sign, destroying some police cars, and breaking up the tarmac before dropping the SUV he is carrying on top of a building. Not only does Hancock display little regard for the collateral damage he is causing, the music changes again to highlight this. Rather than upbeat rock, orchestral, or even quiet blues guitar, the music is Ludacris's "Move Bitch." The use of a hip-hop track here further serves to make Hancock into a (dangerous) Other, and highlights the wantonness of the destruction by playing to stereotypes of Africa-American males.<sup>448</sup> Again, this presents an alternative line of flight to the idea of the superhero as avatar of American exceptionalism.

Moreover, Hancock's destruction of large parts of L.A. in the first act of the movie also undermines the centrality of the built environment as location of sacrifice that was previously identified as a condition of success in the end of wars assemblage. Rather than depicting the built environment as necessary for redemption following sacrifice as in *I am Legend* or *Children*

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<sup>446</sup> Excuse the pun.

<sup>447</sup> There are a number of interesting points to be made about damage done by superheroes in movies. The first is that more recent movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe directly address the question of damage wrought by superheroes and how they might be brought under control (especially *Captain America: Civil War*). Secondly there is, in Hancock, a racialised narrative to damage that can be read into the film whereby when white superheroes cause damage (Captain America, Iron Man, Superman, Batman, or whoever else) it is for the protection of civilians, or the state, or to save the world whereas when the African-American character of Hancock does it, it is vandalism and incurs punishment. Finally, there is also an interesting link between certain superheroes and specific urban environments that would be useful to explore further (Hancock with Los Angeles, Spider-Man with New York, Superman with Metropolis, Batman with Gotham).

<sup>448</sup> See, for instance, Amy Binder, 'Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music', *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 6 (1993): 753–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095949>.

of *Men*, *Hancock* presents it as a nuisance, an undue cost, a hindrance, and less than worthless. As the news report after the initial scene states, ‘Hancock’s latest act of so-called heroics took a hefty financial toll. Initial damage estimates are said to top \$9 million which, if accurate, represents a personal record.’ A police officer continues, ‘L.A. would be a lot better off if this guy would just leave and let us get on with our jobs.’ Furthermore, in chapter four we see the link between sacrifice and the built environment established as a condition of success. Hancock as a superhero, however, is also emblematic of American values, morals and exceptionalism. The fact that this urban destruction is wrought by that avatar, in that built environment of Los Angeles, breaks this link between urbanity and victory as the urban environment becomes the playground of a destructive power connected to exceptionalism and American values. Within the first ten minutes of the movie then, two central conditions of success in the War on Terror are undermined: American exceptionalism and the centrality of the built environment to redemption. The potential effect this has on the end of wars assemblage is to deterritorialise and change it into something different and new. This potential to deterritorialise the assemblage is further strengthened when we map the challenge that *Hancock* poses to the genre of the superhero movie onto the potential challenges that President Obama articulates to his predecessor’s legacy and conditions of victory in the War on Terror.

During his first election campaign for President, Obama’s foreign policy platform was largely centred on removing American troops from Iraq. The Iraq War was depicted as a ‘misguided war,’ where ‘there is no military solution...and there never was.’<sup>449</sup> In March 2008, Obama criticised and challenged the narrative of victory through sacrifice when he said that in the Iraq War

Nearly four thousand Americans have given their lives. Thousands more have been wounded. Even under the best case scenarios, this war will cost American taxpayers well over a trillion dollars. And where are we for all of this sacrifice? We are less safe and less able to shape events abroad. We are divided at home, and our alliances around the world have been strained. The threats of a new century have roiled the waters of peace and stability, and yet America remains anchored in Iraq.<sup>450</sup>

Then-Senator Obama also articulated a critique of a core condition for success in the Iraq War that was discussed in chapter four - sacrifice and the centrality of the built environment. Rather

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<sup>449</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Barack Obama: Remarks in Clinton, Iowa: “Turning the Page in Iraq”’, The American Presidency Project, 12 October 2007, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77011> Importantly as well, this speech was delivered the day after the anniversary of the September 11th attacks.

<sup>450</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Barack Obama: Remarks in Fayetteville, North Carolina: “The World Beyond Iraq”’, The American Presidency Project, 19 March 2008, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77035>.

than the sacrifice of American troops working to secure victory in the cities of Iraq and thus the broader War on Terror, Obama stated that the reduction in violence ‘has little to do with the surge - it’s because Sunni tribal leaders made a political decision to turn against al Qaeda in Iraq.’<sup>451</sup> Going further, he said that ‘Rather than use our presence to make progress, the Iraqi government has put off taking responsibility...And our troop presence cannot be sustained.’<sup>452</sup> Much as Hancock’s destruction of L.A. in the opening act of the movie also serves to challenge the centrality of the built environment to redemption and the ideals of American exceptionalism, Obama’s rhetoric can function within the assemblage in similar ways. Obama says that even though sacrifices have been made (in urban environments), the US is actually less safe as a result. Much as Hancock’s destruction is a cost and hindrance to L.A., the sacrifice of troops and the cost to Iraq that comes with war is actually a cost and hindrance to ultimate success in the War on Terror. Furthermore, Obama’s claim that the US is divided at home and increasingly isolated internationally also challenges the idea of America as a “shining city on a hill” that is foundational of the American monomyth, mirroring *Hancock*’s challenging of this monomyth as well. The potential result of these cinematic and political artefacts is to produce encounters that ‘shock,’ in Protevi’s terms, the patterns of thought and basins of attraction that connect allow particular tropes to be connected to victory and politically utilised as such.<sup>453</sup> It is not just that the political and cultural narratives and imagery undermine these conditions, but the effect that this has on the system of the assemblage to produce them in the first plane. There is a further critique that these movies potentially articulate against the conditions of victory allowed for by the end of wars assemblage through nostalgia and pastiche.

### 5.3.3 *RED, The Expendables, and The A-Team*

*RED*, *The Expendables* and *The A-Team* all trade on a certain degree of nostalgia or an appreciation of the past. The tagline of *RED* (standing for retired, extremely dangerous) is ‘Still armed. Still dangerous. Still got it.’ *The Expendables* features cameo appearances by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis that feature prominently in the trailer, as well as being directed by, written by and starring that hero of Reagan-era cinema, Sylvester Stallone. Finally, *The A-Team* rebooted a beloved 1980s television series and is replete with references to it: Hannibal’s cigar, catchphrases, B.A.’s iconic van, and musical cues from the original title sequence.<sup>454</sup> However, I do not intend to lump together these films simply as nostalgia-fests,

<sup>451</sup> This claim has some validity to it. See Wilbanks and Karsh, ‘How the “Sons of Iraq” Stabilized Iraq’.

<sup>452</sup> Obama, ‘Barack Obama: Remarks in Clinton, Iowa: “Turning the Page in Iraq”’.

<sup>453</sup> Protevi, *Political Affect*, 18.

<sup>454</sup> If anything, the film did not do enough to play on the nostalgia of the audience. As someone who grew up watching *The A-Team* after school every day I wanted to see more of the GMC van, more of the title music, and more terrible stunts.

although that is certainly a common theme, as these films also engage in critical practices that extend beyond their nostalgic value. Differences include *RED* being much more explicitly tongue-in-cheek than the genre norm while *The Expendables* is pitched as a straight-faced action film, and *The A-Team* falling somewhere in between.<sup>455</sup> Other differences include the prominence given to the age of the protagonists: *RED* is based on the fact that the characters are retired while the other two only make occasional references to the age of either Barney Ross (Sylvester Stallone) or Hannibal Smith (Liam Neeson). Furthermore, while the plot structure of *RED* and *The A-Team* follow similar lines of betrayal and a high-level political or military plot, *The Expendables* opts for a ‘mercenaries as liberators’ narrative structure.<sup>456</sup> Nonetheless, the similarities between the films either on plot, age of actors/characters, appeal to nostalgia, or flippancy allow them to be considered and analysed alongside one another. How then, do these films deploy tropes, narrative structures, and cinematic techniques that have the potential to reshape the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of success it allows for? This section will look at how they use pastiche and nostalgia to engage in a running critique of the action movie genre as it has been established since at least the 1970s. By laying bare the conventions of the genre through pastiche and nostalgia, these three movies can work to make the processes and conventions of the action genre more apparent. As action movies are a component of the end of wars assemblage challenging or laying bare their conventions, or allowing audiences to engage with them differently, could produce alternative encounters or lines of flight that shock the system of the assemblage, making it evolve or change. If the cultural elements of the assemblage change drastically within a short time frame, and this coincides with a changing political rhetoric, the stability of the assemblage and the emergence of previously enumerated conditions of success could be challenged.

What is implicated in the self-conscious use of tongue-in-cheek humour and the self-referential nature of nostalgia in these films? As outlined above, nostalgia is central to the appeal of these films. These movies were pitched partly to an older audience who would remember films such as *Die Hard* or *Rambo*, as well as the more traditional 15-24 demographic that makes up more than a quarter of total movie admissions in the UK and that show a preference for the action genre. As such, the use of pastiche and genre placing is vitally important to the box-office success of these films as well as their value in understanding how they might undermine the

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<sup>455</sup> As *The Expendables* franchise continues in the two sequels, the cast becomes larger, older, and Stallone no longer directs, resulting in films that are more explicitly humorous and playful. The sequels also received a much better critical reception.

<sup>456</sup> Perhaps in reference to one of Stallone’s most famous film franchise, *Rambo*.

previously established emergent properties of the assemblage.<sup>457</sup> Fredric Jameson notes that pastiche has eclipsed parody as the style of choice for the postmodern era. For Jameson, pastiche is

Like parody, the imitation of a unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor.<sup>458</sup>

If we read this through the three films under discussion here, it is clear that they are pastiches of the action movie genre.

All genre films must engage in a degree of implicit referencing of older and more established films within the same genre in order to establish themselves as a certain type. As Moine states, 'a genre film is constructed out of a limited repertoire of techniques that can be viewed as common property.'<sup>459</sup> Accordingly, conventions such as gun battles, explosions, hand-to-hand combat between protagonist and antagonist are utilised in these films extensively. However, the three films being looked at here do not just deploy the conventions of genre to establish themselves, but rather engage in a pastiche of them. The most obvious of these winks and nods is in *The Expendables*. The most blatantly nostalgic scene in this film is where Mr Church (Bruce Willis) offers a job to Barney Ross (Sylvester Stallone). The third man in the scene, to whom Church has also offered the job is, of course, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Much was made of his cameo appearance, and it features heavily in the trailer for the film despite his screen time being under two minutes. The reason for his appearance, according to Church, is that both Trench Mauser's (Schwarzenegger) and Ross's name came to the top of the list.<sup>460</sup> The scene continues with the dialogue between Mauser and Ross.

MAUSER:	You lost weight.
ROSS:	Whatever weight I lost you found pal.
CHURCH:	You guys aren't going to start sucking each other's dicks are you?
	...
MAUSER:	I'm busy anyway, so give this job to my friend here. He loves playing in the jungle.
	...
CHURCH:	What's his fucking problem?

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<sup>457</sup> British Film Institute, 'Statistical Yearbook' (London: British Film Institute, 2015).

<sup>458</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, Haymarket (London: Verso, 1988), 16.

<sup>459</sup> Moine, *Cinema Genre*, 99.

<sup>460</sup> A list, presumably, of 1980s action movie stars looking for a job.

ROSS: He wants to be President.<sup>461</sup>

There is a degree of humour here but, as pointed out by Jameson above, it does not have the ulterior motive of parody. There is a reference to Stallone's Rambo franchise, Schwarzenegger's political career, and Willis's role (as a CIA agent) in *RED*. Furthermore, the framing of the scene enhances this point. Close ups serve to highlight the star of a film and place an undue emphasis on their face and the recognition of that face by an audience.<sup>462</sup> The extreme close ups on Willis's, Stallone's and Schwarzenegger's faces serves to heighten the importance of these three actors within the genre which highlights the nature of the pastiche by privileging the mask of the actor's face within the shot. When the rarity of the extreme close up within the contemporary action genre is taken into account, the meaning behind these shots becomes clearer. Namely that it is a self-indulgent reference to the history of the genre (through the spaghetti Westerns of directors such as Sergio Leone) and that, because the shot allows for a more subjective viewing position, it further enhances the link between genre and actor, as well as highlighting the pastiche function of the scene.<sup>463</sup> As Jameson notes, pastiche shares similar techniques and patterns to parody but without any ulterior motive. Nonetheless, this facade of critical engagement with genre conventions plays an important function within the assemblage. The encounter that is induced by a non-standard technique (the close-up) has the potential to alter the function of these movies, and thus the genre, within the assemblage. Such a disruption to patterns of thought and input could then allow the assemblage to produce new or different emergent properties. Furthermore, it could possibly decode the processes through which conditions of success are articulated, circulated, and legitimised. In other words, by going through the motions of critique by using pastiche, these movies can work to change the dynamic of the end of wars assemblage by presenting a different articulation of the action genre. These allows for the film to work through self-referentiality in order to both undermine and re-establish the boundaries of genre, and therefore the boundaries of the political possibilities that it creates the conditions for.

Obama's election on the basis of hope and change, as mentioned above, served to potentially change the end of wars assemblage by challenging conditions of success on which victory in the War on Terror was predicated. Although President Obama argued that 'there is a tendency in Washington to spend our time pointing fingers at one another,' he was also acutely aware of

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<sup>461</sup> Sylvester Stallone, *The Expendables* (Lionsgate, 2010).

<sup>462</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3 (2003): 89–111.

<sup>463</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 232.

the history and pressures of his office saying in 2014 that ‘At least since George Washington served as Commander-in-Chief, there have been those who warned against foreign entanglements.’<sup>464</sup> The self-awareness of continuity gives the impression of arguing for change which is something that is common to both the pastiche of these films and the rhetoric of President Obama. It enables ongoing continuity of foreign policy to be masked by an appeal to changing it, just as *RED* and *The Expendables* continue the genre of the action movie while challenging it by self-consciously making references to it. Thus, the challenging and subsequent reassertion of cinematic and political tropes function to decode the patterns of thought that constitute the assemblage. While Bonta and Protevi define decoding as ‘genetic drift or mutation allowing for differential production of traits in a population,’ it is not too much of a stretch to apply this phraseology to genre.<sup>465</sup> Thus, by problematizing the action genre, these movies engage in processes of decoding the assemblage by changing the patterns and parameters that shape it. Although not a strong decoding force on the assemblage, combined with other pressures explored above in *Hancock* and *Inglourious Basterds* the cumulative effect on the stability of the end of wars assemblage could potentially be effective.

*The A-Team* also plays heavily on nostalgia. As Jameson suggests, a film does not need to be set in the historical past in order to evoke nostalgia. He uses *Star Wars* (1977) and *Body Heat* (1981) as examples of films that do ‘not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality [but rather reinvent] the feel and shape of characteristic objects of an older period.’<sup>466</sup> *The A-Team* is set in a contemporary time period: the characters are soldiers stationed, for a time, in Iraq under American occupation. Despite apparently striving to update the film and break with the television series of the 1980s, there are deliberate evocations of nostalgia through the use of objects, language, and tropes, especially in the opening sequence of the film. To take each character in turn during this first escape: Hannibal (Liam Neeson) lights a cigar and says ‘I love it when a plan comes together;’ Murdock (Sharlto Copley) is broken out of a mental institution and flies the crew in a helicopter across the Mexican border; B.A. (Quinton “Rampage” Jackson) shows off his knuckle tattoos of ‘pity’ and ‘fool’ while rescuing his iconic GMC van; and Face (Bradley Cooper) is about to be killed for sleeping with the wife of the antagonist.<sup>467</sup> The introduction is rife with these moments, and such nostalgic elements are present throughout

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<sup>464</sup> Obama, ‘Remarks by the President On National Security’; Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony’, The White House, 28 May 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>.

<sup>465</sup> Bonta and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 75.

<sup>466</sup> Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, 19.

<sup>467</sup> Joe Carnahan, *The A-Team* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 2010).

the film and include B.A.'s fear of flying and dislike of Murdock, their incarceration 'for a crime they didn't commit', and even a cameo appearance from Dirk Benedict (Face from the original television series).

As well as helping to cement the film as a pastiche, the deliberate use of nostalgia has an affect which could influence the end of wars assemblage. Much like the films discussed above, *The A-Team* lays bare some of the conventions of the action genre and deliberately uses nostalgia and pastiche as a way of critically engaging with them. It is important to note that 'every code is affected by a margin of decoding,' and there is no absolute link between decoding and deterritorialisation.<sup>468</sup> However, in the case of the films under discussion here, exposing the structures through which affects and encounters are cinematically produced in audiences can serve to break the fourth wall and construct a more active audience that could reduce the power of these techniques in other movies. As such, this nostalgia and pastiche can undermine the stability of the genre by making its processes more apparent and thus has the potential to change the shape and nature of the conditions of success that are emergent properties of the end of wars assemblage.

These processes can be productively linked to the presidential politics that the movies are contemporaneous with. For instance, President-elect Barack Obama's victory speech in 2008 opens with the argument that the US is not a collection of red states and blue states but the United States of America and that 'change has come to America.'<sup>469</sup> Using the tropes expected of a presidential victory speech - thanking his opponent, Senator John McCain, his family, allies on the campaign trail and so forth; invoking historical events; and looking forward to a new era of politics to mention a few - Obama utilises nostalgia that also works to decode some of the political practices and discourses that shaped the assemblage over the previous seven years. By arguing for a "new" type of politics but still self-consciously using nostalgic appeals, it could be argued that Obama's rhetoric during these years functioned in a similar way to the movies discussed above. By laying bare the conventions of Presidential speech and bringing new rhetoric to bear on it, Obama's speeches served to undermine the political components that are part of the end of wars assemblage. By changing this input, the stability of the assemblage might be challenged which could allow it to produce alternative conditions of success.

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<sup>468</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 53–54.

<sup>469</sup> Barack Obama, 'Barack Obama: Address in Chicago Accepting Election as the 44th President of the United States', The American Presidency Project, 4 November 2008, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=84750>.



What has been demonstrated in the above section is that during the years 2007 to 2010 the end of wars assemblage was exposed to potentially critical, challenging, and changing aspects of politics and culture. Since 2001, the action cinematic and political rhetoric inputs of the assemblage had been reasonably stable and certain conditions of victory had been produced as emergent properties of that assemblage. The effect of the cultural and political artefacts in the years under discussion here had at least some potential to change the ways in which this assemblage functioned. *Inglourious Basterds*, through its partial equation of American violence with Nazi violence undermines American exceptionalism; *Hancock*'s challenging of the conventions of a superhero movie and the superhero's positions as avatar of the American monomyth again challenges exceptionalism and his destructive nature questions the connection between sacrifice and redemption in urban landscapes; *RED*, *The A-Team*, and *The Expendables* utilised pastiche and nostalgia to lay bare the genre conventions that allow for encounters thus potentially destabilising the genre. As the action genre is an important component of the end of wars assemblage, destabilising the genre has the potential effect of destabilising the assemblage and its emergent properties. Furthermore, during these years the political rhetoric of Senator and President Obama also challenged the political foundations upon which the end of wars assemblage rested. This was through challenging the moral superiority of America with his references to Guantanamo Bay, arguing that the urban-centred surge in Iraq did not help, and questioning the value of American sacrifices. The political and cultural artefacts being discussed here thus had the potential articulate critical lines of flight to change the assemblage. Through directly challenging particular conditions of success or undermining the genre conventions as a whole, there was a possibility that the end of wars assemblage would change and evolve to take account of these new inputs. This could have altered the nature of existing conditions of success, – for examples by reframing American exceptionalism as more conditional – reduced the possibility of them surviving, or new ones could have emerged – such as success through extreme violence or success through heedless destruction. However, this radical challenge to the stability of the assemblage was not continued. These films and Obama's political rhetoric and actions merely wore a mask of critique rather than having inherent critical tendencies. As will be shown in the following section, each of these artefacts reasserts dominant tropes, conventions, and styles of movies and politics.

#### **5.4 Behind the mask: the reassertion of conditions of success**

Having looked at how these five films have the potential to critically engage with, critique, destabilise, and potentially change the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of victory it produces as emergent properties we can now turn to the other side of the argument. This is,

namely, that while these movies have critical potential, they do not exploit it and eventually reassert the dominant tropes, conventions, narratives, imagery, and language that recodes and restabilises the assemblage thus allowing for already existing conditions of success to continue to emerge. Indeed, this reterritorialisation is all the stronger *because* of their potential for critique. As discussed above, these films wear only a mask of critique that has the effect of further strengthening the assemblage and the conditions of political possibility it allows for.

#### **5.4.1 *Inglourious Basterds***

Having explored the potential for *Inglourious Basterds* to undermine the end of wars assemblage and its conditions of success through the encounter induced by equating American violence with Nazi violence we now turn to how the film does not continue with this critical potential. Rather, what we see in the movie is a reassertion of the moral superiority of American political violence and the importance of sacrifice and thus their stabilisation as conditions of success in the War on Terror.

*Inglourious Basterds* is a particularly interesting film to analyse in the context of this thesis because of the centrality of cinema to the narrative and climactic sequence of the movie. In chapter three of the movie, “German night in Paris,” we are introduced to Emmanuelle/Shosanna (Mélanie Laurent) - a Jewish cinema proprietor in Paris under Nazi occupation. When we first meet Emmanuelle/Shosanna, she is changing the billboard advertising what is showing at her cinema. As she is doing this, a young German soldier, Frederick (Daniel Bruhl), approaches her and comments that she is showing a film by a German director to which she replies ‘I’m French, we respect directors in our country...even Germans.’<sup>470</sup> While Frederick tries to engage Emmanuelle/Shosanna in a discussion about cinema, perhaps hoping to cross the divide between them and with obvious romantic overtones, Emmanuelle/Shosanna does not engage. The potential for cinema to be a unifying force here is thus undermined and, as we shall see, cinema becomes central to the war effort of the movie itself. Having had her cinema selected to host a screening of “Nation’s Pride,” a propaganda film about and starring Frederick (a noted German war hero) with guests including Joseph Goebbels, Hermann Goering, and Adolf Hitler, Emmanuelle/Shosanna decides to kill the top Nazis who will be attending by burning the theatre down, with them locked inside. Furthermore, with no access to explosives, she decides to use reels of film as the main combustible material saying ‘with the nitrate film collection we wouldn’t even need explosives.’<sup>471</sup> Thus, film itself

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<sup>470</sup> Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*.

<sup>471</sup> Tarantino.

becomes a physically key component of attacking and defeating the elites of Nazi Germany. Simultaneously, and unknown to Emmanuelle/Shosanna, the Allied soldiers from the first act of the film are also planning to attack and kill the upper echelons of Nazi Germany during the premiere at the cinema.

The final climactic scene of the movie is, of course, typically Tarantino with the usual gratuitous violence, blood, gore, and all round mayhem. As the Germans arrive at the cinema for the screening, Tarantino uses subtitles to highlight the identity of some of the guests including Goering and Martin Bormann. This, in addition to the sporadic (an uncredited) use of Samuel L. Jackson as narrator, works to disrupt the narrative and the experience of the artefact in a similar way to the breaking up of the film into chapters, each split with an intertitle. It is interesting to briefly explore the effect this has. The use of a narrator, for instance, might be to create what Neupert calls a 'discursive closure device' to the narrative.<sup>472</sup> Using the narrator to discuss certain points in a film, especially when used sparingly as Tarantino does here, helps to highlight those points as key moments. The subtitles can also work in a similar fashion - by breaking the fourth wall and reminding audiences that they are watching a movie, it helps to both highlight the importance of the climactic sequence and soften the blow of the gruesome violence that is to follow - to erect a barrier between the depiction of this cinematic violence and the realities of ongoing political violence. This means it stands in contrast to the scene of the soldiers scalping the dead Nazis in chapter one that was visceral, brutal, and deeply affecting. As such, this highlights and makes clear the distinction between cinematic violence (gruesome, gratuitous, and gory) with political violence (sanctioned, surgical, and sober). Chapter one of the movie used the close-up in order to equate American violence with Nazi violence. However, by the climax of the movie, the audience is reassured that American violence is moral and justified through the use of subtitles and narration. This sequence recodes the assemblage by asserting that American political violence is good, is moral, is sacrificial and is fundamentally connected to film. American morality and sacrifice are important conditions of success within the end of wars assemblage in previous years. By concluding the movie with a sequence that celebrates this exceptionalism and sacrifice, it works to legitimise these as conditions of success. Rather than allowing the end of wars assemblage to evolve in order to take account of new depictions of American violence and lack of moral superiority, it is allowed to continue producing these conditions as emergent properties. The centrality of film and cinematic techniques therefore allows for moral (Jewish-)American political violence to be

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<sup>472</sup> Neupert, *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema*, 21.

recoded into the assemblage.<sup>473</sup>

This process of recoding American moral exceptionalism and sacrifice into the assemblage is also present in the political rhetoric of the Obama presidency. When Obama was in office, although certain aspects of the tactics of the War on Terror were altered in line with his rhetoric of change, the broad strategic thrust and conditions of success were largely maintained. For instance, the willing sacrifice of Omar Ulmer (Omar Doom), Donny Donowitz (Eli Roth), Marcel (Jacky Ido), and Shosanna in the theatre to kill Hitler and his top lieutenants is mirrored in Obama's Nobel prize acceptance speech which recognised that 'The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea,' and that 'Peace entails sacrifice.'<sup>474</sup> Or that 'because of your service, because of your sacrifices, we're making progress in Afghanistan.'<sup>475</sup> The connection between *Inglourious Basterds* targeting the leadership of the Nazi regime and the foreign policy of President Obama focusing on so-called decapitation strikes is also notable. Announcing the death of Osama bin Laden, President Obama remarks that 'shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta...to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda,' and that 'The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's efforts to defeat al Qaeda.'<sup>476</sup> Later in 2011, on the death of Muammar Qaddafi, President Obama notes that 'We've taken out al Qaeda leaders, and we're put them on the path to defeat...And now, working in Libya with friends and allies, we've demonstrated what collective action can achieve in the 21st century.'<sup>477</sup> Having worked to undermine these particular conditions of success set out by his predecessor previously, President Obama is here reasserting them, just as Tarantino

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<sup>473</sup> Many people have interpreted this climactic sequence as a Jewish revenge fantasy and a rewriting of history as opposed to being linked to the a broader articulation of the morality of American violence. I do not disagree with this but it is inescapable that the characters are agents of the US military and it is therefore not a stretch to extrapolate out meaning to a broader social grouping. See, for instance, Walters, 'Debating Inglourious Basterds'; John Rieder, 'Race and Revenge Fantasies in Avatar, District 9 and Inglourious Basterds', *Science Fiction Film & Television* 4, no. 1 (2011): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.3828/sfft.v.2011.3>; Eric Kilgerman, 'Reels of Justice: Inglourious Basterds, The Sorrow and the Pity, And Jewish Revenge Fantasies', in *Quentin Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds: A Manipulation of Metacinema*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky (New York: Continuum, 2012).

<sup>474</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President at the Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize', The White House, 10 December 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.

<sup>475</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President at United States Military Academy at West Point Commencement', The White House, 22 May 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-west-point-commencement>; Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President to the Troops', The White House, 28 March 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-troops>; Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President and the Vice President to the Troops at Fort Campbell, KY', The White House, 6 May 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/06/remarks-president-and-vice-president-troops-fort-campbell-ky>.

<sup>476</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden', The White House, 2 May 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/02/remarks-president-osama-bin-laden>.

<sup>477</sup> Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Death of Muammar Qaddafi'.

is reasserting the valour and sacrifice of Jewish-American troops in the climactic sequence of *Inglourious Basterds*. The work of destabilising and then restabilising; of undermining and reasserting; of decoding and recoding happens in both political and cultural artefacts. The effect of this on the emergent properties of the assemblage – the conditions of success – is to stabilise their process of formation and contribute to their ongoing legitimisation.

President Obama also engaged in the reaffirmation of the moral use of technology as a key condition for success in the War on Terror when discussing the US's drone programme and its relationship to decapitation strikes in 2013. Saying that the administration has 'relentlessly targeted al Qaeda's leadership,' so that 'the core of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan is on the path to defeat,' President Obama remarks that while the technology of drone strikes raises questions, 'our actions have been effective...Simply put, these strikes have saved lives...So this is a just war, a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defence.'<sup>478</sup> This focus on the moral use of technology, the responsibility that comes with it, and the targeting of key leadership figures leads to his final point on this topic which is that 'this war, like all wars, must end. That's what history advises. That's what our democracy demands.'<sup>479</sup> Obama assumed the presidency partly on the basis of his opposition to the Iraq War. However, while in office he does keep pushing for an end to that conflict, but utilises the same conditions of success as his predecessor. The cinematic and political decoding of the assemblage through the mask of critique that was articulated above allowed for a more effective subsequent recoding of these concepts back into it. Not only did this reassert, stabilise, and even strengthen the established conditions of victory necessary to bring the War on Terror to a close, but it also created political space to include weaponry that is even more advanced as well as a relentless targeting of leadership figures in al Qaeda.

#### **5.4.2 *Hancock***

By critically engaging with dominant genre tropes and conventions about the role of a superhero as an avatar for American exceptionalism, *Hancock* the film and Hancock the character have the potential to articulate critical lines of flight that question the moral superiority and exceptional nature of American political violence established as conditions of success in the end of wars assemblage. However, as the film progresses, it becomes increasingly closer to a generic superhero movie through montage, imagery, and the development of Hancock as a character. Ultimately, this reasserts the traditional conventions of the genre, recodes and

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<sup>478</sup> Obama, 'Remarks by the President at the National Defense University'.

<sup>479</sup> Obama.

reterritorialises the assemblage, and strengthens the conditions of success, especially exceptionalism, that have heretofore been culturally and politically established.

After a particularly destructive episode in the movie, the ‘Bono of PR’ Ray suggests that Hancock spend some time in prison (after seeing a report on cable news saying ‘you may be a superhero, but let me tell you this: you’re not nearly as strong as the U.S. constitution. Bank on it buddy!’<sup>480</sup>) in order to make people realise how much Los Angeles needs him. During his incarceration, Ray works with Hancock to make him accept his situation and his role in society: ‘you’re a hero Hancock...Trust me, trust this plan, trust the process. Just stay in here. When they call, a hero is what we’re going to give them.’<sup>481</sup> In addition to making Hancock trust the system (of incarceration, of control, of heroism, of public relations) Ray coaches him in the genre conventions of a superhero: landing – ‘don’t come in too hot, don’t come in too boozy, and don’t land on a \$100,000 Mercedes;’ relationships with, and trust of, authority – ‘tell the [police] officer he’s done a good job;’ finally, Ray buys him a symbol of the superhero genre – the spandex jumpsuit.<sup>482</sup> During Hancock’s time in prison, the focus shifts between group therapy sessions, the prison exercise yard, meetings with Ray, Ray’s domestic life, and panoramic views of Los Angeles with clips from radio shows discussing Hancock in montage. As Deleuze says,

Montage is the determination of the whole...Eisenstein continually reminds us that montage is the whole of the film, the Idea. But why *should* the whole be the object of montage? Between the beginning and the end of a film something changes, something has changed. But this whole which changes, this time or duration, only seems to be capable of being apprehended indirectly, in relation to the movement-images which express it. Montage is the operation which bears on the movement-images to release the whole from them.<sup>483</sup>

Although Deleuze tends to ignore popular film in his work on cinema, for which he has attracted criticism, it is not unreasonable to apply it to my work that deals exclusively with such forms of culture.<sup>484</sup> The montage sequence in *Hancock*, then, can be seen as the central moment of the film – the whole – in which something changes. This change is from Hancock as subversive superhero to Hancock as guarantor of the political system and avatar of American exceptionalism. If the montage sequence is the “whole” of the film, or the “Idea,” it can be read as a primary encounter that reshapes the end of wars assemblage.

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<sup>480</sup> Peter Berg, *Hancock* (Columbia Pictures, 2008) The reference to Sarah Palin in this scene is marked.

<sup>481</sup> Berg.

<sup>482</sup> Berg.

<sup>483</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 29.

<sup>484</sup> Ian Buchanan, ‘Introduction’, in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (London: Continuum, 2008), 12.

After this montage sequence Hancock accepts his role in society as a superhero. He is released from prison during a bank heist and, after thanking the police officer in charge, successfully saves a wounded police officer, rescues the hostages, and apprehends the bank robbers. As the plot of the film progresses and gets increasingly ludicrous, it also becomes closer to what audiences expect of a superhero movie. There is a climactic battle between Hancock and Mary (Charlize Theron), a female counterpart with similar superpowers that involves the destruction of large parts of downtown Los Angeles (with no mention of the cost of the damages this time). The film ends with Hancock, dressed in the spandex jumpsuit, having fully accepted his role in society and that this role is bound by a certain code of behaviour as superheroes need to act as the moral compass of America. *Hancock* ultimately reaffirms the dominant tropes, conventions, language, and imagery of the genre and Hancock accepts his role within American society and the wider genre of the action or superhero movie. Thus, the film completes the process of recoding exceptionalism and morality into the end of wars assemblage that is initiated with the montage sequence.

The values that President Obama criticised President Bush for failing to uphold through torture and Guantanamo Bay also feature prominently in his rhetoric, despite his administration's failure to fully close the prison. In his first speech to the CIA in 2009, President Obama says that 'what makes you special, is precisely the fact that we are willing to uphold our values and ideals even when it's hard, not just when it's easy...that's what makes us different.'<sup>485</sup> Just as *Hancock* challenged then remade the superhero, so too did Obama challenge American moral superiority only to reassert it when in office. The implications of this are two-fold. Firstly, it induces a political encounter with audiences whereby exceptionalism is recoded into the assemblage and politically utilised to justify decisions and actions of the administration. Secondly, it demonstrates the power and resilience of these conditions of success. Rather than continuing with his critique of Guantanamo Bay, Obama here elides them by claiming that the CIA uphold these moral American values despite all evidence to the contrary. Both *Hancock* and President Obama engaged in a critique of the political and cultural artefacts that partly comprise the assemblage. Having articulated these alternative lines of flight, they continue by reaffirming the conventions and practices that are the inputs of the assemblage. The potential to shock the system, either politically or culturally, are then undermined leaving the assemblage

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<sup>485</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President to CIA Employees at CIA Headquarters', The White House, 20 April 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cia-employees-cia-headquarters> Note also the oblique reference to John F. Kennedy.

and its conditions of victory largely intact. Furthermore, the mask of critique that cinematic and political components wore could serve to further strengthen and legitimise these conditions. The radical and critical potential of the film and political rhetoric are usurped by a reaffirmation of dominant narratives, conventions, and rhetoric that works to reterritorialise the end of wars assemblages and allows it to continue in the creation of the conditions of success that have been outlined in the thesis.

## 5.5 Conclusions

While assemblages are always subjected to forces and processes that challenge, change, reshape, and destabilise them, this chapter has sought to analyse these forces in the early years of the Obama administration in order to ascertain what a simultaneous political and cultural challenge might do to the end of wars assemblage. In the previous chapters I outlined how the stabilisation of the assemblage allowed for conditions of success to emerge through cinematic encounters. However, between 2007 and 2010 both political and cultural artefacts demonstrated the potential to undermine these conditions and destabilise the assemblage. Politically we see the soaring rhetoric of Obama; his platform of hope and change; his opposition to the Iraq War; and his argument that certain practices in the War on Terror undermined American values. Culturally, the movies discussed here exhibited similar critical potentials. *Inglourious Basterds* equated Jewish-American political violence with that of the Nazis; *Hancock* challenged the idea of the superhero as avatar of the grand monomyth of American identity and the centrality of the built environment to redemption; finally *RED*, *The A-Team*, and *The Expendables* laid bare the techniques by which encounters are induced in the genre. All of this had the potential to destabilise the end of wars assemblage by bringing new and different cinematic and political techniques, conventions, tropes, and narratives to bear. The simultaneity of political and cultural change further enhanced this possibility.

However, as the chapter continued, we saw that these critical potentials to destabilise the end of wars assemblage was largely unfulfilled and that the assemblage emerges from these years with the same conditions as emergent properties and, indeed, potentially strengthened by the mask of critique. *Inglourious Basterds* ends with the reassertion of American moral superiority with the use of film to kill the Nazi leadership; Hancock realises that he needs to embrace the conventions of a superhero in order to be a model American; and despite their pastiche and nostalgia, *RED*, *The A-Team*, and *The Expendables* all conform to the genre type of an action movie. Politically, despite his challenge to the existing foreign policy order, Obama continues to claim that sacrifice is necessary for redemption; argues that the military are an unbroken



chain of heroes; that the CIA upholds the core values of America; that justice was done in the Libyan Civil War; and that the use of drone technology is just and proportionate.

This chapter also demonstrates that contemporary Hollywood action genre movies are not homogeneous. While it is clear that the five films being discussed in this chapter all ultimately engaged in recoding and reterritorialising practices that function to stabilise and reinforce the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of success that are its emergent properties, they have all, to varying degrees, exhibited some critical potential. While the contemporary action genre most often works to territorialise the assemblage and strengthen the conditions of success in the War on Terror, it is important to realise that it is an ever evolving category that has the potential to articulate alternative lines of flight. As demonstrated above, these films exhibit critical potentials that could herald a more critically engaged popular cinema that aligns more closely with ideas about the power of culture to challenge, change, and critique political possibilities and political modes of being and becoming.

Understanding how these particular movies exploit and subsequently undermine this critique is an important point of departure for how such a critical cinema can be constructed. As has been shown with reference to *Inglourious Basterds*, an implicit critique of the assumed moral superiority of American political violence is key to the articulation of a popular and critical cinema. It may be possible for moviemakers to exploit similar techniques in future films, especially given the critical and commercial success of Tarantino's approach. *Hancock* also expresses a similar critical approach to the conventions of the superhero genre. By depicting Hancock as a drunken, vandalous, and irresponsible subject, the film works to undermine the role of the superhero as an embodiment of the monomyth of American exceptionalism. Such a critical engagement with the role of superheroes has already been developed through films such as *Batman V. Superman: Dawn of Justice* as well as *Captain America: Civil War* where the ambiguous nature of the superhero and their role within the (inter)national realm is explored. Finally, by engaging in a pastiche and nostalgia-fuelled intervention into the action genre, *RED*, *The Expendables*, and *The A-Team* represent a potential for moviemakers and cinema audiences to approach the genre in a more engaged, knowledgeable, and critical manner.

However, as was demonstrated in the final section of this chapter, none of these films actually held onto these critical potentials and, in various ways, undermined it much as the presidential discourse of Obama also failed to follow through on his critique of Bush-era policies and conditions of success. While this is not to say that they have not laid the groundwork for a more

critical cinema to emerge, it is clear that these artefacts' ultimate effect on the assemblage is one of territorialisation and stabilisation with the concurrent effect of then stabilising and supporting the conditions of success that emerge from that assemblage. As with all analysis in this thesis, this recoding, territorialisation, and stabilisation is not an intentional effect of the filmmakers. There are many factors that contribute to producing a film and, as noted already, movies are there primarily to make money – especially so for big-budget and mass appeal action movies. Movies which identify American violence with Nazi violence, or critique the role of the superhero, or do not appeal to the nostalgia when that is the main draw are not quite as likely to break even at the box office. There are forces that underlie the assemblage of movies, the assemblage of genre, and the assemblage of the end of wars that shape them in novel ways and would be highly interesting and productive to research further. Nonetheless, while acknowledging these other forces and processes at work, they are beyond the scope of this project which focuses on the artefacts themselves and their role within the end of wars assemblage.

All these films in some way question, critique, or lay bare the dominant genre conventions of the contemporary action movie. They also all reassert that dominance by the end of the film. While this is perhaps as much to do with the risk-averse studios of Hollywood, out to make money rather than art, it also performs a political function. The end of wars assemblage articulates systems of power that are created in part through genre conventions such as the moral superiority of American violence, conceptions of American exceptionalism, or the necessity of sacrifice. By initially destabilising these conventions and, through this, decoding and deterritorialising the assemblage, before ultimately reasserting them we find that those conventions, the systems of power that the assemblage contains, and the conditions of victory that are created, articulated, and reinforced through cinematic encounters have ultimately been reasserted and strengthened through the mask of critique that underpins these films and the political discourse of President Obama.

## Chapter Six: Linear, recursive time travelling loops

*“This time travel shit fries your brain like an egg.”*

*Looper (2012)*

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter follows on from the previous one by further analysing the stability of the assemblage and assessing how potentially destabilising temporal forces challenged it between 2010 and 2014. Cinematically, chapter five engaged with the questioning of American moral superiority, the role of the city, and pastiche and how these could work to destabilise the genre, the assemblage, and the conditions of success produced through it. The films under discussion in this chapter have the potential to destabilise the assemblage by utilising radically different conceptualisations of time than expected in the genre and that we are accustomed to encountering. However, as in chapter five, I argue that this critical potential remains unfulfilled. I will discuss how portrayals of time and temporality in cinema and politics work to code the end of wars assemblage and thus further legitimise the conditions of victory as emergent properties of that assemblage. While still assessing potentially destabilising forces and the resilience of the assemblage, the conclusion will be that stability is maintained.

Time has become an increasingly talked about aspect of International Relations, from how our understanding of time shapes particular political practices and theories to how specific forms of temporality frame, narrativise, and historicise ongoing political events. For instance, the War on Terror was constructed as a conflict where victory is inevitable. The effect of this on the end of wars assemblage is to stabilise and strengthen it by presenting a teleological view of the conflict. Concomitantly this also stabilises the emergence of conditions of success. Furthermore, by claiming that victory is never in question, the conditions of success that are politically utilised carry additional persuasive and teleological power. Cinema participates in this ongoing construction of linear and teleological temporalities through narrative arcs, the so-called “Hollywood ending,” and the franchise and studio system. However, the films to be discussed in this chapter have the potential to destabilise this linear temporal construction by utilising radically different cinematic temporalities such as time travel and circular time-loops. By destabilising conventional cinematic temporalities upon which the assemblage is partially predicated, there is the possibility of destabilising the assemblage as a whole and thereby its processes of emergence. However, as will be argued in this chapter, despite utilising alternative temporalities, each of these movies ends with a reassertion and reinforcing of conventional linear temporalities thereby restabilising the assemblage and its emergent properties. This has

the political effect of making these conditions of success – American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity – stronger and more persuasive and legitimises armed conflict as legitimate, as progressing towards a better future, and as one in which “we,” the West, will be ultimately victorious.

The main films that will be discussed in this chapter are *Source Code* (2011), *Looper* (2012), and *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014). Each of these films engages with non-linear temporality involving, as they do, time loops, time travel, alternate timelines and a general narrative trajectory towards either preventing a global disaster, apprehending a terrorist, or saving the protagonist’s life. As such, they have the potential to undermine the linear temporality that has been inscribed on the War on Terror. Of course, many films have dealt with people travelling to the past to avert disaster (*Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) or *12 Monkeys* (1995)); people stuck in time loops (*Groundhog Day* (1993)); alternate and converging timelines (*Star Trek* (2009) or *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014)) as well as time travel in literature going back to the late nineteenth-century *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells. Alternative temporalities must necessarily blur across the boundaries of periodization established herein, but the three films analysed here “hang together” in a coherent manner and allow me to engage with the role of temporality within the end of wars assemblage. Given the work that has been done on time within the study of Popular Culture and World Politics and International Relations more broadly, these three movies present an opportunity to analyse the resilience and stability of the end of wars assemblage to alternative temporalities that may destabilise it. If the War on Terror and the end of wars assemblage operate under a linear and teleological temporality, then radically different articulations of time have the potential to deterritorialise the assemblage and reduce its capability to produce emergent properties. Ultimately however, it will be shown that these films occupy a place within the end of wars assemblage whereby they code, strengthen, and territorialise dominant conceptions of temporality and therefore the conditions of success that were outlined in chapters three and four. In other words, these films reinforce the dominant political narrative of the War on Terror where “we” eventually have to win because of our values, our exceptionalism, our use of technology, and our sacrifices.

To understand how cinema works to reinforce conditions of victory in the War on Terror, this chapter proceeds in two parts. Firstly, I explore how time and temporality have been thought about in some recent literature in International Relations as well as how specific temporalities have been politically inscribed onto the War on Terror. Secondly, I move on to analyse how the three films examined here challenge or legitimise these political temporalities, particularly

through the use of montage, and the effect that this has on the stability of the end of wars assemblage. I conclude the chapter by arguing that even though these three movies all have the potential to undermine the temporal inscription of the War on Terror and thus challenge the conditions of victory that have emerged, they fail to do so. This results in the further strengthening and legitimisation of the end of wars assemblage as constituted previously.

## 6.2 Time and International Relations

Time has become an increasingly discussed element of Politics and International Relations.<sup>486</sup>

McIntosh has stated that ‘time and temporality play critical roles throughout all areas of the discipline of International Relations.’<sup>487</sup> What I want to turn to first is how specific temporalities are written into political discourse and what impact this has on the articulation of the conditions of victory outlined in chapters three and four. Lee Jarvis has written in quite some depth about how 9/11 and the War on Terror were constructed not just politically but also temporally by prominent members of the Bush administration. He identifies three types of temporal writing: radical discontinuity, temporal linearity, and timelessness.<sup>488</sup> All three will be useful for this discussion of temporality in cinema, and firstly require a brief outlining. Radical discontinuity can be seen in the construction of 9/11 as an extreme event that represents a profoundly altering event in history. Jarvis identifies three parts to this notion: a period of stability, a rupturing event, and a subsequent period of relative stability. Secondly, linear time is the type of political writing that inscribes a more evolutionary nature to the War on Terror. It is considered just another step in the history of terrorist attacks on the USA and other countries and the inevitable response to those attacks. This form of temporal writing is the one that will be most discussed in this chapter as it is this temporality that these movies could have the greatest critical effect on. The third style of temporal writing, timelessness, places 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror within the broader historical framework of America’s fight against Fascism and Communism, and the general inevitability of human conflict.<sup>489</sup> While this last category of timelessness appears similar to linear time, the difference is that it frames America’s position in opposition to conflicting ideologies (Fascism, Communism, terrorism) not as progressive steps towards an ultimate liberal end, but rather as aspects of the same situation whereby America’s exceptional position renders opposition of various types in similar terms.

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<sup>486</sup> For a good review of the discussion, see Rahul Rao, ‘One Time, Many Times’, *Millennium*, 2018, 0305829818801494, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829818801494>.

<sup>487</sup> Christopher McIntosh, ‘Theory across Time: The Privileging of Time-Less Theory in International Relations’, *International Theory* 7, no. 03 (2015): 464, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971915000147>.

<sup>488</sup> Lee Jarvis, *Times of Terror: Discourse, Temporality and the War on Terror* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 35.

<sup>489</sup> Jarvis, 36–39.

### 6.2.1 Temporality in the War on Terror

It is important to bear in mind that the three types of temporal writing identified by Jarvis are not themselves to be understood within a linear time frame. It is not that the Bush administration started with framing the War on Terror with radical discontinuity then as linear and subsequently developed the conflict within a timeless framework. Rather, all three temporal ways of framing the events of 9/11 and the War on Terror exist simultaneously and are subject to multiple framings *at the same time*. 9/11 was fracturing, evolutionary, and timeless concurrently. The War on Terror was a radically new conflict that was also just the logical extension of other responses to terrorism while also being the same sort of conflict as World War II or the Cold War. Richard Jackson has also noted these patterns:

the attacks are discursively constructed as an exceptional tragedy and a grievous harm...Second, the official language constructs the attacks as primarily an “act of war”...Third, the attacks are described in ways which allow them to fit into a number of pre-existing and highly popular meta-narratives: World War II (the Pearl Harbour analogy), the cold war.<sup>490</sup>

Related to the simultaneous construction of various temporal narratives, Tom Lundborg has noted that ‘even though the exceptional security measures of the “war on terror” can be said to highlight a radical shift and the beginning of something “new,” these measures can also be analysed as attempts to reaffirm something rather “familiar”’.<sup>491</sup> What is important to bear in mind for this chapter, however, is that according to Jarvis, ‘it was simply impossible for them [the Bush administration], it seemed, to reflect on the War on Terror’s status and import without discussing - or imagining - its past, presents, and futures.’<sup>492</sup> Time, and the construction of certain temporalities surrounding political events and political violence, is thus beginning to be seen as a central feature of politics. Furthermore, ‘representations of temporality worked not only to call forth particular violences for the acceptance or condemnation of audiences and observers. They also, crucially, worked to obscure alternative violences that may otherwise have been quite legitimately invoked or considered.’<sup>493</sup> Therefore, the construction of the War on Terror according to particular temporal frameworks works not just to justify particular political actions, but also to preclude others. From this we can argue that the inscription of certain temporal frameworks onto 9/11 and the War on Terror serve to code the conditions of

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<sup>490</sup> Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, 31.

<sup>491</sup> Tom Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

<sup>492</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 160; McIntosh even suggests that the past, present, and future are each constituted by the other. Christopher McIntosh, ‘War Through a Temporal Lens: Foregrounding Temporality in International Relations’ Conceptions of War’, in *Time Temporality and Global Politics*, ed. Andrew Hom et al. (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2016), 119.

<sup>493</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 164.

success as not just necessary to victory, but also inevitable. Similar to what was explored in the previous chapter around inversion and the mask of critique, this coding serves to reinforce these emergent properties temporally as well as culturally.

It is useful here to expand a little on different conceptions of time. On the one hand we have ‘scientific,’ ‘clock-face,’ or ‘calendar’ time that we recognise as the inevitable pull of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years that progresses in an even, linear way and is sub-divided into these various parts. But of course, time is not necessarily experienced in this way. Our subjective experience of time depends on our activity, position, history, perspective and culture. Writing this thesis for example can at times seem like an endless process that apparently takes far longer than it appears and it simultaneously feels like yesterday when I started.<sup>494</sup> While this may seem a trite example, it gets to the heart of how one’s sense of self ‘is continually produced in and through time,’ therefore meaning that time plays a constitutive role in the production of the subject.<sup>495</sup> Furthermore, time can not only alter and construct our own subjective experience of life, but also our political subjectivities. In fact, Deleuze and Bergson argue that not only do time and temporality shape our subjectivities, but also make them possible. Thus, our experiences of time make certain subjectivities come into being. The temporal precedes the subject.<sup>496</sup> Furthermore, similar to our discussion of the temporal inscription of 9/11 and the War on Terror above, for Deleuze time is irreducibly multiple with overlap, flow, and interaction between various conceptions of time, the experience of temporality, and the quantitative nature of ‘clock-face’ time.<sup>497</sup> Thus, if temporality precedes subjectivity and politics, differing inscriptions of time onto events, by politicians or cinema, carries personal and affective power.

If the War on Terror is politically inscribed with a temporality that implies a long but ultimately victorious road, then the conditions of success outlined in previous chapters will be subjected to that temporal writing as well. In other words, time becomes deeply and thoroughly political and its inscription onto particular events has an effect on how the end of wars assemblage

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<sup>494</sup> This is also related to Bergson’s distinction between ‘duration’ and ‘spatial’ time. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), 108; See also Stephen Linstead and John Mullarkey, ‘Time, Creativity and Culture: Introducing Bergson’, *Culture and Organization* 9, no. 1 (2003): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759550302799>.

<sup>495</sup> Ty Solomon, ‘Time and Subjectivity in World Politics’, *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 671, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12091>.

<sup>496</sup> Matt Hodges, ‘Rethinking Time’s Arrow: Bergson, Deleuze and the Anthropology of Time’, *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 4 (2008): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499608096646>.

<sup>497</sup> James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 5.

functions and how stable it is. To return to Jarvis's three forms of temporal writing outlined above, he makes the case that these different writings serve to inscribe different political meanings on events and texts. As Jarvis mentions early in his work,

it was frequently through specific (and, importantly, contestable) writings of temporality that these otherwise disassociable moments were able to be linked or cohered into one seemingly coherent political, strategic, discursive totality: one political, strategic, discursive totality that became, simply, the War on Terror.<sup>498</sup>

So rather than seeing political and cultural artefacts as existing within a scientific or clock-face mode of time, it is important to bear in mind that these artefacts are constructed within specific temporal frameworks such as discontinuous, linear, or timeless.

It is worthwhile expanding on Jarvis's second, linear, writing of temporality within the War on Terror to see whether the movies under discussion in this thesis, and the alternative temporalities they employ, can challenge this linear inscription. It is this linear temporal framing of the War on Terror that is the most relevant to the end of wars assemblage. The linear framing of time imagines a future, it creates a narrative that marches to an inevitable goal, in this case the victorious end of war. It is also the temporality most similar to scientific time making a linear timeline easy to follow for audiences. As this linear temporality is most relevant to the end of wars assemblage's conditions of victory, it is also most open to critique by those cultural artefacts that present different articulations of time. In other words, the movies to be discussed here could, through the depiction of alternative temporalities, undermine the linear time that is included within the end of wars assemblage.

Jarvis makes an important and perceptive argument when he identifies both a timelessness and a linear temporality in the Bush administration's comments on the War on Terror. He writes that the Bush administration increasingly presented the War on Terror as part of a broader history of attacks against America and the West and, most interestingly, that this temporal framing also ensured America's and the West's ultimate victory in the War on Terror. Within the context of the end of wars assemblage, we can argue that this temporality works to stabilise the conditions of success by placing them in both a historical and teleological framing. An example of this linear temporality can be seen in President Bush's pre-invasion commitment to rebuild Iraq when he said that the US 'has made and kept this kind of commitment before - in the peace that followed a world war... In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty

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<sup>498</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 4.



found a permanent home.<sup>499</sup> Jarvis goes into considerable depth with this point, using a large number of primary sources from the main office-holders of the Bush administration and concludes that ‘Victory was, in this writing of temporality, simply assured. If not entirely predetermined, it was clearly certain.’<sup>500</sup> Deploying elements of American exceptionalism and perceived US values here links together these conditions of success with a linear temporality that ascribes a certain degree of inevitability onto those conditions, thus coding them with legitimacy and power and further strengthening the assemblage. This is also particularly evident in a speech by President Obama in 2013 where he says that

Having faced down the dangers of totalitarianism and fascism and communism, the world expects us to stand up for the principle that every person has the right to think and write and form relationships freely - because individual freedom is the wellspring of human progress,<sup>501</sup>

Here then we see American morals and the application of technology being used within a linear temporal framework. Jarvis further notes that time and temporality are important within the War on Terror because they inscribe significance to events, they create a sense of moral legitimacy, they allow the War on Terror to cohere into a structural entity, and they reproduce collective identities of America(ns).<sup>502</sup> This is created through a number of techniques including an appeal to American principles such as the rule of law, defending freedoms, and advancing liberty, discussed above and in chapter three. Furthermore, there is the evocation of historical precedents for contemporary security practices as President Bush justifying Guantanamo Bay through reference to President Roosevelt’s decision to intern people of Japanese descent during World War II.<sup>503</sup> This ascription of a specific temporality onto the events of 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror demonstrates the power of temporal framing to create a sense of inevitability around the conditions of success in the War on Terror that are culturally and politically constructed.

### ***6.2.2 Temporality in the end of wars assemblage***

Although Jarvis’s work is largely discursive, Deleuze and Guattari can help us conceptualise how these temporal inscriptions function within the end of wars assemblage. Furthermore, approaching discussions of temporality through the assemblage allows for a more detailed

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<sup>499</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Discusses the Future of Iraq’, The White House, 26 February 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>.

<sup>500</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 123.

<sup>501</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on Review of Signals Intelligence’, The White House, 17 January 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/17/remarks-president-review-signals-intelligence>.

<sup>502</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 14–15.

<sup>503</sup> Bush, ‘President Discusses War, Humanitarian Efforts’.

account of how these temporalities code the conditions of victory in the War on Terror. As Deleuze and Guattari say:

a performative statement is nothing outside of the circumstances that make it performative. Anybody can shout, "I declare a general mobilisation," but in the absence of an effectuated variable giving that person the right to make such a statement it is an act of puerility or insanity, not an act of enunciation.<sup>504</sup>

So from this we might be able to establish that the political framings of temporality that Jarvis identifies are not, by themselves, enough to create the conditions of success that are necessary for the declaration of a definitive end to conflict. Rather, these temporal framings work to reinforce those conditions of success that emerge from political and cultural encounters with a sense of inevitability. As the Deleuze and Guattari quote above recognises, declaring that victory will be inevitable relies on particular conditions to be met; it requires that these conditions are formed and then subsequently reinforced through political and cultural discourses as well as the affective interactions between them.

Temporalities then and, more importantly, the inscription of a specific linear temporality to the War on Terror work to legitimise and strengthen these conditions of victory by constructing the entire conflict as teleological. This helps to provide the 'effectuated variable' mentioned above that converts a declaration of victory from an act of puerility to an enunciation. This can also be thought of in terms of securitisation, 'conceptualised as a performative act,' as it is not just 'anybody' constructing these temporalities, but prominent members of the Bush administration including the President himself.<sup>505</sup> However, as Stritzel has noted, securitisation theory can generally put too much weight 'on the semantic side of the speech act articulation at the expense of its social and linguistic relatedness and sequentiality.'<sup>506</sup> Stritzel's critique of the focus on the linguistic aspect of securitisation and, by implication, Jarvis's discursive approach to temporality, can be addressed through an assemblage-orientated method that engages not just with the intertextuality of artefacts, but also their pre-cognitive effects. Although Stritzel rejects 'radical poststructuralism' and its focus on power and performativity, his discussion of externalism can lead into a Deleuzian approach to security through his concept of the exteriority of artefacts that allows rhizomatic connections to be forged through assemblages.

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<sup>504</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 82.

<sup>505</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 72.

<sup>506</sup> Holger Stritzel, 'Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond', *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 3 (2007): 359, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107080128>.

Paul Patton's analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy is useful in this regard as it suggests that they approach political concepts and political writings as multiple and contingent as they are not a singular entity in their own right, but are made up of components each with their own specific history, baggage, and connections. As he says, in each case, the outcome is of a 'singular concept of a social contract [applied here to mean the successful writing of a particular temporality onto an event] where the nature of this singularity is determined by the components and the complex relations between them.'<sup>507</sup> Through this we can argue that the creation of an agreement between political discourse and audiences is not just dependent on the particular articulation of a politician, as in some securitisation theory, but is also dependent on the various complex relationships between that articulation, the broader political climate, popular culture, temporalities, and warfare. Tom Lundborg has also approached the writing of temporality within the War on Terror, but from a Deleuzian perspective rather than a discursive one. Lundborg can be seen as taking up where Stritzel's critique of securitisation left off by saying 'the point is to precisely get away from the idea of static reference points and instead adopt the view that everything and anything is the result of making connections.'<sup>508</sup> As such, it is not just individual components of the assemblage that determine whether a particular claim to truth is articulated and legitimised, but rather how various aspects of the assemblage combine and connect at a pre-cognitive level. If popular culture undermines linear temporalities, then it becomes more difficult to inscribe an armed conflict with teleological force.

By creating the war as a teleological conflict, as a conflict that will take an indeterminate, though substantial, period of time, these temporal writings allow for the eventual declaration that they have been met or, alternatively, the continued deployment of these conditions as unsatisfied. Thus, these temporal writings allow for both the arbitrary end to conflicts to be decided and simultaneously, the arbitrary continuation of these conflicts. This is not to say that these political speeches and those who gave them do not have any political power on their own, but rather that their articulation contributes to aspects of the end of wars assemblage that popular culture also contributes to. Conceptualising these political pronouncements and the cultural artefacts that relate to them as part of an assemblage allows us to analyse whether they stabilise or challenge the conditions of victory that have heretofore been articulated. We have now seen how political rhetoric has inscribed a linear temporality onto the War on Terror and the end of wars assemblage. By analysing cultural artefacts from the years under discussion

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<sup>507</sup> Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 12–13.

<sup>508</sup> Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming*, 8.

here, we can ascertain whether they play a stabilising or destabilising role in this inscription of linear temporality. These films are one potential site of critique and challenge to interrogate these writings of linear temporalities through their deployment of an explicitly non-linear temporality themselves.

### **6.3 The Films: Montage and Confusion**

#### **6.3.1 *Edge of Tomorrow***

*Edge of Tomorrow* is perhaps one of the most interesting films to emerge from this time in regards to its potential to undermine the stability of the end of wars assemblage and its ultimate failure to do so. The premise of the film is that there has been an alien invasion of Earth, starting in Europe. The opening visuals of the film use news footage from various real events to set out, within the first ninety seconds, the Mimics' invasion of Europe as well as humanity's first victory against them at Verdun, five years after the invasion began. This blending of stock news footage with film-specific shots is a common trope within the action genre that helps to temporally place the film in a contemporary setting, challenge the fourth wall by merging the real with the virtual, and to disorient viewers through remarkably fast edits, quick shots of explosions and riots, a large amount of audio and repetitions of spoken, written and visual images of 'breaking news.' The visual representation of the Mimics' spread across Europe is somewhat reminiscent of World War II and imagined images of a Soviet invasion, starting as it does in the middle of Europe and spreading out from there as well as highlighted on maps in the news media in red and until 'Britain stands alone' against the alien hordes. This can be seen as analogous to the temporal positioning of the War on Terror as merely another conflict in a long history of ideological wars against Fascism and Communism.

The film progresses conventionally enough, with slick PR-man turned pretend Major Bill Cage (Tom Cruise) appearing on various news outlets to wax lyrical about the war machines that the "United Defence Force" have developed and how this will turn the tide of battle. Following this, Cage travels to the UDF headquarters in London and, despite his pleas that he is 'not a soldier, really,' is eventually pressganged into the front line of Operation Downfall, a D-Day style invasion of Normandy, by General Brigham (Brendan Gleeson). The film then appears to take a turn towards the familiar training camp into combat format that is well-known from numerous war and action films discussed in this thesis, such as *Bataan* (1943), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987, including a Hartman-esque drill Sergeant), *Training Day* (2001), potentially even something like *Spider-Man* (2002).<sup>509</sup> This format, along with the visual effects, narrative style,

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<sup>509</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 2003, 82–84.

and other tropes, firmly establishes *Edge of Tomorrow* within the action and broader combat genres. And if further evidence of this film's genre credentials are needed, the amphibious landing on the beaches of Normandy (with reference to *The Longest Day* (1962) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) to name two of the more famous) amply provides it.<sup>510</sup> The first half hour of this film, with the familiar progression of training, combat, and death can potentially be read then as participating in the strengthening of the temporal linearity that Jarvis identifies. However, having established its bona fides as a genre film, *Edge of Tomorrow* takes an interesting temporal detour. Rather than carrying forward the temporally linear narrative of training into amphibious landing into brutal combat slog that other war and action films opt for, Major Cage kills an enemy Mimic and somehow gains its ability to travel through time.<sup>511</sup> Having then been killed, Cage wakes up where he started after being pressganged into front-line duty: the heavily militarised "Forward Operating Base" Heathrow.

The references to World War II and the Cold War in the opening news montage frame this cinematic conflict within a longer history of Anglo-American struggles against European tyranny and the shock of a sudden act of violence against the West that are both common themes in political discourse after 9/11. These themes code the conditions of victory that are articulated through politico-cultural interaction with a linear temporality that serves to strengthen and legitimise them. For instance, in 2014, President Obama states that

from the Civil War to our struggle against fascism, on through the long twilight struggle of the Cold War, battlefields have changed and technology has evolved. But our commitment to constitutional principles has weathered every war, and every war has come to an end.<sup>512</sup>

This makes clear the connection between American exceptionalism (as a shining city on the hill), American values and the past victories of the US in conflict. By aligning these conditions of victory with a linear temporality, President Obama makes the case that the US will again be victorious, just as *Edge of Tomorrow* is highlighting the inevitability of humanities' victory against the Mimics by placing it within the visual narrative of World War II and the Cold War. Similarly the appeal to the idea of a sudden violent shock to the accepted world order as a

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<sup>510</sup> I should mention that one important difference between *Edge of Tomorrow* and other training into combat style films is that there is a distinct lack of camaraderie, especially in the first loop. In some ways, this might be explained by either the lack of time given to training, or the inclusion of non-Americans.

<sup>511</sup> Plot holes are rife within this genre and I have not usually taken the time to point them out however, there are a few in this film that I feel should be noted. Why does General Brigham force Cage into frontline duty? Why does no-one at Forward Operating Base Heathrow recognise Cage when the film spent time raising his media profile in the opening sequence? How and why does Cage gain the ability to travel through time? These are mysteries that must unfortunately remain unsolved, though the original Japanese light novel on which it is based, *All You Need Is Kill* may go into more depth but is sadly beyond our scope here.

<sup>512</sup> Obama, 'Remarks by the President at the National Defense University'.

rallying cry towards victory is echoed numerous times throughout the War on Terror. For instance, when President Obama announced the troop reduction in Afghanistan in 2011 he stated that

we killed Osama bin laden, the only leader that al Qaeda has ever known. This was a victory for all who have served since 9/11. One soldier summed it up well. “The message,” he said, “is we don’t forget. You will be held accountable, no matter how long it takes.”<sup>513</sup>

In this quote we see the inscription of a linear temporality onto the War on Terror. The effect of this linearity here and its articulation with reference to American exceptionalism and values above is twofold. Firstly, it implies that because the US have been victorious in the past, they will be victorious in the current conflict therefore ascribing a sense of inevitability. Secondly, within the context of the end of wars assemblage, the association between linear temporality and American values serves to strengthen it as a condition of success. As temporality precedes the subject, according to Deleuze and Bergson, audiences can associate linearity, inevitability, and American values at a pre-subjective level. *Edge of Tomorrow*, by initially reiterating this linear temporality, functions to strengthen the claim that American exceptionalism is a key condition of success in the War on Terror. By employing linear temporalities that are contemporaneous with similar political discourse, the movie thus assists in the audience’s association between linearity, inevitability, and American values. Therefore, this opening section can be seen to stabilise the end of wars assemblage and strengthen American exceptionalism as a condition of success in the War in Terror. It might be thought that the time loop structure that occurs after this opening section would work to destabilise the assemblage and the conditions of victory that it allows for through, if not a direct critique of this linear writing, at least an implicit challenge to it. It could be read as a challenge to the ordered, linear nature of modern political violence that is created through specific framings of temporal linearity. Rather than coding political violence as an ordered, linear march towards ultimate victory, does *Edge of Tomorrow* instead present us with a *Groundhog Day* scenario where we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again? Or does it present a temporality where multiple outcomes are possible depending on our commitment to the cause?

Not quite. This alternative cinematic writing of temporality can be thought of not as something distinctively new or revolutionary but

just another beginning, another beginning of a world based on history and progress...[an]

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<sup>513</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan’, The White House, 22 June 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-afghanistan>.

attempt to reinforce a modern understanding of history, progress and sense of belonging, in time as well as space...[and] can be considered as just another attempt to reinforce a historical and spatial imaginary based on some rather familiar assumptions about modern subjectivity, political authority, and legitimate political violence.<sup>514</sup>

We can argue that the time loops of *Edge of Tomorrow* do not challenge and critique the linear writing of temporality onto the conditions of victory in the War on Terror but rather utilises this structure to reinforce them. So how does this seemingly perfect opportunity to articulate alternative lines of flight go unfulfilled? *Edge of Tomorrow* could have used the “stuck in a time loop” structure in order to highlight the futility of war – no matter how many times we go through this, nothing gets accomplished, even if we try again and again. Or it could have engaged with the endlessly recurring nature of political violence and critiqued it. Alternatively it could have been used to mourn the countless dead in each amphibious invasion of mainland Europe. These would have had the potential to not only undermine the end of wars assemblage with a radical temporality, but could have also challenged the discursive and material practices of political violence more broadly. We might expect Cage to grow weary and disillusioned with the war with each loop and each successive failure.<sup>515</sup> But instead of this critical potential *Edge of Tomorrow* deploys its temporality essentially as a training tool for Cage. This is presaged by Master Sergeant Farell (Bill Paxton) stating that “Battle is the great redeemer. The fiery crucible in which true heroes are forged...tomorrow morning you will be baptised, born again.”<sup>516</sup> The sense of combat, and potentially sacrifice, as being necessary to redemption also further to strengthen sacrifice as a condition of success.

Not only does this film not achieve its critical potential, it actually works to temporally strengthen the conditions of success that emerge from the assemblage by using the same tools that might be able to overcome it - that is, the formal aspects of cinema and the conventions of the action genre. Perhaps the foremost of these tools utilised in *Edge of Tomorrow* is the montage. The montage has long been theorised in film studies, with Eisenstein seeing montage through a Marxist lens where it is ‘any aggressive aspect of the theatre; that is, any element of the theatre that subjects the spectator to a sensual or psychological impact...that enable the spectator to perceive the ideological side of what is being demonstrated - the ultimate ideological *conclusion*.’<sup>517</sup> Adding to this, Deleuze’s own take on montage is that ‘it is montage

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<sup>514</sup> Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming*, 85–86.

<sup>515</sup> I should mention that Cage does take at least one loop “off” in order to have a pint, but this is interrupted by the war itself reaching London, forcing him back into the fray.

<sup>516</sup> Doug Liman, *Edge of Tomorrow* (Warner Bros., 2014).

<sup>517</sup> Sergei Eisenstein and Daniel Gerould, ‘Montage of Attractions: For “Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman”’, *The Drama Review: TDR* 18, no. 1 (1974): 78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1144865>.

itself which constitutes the whole, and thus gives us the image *of* time. It is therefore sometimes thought of as the principle act of cinema.<sup>518</sup> Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari, although agreeing on the importance of montage within cinema, see artefacts in a very different light to Eisenstein saying that ‘Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been.’<sup>519</sup>

Montage is used to great effect in *Edge of Tomorrow*. We see Cage getting progressively better at evading the training regime to meet up with the “Angel of Verdun” Sergeant Rita Vrataski (Emily Blunt) in order to plan their next move. The main way that montage is used, however, is to highlight how Cage gets better at combat with each loop. In Cage’s first experience of the Exosuit the camera pans across the other soldiers gearing up and moving in the suits while Cage sweats asking ‘what’s that noise? Listen man, I’ve never been in one of these.’ During the loadout sequence after a few loops however, he is confident enough to say that he never wears a helmet as it is a distraction and is precise in how he requests specific armaments and ammunition for it: ‘I need five more clips of 5.56, eight grenades, and an extra battery. Get it.’<sup>520</sup> This even causes remarks among the other soldiers in his unit who are stunned by this “buck private” demonstrating great combat skills, knowledge, and experience. Again, the development of Cage that led to this point is achieved through montage cementing it as the central moment of the movie. The way that Cage becomes better at combat is not just through an increase in skill though this is implied. Rather, he improves because of persistence and repetition. He knows exactly where to go during the beach landing, exactly where the enemies will be, exactly how many footsteps he needs to take to reach shelter and so forth. Much like in a video game where a player can beat a level by learning exactly where to move and when to shoot, Cage improves essentially through “respawning.” As Cage says, ‘We fight, that’s what we do,’ regardless of the seeming futility and recursiveness of it all and the suffering and death he has to go through over and over again.<sup>521</sup> Thus, the necessity of conflict, fighting, and sacrifice is reinforced through these sequences. Rather than highlighting the futility of political

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<sup>518</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 35; Eisenstein’s point may have been true of 1920s Soviet cinema, but as Geoff King notes, contemporary Hollywood cinema has very different and non-ideological motives. King, *Spectacular Narratives*, 98.

<sup>519</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

<sup>520</sup> Liman, *Edge of Tomorrow*.

<sup>521</sup> Liman; The constant death and rebirth that Cage undergoes has interesting consequences for how we perceive mortality, sacrifice and redemption in combat as discussed in the previous chapter. Whether Cage’s innumerable deaths detract from the concept of the noble and necessary sacrifice or whether it works to amplify it is an intriguing question and one that unfortunately will not be addressed here. This is a video mashup released several months after the film by Warner Bros. of at least some of the deaths that Cage undergoes Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, *Edge of Tomorrow - Death Mashup*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRfPNZ0Xghs>.



violence by depicting it repeatedly, *Edge of Tomorrow* legitimises the idea that sacrifice or repeated suffering and death is the way to redemption and victory, as discussed in chapter four.

It is important to bear in mind that the montage technique used in *Edge of Tomorrow* is that of ‘a process in which a number of short shots are woven together to communicate a great deal of information in a short time,’ rather than the dialectic mode of Eisenstein discussed above.<sup>522</sup> That being said, this does not make the montage any less interesting or deliberate. The central montage of the film depicts the repeated beach attacks, combat, and gruesome death of Cage and others and assaults the senses through quick edits, sounds, explosions, and the overload of information. As ‘[a]ttention to its molecular articulations takes into consideration the fact that film viewing is an embodied affective encounter’, focusing on what is being repeatedly shown as well as the iterative aspect of each shot (that is, how much Cage improves with each loop), helps to explain the encounter of the film.<sup>523</sup> So the response that is induced by this repetitive assault on the senses might be read, at first glance, as questioning the linear temporality that framed the War on Terror through its repetitive depiction of the horrors of war. However, a more productive and careful reading of this montage instead suggests an implicit support of those linear temporal writings. Throughout the central montage sequence the focus is on Cage’s improvement rather than the repeated horrors of war. For instance, we see a number of attempted assaults on the beachhead with Cage and Vrataski being killed each time. The shot cuts back to them at the base strategizing and Cage telling Vrataski where to move next time round, only for them to be killed again. As the montage progresses they get increasingly far into occupied territory. As such, through the focus on Cage’s gradual improvement and the few extra steps they are able to take on the beach with each repeat of the montage a linear temporality is established rather than a discontinuous or circular one. *Edge of Tomorrow* demonstrates that with each invasion, with each “noble sacrifice,” with each bloody death, with each mechanical tool of political violence, that ultimate victory is assured. It might take days, weeks, months, or years (and, indeed, the time that Cage spends in each loop and precisely how many there are is deliberately vague in the film) but victory is ultimately achieved. Despite the looping of time, it is still a ‘cumulative, linear directionality.’<sup>524</sup> This is mirrored as a common theme of political discourse in the War on Terror, and something articulated by President Bush less than a month after 9/11 when he stated that ‘It may take a long time, but no matter how long it takes, those who killed thousands of Americans...will be brought to justice, and the

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<sup>522</sup> Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 240.

<sup>523</sup> Rizzo, *Deleuze and Film*, 65.

<sup>524</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 39.

misuse of Afghanistan as a training ground for terror will end.’<sup>525</sup>

As Jarvis states, echoing Lundborg above, 9/11 and the War on Terror were not just predicated on ‘claims to historical rupture, breakage, or qualitative disjuncture but, rather, on assertions of continuity, evolutionary development, and progress.’<sup>526</sup> Just as Cage develops in an evolutionary fashion, progressing each time he loops, the development of technique, technology, skills, and the resultant sacrifices is also clearly seen in the political discourse of the Obama presidency and victory becomes further conditional upon it: we will win because we are getting better at what we are doing. For instance, in 2009, during a major speech on Iraq, Obama said that ‘thanks to the sacrifices of those who have served, we have forged hard-earned progress.’<sup>527</sup> In 2009, he states that ‘we’ve made progress. Al Qaeda’s leadership is hunkered down. We have worked...to inflict major blows against al Qaeda leaders.’<sup>528</sup> The slow but steady technological progress that allows the US to more effectively target its enemies with drones is also related to *Edge of Tomorrow*. Just as Cage becomes better equipped as the film progresses - thus allowing him to achieve victory more easily - so too does the US military become better equipped. President Obama, in a major address on terrorism and drones at Fort McNair in 2013 said that ‘We relentlessly targeted al Qaeda’s leadership’ so they are on the path to defeat, that because special forces are not always an option ‘it is in this context that the United States has taken lethal, targeted action against al Qaeda and its associated forces, including with remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones.’<sup>529</sup> The instance of a recurring temporality in *Edge of Tomorrow* allows for Cage to become better and better at combating the Mimics, allows him to come closer and closer to victory, allows him to (borrowing from video games), “level up”. Similarly, the gradual progress and technological improvements gained through recursive drone strikes allow for American political violence to be claimed as more effective under President Obama. The result of this simultaneity is to reinforce both technology and sacrifice as conditions of success, but the linear temporal framework in which these conditions function is also politically and culturally strengthened. The effect of this is to allow political violence that is recursive and repetitive is culturally

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<sup>525</sup> George W. Bush, ‘President Bush: “No Nation Can Be Neutral in This Conflict”’, The White House, 6 November 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011106-2.html>.

<sup>526</sup> Jarvis, *Times of Terror*, 98.

<sup>527</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks of President Barack Obama - Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq’, The White House, 27 February 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-ndash-responsibly-ending-war-iraq>.

<sup>528</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on Strengthening Intelligence and Aviation Security’, The White House, 7 January 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-strengthening-intelligence-and-aviation-security>.

<sup>529</sup> Obama, ‘Remarks by the President at the National Defense University’.

framed within a discourse of securing ultimate victory through incremental or evolutionary progress, technology, and sacrifice.

Furthermore, *Edge of Tomorrow* also reinforces technology as condition of success because of its aforementioned similarities to video game affects and temporalities. As Helen Berents and Brendan Keogh suggest, ‘representations of modern military technologies through videogames and other media as efficient, precise and superior obscures the indiscriminate devastation on the other side of the screen.’<sup>530</sup> *Edge of Tomorrow*’s video game aesthetics and temporalities portray similar ideas about the role of technology as something that is not just invaluable to victory, but as something upon which victory is fundamentally predicated. Furthermore, Cage’s increase in skill and use of military technology through the repeated training enhances the use of technology as condition of victory. Thus, rather than utilising a non-linear temporality to challenge the premise of armed conflict and the indiscriminate nature of modern military technology, *Edge of Tomorrow* actually stabilises these conditions through that non-linear temporality.

Just as the time that Cage spends looping is uncertain, the War on Terror was also constructed as having an uncertain duration. President Bush repeatedly refused to commit to a specific deadline for troop withdrawal saying that

some are calling for us to withdraw from Iraq on a fixed timetable, without regard to conditions on the ground...That’s the wrong policy for our government. Withdrawing on an artificial deadline would endanger the American people, would harm our military, and make the Middle East less stable. It would give the terrorists exactly what they want.<sup>531</sup>

This is a practice that continues into the ongoing fight against ISIS, with President Obama remarking in 2014 that ‘I’m not going to give a particular timetable,’ and in 2015 that ‘It is not a timetable. It is not announcing that the mission is completed at any given period.’<sup>532</sup> While each iteration of political violence within the War on Terror is constructed as bringing us closer to ultimate victory, the precise timetable for this is left deliberately vague, just as the amount of time Cage spends looping is. The effect of this on the conditions of success in the War on Terror is clear. It serves to imbue these conditions of success with additional strength so that

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<sup>530</sup> Berents and Keogh, ‘Virtuous, Virtual, but Not Visceral’, 367–68; See also Krcmar, Farrar, and McGloin, ‘The Effects of Video Game Realism on Attention, Retention and Aggressive Outcomes’.

<sup>531</sup> Bush, ‘President Discusses War on Terror and Rebuilding Iraq’.

<sup>532</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Statement by the President on Iraq’, The White House, 9 August 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/09/statement-president-iraq>; Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on Request to Congress for Authorization of Force Against ISIL’, The White House, 11 February 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/11/remarks-president-request-congress-authorization-force-against-isil>.

they can be deployed to arbitrarily end conflicts as well as allow them to be deployed to extend or change the terms of these conflicts. The conditions of victory are thus constructed as legitimate, coming closer, but also just beyond our reach. While we may not have the jam today, we will certainly have it tomorrow. As both *Edge of Tomorrow* and the political discourse of the Obama administration articulate a temporality that is linear, the eventual fulfilment of the conditions of success is constructed as inevitable. Cinematic and political haziness about the timeframe means conditions of victory cannot ever fail to contribute to the end of wars. Even if not achieving immediate success, they achieve in bringing it a bit closer.

### 6.3.2 Source Code

Montages like the one explored in detail above are also present in *Source Code*. The temporal structure used here is similar in nature to *Edge of Tomorrow*. The main differences though are that the loops are shorter and of a fixed duration (around eight minutes) and they exist only within a computer simulation. The loops themselves recreate the final minutes before a bomb explodes on a commuter train in Chicago and this is the problem the protagonist is supposed to resolve. Despite the loops being used for different narrative purposes - one being about ending an alien invasion of Europe in a futuristic science fiction universe and the other about catching a terrorist in the contemporary US Midwest - they function temporally in very similar ways. Both involve a lone (male) hero who is pitched into an unfamiliar situation and has a finite amount of recurrent time to, essentially, solve a puzzle.<sup>533</sup> Each loop allows the main character to get progressively better at his set task. Each time Cage and Captain Colter Stevens/Sean Fentress (Jake Gyllenhaal) reset their time loops, they have worked out the next move in the game. Both movies draw on the styles, gameplay, and temporalities of video games. While *Edge of Tomorrow* feels, at times, like a first person shooter video game, *Source Code* has a slower, puzzle-solving element and aesthetic to it - perhaps more akin to *Half-life* (1998) than *Doom* (2016). In *Edge of Tomorrow* the construction and reiteration of a linear temporality takes place almost exclusively within the time loop. In *Source Code* we see this linearity not only reinforced through the progressive improvement of Stevens that mirrors that of Cage but also an ongoing linear narrative of a bomber at large in Chicago. As Stevens' looped experience on the commuter train exist solely in a simulation and the actual bomber is still at large in Chicago and planning to detonate a "dirty bomb" somewhere in the city, the narrative has a parallel timeline that progresses in a linear fashion. While it may seem like these timelines should be separate, at the end of the film they merge (somehow) as Stevens "breaks" the

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<sup>533</sup> Again, the similarity between this device and video games is striking.

computer programme and escapes into reality before the bomb detonates.<sup>534</sup> There is a narrative similarity between the endings of both of these films that is interesting to consider. Although both use a non-linear and recursive temporal structure, both are concluded with a reassertion of “scientific” or “clock-face” time in ways that are never fully explored or explained to the audiences. While the necessity of a “Hollywood ending” almost certainly played a role in these decisions, the ultimate effect on the assemblage is to further reinforce its temporally linear construction.

*Source Code* is a great illustration of how pop culture artefacts can help to not only strengthen the linearity of the end of wars assemblage but also how they can reinforce dominant political constructions of the necessity, legitimacy, and perceived success of political violence in general. *Source Code* works to legitimise ongoing practices of political violence in the War on Terror through its suggestion that exceptional security measures are legitimate, necessary for protection, and ultimately successful. While this comes through the broad narrative of the film and the gradual revealing of the secretive military project that Stevens exists within, it is also constructed through the repeated noble sacrifice of Stevens and his near-unwavering commitment and dedication to the mission. Indeed, unlike Cage in *Edge of Tomorrow*, Stevens is a remarkably willing soldier even after, or perhaps more so, once he learns of his own official “death” and hearing a recording of his father praising him. Lundborg notes that it is not the actual event that drives political violence forwards towards an ultimate victory but rather the potential occurrence of an exceptional event. ‘As long as something *could potentially* happen it can be argued that it *probably would* happen and that unless something is being done about it *now* it cannot be prevented.’<sup>535</sup> Thus, the exceptional security measures depicted in *Source Code* represent a cultural reaffirmation of political violence as well as domestic security processes. Rather than using the looping time travel that Stevens goes through as a critique of the never-ending nature of violence and the futility of war, his constant attempts (within the “real” timeline outside the programme) to stop a *potential* event from happening and his own perceived attempts to stop an *actual* event from occurring (within the confines of the source code) overlap.<sup>536</sup> Much like *Edge of Tomorrow*, this narrative structure works to embed the idea

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<sup>534</sup> There is a narrative similarity between the ending of both of these films that is interesting to consider. Although both use a non-linear and recursive temporal structure, both are concluded with a reassertion of “scientific” or “clock-face” time in ways that are never fully explored or explained to the audiences. There is the potential that the necessity of a “Hollywood ending” played a role in these decisions.

<sup>535</sup> Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement, Becoming*, 72.

<sup>536</sup> This is an excellent example of the difficulties of coherently discussing time travel within an academic work. As Douglas Adams observed, ‘One of the major problems encountered in time travel is not that of becoming your own father or mother... The major problem is simply one of grammar.’ Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (London: Pan Books, 1980), 79.

that exceptional security measures are legitimate and through sacrifice and incremental improvements in techniques, policies, and strategies, victory in the War on Terror is inevitable.

These two films also overlap at the level of the use of simulation and how depictions of this help to create a new form of exceptional security practice. *Der Derian* suggests that in the technological drive to map the future, ‘to deter known threats through their simulation,’ we may be constructing new and more catastrophic dangers.<sup>537</sup> *Source Code*, through the use of a simulation that may or may not exist in “real” time, blurs the border between reality and simulation. When Stevens asks Captain Colleen Godwin (Vera Farmiga) under whose orders the simulation is being run for explanation, she replies that ‘This is not a simulation, lives are depending on you.’<sup>538</sup> Blurring the boundaries of the real and the virtual can be seen as emblematic of the blurring between cinema and politics that the assemblage allows for. Reading this through the end of wars assemblage more generally we can say that conditions of success are produced through the audiences that confront both movie and politics. This shift from narrative arc to particular “reel” moments that will be remembered in the “real” world is an important aspect when engaging with the action genre. Scenes such as Colter Stevens and Christina Warren (Michelle Monaghan) kissing while an explosion comes towards us in slow motion; Stevens’ tearful conversation with his father; his determination to save Christina despite the mission having been formally ended; his gradual improvement each time his loop resets. This is some of the imagery that allow for affects to be produced in audiences that they can then take outside the cinema to engage with, encounter, and parse political events in various ways. Similarly, in *Edge of Tomorrow*, the use of montage to portray Cage’s improvement, his movements through the battlefield, and his training regime with Vrataski are all moments that can pre-cognitively induce audiences to accept political articulations of gradual improvement and ultimate victory.

As people encounter cultural artefacts with political events in their mind, thus they must also encounter political artefacts with cultural events in their mind. As Louise Pears notes, ‘it is through the everyday and emotional interactions with popular culture that people come to make meaning.’<sup>539</sup> Yvonne Tasker has a similar point to make about our engagement with action movies and how it can relate to spaces beyond the screen. She states that we *know* in genre cinema that the hero or heroine (though mostly hero) will survive the various trials that are thrown at them and that the narrative arc will be successfully concluded but that ‘the moments

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<sup>537</sup> *Der Derian*, *Virtuous War*, 95.

<sup>538</sup> Duncan Jones, *Source Code* (Summit Entertainment, 2011).

<sup>539</sup> Pears, ‘Ask the Audience’, 92.

that are remembered, the images which an audience may take from the cinematic experience, cannot be summed up within the terms of narrative resolution,' and that cinema is a 'sensuous experience.'<sup>540</sup> Within the context of the end of wars assemblage, then, these sequences function in several ways. Firstly, bearing in mind Tasker's point about genre above, the audience's knowledge that the hero will ultimately be successful reinforce the temporally linear coding of the assemblage thus strengthening it. Secondly, Stevens' and Cage's recurring sacrifice and gradual improvements each loop works to reinforce the condition of success that entails redemption through sacrifice. Thirdly, the drive to save Christina and reconciliation with his father can be read as examples of American values and morality that can strengthen the associated condition of success. And fourthly, the depiction of scientific and technological expertise to solve a crime and prevent another helps to reinforce the idea that success is predicated upon technological superiority. The ultimate effect of these encounters then is to legitimise many of the conditions of success that are produced by the end of wars assemblage. The potential of non-linear cinematic temporalities to produce diverse lines of flight is eroded and it allows for a particularly strong depiction of some of these conditions of victory, such as sacrifice and technological progress.

### 6.3.3 *Looper*

*Looper*, as its title suggests, also uses time loops but in a slightly different way to either *Edge of Tomorrow* or *Source Code*. Unlike the previous two films where the characters are caught in recursive loops and use them to become incrementally better at the military tasks they have been set, *Looper* is a more "conventional" time travel film with the main character travelling back in time in order to change the future. Young Joe (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is a mob assassin tasked with killing people from the future where time travel has been invented and outlawed. Old Joe (Bruce Willis) is Joe from thirty years in the future sent back to be killed by his past self to "close the loop" and so prevent the assassins from informing on the gang. Again, the non-linear timeline here could be used to undermine various ongoing political discourses and practices. For instance, the use of money to pay for killing could be linked to a disruption of the use of mercenaries. The idea of killing one's future self could be used to depict the futility of armed conflict. Or the role of the economy in violence could be highlighted to critique neoliberalism's roles in a global cycle of criminality and violence. Although Old Joe escapes his assassination in order to prevent his wife from being killed (in the future, possibly in an alternate timeline); Young Joe eventually takes his own life to prevent his future self from

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<sup>540</sup> Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 153.

killing the mother of a child who may grow up to be the “Rainmaker,” a future mob boss who is taking over the underworld and closing all the loops. Through this closed loop that the film presents us it removes any possibility of challenging the linear temporality constructed for the War on Terror. *Looper* closes off the possibility of creating a different future by demonstrating that no matter how much we may want to travel back in time to change the past the future is remarkably difficult, if not impossible to change. We have been set on this course and we must follow it through. This resonates with the previous two films that challenged and then reasserted the linear temporality constructed for the War on Terror by demonstrating that challenging, incremental improvements and a linear time frame are the key to defeating an enemy or capturing a terrorist. This determination to follow through conflict until victory is secured is something that also appeared in the political views on the War on Terror. President Obama makes reference to a similar sentiment in several speeches, including his 2013 State of the Union address where he said that ‘thanks to the grit and determination of the American people, there is much progress to report. After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home.’<sup>541</sup>

The previous two films also challenged and reasserted dominant conceptions of temporality through montage which had the effect of strengthening the linear temporality of the War on Terror, therefore confirming the conditions of success that emerge from the assemblage. *Looper* uses montage to convey how Joe ages, indulges, falls in love, and settles down therefore also using the technique to reinforce a linear temporality through Joe’s life. There are a number of timelines intersecting and overlapping in the film, causing, on first watch at least, almost a sense of hopelessness. It leaves the audience in a state of mind where they are unsure what to believe, who to trust, or who to support. While Young Joe is the main character in the early part of the film and so the audience naturally can develop a bond with him, we also sympathise with Old Joe wanting to regain his murdered wife and life of tranquillity; but once Old Joe decides to murder children to change the future we become much less involved in and supportive of his motives and means. But if Old Joe is just Young Joe thirty years hence, how can we support either of the main characters? Eventually this narrative and affective roller coaster is solved through Young Joe taking his own life to save the child Old Joe wants to kill, thus “closing the loop.” Not only does this neatly conclude the narrative arc of the movie and reconcile various

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<sup>541</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address’, The White House, 12 February 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address>; See also Obama, ‘Remarks by the President at the National Defense University’, Barack Obama, ‘Statement by the President’, The White House, 19 April 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/19/statement-president>; and Barack Obama, ‘The President Addresses Joint Session of Congress: February 24, 2009’, The White House, 24 February 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/4126>.



timelines, it also can also have a second order effect on the end of wars assemblage. Firstly, Young Joe enacts the classic trope of the noble sacrifice that we know stretches back to at least World War Two. The effect of this is to further reinforce the idea of victory through (self-)sacrifice and a condition of success within the assemblage. Secondly, the reconciliation of multiple timelines helps to reassert linear, “scientific,” or “clock face” time. As has been argued here, this linear temporal framing is a key component of how conditions of success are articulated and framed within the War on Terror. By stressing the importance of linear temporality at the emotional climax of the movie, *Looper* undermines its own potential to challenge this temporal framework of victory, therefore strengthening this aspect of how the end of wars assemblage functions.

As a final point, not only are these three movies characterised by diverse temporalities, violence, and the ultimate reassertion of linear time, they are also driven by gendered narratives. In the case of *Edge of Tomorrow* there is a burgeoning love interest between Cage and Vrataski ending happily with his final loop and the potential for romantic involvement (as well as a sequel).<sup>542</sup> *Source Code* sees Stevens re-enter the simulation to try to save the Christina Warren, again ending happily with them deciding to take the day off to spend together in Chicago. *Looper*, finally, sees Young Joe become romantically involved with Sara (Emily Blunt) and sacrifice himself to save her and her son Cid (Pierce Gagnon). As Susan Jeffords argues in relation to *The Terminator* and the *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, they take ‘as their focus how the future can be born and the extent to which men can control it.’<sup>543</sup> As well as signalling a reinforcement of gendered roles in Hollywood film and a rejection of critical engagement with dominant political narratives, this aspect of these movies gives control of the future to men. While the gendered narrative present in these films and the notions of self-reproduction that they present are highly important and timely there is not enough scope or time here to delve very far into it. Suffice to say that this represents not only ‘the reproduction of masculine authority...through the affirmation of individualism,’ but also a failure to further exploit the critical potentials of temporally challenging cinema.<sup>544</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed whether the end of wars assemblage was destabilised by alternative

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<sup>542</sup> This sequel, with the working title *Live Die Repeat and Repeat* appears to be stuck in development hell unfortunately.

<sup>543</sup> Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 156 Jeffords presents here a definitive account of masculinity in the Hollywood action cinema of the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>544</sup> Jeffords, 176.

cinematic temporalities. What has been argued is that while these temporal lines of flight have critical potential, the end of wars assemblage is highly resilient to potentially challenging political and cultural artefacts. The three movies being analysed presented alternative temporal frameworks to the linear writing of the War on Terror. Despite this initial alterity, all three films reassert linear, scientific, or clock-face time at the end thus allowing for a temporal linearity to continue within the assemblage. Time has become an increasingly important site of analysis in International Relations and one that seeks to uncover how particular writings and constructions of temporality shape both the political discourse that allows for events to occur and the very shape of the international system itself. As we have seen in the three films that I have analysed in this chapter, it is clear that these cultural artefacts participate in this ongoing dialogue between politics, the academy, the discipline of International Relations, and practices of political violence. There are certainly many films that use time travel in some shape or form - going back or forward in time, time loops, alternate timelines and so forth - in order to challenge dominant conceptions of time and temporality. Shapiro has noted, for instance, how some movies 'challenge the Hegelian continuous, linear version of historical time.'<sup>545</sup> The films analysed here all share a potential to engage critically with the linear construction of temporality within the War on Terror. Importantly however, they do not exploit this critical potential but, rather, they work to reterritorialise the end of wars assemblage in such a way as to reinforce these linear temporal constructions, legitimise the perceived necessity of extraordinary security measures, and reaffirm dominant political narratives in the War on Terror.

The action genre is an interesting and important site for politico-cultural analysis precisely because the innate conservatism of the genre often removes the overt politics from a film, but the connections to politics that any cultural artefact demonstrates can still be analysed. Here more so because it appears, at first glance, to not deal with questions of victory in the War on Terror or the political construction of linear temporalities. At the core of the analysis is the argument that these films unintentionally participate in the legitimisation of ongoing practices of political violence through their narrative arcs and stylistic choices. This then helps to code the conditions of success necessary to end conflicts in the War on Terror with a linear and teleological temporality. Secondly, they engage in the construction of an ending to the War on Terror. As these conditions of success emerge through the end of wars assemblage, it follows that this assemblage is predicated upon a particular construction of linear temporality. This temporality and, by extension, the conditions of success in the War on Terror are thus

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<sup>545</sup> Shapiro, *The Time of the City*, 40.

legitimised and strengthened through the reassertion of linear temporality that these movies present. While it is clear that “we will ultimately win,” how and when this victory comes about is deliberately left vague. Needless to say though, this victory must always come at a cost to people and security. The encounters discussed here demonstrates that the conditions of victory are being achieved in a linear fashion even though it feels like we are stuck in a recursive loop; even though it may seem that we deviate from the path, it is all part of the plan to ultimately succeed; and that victory is inevitable, whatever the cost.

## Conclusion: Cinema and Closure

*“Welcome to camp victory.*

*Camp victory? I thought it was camp liberty?*

*Oh no, they changed that about a week ago. Victory sounds better.”*

*The Hurt Locker (2008)*

Throughout this thesis I have argued that popular culture is an important site for the construction, circulation, and legitimisation of political meaning and contributes to conditions of political possibility. I have argued that we can conceptualise war termination in the War on Terror as the end of wars assemblage that is partly predicated upon political rhetoric, popular culture, and the interaction between the two. Specifically, I have argued that the contemporary Hollywood action genre produces intensive and affective encounters that allow for certain conditions of success in the War on Terror to emerge. The conditions of success that I have identified are American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity. An assemblage orientated understanding of the end of wars allowed me to analyse how particular cultural artefacts induce affective encounters in audiences and what type of endings these encounters allowed for politically. Furthermore, I have argued that the end of wars assemblage and its conditions of success are not static entities but are in a process of constant change, evolution, and contestation. Tracing the contours of this assemblage over a fourteen year period has meant that I have not just engaged in assessing what conditions of success emerge from the assemblage, but also how processes of stabilisation and destabilisation act on that assemblage. I have argued that, because of the constraints of genre cinema and the power of intensive affect, these conditions of success remained largely intact during the period covered by this thesis.

Understanding how wars end is a critical question for International Relations for a number of reasons. Although the start of wars is often seen as the central question of International Relations, we must also understand how the violence, destruction, and death of armed conflict is brought to a close. Furthermore, war termination has been historically marginalised and under-researched within the discipline despite the clear parallels between how wars start and how they end. Therefore, understanding how they are brought to a conclusion is not only useful for its own sake, but it can improve our knowledge of how they begin. As was shown in the Introduction, most studies of war termination have approached the question from the perspective of rational choice. As such, these studies are necessarily limited in their scope and type of artefact that they can engage with. The changing nature of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century also

poses challenges to rational choice methodologies that, in this field, tend to rely on dyadic models, cost-benefit analyses, and utility theory. Engaging with popular culture, not just as an example of representation of conflict, but also as a site of meaning making, opinion forming, and political action can broaden the types of artefact we can engage with productively and can deepen our understanding of complex political processes, such as ending a war. By exploring how meanings around the end of wars are constructed, circulated, and legitimised through popular culture this thesis represents a critical intervention into the literature on conflict termination studies, critical approaches to International Relations, and the study of Popular Culture and World Politics. It does this by presenting a novel approach to understanding how and why contemporary armed conflicts end, engaging with the affective encounters that can be induced by cinema and the potentials they produce, and tracing the contours of an assemblage over a period of time.

The argument that popular culture and world politics are deeply entwined with one another, that they function together to create conditions of political possibility, and that these conditions of possibility are then enacted in the world, often in the form of highly problematic forms of political violence is an important argument to make normatively and in terms of the discipline of International Relations, security studies, and war termination studies. Using popular culture generally, and the contemporary Hollywood action genre specifically, is perhaps a controversial approach to the study of how conditions of success for armed conflict emerge. However, as has been shown throughout this thesis, such an approach is grounded in an existing and expanding literature and a theoretical approach that is established within the field and beyond. Furthermore, popular culture can tell us things about contemporary politics that would not be available through a more traditional study of quantitative data, rational choice models, or a discourse analysis of the news media for instance. What such an approach does then, is to challenge a representational and mimetic logic that has largely defined studies of war termination. By embracing the complexity of politico-cultural interaction, I have sought to analyse the affective encounters that popular culture can induce in audiences and the effects that these have on the end of wars assemblage – namely the emergence of conditions of success. I have also analysed how these conditions of success and the stability of the assemblage more broadly have been challenged yet remained intact.

Developing and building on other critical work in International Relations, I engage with the emerging study of Popular Culture and World Politics which, although not monolithic from either an ontological or methodological perspective, seeks to devote attention to ‘developing

theoretical and analytical means for accounting for the manifest influences of world politics as popular culture and popular culture as world politics.’<sup>546</sup> It is within this sub-field of International Relations that my own research, and this thesis, is largely located. Becoming more specific I outlined a case for using contemporary cinema as a site for critical understanding of how conditions of success in the War on Terror emerge, building on those that have engaged in politico-cultural analyses of various political topics but bringing in both affect and an understanding that popular culture does not always function to critique dominant discourses and articulations of power, but rather often functions to strengthen and legitimise them. Having thus situated my work within, and at the intersections of, war termination studies, conflict studies, Popular Culture and World Politics, and critical International Relations I then engaged in developing a theoretical understanding that could be fruitfully applied to the question being posed: how does popular culture help to create the conditions of success in the War on Terror? To do this, I framed the question around the end of wars assemblage and the conditions of success that are its emergent properties.

Although popular culture influences political action in complex and non-linear ways, I have argued that we can bring these connections under analysis through an engagement with assemblages and encounters. Assemblage theory, although admittedly dense at times, furnishes us with a theoretical and methodological orientation that allows for a conceptualisation of how conditions of success are the products of politico-cultural interaction. As has been argued throughout, these conditions of success are formed through encounters between screen and audience that pre-cognitively connects particular tropes, themes, and imagery with victory. This allows for these conditions to then be politically deployed and have a much greater effect in concluding a conflict. These conditions can be thought of as emergent properties of the assemblage, though irreducible to the components of that assemblage. Chapter one outlined how I have engaged with and utilised assemblage theory to help understand these links and how they create particular emergent properties. It is important to once again reiterate that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is both complex and multiple. By this I mean that there is no definitive understanding or utilisation of their approach and their work and the work of other scholars engaging with assemblages makes it clear that it is not their intention to make it definitive. Rather, what is made clear through a critical reading of this work is that it is precisely this multiplicity, this methodological and epistemological openness that characterises their approach and indeed is one of its greatest strengths. Chapter one further demonstrated that the

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<sup>546</sup> Grayson, Davies, and Philpott, ‘Pop Goes IR?’, 156.

internalities of cinematic and political artefacts (shot, lighting, editing, trope, language, narrative, and so forth) are intrinsically linked to their externalities that allow for affective encounters to be induced in audiences that can then have political effects beyond the intention or design of moviemakers. What this chapter also makes clear is that this thesis was not about the internal meaning of a film or about reading the ‘politics of the movies’ in a traditional sense, but rather about what connections might be forged between these seemingly separate spheres. In this chapter I laid out a number of examples of assemblages including those of popular culture, politics, and the end of wars. I then discussed emergence and intensity as key theoretical tools that allow us to understand how assemblages form and how they produce emergent properties that are not reducible to the components of an assemblage. Engaging with affect and encounters provides a methodological orientation in assessing how particular movies function within the assemblage and how they can pre-cognitively affect audiences and allow conditions of success to emerge. I also discussed the materialist ontology of assemblages, their non-linearity, lack of intentionality, and the conceptual and practical differences to intertextuality. Finally, I outlined my methods as well as engaging in some methodological debates around the reasons for, and limitations of, the periodization of the thesis. The purpose of this chapter was to outline my theoretical orientation and discuss how it was to be applied in the empirical chapters.

Chapter two is an important move to ground the artefacts I engage with and the end of wars assemblage historically. I began this chapter by tracking the development of the action genre from the World War II combat film to the present day. By mapping how the genre first emerged, evolved, was inverted, subverted, and reinvented I make a number of points. Firstly, it became clear through this chapter that contemporary cinema, even the generic movies of the action genre, have a long and interesting history to them with particular tropes, styles, shots, edits, and so forth being grounded in an extensive history. This, in addition to the critical and commercial success of the genre, adds to the justification outlined in this chapter for the specific focus on contemporary Hollywood action movies. Secondly, chapter one made the argument that genre as a category is an important, interesting and useful way to approach the end of wars assemblage and how conditions of victory are formed. As shown at various points throughout the thesis, but particularly in chapter five, how movies engage with, subvert, and reinforce the tropes and conventions of the genre has an effect that can help to decode and recode the assemblage and the conditions of victory that it allows for.

I could have structured this thesis in various ways such as according to particular sub-genres of

action; or according to dominant themes and narratives; or by how the films were critically and commercially received; or in any other number of potential ways. However, organising it chronologically has a number of benefits. Firstly, and chiefly, it has allowed me to not only analyse how conditions of success emerged from the end of wars assemblage in the early years after 9/11, but also to assess diverse lines of flight that arose from culture and politics and how these had the potential to challenge, change, or reshape these conditions of success. Although the conclusion of later chapters is that these conditions remained broadly similar rather than being radically altered as a result of political or cultural forces, this in itself is an interesting conclusion as it suggests that the end of wars assemblage is rather resilient to change. Tracing the contours of the assemblage over time not only provides a fuller account of how wars end, but it also makes the point that assemblages are not static entities but are always subject to multiple processes and forces acting on them. This is not to ascribe a teleological direction to the assemblage where it must first emerge before it is subjected to challenge. Assemblages are always undergoing processes of change and evolution, but structuring the thesis in this way has allowed me to explore emergence and change in a clearer fashion. Chapters three and four were largely focused on the stabilisation of the assemblage while chapters five and six discussed how the assemblage was subjected to destabilising forces. While these two processes – stabilisation and destabilisation – are always simultaneous, this division allows for a clearer analysis of them as separate but intertwined forces. Placing this analytical division at the election of President Obama further allowed me to ascertain what a change to the political rhetoric aspect of the assemblage would achieve when combined with potentially radical cinema.

Secondly, there is a methodological justification for this structure as it allowed for a more organised approach to the research process itself. By giving each chapter a defined time period it simplified the textual selection practices and streamlined how I approached the vast amount of films and political artefacts that have been engaged with during the process. Furthermore, it has hopefully made for a more structured experience for the reader, allowing them to also trace how the end of wars assemblage developed, was subjected to challenge, and emerged from this. Thirdly, as this thesis has addressed the question of what conditions of victory are allowed for through the interactions between cinema and politics, it has allowed for a more concrete analysis of this through artefacts that were contemporaneous with one another. As discussed in the Introduction and chapter one, concurrence between political and cultural artefacts allows for more intense affective encounters to be induced therefore making pre-cognitive effects more apparent. While it could be said that this has elided the question of causality, I would argue that it has addressed it directly by arguing that there are not necessarily direct, linear causal



interactions at work but rather that these seemingly separate fields are mutually involved with and through one another in an ongoing and symbiotic way. In other words, this thesis has not approached the issue of politico-cultural interaction by looking at how art imitates life or life imitates art but rather by addressing the more fundamental and complex question of how these areas interact with one another through factors and processes that are not immediately apparent and what politics this interaction allows for.

To discuss what each chapter has said individually as well as reiterate how they all fit into and support the main argument of this thesis is now useful. While each section of the thesis has its own internal logic, structure, meaning, and argument, they can all clearly be shown to support the central case of the thesis which is that the intensive and affective encounters allowed for by cinema allows for particular conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage. Because the assemblage is not a static entity, analysing destabilising forces was also important. Because these conditions of success emerge from cinematic encounters, when they are politically deployed to make the case that a war has ended or will end, audiences that confront both politics and cinema can have pre-cognitive affects retriggered thus making the claim to truth that has been politically articulated more acceptable. Chapter three addresses how initial conditions of success emerged from the assemblage between 2000 and 2003, that is, from just before 9/11 until the invasion of Iraq. What was argued in this chapter is that the movies under analysis – *X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, *Training Day*, and *Tears of the Sun* – all included sequences, shots, styles, and stories that allowed for affective encounters between audiences and cinema to help two conditions of success emerge as properties of the end of wars assemblage. These conditions were American exceptionalism and the morals it exemplifies and the use of technology as an amplification of this morality and exceptionalism. The occurrence of these motifs simultaneously in political and cinematic discourses, while sharing a long history, helps with the inculcation of these encounters and allows them to function in a territorialising way. American exceptionalism and the values it embodies as well as the use of technology as a moral amplifier are strongly territorialising forces on the assemblage as they not only emerge as conditions of success, but they strengthen already-existing discourses that surround the use of American military force in the world. This chapter demonstrates that from the outset of the War on Terror, and indeed even before it began, the basis for these conditions of success was already in place. In other words, the conditions of success discussed throughout this thesis did not emerge as a response to 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq's spiral into violence, opposition to war, or American foreign policy but were actually already in circulation. Nonetheless, the War on Terror provided the outlet for these conditions of possibility to become actualised and

enacted through cultural and political discourses and physical and material practices of political violence.

Moving through time, cinema and political events into chapter four, we witness *The Ultimate End*. Apocalyptic imagery and the built environment allow strong encounters to be inculcated in audiences that allow for sacrifice and urbanity to emerge as conditions of success from the assemblage. Simultaneous with these cultural artefacts we also saw violence in Iraq peaking and resulting in the troop surge of 2007 designed to secure urban areas within a political discourse of sacrifice begetting redemption and victory. The three films analysed in this chapter – *I am Legend*, *Children of Men*, and *War of the Worlds* – all share apocalyptic imagery and a visual and narrative focus on urban or built environments of New York, New Jersey, and Bexhill and have sacrifice and redemption at the core of their narrative and highlighted visually throughout. Drawing on literature about the apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian as well as concepts of urbicide I argue that apocalyptic imagery and urban environments in these movies worked through affect to pre-cognitively allow audiences to fall into particular patterns of thought regarding sacrifice and urbanity as being essential for victory. As such, the encounters allow for these themes to emerge as conditions of success from the end of wars assemblage. Thus, when sacrifice and urbanity are politically articulated as important concepts and sites of victory, audiences have been pre-primed to accept this claim to truth. Again, not only do these narratives and images allow for the assemblage to be stabilised, but they are also the conditions of success that are then politically deployed to bring about a conclusion to conflict. The use of these themes suggests a political narrative of victory through sacrifice or, alternatively, sacrifice guaranteeing victory. The location of these sacrifices within an urban landscape and built environment further territorialises the assemblage and strengthens the sacrifice as a condition of victory in the War on Terror. Furthermore, by utilising the Judeo-Christian imagery of redemption through sacrifice and an apocalyptic narrative, the films, politics and assemblage through which they are connected helps to create the conditions of possibility for endings to be constructed. If we make enough sacrifices in the right places at the right time it will lead to redemption. Mapping this onto Iraq and the troop surge of 2007, it is clear that these contemporaneous themes, narratives, tropes, imagery, and language work to create the conditions of success that are politically necessary to make a claim to truth about the ending of a war.

Having established four conditions of success that emerge from the end of wars assemblage in the early years of the War on Terror, I began to analyse the effect of destabilising forces on

these emergent properties and the stability of the assemblage itself. The years under discussion in chapter five covered the 2007 election campaign and President Obama's election on a promise of hope and change. As such, it was possible that different conditions of success could have emerged from the assemblage or that existing conditions would have been undermined by this changing political rhetoric. As such, chapter five engaged with the potential of critique and alternative lines of flight. However, as was argued in the chapter, this critique was only superfluous and I concluded that such a critique is transient, ineffectual, and ultimately unfulfilled. While the end of wars assemblage is composed of many different elements, artefacts and components and is subject to multiple forces and processes, the subjects of this research have been action movies and political speech. Not only did the election of President Obama change the political aspect of the assemblage, but during these years there were a number of films within the action genre that challenged the conventions, norms, and structure of the style as part of the ongoing evolution of genre. As such, it was productive to engage with these different artefacts in order to analyse what effect they may have had on the assemblage and its emergent properties.

In chapter five, I therefore argued that the evolution of the action genre and the rhetoric of President Obama apparently functioned to undermine the stability of the assemblage and its emergent properties. These critical potentials functioned through moral equivalencies between American and Nazi violence in *Inglourious Basterds*, challenges to the role of superheroes in *Hancock*, and the use of pastiche to consciously reference previous iterations of genre conventions in *RED*, *The A-Team*, and *The Expendables*. However, while all of these films exhibit the potential to challenge and undermine the functioning of the assemblage, what we find is that by the end of the final act, the conditions of success that emerged in previous years were reasserted. In other words, American violence is reaffirmed as superior to that of others; the wayward superhero of *Hancock* fulfils the expected role of such a superhero; and the pastiche proves to have no critical attitude at all. This failure of cinematic critique here parallels with the rhetoric of then-Senator Obama during the 2008 election campaign articulating a different foreign policy to the previous administration, but ultimately reasserting the same policies, tropes, and conditions of success for the War on Terror. These reterritorialising moves thus strengthen the end of wars assemblage and its emergent properties. Indeed, because these films and the rhetoric of senator and then President Obama wear what I termed the mask of critique at their outset, the reterritorialising force is significantly strengthened as it carries the legitimacy of having gone through a challenge and emerged in much the same ways as before. The outcome is that while we may critique genre conventions, discourses, foreign policies and

conditions of political possibility, we will inevitably find that they are, in fact, correct and legitimate.

Chapter six, finally, engaged with questions of temporality in politics and cinema. In this chapter I drew on existing literature on time and politics which argued that the War on Terror was inscribed with a linear temporality that worked to create a teleological view of conflict. This teleological view suggested that victory is inevitable because of the conditions of victory that had been analysed in previous chapter – American exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity. As I argued in chapter five that these conditions are somewhat resilient to critique, in chapter six I analysed whether a cinematic disruption to the temporality inscribed into the War on Terror would destabilise the assemblage and its emergent properties. Chapter six thus represents an expansion on how these conditions of success have been formed as well as how time functions within the end of wars assemblage. Much like in chapter five, the three films discussed here – *Edge of Tomorrow*, *Looper*, and *Source Code* – have, at first glance, a potential to critically engage with dominant conceptualisations of time as linear and progressing towards an ideal end. While the use of time travel in each of these films presents us with such a potential, it is argued that this is unfulfilled and that, through the reassertion of dominant temporalities, such critical moves are undermined, the assemblage avoids radical change, and the conditions of success continue as its emergent properties.

One of the primary ways that these films function within the assemblage is through montage and the affective encounters it can induce. But rather than use montage sequences to disrupt linear temporality and thus the stability of the assemblage, these movies use montage to reassert this temporality which therefore allows the assemblage to continue to produce conditions of success as emergent properties. Through a discussion of the use of montage in these films, as well as some other key scenes it is argued that this cinematic technique is central to the undermining of the films' critical potential and the reterritorialisation of the assemblage. As in chapter five, it is argued that the ultimate reassertion of dominant discourses is further strengthened by the potential for critique that these films exhibit. This chapter, standing at the end of the substantial portion of the thesis argues that temporalities - and how they connect to other themes discussed throughout - work to strengthen the end of wars assemblage. This strengthening then allows for the conditions of success to be further legitimised at a pre-cognitive level. As such, the ability of political leaders to deploy these conditions as political articulations of the end of war is further legitimised.

The end of wars assemblage is composed of multiple component organs – military strategy, tactics, alliance structures, economies, societies, elections, discourse, geographies, and so many more – all of which can be thought of as assemblages in their own rights. What I have argued throughout this thesis is that popular culture is also a component organ of the end of wars assemblage. While not a total account of how wars are brought to an end, engaging with popular culture as a site of political meaning making, circulation, challenge, and legitimisation is a novel approach to the study of how and why wars end. Engaging with all aspects of how and why wars end is beyond the scope of any single research project, and even analysing all of popular culture would be a significant challenge. As such, I have focused exclusively on the contemporary Hollywood action genre because of its box office dominance, global reach, high budgets, mass audiences, and its particular connection to historic combat movies. I have argued that the movies analysed in depth in this thesis function as part of a broader assemblage and work through intense and affective encounters to pre-cognitively form patterns of thought in audiences that allow conditions of success to emerge in the War on Terror. These affective encounters work to embed ideas of exceptionalism, technology, sacrifice, and urbanity as central to victory and success in armed conflict. Therefore, when political leaders deploy these conditions to make a claim to truth that a conflict has or will end, audiences are pre-primed to accept them as legitimate. These conditions of success are not the only ones that emerge from the end of wars assemblage and so there is scope to expand this research to include other articulations of military or political victory.

No work on the end of wars is ever total and this research has its limitations and potential for expansion. There are multiple ways that this work could be built upon by myself or others. In particular, a Marxist perspective could lend more focus to questions of production and dissemination, as well as how cultural artefacts function in terms of political economy.<sup>547</sup> Related to this is the potential for a more explicitly materialist approach to politico-cultural interaction. As discussed in chapter one, the material and discursive are not mutually exclusive from one another however an analysis that focuses more on the material creation and global circulation of cultural artefacts would be a welcome addition to the study of how wars end. A more explicitly feminist engagement with questions of conflict termination through popular culture and the particular masculinities and affects that are circulated through, and allowed for by, cultural artefacts would also be a useful addition to this research. The assemblages based

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<sup>547</sup> Matt Davies, for instance, has already written on this Matt Davies, “‘You Can’t Charge Innocent People for Saving Their Lives!’ Work in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*”, *International Political Sociology* 4, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 178–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2010.00099.x>.

approach of this thesis has been an important and novel intervention into the field and answers a question on war termination that has traditionally been marginalised, but these are questions and approaches that can be greatly expanded on in the future.

Furthermore, by expanding the genres and locations of cinema to include romantic comedies, drama, horror, science fiction, musicals and historical films; European, Korean, Chinese, “Bollywood” and “Nollywood” cinema we can build up a picture of how meanings, themes, narratives, imagery, tropes, and language circulate globally and where potential sites of resistance to the territorialising forces of the cinema discussed here might be articulated. As has been reiterated above, the central argument of this thesis has been that the cultural artefacts discussed throughout work through the encounters to allow for particular conditions of success to emerge from the end of wars assemblage. However, chapters five and six suggest that there may be other articulations, forces, and lines of flight that are emerging within Hollywood action cinema that can shock the assemblage in such a way that it could change. This has been furthered through recent films such as *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *Batman V. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) which problematise dominant cinematic representations of mass violence in various ways and potentially undermine or at least question the role of superheroes as saviours and the embodiment of the American monomyth. As these films lie outside the temporal focus of this thesis I have not engaged with them at the same level as others discussed, but it appears that they function in a similar mode to those in chapters five and six in that they might initially destabilise the assemblage and its emergent properties only to reassert them in the final act of the film. Nonetheless, such critiques are potential ways forward for a more critically oriented action cinema. Genre is a fluid category and one that, as has been shown, evolves slowly. The action genre is especially affected by what is popular and what, in the end, makes money at the box office. It remains to be seen whether such a critical approach will be continued and slowly expanded on, but I remain hopeful that such a cinema can be developed. As mentioned above, understanding how the end of wars assemblage functions and how it is subjected to change, challenge, and evolution is an important step towards understanding how we can resist regressive political effects both culturally and politically in order to challenge conditions of political possibility. Although not explicitly discussed in the empirical chapters, this has been a normative thread that has informed the research and my own political approach to it.

To conclude, this thesis has demonstrated a number of arguments that are relevant to the study of conflict termination, popular culture and world politics, and the broader discipline of

International Relations. It has shown that popular culture is an important site of political meaning making and that through affective encounters, movies can have a strong impact on the emergence of conditions of success in the War on Terror. Conceptualising all of this through the assemblage allows for an engagement with affect that moves our understanding of politico-cultural interaction beyond the intertextual. The conditions of success that emerged from this affective interaction and discussed here are American exceptionalism and the values it exemplifies; the use of technology and its co-production of moral subjectivities; the necessity of sacrifice; and the centrality of the built environment. These conditions of success can then be politically deployed in order to make a claim to truth that a conflict will end or has ended. The end of wars assemblage and its emergent properties are not, however, static entities and are always subjected to forces that strengthen them and weaken them, stabilise them and destabilise them, and code and decode them. By structuring this research in a chronological fashion, I have been able to trace the development of the assemblage over a period of time not only to assess what conditions of success it allows for, but also forces of stabilisation and destabilisation. As has been demonstrated in chapters five and six, these conditions of success and the assemblage as a whole are somewhat resilient to change. However, this does not preclude the possibility of the assemblage changing either radically or gradually. Engaging with popular culture to understand how affective encounters help to produce the end of wars is a critical and novel intervention into the study of how wars end, the interaction between politics and culture, and critical approaches to International Relations. By understanding the crucial question of how endings to conflict are culturally created we can begin to ask questions of how, why, and to what end these conflicts have been concluded and how, why, and to what end they may start again.

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