

WARRIOR GEOPOLITICS:  
GLADIATOR, BLACK HAWK DOWN AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

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ABSTRACT

The "war on terror" and remilitarization of political anxiety in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the West, is both facilitated and challenged by representations of geopolitical danger and the supposed necessity for warriors to fight wars in distant lands. Ridley Scott's three movies, "Gladiator", "Black Hawk Down" and most recently "The Kingdom of Heaven" explore the morality and identity of warriors. They do so in exotic landscapes and settings that emphasize the confrontation with danger as external and frequently unknowable and political violence as something that has complicated geographies. From the putative left in the case Michael Ignatieff and the Warrior's Honor or the right in the case of Robert Kaplan's Warrior Politics, the public discussion of the necessity for warfare and "intervention" is enmeshed in discourses of moralities, rights and "just war". The professional Western warrior, whether a special forces operative or garrison soldier in peacekeeping mode, is a key figure of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> era, physically securing the West, and simultaneously securing its identity as the repository of virtue against barbaric threats to civilization. These themes are key to Ridley Scott's work.

## CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS

In the discussions of empire, the histories of imperial conquest and more recently the themes of post-coloniality in geography, one figure has received much less attention than others. This is the figure of the warrior, the imperial adventurer par excellence in many cases, but a dark figure, a violent figure, one who does the dirty work of empire but who frequently goes unmentioned. But the imperial warrior is very much back in the news these days as special forces, garrison troops and expeditions in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere are an unavoidable part of what was until recently the global war on terror, but is now the Bush administration's "long war" to "eliminate tyranny". This paper suggests that it is time to revisit the discussions of empire and look at the codes of the warrior and how they are represented in contemporary geopolitical discourses.

It is so specifically because the geographical literature has not dealt much with the figure of the warrior in its discussions of the cultural landscapes of empire, and because contemporary landscapes of warfare are populated with warriors now widely understood, once again, as doing the business of empire, even as the Bush administration flatly denies this is what is happening (Dalby 2006). Neither, until recently (Graham, 2004, Gregory 2004, Gregory and Pred 2007), has it paid much attention to the landscapes of combat despite to theme in the 1980s. Rachel Woodward's (2004) discussion of military landscapes might be usefully extended to tackle matters of combat in the new "political economy of violence" (Kaldor 2007) after the cold war. The relative neglect of the theme of the warrior may in part also be a matter of revulsion and an implicit assumption that studying such matters in some way makes one complicit in the violence. Condemnation is undoubtedly much easier, although the contradiction between the peace movement's slogan of "ain't going to study war no more" and professional scholarly practice should give all geographers pause. Naïve didacticism is not an appropriate intellectual stance for any scholarly practice worthy of the name critical. In present circumstances where the policies of the most powerful state on the planet are explicitly stated as those of warfare to transform political order in many places, engaging with the logics of such legitimations of force is a task for geographers, not only those who explicitly espouse critical geopolitics.

The "war on terror" and remilitarization of political anxiety in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the West, is both facilitated and challenged by representations of geopolitical danger and the supposed necessity for warriors to fight wars in distant lands. It directly challenges conventional assumptions of state centered social thinking and war relating to territorial integrity and suggests once again, not only the obvious importance of extraterritoriality in contemporary geopolitics, but the importance of thinking of contemporary war in imperial terms. From the putative left in the case Michael Ignatieff and the Warrior's Honor (1998), or the right in the case of Robert Kaplan's Warrior Politics (2002), the public discussion of the necessity for warfare and "intervention" is enmeshed in discourses of moralities, rights, "just war" and discussions of modes of behaviour appropriate for the contemporary warrior.

But they are also directly now a matter of discussions of empire (Ferguson 2003). There is little agreement on what kind of empire, the possibilities of successful policing, a carefully worked out grand strategy, but the theme of empire is now unavoidable. With it goes the imperial functionary, the moral discourses of civilization and the figure of the professional Western warrior. Whether a special forces operative or garrison soldier in peacekeeping mode, these warriors are key figures of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> era, physically securing the West, and simultaneously securing its identity as the repository of virtue against barbaric threats to civilization. But a virtue compromised by precisely the supposed need to act in very uncivilized

manners in fighting the war on terror (Hannah, 2006). Hence the importance of discussions of the moralities of warfare and the key contextualizing tropes that supposedly offer the alibi of exceptional circumstances requiring exceptional license.

The present draws on tropes from the past to structure its narratives, and does so in numerous publications, images, and movies which in various ways interpellate contemporary imperial citizens into the narratives of power and morality. Selecting an appropriate lens through which to explore the geographical moralities of empire thus presents the critic with a methodological difficulty due simply to the proliferation of so much material germane to the theme. The device used here, to keep the whole analysis manageable within the bounds of a single paper, is to focus on three of Ridley Scott's more recent movies. Specifically this paper reads "Gladiator", "Black Hawk Down" and "The Kingdom of Heaven" to begin to examine this figure of the warrior and how moral codes are related to extreme circumstances, and in part how travel narratives, a traditional theme in geographical analyses of the realities of empire, are in the case of Scott's work at least, both journeys with a redemptive twist and a dramaturgical device to explore ethics in the extremities of imperial violence. Given the director's repeated statements that what he likes doing most is making worlds, then he is an especially germane subject for geographical analysis.

As such this paper is an extension of recent work in critical geopolitics on film as a genre that is important. "This involves a recognition that cinema provides an important space of confrontation and encounter for viewers and the recognition that the reception of filmic meaning is far from passive. ... Thus film is important in the study of critical geopolitics because it represents a constitutive element in the production of political geographies and because political spaces and landscapes are implicit tools in the production of film." (Power and Crampton 2005: 197) More specifically of late combat movies have been an integral part of the production of geopolitical spaces which construct identities of heroes and villains on the one hand but also provide both fictional and mimetic discourses of the terrains of danger in the era of the war on terror. But they also pose questions of the larger canvass of political order, the role of troops in exotic places, how imperial operations are to be understood and crucially how the phenomenology of perception constructs arenas of combat (Shapiro 2005). Shapiro's key Kantian point about how the fog of war presupposes a given clarity this is obscured by fog, rather than being a matter of the categories that are brought to bear on the construction of objects that can be observed, is also applicable to the delicate art of film criticism where the categories brought to the cinema are key to understanding the subsequent texts.

## EMPIRES, WARRIORS, MORALITIES

The argument in this paper suggests in part that what makes the drama of the warrior, and the moral dilemmas and choices facing the warrior, so compelling is the settings in which these dramas unfold. Precisely because of this geography of extreme conditions, set in exotic locales beyond the mundane, the routine and the quotidian, the staging offers dramatic possibilities. But these are then landscapes of extremes, imperial landscapes where conquest and bloodshed are the "order of the day". Or in the case of the *Gladiator* they are where abjection, the radical contingency of slavery, and the violent infrastructure of empire is taken literally to its centre in the coliseum in Rome. The contrast between the extraordinary architectural power of the arena and the contingency of combat was a device used to emphasize the power of empire, and a theme that Scott exploits fully to tell his story of Maximus and Commodus. But even in the prison that

is the gladiators' compound, there is a social order and appropriate codes of conduct among those about to die, and unavoidable moral choices in accordance with the tag line from the movie which is also the salutation used by the warriors, "strength and honor". The gladiators and warriors perform their tragic and heroic deeds in exotic landscapes and settings that emphasize the confrontation with danger as external and frequently unknowable and political violence as something that has complicated moral geographies both on the periphery and at the heart of empire in the arena of entertainment. Because empire, and its legitimation is very much about spectacle, as the "retort" (2005) authors have reminded us all again recently, or as Senator Gracchus puts it in *Gladiator*, a matter of "fear and wonder".

The importance of context to the operation of morality is key, albeit its a topic that contemporary discussions of codes of ethics and the establishment of universal rules or morality, whether in the discussions of international politics or elsewhere, frequently occludes (Burke 2007). Warfare makes these matters clearer than most venues of human conduct. Chivalry between knights, and King Henry V's despair at the violation of the warrior's code when the French slaughter the personnel in the baggage train in Shakespeare's rendition of the battle of Agincourt are emblematic. But a more contemporary account of American troops in Western Europe in the Second World War is perhaps clearer on the applicability of particular codes in precise geographical circumstances: "It should strike everyone as funny that armies at war are insane institutions devoted to two quite contradictory operations, both brought to the highest technological standard. One operation requires bringing death to people with the highest efficiency. The other is rescuing people from death with the greatest efficiency. And those rescued are, crazily, not just members of the familiar, homegrown army but the despised enemy as well." (Fussell 2003: 115) The codes that apply on the battlefield are neatly reversed in the nearby field hospital and the prisoner of war camp.

Locale is thus crucial in this conduct of modern warfare, or at least it is commonly understood to be in this rendition of warfare according to the Geneva conventions, where combat is limited to specific arenas and the distinction between combatant and civilian is relatively clear most of the time. This distinction still frequently dominates the modern military imaginary; it was key to the reconstruction of a professional ethos in the American army after Vietnam which repudiated counter-insurgency actions given that they had violated all such distinctions in South East Asia. The legacy of this professionalization of the armed forces in part explains why that army went to war in Afghanistan and then Iraq without any doctrine or training to deal with insurgencies (Aylwin-Foster 2005; Vest 2005). An institution constructed to fight a conventional modern war between states found itself doing something very different, fighting an unconventional foe. But then most imperial wars are "unconventional", a point that the American forces fighting in Iraq have learned the hard way over the last few years (Ricks 2006). A further consideration here is the important point that Michael Shapiro (1997) makes in his discussion of cultures of war, the normal focus on the matter of interstate violence in international relations, and the simple fact that much of contemporary violence simply doesn't fit this cartography.

In imperial wars, and in the conduct of both traditional pacification operations and the contemporary counter insurgency operations of the new wars of our time, these codes of interstate warfare and distinctions between battlefields and other spaces, are not so simple. The distinction between civilian and combatant are unclear, frequently deliberately muddled in the disrupted social spaces of postmodern warfare which is usually much more about struggles for political support and economic advantage than it is about either battlefield supremacy or the physical control of territory (Kaldor 2007). Good wars are those that are modern where death

follows the codes of combat; bad wars are those where the distinctions blur and the criteria for judging actions are less clear; the rules of engagement are fuzzy in contexts where missions are ill defined precisely because of the social ambiguities inherent in using conventional forces to fight unconventional wars, build nations or police United Nations sponsored ceasefires of contemporary "civil wars" under the hegemonic shadow (O'Loughlin 2005).

All this was the case in the American intervention in Mogadishu in 1993, where American soldiers found themselves in a situation where friend and foe were nearly indistinguishable and combat capabilities designed for one mode of war led to massive casualties when applied to another mode, in the urban spaces of a failed humanitarian intervention (Bowden 1999). As Lisle and Pepper (2005) suggest the movie *Black Hawk Down* is not a simple matter of America confronting the rest, it's a matter of Empire, or post politics, or in their terms, meta-sovereignty where more complicated geographies than those encapsulated in simple formulations of national interest or sovereignty are involved. Given this difficulty with the spatial specification of power and the apparently imperial operation of American forces in distant places, metaphors of empire are prevalent once again. And as Sparke (2005) notes, in the aftermath of 9/11, the Pentagon commissioned a study of the lessons of empire explicitly to garner insights that might be applicable to the war on terror.

Michael Ignatieff (1998, 2000, 2004) spent much of the 1990s and the first few years of the new millennium traveling and writing about the post cold war world and the obligations he thinks that Western powers had to intervene in numerous wars and humanitarian disasters. In this work he reprises many of the nineteenth and early twentieth discussions of liberalism and empire (Long 2006a). He is highly critical of contemporary American practice in particular. In the aftermath of 9/11 he explicitly invoked the theme of empire in his writings, arguing that America was effectively operating in *Empire Lite* (Ignatieff 2003) mode, and as such probably not being effective at dealing with the long term problems of many places. Ignatieff is blunt in his formulations of the American policy in Afghanistan:

Call it peacekeeping of nation-building, call it what you like, imperial policing is what is going on in Mazar. In fact, America's entire war on terror is an exercise in imperialism. This may come as a shock to Americans, who don't like to think of their country as an empire. But what else can you call America's legions of soldiers, spooks and Special Forces straddling the globe?

These garrisons are by no means temporary. Terror can't be controlled unless order is built in the anarchic zones where terrorists find shelter. In Afghanistan, this means nation-building, creating a state strong enough to keep al-Qaeda from returning. But the Bush administration wants to do this on the cheap, at the lowest level of investment and risk. In Washington they call this nation-building lite. But empires don't come lite. They come heavy, or they do not last. And neither does the peace they are meant to preserve. (Ignatieff 2003: 79)

In contrast Robert Kaplan (2002) too was concerned about imperial entanglements, but offered a rather different set of arguments, ones that reprise earlier realist thinking in international relations to justify American military involvement round the globe. The tragic inevitability of great power rivalry, and the inevitable need to police the wild zones on the imperial frontier is what Kaplan focuses on in his discussion of "a pagan ethos". His later work, in a stream of articles in *the Atlantic Monthly* and in his 2005 volume *Imperial Grunts*, investigates the practicalities of imperial administration round the world. He is clear that America is acting in imperial mode, its military bases round the world and the actions of its

special forces, the men in floppy hats, to use Ignatieff's phrase, as well as its Airforce technicians and infantry in Iraq and Afghanistan, are his focus. In Imperial Grunts in particular Kaplan is fascinated by the code of the warrior as it plays out in the firefights and combat patrols in Iraq. There is an heroic cause, a noble calling an unavoidable necessity in a world specified as in need of pacification and administration due to the absence of such social attributes in places not blessed with the benefits of civilization. But it is also a tragically inevitable situation, part of the ineluctable pattern of the rise and overreaching of empire, a pattern that structures Edward Gibbon's eighteenth century history of the decline of the Roman Empire, and it seems, most discussions of imperial overstretch ever since.

But the key point in all this is the geographical imagination that constructs the world as a place in need of such activities (Dalby forthcoming). How are the landscapes of violence understood as needing interventions? How do the specific portrayal of violent places fit into the larger geopolitical imaginary that contextualizes justifications for "intervention"? If the United States is avowedly not in the business of nation building, is not an imperial power, then how does the cultural geography that makes its undertaking such tasks despite its inclinations work? For Kaplan as for Ignatieff the wild zones, the zones of violence beyond the imperial core are understood in terms drawn from imperial histories. Kaplan (2005) is blunt in drawing parallels with the Indian wars of pacification in American nineteenth century expansion. He notes repeatedly that U.S. military commanders use the phrase Injun Country in their specification of the realms that they fight in. The task of the (now airborne) cavalry is to quell uprisings and protect the settlers, aid workers and development experts on the ground bringing the benefits of civilization to the natives.

Although given the paltry amounts of aid and the very limited extent of provincial reconstruction teams on the ground in Afghanistan in particular this task of protection seems a minor function of the imperial troops actually on the ground. But there is more to this once the structure of the simplistic quasi realist reasoning that Kaplan uses is investigated. The realist tragedy is the assumption of the inevitability of warfare as part of the human condition. Given this the context is set aside, and in a celebration of the event, and the codes of coping with the event of violence, the structural conditions requiring the event are elided from the analysis. Violence is subsequently rendered regrettable but nonetheless noble. And once again Kaplan falls back on a bifurcation of the world into zones of civilized peace and zones of unavoidable violence that must be managed by practices of the warriors, struggling heroically in exotic landscapes. But as before in his earlier writing, landscapes are disconnected spaces in which "interventions" happen separate from the larger patterns of political economy or prior linkages (Dalby 2002).

In the process the warriors live out the codes that simultaneously produce violent places in need of taming, and the virtuous warriors, the bearers of civilization and its peaceful places in need of protection. Hence in Derek Gregory's terms the production of a colonial modernity, one that needs to be understood in the present tense:

Modernity produces its other, verso or recto, as a way of at once producing and privileging itself. This is not to say that other cultures are the supine creations of the modern, but it is to acknowledge the extraordinary power and performative force of colonial modernity. Its constructions of other cultures – not only the way in which these are understood in an immediate, improvisational sense, but also the way in which more or less enduring codifications of them are produced – shape its own dispositions and deployments. (Gregory 2004: 4).

As Edward Said (1978), the theoretical inspiration for Derek Gregory and many of the texts of critical geopolitics, long ago argued, these simultaneous productions are key to the mutual constitution of the Occident and the Orient.

The dualism is immensely productive but not deterministic. It is a matter of culture at the most basic, as the construction of the ontological categories of politics, the geo-graphings that map the basic order of the world in ways that make it meaningful to its citizens (O'Tuathail, 1996; Sparke 2005). On this stage the dramas and storylines of political activity are played out in the cultural productions of modern colonial identities and the legitimizing moral codes of its protagonists. This happens in culture, fictional and non fictional. The cultural repertoire spills over this divide; 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 (Gogwilt 2000). The nearly endless comments about the attacks on 9/11 being like a movie, or constituting a moment that had apparently already been seen, confirm the cinemagraphic imagination brought to bear on political discussion, hence the appropriateness of investigating the contemporary cultural imagination of empire through the lenses of contemporary movies (Carter and McCormick 2005). Film provides the moral vocabulary, and with it implicitly the geographical metaphors and the contextualisations into which narratives of right conduct and the justifications for violence are situated.

## RIDLEY SCOTT'S IMPERIAL VISIONS

Two interconnected themes run through many of Ridley's Scott's "big" war and science fiction movies, those of his fascination with making worlds, constructing believable universes for cinema audiences, and questions of moral codes, or in the case of the Kingdom of Heaven, questions of "right conduct" in those landscapes he constructs. These themes of violence, morality and exotic landscapes are key to Ridley Scott's work. In the case of *Gladiator* the figure of Maximus is used to re-ask Marcus Aurelius's (1997) stoic questions concerning the nature of a moral man and the necessary virtues that make one suitable to rule. The other two movies, more obviously loose reinterpretations of historical events, also pose the questions of conduct in battle in faraway places where codes and cultures clash in ways that are sometimes bizarre, frequently violent, and usually require dramatic moral choices in the face of danger and imminent death. All three movies pose the questions that are in circulation in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> about the geopolitical contexts of violence, the appropriate conduct of soldiers and how, in the salutation used repeatedly in *Gladiator*, strength is to be linked to honor. They also pose numerous questions about war and its conduct far from home, a central concern of geopolitics.

Scott works closely with Hollywood which makes his movies part of the American industry, but the fact that he is not an American, frequently used actors that are not Hollywood stars, and works in England as well as in Hollywood, dilutes any claim that this is an investigation of a specifically American movie phenomenon. The ambiguities of identity and ethics are complicated here by Scott's sensibilities to history, a sensibility in part as a result of his background outside the United States. But it works to add to the argument in this paper about the ambiguous spatialities of empire; the British have an imperial history par excellence, and contemporary writers including those as different as Niall Ferguson (2003) and Robert Fisk (2006a) continue to self consciously invoke imperial themes to explain contemporary events. Scott might be understood loosely in common with this theme, one that makes the problematic of empire as something that cannot be constrained within discussions of specifically American

practices. Moroccan settings, and Orlando Bloom also provide connections between the movies; Bloom plays a soldier in *Black Hawk Down* and the key role of Balian, the murderer become knight in search of redemption in *Jerusalem*, the aspirations to the kingdom of conscience, or the possibilities of *The Kingdom of Heaven* as a possible earthly polity.

These three movies straddle the 9/11 period, *Gladiator* was released in 2000, *Black Hawk Down* late in 2001, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, although it was made prior to these events, while *The Kingdom of Heaven*, which investigates so many of the themes of clash of Christianity and Islam came later, in 2005, after the invasion of Iraq. Given the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the persistent dangers of an escalation to directly include Iran, the interpretations of crusades through contemporary lenses is inevitably a dominant motif in the commentaries and criticisms of the movies; which is of course precisely what makes this one especially interesting as a lens through which to begin to unravel the debates about the spatialities of global politics, and the tropes of empire, obligation and the suppositions of civilization, that are invoked in discussions of foreign policy, right conduct and war.

None of what follows imputes particular motives to Scott; this paper is not an exegesis of some hidden meaning, intentional or not in the three movies. They do however have some important commonalities of theme, and its in the shared concern with warriors in extreme and exotic circumstances that the larger geopolitical problematic of empire emerges. Because in constructing locales for the drama, and in doing so in three historical periods, the end of Marcus Aurelius's wars in Germania, the third crusade in Palestine a millennium later, and the "intervention" in Somalia, not quite a millennium later again, the spatialities of politics are implicitly in question just as soon as political questions are asked concerning the lessons that might be learned and the metaphors extracted. But in asking questions about right conduct, and the knights' obligations to protect the poor, the questions of war, violence and the appropriate modes of conduct in various arenas, pose the situational contexts for ethics and moral codes more clearly than most. And they do so in the larger contexts of the role of military force as spectacle, and as foreign imposition and conquest.

They do in part because of the multiple abjections through which militarism is viewed, not least the most important one in which all war is denigrated by those who understand its violence and its frequent futility. But in this case, and the interminable cultural struggle over the legacy of Vietnam in the United States is especially important here, the soldiers and warriors, when they become veterans are also subject to abjection. They are inside, but not inside, of us, but an uncomfortable reminder of complicity in acts that are unworthy, a guilty reminder of that part of the body politic that civilized society has supposedly transcended. The counter part to this abjection is the simplistic glorification of war; Robert Kaplan's (2002) *Warrior's Politics* is condemned by Debrix (2005) in just these terms.

The difficulties with thinking about imperial wars, their landscapes and the moralities invoked to justify warrior identities in these circumstances are not trivial. This paper builds on a considerable literature in critical geopolitics dealing with popular geopolitics and cinematographic representations. The absence of a substantial engagement with the warrior may be a matter of revulsion, a continuing facet of geography's guilty past association with geopolitics. Nonetheless Dodds (2003) and O'Tuathail (2005) have looked cinematographic portrayals of the secret agent, and the downed airman respectively confronting perils in strange lands, and in the process reasserting the identity of the imperial culture that sends them into harm's way.



This is tied directly to the matter of the affective logics of geopolitical intervention. In their reading of *Black Hawk Down*, Carter and McCormick (2005) invoke O'Tuathail's (2003) analysis of 9/11 and the cultural shift involved in the post 9/11 American geopolitical imaginary. O'Tuathail (2003: 859) wrote:

the affective tsunami unleashed by the terrorist attacks of 2001 is a broad and deep one that has set down a powerful somatic marker for most Americans. '9/11' is its shorthand, a phrase that has instant meaning for millions of Americans but more estranged resonance overseas. The calendar digits memorialize a moment in time that has become an affect-imbued memory bank for the media and political class in the United States and, consequently for the media-incited nation. 9/11 is the somatic pivot of geopolitics in contemporary America, a memory that necessitates and justifies a radical 'down-scaling' of the world into infantile categories and identities: 'good' versus 'evil', 'civilization' and 'freedom' versus a cartoon world of 'evildoers,' terrorists,' and storybook characters described in presidential speeches as 'the dictator' and the 'tyrant'.

Such formulations then draw on a larger cultural repository of images and scripts that link civilization to virtue and specify danger as residing in the distant and the peripheral. Dangerous spaces that need the heroic deeds of champions and defenders to keep their hazards at bay are a recurring theme in popular culture, whether in the antics of comic book heroes who explicitly invoked tropes of empire (Dittmar 2005), or in the adventures of latter day warriors in the form of secret agents who nonetheless reprise themes of imperial mastery even while lampooning them on screen (Dodds 2003). They also structure both the official documents of the Bush administration's formulations of the long war (Dalby forthcoming), and the popular articulations of the rationale for this war in Tom Barnett's *Blueprint for Action* (2005) on the *Pentagon's New Map* (2004). In this sense Derek Gregory's (2004) book title captures the essence of our geopolitical times in specifying matters as *The Colonial Present*.

## GLADIATOR

Gladiator begins on the battlefield, in a lull in combat operations while the legions await the return of an envoy sent earlier to treat with the barbarians. The Roman general, Maximus Decimus Meridus enjoys a moment of quiet pastoral reflection in contrast to the horror and violence he soon discovers he will once again be called upon to set in motion. Viewing the return of the body of the decapitated envoy, sent back to Roman lines tied to his horse, Maximus's subordinate Quintus, opines that a people should know when they are conquered. Maximus in turn wonders aloud if Quintus, or he himself, would acknowledge the fact and act accordingly. One of the movies' key themes is thus introduced as the legions make their final battle preparations.

After the battle, and the untimely late arrival of Commodus, the heir to Marcus Aurelius' imperial throne, the emperor summons Maximus to his tent. There he announces in private to Maximus that Commodus is not fit to rule after him. Marcus Aurelius' formulation of the stoic virtues, in his *Meditations* (1997, p. 19), of "justice, truth, temperance and courage" also structure the narrative of the movie.<sup>1</sup> Commodus is not a moral man we are told by the emperor. Thus the second key theme of the plot emerges, the appropriate code of morality for a ruler and

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<sup>1</sup> "Courage" in the Wordsworth Classics edition is translated as "fortitude" in the MIT classics online (book 3 paragraph 6) <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.mb.txt>, Commodus uses "courage" in the movie.

for a warrior fit to serve Rome. Commodus' failure in all the stoic virtues is subsequently shown as the plot progresses; Lucilla's inability to live by the code due to her position as Commodus' sister, and mother of the heir to the throne, parallels Maximus' dilemmas as to how to carry out Aurelius' wishes; she faces a series of choices of who to betray to keep her son alive. Only at the very end of the movie when the mortally wounded Maximus finally slays Commodus in the Coliseum and then dies himself, can she state, by way of partial expiation for her earlier betrayal, "he was a soldier of Rome, honor him!"

Marcus Aurelius requests that Maximus undertake the task of restoring power to the Senate in Rome, becoming the interim "protector" of Rome until the transfer of power is complete. Maximus is reluctant and expresses a preference to return to his wife, son and farm in Spain. Commodus is then summoned to the tent for a private audience, and when he discovers that his ambition is to be thwarted, he kills his father and then declares himself emperor. Maximus is asked to swear loyalty to the new emperor. Realizing that Commodus has killed his father, Maximus refuses, and is subsequently arrested and sentenced to death. He escapes, and although he is wounded in the process of killing his guards, the movie's viewers are once again left in no doubt about his prowess in combat. Finding his wife and son executed before he could reach them, he collapses in exhaustion and is thus captured by a band of slave traders who sell him to Proximo who runs a gladiator business in one of the remote provinces of the empire.

Subsequently Maximus is faced with the decision as to whether to fight in the arena, and his decision is made when Proximo invokes the stoic formulation that states that a man may not choose his death, but may choose his manner of meeting it so as to be remembered as a man. This reprises Maximus' earlier instructions to his own troops prior to the battle at the beginning of the movie and is apparently a key to resolving Maximus' hesitation. Subsequently given the possibility of getting to Rome and the admittedly extremely unlikely chance of vengeance against Commodus and hence also the possibility of carrying out his duty to rid Rome of Commodus, Maximus fights and his career as a gladiator takes off. Apparently Maximus doesn't know when he is conquered. Proximo enlightens him on the secret of winning the crowd by gaining their affection, a key theme subsequently when he is brought to Rome to fight in the Coliseum. He wins the admiration of the crowd when once again his combat skill and leadership of a group of gladiators in defeating the charioteers sent into the arena to kill them. Then face to face once again with Commodus the crowd's affection ensures that Commodus temporarily spares his life.

Strength and honor is both the tag line for the movie and the salutation between both legionaries and gladiators; the warrior code of respect transcends the social circumstances of slave and soldier. Slaughter and the entertainment of the masses in the Coliseum is understood as key to the survival of imperial power; the spectacle and the ability of the political class to provide this undergirds the legitimacy of power. The extreme affluence of the ruling class premised on the violence and abjection of much of the empire, a social arrangement explicitly presented in the arena where the subjection of man and beast to violence is presented as entertainment to maintain order. In the words of senator Gracchus about Commodus and the Roman mob: "Conjure magic for them and they'll be distracted. Take away their freedom, and still they'll roar. The beating heart of Rome is not the marble of the Senate. It's the sand of the Coliseum. He'll bring them death... and they will love him for it." Power simultaneously asserted and legitimated by spectacle.

While this is a reinvention of the sword and sandals genre from an earlier Hollywood era, it is also an investigation of the code of the warrior, the applicability of morality in the face of

violence and imminent death and an investigation of resistance in the face of apparent defeat and impossible odds. Read as a critique of the spectacles of violence implicit in empire it also has obvious intertexts with violent sports and the contemporary consumption culture and the celebration of imperial power in the age of globalization. Likewise the computer generated effects that make possible the cinematographic representation of Rome and the Coliseum in particular are a celebration of the Hollywood technology too. As such it is replete with numerous American themes, but also suggests an imperial sensibility in the culture in the 1990s where power and affluence were juxtaposed with abjection and poverty in the fringes.

Above all its rendition of empire as violence combined with affluence and the spectacles of violence as key to its mode of rule caught the mood before events of 9/11 shattered the complacency while simultaneously reasserting the aesthetics of empire in a dramatic episode of shock and awe. It set the scene for many similar themes that Scott filmed before 9/11 for *Black Hawk Down*. This movie's release was accelerated by 9/11, which raised the ire of many critics of militarism convinced that this was some combination of a propaganda movie for the Pentagon or a crass cashing in on potential increased revenues by the studio, or both. While the critics might be correct on both grounds, they mostly missed the more subtle geographies of the intervention, and the important points about the tactics used, and the applicability of leadership decapitation as a strategy to resolve civil wars.

## BLACK HAWK DOWN

While the movie has powerful affective motifs that undoubtedly tie into the remilitarization of American politics in the aftermath of 9/11, it also however tells a more complex tale of morale and the related matter of morality among the warriors caught up in the violence. In places this ultimately reverts to classic discussions of soldiers whose only loyalty in a crisis is to each other, to ensuring their survival if possible, to making every possible effort to assist one's comrades, and if that fails to ensure the return of their remains "home" no matter what, "leaving no one behind". The theme runs back to ancient Greece and the reinvention of the quasi mystical links between the bodies of previous generations of soldiers as well as current casualties, the fascination with memorials and military cemeteries, has increasingly shaped contemporary military practice, becoming part of the contemporary soldier's code (Samet 2005). This warrior ethos elides the specificities of place, invoking a widely understood military code of practice that has powerful morale building functions. It also in the case of *Black Hawk Down*, is premised on the merely temporary presence of strangers in a, to them, very strange land, an insistence on post combat relocation to maintain the integrity of the social entity on whose behalf combat is undertaken in the first place.

As Carter and McCormick (2005) note the movie does not go into the details of the larger geopolitical contextualization of the intervention in Somalia. There are nonetheless some contextual comments within the opening credits of the movie that situate the intervention. One scene near the beginning of the movie invokes the complexity of the rules of engagement and the apparent incoherence of the American task. Watching as Aidid's militia drives up to a food aid distribution point and then machine guns the crowd while appropriating the food, the helicopter crew radios to base explaining what is going on. They are refused permission to open fire on the militia because they themselves are not being fired on; the rules of engagement must be observed given the specific parameters of the mission. The disgust on the part of the crew at their helplessness in the face of militia violence is clear. Slightly later helicopter borne troops ambush

and capture one of Aidid's aides, one Mr. Atto, and bring him back to the American base at Mogadishu's airport. The ensuing dialogue with the American commander general Garrison includes a telling exchange where Atto expresses his contempt for the American presence. He suggests the absurdity that after just six weeks in Mogadishu Americans think they know enough to stop the fighting by arresting key supporters of Aidid. Atto points out that they will never understand the local society, and then suggests that the Americans leave, because it's not their war, "its our war", a matter for Somalis alone.

Carter and McCormick (2005) point out that the theme of the movie picks up Mark Bowden's (1999) discussion of how unreal, or movie like, many of the American soldiers understood the whole episode to be. Given Ridley Scott's fascination with "making worlds" and his acumen with the technologies of special effects this is not surprising. But it works to explore the phenomenology of combat in a way that also requires the decontextualization of the exotic locale of "intervention" as the necessary backdrop to the examination of the warrior's code. It also emphasises the great fear expressed by a number of the soldiers that in the moment of supreme danger they will not live up to their obligations to the code, so they will not be remembered as a soldier who fought well. While the Rangers never actually say "strength and honor", the theme is ever-present in the combat scenes; one dying Ranger's final request is only that his parents be told that he fought well.

The reviewer of *Black Hawk Down* in Diplomatic History likened the movie not to other American war movies, but rather to the 1963 British movie *Zulu*. "In both, a small self referencing body of professional soldiers stands off an overwhelming enemy in an alien land for reasons never given. "Why us? asks a young and bewildered Tommy. "Because we're here, lad" replies the grizzled color-sergeant. "No one else. Just us." " (Showalter 2002: 651) The parallel is drawn with the comment in *Black Hawk Down* from the delta force soldier "Hoot" played by Eric Bana, "Once the first bullet goes past your head, politics and all that other shit goes right out the window." Later Hoot also explains that people who have never been in combat cannot understand why soldiers do it, the logic is sufficient to itself, the meaning comes from the code of leaving no one behind; honor is served, and the quasi-mystical continuity of the martial traditions of the service maintained by acting according to the code. This also ensures that Mike Durant, the captured helicopter pilot, is not forgotten, and we are told at the end of the movie that he was released eleven days later.

As Lacy (2003) notes things go wrong and violence results, but few commentators seem to note that the specific forms it takes are in part as a result of the Ranger code of leaving no one behind. While Carter and McCormick (2005) emphasize the importance of the theme of leaving no one behind, and the fact that this matter of warrior morality is frequently discounted in discussions of intervention and the geopolitical affects they don't note that it is ironically key to the scale of the violence that happened in Mogadishu in October 1993. Neither do many of the commentaries and criticisms that Lisle and Pepper (2005) carefully survey, which suggest variously that this is a glorification of war, or America, or American armed forces. The movie's release as American forces were fighting in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 suggests an obvious "support the troops" function as war propaganda. Ironically the theme of spectacular violence legitimating imperial power, and Maximus' disgust at his martial talents being put to use in the arena in *Gladiator*, is put to work criticizing Scott's subsequent film.

The supposed lack of a conventional movie narrative in the battle sequences suggested this glorification of war to critics. In part this is because the commentators don't engage the movie in explicitly military terms. The tactical decisions taken are rarely discussed, the focus of

the analysis is on the Orientalisms and the violence, the role of American power in a globalized world, and the moral justifications of this, rather than on the very specific geographic contexts in which the fighting happens. In the movie Atto's vehement criticism of the naivety of American attempts to stop the war by using helicopter borne snatch squads to capture warlords and their aides condemns the folly of the strategy. The tactical dangers are revealed as the subsequent operation goes wrong when the Black Hawks are shot down, but this key theme, and the micro geographies of combat are usually ignored by commentators.

Watching the movie closely, and allowing considerable license in how the movie dramatizes the events, the key point about why this episode was so violent comes from considering the micro geography of combat and listening to what the American commander General Garrison in particular says in various places. Once the first helicopter is shot down, and Garrison makes the key decision to reroute the convoy to get to the crash site and "secure" the wounded or dead crew, he recognizes that he has lost the battlefield initiative, but he accepts this implicitly as the consequence of living up to the code's requirements. This in turn allows the militia to converge on the American forces and battle ensues. When the second helicopter is shot down, two Delta snipers volunteer to go to that scene, and to their almost certain death. They do indeed die, although not before killing many Somalis, protecting the site and the injured pilot Mike Durant, who was then captured. Indeed their death and the success of the Somali fighters in capturing the bodies from this site lead to the subsequent television pictures of American bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, scenes that dominated much of the subsequent discussion about the appropriateness of American interventions in such circumstances (Dauber 2001).

The discrepancy between the firepower available to the Americans and the Somali militias is part of the story about the carnage in Mogadishu. The American way of war is about superior firepower, and the use of technological capabilities to defeat conventional military foes. But then professional militaries with state of the art weaponry are always unevenly matched against local militias (Boot 2006). Garrison laments the absence of the appropriate equipment, armored personnel carriers, and C-130 airborne gunships, that were not sent to Somalia as part of his mission on the grounds that they were too provocative. (In early 2007 such a gunship was used in unsuccessful attempts to kill some Al Qaeda operatives in Somalia; numerous Somalis died once again under American fire.) But nonetheless the violence unleashed by his substitute equipment completely outclasses anything in the Somali militia arsenal. But the Somali militias are apparently willing to take huge casualties recognising that the American tolerance for losses is much lower, and recognising the ambiguities of the rules of engagement give them some opportunities. Perhaps, to return to the opening scenes of *Gladiator*, a people simply don't know when they are conquered.

At the end of the movie another scene emphasises the geography of this combat too, and reprises the theme of the rules of engagement in such circumstances. As the surviving American soldiers run out of the zone of combat towards the UN compound in the stadium a soldier watches through his gun sights as a woman runs towards a fallen Somali man. Anticipating that the woman plans to pick up the fallen man's weapon and fire at the Americans, he says to himself, "don't do it, don't you do it" hoping she will not reach for the weapon and hence force him to shoot her. She reaches for the weapon and he shoots her. The rules of engagement in these circumstances once again apply; don't shoot unless being shot at. The attempts to impose a moral order on all this once again remind the viewer that this is not a traditional "good war", but an imperial war in which the division between combatants and civilians is at best obscure, and

the tactical doctrines designed for conventional warfare may be much less than appropriate for humanitarian intervention or peacemaking.

Reflecting on the lessons the Pentagon learnt from Mogadishu in 1993, Mike Davis ends his book on the contemporary urban predicament *Planet of Slums* (2006) pondering the possible future of the planet's poverty stricken spaces as battlegrounds between American high-tech military forces and local insurgents. Noting Stephen Graham's postulations of how the axis of evil and the terrorist networks of evildoers in the contemporary geopolitical language might map onto the urban future suggests to Davis (2006: 206) a postmodern dystopia: "This delusionary dialectic of securitized versus demonic urban places, in turn dictates a sinister and unceasing duet: Night after night, hornet like helicopter gunships stalk enigmatic enemies in the narrow streets of the slum districts, pouring hellfire into shanties or fleeing cars. Every morning the slums reply with suicide bombers and eloquent explosions." Baghdad or Gaza? Or has Davis simply juxtaposed *Black Hawk Down* with the *Terminator* and drawn the logical inference?

Carter and McCormick (2005: 242) conclude their analysis of *Black Hawk Down* by noting that "it is the particular way it combines narrative strategy and affective technique that make it a (potentially) powerful cinematic intervention." To which this paper would add that it's also in part about how the landscapes of danger, the presence of the exotic confronting the familiar that make the link effective. It resonates with audiences, but it is also a matter of interpellation, of audiences being constituted as subjects in the process of viewing the movie. Ridley Scott's genius as a film director is precisely how he makes his worlds believable and how the exotic dangers are interpreted through codes that allow watching subjects to constitute their own identity in resonance with the characters on the screen.

## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The notes accompanying the directors cut DVD version of *The Kingdom of Heaven* quote Ridley Scott from an article in *Time* magazine on 11 October 2004 saying "What really interested me was something that seems to have disappeared from our vocabulary, which is the notion of grace and chivalry – right action. I think right action is what it is really all about." The theme for the movie is the Knight's oath, one which governs their conduct, and which shapes the decisions of Balian, the central Christian character in the drama once he has taken it in the presence of his dying father: "Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Speak the truth, always even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless, and do no wrong. That is your oath."

But given the opening scenes where Balian kills a priest and then flees to join his father on crusade, the movie is also very much about individual redemption for this leading character. This is an obvious point that at least one reviewer, caught up in listing the historical "inaccuracies" of the movie when judged in a literalist mimetic mode, completely misses in claiming the fictional back-story renders his actions defending the city "nonsense" (Aberth 2005). But subsequently in reflecting on the historical parallels with contemporary times this reviewer comes to a sobering conclusion:

"In one scene Scott seems very much in tune, if not with the historicity of the Middle Ages, then with the prevailing historical winds of his own time. Guy instructs Reynald to "give me a war," which reminded me of nothing so much as George W. Bush asking Donald Rumsfeld to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. *Kingdom of Heaven* seems to be warning here that a fragile peace can be all too easily torn asunder by crusaders blinded by ideology and zealotry. Given the

ongoing and unmitigated string of catastrophes coming out of the United States' current intervention in the Middle East, this may be the most prescient and coherent message of this film." (Aberth 2005)

Allegory is alive and well at the movies, rarely more so than in Scott's work.

The portrayal of Islamic characters is made more believable by their being played by actors from the Arab world. In Robert Fisk's (2005) terms: "But there is an integrity about its portrayal of the Crusades which, while fitting neatly into our contemporary view of the Middle East – the moderate crusaders are overtaken by crazed neo-conservative barons while Saladin is taunted by a dangerously al-Qa'ida-like warrior – treats the Muslims as men of honor who can show generosity as well as ruthlessness to their enemies." Fisk (2005) goes on to reflect on the irony that this movie was so unfavorably reviewed in the West: "Here is a tale that - unlike any other recent film - has captured the admiration of Muslims. Yet we denigrated it. Because Orlando Bloom turns so improbably from blacksmith to crusader to hydraulic engineer? Or because we felt uncomfortable at the way the film portrayed 'us', the crusaders?"

He leaves those questions unanswered but the meshing of historical cinema and contemporary geopolitics is confronted directly as Fisk (2005) discusses Ghassan Massoud the Kurdish actor who plays Saladin. "Massoud, who is a popular local actor in Arab films - he is known in the Middle East as the Syrian Al Pacino - in reality believes that George Bush is to blame for much of the crisis between the Muslim and Western world. "George Bush is stupid and he loves blood more than the people and music," he said in a recent interview. "If Saladin were here he would have at least not allowed Bush to destroy the world, especially the feeling of humanity between people." The historical and the real are once again interwoven when Fisk meets Massoud in a café close to Saladin's tomb in Damascus: "Massoud leans back in his chair opposite me, recalling the "civil society" and the friendship towards the West shown by former Iranian president Mohamed Khatami. "Ah, what a mistake Bush made in not making a dialogue with Khatami. America wasn't interested in this man. And so they got (the new president) Ahmadinejad. And now what do we hear? 'Look at the Iranians, they are fanatics – they elected Ahmadinejad!' (Fisk 2006b)."

But the point about Balian, the onetime blacksmith become crusader, become commander of the Christian defenders of Jerusalem, is precisely that he is not a fanatic. His lack of fanaticism is what allows him to treat with Saladin and come to a resolution of the war that prevents the whole scale slaughter of the population in Jerusalem. Resolute action, innovation and political savvy allow the redemption of Balian and the peaceful surrender of Jerusalem, a surrender made inevitable by the hasty vainglorious ambition of the neo-conservative princes determined to impose their will by violent means. Ironically it is also the rejection of her role as Queen and her implicit repentance for earlier misdeeds that allows Balian's lover Sybilla to survive and join him as he resumes his interrupted career as a blacksmith in the final scenes. One cannot help but wonder whether Fisk's puzzlement over why Westerners panned the movie might not be in part about the implicit necessity to set aside the certainties of the neo-con world with its aspirations to use military force to remake the Islamic world and the related identity politics of the war on terror. Because in Derek Gregory's (2004, 262) words, "... [i]n order to conduct ourselves properly, decently, we need to set ourselves against the unbridled arrogance that assumes that "We" have the monopoly of Truth and that the world is necessarily ordered by – and around – Us."

## VIOLENT LANDSCAPES OF EMPIRE

This reading of these three films, first in terms of the imperial theme, second in terms of the neglected dimensions of the geography of combat, and finally in terms of how historical analogies suggest contemporary relevance, emphasize the imperial contexts of debates about violence. In particular this reading suggests nuances to the spatialities of intervention and politics discussed in other literature on *Black Hawk Down*. Where Lisle and Pepper (2005) argue that the movie is not best understood as a reassertion of American power, America understood as a nation state, but rather a more subtle discussion of Empire, post-politics, or in their formulation metasovereignty, reading it as one of the larger corpus of Scott's movies suggests a broader spatial canvas tied into the complicated geographies of empire and the peculiar dangers associated with interventions in the post cold war world of global violence that is frequently, as Kaldor (2007) suggests, also very specifically local.

Into these strangely violent places come the expeditionary forces of the international community who behave in manners reminiscent of earlier imperial operations. The complex, and to the American troops, bizarrely impenetrable landscape of Mogadishu, is then rendered all the more surreal when they finally escape to the sports stadium which houses the U.N. forces who were unable to help in the combat the previous day but ultimately came to their rescue. While the intervention isn't empire in straight forward terms of territorial conquest, the presence of foreign troops policing Somalia has many of the characteristics of imperial power. Imposing order as the first priority and using force to do so prior to political discussions and accommodations mirrors at least some imperial practices of the past. It makes the ethics of "intervention" much more complicated than the arguments about "the responsibility to protect" suggest they should be (Bain 2006; Burke 2007; Kernot 2006).

The failure to stop the violence in Mogadishu by using military force to remove troublesome political leaders suggests that this is a pattern of forceful intervention dictated as much by the capabilities of the American forces than by any more carefully thought through political strategy. The pattern was to be repeated later in Afghanistan and Iraq where the successful removal of elites, something that military technological superiority accomplished relatively effortlessly, has not lead to the establishment of peace or security. But it does suggest that Alain Joxe's (2002) formulation of such matters as an empire of disorder is still apt; deposing local elites and reorganizing security forces are all that is required to ensure that most of the chaos remains distant from American shores while necessary commodities flow to the metropolises. On the other hand all this implies that those who would intervene, precisely because local elites are not providing the peace and security that they supposedly should, are obligated to provide that peace and security which the locals have failed to deliver; after all Balian understood his oath to require that he spent time as a hydraulic engineer precisely to better the lot of the people who he became lord over.

But contemporary imperial adventures also take place in the context of numerous discourses of abjection, not least the specification of spaces of the wild zones in need of military ethos and American violence, the impossible geographies of terror, the presence and absence of America simultaneously in the post-modern spaces of identity reconstruction coextensive with a permeating fear of terror (Debrix forthcoming). It is this ambiguous geopolitics that has made the war on terror so difficult to specify in geographic terms and obviously a matter that can hence only be understood in terms of its being global. It can be anywhere and hence has to be understood too as everywhere. Hence, perhaps too, Saladin's response to Balkan's question "what



is Jerusalem worth?" where he first replies "nothing" and then pauses, turns and exclaims "everything". The ambiguities fill the dramatic failure of the popular geopolitical imagination to understand the global war on terror as global, universal, a rhetorical claim to the ontological that strands discourse in impossible geographies.

While the impossible geographies of 9/11, which among other things requires its specification in temporal rather than spatial terms, invoked fear and denial in the initial formulations of a response to the attacks in New York, at least part of the anger was premised on the violation of the supposed geopolitical ordering of the world (Dalby 2003). So many arguments were made that something had fundamentally changed that it suggested a violation of the spatial ordering of the world, where the United States was exceptional in its geography, the new world as a different place from the old, and hence America's "New" War. Sovereignty was violated, boundaries crossed, insecurity invoked by theatrical terror. But it took eighteen months before Tom Barnett (2003, 2004) stepped forward to provide a new cartographic representation of the geographies of violence and the need to formulate a new neo Mackinderian vision of the world (Monmonier 2005) in his "the Pentagon's New Map".

While in so many ways this, with the obligation to act to eliminate the gap, is an imperial formulation (Dalby 2007), it also perhaps finally marks the end of the cartographies of the short twentieth century (Hobsbawm 1994) marked by trenches, passports, iron curtains and so called de-militarized zones. A decade after Mackinder (1904) wrote about closed political space, the frontlines of the first world war did close space in another way, literally drawing lines of trenches across the map of Europe. What followed subsequently in the introduction of passports, the attempts on the part of the league of nations, various international conventions on non-intervention, and the economic protectionist policies of the interwar years, was the affirmation of a mode of governance that implied the norm was the territorially integral sovereign state. International relations, the discipline that studied these things became fully institutionalized as an American discourse in the early part of the cold war (Long 2006b), as the iron curtain closed off large parts of the world with this spatial premise as its foundation. But now the vocabularies of meta-sovereignty, post politics and Empire struggle to grapple with the geographies of violence and intervention perhaps this is as much a reflection of the inadequate spatial categories of social science as it is a recognition of novelty.

At least as far as global capital was concerned once the cold war ended much of the world reverted to the conditions of 1913. So too much of the discourse of immigration, multiculturalism and fears of culturally different others reverted to at least loosely parallel the pre World War One discussions of inter-racial relations (Vitalis 2006). Which is how matters were discussed prior to the emergence of a discourse of international relations with its entirely unreflective cartographical categories; categories which have stymied both politics and scholarship ever since. In this sense at least 9/11 marks a watershed because the inadequate spatial categories of politics are finally unavoidable (Dalby 2005). But it is, as the critical literature in international relations in the last decade has made very clear, one that requires a different vocabulary for analysis and different topics for scholarly attention including those understood in the terms of cultural studies (Falk, Ruiz and Walker, 2002; Weber and DeBrix, 2003; Shapiro 2004), and as critical geopolitics has made clear too, film criticism.

Hence the continued relevance of investigations into the geographical metaphors that structure political discourse and the criticism of the spectacular violence that legitimate imperial adventures. Reading the metaphors in contemporary movies in terms of the geopolitical categories that structure their narratives is part of this task. But the task itself is much less than

complete if the moral codes of violence, the importance of settings, and the political decisions made by actors in those settings are not incorporated into the analysis. Geopolitics is obviously about the geography of all this; but it is also very much about the politics, and necessarily about the spectacle.

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