OPENING CHOICES

Intimacy, 'truth' and the gaze: The double opening of *Zero Dark Thirty*

The opening scene of *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2013) is, strictly speaking, not a 'scene' at all since it offers no images, only a black screen, some text and a soundscape created from real recordings of phone-calls made on 11th September 2001. In this article I want to discuss the operation of intimacy, cultural memory and audience address in these ninety seconds, the way in which these same ideas are reworked in the scene that immediately follows, and the way the film's investment in 'the spectacle of authenticity' and its complex treatment of the gaze is established within both these opening sequences.

Structurally, the film can be conceived as having two beginnings, balanced by two endings, to create a double frame. The main narrative, depicting the CIA's ten-year hunt for Bin Laden through the personal quest of Maya (Jessica Chastain), begins with the heroine's first involvement in the torture of a prisoner thought to have information that may lead to Bin Laden's whereabouts; it ends with her identification of Bin Laden's body. Sitting outside this narrative are a prologue and epilogue. The prologue sets up the attacks of 9/11 as the context for Maya's quest – both at a national and a personal level, for to Maya the hunt is always personal. The epilogue, in which Maya finds herself the sole passenger on a troop carrier with no clear sense of destination, speaks again as much to a national as a personal loss of purpose, after the quest is over.

The film's epilogue has received considerable critical attention[1]; the prologue less so. And where critics do mention it, details are often misremembered. In an interview with Kyle Buchanan, screenwriter Mark Boal reflects on the difficulties of writing the 'opening scene' of *Zero Dark Thirty* (2013). The scene he is referring to in this discussion, however, is the infamous torture scene that begins the narrative proper (to which I will return). It is as if he has momentarily forgotten the scene that precedes it in the original shooting script as well as the film. Given this oversight by the writer himself, it is understandable that many critics, fixating on the dramatic and / or ideological impact of the images of torture, make the same error. The preceding frames, after all, offer no images at all, and even the choice of audio is remarkably low-key given the events involved. Yet the prologue is critical, both dramatically and ideologically, to the reception of all that follows, and sets a striking tone both in terms of aesthetics and point-of-view.

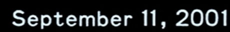
The reality affect

Zero Dark Thirty deliberately, even self-consciously, embraces a documentary aesthetic designed to support the film's status as a 'true story'. The film's visual pleasures are best described in terms of what Geoff King calls 'the spectacle of authenticity', which is often employed by the 'respectable' war film to distance itself from 'more "lowly" works of action-exploitation' (2000: 188). While the latter encourage us to 'wallow in the glorious sensual experience' afforded by special effects, the former seek to integrate our perspective with that of the participants, allowing us a 'sense of what the real event must have been like' (2000: 119). Thus, compared with the action-adventure film, such a war film often offers an experience that is uncomfortable, with periods of waiting and of prolonged bombardment; claustrophobic framing offering little respite in terms of long or establishing shots; and uneven, hand-held camerawork that often privileges camera movement over frequent cuts. A limited colour palette, naturalistic lighting and understated performances further serve to create what might be described as a reality affect.

The 9/11 sequence offers an extreme version of the realist aesthetic and the rejection of spectacle. From the second plane hitting the tower, to the falling man, to the rubble of ground zero, there are any number of iconic images the filmmakers might have selected to represent the destruction wrought by the attacks. However, what such images have in common, what potentially makes them effective as a form of cultural shorthand, also renders them problematic in terms of eliciting a fresh response – and certainly in terms of the slow-burn, reality affect. Their very familiarity can render such images hackneyed and over-determined. Ironically, their spectacularity can detract from their felt impact – not least because (as many observers commented at the time) they seem more like scenes from a movie than images of reality.[2] Instead of including such images, then, the scene offers only voices over a black screen: the voices of victims, emergency operators and airline staff woven together into what William Goldenberg, the film's editor, calls an 'audio collage' (Hogg, 2013). Goldenberg's description of the intention behind the scene is quite revealing:

> It's devastating to hear the voices of these people and they're real and not here now. […] [W]hat it does is [it] sets up the rest of the movie and creates the mindset that the country was in after that happened. Everything that happened through the 10 years is set up by that one event. […] It was important to Mark and Kathryn to get the audience in that mindset. (2013)

The sequence begins with the on-screen text: 'The following motion picture is based on firsthand accounts of actual events'. Then the collage of recorded voices fades in over a blank, black screen. As they gradually become intelligible the date momentarily appears on-screen, and the voices can be identified as those of the 9/11 victims, members of the emergency services and reporters, woven together with a certain amount of static. Individual phrases are emphasised within the mix: 'United 93' […] 'we can't breathe' […] 'real world or exercise?' […] 'A plane's crashed' […] 'a plane crashed into World Trade Centre One' […] 'killed' […] 'I love you' […] A muffled cry and the sound of the second plane, followed by a



scream, takes us into the final part of the sequence: an edited version of the 911 call made by Melissa Doi, trapped on the 83rd floor. Doi repeatedly describes the heat and the smoke while the operator asks her to stay calm and reassures her that 'they're gonna come get you', until it becomes clear that there is no longer anyone on the other end. The sequence ends with the operator's quiet 'Oh my God,' as she realises this.

The voices are, of course, those of real people,[3] although creatively re-mixed and enhanced with Foley. The scratchy, degraded nature of the recordings only serves to emphasise their status as what documentary makers would designate 'actuality', as opposed to reconstruction. Their use thus blurs the boundaries between documentary material and documentary aesthetic, creating a degree of slippage which the filmmakers continue to exploit throughout the film – for instance, by introducing actual television broadcasts (most notably, news footage of the London bombings and of Obama announcing a change in policy) alongside fictionalised coverage (such as the surveillance footage of the hotel shooting or the radio announcement of the Balawi bombing). At this early point in the narrative, however, such a complex web has yet to be woven and the simplicity of the 'scene' is powerfully evocative.

Intimacy and address

The voices have a further quality which the brash, visual products of long-range photography might lack. Whereas collapsing towers and falling bodies could invite us to take an outsider's view of disaster-as-spectacle, these voices take us inside the experience, aligning us with the participants and inviting us to imagine the view from within. It is a commonplace of radio studies that audio, devoid of visual material, brings a particular intimacy as we actively re-create a world inside our head.[4] It is something of this quality that the recorded voices of 9/11 bring to the film. And indeed, this is a quality that sound designer Paul Ottosonn seems to be describing as he discusses the use of sound elsewhere in *Zero Dark Thirty* to draw audiences in and 'make it closer [so that] you feel what the character is feeling in the movie' (2013). King describes how 'a deliberate "handicapping" of the means of representation' (for example the rejection of Steadicam technology or the introduction of motion blur) can contribute to the 'spectacle of authenticity' (2000: 121); here the poor quality recordings of the emergency services operate in a similar way. Not only does the scratchy quality function as a 'guarantor' of authenticity, it draws the audience in as we struggle to make out and make sense of the distorted dialogue.

The extent to which the viewer, given such a stimulus, will re-create the scene in her own head is illustrated by Ottossonn's interviewer who, in summing up, refers to the 'cacophony of horrifying screams during the bombing of the World Trade Center' (2013). The soundtrack features no such 'cacophony', although this commentator is unlikely to be alone in his creative re-imagining of the scene. In fact the voices selected are comparatively calm and measured (the screams that occurred at the end of the original Melissa Doi recording, for example, are omitted); yet they are all the more poignant for that, and carefully orchestrated across locations and timeframes to build an impression less of a single incident than of a nation under attack. Ottossonn describes how, in the almost complete absence of music, he built a complex 'score' for the film of layered ambient sound, augmented with an imperceptible element of heightened reality either from conventional Foley or the whine of a spike fiddle (2013). The opening sequence establishes this augmented 'natural' sound both as a constituent of the realist aesthetic of the film, and as a key storytelling tool.

The stories told – and the stories untold – in this short sequence are highly significant in terms of the audience that is variously assumed, constructed and addressed. The collage of voices is briefly accompanied by text informing us of the date (as on four successive occasions when historical atrocities serve to fuel the fervor of the avenging agents) but in the absence of imagery there is nothing to explain the nature of events of 9/11. It is assumed the date alone will be sufficient. There is certainly nothing to hint at the event's background or its geo-political context – the world events leading up to the attack, or indeed the wider repercussions that were to follow (what Nick Rombes refers to as 'deep history' [2013]). The stories that are told, fleetingly, yet effectively, are those

of ordinary American citizens caught up in these traumatic events, either as victims or as electronic 'bystanders' (switchboard operators etc.) powerless to help. The audience is invited into an intimacy of communion with these bewildered and frightened victims, and to revisit their own (in most cases already mediated) memories of that day. Thus the film both draws upon cultural memory as a sense-making paradigm, and helps refresh, reinforce and reinvent that memory. Just as many observers on 9/11 couldn't help but see the attacks through the prism of a Hollywood disaster movie, many subsequently struggled to distinguish their own memories from the various vivid re-presentations with which they were bombarded.[5]

Critically, the low-key, personal representation of this shared national tragedy is the closest we are offered to a backstory for Maya, the heroine of *Zero Dark Thirty*. It sets up what will be revealed as a very personal mission: her contribution to the hunt for Bin Laden. The invitation of the prologue is to derive her backstory from our own, rather than having to engage us in hers as would be usual in a conventional revenge narrative. For what we are recruited into here is not so much a mission to save the world, as one woman's uncompromising quest for revenge.[6]

The spectacle of authenticity

If the prologue works through a kind of cinematic sensory deprivation, privileging suggestion over explicit depiction, the scene that follows provides a startling contrast, forcing the audience to witness, in uncomfortable detail, the 'enhanced interrogation' of a prisoner by CIA operatives. The almost elegiac tone of the prologue is replaced by a pervading atmosphere of violence, made all the more disturbing by its banal, routine nature. Nevertheless, there is an underlying continuity in terms of the aesthetics of intimacy and investment in what I have described as the reality affect.

This second opening is announced with on-screen text over black: '2 years later'. The succeeding moments constitute an assault on the senses, following the dark, muted prologue: a hand-held shot of bright sunlight streaming through a hole in the corrugated iron roof, illuminating dancing particles of dust, is accompanied by the grating noise of a heavy metal door being opened. On-screen text announces 'The Saudi Group' as footsteps approach loudly. The next shot reveals a guard in a ski-mask, viewed over the left shoulder of his prisoner who is silhouetted in the foreground. A pan right repositions our view so that we look over the out-of-focus right shoulder of the foregrounded prisoner as CIA agent Dan (Jason Clarke) enters the space. Dan is momentarily framed in the bright sunlight of the open doorway, then the door swings firmly shut as he bears down on the prisoner, revealing another masked figure following behind him. A long shot shows the prisoner, Ammar (Reda Kateb), bloodied and bruised in filthy clothes, standing on a gym mat against a backdrop of plastic sheeting, surrounded by three large masked guards. The room is a concrete and metal shell, with high windows, ropes hanging from the ceiling and large wooden box to the side. A sharply focused close-up of the anonymous observer reveals

bright, unblinking eyes watching from behind the ski-mask, before the interrogation begins.

Shot largely in close-up, the brief exchange between the CIA agent and his prisoner is disturbingly intimate. Dan is again framed in close-up, over the shoulder of the indistinct figure in the foreground, as he moves very close to Ammar and speaks very quietly: 'I own you, Ammar. You belong to me.' As he says this the scene cuts to a close-up of Ammar, who looks resolutely down and away from Dan, avoiding his gaze. Again we see Dan in close up as he insists: 'Look at me'; again Ammar is seen in over-the-shoulder close-up, as he raises his head slightly but continues to avert his eyes. This exchange is framed to create an unequal dynamic in terms of power and perspective that reflects the dramatic context. In Dan's close-ups, his figure dominates the frame, shot slightly from below so that in the background we see the ceiling and the spots of blinding sunlight that shine through the holes. In the foreground we see just a little of the back of Ammar's head in the lower corner of the frame, his position emphasised by Dan's downward gaze on him. Ammar's close-ups, by contrast, are shot from slightly above, while Dan's shoulder and neck in the foreground occupy about a third of the frame, crowding the shot and dominating the slumped figure of Ammar.

The next shot positions the antagonists in profile, but favoring Dan, who is in the centre of the frame, while Ammar remains in the foreground, slightly out of focus. Suddenly Dan is shouting: 'You don't look at me when I talk to you, I hurt you!' A medium close-up reveals that Ammar is still refusing to meet Dan's gaze while the guards, barely visible at the edges of the frame, begin to shove Ammar back and forth with increasing violence. Another close-up of Dan is momentarily obscured by the movement of the prisoner in the foreground of the shot; then, as Ammar is pushed to the left of frame, the watching figure of the masked observer is briefly seen in the background. The close camera work and rapid editing makes it difficult to follow the action, with Dan's persistent gaze providing the clearest sense of the prisoner's movements. As the pace of the scene continues to increase, the use of the hand-held camera gives the impression of an observer barely keeping up with developments as a whip-pan to Dan, now shouting in the prisoner's face, is replaced

with another indistinct shot of the guards manhandling the prisoner, followed by one more close-up of Dan wherein the camera jerks as though its operator had stumbled, before, with a final 'Look at me, Ammar!', Dan turns on his heel to walk away. A second close-up of the masked observer serves to frame this grubby 'spectacle', her steady gaze broken only by Dan's body passing through the foreground of the shot, as he mutters 'Come on' and a wide shot shows them both heading for the door. Meanwhile the three guards string their struggling prisoner up, a succession of jerky hand-held close-ups showing his feet dragging across the floor and the guard's gloved hands tying his with the hanging ropes. We see the agent and observer exit into the sunlight, through a door that seems improbably distant, as the prisoner and guards are framed in the foreground.

The next shot shows the same scene, but now viewed on a surveillance monitor outside the building, over the shoulder of a uniformed watcher. The tiny figure of the prisoner is distanced and depersonalised, while we are invited to engage with his erstwhile tormentors and explicitly with the difficulty of their 'work'. In particular we are introduced to our protagonist, for the anonymous observer peels off the ski mask to reveal the incongruously beautiful face of Maya. This revelation is in its own way almost as shocking as the scene we have just witnessed. As she takes off her bulky coat, Dan teases the newcomer about walking straight off the plane from Washington into her first interrogation 'rocking [her] best suit', and reassures her that 'they're not always this intense'. With a brief glance down, she murmurs 'I'm fine'. The tension is lifted by a series of wider, longer shots as Maya moves to watch the image on the monitor. She refuses Dan's offer of coffee, insisting that 'we should go back in'. The ski mask appears to have been replaced with another, almost as inscrutable, as she narrows her eyes against the bright sunlight. It is clear that Dan does not know what to make of her. He suggests that 'there's no shame if you want to watch from the monitor', but Maya shakes her head, almost imperceptibly, maintaining her unnervingly steady gaze. She shakes her head again when he offers her a ski-mask to wear as they make to re-enter: 'You're not wearing one. Is he ever getting out?' 'Never', he confirms, and they go back in.

The jarring effect of this scene, following on from the prologue, results not only from the shocking nature of the torture in itself but from the scene's stylistic intensity and shifting perspectives as well as its troubling juxtaposition within the narrative. It might be possible to see the opening events as motivation, justification even, for the torture. At the same time the scene opens up the possibility of a critique of 'enhanced interrogation', in keeping with the objective, journalistic approach to which the filmmakers have laid claim.

The dynamics of point-of-view within the scene also provoke an uneasy response. The opening images, and the early stages of the interrogation, are seen primarily from the perspective of the prisoner who, as a frightened victim, offers certain parallels with the 'prisoners' in the twin towers. Sounds of the heavy door scraping open and banging shut serves to highlight his predicament, as do the anonymous, masked guards and spots of sunlight intruding through holes in the ceiling and the frame of the door – glimpses of an exterior world Ammar will never see again. However, we find ourselves increasingly aligned with his torturers as the scene develops. Ammar's sullen, averted gaze offers us limited access and his out-of-focus silhouette in both the reverse shots and those in which he is manhandled by the guards, still less. Meanwhile the asymmetrical framing of their exchanges favors Dan, who presents a powerful figure framed in more traditional close-ups.

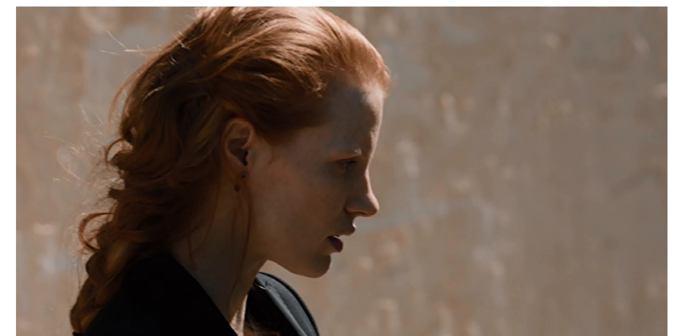
The film's investment in the 'spectacle of authenticity' is apparent in its treatment of torture: rather than offering the distancing, if exciting, spectacle of violence-as-entertainment it presents us with a perverse intimacy, drawing us into the very personal relationship between the torturer and his victim. This is achieved in part through the language and manner of the former, who speaks quietly at first, calling his victim by his first name, and in part through the use of intense close-ups and the hand-held camera work which places us in the midst of the action, altogether too close for comfort and indeed too close for a clear perspective – another instance of King's "handicapping" of the medium (2000: 121). The 'reality affect' makes this a disturbing scene to watch, more so due to our increasing complicity with the torturer rather than his helpless victim.

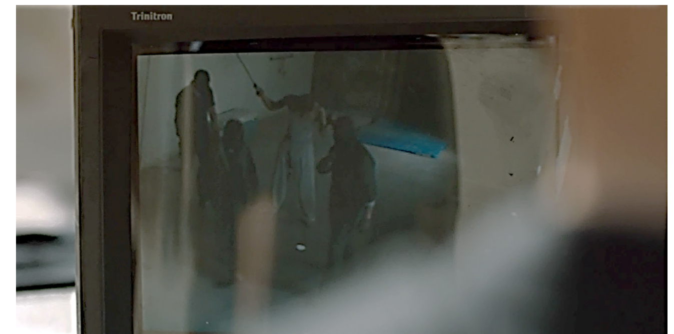
This complicity is reinforced by the presence of Maya, her role emphasised by the focus on her bright eyes and steely gaze. Maya's gaze, whether intense, detached or an unsettling combination of the two, can be said to be her defining characteristic as the film's protagonist. Her gaze structures the narrative; it also provides the audience with our main point of access, as we will spend two and a half hours figuratively and often literally looking over her shoulder. In this scene, her position is parallel to our own: we, like her, are observing torture for the first time, and like her we are implicated, not watching from afar but very much 'in the room'. Yet she is masked, offering us a limited point of identification. This is emblematic of our problematic relationship with Maya throughout the film: on the one hand, we watch with her and find ourselves closely aligned with her in terms of the unfolding investigation; on the other, we watch her watch – often inscrutable or apparently unmoved – her gaze as likely to present a barrier as a window to her inner life.

Watching the watchers

It is not by chance that one of the first lines of dialogue in the film, 'Look at me!', foregrounds the power dynamics associated with the gaze. For the relationship between spectator and spectacle is a theme that runs through much of director Kathryn Bigelow's work and informs *Zero Dark Thirty* on a number of levels. In the course of her career, Bigelow has experimented with a range of (mostly action-orientated) genres. Particular themes and stylistic tropes, however, have marked her work throughout. Visually, she has consistently approached Hollywood staples with an art house sensibility (what has been called a 'painterly' aesthetic, reflecting her fine art background). Spectacle has been privileged over narrative, or constituted a key component of narrative, in many of her films (as for example in *Point Break* [1991]), while the gaze – particularly the male gaze that renders woman as spectacle – has been an explicit theme (*Blue Steel* [1989], *Strange Days* [1995][7] and, in a self-conscious reversal, *The Weight of Water* [2000]). Meanwhile the technology of surveillance, implicitly suggestive of the film director's role, has been explored at levels ranging from the photographer heroine of *The Weight of Water* to the futuristic SQUID in *Strange Days*. *The Hurt Locker* (2008), Bigelow's first foray into the contemporary war film, is marked by a poetic, almost 'other worldly' rendition of the physical detail of each heightened moment of combat, combined with a constant sense of watching and being watched. *Zero Dark Thirty*, while still characterised by close attention to detail (both visual and aural), seems to represent something of a departure aesthetically, embodying a willful refusal of visual spectacle – particularly in terms of its representations of violence and women, representations which were often combined to sensational effect in previous work. Nevertheless, the film continues a representational dialectic that self-consciously explores the nature of both the cinematic spectacle and the cinematic gaze.

Maya's unmasking is a significant moment in this respect. Fleetingly, she is positioned as Mulvey's 'woman as spectacle' (1975), creating a hiatus in the narrative flow. She looks down, away from the camera, watched by Dan. When he speaks to her, however, she meets his comments with her challenging, intense gaze, narrowing her eyes against the sunlight – once more a watcher. From this moment on Maya will own the gaze – explicitly represented as its subject, rather than its object – and with it a clear sense of purpose (in terms of character) and agency (in terms of character function). Bigelow's direction painstakingly avoids objectifying Maya: her beauty is, as it were, incidental. Yet her face also provides little in the way of clues to her inner life, always referring us back, with her intense mask of concentration, to the object of her gaze, and the exertion of her will though her gaze. Neither sexualised nor victimised, Maya is diegetically positioned as always the watcher, almost never the watched. At the same time, of course, we as the audience watch her repeatedly in the act of watching – partly drawn into and partly repelled by her cool, detached gaze. Only when her mission is complete, in the film's epilogue, will she become briefly again woman-to-be-looked-at, the film's famous final shot lingering in a medium close-up on her distraught face. Two moments of narrative-stopping 'spectacle' thus frame the narrative of Maya's quest. These coincide with the two moments when she experiences a comparative lack of agency: a moment before





she has taken full control of her quest, and the moment when, quest completed, she finds herself drained of purpose.

Having gained possession of the gaze, Maya directs it primarily toward the monitor, on which the prisoner can be seen. From an investigation which consists primarily of watching and analyzing hours of video footage to the climactic assault on Bin Laden's compound, experienced as a feed from the soldiers' night-vision helmet cameras, Maya's gaze will be mediated, like that of the audience, for much of the film. The monitor repeatedly draws her eye in this short sequence: the image, however ugly, fascinates with its promise of knowledge. Robert Burgoyne has described Maya's experience in terms of 'a direct, intimate witnessing, a witnessing that sutures her to the larger social and historical world the film portrays' (2013). As an audience we share in the alternating experiences of power and impotence that characterise the position of the unseen watcher. As we watch, with Maya, the surveillance feed from the torture chamber, the prisoner may come to seem less a sympathetic victim of violence than a potential source of useful information: the first of many such 'sources' we – and Maya – will encounter over the course of the film.

Maya's focus on the monitor, rather than on her colleague's attempts at small talk, also speaks to her single-minded, driven character. A typical Bigelow protagonist, she has, as Dan remarks, stepped straight off the plane and got down to work. Her refusal of a friendly coffee also sets a tone and a precedent: there will be no romantic sub-plot; her relationship with Dan will remain amiably professional. There is room in Maya's life for only one man – Usama bin Laden. Over the course of the film, despite never meeting him, she will develop an intimate relationship with her enemy: an intimacy presaged by Dan's relationship with his prisoner. In this respect Maya challenges another surprisingly persistent cinematic stereotype: that of woman who fears to look at the monster, or who in looking is destroyed. Instead Maya's steady, forensic gaze drives a quest which ends with her coolly identifying her enemy's body in the final scene of the main narrative. That moment is mirrored in these opening moments of that narrative, with their subtle but persistent emphasis on Maya's gaze: through the ski-mask, through the monitor, and directly challenging Dan with an intensity that effectively deflects his scrutiny. Knowledge and the enquiring gaze are not dangerous for Maya: they are empowering. But they are also costly. Dan, apparently inured to his role, can joke, smoke and appear relatively relaxed outside the torture chamber.[8] Maya's impenetrable exterior speaks to the conscious effort involved in preserving her steely composure as she insists that they 'go back in'.

Conclusion

The opening sequence of a film can function as a 'meta-text', introducing its representational system and, as Thomas Elsaesser has it, 'how it wants to be read and how it needs to be understood' (2012: 115). The foregoing discussion shows that the two openings of *Zero Dark Thirty* operate very much in this way. As well as establishing an intimate, 'documentary' aesthetic, and setting up a complex set of dynamics around the surveillance and the gaze, the two openings introduce

tonal and evaluative tensions in our relationship to the protagonist, whose work we will follow so closely.

At the same time the two openings provide the structural 'questions' which are to find their 'answers' in the two final scenes, framing the narrative with a rhetorical symmetry that organises our reading of the film. On one level this rhetoric is simple: the story 'proper' begins with an interrogation designed to find Bin Laden and ends with the identification of his body. In its prologue and epilogue, however, the film seems to acknowledge that such simple narratives do little to make sense of the post-9/11 world. Discussing the ambivalent epilogue in which Maya finds herself unable to say where she wants to go, Bigelow elaborates: 'Maya cries because Bin Laden's death is not an uncomplicated victory, since it leaves us with the national and global question of "Now what?"' (Rothman 2013). For 'Where is Bin Laden?' is not, in fact, the defining question of the preceding decade. The more important questions have to do with the wider consequences of the 9/11 attack and America's response to it – both for America and the rest of the world. These are the questions posed by the prologue and they inform the uneasy tone of the film, complicating our relationship with its protagonist.

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[1] For example: Brockes 2013, Burgoyne 2013, Westwell 2013.

[2] Terence McSweeney has noted that the reason the images of the destruction of the twin towers struck people as being like a movie was because similar scenes 'had been a staple of American popular cinema for decades', citing *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) as one such film (2014: 7).

[3] Indeed, as though the film didn't already have enough problems with regard to debates around depictions of torture and the relationship of it makers with the CIA, relatives of some of the victims expressed distress that the audio had been used without their permission – gaining considerable media coverage and an apology, although legally there was no case to answer since the material was in the public domain.

[4] For example: Shingler and Wieringa describe 'the unusual intimacy between radio and its audience' (1998: 114).

[5] Alison Landberg has discussed the power of such texts to function as 'prosthetic memories' (1995: 180).

[6] Indeed at one juncture her boss tells her she is 'chasing a ghost' and that Bin Laden is no longer relevant given the rise in internet-inspired 'free lancers', yet Maya continues to insist he is a priority.

[7] Bigelow's comment in an interview about this film, that 'we're a watched society and a society of watchers' (Smith 2003: 30) makes clear her very deliberate exploration of these themes.

[8] Although it is he who will subsequently leave for an office job back at Langley, having had his fill of torture chambers and needing to do 'something normal for a while' and, it is implied, unwilling to be 'the last one holding a dog collar when the oversight committee comes'.