Four Forms for Terrorism
Horror, Dystopia, Thriller, and Noir
John S. Nelson

1   The aftermath of events on September 11, 2001 shows the importance of film, television, and other electronic media in constructing our political realities. Soon the Bush administration was working with Hollywood screenwriters to help anticipate possible targets and scenarios for further terrorist atrocities. Yet the main Hollywood contributions had come earlier, even before September 11, through popular films. These let American audiences experience acts of political terrorism in vicarious, virtual, symbolic, and other modes.[1] Now, in response to the dramatic escalation of terrorist attacks on U.S. institutions, Americans can call on cinematic prefigurations of terrorist strategies, the movements and states that use them, the regimes that support them, and the politics that reply to them.

2   Hence we do well to consider how Hollywood mythmaking from the 1980s onward has helped us to characterize terrorism, connections between American and Middle-Eastern politics, attacks on the virtue or viability of Western Civilization, and more. Here the emphasis is on the Hollywood aesthetics available to influence American experiences of terrorism and responses to it. What networked figures of sight, sound, story, and concept from popular films contribute to American senses of terrorist acts and world politics in the wake of the September 11 atrocities? What are their principal sources? And what may be said of their political trajectories?

3   The argument is that, especially through the aesthetic packages that we call popular genres, Hollywood cinema has been prefiguring our experiences of the events of September 11, their aftermath, and other acts of political terrorism. Popular genres occur in myriad media.[2] In the movies, they are families of conventions for cinematography, mise-en-scène, story, dialogue, acting, editing, music, even marketing.[3] This is to say that popular genres are aesthetics. They provide templates for our personal and political experiences. Four of these forms are particularly pertinent for analyzing the looks, sounds, and dramas of political terrorism that we encounter on the silver screen. These popular

genres of cinema are horror, dystopia, thriller, and noir.

4   Events over the last decade shifted American sensibilities and
     Hollywood movies away from a Cold War conflict that had pitted
     the Communist Iron Curtain in the East against the Free World of
     Democracy in the West. As much or more than any administration
     or foreign-affairs contingent, popular movies have been helping to
     turn American attention away from villainous Commies out to
     undo Democracy in America. Hollywood has played a leading role
     in replacing the outdated villains of the Evil Empire with Ruthless
     Terrorists ranging from the Middle East to Middle America.
     Often, but not always, cinematic terrorists have hated Western
     ways. Often, but not always, they have declared total, albeit
     asymmetrical, war against America's hegemony as the world's only
     remaining military, political, and cultural superpower. Often, but
     not always, they have been pointedly or vaguely Arabic in look and
     sound. (Many nationalities do surface.)

5   As widely noted, these figures have become so familiar to
     Americans – principally from Hollywood films – that the
     journalistic and popular presumption at first was that terrorists
     with ties to the Middle East had obliterated the federal building in
     Oklahoma City. Although the American militia movement had not
     been ignored altogether by the popular media in America, Timothy
     McVeigh still came as a special shock to the country. Furthermore
     his mythic figure has yet to become commonplace in popular films
     about political terrorism. Hollywood already has filled most roles
     for terrorists with figures from afar, and its arsenals of terrorist
     plots twist more toward international machinations.

6   Fortunately for Americans in the twentieth century, Hollywood
     supplied more numerous and sometimes more vivid instances of
     political terrorism than the country's enemies. Neither America's
     political elites nor its mass publics concentrated sustained
     attention on political terrorism prior to the atrocities wrought in
     2001 by al Qaeda. Not even terrorist bombings in the 1990s of the
     World Trade Center, the Murrah Federal Building, and American
     foreign embassies crowded out the sights and sounds of terrorism
     as genred by movie conventions increasingly global in their
     ambition and impact. This was due in important part to the
     enormous commercial success and cultural reach of Hollywood
     products, distributed to audiences almost everywhere in the
     world. By September 11, the earlier terrorist acts mainly had
     become fuel for still more imaginative and graphic films.
     Consequently the phenomenal field for experiencing and

responding to political terrorism remained wide open to prefiguration by Hollywood films.

Figures and Phenomena

7   Americans have been making sense of terrorist events and concerting themselves to action with the help of Hollywood aesthetics. This is happening even though these popular styles are being disrupted in various degrees by the emerging politics that they have helped to prefigure. Borrowing from the Santa Cruz meta-historian Hayden White, we might observe that popular movies in the last two or three decades have been contributing to a "prefiguration of the phenomenal field" for political terrorism – as we are coming to know and contest it in the wake of 9/11.[4]

8   Recent dynamics of terrorism are no exception. Through a Hollywood war movie, we could re-experience Mogadishu in Somalia with a *Black Hawk Down* (2001) years after the dust had settled from the disastrous moments of an aid mission in 1993. Through a political thriller, we could anticipate the experience of New York City under *The Seige* (1998) of terrorist attacks, years before the fall of 2001. Through a foreign dystopia, set in *Bab El Oued City* (1994), we could feel the effects of individual moves to resist or escape the encompassing system of regime terrorism in Algeria. Through the experimental cinema of *The Tornado* (1996), we could do the same for the anarchical system of civil-war terrorism in Lebanon. And through the blockbuster entertainment of *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), we could sense the frustrating complications in endeavors to resist the residual system of Cold War suspicions when trying to avert nuclear war spurred by rogue acts of nuclear terrorism.

9   The phenomenal field is the vague situation of events and experiences that start to take particular shapes and come into our specific awareness as we encounter them. Both existential phenomenologists and social cognitionists have suggested in various ways that, even before we consciously configure (let alone interpret) our experiences of events, we must prefigure them as diffuse and initial kinds of occurrences.[5] For cognitive science, the clear implication can seem paradoxical: before – or at least as – we cognize experience, we must re-cognize its elements. Otherwise cognition as form and dynamic must lack any content on which to work. Cognition depends on – more or less prior – recognition. To "apprehend" something in the firm if mental grasp which is what the word means, we must discern something to

grasp. We must (know to) turn toward it. Because form and content cannot yet be distinct, we do this with a turn. Indeed the ancient Greek word for such a "turn" is "trope," which even the Greeks appreciated also as a prospective "figure" of speech, experience, making, perhaps even acting.[6]

10   Popular genres are families of figures. Genres work as wholes; but they also perform in parts, subject to appropriation outside their usual milieus, as fragments when a familiar genre is in disarray, or as remnants when an earlier genre has been dispersed. The conventional elements of genres, as of aesthetics in general, are figures. Even as fragments and remnants, these figures inform our deeds, our words, our thoughts, even our sensations.

11   Figures and, thus, genres go together by elective affinity.[7] We connect like with like as we discern and choose them. Prefigurations play a role, sometimes a decisive one. Yet we can make different affinities as we like, individually but even more socially. Popular genres work this way: like cultural myths and cognitive networks, they are dynamic webs of associations. The experiential activation of a node almost literally re-minds us of linked nodes to the degrees that they have been associated with the first, spreading the activation throughout the web. Each experience reinforces associations that otherwise atrophy, even as it subtly or significantly alters them.

12   Popular films play prominent roles in our political cognition. Hollywood gives us figures for even beginning to sense political events. This is always already a beginning for our response. Popular cinema is far from our only source of prefiguration for any phenomenal field, including the events of September 11 in particular or political terrorism in general. Nonetheless movies do help prefigure our political experiences and responses, even when their figures have not cohered into a singular genre. What we bring with us into new experiences, we may say, are less political facts than audiovisual "figures," many from movies.[8]

13   As aesthetics, popular genres are conventional affinities among figures that help define one another. The resurgent genre of noir does not have to link night and rain, but typically it does, and we know it in part from such figures. Conventionally a noir protagonist encounters some dark night of the soul and needs a purging deluge. The figures of night and rain enact or embellish such desired meanings through the "pathetic strategy" common in popular genres.[9] And this holds even when both the night and the

rain might be, well, more figural than literal: *The Matrix* give us green figures that rain down the black screens of computers like the deluge down a window pane at night. The families of defining conventions for popular genres are far more numerous – and sometimes far more complicated – than any two or three figures such as night and rain.[10] The relationship is not one of necessary conditions: there are many noir films with no rain and now at least two with no night.[11] Nor is the logic one of sufficient conditions: there are innumerable movies with night and rain but no noir aesthetics. Nor is the connection one of separate causes to contingent effects, as in behavioral paradigms for the social sciences. Rather than atomistically mechanical, our aesthetics, genres, and figures are interdependently systemic. Rather than specifying any directions or degrees of causation, the correlations worth tracing among figures, styles, themes, or other aspects of a genre can help us to appreciate their patterns of meaning. What figures has Hollywood been generating for the phenomenal field of terrorism? How do figures from popular cinema inform our political sense of what to say and do about terrorism? The political aesthetics of horror, dystopia, thriller, and noir suggest answers.

14   And we need all four. One remarkable development is that mythic figures of terrorism do not exactly constitute a singular genre or even a distinctive aesthetic. That leaves political terror open to exploration in diverse genres with contrasting aesthetics. As conventional networks of figures, popular genres of cinema have been shaping our senses of terrorist ends and means. Four of these generic aesthetics seem especially relevant for informing how we experience terrorist events such as those on September 11 – and therefore how we respond to them.[12]

Horror and Evil

15   Apocalyptic reactions to 9/11 might suggest that the generic home for terrorism could, even should, be popular horror. President George W. Bush immediately denounced all terrorism as unqualified "evil;" and the enduring phrase from his next State of the Union Address became the condemnation of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea for pursuing weapons of mass destruction and sponsoring international terrorism as "the Axis of Evil." Horror is *the* popular genre of evils.[13] Yet the aesthetics and other conventions of popular horror have not figured prominently in any Hollywood treatments of political terrorism that come to mind, save for the dynamics of regime terrorism and war that Americans

elect to keep categorically separate from both "international terrorism" and "domestic terrorism."[14] The genre for regime terrorism has become dystopia, an outlying form of political horror analyzed in the next section. War has a cinematic form of its own, of course, with war movies arguing generically that war is (not so much terror as) hell.[15] When it comes to terrorism, however, the Hollywood dog that has not barked is horror. Hence it helps to contrast terror with horror, as both a family of feelings and a popular genre of films.

16   Terror is the fraternal twin of horror. As emotions and conditions, the two share much of their genetic material, yet they present distinct faces to the world. Together terror and horror form a complex of action and feeling that can figure momentarily in almost any kind of drama or film. Yet "horror" names a popular genre of movies, a whole family of conventions, whereas "terror" surfaces only in a few conventions of film. And "terrorism" characterizes a prominent form of politics, while "horrorism" remains a word in waiting, with no referents for politics or otherwise. Perhaps an implication is that the intertwined trajectories of horror and terror can be teased apart in the popular operation of politics and possibly in the generic apparatus of cinema. How does Hollywood handle them?

17   Terror is the overwhelming dread-and-despair that puts us (or our movie stand-ins) at the categorical center of assault. Or it does much the same by dispersing specific assaults into a continuing condition. Terror radicalizes anxiety. It projects death or degradation as immanent possibilities from almost any angle at any time in any place. Therefore terror disables you from action. It diminishes personal movement into mere behavior. It makes people flee or freeze in blind, frantic, unthinking aversion. Terror overflows fear. It overwhelms the appeal of fear to cognitive calculation of punishments and alternatives. It shoves aside the calm, cool apparatus of rationality. It panics people and destroys their identities as individual, responsible beings. It escalates and coagulates anxiety. Terror preempts escape. It prevents hope.[16]

18   Horror is the overwhelming dread-and-disgust that initially puts someone or something else at the center of assault. Horror happens at first to us as onlookers. We see atrocities that mock any possibility for goodness, truth, or beauty to remain unmixed with monstrosity. Later in horror, however, we look around to realize that the source of perversion is turning to get us, the circle of corruption is coming to encompass us, the sinister system has

swallowed us whole. Horror is revulsion for awful acts; it is repulsion from terrible entities.[17] It stems from natural boundaries eradicated or cultural standards transcended. Hence it springs from the strange territory of the uncanny and the sublime, where awful abominations and awesome absolutes turn into one another with each twist in perspective. We might freeze in horror. Or we might refuse to recognize the horrors we glimpse, and go back to daily routines that pretend nothing major is awry. Yet we also might turn to face horrors, making human sense of their threats and finding good ways to resist them. Horror appalls and revolts; yet horror also can revolutionize, provoking fresh perspectives and effective inventions. For good or ill, horror provokes extreme responses that range from willful oblivion to apocalyptic reckoning. Terror disrupts and stops action by the victims; horror interrupts and radicalizes it.[18]

19 Terrorism can stem from criminals, from corrupt governments, from political or religious movements. Sometimes it serves strategies of war, sometimes oppression, sometimes protest or resistance or rebellion or liberation, sometimes revenge and redistribution; other times psychosis, sheer destruction, or the emergence of some new kind of civilization. At times, terrorism can operate through big-lie and brain-washing techniques. It can use tactics of random death and disappearance. It can impose iron discipline, work through mass hysteria, propagate paranoia, or rely on surveillance. It can anonymize people beneath notice, let alone contempt. It can debase or humiliate most abjectly. It can concentrate citizens like pigs into pens. It can isolate individuals like pigeons into holes or compartments. It can drive parties, interests, even families underground. It can incarcerate whole populations. Nevertheless terror has stayed surprisingly separate from horror, with episodes of political terrorism as rare as a vampire's reflections in the popular genre of horror.

20 Still there is an obvious objection to these contrasts between terror and horror. It is the same objection that might be made to the claim that Hollywood seldom, if ever, treats political terrorism through the popular aesthetics of horror: Do these contentions allow for the defining symbolism of generic horror? Relentlessly the existentialist conventions of this genre disguise the daylight dynamics of psychology, society, history, economy, polity, and more within the nightmare figures of vampires, werewolves, witches, zombies, demons, ghosts, and myriad monsters; haunted houses and hidden lairs; magical spells and satanic rituals. "Just as science fiction stories are popular science," remarks horror

writer Dennis Etchison, "then horror stories are popular existentialism."[19] Who is to say that episodes of political terrorism are not amply and specifically evoked by Hollywood uses of existentialist symbolism in the genre of horror?

21   Yet film after film, intriguing glints of horror do not develop into sustained illuminations of terrorist politics. Nor do possible hints do not turn into detailed subtexts of political terrorism. These would be the ways to seek signs of political terrorism in horror movies: as a *New Yorker* film critic has said, "The secret of horror movies is subtext – metaphors that attack like viruses and produce a fever of associations in our minds."[20] The few exceptions, where the symbols or subtexts do evoke political terrorism, leave us more with diffuse ideas than specific actions. To me, at least, these possible turns to political terrorism remain too fragmentary, too momentary, for real contributions to structuring our sensibilities for terrorist acts. At most, these cinematic signs in horror give mere glimpses: neither articulate nor imaginative enough to prefigure a field of political terrorism addressed far more amply in thrillers and, perhaps increasingly, in noirs.

22   Unsurprisingly the (counter) examples of political terrorism that surface in the popular genre of horror tie most to regime terrorism. The most vivid example I know is from *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), a cinematic allegory for horrors of the modern state. Its figure for the fire-bombing of Germany and probably also for the nuclear holocaust suffered by Japan is the poignant pose of a vampire "mother" and "daughter" who hold each other in their arms while the sun burns them into an ashen monument that soon blows away on the breeze.[21] The scene and its encompassing sequence evoke acts of totalitarian terrorism that induce the response of a terrorist campaign in war. Notwithstanding considerable attention to these episodes of political terrorism before and after seeing the film, its imagery is enormously affecting. Horror, like terror, can be overwhelming.[22]

23   If this were an exercise in the cinematic psychology of terrorism, we might try to probe the existential conventions of horror movies. How might the seductive gaze and glamour of the vampire suggest how situations of terror draw us into self-destruction, even as they horrify and repulse us? How might the dull gaze and crude appetites of the zombie show how terrorism takes away capacities for intelligent, truly political action? How might the haunting chill of the ghost evoke the abiding hatred and corrosive guilt that keep terrorist acts from much success? Horror might be ripe for use in

probing dynamics of political terror; in fact, however, it has not been turned often toward pointedly political acts. In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King talks of "the horror film as political polemic." But it is telling that his examples are entirely from the regions where horror overlaps science fiction, and King's own forays into political horror seem to me to be science fiction first, horror only second.[23] The single most visible exception associated with the current meisters of horror probably is *The Dead Zone* (1983), directed by David Cronenberg from a King novel of political apocalypse and assassination.[24] (In the context presently at hand, the assassination of a political leader would not count as a terrorist act because it does not target civilians or other bystanders, a consideration emphasized in the King novel.)

24 Even so, it is intriguing to notice that four of the recent westerns I know to include tastes of political terrorism all appropriate figures of horror in this connection. *Unforgiven* (1992) and *The Quick and the Dead* (1995) turn in important part on regime terrorism – in both cases as a figure for state terrorism. The touches of horror in *Unforgiven* are subtle, but *The Quick and the Dead* includes a moldering black mansion and nightmare riders from the most horrific pages in *The Lord of the Rings*.[25] Both *Tombstone* (1993) and *Wyatt Earp* (1994) show how Earp took the modern politics of enforcement and revenge beyond the bend into political terrorism; and both movies borrow visual and verbal devices of conventional horror to mark his departure from any stern, proportionate, or otherwise defensible endeavor.[26] Do not expect to see these westerns in rosters of films that feature political acts of terrorism. Discussions with diverse viewers show that few recognize Earp's acts as terrorism, even in glimmering ways, and western conventions overshadow figures of terror and horror in all four. Nonetheless they merit mention, since they suggest some cinematic routes to addressing political terrorism through figures of popular horror.

Dystopia and Totalitarianism

25 In regime terrorism, the political system targets its own inhabitants almost willy-nilly for atrocities such as arbitrary arrests, tortures, disappearances, poisons, bombings, or other radical disruptions. The aim, insofar as there is a coherent idea at work, is to subjugate, humiliate, and dehumanize the population.[27] In other words, the anti-political purpose of regime terror soon turns into power and cruelty for their own insanely

sadistic sake. Picture, wrote George Orwell, "a boot stamping on a human face – forever."[28] This is the totalitarian nightmare of systematic regime terror that drove the democratic imagination throughout most of the twentieth century.[29] By the start of the twenty-first century, events and Hollywood had begun to supplant totalitarian control and regime terrorism with terrorism by movements and insurgent conspiracies as the western template for political hell on earth.

26   Regime terrorism virtually defines its own (sub)genre of dystopia.[30] This articulates the horror archetype of the Bad Place into an intricate and far-reaching web of figures that remains even today America's primary epitome of political horror.[31] Hollywood seldom produces films in this mode, in important part because relentless downers do not draw lots of viewers or make much money. As far as Hollywood is concerned, dystopia is less a genre in its own right than a subgenre. It is more a subgenre of science fiction than horror. And it tends to omit specific acts of political terrorism. Two of the best dystopias that focus on terrorist acts are popular Middle-Eastern, rather than Hollywood, films: *Bab el Oued City* and *The Tornado*. Remarkable as well is *The Day After* (1983), one of the more sensational movies made for television. Its terrorizing regime is the international system of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War. When the system of Mutual Assured Destruction breaks down, the resulting nuclear holocaust becomes an act of political terrorism that produces an unremitting nightmare. Yet none of these three films seems important, at least for Americans, in prefiguring political terrorism regarded as specific acts by insurgents or anti-western movements.

27   When Hollywood does venture a dystopia, it is apt to slide from terrorism that targets bystanders to ruthless regimes of surveillance, torture, and punishment that identify dissidents and do them in. Presumably the judgment is that this makes motivations more comprehensible, plots tighter, and settings more plausible for viewers used to people and practices that calculate interests for efficient means to given ends. *Brazil* (1985) and the 1984 version of *1984* are ready examples. As a result, the political terrorism crucial for the dynamics of totalitarian regimes – and apparent also in the actions of some authoritarian polities – seldom surfaces in Hollywood dystopias. For political theorists, terrorism by totalitarian regimes is arbitrary in many particular instances but endemic to the system. It is, in a word, systemic. For Hollywood movies, political terrorism is occasional and instrumental. It springs from relatively specific grievances even

though it targets civilians who lack any direct role in producing the grievances.

28 Again, though, there is a complication. For reasons of dramatic economy and punch, as well as ideology, Hollywood seldom portrays political or other systems overtly as such, in fully literal terms. Instead movies rely on the trope of conspiracy.[32] Examples are easy. *The Parallax View* (1974) uses an assassination conspiracy to trace symbolically how America's two-party system squelches political dissent. *Conspiracy Theory* (1997) does the same to probe oppressive aspects of the political system of the national-security state. *The Skulls* (2000) evokes Yale's notorious secret society for the Bushes to suggest how political elites systematically extend themselves in democratic times. *From Hell* (2001) also deploys a secret society to indict how Victorian culture systematically exploits and represses middle-class dreams and personal freedoms.[33] In popular cinema, conspiracies abound.

Thrillers and Conspiracies

29 By convention, nonetheless, conspiracies have their primary Hollywood home in thrillers. Not entirely by coincidence, thrillers are the principal genre for films that feature acts of political terrorism. Thrillers typically give viewers unqualified heroes, heroines, and villains. Yet thriller settings are more familiar, realistic, and up-to-date than those for the far-larger-than-life figures in action-adventure films, let alone superhero movies. In fact, such settings define subgenres for thrillers. These span international intrigues, criminal connivances, governmental and military contests, foreign wars, political potboilers, police stories, business tales, medical sagas, legal dramas, and others at the edges of neighboring genres like detection or action-adventure. The Hollywood disposition to emplot political terrorism in thrillers has several implications for the figures of terrorism widely available to Americans in experiencing events in the wake of 9/11.

30 The academy and the press share an unfortunate penchant for literalistic criticisms of the Hollywood fondness for conspiracies. We all know the refrain: how epistemically implausible, how social-scientifically unsophisticated, and how politically irresponsible it is to portray some cabal as running the world from behind the scenes.[34] Political scientists have wondered in print whether such Hollywood scripts are written by political rubes who know little about systems or art — and hence personalize everything simplistically — or by political extremists from the left

and right who compulsively demonize a few foes as responsible for all the things that go wrong with their worlds.[35] Almost anywhere we turn, and not just Hollywood, American rhetorics of conspiracy are more sophisticated than these options conceive.[36] Yet the frowning equation of conspiracy with crackpot politics surely creeps into American notions of terrorism when popular films insistently show political terrorism conducted by conspiracy.

31   This is not to say that popular cinema errs in connecting terrorist acts with conspiratorial politics. Conspiracies in a literal sense can be prominent devices of political struggle, especially in republics. Rome named conspiracies (from the Latin *with-breath*) for reliance on planning in whispers outside the hearing of courts or publics.[37] In popular movies with sustained moments of political terrorism, literal conspiracies must be rife. How could they be missing most of the time, when the ruling regimes in Hollywood films are seldom the sources of terrorism? For a group to conceive and conduct illegal acts without preemption by any regime that enforces its laws, secret communication is crucial: actual conspiracy is a must. Even the peculiar acts of political terrorism that do not primarily target a state or regime tend to attack both secondarily. Such terrorism impugns the legitimacy of states and regimes by demonstrating that they cannot meet their responsibility to provide domestic tranquility – by protecting civilians from violence.

32   Yet if conspiracies appear in many films with political terrorism, and if conspiracies can be Hollywood figures for political systems, how can I say with confidence that few Hollywood films so far have addressed regime terrorism – even in contrast with the run-of-the-mill devices of political oppression portrayed at least in passing by thousands of popular movies? Might the terrorist conspiracies in Hollywood cinema often turn out to symbolize terrorist systems – and thus regime terrorism? Possibly, but concerted efforts to think through the symbols in the films at issue leaves me without a single clear example. It is not that regime terrorism never surfaces at all in Hollywood films. Rather it appears seldom and mostly as a sideshow, not as the focus.

33   Conceptually and politically, it helps to distinguish occasional conspiracies within larger plots from plots that are conspiracies overall. Among recent thrillers, some forty stress political terrorism. At least thirty include some sort of conspiracy in their plots, although it often is the merest kind of criminal conspiracy. Yet only four of these films have conspiracy plots overall.[38] The

ratios are telling: three-fourths of the plots with acts of political terrorism *have* conspiracies, but only one-tenth *are* conspiracies. *Arlington Road* (1999) sounds an alarm about the American militia movement, and it shows how terrorists can use benign politics within America against the government. *The Package* (1989) offers an assassination conspiracy at the end of the Cold War. *The Siege* warns that terrorism can happen here, might elicit an authoritarian and racist response, and could go so far as to provoke something like regime terrorism.

34 To emplot terrorism in thrillers is to endow its politics with clear heroes and monstrous villains, both acting from motives more personal than ideological. Thrillers treat terrorism as political violence against bystanders – by contrast with military combatants and public officials. This accords with a classic definition of political terrorism.[39] (And it suggests that we set aside for now the many thrillers about actions against political figures.) In thrillers, this puts terrorists unarguably in the wrong: thrillers seldom explore the complications in how one cause's terrorist can be another's freedom fighter. To do that might take tragedy of a classical kind. This is rare in popular films, but among movies on political terrorism perhaps *The Crying Game* (1992) and *The Boxer* (1997) come close, and it is notable that neither is exactly a Hollywood product.

35 The notion of terrorism as attacking innocents for political gain does not fit the genres of horror and dystopia. In horror, adults are guilty, secretly if not originally. That is how they can know and combat (but also be) the monsters. Children might begin as innocents, yet they must develop the moral and political sophistication born of facing their own eventual evils if they are to survive monstrous attacks. The systematic, encompassing corruption of dystopias means that the civilians targeted by the regime share responsibility for its terrorism. As theorists have made painfully clear, the subjects of totalitarianism contribute to terrorizing themselves.[40] Hence there is little room in horror or dystopia for the dynamics of political terrorism that turn on victimizing bystanders. In the systems of transgression and guilt that both those genres present, nobody is a bystander. Of course, that argument is congenial to political terrorists who take themselves to attack oppressive regimes where, if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. To date, though, terrorists have not made many popular movies, let alone Hollywood releases.[41] Accordingly the thriller has become the

Hollywood genre of choice for facing political terrorism.

36   But we misestimate the craft of popular movies if we infer that Hollywood merely turns terrors into thrills. Critics and scholars do complain that Hollywood thrillers cheapen the politics and denature the terrors.[42] That happens in some thrillers, but it is not the generic pattern. Part of the misunderstanding arises from the modern inclination to treat politics as exhausted by the operations of government and ideology. Not even thrillers about political terrorism show much interest in political ideologies, although the films do give considerable attention to machinations of government in combating terrorism. Fortunately for us, there are many other kinds of politics, they are amply evident in electronic times, and they play signal roles in thrillers on terrorism.[43] These surface in the political projects attributed to the terrorists as villains. That their politics seldom fit such modern ideologies of politics as liberalism, socialism, and conservatism or even the likes of fascism, nazism, and communism should not surprise us. Most terrorist politics have been postmodern or anti-western, and many terrorist thrillers do engage such politics literally or figurally.[44] Thrillers also attend to the political projects enacted by the heroes who resist assaults by terrorists. Again this becomes easier to recognize when we encompass subtexts and we open our eyes to politics that exceed the forms most familiar to modern scholars.[45]

37   On occasion, a thriller features coequal heroes – or heroines. Then their interplay may be as important to the thriller's politics as any struggles between the heroes and villains. This is particularly true when a thriller taps conventions from such genres as romance, odd-couple films, or buddy movies. Among thrillers on terrorism, *The Peacemaker* (1997) is a case in point. Heroine Nicole Kidman enacts a liberal analyst of intelligence, Dr. Julia Kelly. She is an academician transplanted into government. Hero George Clooney plays a republican actor, not accidentally a military man: Lieutenant Colonel Thom Devoe. The film shows how they must marry their efforts in order to withstand a terrorist act born of humanist despair unto nihilism.

38   This leaves *The Peacemaker* comparable to *The Siege* in suggesting that the United States needs to work as a liberal republic in order to survive, whether as the lone superpower taking primary responsibility for a nuclear world or as the leading ally in a multilateral effort through the United Nations. Otherwise neither the U.S. nor the U.N. can withstand the asymmetrical warfare from terrorists with access to weapons of mass

destruction. In *The Peacemaker*, it is telling that the liberal analyst must persuade the republican actor to take seriously the political motives, especially the ideological causes, of terrorists. As a military man, Devoe has learned scorn for the supposedly political reasons of most people, including terrorists, who operate in an increasingly globalized world of would-be profiteers. Maybe Devoe has been reading too many books about the onward march of globalization.[46] Or maybe he has been watching too many Hollywood thrillers like the *Die Hard* and *Speed* films, where the apparent terrorism turns out to be a smokescreen for garden-variety robbery.)

39   Stanley Cavell provides a beautiful analysis of the mid-twentieth-century "Hollywood comedy of remarriage."[47] *The Peacemaker* might be more or less a thriller of remarriage. It starts logically from the destroyed marriage of the eventual villain, a professor of music and political activist who has lost his wife and daughter to warfare when America and its N.A.T.O. allies attempted to impose order on the disintegrating Balkans, Bosnia-Herzogovina, Yugoslavia, or whatever label might make most sense for the moment. The wife and daughter were civilians caught in the crossfire. They were bystanding victims of semi-advertent, busy-body terrorism – as the professor experiences it. Acting from despair at any decent future, with his marriage and his community gone, the professor contrives to bring the terror home to its careless perpetrators in New York City. In diagnosing then responding to his terrorist project, the movie weaves a replacement marriage. Step by step, it intertwines the components initially pitted against one another in the pairing of Lieutenant Colonel Devoe with Ph.D. Kelly:

<div align="center">

male vs. female
military vs. civilian
economic vs. political
anti-crime vs. anti-terrorism
practice vs. theory
action vs. thought
reality vs. academy
reality vs. bureaucracy
brute force vs. civilized negotiation
low culture vs. high culture
trust vs. distrust

</div>

To face and defeat the world-destroying powers soon to be in the possession of terrorists, *The Peacemaker* suggests that America

must reunite these long-alienated identities and capacities. That is a pretty tall order. But if anybody is up to this task of remarriage, Hollywood can help.

40   Indeed it can call its hero of heroes to the task.[48] *True Lies* (1994) is a remarriage thriller that is equally a comedy of remarriage. The matrimonial union between Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and his wife, Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis), drifts then begins to unravel piece by piece in the first half of the film. So the second half reweaves it. Along the way, of course, the political terrorists get identified and defeated, while the Taskers and the audience share comic thrills from James Cameron. The system of the national-security state achieves respect, rescue, and restoration. Overall the politics are ideologically conservative: no great surprise with Arnold in the lead. But again aesthetics trump ideologies: comedy devolves into farce, thriller heroism escalates into super-heroism, and the conservative outrage at terrorism turns into the sly romance of bystanders striking back. Nuclear annihilation of the Florida Keys begins as a terrorist atrocity, but it becomes merely a colorful prelude to fun on the dance floor.

41   *The Sum of All Fears* is complicated because there are two sets of obstacles for the hero. The overt villains are nazis who crave world domination, and they provoke the crisis typical for thrillers. Yet the crisis would not occur were there no quasi-Cold War confrontation remaining between Russia and the United States as the world's two nuclear powers of greatest note. The government officials in Russia and the United States are driven in conventional thriller fashion by personal and political imperatives that boil down to upholding the honor of their own sides.

42   Jack Ryan (Ben Affleck) must exercise a cool calculation of interests based on a mastery of information about characters and conditions in order to take the Russians and Americans out of their escalating showdown over national and individual honor. In regard to the Russians and Americans, therefore, Ryan is a critical historian who promotes the liberal politics of a larger rationality of knowledge and human interests. This averts disaster from the republican dialectic of honor and anger, with affronts escalating into all-out war. Thus it replays the political lessons promoted by proto-liberal theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

43   In response to the international gang of resurgent nazis, by contrast, Affleck's figure is the dashing hero familiar from spy-vs.-spy thrillers. He shows his excellence in action through daring,

perseverance, improvisation, and martial arts. The nazi terrorists instigate the crisis, but the nuclear powers complicate it. Thus the first skein of the plot is republican, and the second is liberal. Ryan helps America and the world limit nazi terrorism and avenge nazi evil. He also helps Russia and the United States escape from the terrible system of escalating grudges.

44 The academic caricature of thrillers would take their conventions of heroism and villainy to mean especially short shrift for the grievances of terrorists. That is what *The Sum of All Fears* gives us for the nazi terrorism: little sense of what grievances the gang might have or why, and no sympathy at all for its politics. The larger part of the movie, however, concerns motivations for Russian and American acts that provide chilling parallels to the nazi terrorism. These receive careful exposition in words as well as colorful articulation in symbols both aural and visual. The film cultivates some sympathy for grievances on each side, even as it criticizes every turn toward terrorism. The genre does much the same. Roughly a fourth of the time, it disregards grievances altogether, at least in recent offerings. Half of the time, it discredits grievances emphatically and perhaps one-sidedly. But the other fourth of thrillers on terrorism delve more respectfully, even sympathetically at times, into the motivations for political terror. Thrillers condemn terrorism as violence against more or less innocent bystanders; yet this does not keep the genre from detailed, and sometimes supportive, consideration of troubles that generate political terrorism. Hollywood thrillers have been more subtle and intelligent than we might expect in prefiguring terrorism. In movies such as *The Siege*, the genre even warns against accommodating terrorists by responding to their attacks with misdirected or disproportionate retaliation, suspension of civil liberties, and regime terror. Thrillers show more than a modicum of sophistication about political terrorism.

Noir and Sophistication

45 It is no wonder, then, that Hollywood has started blending thrillers with noirs in order to tackle political terrorism with even greater flair and sophistication. In some Hollywood quarters, noir films seem little more than thrillers become acutely stylish, self-aware, and sophisticated. In others, the mark of noir is realism, in a strongly stylized sense. This realism encompasses seedy settings, grainy colors, and many shadows. It also means moral malaise, political hardball, and rhetorical savvy in social systems that

ensnare people left and right. Noir is a genre ready-made for the complexities of political terrorism along with attempts to preempt, repudiate, or punish it.

46 As political terrorists began targeting the United States more intensely in the 1990s, film noir was returning to the fore in popular movies. The genre had flourished in the 1940s and '50s. Then noir subsided so much in prominence that some scholars defined it as a delimited period rather than a continuing genre. When you look for them, of course, there turn out to have been more than ten noir films released every decade in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Nevertheless the Hollywood proportion of noir films had declined, and a few shining exceptions like *Chinatown* (1974) showed how marginal to the aesthetics of Hollywood in this interregnum generic noir had become. By the second half of the '80s, however, film noir was making a comeback. The '90s viewed some fifty new noirs, and the resurgent genre once more became a prominent Hollywood source of sights, sounds, and stories.[49] If we reckon that the new century began in 2000, we may say that already it has contributed another thirty noir films.[50]

47 Accordingly noir aesthetics have been amply available to help Americans experience the terrorist atrocities of September 11, 2001; and this Hollywood genre is making an impact on our political sensibilities. When Maureen Dowd, the national weathervane of the *New York Times*, addressed that day's terrorist attacks, she took her title from a famous noir film by Orson Welles. It recently had been re-released in a "director's cut," based on requests that Welles made of the studio, which had edited his footage into a logical mess. His movie still was powerful enough aesthetically to attract popular attention half a century later. "Touch of Evil," Dowd called her take on the world in the wake of September 11. She began a commentary with the look and feel of a genre renowned for painting gray on gray: "I've always loved film noir. The grays, the shadows, the mysterious webs of murder, deception and corruption, the morally ambiguous characters." Nonetheless, she wrote, "I never expected to see a noir shadow fall on the white marble hive of Washington. The film noir hero, as Nicholas Christopher wrote, descends 'into an underworld, on a spiral.' The object of his quest 'is elusive,' and he is beset 'by agents of a larger design of which he is only dimly aware.'"[51]

48 Like most fans, Dowd seems to have thrilled to the genre's ambiguities, its sophisticated sense of foggy complications making for steamy mysteries and stories of the American dream undone by

its own ambitions. Even by October, Dowd could observe how "Sept. 11 was a day of crystalline certainty. Thousands of innocent people were dead. We had to find the murderers and unleash hell." Soon there were complications. "But after that things got weirdly muddied. We would have been prepared for a conventional war outside our borders. But we were not prepared for the terrorists' unconventional war inside our heads. We went from never imagining the damage the barbarians inside our gates could do to imagining little else." Noir contributed to the imagining. Even before the United States became super-serious about political terrorism, noir had started to edge into the field of popular films about it. *Fight Club*, *Spy Game*, and *Swordfish* feature the looks, sounds, and structures of film noir; and they are three of the more provocative treatments of political terrorism to issue from Hollywood.

49   *Fight Club* and *Swordfish* pay special attention to spectacle, a shared concern of terrorism and cinema.[52] Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn maintain that "the essence of terrorism is the actual or threatened use of violence against victims of symbolic importance in such a way as to gain psychological impact for the purpose of achieving political objectives."[53] Spectacle is what terrorists promote for this purpose, and spectacle is the stock-in-trade of popular cinema.[54] As a genre, film noir has developed an acute concern for the engines and dangers of spectacle.[55]

50   The terrorists who star in *Fight Club* and Swordfish both pursue the politics of spectacle. In doing this, these characters claim superior realism, yet neither film is the least inclined toward mundane realism in story or cinematic style. Instead they share the sophisticated realism of noir, and they use the genre to expose the corruption of spectacular societies as systems that invite the politics of terror. Such stylish realism stems from their attunement to the cinematic construction of political realities in America – and the world that its media have been busy globalizing. The movies' cinematic devices of terrorism display this knowledge, though playfully in both cases. This locates them in the family of films such as *Simone* (2002), *15 Minutes* (2001), *EdTV* (1999), *Pleasantville* (1998), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Mad City* (1997), and *Wag the Dog* (1997) that play reflectively and prophetically with media construction. Most of the films with political acts of terrorism show some awareness of such media dynamics and their postmodern politics. Yet among these, only *Three Kings* (1999) and possibly *Spy Game* also might qualify for

the family of films that emphasize dynamics of media construction.

51   The specific brands of postmodern politics in *Fight Club* and *Swordfish* are exceptionally debatable as to types. *Swordfish* has an anti-terrorist terrorist named Gabriel and played by John Travolta. By the end of *Swordfish*, Gabriel's terrorism is financing his own foreign and military policy of counter-terrorist vengeance. This radical, perhaps satirical adjustment of domestic and international politics seems somewhat anarchical in ideology but even more in style. The later politics of terrorism in *Fight Club* also might be categorized as anarchical – or nihilist, since its movement named Project Mayhem claims to pursue a fanaticism of destruction. The obliteration of civilization by bombing credit records is to plunge the world into a kind of chaos. That should return sophisticated cities from the corrupt "barbarism of reflection" to the noble "barbarism of sense," as the republican theorist Giambattista Vico long ago contrasted those two conditions.[56] Western civilization knows this situation, without government as hierarchical rule, to be anarchy in a sense that traces back to Thomas Hobbes.

52   Yet the charismatic project of liberation by Tyler Durden, the protagonist in *Fight Club*, is devoted less to eliminating all hierarchical order than to reviving pure, impulsive, perfectionist action by Nietzschean nobles in a setting before the West was won. The movie makes such a masculinist trajectory at least borderline patriarchial, hence incipiently hierarchical, though cultic would be a better category. There is in *Swordfish*, by contrast, no perfectionist celebration of impulsive action or primitive cult-ure.[57] Its violence of terrorism is not a Dionysian rite, as in *Fight Club*, but a hardball device for trumping violent terrorists. Gabriel is a planner who leaves few probabilities uncalculated. His enterprise is eminently sophisticated, if fatally cynical – at least to others. Therefore the politics of *Swordfish* are "anarchical," whereas the politics of *Fight Club* are "perfectionist" and Nietzschean, In neither film, though, is the ideology half so detailed or influential politically as the aesthetics of noir. Neither film offers a sober, respectable take on terrorism; and both mobilize noir in similarly playful ways. Yet both have become cult favorites by featuring noir conventions for configuring and prefiguring our senses of political terrorism.

53   *Spy Game* uses the stylish realism of noir to indict terrorist tactics by covert operatives for the United States. It moves good-hearted but hard-boiled protagonists played by Brad Pitt and Robert

Redford from CIA assassinations during the Vietnam War, Cold War betrayals in Berlin, and political bombings in Beirut, to ruthless trade struggles with China. The film fully acknowledges that American enemies also terrorize, but it suggests that many of America's hard choices have come mainly from being all too hard-headed and heavy-handed in foreign policies. Noir tropes sophisticate the thriller politics until, by the end, personal ties lead the protagonists to renounce the room that Realpolitick makes for sacrificing bystanders to larger political causes.

54 Like horror and dystopia, noir suspects that systems entrap us even in the most ordinary of everyday activities. The leading figures in noir films are nothing like innocent. When they try hardest to be bystanders, stepping aside from the fray or pretending that they can stay aloof from the systematic corruption, their ignorance ruins their own efforts and other people's lives. Yet the wake-up calls that rouse noir protagonists to recognize their perils and responsibilities activate their residual virtues. These reconstruct the shadows and mirrors of politics into rights and wrongs that make human sense in fallen worlds far from pure innocence or absolute evil. In some ways, we all participate in the regime, the system, the transgressions, even the terrors. But in other ways, there can be bystanders, civilians, victims outside any proper scope of violence – notwithstanding their real contributions, conscious or not, to acts that outrage others. In noir, we can learn how war and terror and freedom-fighting and all other politics face complications that should induce a sense of limits along with a capacity of self-criticism.

55 Noir sprang from the literary (sub)genre of hardboiled detection. In the 1920s and '30s, the "roman noir" had turned the upper-crust amateur detective operating in the milieu of the country manor into a sometimes suave but always hard-bitten private eye who scrambles to make a living from the seamy side of the city. [58] Like hardboiled detection, classical film noir situates itself in the gritty night of an endlessly corrupt city under siege in every direction from criminals and political manipulators.[59] As a "lone knight of justice," the noir detective cannot hope to restore order or impose justice on the model of the classical detective. He is in over his head, and his interventions in the ongoing dynamics of crime are more likely to aggravate the harm than heal even a small part of the city. Even when the protagonist of classical noir is not exactly a detective – but more a minor-league Faust who blunders toward personal, moral, social, and political catastrophe – the most he can manage is to leave behind a lesson: his cautionary

tale about how things went wrong.

56 Dowd observed that "The last thing this country wanted was to be pulled into another hostile, unfamiliar landscape or more political quicksand. Even in our national discourse, we rejected ambiguities, preferring the thumbs up-thumbs down, who's in-who's out, box office winner-box office loser sureties. But now we're enmeshed in ambiguity. First we wanted to bomb Afghanistan. Then, when we saw the suffering of the people there, we wanted to send food. Now we may bomb them with missiles and care packages." This fits the chiaroscuro complexity of noir. "President Bush is struggling with geopolitical jujitsu. Our old enemy Russia is our new ally. Our old ally Israel is accusing us of appeasing the Arabs. We have to now trust countries we distrusted, like Pakistan. We have to hand out bribes and play footsie with those who tolerated and sheltered and exported terrorists – and may again." As Dowd concluded, "Our desire for justice remains unambiguous. Beyond that, as Keats wrote, "there is nothing stable in the world; uproar's your only music." The classical sensibility of noir finds abyss and chaos just below the surface. It experiences ruin and corruption perceptible through the pretty pretensions and petty sophistications of the city.

57 Classical noir always favored Los Angeles as its sin city. As a city, however, L.A. was always already decentered and postmodern: more a ramshackle network of suburbs in search of a city than a gleaming beacon on the hill of western imagination.[60] Film noir establishes L.A. with shots from the hill. These look down on a tangle of freeways, aqueducts, and subdivisions in a valley shading into smog and night. The Hollywood sign of celebrity culture and politics labels a neighboring hill. Hollywood films show Arab terrorists in particular as coming from the dark warrens, bright deserts, and sun-washed cities of the Middle East; and the L.A. of film noir manages all three at once, as well as unreal downpours of rain that never can wash the city clean. When we witness a New York suffocated in ash and smoke and grit, or we look upon the ruined-coliseum made by fallen fragments from the twin towers of the World Trade Center, we see with Dowd a noir city left in the twilight of the idols.

58 Resurgent noir turns the fatally sophisticated city not only into suburbs but also into the abstracted systems of domination and corruption long excoriated by the existentialists.[61] The targets, dynamics, and consequences of political terrorism find themselves and lend themselves to noirish figures that include rather than

excuse ourselves from the picture.

59   Not long after reading Dowd, I attended a POROI Rhetoric Symposium on responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11.[62] The conference guide to art exhibits, academic panels, and original performances runs almost forty pages, and its cover shows in noirish silhouette an airplane flying in the soft gray air over a New York skyline that still featured the twin towers. For the first day, the conference managers projected this grim, funereal image in grayscale on a big screen behind the symposiasts. Throughout the second day, participants watched video ruminations on the 9/11 aftermath, photographs of Ground Zero and the informal memorials taking shape around it, and a drama on naming the dead: the victims in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. Every one of the videos, pictures, and performances glowered with shadowy-gray sensibility of noir. More ominous even than the stark blacks, whites, and reds of horror, the chiaroscuro sophistication of noir gave the occasion a somber sense of the fatal perplexities of political terror. Similar effects can be seen in the Hollywood turn to noir as a generic setting for coming to terms with terrorism.

60   Wallace Stevens said that "Politic man ordained / Imagination as the fateful sin."[63] For a civilization now learning more than it ever wanted to know about the politics of terror, noir is a popular genre that has much to recommend it. The shadowy shapes of twin towers at the World Trade Center collapse into a flash of fire, a rain of ash, a darkness of more than night and rubble. These are powerful figures from noir for the terrorism now emerging in Hollywood's politics – and our own.

© John S. Nelson, 2003.

Notes

[1]   See John S. Nelson and G. R. Boynon, *Video Rhetorics*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1997, pp. 195-232; John S. Nelson, "Argument by Mood in War Movies: Postmodern Ethos in Electronic Media," *Argument at Century's End*, Thomas A. Hollihan, ed., Annandale, VA, National Communication Association, 2000, pp. 262-269.

[2]   See Nelson and Boynton, *Video Rhetorics*, pp. 27-86.

[3]   See Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*,

New York, St. Martin's Press, third edition, 1998; Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London, British Film Institute, 1999.

4   See Hayden White: *Metahistory*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Also see John S. Nelson: "Review Essay [on *Metahistory* by Hayden White]," *History and Theory*, 14, 1, 1975, pp. 74-91; "Tropal History and the Social Sciences," *History and Theory*, 19, 4, 1980, pp. 80-101.

5   See Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith, tr., New York, Humanities Press, 1962; *The Primacy of Perception*, James M. Edie, ed., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1964; *Sense and Non-Sense*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia A. Dreyfus, trs., Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1964. Also see Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition*, New York, McGraw-Hill, (1984), second edition, 1991.

6   See John S. Nelson, *Tropes of Politics*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, especially pp. xvi and 99-114.

7   See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, Elizabeth Mayer and Louise Brogan, tr., Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1963.

8   On such audiovisual icons in environmental politics, see Andrew Szasz, "'Toxic Waste' as Icon: A New Mass Issue Is Born," *Ecopopulism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 38-68; Nelson and Boynton, *Video Rhetorics*, pp. 154-194; Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*, New York, Guilford Press, 1999. Also see G. R. Boynton and John S. Nelson, "Orchestrating Politics," *Hot Spots: Multimedia Analysis of Political Ads*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1997, third video.

9   See Nelson, *Tropes of Politics*, p. 142.

10   For twenty conventions of film noir, see John S. Nelson, "Noir and Forever: Politics As If Hollywood Were Everywhere," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2001.

11   See *Insomnia* (2002), directed by Christopher Nolan, and its inspiriting film.

12   On this kind of information, more full-bodied and active than

cybernetic and realist modes of information as mere data, see Nelson, *Tropes of Politics*, pp. 124-126.

[13]   See John S. Nelson, *Deliver Us From Evils: The Politics of Popular Horror*, unpublished manuscript.

[14]   For a persuasive exception, see Caleb Carr, *The Lessons of Terror*, New York, Random House, 2002.

[15]   See Nelson, "Argument by Mood in War Movies." Also see John S. Nelson and G. R. Boynton, "Arguing War: Global Television against American Cinema," *Arguing Communication and Culture*, G. Thomas Goodnight, ed., Washington, DC, National Communication Association, 2002, pp. 571-577.

[16]   See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, (1951), fourth edition, 1973; John S. Nelson, "Orwell's Political Myths and Ours," *The Orwellian Moment*, Robert L. Savage, James E. Combs, and Dan D. Nimmo, eds., Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 1989, pp. 11-44.

[17]   See John S. Nelson, "Horror Films Face Political Evils in Everyday Life," *Political Communication*, 21, forthcoming.

[18]   See Stephen King: *Danse Macabre*, New York, Berkley Books, 1981; *Bare Bones*, Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller, eds., New York, McGraw-Hill, 1988. Also see Ron Rosenbaum, "Gooseflesh: The Strange Turn Toward Horror," *Harper's Magazine*, 259, 1552, September, 1979, pp. 86-92.

[19]   Dennis Etchison, quoted in Douglas E. Winter, *Faces of Fear*, New York, Berkley Books, 1985, p. 62.

[20]   Terrence Rafferty, "Secret Sharers," *New Yorker*, 64, 33, October 3, 1988, pp. 92-94, on p. 92.

[21]   See John S. Nelson, "The Dark Prince Stirs at Sunset: Dracula and the Post-Western Politics of Film," paper for the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 2000.

[22]   See John S. Nelson, "Horror, Crisis, and Control: Tales of Facing Evil," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1985.

[23]   See King, *Danse Macabre*, pp. 144-153.

[24]   See Stephen King, *The Dead Zone*, New York, New American Library, 1979.

[25]   See J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, in three volumes, 1954, 1955, 1956.

[26]   See Peter A. French, *The Virtues of Vengeance*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2001.

[27]   See Hannah Arendt, "The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany," *Commentary*, 10, 4, October, 1950, pp. 342-353.

[28]   George Orwell, "1984," *Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Irving Howe, ed., New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, (1963), second edition, 1982, pp. 3-205, on pp. 175-178.

[29]   See Nelson, "Orwell's Political Myths and Ours."

[30]   See Nelson and Boynton, *Video Rhetorics*, pp. 221-230.

[31]   See King, *Danse Macabre*, pp. 263-294.

[32]   See Fredric Jameson, "Totality as Conspiracy," *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 7-84; John S. Nelson, "Conspiracy as a Hollywood Trope for System," *Political Communication*, 20, 4, October-December, 2003, forthcoming.

[33]   For the ambitious graphic novel on Jack the Ripper that inspired this striking movie by the Hughes Brothers, see Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell, *From Hell*, Eddie Campbell Comics, Paddington, Australia, 1999.

[34]   See Rick Marin and T. Trent Gegax, "Conspiracy Mania Feeds Our Growing National Paranoia," Newsweek, 128, 27, December 30, 1996 - January 6, 1997, pp. 64-71.

[35]   For a better effort, see Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, "Devils and Demons: The Group Mediation of Conspiracy," Mediated Political Realities, New York, Longman, (1983), second edition, 1990, pp. 203-222.

[36]   See Ted Remington, *Conspiracy Theories as Socially Constructed Mythic Narratives*, Ph.D. dissertation for the University of Iowa Department of Communication Studies, Iowa City, IA, 2002.

37   See John S. Nelson, "The Republic of Myth," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2001.

38   See John S. Nelson, "Hollywood Prefigures Politics: Cinematic Anticipations of Terror in America," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2002.

39   See Carr, *The Lessons of Terror*; Brent L. Smith, *Terrorism in America*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994.

40   See Orwell, "1984;" Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, New York, Viking Press, (1963), enlarged edition, 1964.

41   It is not hard, however, to see the martyr videos, recruitment movies, and training films from terrorist organizations as possible steps toward a counter-cinema.

42   See Walter Laquer, *The Age of Terrorism*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1987, p. 202.

43   See Nelson, "Hollywood Prefigures Politics."

44   See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Berkeley, University of California Press, (2000), second edition, 2001; Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2002. Also see John S. Nelson, "Terror from Totalitarianism to Tinsel Town: Making Myths of Anti-Western Movements," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2002.

45   See Nelson, *Tropes of Politics*, pp. 205-230.

46   See Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1995; Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, New York, Random House, (1999), second edition, 2000.

47   See Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1981.

48   On the increasingly conservative politics of the initially liberal "task," see Michael J. Shapiro, "The Rhetoric of Social Science: The Political Responsibilities of the Scholar," *The Rhetoric of the*

Human Sciences, John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and D. N. McCloskey, eds., Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, pp. 363-380, especially pp. 370-375.

49   On the classical period of noir and its inspirations, see J. P. Telotte, Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1989; Joan Copjec, ed., *Shades of Noir*, London, Verso, 1993; R. Barton Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir*, New York, Twayne, 1994; Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader*, New York, Limelight Editions, 1996; Paul Duncan, *Film Noir: Films of Trust and Betrayal*, Harpenden, UK, Pocket Essentials, 2000. On recently resurgent noir, see Foster Hirsch, *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir*, New York, Limelight Editions, 1999; Nelson, "Noir and Forever."

50   These are *Boiler Room*, *The Crow: Salvation*, *Memento*, *Panic*, *The Pledge*, *Reindeer Games*, *Shaft*, *Traffic*, and *X-Men* in 2000; in 2001, *The Caveman's Valentine*, *The Deep End*, *From Hell*, *The Glass House*, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Spy Games*, *Swordfish*, and *Training Day*; in 2002, *Blade II*, *City by the Sea*, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, *Femme Fatale*, *Insomnia*, *Minority Report*, *One Hour Photo*, and *The Salton Sea*; plus early in 2003, *Confidence*, *DareDevil*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, even *T3.*

51   Maureen Dowd, "Touch of Evil," *New York Times*, October 7, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/07/opinion/07DOWD.html?ex=1003468906&ei=1&en=d7d1a5eda5168771.

52   See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red, (1967), 1977; Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

53   Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *The Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism*, New York, Longman, 1994, p. 4.

54   See Larry Beinhart, *American Hero*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1993; Terrence Rafferty, "Lost at Sea," *New Yorker*, 71, 23, August 7, 1995, pp. 83-85.

55   See Nelson, "Noir and Forever."

56   See Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, Thomas Goddard

Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, trans., Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, (abridged from the third edition, 1744; 1948), 1961, 1106, pp. 381-382.

[57] See John S. Nelson and Anna Lorien Nelson, "Greening Nietzsche: Perfectionist Politics from *Fight Club* to *Magnolia*," paper for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2002.

[58] See William Marling, *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1995.

[59] See Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City*, New York, Henry Holt, 1997.

[60] See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, New York, Random House, 1990.

[61]   See Nelson, "Noir and Forever."

[62] Susan Zickmund and Merrie Snell, organizers, "Infinite Respect, Enduring Dignity: Voices and Visions on the September Attacks," sponsored by the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, January 25-26, 2002.

[63] Wallace Stevens, "Academic Discourse at Havanna," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, New York, Knopf, 1975, pp. 142-145, on p. 143.