In Praise of Cinematic Bastardy

Edited by

Sébastien Lefait and Philippe Ortoli

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personne, tant la parenté formelle était évidente. En effet, la poussière, les rochers, les armes sont là, le méchant arbore la même trogne hirsute habituellement dévolue au bandit mexicain, et une couverture drapée se substitue au poncho auquel Eastwood nous a habitués chez Leone. Stade pour l'instant ultime de l'abâtardissement générique: dans *Sholay* et sa progéniture, c'est la forme du western, via sa mutation italienne, qui a été transférée, et non le contenu. C'est donc très spontanément que ce nouveau style de film d'aventures, qui crée sous les traits de l'acteur Amitabh Bachchan un nouveau mythe du cinéma hindi, le personnage du *good bad guy*, fut baptisée *western massala*.[10]

En somme, le film de genre se perpétue par mutations autant que par imitations. Si l'imitation pure et simple peut passer, pour filer la métaphore, comme une progéniture naturelle du modèle parental, il semble que la vitalité nécessaire à la longue vie de l'espèce, et à la permanence de l'engouement qu'elle suscite, c'est dans la mutation, l'hybridation, le métissage, le transfert, en somme la bâtardise, que le genre le puise. Non seulement dans le cercle familial immédiat, comme on l'a vu dans les exemples pris dans le modèle américain, mais également dans un cercle dont l'élargissement est peut-être sans limite. On a vu ainsi le western accomplir sa mutation en Italie ou en Inde, exemples évidents car, par la quantité, la qualité et la diversité, ils constituent à leur tour un genre dans le genre. Mais il aurait été loisible de citer également les avatars britanniques (*Le Cavalier noir/The Singer not the Song*, Roy Ward Baker, 1961), africains (*Tant que soufflera la tempête/Untamed*, Henry King, 1955; *The Hellions*, Ken Annakin-Irwin Allen, 1961), australiens (*The Proposition*, John Hillcoat, 2005; *Australia*, Baz Luhrman, 2008), français (*Haceldama*, Julien Duvivier, dès 1919), voire japonais (*Les Sept Samouraïs/Shichinin no samurai* de Kurosawa devient western américain, mais n'était-il pas déjà, à l'origine, un schéma westernien transféré au Japon ou, du moins un recoupement significatif des schémas japonais et américains?). Comme dans quelque roman picaresque où le bâtard roule sa bosse sous les cieux les plus divers avant de venir exiger la reconnaissance de ses droits dans le lieu d'origine, le western hybride a bourlingué pour venir à son tour perpétuer la vitalité du modèle originel.

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10 Sur ce film, on trouvera une foule de renseignements précieux dans Sholay Anupama Chopra, *The Making of a Classic* (Dehli, India: Penguin Books India, 2001).

CHAPTER TWO

FILM GENRE AND MODALITY: THE INCESTUOUS NATURE OF GENRE EXEMPLIFIED BY THE WAR FILM

MATTHIAS GROTKOPP AND HERMANN KAPPELHOFF

1. Of Men and Squirrels

The film *Gung Ho!* (Ray Enright, USA, 1943), one of the first world war II combat films, begins like many another of its kind with the process of initiation, the separation of men from their civil background and their re-incorporation in the army. But two things stand out in this specific instance. With a length of 11 minutes, the scene is of unusual duration. And the logic of recruitment goes beyond the stereotypical collection of men representing a geographic and ethnic variety. This makes something visible that is of high importance to the study of the war film genre.

The first recruit directly descends from the settlers and homesteaders who are the secret, quiet heroes of the western: "Down home in Kentucky, a fellow ain't much of a shot unless he can shoot a squirrel through the head." The next one is a minister who escaped from a melodrama about losing faith in the sacred or about the conflict between faith and desire. The recruit's melodramatic origin directly inscribes itself in the exaggerated gesture of his counterpart. After the melodrama and the western, we are presented with a young "no good kid" from a gangster movie, only the army gets him just before he happens to become the "*public enemy*." The following entrance presents two boys from a romantic comedy, who are in love with the same girl. And finally, Robert Mitchum represents a rather obscure sub-genre hybrid of the 30s and 40s, the boxer film noir.

The ritual of initiation into the army is presented here as the collection of characters from diverse genres. And this brings forward the questions we want to deal with in this paper:

In what ways is the imagination of a society at war created as a relation to the imagination of its founding, of its civil conflicts and struggles? What does the birth of the war film tell us about genre? How can we reconsider genre in order to account for this form of exchange and migration?

Beyond issues of genre theory and genre history, these questions lead us to the underlying structures of mass entertainment as ways of making sense of experience.

2. Defining genre modalities

What do the characters in the first sequence of *Gung Ho!* represent? They are certainly not simply the stereotypical characters of the genre. Neither can their descent be simply processed as narrative information. They cannot be fully appreciated by a taxonomic approach that would proceed like this:

> Each genre represented a body of rules and expectations, shared by filmmaker and audience, which governed its particular generic "world" and by which any new entrant was constructed and operated. The task of the genre critic was to survey the terrain of this world, identify its *dramatis personae*, iconography, locations, and plot possibilities, and establishing the rules of narrative engagement and permutation.[1]

Such an approach conceals the real issue: the recruits represent modalities of experience and not "dramatis personae." They carry with them ways of behaving, ways of using the human body, ways of inhabiting space and time, and ways of getting emotionally involved. The war film is above all a propagandistic effort: "The tools of the cinema are employed to manipulate viewers into various emotional, cultural, and intellectual attitudes."[2] It addresses its spectators by offering them docking sites that constitute a common ground of emotional participation, a world they are familiar with, a world in which they are located.

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[1] Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 223.

[2] Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003, 2nd ed.), 57.

The war film inserts itself into the existing genre system, not only as a tool for organising studio production and audience reception,[3] but as a system of communication by which a society constitutes its values and its identity. If genre is regarded as an ongoing discovery of "ways of making sense,"[4] as Cavell put it, then it must be possible to analyse the specific function of the war film within that system. In order to orientate ourselves, we want to employ and modify the approach brought forward by Christine Gledhill and pioneered by Peter Brooks:[5] "the concept of modality as the sustaining medium in which the genre system operates."[6]

Modalities can be defined as specific aesthetically organised forms of experiencing and perceiving the world.[7] They are not merely rules of organising narrative events, but rather systems of addressing, modelling, and differentiating experience. A modality is a "mode of conception and expression"[8] that must be regarded as a "sense-making system"[9] and the different modalities are "related but significantly different versions of reality."[10]

Using this definition, one has to go on and describe the specific elements of that aesthetic organisation. The following is a rough sketch of these elements, which necessarily intersect and correlate.[11]

a) *The temporal and spatial organisation of perception.* This could be analysed and classified according to Bakthin's concept of the chronotope[12] as cultural memory. But it also includes the temporal structures of "too late" in melodrama or the relation to the sacred in tragedy.

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[3] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 100-101.

[4] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1979), 32.

[5] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, Conn. and London, UK: Yale University Press, 1995).

[6] Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 223.

[7] Ibid., 227.

[8] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, xvii.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 203.

[11] We do not claim that this is an exhaustive account or the only possible way of breaking this down. And most importantly, these five elements are not bound to the medium of film or indeed any other medium.

[12] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, Tex. and London, UK: University of Texas Press, 1981).

b) *The body and the face and their performance, their gestures and action potentials between activity and passivity.* This aspect is related to Linda Williams's "body genres"[13] but it also plays a general role in its more subtle varieties.

c) *The emotional registers that are addressed and modelled.* The basic emotions such as fear on the one hand, more diffuse moods and atmospheres on the other hand, provide a differentiation of emotionally pre-focused world conditions.

d) *Language.* This regards most of all the rules of speech acts or language games but also the rhythm and prosody of language. The specific ways of doing things with words for example more or less define comedy.

e) *Social constellations.* The ideas of the social, which are embodied in characters or character constellations, are more than narrative information. They provide ways of inhabiting body and language; they structure and organise the surfaces of reality and provide the range of action within social time-spaces.

What counts as a mode in the most basic sense is usually given by the mentioned genres: the rules of using the expressivity of body and language are clearly operating differently in melodrama and comedy. The perception of time-space in realism is occupied with surfaces and contingencies as opposed to the conflict between eternal order and transgression that marks the tragic mode.[14] What makes these recognisable as "versions of reality" from another perspective is that they represent claims on possible relations to the ordinary: the importance of an importance within the ordinary in melodrama, the importance of unimportance in realism, the reinvention of the ordinary in comedy or the failure of its acknowledgement in tragedy.[15]

We are not going to elaborate on the difference between these, which would amount to a cultural history on a larger scale. Instead, we want to concentrate on the modalities of experience within the melodramatic mode, where perception is organised by an excessive claim to meaning, as it is the pivotal mode for an affect-defined genre cinema. "Melodrama is

[13] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2-13.

[14] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 198-199, 205.

[15] Cf. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

not nor ever was a singular genre."[16] As a "culturally conditioned mode of perception and aesthetic circulation,"[17] it has historically emerged and developed into "a genre-producing machine."[18] The melodramatic forms of experiencing the world are migrating forms *per se* and they possess the flexibility of integrating the other modes like the surface-orientation of realism. Additionally, all the melodramatic subgenres are open to their comic subversion and still remain recognisable.[19] Melodrama is inherently promiscuous.

But what makes the melodramatic modality so important historically and significant for the popular cultural system of genre cinema is that it relates its "version of reality" to a realm of experience that is generally accessible: the experience of embodied subjectivity. Melodrama takes the symbolic systems and moral problems that constitute a society and realises them as a temporally unfolding modulation of extreme states of emotional being.[20]

This marks the radically democratic nature of melodrama, "striving to make its representations clear and legible to everyone."[21] It aims at "making the world morally legible,"[22] and this implies a claim to a common realm of judgement that is inherent in the human capacity to utter statements or to make gestures that are highly subjective and that at the same time are attempts to speak for others.[23]

Furthermore, the melodramatic mode itself becomes a form of experiencing oneself as located within social and historical frameworks:

It provides the genre system with a mechanism of "double articulation," capable of generating specific and distinctively different generic formulae

[16] Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 227.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 229.

[20] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 11-12.

[21] Ibid., 15.

[22] Ibid., 42.

[23] This marks the historical and political context of the emergence of melodrama as witnessed for example by Kant: modern society constitutes itself not as insurmountable spheres of belonging but as a public space that is aesthetically organised and in which—potentially at least—every judgement is in conjunction with the other. Common sense or sense of community is now understood as a form of spectatorship that partakes with public positions on the basis of the individual's sense of taste and sentiment and a capacity of enlarged thought. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

in particular historical conjunctures, while also providing a medium of interchange and overlap between genres.[24]

The history of the melodramatic genres is a process of shaping perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in relation to the audience's embodied memory of previous aesthetic experience. "Genres thrive, after all, on the persistence of the problems they address; but genres thrive also in their ability to recast the nature of these problems."[25] Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (USA, 1955), for example, is a melodrama for the 1950s that is about the emotional and moral unacceptability of the maternal sacrifice provided by melodramas of the 1930s. Its visual texture and rhythm of colours "articulates social, as aesthetic questions, and vice versa."[26]

3. Genre modalities and the war film

With this in mind, we can describe what happened when the new genre, the war film, appeared as an answer to a very complicated question: "Why do we fight?"[27] The "war" in war film is not just content matter. It includes the presence and memories of stocks of images on the one hand and the attachment to a set of values, the mythology of sacrifice and guilt on the other hand. The classic war films are constituted by newsreel images not just as facts and information but also as an emotional experience, which the films themselves refashion into something less overpowering, into an experience that can be digested as an affective knowledge of one's social fabric. It is on these grounds that the war film genre performs its function, modulating the emotional experience of the audience and so shaping a process of living memory and compassionate relation.

The war film answered the question "Why are we Americans at war?" by taking up the established sub-modalities of the melodramatic mode and turning them into ways of relating to the documents of war and the

24 Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 229.
25 Williams, "Film Bodies," 12.
26 Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 12.
27 Frank Capra's series *Why we fight* (USA, 1943-45) is the epitome of the direct approach to this question and it is only fully appreciated in its own relationship to genre cinema: Hitler as a gangster and the daily American life as virtue jeopardised. Cf. Hermann Kappelhoff, "Kriegerische Mobilisierung: Die mediale Organisation des Gemeinsinns. Frank Capras Prelude to War und Leni Riefenstahls Tag der Freiheit," *Navigationen. Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften* 9, no. 1 (2009):151-165.

affective memories inscribed in them. The iconography of war, the constellations of character and narrative seemingly specific to the war film genre are realised as forms of affect that transcend genre expression and their way of shaping distinct realms of cinematic expression that plays with the genre stereotype.

For example, there is a specific modality that plays with the uncertainty of perception, with an uncanny hyperagency looming beyond the frame or in the shape-shifting depth of the image. This agency occupies the entire space and seems to be always already there. "The combat film also has a curious affinity for the horror movie."[28]

The modality of horror can be defined as the modulation of an imminent threat to the integrity of the individual body. War films create this threat as a physical experience of claustrophobia, be it in the stomach of a submarine, a transport ship or the interior of the Humvee: every armour is a prison, every order can bring death. But even more importantly, it is the image of nature that becomes a central pattern of the war film. Classic war films create war as an experience of horror. It is the image of nature as a mode of perception at the verge of breakdown, saturating invisibility with fearsome agency. Nature as a diffuse alien body becomes the mode of experiencing the enemy. It is not about "fighting in the jungle" but about "the jungle within fighting." This is where an account of modalities transcends patterns of narrative or information. If one emphasises "mode of perception" instead of iconography, then the jungle images from *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan, USA, 1949) to *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, USA, 1986) easily transform into the desert of *Sahara* (Zoltan Korda, USA, 1943) or the urban spaces of Mogadishu or Baghdad. This modality represents the paradoxical enjoyment of anticipating and experiencing fear: I am lost in nature; I lose myself in the overpowering technology; I cede control over myself to the collective body of the military.

The same reversal of emphasis between iconography and mode of perception can be made with the element of technology. Artillery and air support do not only provide the information and narrative expansion of the Bigger Picture, they provide a cinematic mode of perception that mimics the human body, a mode of perception that allows the spectator to participate in the destructive force of that seemingly indestructible entity. A related pattern consists of the way the "corps" is staged as a rhythmic, geometric entity, uniting a multitude of once individual bodies under a common vector of speed, direction, and force. The drill as military practice

28 Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 124.

automatically delivers these cinematic compositions from *Gung Ho!* to *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, UK/USA, 1987). The audience experiences the ecstasy of dissolution, the dissolution of time, space, bodies, and objects via the cinematic kinaesthetic of montage and the centrifugal intensification of movements.

The horror film and the delusions of grandeur provided by the action modality can be correlated as elements of a reversible figure. And both of these forms of pleasure can be flipped over into instances of melodramatic emotion in the narrower sense: the hardened soldier, who renounces the civic part of his existence, and the shell-shocked face are the two polarities embodying the melodramatic conflict that structures the war film's poetics of affect. Considering the fact that the melodramatic mode can be regarded as a historically situated way of coping with the experience of sexuality and mortality in a secular age,[29] it is consistent to claim its suitability for the moral confrontation inherent in the war film: the forced separation of the sexes and the sacrifice of individual lives. The conflict between an individual's right and desire to live and to pursue happiness and the fact that war means to be prepared to forsake both for the sake of your nation might be regarded as the central pathos of the genre.

This is articulated by the characters' attitudes towards each other, by the dying gestures and the utterances of those who survived. The cinematic forms of expression shape the viewers' emotions, oscillating between anguish and compassion. At the height of this conflict, the melodramatic modality positions us in that exclusive and singular perspective of loneliness, pain, and agony, the existential reality of the finite being.

This point of culmination then includes the power to transform itself. The transformative power of the ritual as the mise en scène of mourning, of a shared commemoration produces the reinstallation of the very values these soldiers were denied. The war film participates in the images of sacrifice and the founding myths of the western genre. How soldiers die and what their deaths mean is equivalent to the modes of cinematic expression. The films orchestrate gestures, verbal and musical appellations that try to create another space, that try to lay a foundation for the renewal of the community, the re-emergence of an original state.

The affective bonds to the nation as a community are shaped through the acknowledgement of violence—"The Western: it is the place where we accept violence as a necessary event"[30]—and moral fallibility, a rebirth in

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29 Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 235; Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.
30 Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 239.

spite of all that, for the sake of the universal promise of freedom and self-determination that is called "America."

Each of these four modalities is an orchestration of ways to perceive the world, as specific temporalities and spaces, bodies, speech acts, social meanings, and especially emotions. Delineating these elements makes it possible to show how their predetermined breaking points are also points of contact. They originate compositional structures that in fact become the means by which they are converted into another. This convertibility as a continuous realm of aesthetic experience makes the "poetics of affect" of initially distinct genres traceable to the fundamental hybridity of an affect-based genre system.[31] The "poetics of affect" of the war film genre and the individual war movie, respectively, can be described as the temporal unfolding and reciprocal penetration of these affective states: horror and exaltation, pity and anguish, grief and solemnity.

In the end, we can comprehend these as ways of making sense of war as an aesthetic experience that joins the symbolic ideas of community, society, and values with the embodied affectivity of the individual spectator. This individually embodied affectivity is finally always historically situated and addressed by these films: "The melodramatic imagination needs both document and vision, and it is centrally concerned with the extrapolation from one to another."[32] The war film genre does not only consist of a set of characters, iconographies, and narrative standards ready to be modelled into entertaining fiction. On the contrary, those are produced by the audiovisual orchestration of emotions and perceptions as encounters between the cultural pool of aesthetic modes and the documents; "it is 'something recognized and understood from prior experience,' real or unreal."[33]

Genres construct fictional worlds out of textual encounters between cultural languages, discourses, representations, images, and documents according to the conventions of a genre's fictional world, while social and cultural conflicts supply material for renewed generic enactments.[34]

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31 For a systematic implementation of this approach—the qualitative-empirical analysis of temporal segmentation as a structuring of emotion—which we performed within the framework of the Cluster of Excellence "Languages of Emotion" (Freie Universität Berlin) see the research platform by Hermann Kappelhoff et al.: *www.empirische-medienaesthetik.fu-berlin.de/en/index.html*.
32 Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 9.
33 Basinger, *World War II Combat Film*, 249.
34 Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," 238.

The war film genre historically emerges through the emergence of the question "Why do we fight?" It builds its answer by organising the images of war as a course through historically emerged aesthetic strategies of modulating the spectators' emotional experience. The function of every singular film, its historical and social involvement can be analysed by its specific arrangement of these elements as a temporally structured emotional process, as an organisation of audiovisual composition.

4. … and beyond

Using the example of the Hollywood war film, we have tried to draft our theoretic and analytic approach that does not define genres as monolithic entities but as forms of expression and experience that are flexible and affiliating. And so we would conclude by recapitulating the layers of bastardy as the fundamental structure of a genre-based mass entertainment that is consistently applicable to the late modern era up until the present day.

For one, genres are constituted by elements of aesthetic organisation that traverse media and channels as forms of sense-making world experience. "Movies begin as Victorian theatre"[35] and this theatre itself begins as a theory of language and expression in the 18th century.[36]

Then there is the promiscuity of melodrama, its ability to bond with other modes and the conditions of socio-cultural environments to give birth to all those subgenre modalities that surround us: horror, crime, western, suspense, action etc.

And in turn, these melodramatic submodalities as sedimentations of shared judgements—that is judgements of taste as well as moral judgements—are highly convertible amongst each other. The fact is, it would be quite difficult to imagine the western without action, horror and action movies without scenes of recognition and reunification. Perhaps this is what Stanley Cavell meant when he thought about the certain naturalness of the fact "that a movie comes from other movies."[37]

Genres as realisations of modalities of experience create historically and culturally variable "poetics of affect." They are aesthetic forms of situating the spectator in a shared space of perceiving, feeling, and thinking: genres and their instantiations are testimonies to a faculty of

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35 Cavell, *World Viewed*, 93.
36 Hermann Kappelhoff, *Matrix der Gefühle: Das Kino, das Melodrama und das Theater der Empfindsamkeit* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2004).
37 Cavell, *World Viewed*, 7.

imagination that is capable of crossbreeding one's embodied experience with the fantasies of others.[38]

One challenge of genre cinema, as a particular, historically emerged form of organising aesthetic modes of reference to world experience, is to conceive of the socio-historical implications. A future perspective of this consists of a systematic itemisation that unravels the modalities of genre as virtual possibilities, rather than taking them in their already parcelled actualisations. One could systematically reconsider the principle of genre cinema under this notion, drawing a map of modalities as ways of perceiving the world, and then marking the genres as trajectories through this shared territory of forms of experience. This would make the question of genre hybridity, as postclassical, postmodern, etc. appear in a totally different light. Decoding the gene pool of genre cinema could become a fruitful way of accounting for its historical actualisations, before and beyond hybridisation or self-reflexivity.

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38 Ibid., 11, 85, 90.