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## BUREAUCRACY, COERCIVE FORCE AND INDIVIDUAL AGENCY: THE GENDERED PROTAGONIST IN THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

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### INTRODUCTION: THE FAILURES OF 'REAL WORLD' AUTHORITY

The 9/11 Commission noted that the institutions 'charged with protecting [US] borders, civil aviation and national security' had failed to appreciate the gravity of the threat posed to the United States by a 'sophisticated, patient, disciplined and lethal' enemy (9/11 Commission Report, 2004: xvi). This censure of official agencies may suggest a powerful bi-partisan assault on the incompetence of the US security apparatus, but the extent of the critique is limited by the Commission's remit, which was to investigate the 'facts and circumstances' of the September 11th attacks (xv). The final Report, therefore, did not attempt to 'assign individual blame' but to provide 'the fullest possible account' of the events of September 11th (xvi). The ultimate goal, it claimed, was to help prevent another such operation achieving success on American soil.

The Commission's explicit refusal to determine individual responsibility, was entirely appropriate to the role it had been assigned (and presumably useful in securing the cooperation of witnesses). Another clear advantage in using *structure* (rather than individual activity) as the preferred frame of reference, was that it met the need to appear objective. Within the narrative of the Report, however, the formal concentration on systemic problems conflicts with the inevitable appearance of active, culpable human agents. In its assessment of political manoeuvring in the post-9/11 world, for example, it clearly implicates individuals. Paul Wolfowitz, in particular, appears as an early enthusiast for military action against Iraq (9/11 Report, 2004: 352). Initially resisted by some within the Bush administration, this immodest proposal eventually hardened into formal policy.

Despite its declared limitations, the Commission's work provides a revealing insight into the internal mechanisms of state bureaucracy and the role of individual actors in attempting to mobilise resources: it is packed with incidents that reveal the inability of senior officials to make the chain of command effective, to overcome communication breakdowns, and thus to gain an accurate picture of the perils they faced. A sal-

utary example of procedural failure may be found in the confusion surrounding the decision, made on September 11th itself, to shoot down civilian aircraft should they fail to 'divert' from a suspicious course (40). Based on a telephone conversation with President Bush, Vice President Cheney had authorised fighter planes to engage the hijacked passenger jet United 93, unaware that it had already crashed in Pennsylvania. However, the order to 'take out' rogue aircraft was not, according to the Commission, passed to the first set of fighter pilots circling New York and Washington—who were told to 'ID type and tail' (44)—but was communicated to a second group which was scrambled from Andrews Airforce Base (44). The Report's authors, commenting on this state of disorder, noted out that officials 'struggled ... to improvise a homeland defense against an unprecedented challenge' (45).

Calls for the punishment of public servants, however, lay beyond the powers of the Commission. Together with the reluctance of the Bush administration to accept its own mistakes, this meant there was little visible evidence at the time of the Report's appearance, in July 2004, of any significant protagonist having to pay the price for a number of very grave shortcomings. The eventual indictment in October 2005 of Cheney's chief of staff, I. Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, on perjury charges related to the Administration's decision to leak the name of a CIA official (Woodward, 2006: 419; McClellan, 2008: 305), did little to contradict this perception. What remained, therefore, was a sense of general disorder and confusion both during the September 11th attacks, and in the years that followed. The belief that serious deficiencies existed within the US system of government included a negative assessment of its executive leadership, linked to the increasingly poor reputation of the President.

The Commission's refusal to apportion blame might have had a beneficial effect, in the sense that it prevented an unnecessary diversion from the more urgent study of systemic problems, but the fact that no one was called to account (especially during the Iraq debacle) could encourage the rather abstract conviction that 'government' in general was at fault. The plethora of conspiracy theories which followed September 11th, may attest to this sense of disaffection with the political system. When, for example, the PR company Ogilvy ran an exercise called 'Topoff' for the Department of Homeland Security, in which it tried to prepare senior officials for the possibility of a fresh terrorist assault on US infrastructure, it encountered 'a number of serious challenges', particularly the fact that 'some members of the target audience were suspicious of possible government involvement in 9/11' (Ogilvy, accessed: 1/03/2006).<sup>1</sup>

### POWER, DISSENT AND REPRESENTATION

Besides the growth of political scepticism and disengagement, the public registration of dissent can make itself evident in more formal ways, such as demonstrations, petitions, and campaigns of civil disobedience. However, citizens can only secure what Dahlgren calls 'consumer choice in the rotation of elites' (Dahlgren, 1995: 3) when an electoral opportunity presents itself. The most significant defeat of neo-conservative dominance in America had to wait for the Congressional, Senate and Presidential Elec-

<sup>1</sup> Since the date accessed this reference has been removed from the website. The website now presents a brief overview of the exercise: [www.ogilvypr.com](http://www.ogilvypr.com).



tions of 2008. Rather than a complete revolution in political values, the Democratic resurgence may represent a degree of exhaustion with one form of authoritarian culture. On both the international and domestic stages, the Bush administration had served its purpose and run its course. It had reminded its rivals of US military strength but had overplayed its hand, wasting the economic vitality upon which armed might depends. Barack Obama's reconstruction of US power on a more 'rational' basis, especially the decision to make Afghanistan the main focus of America's 'anti-terror' enterprise, will demand the focussed application of those instruments of coercion that his predecessor had divided between two theatres of war, and which had produced in turn yet more violence against US interests.

The degradation of public trust may be attributed, therefore, to the failure of the US political executive to substantiate one of the central alibis which formal authority uses to defend its own existence: the need to preserve the lives of its citizens. This value is projected as one of the foremost requirements for the exercise of stable governance, an essential element in the reproduction of existing social relations. Not only, however, is public safety impossible to guarantee, but the behaviour of the principle actors in 'neo-liberal' states suggests that the attempt to concentrate executive power, pursued in tandem with the diffusion of political responsibility (Price, 2009), is the primary goal. The political class attempts to insulate itself from the 'popular will', taking decisions without public approval, while allowing influential delinquents to escape lasting retribution.

The projection of certain themes by a powerful elite, such as the importance of public security, represents one of the necessary elements of successful rule. Such concepts circulate within a larger process of public narration, in which many significant institutions participate. Corporate citizenship, for instance, is a form of story-telling about the virtues of private intervention, while cultural formations like the cinema are particularly effective in making narrative and emblematic sense of common experience. Therefore, if governance represents the attempt to establish the 'rational' control of subjects, then one might expect to encounter references to this process in mainstream narrative forms. In other words, the everyday endeavour to achieve consistent political effects within institutional constraints offers material which can be re-worked in film.

Although specific allusions are indeed made to the operational exercise of social control within the police or espionage genre, and television series like *CSI* devote time to a glamorised version of investigative procedure, the representation of institutional forces within the 'story world' (Branigan, 1993: 33) is chiefly undertaken when the condition can be sensationalised. So, for example, a number of genres (like the courtroom drama) will present heightened but superficial dramatisations of bureaucratic procedure. In such cases, an analysis of structure is usually limited to a background sketch upon which heroic identity can be projected. Although real police activity may be described as largely procedural, cinematic narratives show life in the office as a jumping-off point for interrogations, confrontations with authority, rapid departures for crime-scenes and contests with other agencies over the meaning of the law.

## NARRATIVE, BUREAUCRACY AND PUBLIC VALUES

Responses to the ubiquitous appearance of hierarchical power within political life could be based upon a variety of attitudes, yet some currents seem to predominate within cinematic representation. Individualism and anti-federal sentiment, useful in feigning a vehement objection to the exercise of authority, seems for example to be animated with greater conviction, than the more complex but tentative liberal analysis of power. While Redford's *Lions for Lambs* (2007), for example, presents a convincing study of right-wing Republican intransigence, its attempt to offer a counter-narrative produces a tortuous account of alternative values, an uneasy dramatisation of sincere but misguided patriotic sacrifice, and middle-class liberal principle. The transposition of either 'proto-political' traits or more developed opinions to film, does not of course generate an exact correspondence between models of the real and fictional representation, nor does it necessarily produce a successful address to an audience.

Public understanding of political events is, however, already reproduced in a fabular structure, and new occurrences are marked by expectations created from established narratives found in a multitude of sources, including press and TV reportage. There exists therefore, a great deal of recycled thematic material which moves across generic forms, most of it based on conventional interpretations of the social order. Powerful institutions, responsible for the dissemination and reproduction of meaning, make reference to the various arrangements that make up our perception of reality. The discursive realm, in which narrative circulates, draws from events and activities produced within all three spheres of human experience: the natural, practical and social worlds (Archer, 2000). Cinema is capable of presenting a convincing amalgam of these spheres of existence, but in so doing can confuse the ontological character of events, making mythical/discursive material from practical exigencies like the prosecution of a war.

When the police, secret service and espionage movie is examined, it seems that the cinematic critique of state power emerges as an attack on fragmented parts of the structure: on corrupt officials, 'parallel' or illicit authority, factional conspiracy, and most commonly of all, on 'rule-bound' bureaucracy. In other words, the state must receive due prominence in the narrative, but an over-emphasis on the importance or even usefulness of structure would diminish the celebration of individual agency. The hero/heroine is shown overcoming established constraints through force of will, yet these are structural procedures which would in real circumstances *enable* the legitimate production of effect. Aligning the protagonist ('first actor' in Greek) with officialdom is, however, anathema to narratives which are driven by the desire to highlight heroic agency; the attainment of results must therefore be shown to be made 'against the grain'. This 'anti-bureaucratic' perspective strives to demonstrate and validate the heroic agency of the professional specialist, an individual trained within, but often abandoned by, the coercive apparatus of the military and/or national security agencies. Agency is thus re-cast in fictional form as the attempt by a charismatic individual both to maintain personal integrity and to escape the restrictions of an overbearing and often anonymous structure. As the power of individuals is clearly limited by the attribution of certain capabilities to masculine and feminine characters, the



performance of gendered identity and its imagined relation to the exercise of authority is a central aspect of narrative composition.

Authority, generally understood as the 'right' of an established power to expect or enforce compliance, does not necessarily refer to the production of commands and obedience, but rather indicates an individual or group associated with the origins of a policy or enterprise (Watt, 1982: 11). In sum, the effectiveness of this form of influence should be distinguished from the operative character of power, because it resides in a general acknowledgement of eminence or distinction. Different forms of authority, such as coercive, moral or normative, can be used therefore in the accomplishment of tasks, and are also made apparent within the structure of film. It is, however, the distribution of such qualities to different types of individual (righteous coercion to the protagonist, normative conformity to the bureaucrat) that actually reveals the values espoused within each narrative.

#### REFERENCES TO THE REAL

The simple assignation of character traits and behaviour to individuals is insufficient, however, to determine the political trajectory of narrative forms. So, for example, narratives that maintain a distinction between the pathological aggression of the villain and the morally justified violence of the protagonist, must demonstrate these attributes through an event which confirms their relative positions. This is often an initiating act in which a criminal or terrorist offence is committed. In the case of *The Kingdom* (2007), this is a bomb attack on US civilians living in Saudi Arabia, which kills over a hundred people. The event is therefore intended to create resonance in an audience that might interpret this attack in the light of other supposedly unprovoked assaults on US interests. The particular nastiness of the scenario is apparent in its representation of the slaughter of innocent people of all ages, while they are engaged in playing a baseball game. This event, the plausibility of which is reinforced through the typical use of TV reports to suggest an authentic social reality separate from the narrative, is received with shock by the authorities in the US. The response of American officials is, however, constrained by diplomatic considerations. Frustrated by a State Department edict preventing the immediate use of the FBI at the Saudi crime-scene, the hero of the movie, Ronald Fleury, declares 'I'm gonna get us access'. He then confronts the Attorney General, a character called Gideon Young, in a meeting which sets out the difference between the complacent bureaucrat and the man of action. In attempting to persuade Young to send his team of investigators to Saudi Arabia, Fleury refers to a number of actual locations that contextualise his argument, including Yemen and Iraq. In this way, the necessity for action becomes a material principle, a notion that offers a logical transference from the fictional environment to a wider social universe of political meaning.

One important reason for the use of extensive reference to the external world is the simple need to achieve currency, or in other words to confirm the social relevance of a tale. A closely related requirement is the 'heritage of realism' (Leishman and Mason, 2003: 2), which fulfils a perceived demand for authenticity. Where violent action is portrayed, for example, the current requirement (set out within the *Bourne* trilogy and

taken up by the *Bond* franchise) is for accurate reproductions of hardware and a convincing presentation of martial skills. Productions call on the talents of a host of physical trainers, ex-special forces personnel, weapons handlers, and other experts. Actors, tasked with mimicking the established conception of the skilled field operative, speak of their devotion to real-life exercises as they prepare for their roles. Matt Damon, star of the *Bourne* trilogy, described in an interview of 2002 how he strove for realism in his characterisation of the agent:

'Say ... I picked up the gun and it looked like I didn't even know what I was doing, the audience would pick up on it. So I had to spend hour after hour loading and shooting pistols' (Morris, 2002)

The desire for authenticity is attributed here to the demands of the audience. Mamet, describing his production of the script for *Spartan* (2003), described how his perusal of the book *Inside Delta Force* by Eric Haney (2002) led to his use of the author as a technical advisor for the film. In this case, the 'war on terror' is not made into an explicit frame of reference, as it is in *The Kingdom*, but is based instead on another related theme, the trafficking of women by foreign criminals. The state mobilises its most effective operatives in order to rescue the President's daughter, abducted by gangsters who do not realise the identity of their victim. 'Real world' references once again underpin the general proposition of the movie. Disillusion with formal authority, referred to in the material on 9/11 (see above) is represented by a deep and pervasive cynicism, applied to a host of representative characters (a college professor, an inept agent, the President himself) who are corrupted by their sexual weaknesses. It is the emphasis on this particular theme that distinguishes Mamet's overall position from the perspective taken within *The Kingdom*, which is predicated more firmly on the simple representation of violent retribution, meted out by a 'rainbow' coalition of determined agents.

### THE REPRESENTATION OF BEHAVIOUR AND GENDERED IDENTITY

Mamet's reproduction of the heterosexist values of a military elite is not assigned to the stoical protagonist, who stays aloof from such casual expressions of disdain. While a corrupt internal faction attempts to protect their immoral Commander in Chief from scrutiny (even to the extent of planning to kill his daughter), the principal agent, Scott, delves beneath the surface to establish the truth and retrieve the kidnapped woman. His superficial purity enables him to act against subordinated social groups (criminals, students, traffickers, brothel keepers) who possess the information he needs. In this, it is possible to discern the application of extreme measures associated with the US prosecution of the 'war on terror', but the explicit message seems to be the necessity of acting beyond the bureaucratic confines of the law. In one particularly telling scene the hero, played by Val Kilmer, is shown first threatening to kill and then nearly choking a woman called Nadya Tellich. Since it has been established that this hero does not reproduce the sexist utterances and behaviours of his colleagues, the action is not presented as deviant but as no more than the necessary application of force in the service of a greater justice. The departure from legality is clearly signalled in the conversation that precedes this event, when another agent confronts Tellich. Tellich, a Serb working in the US on a green card, runs an escort service (in effect a brothel),





and thus provides a crude means of proving the unscrupulous character of those who evoke the law in order to frustrate the progress of an urgent investigation:

Nadia Tellich: I'm entitled to my lawyer.

Agent: You're entitled to shit. You're entitled to tell me what you know.

While such discussions of power, agency and ideology, applied to the realm of film and television narrative, suggest the deployment of various forms of textual and cultural analysis (semiological, psychoanalytic and genre-based approaches have provided major paradigms) it is also important to recognise the distinctive quality of film and TV texts that moves *beyond* their role as a means of exposition. Movies and television programmes are effective where they offer a convincing visual and auditory experience, one that reproduces aspects of human sociability, speech and gesture, allowing audiences to interpret quite subtle behavioural signals. These 'naturalistic' aspects of the repertoire of film and television may express or contradict the explicit meanings presented within single narratives but, irrespective of such tendencies, help to confirm the viewer's sense of access to an intimate social universe.

Crossley, writing from a sociological perspective, draws attention to bodily 'techniques' which are 'oriented to social situations' and which may therefore be classified as a form of 'social action' (Crossley, 1995: 135). The on-screen appearance of such *performances* is of course planned (scripted) in advance, but can only be given life through the process of direction in which real individuals reproduce the types of activity which audiences can accept as legitimate, including intonation, gesture, and facial expression. So, for example, scripted utterance in film parodies everyday exchange, revealing an awareness of the 'design' of conversational strategies, in which apparently minor interactions achieve important tasks. In film, these tasks are not, unlike examples of real exchange, practical (designed to advance a real project or desire), but narrative and explanatory. Yet, to be convincing, they must be more than didactic; they must be represented by persons and 'clothed' in behaviour. As Horton and Whol, point out, when this is achieved, the audience may be 'subtly insinuated' into the text's 'action and internal social relationships' (cited Tolson, 2006: 14). The reproduction of a naturalistic environment, including the imitation of natural speech and everyday conduct, may however create conflict with larger narrative purposes.

So, for instance, the arrival of Bourne and Kreutz at Bourne's Paris flat (in *The Bourne Identity*, Liman, 2002) begins as a fairly delicate study of anticipation and tension, as two individuals who know they may enter into a relationship examine the contents and arrangement of this living-space, and what it reveals about its occupant; both need to gather information because Kreutz is assessing Bourne's character and social status, while Bourne has no recollection of his own personal history (see below). These characters are clearly not 'autonomous subjects', but the point here is their presentation as such, secured by their embodiment in the persons of professional actors.

The tentative nature of this exploration symbolises the early stages of a mutual attraction, initiated in the first instance by Kreutz. As the scene develops, however, certain things occur. The naturalistic exchange is not developed in its own right and the larger narrative trajectory intrudes as Bourne discovers that he is under threat. The ten-



sion focuses, at this point, on his anticipation of an attack. As a choreographed fight sequence begins, the brief glimpse we have of Kreutz as *protagonist* disappears. In shock after the struggle, she becomes incapable of action and speech and must rely on Bourne's dynamic and 'automatic' reversion to the skilled production of agency. The original problem of 'attribution' and agency manifests itself in a much repeated strategy; the appearance of challenges to the protagonist's ascendancy.

### AGENCY AND 'INNOCENCE'

In many films and series, the values and behaviours of the protagonist are called into question. Ostensibly, the point of any such contested exchange is to 'test' the quality and accuracy of his/her perceptions and assertions ('truth claims', in linguistic terms). Bourne is, for example, taken to task over his methods and attitudes at more than one point in the narrative. His actions, however, prove appropriate to the extremity of the situation in which he and Kreutz find themselves. In fact, the point of the disagreement is to validate the social role of the male hero. The introduction of material that interrogates heroic status remains, however, an underdeveloped counter-point to the dominant course of the narrative. There are places, therefore, where Kreutz questions the story (or alibi) that Bourne produces as an explanation for his conduct. The audience is, perhaps, most willing to give credence to Bourne's perspective, because it has been prepared in advance by the opening sequences. Kreutz, meanwhile, has already been portrayed as confused and inefficient.

During an early conversation, as Kreutz drives Bourne to Paris, the 'master narrative' is preoccupied with establishing the hero's calibre and lack of guile. In the following passage, the 'rational' explanation for Kreutz's verbosity, that she is nervous, competes with another perspective; that this is a *gendered* account of behaviour which refers to female volubility and male *inexpressiveness*:

Bourne: And what?

Kreutz: What do you mean what? Listen to me. I've — I've been speed-talking for about 60 kilometres now. I talk when I'm nervous. I mean, I talk like *this* when I'm nervous. I'm gonna shut up now.

Bourne: No. Don't do that. I haven't talked to anybody in a while.

Kreutz: Yeah, but *we're* not talking. I'm talking. You've said, like, ten words since we left Zurich.

This exchange reveals certain features that can be attributed to the roles each character enacts; Kreutz produces an *expressive* utterance, revealing aspects of her psychological state, while Bourne responds with an *invitation* to her to continue talking. Significantly, in the light of later developments, this invitation assumes the form of a *directive*, a form of utterance that can be read as a request or a command (Price, 1996: 153). In her reply, Kreutz points out the difference between talking as the production of conversation and talking as monologue. Here, too, it may be possible to discern the recursion of stereotypical speech-behaviours and the assignation of distinct traits to gendered individuals. Bourne goes on to provide his companion with a *physiological* explanation for his preference that she continue speaking; he has a headache and listening to her speak is helping to make it fade away:



Bourne: Well, listening to you, um, it's relaxing.  
I haven't slept in a while and — and I've had this headache.

Kreutz then agrees to continue talking but the next exchange becomes uncomfortable because, instead of telling a story, she interprets Bourne's request as an opportunity to make a conversational opening:

Kreutz: What kind of music do you like?

Huh? What do you like? Come on. Um -

[turns on radio]

Bourne: You know what, never mind.

Kreutz: No. It's fine. Tell me [switching channels]. What do you want to listen to?

Bourne: I don't know.

Kreutz: Come on. It's not that hard. What do you like?

Tell me.

Bourne: I don't know.

In contrast to the tale of sociability, adventure, friendship and risk that Kreutz produces at the beginning of this scene, in which she reminisces about her dissatisfaction with Amsterdam and her move to begin a new venture with friends in Biarritz, Bourne has nothing to offer. His heroic individuality is protected by his memory loss. His lack of family, friends, and complete absence of any interesting tales, even his inability to name the kind of music he likes, presents the viewer with another insight into gendered behaviour. This is the suggestion that Bourne is the unsocialised male, whose recourse is to *pathological* and neurotic behaviour, devoted to detailed planning, violence and unceasing activity, all of which are used to constrain Kreutz's personal trajectory of random but productive encounters.

Once again, the narrative or ideological 'project' insists on a simple explanation; Bourne has no identity, only abilities and thus cannot be held responsible for his instinctive responses to events. His 'paranoia' is legitimate; 'they' are indeed out to get him. Increasingly, therefore, he begins to exert discipline over Kreutz, beginning with the initial act of bribery that buys the escape from Geneva and which, in effect, becomes the down payment that 'purchases' the relationship.

Kreutz's question, 'Who pays \$20,000 for a ride to Paris?' is eventually answered when they discover Bourne's combined occupation and identity, that of assassin. Even before the discovery, the 'unknowing' Bourne is allowed to exert pressure on the disorganized Kreutz, always apparently for her own benefit ('I'm trying to do the right thing for you', he says). Returning from his mission to secure the money from the deposit box in a station locker, he finds that she is not waiting in her assigned place and remonstrates with her:

Bourne: Hey. I told you to stay in the car.

Jesus Christ. I told you to stay in the car.

Kreutz: I needed a drink. I didn't think you would come back.

In effect, what an audience witnesses is the odd proposition that training, ability, and worldly insight are not the detritus which covers an essential identity, but the true components of masculine character. In contemporary society, however, with its formal adherence to notions of equality and opportunity, the unabashed promotion of the retrogres-

sive male, without qualification or irony, can only take place where the protagonist is fundamentally innocent, and when he faces an enemy that threatens his destruction.

Throughout the movie, even during the most traumatic episodes, Bourne must remain an *innocent*, presented in some essential way as a decent person, at whom an *undeserved* evil is directed. He does not initiate violence and his response is, given the situation, proportionate. Yet, once again, the reservations expressed by Kreutz provide an alternative point of view. Bourne's amnesia, for instance, is all along an excuse for the reappearance of an unreconstructed masculinity, a justification provided by the narrative but not attributed to the character:

Bourne: Fuck it. I can't remember anything that happened before two weeks ago.

Kreutz: Lucky you.

Kreutz's reply reveals the deviant perspective which may already have occurred to the viewer; Bourne is provided with all the necessities for a highly mobile contemporary lifestyle, including a large supply of currency (disposable income), multiple nationalities (alternative identities), fashionable surroundings and a high level of physical and mental aptitude. He has shed, again in all *innocence*, the social constraints which many might gladly abandon in return for mobility and freedom. Bourne's loss of identity can be interpreted by the unscrupulous commentator as nothing less than an immense *relief*: 'Lucky you', as his companion says. What, however, does this say about the moral universe inhabited by the characters and, by implication, the enterprise of self-preservation in a real world of agents and operatives?

### AGENTS AND OUTCOMES, FICTIONS AND FACTS

Writing about the reproduction of role identity in *Courage Under Fire*, Tasker notes that the 'prevailing stereotype' of the veteran soldier has been 'an alienated, violent male' whose physical and mental scars 'operate as marks of (masculine) character' (Tasker, 2004: 95). In certain respects, the central character in *The Bourne Identity* inherits this persona. He carries both kinds of disfigurement, but is removed from responsibility (see above) by the narrative device of memory loss. He becomes, therefore, an *innocent*, capable of (but not culpable for) immoral activities. His *limited* verbal interventions return the hero to the classic period of authoritative, muscular masculinity, as opposed to the period in which uncertainty produced a *rhetorical* variant. Isolated from the alibi provided by amnesia, and read at the level of the individual scene, Bourne engages in bribery, assault, manslaughter (in self-defence), destruction of property, illegal surveillance, theft, and dangerous driving!

These transgressions may be valued as essential ingredients of the 'thriller' genre, but it is their production *in opposition to social forces portrayed as less trustworthy*, which secures Bourne's position as the centre of heroic agency. Tasker notes in her analysis of military masculinity, that it is defined not primarily against 'the enemy', but in opposition to 'the insubstantial world of politicians and the domestic media' (Tasker, 2004: 96). Similarly, the most significant threat in *The Bourne Identity* is the power of bureaucracy and the *coercive* apparatus of the 'secret state'. The Bourne character does not, initially



at least, take a principled stand against this coercive authority; he responds to its attacks without understanding their motivation.

## CONCLUSION

The concentration of emotional and narrative resource on the perpetrators rather than the victims of violence, allows the military in general (the armed forces operating in the real world), to evade the charge of criminality. This, I would argue, is why the appearance of such narratives in the story-world matters; not because they produce definite ideological outcomes in audiences *at the time of circulation*, but because they act as preparatory models for other excursions into public consciousness. My contention here is that narrative forms of meaning are not confined to fictional scenarios but are reproduced in other contexts. These include, most significantly, news stories, in which the public is often placed in the moral and executive position of individual state operatives (police, military, secret agents) when they carry out armed or aggressive actions against (in many cases) civilian opponents.

Within the espionage drama, issues of power and effect are presented within a context that displays antagonism between distinct forms of contemporary agency. In essence, the free activity of individuals like Kreutz who appear to create, in a haphazard way, their own destiny, is set against the deep, hidden structures of the government 'agency'. In the embassy scene, Kreutz encounters obdurate reality in the form of bureaucratic procedure and rules, together with their accompanying mentality. The film does not, however, choose to develop the dilemma of this particular 'refugee', nor does it make a real attempt to examine the repressive character of everyday bureaucracy.

Instead, it chooses to assign all illicit and oppressive activity to a secret condition; the existence of a parallel state which works through surveillance and the application of ruthless force. The apparatus of this shadowy institution can be 'shut down' and its operatives disowned. Just as any unofficial programme within the security state is useful because of its deniability, so its fictional counterpart is equally valuable; it too can take the blame for a situation that might otherwise be assigned to the 'democratic' order itself. An objective analysis of effective agency depends, therefore, on understanding the true character of the institutional structures that human beings inherit. Bourne and Kreutz are shown acting within situations and structures which are, in common with most institutional settings encountered in everyday life, not of their making.

A study of the gendered inflection of agency in narrative forms, provides a useful insight into the difference in operational power assigned to characters that are meant to be fighting on the same side. In effect, however, the gendered protagonist in the protected space of the adventure genre remains an essentially masculine figure: despite the limited critique of formal power offered in movies like the *Bourne Identity*, traditional gender roles seem to remain largely undisturbed. Addressing the question of gender and the state, Wendy Brown makes the argument that both state activity and masculine performance have much in common. In recent years, she believes, both have offered an insincere repudiation of their power, in an attempt to disguise political dominance and social privilege. Therefore, according to Brown, the 'central paradox of the late modern state . . . resembles the central paradox of late modern masculinity' (cited in Murphy and Whitty, 2000: 18). Perhaps, however, as Susan Faludi has noted (Faludi, 2008), the situation after '9/11' has changed, in the

sense that few of those in positions of power attempt to offer excuses for the concentration of authority and the narrative dramatisation of coercive force.

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