Cutting and Running from the (Medieval) Middle East: The Mises-hors-scène of Kingdom of Heaven’s Double DVDs

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Abstract

Ridley Scott’s Kingdom of Heaven (2005) certainly invites a reading along the lines of historicist cultural criticism. The final intertitle (and final shot of the film) refers to an “uneasy truce,” which implicitly extended to the film and its more critical reviewers. Despite statements to the contrary, Bush has been widely viewed as advancing U.S. imperialism in more naked form. A number of reviewers and Scott himself have connected the dots between Bush’s reference to a “crusade” against terrorism just after 9/11 and Scott’s film. But understanding the film and its paratexts as relayed between two uncannily double DVDs means that historicism and film and media theory in its cultural studies version cannot escape the trauma which the film and the historicist film critic want to make symbolic and narratable. The film’s uncanny epitexts and delayed delivery, potentially accelerating the speed of reviewing, and collapsing old and new, mechanical and human, oscillate without a telos between cinematic (re)inscriptions and their framing extractions.

Index terms

Keywords : Kingdom of Heaven, film epic, Iraq, paratext, imperialism, narrative loop, DVD extras

Quoted persons : Scott (Ridley), Bush (George W.)
Full text

« There is no escaping the parallels with our time, when leaders who try to make peace are admired, but their efforts are subverted by more radical factions. We set out to tell a terrific story from a supremely dramatic age – not to make a documentary or propagandize. But since our subject is the clash of these two civilizations, and we are now living in the post-9/11 world, Kingdom of Heaven will invariably be looked at from that perspective. (...) Hi, I’m Ridley Scott. I’m the director of Kingdom of Heaven. I think we could say this is the director’s cut in a phrase of being [sic] my favorite version. This isn’t just adding a couple of shots at the beginning, a couple of shots at the end, and doing a long, elongated version of a lot of entries and exits of scenes. This is organic characterization put back into the movie... There are some people who might argue as being [sic] too long or take too long to get there but I think you should see what it is [sic] and you judge for yourself. »

Ridley Scott

« We do not seek an empire. Our nation is committed to freedom for ourselves and for others. »

President George W. Bush

Kingdom of Heaven after Kingdom of Heaven: (No) Exit Strategy from Kerak/Iraq

Recent work on the film epic has sought to explain it in relation to the history of U.S. imperialism. For example, in her book Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000, U.S. Imperialism, Melani McAlister maintains that the Biblical film epic and the sword and sandals film epic were central to the development of U.S. foreign policy from 1946 to 1960 and that film epics such as Cecil B. De Mille’s The Ten Commandments (1956), Quo Vadis (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1951), and Ben Hur (dir. William Wyler, 1964) need to be read not just as anti-totalitarian but also as anti-colonial. The policy of the United State’s global “benevolent supremacy” depended on the U.S. not being regarded either by the rest of the world or by its own citizens as a traditional colonial power but instead as a leader open to all races and cultures. Foreign policy has a cultural component, McAlister observes, in which the film epic played a highly significant part, framing the “religious narratives in terms of contemporary politics” (p.44).

Ridley Scott’s Kingdom of Heaven (2005) certainly invites a reading along the lines of this kind of historicist criticism. The final intertitle (and final shot of the film) refers to an “uneasy truce,” which implicitly extended to the film and its more critical reviewers. Despite statements to the contrary, Bush has been widely viewed as advancing U.S. imperialism in more naked form. A number of reviewers of Kingdom of Heaven and Scott himself have connected the dots between Bush’s reference to a “crusade” against terrorism just after 9/11 and Scott’s film. The final intertitle of the film also alludes to the
The King, Richard the Lionheart, went on to the Holy Land and crusaded for three years. His struggle to regain Jerusalem ended in an uneasy truce with Saladin. Nearly a thousand years later, peace in the Kingdom of Heaven remains elusive.

Indeed, some reviewers of The Kingdom of Heaven drew parallels between the draft screenplay and the war in Iraq before the film was released.5 Cambridge professor Jonathan Riley-Smith dismissed the story as “Osama bin Laden’s version of history,” claiming it will “fuel the Islamic fundamentalists.”6 Muslim critics of the film’s draft screenplay saw it the opposite way: “I believe this movie teaches people to hate Muslims,” UCLA Islamic law professor Khaled Abou El Fadl told the New York Times in August 2005 after reading a script the newspaper had provided, which he regarded as being riddled with Islamophobic stereotypes.7

Many reviewers noted the parallel with 9/11 and the war in Iraq before the film was released, and Scott himself writes in the introduction to the movie tie-in book that his film will inevitably be read in light of 9/11.8 Similarly, Scott and his editor Dody Dorn refer to “what’s happening in politics today” and fanaticism in their audiocommentary on a deleted scene (of the extended four disc DVD) entitled “Hattin Aftermath” in which Saladin overrules his advisor and orders the execution of all of his Christian prisoners because they are fanatics. Moreover, Kingdom of Heaven is one of several film epics that have been read in relation to the war in Iraq.9 Wolfgang Peterson’s Troy (2004) was read similarly in relation to Iraq, and Oliver Stone’s Alexander (2004) pointedly drew parallels between George W. Bush and Alexander the Great (Colin Farrell).10 Furthermore, Kingdom of Heaven appeared in theaters as older epics were also being re-released, including Demetrius and the Gladiators (dir. Delmer Daves, 1954), Helen of Troy (dir. Robert Wise, 1956), The Bible (dir. John Huston, 1966), Hannibal (dir. Edgar G. Ulmer and Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, 1959), and Alexander the Great (dir. Robert Rossen, 1956). Scott’s Gladiator and William Wyler’s Ben Hur were both released in new DVD editions in August 2005.

Yet the timing, on which this kind of historicist reading depends, is somewhat off. According to Vivien Sobchack, the Hollywood historical epic spanned the 1900s to the 1960s, ending with Anthony Mann’s Fall of the Roman Empire in the wake of the end of the Hollywood studio system, the rise of television, the Civil Rights movement, feminism, and the end of the cultural homogeneity of the Cold War as the United States entered Vietnam:

> The era of the Hollywood historical epic [...] can be characterized as informed by those cultural values identified with rational humanism, with bourgeois patriarchy, with colonialism and imperialism, and with entrepreneurial and corporate capitalism. It was in the 1960s that, for a variety of reasons, these ideological values were placed in major crisis. (1999, p. 41)

Scott’s return to the Hollywood sword and sandals film epic with Gladiator in 2000 – the year after Sobchack’s article appeared in print – was both unpredictable and inexplicable in her terms.11 Drawing parallels between cinematic and historical moments of production in the case of the resurgent film epic also proves difficult because Alexander and Kingdom of Heaven were in development long before the war in Iraq began. While these timing problems do not negate the value of historicizing films such as Kingdom of Heaven, they do call into question some of the central and unexamined assumptions.
underlying the historicist practice of using parallels and equivalences between a film and its moment of production. The word “moment” is crucial to historicist film criticism. Extra-cinematic history, however full of contradictions, is spatialized as a single amount of time, a span of years, a period with a label like the “Cold War.” Hence, only the theatrical release of a film is typically historicized; later broadcasts of a film on television and later releases of the film on video, laserdisc and DVD are ignored by historicist cultural critics, the assumption being that these later horizons of reception do not determine anew the film’s meaning and a corollary assumption holds that the meaning of a film is complete, that the film, once released, has an integrity that does not change over time or in its releases.\(^{12}\) To be sure, the impact of the film in theatrical release and the extent of promotion is deeper than the later reception of the film on DVD, the default audience being individual home viewers. Nevertheless, DVD editions are significantly promoted and they are also widely reviewed on various websites and to some extent in major newspapers.\(^{13}\) At the end of his audiocommentary on *Kingdom of Heaven*, Scott mentions the sales of the first DVD and says that the possibility of his making a sequel will depend not only on the box office for the film but also on how well both DVD versions sell.

Consider further the digital afterlife of *Kingdom of Heaven*. Scott’s film is typical in being released twice on DVD in two different cuts.\(^{14}\) The two DVD editions were both released theatrically the same day, the extended edition being limited to a two-week engagement at Fairfax Laemelle Theater, an art house theater in Los Angeles.\(^{15}\) The 144 minute theatrical cut was released in October 2005 on a two disc DVD edition, the first disc being the film and the second disc composed of paratextual documentaries going from the film’s preproduction and production to its release. A second 191 minute extended version of the film was released a year later as a 4 disc edition, the first two discs being the film and the third and fourth containing more documentaries with academic scholars, production notes, galleries, storyboards, and so on.\(^{16}\) (This DVD version was given a brief theatrical exhibition at the Laemelle Theater in December 2005.) Both DVD editions include pop-up “footnotes” written on horizontally elongated red Templar’s crosses in the “Pilgrim’s Guide” on the two disc DVD and in the “Engineer’s Guide” on the four disc DVD; and the extended DVD edition contains three audio-commentary tracks. Some of the footnotes in the Engineer’s Guide refer the viewer to features on other discs of the extended edition. The guides on both DVD editions of *The Kingdom of Heaven* invite the viewer to *read* them as hyper(paragraph)texts rather than *view* them as films designed to be watched from beginning to end.

*Kingdom of Heaven*, Ridley Scott, 2005
Once the consumption of movies is detached from the absolute isolation of absorbed viewing (in the dark, at 24 frames a second, in narrative order and without exterior intrusions), the cohesion of narrative comes under pressure from external discourses, that is, production context, anecdote, history. But digital spectatorship also affects the internal pattern of narrative: sequences can be easily skipped or repeated, overturning hierarchies of privilege, and setting up unexpected links that displace the chain of meaning invested in cause and effect.17

Since *Kingdom of Heaven* is hardly alone either in having more than one DVD edition or in containing a variety of paratextual supplements, commonly known as “extras,” I think the implications of these aspects of both *Kingdom of Heaven* DVD editions may best be examined by first placing them in relation to broader problems for historicist cultural criticism, posed by the digitalization not only of the film epic but of film *tout court*. The digitalization of films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* calls into question the underlying and respectively narratological and phenomenological assumptions about the linearity and successiveness of historical and cinematic narrative, on the one hand, and about the integrity of the film as complete object, on the other. As Laura Mulvey observes, video and digital technologies have had a significant impact both on the cohesiveness of film narrative and on film spectatorship:

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A close examination of the two *Kingdom of Heaven* DVD editions will show that the impact of digitalization on film narrative and spectatorship is more radical than Mulvey allows, and hence equally troubling to historicist cultural film criticism and to film theory. Mulvey refers to the “original cohesion” of celluloid film, but it is precisely this original cohesion that is in question with the digitalization of cinema. For the DVD now often delivers multiple versions, usually only one in theatrical release, but all of which are typically part of the film’s production. The digitalization of film changes its phenomenology and hence its narrative cohesion as a unity of duration and extension. Vivien Sobchack writes:


http://babel.revues.org/815
With the digitalization of the film epic, however, this unity of extension in time and space falls apart. The delayed delivery of film on DVD disrupts this fantasy of priapic cinema by fragmenting and proliferating versions of the film. Instead of one film, we get different films, each one an ostensibly final cut, accompanied by different paratextual commentaries and other extras. Unlike celluloid film, then, digital films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* are no longer one thing, but are subject instead to multiple recuts, which produce arguably more or less cohesive narratives. Similarly, digitalization redefines the phenomeno-logy of film but also, in consequence, what counts as the mise-en-scène. Like historicist cultural critics, film theorists such as Tom Conley and Tom Cohen maintain that a counter-narrative is inscribed in cinema through hieroglyphs, maps, and other kinds of “writing,” adopting a conventional understanding of the mise-en-scène as set design.

Yet in digital film the cinematic scene is no longer determined only by what is in the shot but by which scenes remain in the film; that is, the digital film scene, deleted, extended, or restored and with or without audiocommentary, is a product of film (re)editing and (re)projection as well as shot composition and space, thus further undermining the notion that the final version is completely integrated.

New kinds of interactions between film and spectator are also opened up on DVD through the construction of new paratextual interfaces between word, spoken and written, and image that further disturb the integrity of the mise-en-scène. The additional scenes in the extended version and the paratexts in both versions of *Kingdom of Heaven* constitute what I call “mises-hors-scène”: they are meant to serve as interpretative guides to the film by standing apart from the film and thereby framing the way we are asked to read it or read about it as well as define the limits of the film by seeing what is in it and what is not in it. Far from being merely promotional material or film trivia for fans, *Kingdom of Heaven*’s DVD paratexts are, in my view, central to a (re)reading of both of its versions.

It’s no accident that Ridley Scott addresses 9/11 in the preface to the *Kingdom of Heaven* tie-in book or that *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) indirectly addresses its critics in its paratext when declaring an uneasy truce in the final intertitle. The two versions of the film and the paratexts on both DVDs enable Scott to engage retrospectively and repeatedly not only with the controversy over its putative partisanship in regard to the Muslims, but with two additional related controversies as well. The second controversy concerned a perceived lack of authenticity and romanticism in the film, especially the use of Sir Walter Scott’s *The Talisman* and similar nineteenth century fictional accounts of the Crusades as sources. The third concerned a lawsuit by popular historian James Reston claiming writer William Monahan had plagiarized from his book *Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (2001), which includes a chapter entitled “Kingdom of Heaven.”

Both DVD editions of *Kingdom of Heaven* and their respective paratexts respond to the pre-release controversies, I will argue, but do not resolve them. Scott attempts to exert control over the film’s identity by giving it greater length and more scenes and over its reception by including a variety of new paratexts, or, more precisely, epitexts (paratexts added after the film was first released). Both DVD versions include documentaries with historians who vouch for the film’s authenticity, for example. The theatrical version DVD includes an A&E television channel documentary *Movie Real: Kingdom of Heaven* and the extended version DVD includes a “new featurette on the film’s historical accuracy” entitled “Creative Accuracy: The Scholars Speak,” that includes for balance, male and
female, Western and Middle Eastern scholars identified as, “Dr. Nancy Caciola, Ph. D. University of California, San Diego,” “Dr. Hamar Dabashi, Ph. D. Professor of Iranian Studies, Columbia University,” and “Dr. Donald Spoto, Writer/Theologian.”

Yet the oblique manner in which these extras and the audiocommentaries address the controversies, subverts Scott’s attempts at control insofar as they take the form of censorship as much as they do illumination. The scholars in the Creative Accuracy documentary, for example, did not serve as consultants on the film, and do not directly engage in their commentary the scholars who savaged the film before it was released theatrically.

Instead of giving Scott a controlling narrative of the film or its making, the mises-hors-scène of both versions of Kingdom of Heaven, whether in the form of added scenes or paratextual extras such as the controversial draft screenplay and similarly controversial storyboards of Saladin beheading Guy de Lusignan (Marton Csokas) after parading Guy on an ass, do the opposite: they produce a paratextual proliferation in which even more narratives arise to defend, explain, and excuse why it is the way it is in either version. The continued response to the pre-theatrical release controversies on both DVDs is all the more odd, given that response to the shorter theatrical release put an end to the pre-release controversies: the American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee and the Council on American Islamic Relations issued statements in support of the film. Foreign box office in the Middle East was likewise positive, with Lebanese audiences cheering when Saladin places upright on an altar a crucifix that had been knocked on the floor of a church during the fight over Jerusalem.

Kingdom of Heaven’s mises-hors-scène are symptomatic of the film’s contradictory imperialist and anti-imperialist trajectories, its desire implicitly to justify both the occupation of Iraq and an exit from it. What appears to be a forward movement involving an exit (leave the world a better place than you found it, to paraphrase Balian’s motto etched above his forge) in the form of an exteriorizing, paratextual frame that takes the spectator out of the film’s scene, turns out to be a haunted return and revisitation, a “déjà (p/re)vu” with the result that one cannot tell if Scott’s film is coming or going.

Indeed, the paratextual mises-hors-scène make more evident a narratological problem already present in both versions of the film. As we will see when turning to Kingdom of Heaven’s use of two staples of the film epic genre, the balcony scene and the scale model (both involve the survey of territory or women in order to possess them), are disturbed and disrupted. The scale model of Jerusalem, the toy boat that local children and Balian float in the newly irrigated fields of his home, Ibelin, and young Baldwin’s toy knight, all serve to literalize Scott’s inability to frame and place properly scaled elements in the scene of Kingdom of Heaven. It is as if Scott couldn’t stand outside the frame at a distance that would allow him to decide what to keep in the scene or what to take out and that consequently, he requires paratextual self-justifications for his redo of the film on the extended version DVD.

I read this problem of framing with respect to scale and place of the mise-en-scène as symptomatic not only of Scott’s attempts to resolve the pre-release controversies over the film but also of his own ambivalence about the bearing of 9/11, itself an uncanny event re-transmitted through a narrative loop, on how his film was edited. Unlike American neoconservative imperialists such as George W. Bush who disavow their own imperialism, Scott apparently has no problem with a superpower like the US or UK being an empire. Yet Scott has no wish to justify the occupation of the Middle East by the “coalition of the
willing” either. *Kingdom of Heaven* floats a fantasy of decolonization, an exit strategy for Iraq that allows for an uneasy truce, if not peace, signaled by the repeated use of crane shots behind soldiers or civilians marching away from the camera.

**Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005**

Scott can’t simply let the Middle East go, however, and so builds in a narrative pattern of exiting and return. Hence, the film’s recursive narrative structure, its beginning and ending as returns and departures: the film begins with Godfrey’s return to Europe from the Crusades and almost immediately leaving it, with Balian riding to catch up with him; just after arriving back at his forge in France, Balian and Sybilla leave together at the end of the film presumably to catch up with Richard I, and in a shot very similar to the one that began the film, Balian pauses at his wife’s grave before riding off at the end of the film. Hence the siege of Jerusalem ends with a slow motion tilt shot of the defenders from behind, the camera rising over the breached wall, followed by a lingering forty second overhead shot that stands, in my view, as an emblem of failed exit as vertical transcendence in the film: Arabs and Christians continue to fight in slow motion and morph, as the camera zooms back, into corpses stacked on top of the rubble and each other, neither side able to get out of Jerusalem or get into it but instead both are stuck at the threshold qua gap.

Laura Mulvey remarks that DVD “‘add-ons’ with background information, interviews and commentaries” shift “movies of the past... from pure entertainment into a quasi-museum-like status” (p.27). The two *Kingdom of Heaven* DVDs resemble less a museum than a mausoleum, the two spaces being more than phonetically connected, as Theodor Adorno and others have shown. The *Kingdom of Heaven* DVDs uncannily encrypt, in the sense of encode and inter, the controversies to which they respond: various extras have been buried and yet remain there to be raided, exhumed, ex-scripted, so to speak, by the viewer. Scott stands in relation to these DVD extras as Balian stands in relation to the children’s toys and scale models in the film: the various DVD extras have a relatively small scale in relation to the two versions of the film, a belatedness about them that won’t ever catch up to the impact of the film in theatrical release. Nevertheless they take advantage of what are effectively deracinated or “homeless” entertainment systems in order to supplant the theatrical release by retroactively reframing the film’s meaning and genesis.
“Mission” Accomplished

In order to understand how the film’s mises-hors-scène disturb the film’s attempts to achieve formal unity, we must first grasp the relationship between the film’s fantasy of (de)colonization and its form, particularly its recursive narrative structure and the scale it adopts to characterize Balian’s heroism in childlike terms. Though the film is set in 1184 during the Second Crusade, its idealized account of knighthood makes the film more closely resemble the later Children’s Crusades. Religion is front and center in *Kingdom of Heaven*, but the real purpose of the film’s division of the Christians into evil, intolerant, and hypocritical fundamentalists, on the one hand, and good, spiritual, ecumenical, and morally upright multiculturalists, on the other, is to distinguish a legitimate from illegitimate imperial occupation of the Holy Land by the Christians. Thus, the Templars are murderous marauders who provoke war for personal gain. They are purely exploitative occupiers. In contrast, Sybilla (Eva Green) and Marshall Tiberias (Jeremy Irons) are “good” occupiers who want to allow the same freedoms to Islam and Christianity alike and who want to maintain trade and peace with Saladin. Balian occupies what Scott calls in his audiocommentary on the deleted scene “Golgotha,” a middle position, standing with the good imperialist occupiers against the evil ones but unwilling to “do a little evil for the sake of a greater good,” as Sybilla says. After arriving in the Holy Land to further his father’s mission, namely, recover Jerusalem in order to build a better world, a “kingdom of conscience,” a “kingdom of heaven” where Muslims and Christians will live in peace, he is greeted by the execution of Templar knights for their criminal attacks on Arab caravans.

Balian is a quasi-pacifist imperialist, someone who is interested, finally, neither in war nor in occupation but who wants to help the locals help themselves, rather like a Peace Corps volunteer. After redeeming his wife from Hell by burying her cross necklace at Golgotha, he ends his pilgrimage and goes, at King Baldwin’s order, to Ibelin to defend the trade route and become an engineer.

As a good occupier who improves his lands, irrigates farmlands at Ibelin, Balian “will build a new Jerusalem,” as Sybilla puts it, a phrase that echoes Godfrey’s phrase, “a new world.” Scott earlier made a film about Columbus called *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992) but Balian is not like Columbus (Gérard Depardieu) in Scott’s film, who goes berserk in the New World and discovers, to his deep dismay, that he has helped turn Paradise into Hell. Balian wants moral improvement as well. Balian also says to Nasir (Alexander Siddig) that he can keep the horse and even his freedom, (Balian says he does not keep slaves) and Balian’s terms of surrender to Saladin are that the people of Jerusalem live and not be enslaved. Reversing the domination of the male gaze and eroticizing of the female body that are typical of Orientalist harem bathing scenes, *Kingdom of Heaven* shows a chaste Balian who is the object of the gaze: after bathing at his house in Jerusalem, he demands a towel from the manservant and covers himself at the waist with it, while impatiently allowing several smiling, attractive young woman briefly to towel his torso dry as they laugh in enjoyment.31 Sybilla’s husband, Guy de Lusignan, by contrast, initiates sex with a very pretty young Arab woman who is apparently one of Sybilla’s ladies-in-waiting. In other words, Balian is the only truly good imperialist occupier. He will not sell his soul to become powerful by murdering Guy and marrying the Queen, whose son will become Baldwin V when her brother, the leper King Baldwin IV (Edward Norton) dies. As a working class hero, Balian will accept Sybilla as his wife only if she abdicates her position as Queen and becomes a blacksmith’s wife.
Yet Balian’s difference from Sybilla and Tiberias is one of degree rather than kind. He is no Balian of Arabia trying to mobilize the Arabs to expel the occupiers. Balian is always and only a defender. He never attacks or lays siege (unlike Cecil B. De Mille’s *The Crusades*, 1935), and he will not engage in political struggles and will not become King. In the extended version, the village priest finds Balian at the grave of his dead wife and taunts him; “You never fight back. You always turn the other cheek.” Balian does not fight back until, in a later scene, he sees that the priest has stolen the cross from his wife’s corpse.

The fight in the desert oasis between Balian and Nasir’s servant over the black horse offers a more significant example. The scene is inspired by Sir Walter Scott’s *The Talisman* and its film adaptation *King Richard and the Crusaders* (dir. David Butler, 1954) in which the pugnacious and belligerent Scottish hero, Sir Kenneth, makes an immediate and intolerant challenge to Saladin based on their religious difference. Unlike Scott’s hero, Balian says he does not want to fight. Further departing from the Scott novel in this scene, *Kingdom of Heaven’s* Balian is put at a disadvantage, on foot fighting against a man charging him on horseback, rather than initiating the charge on horseback as in the novel. Similarly, Balian waits for Saladin’s siege attack to come first, and only then returns fire; he doesn’t fight at the battle of Hattin, as he does in the film’s draft screenplay; and when three Templars with their swords or maces drawn, on horse and on foot, come to kill him at Guy’s order, Balian doesn’t use his sword, which hangs on his horse out of reach, but instead uses a piece of pottery and a knight’s own dagger to kill the last of the three.

By the end of the film, Balian has become known chiefly for his reactive tactics. As Richard I tells him, “we come by this road to find Balian who was defender of Jerusalem.” In reactively defending rather than actively attacking, Balian is simply following the orders of his father Godfrey (Liam Niesson) and the Hospitaller (David Thewlis). On his deathbed, Godfrey tells Balian to “safeguard the helpless”; and the Hospitaller says to Balian in Jerusalem that “holiness is in right action and the courage on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves.” Baldwin IV voices similar sentiments to Balian just before Baldwin dies: “Go now to your father’s house at Ibelin, and from there protect the pilgrim road. Protect the helpless. And then perhaps one day when I am helpless you will come and protect me.” Balian himself passes on this message of defence when he knits commoners before the siege on Jerusalem, telling them “safeguard the helpless” and that “it has fallen to us, to defend Jerusalem, and we have made our preparations as well as they can be made.”

In its reluctance to provide a resting place to which Balian might return and reside, *Kingdom of Heaven* suggests not only that Balian is a good occupier, but, contradictorily and more fundamentally, that he is not really a colonizer at all. Balian is not only a defender, but, more significantly a loser, symbolically castrated in psychoanalytic terms and lacking property in economic terms. In the extended version, he gives Ibelin to his Almaric (Velibor Topic), the knight who served Godfrey as well as Balian, before the siege, should Balian not survive (49:49-40:22). Similarly, Balian defends Jerusalem only to surrender it and then immediately exits from the Holy Land for his village in France. He loses consciousness several times while in the Holy Land, first after the shipwreck, then at the end of the battle for Kerak, again after killing the three Templars sent to assassinate him, and finally after the battle for Jerusalem. In his ability to reside and be at rest in the Holy Land, he mirrors Tiberias, who tells Balian that he started out believing in God and
then saw that the Crusades were all about the accumulation of power and wealth. Neither are any of the other good Christians colonizers. Godfrey dies on the way back, the Hospitaller is beheaded after the battle of Hattin, and Sybilla abdicates and leaves the Holy Land with Balian.

*Kingdom of Heaven*’s fantasy of decolonization thus takes the form of disavowing any colonization of the Holy Land in the first place. Hence, the logic of Balian inexplicably losing the black war horse after the shipwreck, only to find it at the oasis, and then, after winning the fight, give it away to Nasir. Although the latter gives Balian back the horse near the end of the film, he does so immediately and only after Saladin retakes possession of Jerusalem. The exchange of the horse is not only symbolic of friendship despite religious differences but also of who owns the Holy Land. The giver in both cases gives when his side owns the Holy Land.34 And though the city is seen changing hands here, Jerusalem at this point in the film is no longer only a geographical space but an idea as well. At the deserted battlefield of Hattin, Tiberias tells Balian that “Jerusalem is finished” before he leaves for Cyprus, meaning the idea of a better world is over. Similarly, Balian tells Sybilla after he has negotiated the surrender of Jerusalem with Saladin, that the city that lives in his and her hearts and heads can never be surrendered.

*Kingdom of Heaven*’s even more fundamental strategy for erasing colonial possession is the lack of narrative closure: the end of the film does not make it clear where Balian will end up and what he will do when he leaves France a second time (apparently, his murder of the village priest has been forgotten). The openness of the ending, at once a return to France and almost immediate departure from it, is further underlined by the film’s recursive narrative structure. The film begins and ends with the same shot of the cemetery where Balian’s wife is buried. When Balian pauses at his wife’s grave, the music returns to the opening theme of the film. Some of the dialogue exchanged between Richard I (Ian Glen) and Balian echoes that between Godfrey and Balian when Godfrey returns to the village near the beginning of the film, with Balian giving Richard I the same directions, word for word, that Godfrey had earlier given Balian: “You go to where the men speak Italian and then continue until they speak something else.” The extended version also adds an early scene in which Balian has a flashback of his dead wife planting a tree behind the forge, meant to be recalled at the end of the film when he touches the buds on the tree. The delay between Richard’s departure and Balian and Sybilla riding off in the same direction, also repeats Balian’s delayed departure after Godfrey leaves the village.

The implication of the film’s final three shots of Balian and Sybilla riding away from the village cemetery is that Balian and Sybilla will catch up with Richard I and join the Third Crusade, which will end, as the final intertitle then tells us, in a truce. Assuming it is reasonable to draw this conclusion, *Kingdom of Heaven* leaves us with a series of unanswered questions even as its final intertitle, about the truce Richard negotiated and elusive peace of the present day, shifts from the present of the film into a past tense that frames what will have happened to the characters after the film ends, and shifts again to the aftermath of these events as of 2005: If Balian is returning with Sybilla, does that mean the two of them plan to rule as King and Queen? Or are they simply going to support Richard Cœur de Lion? If they are going back, their return to France seems rather pointless. Why did Sybilla refuse to be Queen and cut her hair if she never meant to abdicate permanently? After all, he leaves Jerusalem and goes back home. The ending also significantly differs from Balian’s earlier departure in having Sybilla accompany him and ride off ahead while he pauses at his wife’s grave. Has she had enough of his mourning
and blacksmithing and decided to seduce Richard I instead, now the leader of the crusade and a monarch?

We can begin to get a fuller sense of how *Kingdom of Heaven*'s narrative recursions and lack of closure are symptomatic of its fantasy of (non)occupation by attending to Balian’s characterization as loser or castrated hero in relation to the film’s mise-en-scène, more specifically, in the film’s balcony scenes and use of scale models. The possession and holding of territory from a commanding, heroic, and male perspective emerges as a problem of scale that threatens to collapse distinctions both between genders and between adulthood and childhood.

*Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005*

The return to France at the end of *Kingdom of Heaven* is meant to signal Balian’s transition to adulthood and capacity for renewal. An eyeline match between Sybilla and Balian as she looks out at him as he touches the buds on a tree his dead wife planted in the yard below the forge, each of them smiling in mutual recognition, seems to affirm the transition both have made. They seem to have mourned their losses, he of his dead wife and child, she of her dead brother and dead son. Yet this eyeline match quietly suggests that the transition is incomplete. As she looks out at him from above the balcony of the forge, she takes a position that the film marks throughout as the dominant one, reinstating her position on horseback looking down at him on foot in the first encounter, and again when she arrives at Ibelin and demands his hospitality. The suggestion that Sybilla’s position above Balian marks the persistence of something left unmourned is signaled more loudly by the difference between their responses to the grave of the dead wife at the end of the film: Balian pauses, but Sybilla rides on ahead.

To appreciate more fully how Sybilla’s gaze is the source of an aberration in mourning that disturbs narrative closure, we need to consider first how the film’s fantasy of colonial dispossession requires an undoing of Balian’s positions as commanding spectator and director in control of his mise-en-scène. Land is haunted by the dead in *Kingdom of Heaven*, and the film marks this haunting by including a balcony scene at Ibelin that recalls similar scenes in earlier film epics.

*Ben Hur, William Wyler, 1959 – Spartacus, Stanley Kubrick, 1960*  
*Troy, Wolfgang Peterson, 2004 – Alexander, Oliver Stone, 2004*
In *Ben Hur* (dir. William Wyler, 1959), Arrius (Jack Hawkins) and Ben Hur (Charlton Heston) talk about Ben Hur returning home while on a balcony overlooking Rome. *Spartacus* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1960) contains a balcony scene with Crassus (Laurence Olivier) telling his slave Antoninus (Tony Curtis) about Rome, which he personifies as a demanding and dominating irresistible mistress. *Alexander* (dir. Oliver Stone, 2004) contains a balcony scene with Alexander (Colin Farrell) sounding like a neoconservative talking about multiculturalism and freedom with Hephaiston (Jared Leto), and the two communicating their mutual affection. In *Troy* (dir. Wolfgang Peterson, 2004), Priam (Peter O’Toole) and his son Hector (Eric Bana) discuss whether to force Paris (Orlando Bloom) to send Helen (Diane Kruger) home. These balcony scenes are clearly homosocial, even homoerotic in the cases of *Spartacus* and *Alexander*, and arguably so in *Ben Hur*. To gaze is to command, whether to dominate or liberate. *Kingdom of Heaven* has a similar scene in which Balian takes possession of Ibelin, unused lands he has inherited from his father. The scene begins inside the bedroom with a servant opening the door to the balcony in a symmetrical composition. The camera then tracks Balian as he walks from inside the room, outside onto the balcony, where he looks out with Almaric behind him, followed by a long shot of the dry lands below.

*Kingdom of Heaven*, Ridley Scott, 2005

The cinematic mastery in the balcony scene at Ibelin is recalled later when Balian, again with Almaric standing behind him, surveys the land outside of Jerusalem to determine the distances Saladin’s siege towers will be at, so his fire at them will be accurate (1:09:00-
1:09:35). After a close-up of Balian’s right eye looking down the instrument blade, a solitary Arab appears on horseback in a prosthetic long shot taken with a telephoto lens. Balian concludes correctly “they’re here,” and the film confirms his inference with a helicopter shot coming up over the horseman and continuing forward over the mountains to show the enormous size of Saladin’s troops in the distance, again as if the shot were a prosthetic extension of Balian’s sightline.

The characterological and cinematic potency of these sequences depends, however, on Balian not colonizing the land for his own purposes but developing and defending it for the residents. Hence, the film’s introduction of the anachronism of Balian teaching the Arabs how to irrigate, something they had known how to do for thousands of years.

We may now begin to understand the significance of what may seem to be only a relatively minor problem when Sybilla gazes down at Balian from the village forge at the end of the film. Indeed, Sybilla’s commanding position above Balian in that scene recalls a more significant problem earlier in the film: Sybilla appears to “recolonize” Balian’s, instead of being, in typical Orientalist fashion, its erotic object. Sybilla initially appears to be just such an object. Though of French descent, Sybilla was born and raised in the Holy Land and has never been to France. She has clearly “gone native,” as her Arabic dress, eye make-up and henna testify. Yet she seems to “recolonize” Balian’s land by occupying the commanding position of spectatorship as he does, turning him into an object of her gaze.

For example, after she has bathed shortly upon arriving at Ibelin, Sybilla goes to a window grate through which she watches Balian helping his serfs irrigate his lands. We then see her face from the other side of the window much of it hidden behind the grate. As if sensing her watching him, Balian pauses and looks up at the window. The sequence begins as a conventional shot-reverse-shot sequence with her looking at Balian, then Balian looking at her. Yet instead of cutting to Sybilla looking at Balian, the sequence ends with a shot from his position looking at Sybilla’s room. From this distance, he can’t possibly see her face or even if someone is actually looking. In what seems to be a commanding spectatorial position, she sees him without being seen.

Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005

By presenting her gaze in this way, the film risks making both Sybilla into an immoral character and Balian into a weak character. Sybilla’s obscured face and her ability to see without being seen darkens her character and places her interests at odds with Balian’s. Balian’s character is weakened in a later balcony scene with Sybilla washing Balian’s face, which further erodes his position as Orientalist male spectator in command of his lands by
not including a shot of the irrigated lands. (Significantly, a deleted scene entitled “Penitent Man II” shows Balian on his balcony at night surveying his lands as the camera rotates 360 degrees.)

The extended DVD version pointedly marks the erosion of Balian’s power and the darkness of Sybilla’s by extending a montage sequence that begins in the afternoon with shots of Balian in the irrigated fields of Ibelin, followed by shots of the field, in one case, a dissolve of the partly wet lands not a matching shot of the irrigated lands later in the day, as two men ride their camels on the right of the shot. A high angle, long shot of the field even later in the evening (1:17:32) follows, but instead of matching back to Balian’s gaze, the film cuts to Sybilla having her hands painted with henna by her maid, followed by a close-up of Sybilla, and then a long shot pan of the irrigated lands that matches her sightline, as she looks out at them from over the balcony. The montage sequence, unified by Arabic instrumental music, ends as a sapphosocial sequence as Sybilla looking out at Balian, who is now completely unaware that she is observing him.

Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005

The harsh sounds at the end of the caravan attack continue into the long shot of the irrigated fields at the beginning of this added scene and are replaced by a flute when we enter the room. But the sound of the attack returns as we see the close-up of the skeleton and the words “hoc ecitis.” The panoramic shot of the irrigated lands and the overlapping and recurring sounds of the caravan attack mark Ibelin not as an idyllic pastoral space distinct from the violence of the caravan route wherein Guy and Reynald de Chattilon (Brendan Gleeson) make their attack, but rather as a space of death: only in a horizontal gaze approaching and approximating their future deaths can the lovers perhaps stand apart from the violence of Guy and Reynald.
Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005

To distinguish Sybilla from a colonizer, the film represents her as someone not interested in colonization but in peace and moral improvement. By constructing her gaze as symbolically castrated, Kingdom of Heaven goes so far as to occasionally sacrifice continuity of sightlines and literally flattens out her gaze. Before and during the battle of Kerak and its aftermath she gets a commanding, panoramic view until the very last shot. As the battle begins, a long shot of the battle from the castle, its towers symmetrically on the left and right sides of the frame, is followed by a close-up shot of her face looking down at the battle. This same sequence of a long shot of the battle and the (except tighter) close-up of Sybilla is repeated twice during the battle, once after Balian seems to be killed, once when Baldwin arrives and negotiates a truce with Saladin. It is used again when Baldwin enters the fortress to punish Reynald, and twice more after Reynald has been punished.

The Kerak sequence ends, however, with a medium long shot of Sybilla that retroactively subverts her commanding sightline from above. After Reynald is thrashed by Baldwin, a medium close-up of Balian looking up is followed by the same close-up of Sybilla, then by a shot of Guy observing Balian and looking up at Sybilla. Yet the next medium long shot shows Sybilla turning away from Guy to enter the fortress Keep, not above him but on the same ground, level with Balian and Guy. The sequence cuts her gaze down to size, so to speak, flattens it out. A similar breach of continuity editing occurs with respect to Sybilla’s gaze after the battle when a medium close-up shot of Sybilla looking down from above the siege battlefield is followed by a long shot of Balian returning from negotiations with Saladin. Yet in this shot-reverse-shot sequence, Balian looks up not at Sybilla but instead, in successive medium low angle shots, at two groups of defenders on the ramparts who are looking back at him.

Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005
Kingdom of Heaven’s fantasy of an exit strategy as decolonization involves vertical camera work, like the crane shots of the troops, and metaphors: “rise a knight.” Sybilla’s gaze becomes progressively more impotent after Kerak as she becomes a decolonizing loser like Balian. She watches silently when Guy is paraded at Saladin’s command on an ass outside Jerusalem (disc two 1:02:57) and before the siege when Balian knights the commoners (disc two 1:55:04).

The shared impotence of Balian and Sybilla’s gazes is registered in two odd recognition scenes between them, one in which Balian logically should have recognized Sybilla and the other in which he shouldn’t have done. In the first scene, during the siege, Balian walks past Sybilla when she tends to the injured gravedigger (Martin Hancock) without noticing her, even though she faces him as he walks past. One may infer that he misses her because he doesn’t know she has cut her hair. Yet the gravedigger does recognize her, just as he also earlier recognized Balian when Balian knights him before the siege. In an even odder scene after the siege, Balian does recognize her after almost riding past her when she is leaving Jerusalem along with the other refugees. It’s unclear in this scene how he could have spotted her since he passes her from behind.

Kingdom of Heaven pays a rather stiff price in cinematic and narrative consistency, then, for giving up a claim to colonial possession by undoing the colonial gaze. For the decolonization of Sybilla’s gaze ends up making her character less rather than more consistent, either morally pure or less morally pure than Balian (she is willing to engage in hardball politics). Though Scott says in his introduction to the extended version that the Sybilla plot was the central addition, he does not mention that his director’s cut nevertheless deleted two scenes in which Sybilla is held responsible by Guy and holds herself responsible to Balian for Saladin’s siege, because she euthanized her son soon after he developed leprosy. The third disc contains some of Scott’s note cards on the screenplay, one of which describes Sybilla as a “vampire”; she is a murderous, scheming harpy fighting with Tiberias for control of Jerusalem who goes mad because she has poisoned her son in order to save him from her brother’s fate. Leaving these scenes out may make Sybilla more sympathetic than their inclusion would have done.

Yet even in the extended DVD version, something of the draft screenplay’s arguably misogynistic version of Sybilla remains. Her fur-lined hood in the last two close-ups of her at Balian’s forge both obscures and recalls the shot of looking outside at Balian from behind the window grate and, even more tellingly, when her mirror reflection becomes monstrous as it morphs into her dead brother’s deformed face when she cuts her hair
short. Insofar as Sybilla seems to colonize land or Balian through her gaze at all, she is marked in the film as monstrous. However, the efforts to redeem her by decolonizing her gaze, having her do social work (becoming a proto-Florence Nightingale during the siege) and abdicating after she cuts her hair, equally mark her as monstrous. Indeed, the scene in which she cuts her hair suggests that her mirror reflection as a purified Joan of Arc martyr figure is indistinguishable from her reflection as a deformed, zombie-like monster. Similarly, the montage scene of Balian playing with the toy boat at Ibelin that ends with Sybilla watching over him from the balcony, may evoke a maternal feeling on her part. It is precisely her status as a loving mother that the euthanasia scene undermines, however, not only because of the act of infanticide itself, but because the scene begins with close-up shots of Sybilla gazing at her son playing with his toy knight, the way she gazed at Balian playing with the toy boat at Ibelin.

More broadly, by revoking colonization through the symbolic castration of Balian’s and Sybilla’s gazes, Kingdom of Heaven significantly subverts gender and religious differences. A crane shot of Saladin’s troops taken from behind them as they leave for the battle of Hattin, parallels a similar shot of Guy’s troops leaving Jerusalem for that battle. Both leaders of the Christians and the Muslims are cross-dressers: King Baldwin wears a headdress that resembles a woman’s and Saladin wears a long skirt when he enters Jerusalem. Similarly, Balian often cross-dresses in Muslim attire. For example, four briefly held low angle close-ups of Balian wearing black clothing and a black headdress much like the Mullah’s (Khaled Nabawy) and looking down at Guy looking up in a shot reverse shot sequence as he enters Jerusalem on horse with his men following behind.

So neither Christians nor Muslims are credited with an entirely legitimate possession of the Holy Land. The film’s anachronistic multiculturalism is part and parcel of the film’s fantasy of decolonization. If the colonials take leave of land they never really possessed, by the same token, the film does not let Saladin take repossession of it either; if the knights of the religious orders are most often shown exiting, Saladin’s troops are most often shown, in long shots, going in circles and half-circles.

(De)Scaling the Film Frame

By turning now to scenes in Kingdom of Heaven involving scale models, we may see that the collapsing of adulthood into childhood in these scenes, related to Balian as spectator, registers a broader problem of framing the film’s mise-en-scène related to Balian as director. The scale model and toys parallel the film’s symbolically castrated, decolonized gaze as a means of imagining decolonization as a return to the colonized, who had never really been colonized in the first place. Just as Balian cannot frame the scene as a commanding, colonizing spectator, so too his play with models and toys reveals him even more directly as a symbolically castrated, childlike hero who cannot direct; that is, he cannot frame and place elements in the mise-en-scène. Kingdom of Heaven’s fantasy of decolonization entails a corollary descaling of size. In his book Cartographic Cinema, Tom Conley notes the frequency with which maps appear in films. They almost invariably appear in historical films and film epics. It is all the more striking that the only map in Kingdom of Heaven is seen during a geography lesson given to young Baldwin by Sybilla, who explains to him that he may never see France because he has “to be King here” (disc two, 0:16:00).
The connection between the map, residence, and a child-sized perspective is made even clearer in the film through the use of scale models, notably that of Jerusalem in Tiberias’s quarters that Balian examines. The film’s difficulty in achieving narrative unity follows from a literal lack of an adult capable of framing and directing what goes into the film’s mise-en-scène and where.39

The shot of Balian picking up the siege tower matches a shot in the production documentary extra in which Scott looks over a scale model of the Jerusalem set with siege towers, perhaps inadvertently implying an equivalence between Scott as director and Balian as hero, in control of events via the mise-en-scène qua scale model. Scott returns to the cutaway scale model of the Coliseum in *Gladiator* where Commodus places models of two gladiators in the center.

*Kingdom of Heaven*, Ridley Scott, 2005

*Gladiator* alludes to two scenes of Nero (Peter Ustinov) surveying and then showing a scale model of Rome in *Quo Vadis* and perhaps recalls as well as shots in a promotional documentary for *Helen of Troy* (Robert Wise, 1956), in which the announcer hovers over a scale model of Troy as he talks about the film. Stone’s *Alexander* includes a similar scene with Alexander moving models of soldiers in various battle formations as he explains his strategy to his officers before the battle of Gaugamela.

Unlike *Gladiator*, however, *Kingdom of Heaven* can’t direct the mise-en-scène by matching the scale model and film image and thereby encode a clear political stance.40 In *Gladiator*, the shot of Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) putting a gladiator like Maximus into the scene is immediately followed by an overhead blimp shot of Rome that ends over the Colosseum with CGI gladiators fighting in it. There’s a direct match between Commodus’s scale model Colosseum and the full scale CGI Colosseum, associated with shots from Leni Riefensthal’s *Triumph of the Will*. The match implies that Commodus is a fascist auteur and demonic parody of Ridley Scott, an anti-fascist but otherwise apolitical41 film auteur.

*Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, 2000 – *Alexander*, Oliver Stone, 2004

A promotional book for the film entitled *Gladiator* makes the link explicit by including a page with a shot of Scott standing next to the scale model as well as a still of the blimp shot of the Colosseum. The very similar *Kingdom of Heaven* tie-in book has two successive pages matching a shot of Scott with the production model of Jerusalem and a storyboard drawing of the siege and a technical drawing of a Jerusalem street and a scale model of the city under siege.

Unlike Scott’s *Gladiator*, however, *Kingdom of Heaven* has a wide gap of time between the shots of Balian inspecting the scale model siege tower and his destruction of the real siege towers during the actual siege of Jerusalem. Though a pedagogical connection is implied between Balian’s examination of the toy siege tower and his overturning of the real siege towers, the connection is so tenuous as to be nearly invisible. Indeed, it is obstructed by a series of dissolves after the chess sequence in which Balian and Baldwin discuss the city’s fortifications, laid out on a piece of paper held by Baldwin that we never see directly: the defence of Jerusalem seems more closely matched to the chess pieces than it does to the scale model siege tower.

The extended version inadvertently makes clear that the film’s problem of encoding its politics of temporary residence and (non)occupation is a consequence of Balian’s loss of control over the mise-en-scène, a loss of control that goes hand in hand with a reduction in the stature of Balian’s heroism. Instead of looking like a general in command, Balian resembles the children in the film who play with scale models that take the form of toys. For example, Balian finds young Baldwin’s toy knight on the floor and straightens out the lance as Baldwin opens a door and the two exchange glances; the toy knight reappears when Guy finds him playing with several knights on the floor and again finally when Sybilla euthanizes her young son by pouring poison in his ear.

This last sequence with the toy knight ends just as the first one did in a lingering medium close-up shot of the toy knight on the floor. The film’s editing further connects the toy knight to Balian by following the shot of it on the ground, after the child dies, with a nearly 360 degree medium shot whip pan encircling Balian, who is sitting by a palm tree, and coming to rest behind by one of the three Templars arriving to assassinate him. The sequence of these two shots draw a connection between Balian and both the boy,
abandoned by his mother Sybilla, and the boy’s toy knight.

As if to reinforce the point, the film links Balian to the children at Ibelin, the extended version adding scenes in which he plays alone with the toy boat one of the children had floated down the irrigation pump, when water was first drawn from the ground.

*Kingdom of Heaven, Ridley Scott, 2005*

Similarly, a shot of Balian writing at night when Sybilla comes to have sex with him, with the ink stand in the right foreground is echoed in a later series of shots of young Baldwin signing peace letters to Saladin (Ghasson Massoud) on a large table with his mother’s assistance, and the inkstand on the table. Like the geometric formalism of the long shots of the battle of Kerak from Reynald’s fortress, followed by the close-ups of Sybilla, this sequence begins with a geometrically formal shot of young Baldwin signing the letters followed by shots that show he is too small and too young for the job. In both cases, the turn to the female gaze marks an abandoning of the commanding male gaze. The signing sequence, for example, includes a shot from under the table of the seated boy swinging his legs because they are too short to reach the floor and ends with Sybilla losing control of events. Although the war-mongering Patriarch (Jon Finch) sees that Baldwin is not hurt by the hot wax that accidentally drops on his hand as he seals a letter, he does not let on that he has discovered the boy’s leprosy. By not acting on this knowledge he gains no advantage from it.43

Like the balcony scenes that show Balian to be a loser, an (unaware, at times) object of the gaze rather than its commanding director, the scale model and toy show Balian himself to be symbolically castrated, a child and a son lost in play rather than a father. Balian’s heroism is scaled to that of a child’s fantasy of knighthood. His idea of adulthood, namely to “Make the world a better place” and do what his father told him to do – “be a good knight” – amounts to a child’s fantasy of goodness. Balian chooses not to exert control over events in order to make the world better, nor is it clear that he does make the world better. In an extended scene of the extended DVD version, Balian plays chess with Baldwin, the chess set composed of medieval figures that resemble toys, but only Baldwin moves the pieces, telling Balian, “you never know where you’ll end up when you begin the game.” Baldwin is unable to “move” Balian to kill Guy, marry Sybilla, and become King, but neither is Balian able to move others, except to defend a city he then surrenders. Scott’s desire to defend a good, heroic kind of occupation that takes the paradoxical form of exiting and returning, runs into a problem of placement, an uncanniness about the hero’s ability to be heroic by placing himself in the film’s mise-en-scène itself.
Instead of evincing the kind of cinematic extension and duration Sobchack maintains is typical of the film epic, *Kingdom of Heaven* reveals the extent to which its own fantasy of a truce, a middle ground that Balian occupies but that fanatics do not, turns out quite literally to be a cinematically flattened no man’s land, a transitory space of narrative recursion and cinematic castration, rather than a vertical movement upward that implies a colonizing command of territory and bodies. Indeed, vertical moments of elevation and uplift always occur in the film as territory is lost, as in the crane shots of soldiers going to battle, at the end of the shipwreck sequence when Balian loses his horse, and when Balian explains to his men on the ramparts the terms of the truce, and in the final shot of the film when the camera rises slightly and tracks left as Balian and Sybilla ride off into the distance.

Defending the Film Stronghold

Having already discussed several extended and deleted scenes, I wish to turn more directly to the editing of the director’s cut to explore the problem of what I have called the film’s mises-hors-scène, a problem of determining by the director and film editor what is in the scene and what needs to be taken out, in order to unify the film’s narrative. The central means of formal unification in *Kingdom of Heaven* are narrative recursion and a wide variety of related kinds of repetition. Repetitions include identical shots like the opening and ending of the cemetery; the exchange of the black horse between Balian and Nasir; the Arabic music that plays as Reynald’s men behead their Arabic prisoners after the battle of Hattin, and at the end of the siege of Jerusalem when we get an overhead shot of all the dead bodies amassed at the breach in the wall; a flashback shot of Balian’s dead wife and a nearly identical shot of Godfrey’s subsequent flashback of him playfully seducing Balian’s mother; the medium close-up shot of the chicken seen at the beginning of Balian’s flashback of his dead wife and a very similar medium close-up shot of a chicken in Balian’s home in Ibelin seen before he enters it and smiles at it; Balian’s quotation, before the siege of Jerusalem, of Godfrey’s earlier dying speech to Balian about knighthood; and one liners such as “rise a knight,” “God wills it,” and perhaps most strikingly of all, “I am the blacksmith.”

By strengthening the meaning of these repetitions, the added scenes in the extended version may help develop the characters; however they don’t really change the reading of the film or succeed in unifying its narrative; instead, they tend to make moral distinctions between characters that were already clear in the first version. The added scenes are thus redundant, extraneous, out of place. Consider just a few examples. Near the beginning of the film, a Bishop invokes Jesus and gives money to the bad half-brother priest to give to Balian and free him. The scene gives us contrasting good and bad religious figures we see clearly enough in the theatrical release. Potentially the more controversial additions and extensions are the more violent ones. Yet these too make little difference. Consider Saladin’s execution of Reynald after the battle of Hattin. The extended version adds two very short extra shots, the first of Reynald still standing, gagging as blood gushes, just after Saladin slits his throat, and the second of Reynald falling to his knees as more blood gushes from his neck (disc two, 0:40:11). In additional footage, Saladin walks over from the tent to where three of his men hold Reynald, and draws his sword above his head in slow motion as he prepares to behead Reynald. Though Saladin becomes more vindicative
and brutal in this version, our view of Saladin's character is left unchanged. His anger at Reynald links his additional violence to Balian's at the village priest. Both of their murders are committed in revenge for crimes against a female member of their families, a sister in Saladin's case and a wife in Balian's. Moreover, in the extended version of the beheading scene, we get the same kind of alternating and contrasting reaction shots to Saladin's act as we did before Saladin orders his men to march for Hattin: Nasir looks unhappy, while the fundamentalist Mullah smiles gleefully after Reynald is beheaded. This splitting of Arabs into good moderates and bad fanatics is also present in the *Talisman* scene at the oasis, with Scott's single Arab being replaced by two, one violent, the other a trickster and gentleman.45

In addition to their redundancy, added scenes included in the extended version derail attempts to unify it by creating new questions in the process rather than answering questions raised by the shorter theatrical release and first DVD edition. By having Saladin behead Reynald using the sword the Mullah offers him, the extended version makes nonsense of the shorter version in which he refuses that sword and instead uses his own dagger to slit Reynald's throat. Moreover, no mention is made of the draft screenplay on disc three in which Saladin puts his finger in Reynald’s blood after slitting his throat and then touches his own forehead, while Reynald is taken out of the tent and butchered by Saladin’s men. The attack led by Guy and Reynald on the caravan is similarly made more violent and less consistent in the extended version, with a brief shot of the Muslim grandee (Nasser Memarizia) cut in half from shoulder to stomach by Reynald, who consequently looks all the more evil. By adding a conversation between the Muslim grandee and Tiberias after Reynald evades prosecution by Tiberias for his earlier attack, the film makes clear that it is the same Muslim grandee who shouts in recognition “You!” off camera at Reynald. In the shorter theatrical release, this connection is unclear because the Muslim grandee is seen only in the background in Tiberias’s quarters, remaining silent, and thus difficult to recognize as Reynald’s victim in the attack. Yet the added dialogue with the Muslim grandee undercuts the critique of Guy’s brutal raid and murder by making the Muslim grandee himself a bigot who is easily bought off by a sack of coins Tiberias contemptuously throws at him. Furthermore, the much lengthier sex scene before the caravan attack suggests that that attack arises out of Sybilla’s adultery rather than is more evidence of what provoked her to commit adultery, namely, Guy’s rogue violence.

**Cutting and Rutting: Outland Empire, or Lost My Highway**

The peritextual writing in the opening and end titles of the film frames the film like bookends and puts brakes on the film’s narrative recursiveness, thereby reducing the pressure the mises-hors-scène put on narrative cohesion by enclosing and containing the narrative. Yet the audiocommentaries and other epitexts of the extended DVD version effectively undo the limited resolution the peritextual framing offers by taking off the peritextual brakes, allowing for continued kinds of reframing that further derail the film. The two audiocommentary tracks by Dody Dorn and by Scott, Monahan, and Orlando Bloom do this openly by discussing three different versions of the film’s ending, beginning at the scene of the refugees and Balian leaving Jerusalem and finishing as the end title
sequence is over. Monahan originally wanted the film to end with Balian riding past Sybilla, who is walking barefoot and leaving blood in her footprints, without recognizing her. Scott, however, wanted to end with their return to France, saying “I always like going back full circle.” Dorn adds that there was also discussion of ending the film as Sybilla and Balian hold hands after they leave Jerusalem. Yet another possibility was to have Balian ride after Richard Cœur de Lion at the end of the film without Sybilla.

Monahan, Bloom, and Scott also discuss a possible sequel to Kingdom of Heaven about the Third Crusade. Significantly, they talk only about the sequel’s ending, which would have had, according to Monahan, Richard giving Balian lands in England called Locksley. Balian would then have become Robin Hood. For Scott, the sequel would not mean a progression forward in time but a return: “I’d make a sequel in a flash. I’d love to revisit this situation.” Dorn similarly undoes what she calls the “bookend” quality of the ending by completing her commentary wondering about the “life of the film after its release,” whether it will become a classic over time or be forgotten. She then returns to the marketing of the film in theatrical release, which she faults for placing the film in the wrong genre. Sounding rather like a film critic, she says the film was advertised as an adventure film when it was actually an historical epic that should have been marketed as a major “prestige picture” like Lawrence of Arabia or Gandhi (Richard Attenborough, 1982). As a result of the bad marketing, she maintains, people were disappointed by it even “before it got out of the starting gate,” and led to expect it to be something it wasn’t. Her commentary serves as a final attempt, then, to reframe the film not for the DVD viewer but to tell the DVD viewer how the earlier version should have been seen.

Before discussing further how the DVD epitexts subvert the braking function of the film’s peritextual frame, I want first to return to the implications of digital film for historicist cultural criticism broached at the beginning of this essay. In Death 24x a Second, Laura Mulvey notes that the introduction of new technologies such as DVD involves “a delayed cinema” (11). She avers that “there is nothing fundamentally new here” in the ways in which “video and digital media have opened up new ways of seeing old movies” (p.8). Yet she unjustifiably limits the meaning of cinematic delay to two definitions, both of which were already present on video: slowing down a film while watching it and to the time it takes for a dormant detail in a film to be noticed. Mulvey downplays the extent to which digital media have opened up new ways of seeing new movies such as Kingdom of Heaven. Attention to the extended edition’s epitexts will show how they complicate to the point of breakdown, the kind of film historicism that Mulvey continues to practice. Kingdom of Heaven’s epitexts retroactively frame the film in two moments, the earlier moment of audiocommentary and the present moment of auditory spectatorship. Hence, the framing audiocom-mentaries always involve time delay, returns and repetitions, even as they can only be heard if the DVD is played at its normal speed.

The extended version of Kingdom of Heaven provides the viewer with genetic criticism in the form of self-historicizing frames (audiocom-mentaries and documentaries explaining how the film was developed, how it was made, how it was promoted). Yet because the Kingdom of Heaven DVDs involve not only delays but repetitions and returns of the repressed, an uncanny (un)censoring, what consequently follows is a kind of phallic disorder of the auteur, involving both a priapic, Pinnochio-like extension and elongation of Scott’s authority over the film, on the one hand, and a castration of that authority, on the other. Much like Balian riding to catch up with Richard I at the end of Kingdom of Heaven, Scott tries belatedly to catch up with the theatrical release of his film with the
false eternalization and/or universalization: a state which depends upon a concrete historical conjunction appears as an eternal, universal feature of the human condition: the interest of a particular class disguises itself as universal human interest... In the Lacanian perspective, we should change the terms and designate the most ‘cunning’ ideological procedure the very opposite of eternalization: an over-rapid historicization. If over-rapid universalization produces a quasi-universal Image whose function is to make us blind to its historical, socio-symbolic determination, over-rapid historicization makes us blind to the real kernel [i.e. trauma] which returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations.

Žižek’s critique depends on the assumption that historicization can be slowed down to a correct speed through the adoption of Lacan’s account of the Real. Yet what, we may ask, constitutes the right speed of historicization? How does one tell the difference between rapid and over-rapid historicization? Should the proper pace of historicization ever be determined, is that pace ever possible to achieve?

The extended version of Kingdom of Heaven suggests that a proper pace is impossible to achieve for several reasons and mars the film’s historicism of it as deeply uncanny, a reanimation of the past that involves the repression of returns as well as returns of the repressed. Paratextual excuses don’t exonerate, as Paul de Man points out, but require more excuses:

The parts of the text which are destined to be mere additions and exemplifications acquire autonomous power of signification to the point where they can be said to reduce the main argument to impotence. The addition of examples leads to the subversion of the cognitive affirmation of innocence which the examples were supposed to illustrate.

Consider the commentary Kingdom of Heaven by Ridley Scott and his film editor Dody Dorn attempting to explain and justify some of the paradoxically entitled “Deleted and Extended Scenes.” In “Walking the Ramparts,” Balian prepares for the siege and as he walks along the ramparts, meets a woman who offers him an orange. The woman is played by an actress who looks very similar to the actress who plays Balian’s dead wife and who wears the same clothes as well as a similar smile; moreover, both women are silent. Dorn mentions that the woman on the ramparts recalls Balian’s dead wife, and both she and Scott then pause without further comment until Almaric enters the scene. The orange she offers Balian repeats a moment in another deleted and extended scene, “The New World,” in which Godfrey on his death bed reaches out to give Balian an orange. The deleted scene unifies the film through this repetition and would have connected as well to two shots of Balian holding an orange in the montage sequence after he has bathed in his home in Jerusalem, making clearer the film’s theme of death and renewal. They thus seem no more extraneous than other additions.

Yet neither Scott nor Dorn offers any comment on the connections nor explains why a
In the dialogue, Saladin says 'kill all the knights of the religious order,' and Nasir protests, not wanting to hurt Saladin's reputation... it's sort of an inverse of kind of the idea of what is going on in politics today.

Fanatics are fanatics. It doesn’t matter what your call is. A fanatic is a fanatic. And a fanatic’s very hard to deal with. You can’t negotiate. I don’t care whether you’re Christian, Muslim or Buddhist, Hindu. It’s impossible to deal with. There’s no reasoning. And I think Saladin was right in the middle of it all and... cleverly very modern in his view about ‘How do I sustain the status quo ? ’Cause we’re not going anywhere by going at each other'.

Scott quickly leaps to a talking point:

In the dialogue, Saladin says 'kill all the knights of the religious order,' and Nasir protests, not wanting to hurt Saladin’s reputation... it’s sort of an inverse of kind of the idea of what is going on in politics today.

Scott’s commentary indirectly justifies Saladin’s argument, but Scott does not explain why he cut the scene, as he and Dorn do in the extended scene entitled “Rape.” This is the extended version of the scene after Reynald has provoked the war Guy wishes for, and adds footage of a number of prisoners kneeling, their arms bound behind them, about to be beheaded after the first prisoner is beheaded. The extended scene also shows two of Reynald’s men holding a woman down as a third brutally rapes her, as written in the draft screenplay. Scott says he cut the rape footage because “it just seemed just too much,” and because he was trying to get a rein on the violence and atrocities of the period. Dorn adds that the rape footage also makes the viewer hate Reynald instead of regarding him as a mischievous bad boy.

Scott and Dorn could have made a similar case for cutting “Hattin Aftermath,” since that scene exposes the illogic at the core of Scott’s militant, democratic view of religious and multicultural tolerance: to defend against fanatics, Saladin has to act like a fanatic and order the killing of all his fanatical prisoners. No freedom for the enemies of freedom. In any case, by cutting the “Hattin Aftermath” scene, the film leaves the viewer with an
unexplained gap between Saladin’s beheading of Reynald and Tiberias telling Balian at the battlefield in the next scene that he is leaving for Cyprus. No mention is made by Scott or Dorn of why they did not shoot the sequence in the draft screenplay that has the knights being beheaded, including the Hospitaller, who “smiles at his executioner” before losing his head. The sequence ends with a medium close-up shot of severed knights’ heads lined up next to each other on the ground, with the Hospitaller’s in the center, implying that these dead knights got what was coming to them, whether fanatics or not.

Instead of a framing perspective that allows us to grasp more fully how the film’s narrative is unified in the extended version, these epitexts morph into a palimpsest of sedimented frames that make the narrative seem less rather than more unified. Explanations involve loud silences that mark repressions or oblique references to the present. The DVD palimpsest has no set layers because they have no set path to view the extras. To be sure, the third and fourth discs are paratextually linked by their common title, “Path to Redemption,” and both discs have similarly numbered tables of contents and similar designs. Yet putting the discs in dialogue involves their literal separation, or what I would call “ex-traying,” taking a disc out of the DVD tray and putting another into it, the consequent effect being something like an X-ray of a layer of the film. Rather symptomatically, Ridley Scott’s introduction to the extended version is not integrated into the DVD. It is a menu option, but playing it once, one cannot return to the menu or hit the back button to return to the introduction. To see it again, one must take the disc out and reinsert it. Epitextual commentaries and documentaries on the two DVD editions are both spatially and temporally problematic. The epitexts cannot be located in one place or on one disc. In each of the two DVD editions of Kingdom of Heaven, epitexts appear both on separate discs and on the discs with the film itself as visual and audiocommentary tracks. Located both inside and outside the film, the epitexts break down the opposition between a film and its paratexts, or what Mulvey calls “external discourses.”

Between Two Kingdoms of Heaven

The various epitexts appear to be based on a kind of time travel fantasy akin to that of the medieval science-fiction film Timeline (dir. Richard Donner, 2003) that exhibits a fantasy of encryption: like the archaeology professor, his son, and young woman archaeologist who becomes his girlfriend, Ridley Scott and his film crew can travel back in time to the making of the film, if only through the trope of metalepsis, and reframe the film by standing outside it and before it, excavating it, so to speak, as an archival and archaeological ruin, literally a tomb with writing that becomes readable in the present as a result of the travel to the past. Encryption takes the form of ex-script, as it were. 9/11 and the war in Iraq are only one horizon among others that haunt the film. The DVD editions return not only to this contemporary horizon and the pre-release controversy over the film’s putatively pro-Muslim sympathies but also to the earlier horizon of roadshow theatrical exhibitions of the film epic in the 1960s as well as to the exhibition history of Kingdom of Heaven and the history of the making of the extended DVD version. The Engineer’s Guide on the extended version DVD begins with an account of the road show exhibition and ends with commentary on the Lamaelle theatrical exhibition.

Moreover, this extended DVD version mimes the road show versions of earlier epics such as Ben Hur, King of Kings (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1961), Spartacus (dir. Stanley Kubrick,
The process of historicization implies an empty place, a non-historical kernel around which the symbolic network is articulated. In other words, human history differs from animal evolution precisely by its reference to this non-historical place, a place which cannot be symbolized, although it is retroactively produced by the symbolization itself.

Historicist cultural film criticism entails the same kind of Œdipal quest for origins played out in Richard Donner’s Timeline, regarding history as a narrative, whether grand or petit. The historicist film critic frames a film and its contemporary history as parallel yet sequential discourses, the latter being the genesis of the former. The Marxist /Lacanian symptomatic reading offers an account of a given film’s incomplete, because not unified, narrative in relation to a historical narrative or a narratable theory of sexuality and cinema that is complete. In this respect, historicist and film and media criticism converge. In Mulvey’s view, nothing is new about delayed cinema: digital and video media allow the viewer to repeat and replay scenes, to turn motion images into still photographs. Though she refers to the “technological uncanny” and uses psychoanalytic language (fetishism), her account of digital film and delay is really anti-psychoanalytic in that it assumes that a film can be (re)viewed without loss, that a DVD is a cryogenic storage unit the contents of which can be unfrozen and reanimated by the spectator at will. In historicizing film by framing it in relation to a matter of parallel moments in time, historicists, like Mulvey, assume that the film has a resting place, a grave. The historicist moves from one narratable, symbolizable event to the next.

Kingdom of Heaven is more radically uncanny, however, in having not just a restless place but more than one place, no single version, and hence no coherently narratable transition between its death after theatrical release and its afterlife on DVD, but instead a series of homeless phantom commentaries and deleted scenes. The metaphor of DVD as a burial site is an aftereffect, a retroactive fantasy that attempts to make them fully narratable tales from the crypt. As Žižek comments:

The historicist framing of parallels between film and historical events thus implies a fantasy of exteriority, the possibility one could occupy what Žižek calls the “non-historical place” that cannot be symbolized. But as Timeline shows, excavation involves, on the one hand, a violence which threatens to repress the object of excavation either by destroying it or by leaving its contents unexhumed, undiscovered, and unread, and on the other, the
symbolization of the past as its exteriorization. The meaning of the tomb’s contents is written on its outside.59

Understanding Kingdom of Heaven and its paratexts as relayed between two uncannily double DVDs means that historicism and film and media theory in its cultural studies version cannot escape the trauma which the film and the historicist film critic want to make symbolic and narratable. The film’s uncanny epitexts and delayed delivery, potentially accelerating the speed of reviewing, and collapsing old and new, mechanical and human, oscillate without a telos between cinematic (re)scriptions and their framing ex-scriptions. Murmings of ghost versions on the audiocommentaries of the Kingdom of Heaven DVD ruins are remainders, extras that disrupt the possibility either of laying the film to rest by grounding it in a frame or of exhuming it for a kind of ex-post-facto CSI analysis.

Notes

1 Kingdom of Heaven: The Ridley Scott Film and the Story Behind the Story; Introduction by Ridley Scott (2005, 8); Introduction to the four disc, extended DVD edition, Kingdom of Heaven, May 23, 2006.


7 Bob Thompson, op. cit.

8 Though critics of The Kingdom of Heaven drew parallels with the draft screenplay before the film’s release as well as the theatrical release with Iraq, Ridley Scott claimed that the project was
under way two years before the film was made and that such parallels were by the way. The final intertitle does not explicitly refer to September 11 as does the opening intertitle of the history Channel documentary Holy Wars: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin (2005).


10 Stone’s Alexander was even more directly read as a polemical brief for Bush’s neoconservative brand of multicultural imperialism. Stone notes the parallel between Alexander and Bush in his audiocommentary on the first (theatrical release) DVD edition. Zach Snyder’s 300 (2007), an adaptation of Frank Miller’s graphic novel The 300 based in turn on the film The 300 Spartans (dir. Rudolph Maté, 1962), was widely read in relation to Iran both by Western viewers and by the Iranian government as well. See also the scene in Shekar Kepur’s The Golden Age (2007) in which the Spanish, after having provoked Elizabeth I into executing Mary Stuart, gleefully celebrate the launching of the Armada using the execution to claim they are waging a just war; the film strongly implies a parallel between Philip II and Bush.

11 It is perhaps not purely an accident that when McAlister, who relies on Sobchack’s essay, revised her book for publication in 2001, she did not mention Gladiator.

12 Sumiko Higashi discusses briefly the televisual broadcast of Cecil B. De Mille’s The Ten Commandments in her Cecil B. De Mille and American Culture (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), p. 201-203.


14 The first DVD was released October 3, 2005. Extras on the second disc include: Pilgrim’s Guide Text Commentary; Inside Look: Tristan & Isolde; Interactive Production Grid with Production and Wardrobe featurette; History vs Hollywood Documentary, A & E Movie Documentary “Kingdom of Heaven”, History Channel’s “History vs. Hollywood: Kingdom of Heaven”; Orlando Bloom “The Adventure of a Lifetime”; and trailers. The Kingdom of Heaven (4-Disc Director’s Cut) DVD was released May 23, 2006, and features the following extras: Discs One and Two: Director’s Cut Part One; Introduction by Ridley Scott; three audiocommentary tracks, the first featuring Scott, screenwriter William Monahan, actor Orlando Bloom; the second featuring executive producer Lisa Ellzey, visual effects supervisor Wes Sewell, first assistant director Adam Somner; and the third featuring editor Dody Dorn; “The Engineer’s Guide”; Disc Three: draft screenplay; Scott’s notes on the screenplay; Documentary: “The Path to Redemption” Development; Pre-Production; Production: Spain; Disc Four, “The Path to Redemption” (continued): Production: Morocco; Post-Production Release; fifteen deleted and extended scenes with audiocommentary by Scott and Dorn.

15 Extended DVD editions of all other films of which I am aware never received theatrical release. No straightforward parallel may rightly be drawn between any post 9/11 historical films and Iraq, to be sure. There is always some excess, some distortion even when one to one correspondences between the film’s characters and events, on the one hand, contemporary politicians and national international conflicts seem to clear. For example, 300 is so far to the political right that it slides over into satire, and one journalist asked the director if the Spartan leader Leonidas or the Persian leader Xerxes was supposed to represent George W. Bush. See Slavoj Žižek, “The True Hollywood Left,” http://www.lacan.com/zizhollywood.htm (2007). Consider also a scene in Shekar Kepur’s sequel to Elizabeth (1998), The Golden Age (2007) that draws a topical parallel between Bush’s going to war in Iraq based on lies and Philip II’s launching the Armada on a false pretext. This is of course a rather strange parallel to draw since Elizabeth might seem closer to Blair than to Philip. Indeed, the film epics made in the wake of 9/11 seem to be rather less sure footed than the medieval historical films of Sergei Eisenstein, whose deliberately designed parallels between the Tu tone Knights and Nazi Storm troopers in Alexander Nevsky (1938) and between Ivan the Terrible and Joseph Stalin in Ivan the Terrible, Part One (1944) and Ivan the Terrible II, Part Two (1958) were explicit and unmistakable, though Stalin turned on Eisenstein before Eisenstein could complete the third part of Ivan the Terrible. See the Criterion DVD editions of these films in Eisenstein: the Sound Years for more information.

16 A two disc “definitive edition” DVD of The Passion of the Christ was released in February 2007, with various documentaries on the making of the film, audiocommentaries, deleted scenes, as well as the 2005 re-cut version along with the original 2004 theatrical version. Oddly, the definitive edition has two versions of the same film. Similarly, the Gladiator extended DVD also
includes both theatrical and extended DVD versions of the film.


18 The film epic is a crucial genre for any consideration of the transition from celluloid to digital film. See Matt Hanson, “Return of the Epic: Cinema’s Last Stand,” in The End of Celluloid: Film Futures in the Digital Age (Rotovision, 2004), p. 163-171.

19 On the importance of mise en scène to film theories of cinematic writing, see Tom Cohen, Hitchcock’s Cryptonomies: War Machines (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006), p. 194, and Tom Conley, Film Hieroglyphs (revised edition Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007), p.xxx: “with writing conceived as a compositional element in the visuals of film, the narrative that it helps to convey is both aided and subverted.”

20 The sequence of releases does not necessarily amount to a narrative of progress; that is, the latest edition doesn’t necessarily deliver a better image quality or a more unified narrative.

21 The definitive edition of The Passion of the Christ includes what are called “Biblical Footnotes” on the back cover of the DVD. What initially seemed like a critical mass of film epics in relation to Iraq begins to look more complicated once the digitalization of film is taken into account. Consider again the DVD release in 2003 to 2005 of decades earlier film epics. These films too felt the impact of digitalization, brought out with new extras in multiple discs editions. Scott’s Gladiator was released as a three disc extended edition DVD in 2005. William Wyler’s Ben Hur reissued in 4 disc extended edition in 2005 as well, the primary extension in the case of Ben Hur being not the length of the film but the full length of the widescreen image; the DVD also includes the 1925 silent version as an extra. Stone’s Alexander has been issued in three different DVD editions, two of them director’s cuts, as of 2007. The politics of these films and even more recent film epics were different when the films were made, of course, than when they were re-released on DVD. Gladiator was produced, for example, when the U.S. was at peace rather than at war, and one critic has read it as a critique of the Pax Americana and U.S. dominated forms of neo-liberal globalization and soft hegemony. Did it mean the same thing or something else when re-released a second time on DVD in 2005, after the first DVD edition of Kingdom of Heaven and a year before the second DVD edition? Whatever the answer to this question, we may say more generally that digital delays recast the history of the film epic not as a one time event but as a series of time released effects that alter the horizon of reception both by altering the film itself and by offering new paratexual frames through which to view it.


26 On 9/11 as uncanny both because the recognition of the attack was clear only after the second tower of the World Trade Center was hit and because the replays of the attack on television recalled action films that anticipated the “real” attack, see William Warner, “After 9/11: Wiring Networks for Security and Liberty”, 2/27/02 http://dc-mrg.english.ucsb.edu/committee/warner/911.html, and Slavoj Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real (London: Verso), p. 9-19. David Simpson observes that “any attempt at an understanding of 9/11, its place in history, and its projections for a future will constitute some kind of framing, whether it be through the act of remembering, of reliving, or of critique.” David Simpson, 9/11:

27 On the history of U.S. imperialism and its disavowal, see Amy Kaplan, op. cit.

28 The second, extended DVD edition of Kingdom of Heaven adds a number of scenes that are extraneous to a reading of the film in its theatrical release version and remark the pattern of exit and return already evident in the theatrical release. Rather than unify the film, as Scott maintains they do, these extras more deeply etch its symptomatic inability to stay in Iraq or get out of it.


30 On the convergence of electronic media and on repeat viewings of film in the home, see Barbara Klinger, Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Sorely lacking in this kind of cultural studies sociological analysis of reception is any sense that the home is itself uncanny, involves a haunted remembrance or repression of the theatrical viewing experience.


32 In order to keep Balian’s character as non-aggressor and reactive defender consistent, Scott cut a deleted scene entitled “Obstruction and Salvation” in which Balian and his men confront the Patriarch and his assembled Templar knights, led by the fundamentalist Templar master (Ulrich Thomsen) who is given to exclaiming “Gods will it” and “Blasphemy!” When the Patriarch refuses to release the Queen to Balian, Balian then threatens to kill him and does kill the Templar master.

33 Outside Jerusalem at night just before the siege begins, Balian says: “Almaric, if you survive Ibelin is yours. You are master of Ibelin. I confirm it. Rise a knight, and Baron of Ibelin.” Almaric smiles and jokes, recalling and nearly repeating exactly a comment about it he made when first seeing it with Balian: “But it is a poor and dusty place.” This joke effectively diminishes the value of the lands.

34 Similarly, Kingdom of Heaven begins with a fantasy of the Crusades as a pilgrimage that makes possible the redemption of Balian’s dead wife for having committed suicide, Godfrey for his sins, and Balian himself for having murdered the village priest (also his brother in the extended version). Yet this fantasy falls apart even before it comes fully into play. The village priest orders the beheading of Balian’s wife and steals the cross from her neck with which she was to be buried. A priest on the pilgrimage route confirms this negative view of religion by saying “To kill an infidel, the Pope has said, is not murder; it is the path to Heaven.” And Balian concludes he is outside God’s grace after he completes his pilgrimage and buries his wife’s cross at Golgotha.

35 In one of the film’s many moments of contradictory dialogue, Balian tells the defenders of Jerusalem that all have claim to the city and that none have claim.

36 To be sure, once in Jerusalem, Saladin does replace the cross with the crescent and the Christian banners come down. But his Jerusalem will be as tolerant as was Balian’s.

37 Near the beginning of the production documentary on the third disc of the Gladiator extended DVD edition, set designer Arthur Max, who also worked on Kingdom of Heaven, observes that “scale is the essence of the film epic.”

38 Film maps have an uncanny, dislocating dimension that may subvert the film’s ideology: “the map offers a spatial picture of shape and duration other than those of the image in which it is found. Quite often the map locates the history of the film within itself. It has affinities with a mise-en-abyme, but while it may duplicate or mirror the surrounding film, the map can reveal why and how it was made and how its ideology is operating. [...] The fluid and shifting spaces of the film and its cognition become terrae incognitae that the viewer explores in different directions and from various angles.” (Cartographic Cinema, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007, p. 20-21).

39 Conley also points out the scale model of Rome in Gladiator, Cartographic Cinema., p. 200. For a range of examples of maps in historical films, see the recurrent use of mosaic maps of Greece and Persia as prologue frames in Stone’s Alexander; the animated map of France with blood showing the English territory at the beginning of Luc Besson’s The Messenger (1999); a
tapestry map of the Nile River and Middle East on the wall of Cleopatra’s palace in HBO Rome second season finale; a map of England and Norway in The Vikings title sequence; a map of Greece in the opening title sequence of Troy; and the use of maps as transitions between scenes in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and Prince of Foxes (dir. Henry King, 1949).

40 See also the long, penultimate, and panoramic shot out of a David Kaspar Friedrich painting of the fanatical Bonapartist Feraud (Harvey Keitel) in Scott’s first film, The Duellists (1977). Having lost the final duel, Feraud looks out the French rural landscape, very much resembling Napoleon in exile. Scott sides against the impotent would-be dictator and director (Feraud has now lost control of the right to challenge D’Hubert [Keith Carradine] to any future duel).

41 By “apolitical,” I mean the way in which Scott’s Maximus departs significantly from Kubrick’s Spartacus. Maximus is willing to participate in a revolt against Commodus only because he wants to carry out the Emperor Marcus Aurelius’s wishes.

42 For a contrast, see Paul Verhoeven’s Flesh and Blood (1985): the “good” character Steven (Tom Burlinson) helps his father lay siege to a medieval town through weapons he has invented based on science he learned at school.

43 In the extended version, Sybilla sits next to her dead son’s crypt during the siege holding his toy knight. The extended scene “husband and wife” in which Guy confronts Sybilla over the murder of her son and confesses his order to have Balian murdered ends with a ground level shot with the toy knight prominently in the middle frame as Sybilla holds onto it. Similarly, the extended scene “Obstruction and Salvation” ends with Balian finding Sybilla at her dead brother’s crypt; she says to him, “save the people from what I have done.”

44 It’s worth comparing the uncanny recursiveness of Kingdom of Heaven to an earlier film epic to which editor Dody Dorn likens Kingdom of Heaven near the end of her audiocommentary, namely, David Lean’s Lawrence of Arabia (1963). Lean makes use of a double narrative framing. The opening shot of the Overture is repeated after the film’s opening sequence in England with T. E. Lawrence’s (Peter O’Toole) death and funeral, taking us back in time to Arabia to begin the story (again). Furthermore, the film ends with Lawrence riding his motorcycle in Arabia, repeating the beginning of the film which shows Lawrence’s fatal crash in England while on his motorcycle. In both cases, the recursiveness does not produce a full circle, however, but a spacing between beginning and ending that paradoxically gives us, via the source interviewed by the reporter at Lawrence’s funeral, the straight story.

45 Similarly, redundant is a scene (disc two, 1:20:10 to 1:21:06) with Saladin entering the Church in which Sybilla and Guy were crowned, after Saladin has earlier picked up the crucifix on the floor and placed it upright on the altar and immediately after Nasir gives back to Balian the black horse that Balian gave him when the two arrived in Jerusalem. In this added scene, Saladin carefully steps, out of respect, around a tombstone on the ground with a larger cross on it that is covered with flower petals on his way into the Church, and then, in three shots, kneels and prays as Christian banners unfurl and drop to the ground and several knights at the altar quickly exit. A close-up of Saladin’s curl tipped slippers as he walks past the cross on the gravestone makes him resemble the Wicked Witch of the West in the Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, 1939) even though we are supposed to applaud the pacific manner in which he converts the Church into a Mosque. Godfrey’s character is similarly darkened. Godfrey orders the brutal execution of a surviving knight who asks for ransom after his nephew attacks him in an effort to bring Balian back to the village as a prisoner. And Godfrey is more equivocal as the father, saying he didn’t force himself on Balian’s mother, but nevertheless had sex over her objections. Some added scenes create new problems. The Hospitaller appears after Balian has lost consciousness at the end of his fight with the three Templar assassins, but then Balian rides back to Jerusalem alone and almost falling off his horse as the troops assemble to leave to fight the battle of Hattin. Where did the Hospitaller go? Why isn’t he helping Balian ride back? There is also an added scene entitled “The Reckoning” in which a bush catches fire by itself and prompts Balian to mock religion and Moses to the Hospitaller. But the scene ends with two bushes catching fire, again by themselves, as if in response to Balian’s mockery. So the scene endorses both the possibility of religious miracles and their impossibility. Similarly, the duel between Guy and Balian is anti-climactic and inconsistent (disc two 1:15:56-1:18:00). As Balian washes and Guy stops him “The perfect knight is that what you think you are, is it?” “We are all of us what we do” Balian replied and then adopts the falcon sword position his father taught and that he used against the Arab in the fight over the black horse at the desert oasis. He eventually wounds Guy with a cut across his chest, who falls on his knees, like Reynauld before he was beheaded. Guy says “finish it,” yet Balian stops and does not kill him,
saying only: “When you rise again if you rise, rise a knight.” Although Balian is wounded during the duel, he walks off unscathed after it is finished.


47 Paul De Man, “Excuses (Confessions),” in Allegories of Reading (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979), p. 294. De Man’s account of the example turns centrally on the paratext: the addition of prefaces does not succeed in providing authorial mastery, but the reverse. Discussing Rousseau’s prefaces to La Nouvelle Héloïse and Julie, de Man says that textual mastery and authority are being decided and are found to be undecidable: “Writing always includes the moment of dispossession in favor of the arbitrary power play of the signifier and from the point of view of the subject, this can only be experienced as a dismemberment, a beheading or a castration. Behind Montesquieu’s harmless lie, denying authorship of Le Temple de Guide by the manipulation of the preface that ‘heads’ the text, stands the much more dangerous ambivalence of the ‘beheaded’ author” (p.296). Footnote 18 at the end of this passage reads: “The same anxiety in another reference to prefaces in Rousseau... The chain that leads from Tasso to translation, to prefaces, to authorship, to beheading, and to insanity is ready to surface in any context of anxiety about truth and falsehood” (p.296). The example is thus most exemplary when it occupies the relatively extratextual position in the paratext, especially prefaces and footnotes, including de Man’s.

48 Screenwriter William Monahan’s audiocommentary of the film raises similar sorts of questions. In the scene of Hattin, for example, he says he regrets that “we don’t have Saladin’s order to execute the knights of the religious orders here,” but he does not say why. He notes that they also did not have Balian threaten to execute his prisoners when negotiating the truce that ends the siege of Jerusalem, but again does not say whether that omission was good or bad in his view. In the Jerusalem scale model scene, Monahan talks about only using primary sources and for his script and not attending to the historians who vetted the film. “All you need are the sources.” These comments indirectly respond to James Reston’s lawsuit for copyright infringement. Monahan implies he never read Reston’s book even as he doesn’t name it or its author.

49 Scott also praises Saladin in his audiocommentary on the film in the scenes after the siege ends for not sacking the city or executing any of its inhabitants.

50 It’s not clear why Scott shot this scene in the first place. The Kingdom of Heaven tie-in book includes two pages of his annotations of the screenplay from this scene showing he has crossed it out (see p. 54).

51 On the problem of tolerance and “militant democracy,” see the interview with Juergen Habermas in Philosophy in a Time of Terror..., op. cit., p. 40-41.

52 Thus, historicist interpretation of a film may no longer rightly be limited by a single horizon of the theatrical release reception, but must extend to the film’s release(s) on DVD, sometimes two. Since the late 1990s, DVD cuts have been integrated with film production, usually as part of a marketing strategy and also as a way of compromising with a director, whose cut is released on DVD rather than theatrically. See for example, Fuqua’s King Arthur (2004).

53 More details on details of the film’s exhibition history are provided on the documentary on “Paradise Found: Creating the Director’s Cut” on disc four. We learn that the longer theatrical release at the Lamaelle theater was a rough cut of 3 hours, not the DVD extended version which was cut after the 191 minute theatrical release was finished. The documentary is largely composed of shots dissolving one into the next interspersed with shots of various people who made the DVD director’s cut offering comments. Oddly, it contains shots taken from the deleted and extended scenes, in effect documenting a fantasy version of the film as a totality of everything that was shot but that was never made.


55 In his audiocommentary on this scene of The Duellists “special collector’s edition” DVD, released in 2002, Scott does not mention either the name of the castle or Richard I, but says that “you could imagine Lancelot or Guinevere or Tristan and Isolde in that kind of landscape. You imagine these castles when they were bustling and busy... So this could probably be about the time of the crusades, these ruins.”

56 Two relatively contemporary films that are even closer to Lynch’s films than Kingdom of Heaven are Clint Eastwood’s Flags of Our Fathers (2007), with its wrenching shifts back and forth
between multiple framings of the battle of Iwo Jima and its aftermath, and Darten Aronofsky’s The Fountain (2006), a science fiction film with a recursive time travel narrative; one of the film’s three plots is set in sixteenth century Spain and the Mayan Yucatan, and a second contemporary plot involves a scene about a museum exhibition of Mayan codices.

57 One of the disappointments of Mulvey’s promising book is its essentially reactive conservatism, intellectually speaking: she does not engage new media dialectically to rethink her own critical practice, instead ignoring what is really new about new media in order to continue talking about film as she always has.


59 See, for contrast, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (dir. Stephen Spielberg, 1989) and The Da Vinci Code (dir. Ron Howard, 2006). In the former, Indiana (Harrison Ford) and Dr. Elsa Schneider (Alison Doody) break through the X, or Roman numeral 10, on the bottom of the library floor and find a knight’s tomb in the catacombs below. They take the lid off and discover a mummy of a knight with writing on his shield that matches writing on a tablet Jones saw earlier in a private collector’s possession. The inside of the tomb thus remarks writing as an interiorized exteriorization in the form of the shield. The Da Vinci Code ends in a kind of epilogue by conflating the Louvre with a mausoleum. The hero Dr. Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) kneels in the Louvre as if at the grave of Mary Magdalene, a grave that houses only a figurative, nonexistent Holy Grail. The unmarked burial site without a crypt in this case is nevertheless found by a literal bloodline that Langdon connects from blood in a sink when he cuts himself shaving to the Museum. A similar kind of encryption and blocked mourning may be seen in Braveheart (Mel Gibson, 1995), with the cloth William Wallace’s (Mel Gibson) wife (Catherine McCormack) makes for him reappearing on the broadsword that lands in the ground in the last shot of the film.

**List of illustrations**

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