Chapter 3

Cutting and (Re)Running from the (Medieval) Middle East: The Return of the Film Epic and the Uncanny Mise-hors-scènes of Kingdom of Heaven’s Double DVDs

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.

—Ridley Scott, Kingdom of Heaven: The Ridley Scott Film and the Story Behind the Story; Introduction by Ridley Scott (2005, 8)

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 it what is [sic] and you judge for yourself.

—Ridley Scott (introduction to the four disc, extended DVD edition, Kingdom of Heaven, May 23, 2006)

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

—President George W. Bush, speaking to veterans at the White House, November 11, 2002

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

Cultural criticism of the film epic has largely 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 *The Ten Commandments* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1956), *Quo Vadis* (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1951), and *Ben-Hur* (dir. William Wyler, 1964) need to be read not just as antitotalitarian but also as anticolonial. The policy of the United State's global “benevolent supremacy” depended, according to McAlister, on the United States 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, and the film epic was a highly significant part of that culture, framing the “religious narratives in terms of contemporary politics” (McAlister 2001, 44).

Ridley Scott’s *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) certainly invites this kind of historicist reading. The intertitle in the final shot of the film speaks of an “uneasy truce,” which implicitly extended to the film and its more critical reviewers. Despite his statements to the contrary, President George W. Bush has been widely viewed as advancing U.S. imperialism in a more naked form, and reviewers and Scott himself 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 present-day conflict: “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 critics of *The Kingdom of Heaven* drew parallels with the draft screenplay and the war in Iraq before the film was released. Cambridge professor Jonathan Riley-Smith dismissed the story as “Osama bin Laden’s version of history,” claiming it will “fuel the Islamic fundamentalists” (Thompson 2005; Waxman 2005). 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 (see Thompson 2005).

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 book used as a tie-in to the movie that his film will inevitably be read in light of 9/11. 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 edition) entitled “Hattin Aftermath” in which Saladin (Ghasson Massoud) refuses to follow his general’s advice and orders the execution of all his Christian prisoners. Moreover, *Kingdom of Heaven* is one of several film epics, which included Wolfgang Peterson’s *Troy* (2004), read in relation to the war in Iraq; Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* (2004) pointedly drew parallels between George W. Bush and Alexander the Great. Furthermore, *Kingdom of Heaven* appeared in
theaters as older epics were also being rereleased on DVD, 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 Wyler’s *Ben-Hur* both were rereleased in new DVD editions in August 2005, and Wolfgang Peterson’s *Troy* (2004) was similarly rereleased in a “Director’s Cut Ultimate Collector’s Edition” that includes thirty minutes of additional footage in September 2007. In January 2008, *El Cid* (dir. Anthony Man, 1961) was released in two editions, one a “deluxe” edition and the other a collector’s, both with two discs. In these various multiple digital editions of film epics made over a long duration, we may see that what Manovich (2001) defines as the “new media object,” namely “something that can exist in numerous versions and numerous incarnations” (134), is now the cinematic object itself, existing in successively released and differently cut DVD and HD-DVD editions of a given film with various combinations of new and old supplements.

In this chapter, I focus on *Kingdom of Heaven*’s two DVD editions to make two related points: first, I advance a reading of the film in relation to the war in Iraq in order to show that the digitalization of film requires a rethinking of the matching film and its moment of production in (genetic) historicist cultural film criticism, and, by extension, in histories of media theory that adopt the same kind of parallels and analogy in mapping transitions between old and new media (Manovich 2001). New kinds of interaction between film and spectator have opened up on DVD and HD-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 as cinema and computer programming become more and more integrated. 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 cuts of the film. Second, I show how the additional scenes in the extended DVD edition and the paratexts in both DVD editions of *Kingdom of Heaven* constitute “mise-hors-scènes”: the paratextual supplements are meant to serve as interpretive guides to the film by standing apart from the film; thereby attempting to frame the way we read it, or read about it. It is perhaps no accident that attention to how a film was created in “making of” the kinds of genetic criticism (added as bonus features on DVDs) increases as the cinematic object becomes increasingly indefinite; similarly, the border between historical fiction film and documentary becomes more and more uncertain and uncanny as digital reviewings, which may often put the film on pause, turn a given film into a historical document.

One caveat before turning to Scott’s film: what seems new and different is the result in part of a misrecognition of uncanny continuities between celluloid and digital cinema. The digital, new media afterlives of what Paolo Usai (2001), Anne Friedberg (2006), and D.N. Rodwick (2007) consider to be the death of celluloid cinema are
something like a return to the early practices of filmmaking when two cameras were used to shoot domestic and export versions of the same film and edited by different editors, then recut by distributors when exported due to reasons of censorship or projection time. The Eureka two-Disc DVD edition of F.W. Murnau’s *Faust* (1926) released in 2007, for example, makes available the restored and recently rediscovered domestic print with optional and newly translated English subtitles and two modern sound tracks as well as the export version with one modern sound track. The second disc includes a documentary contrasting the versions and providing text claiming to show the superiority of the domestic cut both in terms of its composition and editing. The Eureka *Faust* DVD edition includes a frame to read the history of film’s passage through a standardized double origin at the moment of production (two very similar versions of the what are sold as the same film produced and released at the same time in native and foreign markets) to a standardized double origin at the moments of production and postproduction (one version made during production but with the intention of being its recut at least twice later in two different stages of postproduction and then released successively in quite different theatrical and digital versions).

**K/Irakqing Up the Crusades:**
**The Returns of the Film Epic after 9/11**

The timing on which a historicist reading of a film such as *Kingdom of Heaven* tends to depend is somewhat off in that the film epic returned in ways that were unexpected and multiple. According to Vivien Sobchack (1990), the Hollywood historical epic spanned roughly the first six decades of the twentieth century, ending with Anthony Mann’s *Fall of the Roman Empire* in the wake of the rise of television, the Civil Rights movement, feminism, the end of the Hollywood studio system, and 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” (1990, 41).

Scott’s return to the Hollywood sword and sandals film epic with *Gladiator* in 2000—a decade after Sobchack’s article appeared in print—was both unpredictable and inexplicable in terms of her analysis of the film genre. 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
narrative and a narrative of its moment of production we saw in readings of *El Cid*. (Significantly, in their audiocommentary for the Miriam Collection DVD edition of *El Cid*, William Bronston and Neal Rosendorf mention two kinds of historical analogies between the film and the Cold War, when the film was made, and between the film and post 9/11 Islam.) The word “moment” is crucial to historicist film criticism. Extracinematic history, however full of contradictions, is spatialized as a single amount of time, a span of years, a period with a label such as 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 theatrically, has an integrity that does not change over time or in its rereleases on video, laserdisc, DVD, and HD-DVD. To be sure, the impact of the film and the extent of its promotion during theatrical release are deeper than the later reception of the film when released on DVD or HD-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. 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 film’s box office but also on how well both DVD editions sell.

Consider the digital afterlife of *Kingdom of Heaven* further. Scott’s film is typical in being released twice on DVD in two different cuts. The two cuts were both released theatrically the same day, the extended edition being limited to a two-week engagement at the Fairfax Laemmle Theater, an art house movie theater in Los Angeles. 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, to production, and then to release. A second 191-minute extended version of the film was released a year later as a four-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. (This second DVD edition was given a brief theatrical exhibition at the Laemmle 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 audiocommentary 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(paradtexts rather than view them as films designed to be watched without interruption from beginning to end.
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 a 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:

> 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. (27–28)

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 of a film, usually only one in theatrical release, and all of them are typically part of the film’s production. The digitalization of film changes its ontology and temporality and hence its narrative cohesion as a unity of duration and extension. The epic film genre, Vivien Sobchack writes, “constitutes its historical field aliterally and materially onomatopoetically—extended and expanded. An excess of temporality finds its form in, or ‘equals,’ extended duration: films far longer than the Hollywood norm. Correlatively, an excess of space finds its form in, or ‘equals,’ expanded space: Cinemascope, Cinerama, Superscope, 70mm” (37).

With the uneven and erratic temporality of the digital film epic, however, this unity of extension in time and space falls apart. The delayed delivery of film on DVD disrupts this fantasy of priapiic 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 a single object, but are instead subject to multiple recuts, which produce arguably more or less cohesive narratives. Similarly, digitalization redefines not only the phenomenology of film but also, in consequence,
what counts as the mise-en-scène. Like historicist cultural critics, film theorists such as Tom Conley (1991/2007b) and Tom Cohen (2005) maintain that a counternarrative is inscribed in cinema through hieroglyphs, maps, and other kinds of “writing,” adopting a conventional understanding of the mise-en-scène as set design.23

Yet in digital film the cinematic scene is no longer only what is placed in the shot but also how the shot is placed in the film; that is, the digital film scene, deleted, extended, or restored, with or without audiocommentary, involves film editing and projection as well as shot composition and space, thus further undermining the notion that the final version is completely integrated.24 It’s not an 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. Both DVD editions of the film and the differing paratexts of each edition enable Scott to engage retrospectively not only the controversy over its putative partisanship with regard to the Muslims, but two 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.25 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.”26

Both DVD editions of Kingdom of Heaven and their respective paratexts respond to the prerelease controversies, I will maintain, but do not resolve them for reasons having to do with the temporality of the paratext rather than with Scott’s personality or the particular politics of his film.27 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 editions of Scott’s film include documentaries featuring historians who vouch for the film’s authenticity, for example. The theatrical DVD edition includes an A&E television channel documentary Movie Real: Kingdom of Heaven and the extended DVD edition includes a “new featurette on the film’s historical accuracy” entitled “Creative Accuracy: The Scholars Speak”; the list of historians includes scholars, for male-female and Western-Middle Eastern balance, identified successively in superimposed titles on each of their respective talking head shots 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 illuminate, making both the film in its different versions and Scott as their director into
moving targets. The scholars in the Creative Accuracy documentary, for example, did not serve as consultants on the film and do not directly engage the critics who savaged the film before it was released theatrically.

Instead of giving Scott a controlling narrative of the film or its genesis, and production, and postproduction, the mise-hors-scènes of both DVD editions 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, producing a paratextual proliferation in which even more narratives arise to defend, explain, and excuse why it is the way it is in either edition. The continued response to the pretheatrical release controversies on both DVD editions is all the more odd given that the response to the shorter theatrical release put an end to the prerelease controversies, with the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Council on American Islamic Relations issuing statements in support of the film (ADC 2005 and BBC 2004a). Foreign box office in the Middle East was likewise positive, with Lebanese audiences cheering when Saladin enters Jerusalem near the end of the film and pauses to pick up from the floor a crucifix knocked down during the fighting to place it upright on an altar (see Fisk 2005).

Kingdom of Heaven’s mise-hors-scènes are symptomatic of the film’s contradictory imperialist and anti-imperialist trajectories, namely, 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 (pre)vu” with the result that one cannot tell if Scott’s film is coming or going. Indeed, the paratextual mise-hors-scènes 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, namely, the balcony scene and the scale model of Jerusalem under siege, the survey of territory or women in order to possess them, in Orientalist fashion, is disturbed and disrupted. The scale model of Jerusalem, the toy boat that local children and Balian (Orlando Bloom) float in the newly irrigated fields of his home, Ibelin, and young Baldwin’s (uncredited) toy knight, all 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 have allowed him to decide what to keep in the scene and what to take out, consequently requiring him to justify in new paratexts on the extended DVD edition his recutting of the film, a practice that Scott has followed in more recent DVD editions of his films Blade Runner (1982) and American Gangster (2007) released in December 2007 and February 2008 respectively.

I read this problem of framing with respect to scale and Scott’s problem in framing the mise-en-scène as symptomatic not only of Scott’s attempts...
to resolve the prerelease controversies over his film but also his own ambivalence about the bearing of 9/11, itself an uncanny event, on how *Kingdom of Heaven* was edited in the two different versions.\(^{30}\) Unlike American neoconservative imperialists such as George W. Bush who disavow their own imperialism, Scott apparently has no problem with a superpower such as the United States or the United Kingdom being an empire.\(^{31}\) Yet Scott has no wish to justify the occupation of the Middle East by the “coalition of the willing.” *Kingdom of Heaven* floats a fantasy of the Middle East’s 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.

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 arrivals that are returns and departures that are also returns: 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 Sybille leave it together at the end of the film presumably to catch up with Richard Coeur de Lion (Ian Glen), 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.\(^{32}\) Hence the siege of Jerusalem also 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 a cinematic emblem of failed exit in the form of vertical transcendence: 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 both instead stuck at the threshold qua gap.

In *Death at 24x a Second*, Laura Mulvey (2005) 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” (27). The two *Kingdom of Heaven* DVDs resemble less a museum than the mausoleum, the two spaces being more than phonetically connected, as Theodor Adorno (1967, 173–86) and others have shown (see Crimp 1993, 44–64). The *Kingdom of Heaven* DVDs uncannily encrypt, both in the sense of encode and inter, the controversies to which they respond: extras have been buried in various places and yet remain there to be raided, exhumed, exscripted, 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 editions of the film, a belatedness about them that won’t ever catch up to the impact of the film in theatrical release but which nevertheless attempt metaleptic re-viewings via what are effectively deracinated or homeless entertainment systems that supplant the theatrical release by retroactively reframing the film’s meaning and genesis.\(^{33}\)
No Exodus

The kinds of narratological problems Scott faces in elaborating a coherent fantasy of decolonization, I should pause to note, are not specific to *Kingdom of Heaven* but extend to films related to Iraq that followed in its wake. The cartoonish action film *The Kingdom* (dir. Peter Berg, 2007), about FBI agents collaborating with Saudis to solve a suicide bombing in a compound of U.S. citizens, makes a geographical detour from Iraq and an unconvincing fantasy of a redo of the 2003 invasion that makes Americans the victims rather than victimizers of terrorism and that unconsciously covers up Osama bin Laden's Saudi national origins. Even more incoherent and interesting for our purposes is the liberal minded drama *Rendition* (dir. Gavin Wood, 2007). The narrative loops back at the ending of the film to a suicide bombing we saw near the beginning of the film, as if on a Moebius strip roller coaster. In order to straighten out the impossible temporality of its “even paranoids may sometimes be right” thriller genre and suspense narrative, however, *Rendition* sacrifices its own liberal, ACLU, Amnesty International-derived critique of the U.S. use of torture to gain information from detainees, allowing that torture works if one is guilty (and an Arab) but fails if one is innocent (and an Arab-American immigrant with a green card married to a pregnant white woman U.S. citizen). *Rendition*’s politics come out backward: though the film presents itself as pro-immigration and pro-interracial marriage, its politics turn out in the end, albeit subtly, to be anti-immigration. (Indeed, it’s never made completely clear that the tortured apparently innocent man who escapes from prison, with the help of an American case officer, is indeed innocent.) Unfolding a strangely American fantasy about the exceptional wrongly accused man being allowed to escape from prison and then to immigrate to the United States, the film has no exodus strategy for all the other Arabs stuck back there somewhere in the civil war—torn Middle East (the geography of the Middle East is never identified—at times it seems that the action takes place in Egypt, at others a mix of Gaza and Israel, and at others Iraq).

“Mission” Accomplished

In order to understand how the film’s mise-hors-scène disturbs the film’s attempts to achieve formal unity, we must first grasp the relation 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 idealizing account of knighthood makes the film more closely resemble the later Children’s Crusades. Religion is at the front and center in *Kingdom of Heaven*, but the real purpose of the film’s division of the Christians into bad, intolerant, and hypocritical fundamentalists, on one hand, and good, spiritual, ecumenical, and morally upright multiculturalists, on the other, is to distinguish 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 a “middle position” (in his audiocommentary on the deleted scene “Golgotha”), standing with the good imperialist occupiers against the bad 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 together in peace, he is greeted by the execution of Templar knights for their criminal attacks on Arab caravans. Balian is a pacific 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 (Nathalie Cox) from Hell by burying her silver necklace with a cross at Golgotha, he ends his pilgrimage and goes, at King Baldwin IVs (Edward Norton) order, to Ibelin to defend the trade route and become an engineer.

As a good occupier who improves his 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 differs from Scott’s idealizing imperialist Columbus (Gérard Depardieu), who goes berserk soon after arriving in the New World and discovers to his deep dismay that he has helped turn Paradise into Hell. Balian wants moral improvement as well in his New Jerusalem: he does not keep slaves, as he tells the Arab friend who says Balian can keep the horse and even him, and his terms of surrender to Saladin are that the people of Jerusalem live and go free. Reversing the domination of the male gaze and eroticizing of the female body that are typical of Orientalist harem bathing scene, Kingdom of Heaven shows a chaste Balian who is the object of the gaze: after bathing at his house in Jerusalem, he demands and obtains a towel from the manservant and covers himself at the waist with it, reluctantly allowing the several smiling, attractive young women ardently towel his torso dry as they laugh in enjoyment.34 Sybilla’s husband, Guy de Lusignan, by contrast, initiates sex with a very attractive 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, 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 lays siege (unlike Richard the Lionheart (Henry Wilcoxson), who leads a successful
attack on Acre in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Crusades*, 1935), and he will not engage in political struggles and will not become King. In the extended DVD edition, 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); the pugnacious hero Sir Kenneth presents an immediate and intolerant challenge to Saladin based on their religious difference. Unlike Sir Walter Scott’s hero, Balian tells Nasir (Alexander Siddig) that he does not want to fight, further departing from Scott’s novel in this scene of *Kingdom of Heaven*: unlike Sir Kenneth, who pugnaciously charges Saladin the charge on horseback because of their religious difference, Balian fights reluctantly over property (his horse) with a sword and on foot against an Arab who is mounted on horseback and armed with a spear and a sword. Similarly, Balian waits for Saladin to begin his siege on Jerusalem before returning 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 to kill one of his adversaries and uses the dagger of another to kill him. 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 defending rather than attacking, Balian is simply following the orders of his father Godfrey (Liam Neeson) and the Hospitaller (David Thewlis). On his deathbed, Godfrey tells Balian to “safeguard the helpless,” and the Hospitaller echoes Godfrey when he advises 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 defense when he knights 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 final resting place to which Balian might retire and reside, *Kingdom of Heaven* suggests not only that Balian is a good occupier, but, contradictorily and more fundamentally, also that he is not really a colonizer at all. Balian is not only a defender, but, more significantly, also a loser, symbolically castrated in psychoanalytic terms and lacking property in economic terms. In the extended edition, he gives Ibelin to his Almaric (Velibor Topic)—the knight who served Godfrey as well as Balian, before the siege—should Balian not survive. Similarly,
Balian defends Jerusalem only to surrender it and then immediately exit 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 he started out believing in God and then saw that the Crusades were all about the accumulation of power and wealth. Tiberias becomes disenchanted and leaves for Cyprus. None of the other good Christians are colonizers either: 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 that the Holy Land was ever really colonized by the Crusaders at all—hence the strange logic of Balian inexplicably losing the black horse after the shipwreck, only to find it at the oasis, and then, after winning the fight against Nasir and his servant, giving the horse away to Nasir when he and Balian arrive at Jerusalem. Although Nasir gives back the horse to Balian near the end of the film, he does so only after Saladin retakes possession of Jerusalem. The exchange of the horse is symbolic not only of friendship despite religious differences but of who owns the Holy Land. The giver in both cases gives away the horse when his religious side owns the Holy Land. And though the city is seen changing hands at the end of the film, Jerusalem by this point is no longer a geographical space but an idea as well. Tiberias, before he leaves for Cyprus, says Jerusalem is finished—meaning that the idea of the Crusaders making “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 their hearts and heads can never be surrendered.

*Kingdom of Heaven*’s even more fundamental strategy for erasing European 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 an 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 the beheaded corpse of 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 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 DVD edition also adds an early scene in which Balian has a flashback of his dead wife planting a tree behind the forge—a flashback that is meant to be recalled at the end of the
film when he touches the buds on the tree. Similarly, the delay between Richard I’s departure and Balian and Sybilla riding off in the same direction 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 Coeur de Lion 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’s end 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 Coeur 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, she leaves Jerusalem and goes back home. Balian and Sybille’s departure from France at the end of the film 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, now the leader of the crusade and a monarch, instead?

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 emerge as a problem of scale that threatens to collapse distinctions both between genders and between adulthood and childhood.

Balian’s return to France at the end of *Kingdom of Heaven* signals his transition to adulthood and his 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 Sybilla’s position on horseback looking down at Balian 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 that is evinced more loudly by the difference between Balian and Sybilla’s 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 registers an aberration in mourning that disturbs the narrative closure of *Kingdom of Heaven*, we need to consider 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. The landscapes 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. In *Ben-Hur* (dir. William Wyler, 1959), Arrius (Jack Hawkins) and Ben-Hur (Charlton Heston) talk about the latter returning home while standing 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 Hephaistion (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. The balcony scenes are clearly sites of homosocial bonding, even homoerotic in the cases of *Spartacus* and *Alexander*, and arguably in *Ben-Hur* as well. To gaze is to command, whether by dominating or liberating.

*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 arid landscape below.

The cinematic mastery in the balcony scene at Ibelin is recalled later when Balian, again with Almaric standing behind him, surveys the land outside Jerusalem to determine at what distances Saladin’s siege towers may be fired upon accurately (see 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 in 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.)

The quiet tension arising from Sybilla gazing down at Balian from the French village forge at the end of the film is more loudly present earlier in the film when Sybilla appears to recolonize Balian’s gaze instead of being,
in typical Orientalist fashion, the erotic object of his gaze. 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 makeup, and henna dyed tattoos on her hands testify. Yet she seems to recolonize Balian's land by at times occupying the commanding position of spectatorship, turning him into an object of her gaze. For example, after she has bathed shortly upon arriving at Ibelin, Sybilla goes to a grated window 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 great distance, he can't possibly see her face or even if someone is actually looking at him. In what seems to be a commanding spectatorial position, she sees him without being seen.

By presenting her gaze in this way, the film risks both making Sybilla into a morally bad character and Balian into a politically weak character. Sybilla's obscured face and her ability to see without being seen darken her character and place her interests at odds with Balian's. Balian's position as Orientalist spectator in command of his land is weakened in a later scene showing Sybilla washing his face on the balcony: the exclusively medium close-up shots of the two characters never show the irrigated land. (Significantly, a deleted scene entitled "Penitent Man II" shows Balian alone on his balcony at night surveying his land as the camera rotates 360 degrees.)

The extended DVD edition of *Kingdom of Heaven* more pointedly marks the erosion of Balian's power and the darkness of Sybilla's increasing dominance by including a montage sequence that begins in the afternoon with shots of Balian in the irrigated fields of Ibelin followed by shots of the field; these shots are followed by a dissolve of the partly wet lands into a matching shot of the irrigated lands later in the day as two men ride their camels in 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 sappho social sequence with Sybilla looking out at Balian, who is now completely unaware that she is observing him.

The point of darkening Sybilla's gaze by constructing it as an apparently recolonizing of Balian's is to make her more powerful than Balian, but it weakens them both. Her gaze is impotent, linked, in psychoanalytic terms, to castration and death. The film's fantasy of decolonization plays out as an undermining of any colonizing gaze in order to ground it in an even more radical fantasy, namely, that the Holy Land was never really colonized by
the good Christians in the first place. The extended edition includes a scene that links Sybilla’s gaze to a wall painting in Balian’s home with the dance-of-death figures and two cartoon-like panels with two banderoles (a medieval analogue of the comic-book word “balloons”) stating “quod sumus” and “hoc ecitis.” (In an earlier scene, Balian translated them for the audience, “Such as we are, you will be”). As day breaks at Ibelin the morning after Sybilla and Balian have had sex, the camera pans left from the balcony on the newly irrigated lands, then cuts inside the room where they had sex, and a tilt shot of the wall shows the dance-of-death panels as the camera moves upward. Two medium close-ups of Sybilla lying horizontally in bed alternate with a shot of the dance of death: now awake and with Balian still asleep, she silently reads the panel with the banderole stating “you will be [dead].”

The harsh sounds at the end of the illicit Crusader attack on the Arab caravan continue into the long shot of the irrigated fields at the beginning of this added scene and are replaced by a flute when the camera enters 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 attack on the Arab caravan mark Ibelin not as an idyllic pastoral space distinct from the violence of the caravan route, wherein Guy and Reynald de Chatillon (Brendan Gleeson) make their attack, but 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.

To distinguish Sybilla from a colonizer and represent her as someone not interested in colonization but in peace and moral improvement by constructing her gaze as 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 in 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 a close-up (a tighter shot) of Sybilla follows two more times during the battle, after Balian seems to be killed and when Baldwin arrives and negotiates a truce with Saladin, and is used a final time when Baldwin enters the fortress to punish Reynald and twice more after Reynald has been punished.

The battle of 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 followed by a high-angle 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, keeping her level with Balian and Guy. The sequence cuts her gaze down to size, so to speak, and flattens it out. A similar breach of continuity
in editing occurs with respect to Sybilla’s gaze after the battle when a medium close-up shot of Sybilla looking down from the ramparts at the siege is followed by a long shot of Balian returning from negotiations with Saladin. Yet at the end of 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’s exit strategy fantasy 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 a donkey 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 without noticing her when she tends to the injured gravedigger (Martin Hancock) even though she faces him as he passes by her. 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 possession by undoing the colonial gaze—for the decolonization of Sybilla’s gaze ends up making her character less rather than more consistent, morally either worse or better than Balian (she is willing to engage in Machiavellian hardball politics but she also abdicates). Though Scott says in his introduction to the extended DVD edition 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 described as a murderous, scheming harpy fighting with Tiberias for control of Jerusalem and 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 edition, 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 cover over and recall the shot of looking at Balian outside from behind the grated window 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. 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, however. Indeed, the scene in which she cuts her hair suggests that her mirror reflection as a purified martyr recalling Maria Falconetti’s appearance in Carl Dreyer’s *Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) 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 him from the balcony may evoke a maternal feeling on her part, but it is precisely her status as a loving mother that the euthanasia scene leaves in doubt, not only because of the act of infanticide itself, but also 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 undoing colonization through the castration of Balian’s and Sybilla’s gazes, *Kingdom of Heaven* significantly subverts gender and religious differences. A crane longshot 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 Christian and the Muslim leaders 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: see, for two examples, four briefly held low-angle close-ups of Balian wearing black clothing and a black headdress looking much like the mullah’s (Khaled Nabawy) and a shot-reverse shot sequence of a similarly dressed Balian looking down at Guy looking up 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 Downfall: Scaling the Film Frame

By turning now to scenes in *Kingdom of Heaven* involving scale model toys, we may see that the collapsing of adulthood into childhood in these same scenes further extends the film’s fantasy of decolonization. Just as Balian does not frame the scene through a commanding, colonizing gaze, so too his play with models and toys reveals him even more directly as a castrated, childlike hero who cannot frame and place elements in the mise-en-scène. In his book *Cartographic Cinema*, Tom Conley notes the frequency with which maps appear in films, and the historical films and film epics almost invariably include them. It is all the more striking that the only map in *Kingdom of Heaven* is a scroll young Baldwin writes during a geography lesson given him 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 made between the map, residence, and a child-size perspective is made even clearer in the film through the use of scale models,
notably the scale model of Jerusalem in Tiberias’s quarters that Balian examines. The film’s difficulty in achieving narrative unity follow from a literal lack of an adult capability of framing and directing what goes into the film’s mise-en-scène and where. 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 Jerusalem set with siege towers, perhaps inadvertently implying 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 Colosseum in Gladiator where Commodus places models of two gladiators in the center. Gladiator looks back to scenes of Nero (Peter Ustinov) surveying and then showing a scale model of his new Rome in Quo Vadis as well as to a scale model of Troy in a promotional documentary for Helen of Troy (dir. Robert Wise, 1956), in which the announcer hovers over a scale model of Troy. 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 code a political stance. In Gladiator, the shot of Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) putting a gladiator such as 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 is a direct match between Commodus’s scale model Colosseum and the full-scale CGI Colosseum, associated with shots from Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will (1935) and also from a Nazi film of Albert Speer’s scale model of the new Berlin.

The Downfall (dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) begins with Hitler (Bruno Ganz) and Speer (Heino Ferch) discussing his scale model of Berlin (a replica of the new Nazi Berlin scale model used in Rienfenstahl’s film). The match between model and city in the successive shots of Gladiator implies that Commodus is a fascist auteur and a demonic parody of Ridley Scott, an antifascist but otherwise apolitical film auteur. A promotional book for 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 book has two successive pages matching a shot of Scott with the production model of Jerusalem; a storyboard drawing of Saladin’s siege; a technical drawing of a Jerusalem street; and a scale model of the city under siege.

Unlike the film 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 defense of Jerusalem seems more closely matched to the chess pieces than it does to the scale model siege tower.

The extended edition inadvertently makes clear that the film’s problem of coding 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 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 finally when Sybilla euthanizes her young son by pouring poison in his ear. The 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 with his back resting on a palm tree, and coming to a stop behind one of the three Templars arriving to assassinate him. The sequence of these two shots draws a connection between Balian and both the boy, abandoned by his mother Sybilla, and her young son’s toy knight.

As if to reinforce the point, the film links Balian to the children at Ibelin, the extended edition 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. Similarly, a shot of Balian writing at night when Sybilla comes to have sex with him, with the inkstand in the right foreground, is echoed in a later series of shots of young Baldwin signing peace letters to Saladin 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 that were 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 return to the female gaze marks an abandoning of the commanding male gaze. The letter 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 hawkeyed war-mongering Patriarch (Jon Finch) observes that young Baldwin does not feel the hot wax that accidentally drops on his hand as he seals a letter, the Patriarch does not let on that he has discovered the boy’s leprosy, the Patriarch does not act on this knowledge and gains no advantage from it.46

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 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 edition of *Kingdom of Heaven*, 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 Baldwin too is unable 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 geographical and cinematic placement: an uncanniness or homelessness about the Holy Land undermines Balian’s ability to be heroic by taking his supposedly rightful place in the film’s landscape and mise-en-scène. 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 an elevating movement that implies a colonizing command of territory and bodies. Indeed, vertical camera movements always occur in the film as territory is lost, as in the crane shots of Christian soldiers going to battle Saladin after Guy fails to heed Balian’s warning, the end of the shipwreck sequence when Balian loses his horse, when Balian explains to his men on the Jerusalem 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 in the distance.47

Blackwater Down: 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 mise-hors-scène, a problem, that is, 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 such as 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 chicken seen in medium close-up in the first shot of Balian’s flashback of his dead wife and another chicken
in a very similar medium close-up shot in Balian's home in Ibelin seen before he enters it and smiles at it, as if in recognition; 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 “I am the blacksmith.”

By deepening the meaning of these repetitions, the added scenes in the extended DVD edition may help further develop the characters, but 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 DVD edition of the theatrical release of Kingdom of Heaven. The added scenes are thus redundant, extraneous, and 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 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 edition 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 gushing from his neck (disc two, 0:40:11). In footage added in the extended DVD edition, 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 vindictive and brutal in this extended version, our view of Saladin’s character is left unchanged. His anger at Reynald links his additional violence to Balian’s violence at the village priest. Both 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 personal execution of Reynald as we do earlier before Saladin orders his men to march to Hattin: Nasir looks unhappy after Reynald is beheaded, while the fundamentalist mullah smiles gleefully. This splitting of Arabs into good moderates and bad fanatics is also present in the Talisman-inspired scene at the oasis, with Ridley Scott replacing the single Arab in Sir Walter Scott’s novel (and in David Butler’s 1954 film adaptation King Richard and the Crusaders) with two Arabs, one impulsively violent, the other a trickster and gentleman.

In addition to being redundant, many of the added scenes included in the extended edition of Kingdom of Heaven derail attempts to unify it by creating new questions in the process rather than by answering questions raised by the shorter DVD theatrical release edition. By having Saladin behead Reynald using the sword the mullah offers him, the extended edition makes nonsense of the theatrical release edition in which he refuses that sword and uses his own dagger instead to slit Reynald’s throat. Moreover, no mention is made of the draft screenplay (included as an extra on disc three of the extended edition) in which Saladin puts his finger in
Reynald’s blood after slitting his throat and then touching his own bloody finger to his own forehead, leaving the gurgling Reynald to be taken out of the tent and butchered by Saladin’s men. The attack led by Guy and Reynald on the Arab caravan is similarly made more violent and less consistent in the extended edition, with a brief shot of the Muslim grandee (Nasser Memarizia) cut in half from shoulder to stomach by Reynald, who looks all the more evil in consequence. By adding a conversation between the Muslim grandee and Tiberias after Reynald evades prosecution by Tiberias for Reynald’s unauthorized caravan attack, the film makes clear that this same Muslim grandee shouts in recognition “You!” off camera at Reynald. In the shorter theatrical release DVD edition, the meaning of this recognition is left unclear because the Muslim grandee is seen only in the background in Tiberias’s quarters, remaining silent; he is thus next to impossible to identify as Reynald’s victim in the caravan 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 corrupted by a sack of coins Tiberias throws at him contemptuously. Furthermore, the much lengthier sex scene before the caravan attack makes that attack seem like a consequence of Sybilla’s adultery rather than the kind of action that appears to have caused her to commit adultery, namely, his immoral, rogue violence.

Cutting and Rutting: Outland Empire, or Lost My Highway

The writing in the opening title and end title of the film, or peritexts, frame it like bookends and put brakes on the film’s narrative recursiveness, thereby attempting to resolve the problem of the mise-hors-scène by enclosing the film narrative. Yet the audiocommentaries and other epitexts of the extended DVD edition effectively undo the resolution offered by the peritextual framing to the film’s lack of closure by removing the writing, or brakes, and 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 openly do this 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. One possibility was to have Balian ride after Richard Coeur 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 a historical epic that should have been marketed as a major “prestige picture” such as Lawrence of Arabia (dir. David Lean, 1963) or Gandhi (dir. 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,” 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 at 24x a Second, Laura Mulvey notes that the introduction of new technologies such as DVD involve “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” (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 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 movies such as Kingdom of Heaven on DVD. 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 audiocommentaries always involve time delays, returns, and repetitions, even as they can be heard only if the DVD is played at its normal speed.48

The extended DVD edition of Kingdom of Heaven provides the viewer with a self-historicizing frame in the form of genetic criticism (audiocommentaries 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 delay but repetitions and returns of the repressed, an uncanny (un)censoring, what follows is a kind of phallic disorder of the auteur, involving a priapic, Pinnochio-like extension and elongation of Scott’s authority over the film, on one hand, and a symbolic castration/fragmentation of that authority, on the other. The framing extras are both too much and not enough, remainders that are too little and too late. The DVD’s belated self-historicization takes the form of an
endlessly recursive loop, and so challenges the uncritically held assumptions about narrative and time held by of historicist film and media critics and theorists, even when, as in Mulvey’s case, it incorporates psychoanalysis.

The extended edition of *Kingdom of Heaven* suggests that the 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 (1979) points out, but require more excuses. Thus, paratextual attempts to explain and justify *Kingdom of Heaven* more often than not produce questions rather than answers. Consider the commentary by Ridley Scott and his film editor Dody Dorn on 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. 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. Her gesture of offering the orange to Balian is repeated in another deleted and extended scene, “The New World,” in which Godfrey, on his deathbed, reaches out to give Balian an orange. The deleted and extended scene unifies the film through this kind of repeated element and gesture 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. These deleted and extended scenes thus seem no more extraneous than other additions. Yet neither Scott nor Dorn offer any comment on the connection or explain why the dead wife comes back or why they cut that part of the scene.

Their silence seems more symptomatic, a kind of phantom commentary, than merely contingent, and tracks the generally haunted landscapes of the film. Numerous shots of the dead show the inconsistent ways in which the remains of the dead are either disposed of or left to rot: Balian has his wife buried but cremates the baby’s clothes; he and Saladin cremate corpses during the siege of Jerusalem but those who lie dead after the siege ends are never seen being buried; in a phantom of the opera moment, Sybilla takes off what has become the death mask of her brother and then puts it back on as he lies in his open coffin; drowned seafarers lie unburied on the beach after the shipwreck; Arab and Christian corpses remain strewn on battle fields; and in the deleted “Flashback” scene, Balian, Almaric, and Sybilla discover several semiburied Christians, the wind blowing sand off their partially exposed corpses, when arriving at the aftermath of the Templars’ attack on the caravan.

Scott’s, Monahan’s, and Dorn’s audiocommentaries on scenes that relate to 9/11 and the war in Iraq register a different kind of haunting. No explanation is offered for the deletion of “Hattin Aftermath,” a scene in which Saladin and Nasir walk around the corpses of Christian knights until Saladin gives the order to behead all of the prisoners. In his audiocommentary on this scene, Scott begins by praising Saladin as a “great all-round character of very high integrity . . . and a very, very tough ruler” who had to “act politically” and do “things maybe he really didn’t want to do.” In a typically
oblique manner, Scott excuses Saladin’s execution of the prisoners without ever saying that Saladin ordered their execution. Dorn then jumps in and explains that “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 [sic].” Scott quickly leaps to a talking point:

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’s commentary indirectly justifies Saladin’s argument, but Scott does not explain why he cut the scene, as he and Dorn do explain in the extended scene entitled “Rape.” The extended edition of the “Rape” scene after Reynald has provoked the war Guy wishes for shows a number of Crusader prisoners kneeling, their arms bound behind them, about to be beheaded after the first prisoner is beheaded. The extended scene also briefly shows in the background of the shot two of Reynald’s men holding a woman down while 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 then 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 beheading of the Crusader prisoners, 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, regardless of whether they were fanatics or not.

Instead of a framing perspective that allows one to understand better how the film’s narrative is unified in the extended DVD edition, then, these epitexts morph into a palimpsest of sedimented frames that make the narrative seem less rather than more unified. Explanations involve loud silences that register 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 both called “Path to Redemption,” and both discs have numbered tables of contents. Indeed, putting them in dialogue involves 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 edition is not integrated into the DVD. It is a menu option, but after 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 spatially as well as temporally uncanny. 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 an interior film narrative and its surrounding paratexts, or what Mulvey calls “external discourses.”

No End in Sight: Between Two Kingdom of Heavens

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 the 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 exscription. The events of 9/11 and the war in Iraq are only one historical horizon among others that haunt the film. The DVD editions return not only to this contemporary horizon and the prerelease controversy over the film’s putatively pro-Muslim sympathies but also to the earlier horizon of 1960s road show theatrical exhibitions of the film epic as well as to the exhibition history of Kingdom of Heaven and the history of the making of the extended DVD edition. The Engineer’s Guide on the extended DVD edition begins with an account of the road show exhibition and ends with commentary on the Laemmle theatrical exhibition.

Moreover, this extended DVD edition mimes the road show theatrical releases of earlier epics such as Ben-Hur, King of Kings (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1961), Spartacus, The Ten Commandments, El Cid, among others, by including, as did these roadshow releases, an overture, entr’acte, intermission, and exit music. Just as Scott returned in Gladiator to Anthony Mann’s Fall of the Roman Empire and remade it, so Scott returned in Kingdom of Heaven to Mann’s El Cid (1961), remaking not only that film but his own Gladiator...
(1995) as well (see Winkler 2004). Full of citations to many of Scott’s earlier films, Kingdom of Heaven arguably returns to The Duellists (1976), his earliest film, set in the Napoleonic empire and focused on the unsuccessful efforts of one officer to de-escalate and disengage from a decades-long series of challenges to his honor. In this commentary in the end title sequence, Scott mentions that Richard was imprisoned on his way back to England and that Scott shot scenes from The Duellists at Dürnstein, the castle where Richard Coeur de Lion was imprisoned on his return to England. Yet the recursiveness of Kingdom of Heaven’s epitexts shows that the film’s narrative and archaeology are actually closer to David Lynch’s three most recent films, Lost Highway (1997), Mulholland Drive (2001), and Inland Empire (2006), in which a Mobeius strip narrative recursively loops back to the beginning and then starts over.55

Deadenders: Historicism in the Wake of Cinema’s Digital Remains

Historicist cultural film criticism entails the same kind of Oedipal quest for origins played out in Richard Donner’s Timeline (2003), regarding history as a narrative, whether grand or petit.56 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 as incomplete and full of absences—a nonunified narrative from the perspective of a historical narrative (or a fully narratable theory of sexuality and cinema) that is assumed to be 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.57 Though she refers to the “technological uncanny” and uses psychoanalytic language (fetishism), her account of digital film and delay is really antipsychoanalytic in that it assumes that a film can be (re)viewed without loss, that a DVD edition is an essentially 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, such as Mulvey (2005), assume that cinema has a resting place, a grave. The historicist locates a given film in a sequence of narratable, symbolizable events.

Like so many films on DVD that are subject a series of homeless phantom commentaries and deleted scenes, the DVD editions of Kingdom of Heaven are radically uncanny, however, because they have more than just one restless place since the film object is never definitively over. These always already more or less “extended” DVD editions represent a broader challenge to the practice and theory of historicist film criticism in that their erratic and uneven temporality and ontological fragmentation impede a coherently narratable transition between a film’s death after theatrical release finished and its subsequent afterlife on DVD. 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 Slavoj Žižek (1989) comments,

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. (135)

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 (dir., Richard Donner, 2003) shows, excavation involves, on the one hand, a violence that 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. Hence, the meaning of the tomb's contents is written on its outside.58

By understanding how Kingdom of Heaven and its paratexts are relayed between two uncannily double DVDs, we may grasp a more general point, namely, that historicism and film and media theory of a cultural studies cast cannot escape the trauma that the historicist film critic wants to make fully 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 exscriptions. Murmurings 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.