

# The Impact of New Visual Media on Discourse and Persuasion in the War Film

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## Abstract

The recent uses of digital technology in war films have sparked a wave of discussions about new visual aesthetics in the genre. Drawing on the approach of film discourse analysis, this article critically examines recent claims about new visual grammar in the war film and investigates to what extent the insertion of different media channels has affected the persuasive function of the genre. Through a detailed analysis of *Redacted* (2007), which constitutes an extreme case of a fiction filmmaking use of a variety of digital channels, this article demonstrates that the multimedia format works within systems of classical film discourse while also generating new patterns of persuasion tied to new visual technology.

**Keywords:** digital media; new visual technology; cohesion in film; genre; war film; persuasion

## Introduction

Studies of aesthetics in mainstream narrative films generally show that a high degree of narrative coherence and stylistic stability are the basis of narrative inference and genre expectation. For instance, David Bordwell demonstrates that the principal features of the continuity system have been astonishingly robust throughout the evolution of Hollywood filmmaking.<sup>1</sup> Nick Jones compares 2D and 3D formats and shows how they function in a similar fashion in terms of continuity and narrative effect.<sup>2</sup> Bordwell's and Jones's analyses both point to the fact that, despite changes in visual techniques over time (e.g. as shorter average shot lengths, the use of wider range lenses, the 3D format and CGI), the composition of 'space, time, and narrative relations (such as causal connections and parallels)' in mainstream films remains readily identifiable and this leads the viewer to an effortless comprehension and prediction of the film narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Bordwell and Jones conducted their investigations to elucidate how audiences interpret the audio-visual representations of mainstream fiction films. However, given the widespread use of networked electronic multimedia and social media,

many contemporary narrative feature films choose to embed such multimedia channels within narratives. Of course, using different types of mediated image in a fiction film is nothing new – in *Citizen Kane* (1941), Orson Welles created a newsreel reporting the life of the main character, while the war film *Georg* (1964) begins with a scene that purports to be footage recorded by a soldier's handheld camera. Such a use of different media in fiction films creates a pseudo-documentary mode and, in recent decades, this pseudo-documentary dimension has expanded, along with the evolution of visual technology, beyond the mere insertion of handheld camera work or a piece of newsreel footage. For instance, the war film *Redacted* (2007) exploits new visual technology for pseudo-documentary effect in an extreme fashion, making use of a diverse range of media including camcorder diary, newsreel, surveillance camera, documentary film, websites, self-uploaded YouTube videos and online Skype chat.

A considerable body of work on the recent uses of multimedia formats, particularly in the war film, has emphasised the subversion of generic expectations and the disruption of narrative space and the effect this has viewer engagement and immersion. Garrett Stewart refers to the recent electronic overload at the level plot in the war film as 'genre crash',<sup>4</sup> while Jamie Russell suggests that the development of new media constitutes a 'seismic shift', which redefines the visual grammar of the war genre in films such as *Redacted*, as well as *Stop-Loss* (2008) and *Battle for Haditha* (2007).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Patricia Pisters argues that the contemporary war film has undergone a stylistic shift towards a multiscreen aesthetics that disperses the experience of war on to 'multiple cameras, multiple screens and multiple human subjects'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Holger Pötzsch suggests that the constant flow of disconnected imagery created by digital communication technologies distorts and refracts the purported reality of war, and insists that accounts purporting to convey authentic war history are being replaced by a variety of diffused war stories that resist combination into a coherent whole.<sup>7</sup> This article assesses these positions and seeks to distinguish between the different types of pseudo-documentary elements used in war films; rather than lumping them all together in the category of digital media, it argues that it is necessary to discriminate on the basis of their different functional roles within the film's discourse.

This article focuses specifically on the war film because the genre functions to promote specific kinds of historical discourse, ideology and memory politics through the propagation of a particular attitude and interpretation of a given war, which in turn reminds the viewers of collective memories of a shared past. A study of the textual features of war films thus sheds light on the mechanisms through which audio-visual media create specific discursive impacts. An examination of recent war films that utilise new forms of digital mediation provides an effective starting point for investigating the dialectics of media and genre evolution.

In terms of methodology, the article draws on the technique of film discourse analysis developed recently to investigate how written, verbal and audio-visual elements contribute to the construction of a coherent whole, working together to produce socio-cultural meanings.<sup>8</sup> This choice of methodology is important

since, unlike the piecemeal, problem-solving approach, film discourse analysis draws on a bottom-up, systematic analysis in order to highlight culturally and aesthetically specific patterns drawn directly from textual data and the co-patterning of formal elements. From the traditional perspective of hermeneutic and cultural studies, the discourse patterns that emerge from the data might seem to simply reconfirm immediately apparent interpretations; however, the most valuable feature of this method consists precisely in revealing how the most conventional, readily apparent interpretations are actually constructed and signalled to the viewers through a combination of low-level formal features. In other words, unlike the purely top-down hermeneutic, cultural approaches, discourse analysis unravels the process by which constrained patterns of meaning result in specific paths of interpretation, which, in turn, reflect determined cultural and aesthetic traits.

The article begins by explaining the film discourse analysis approach before applying this method to a detailed analysis of *Redacted*. It focuses, in particular, on its scene transitions,<sup>9</sup> since the main critical accounts of this film rest on a supposed lack of spatial and temporal clarity, which, Ken Provencher and others have claimed,<sup>10</sup> makes it difficult for the viewer to connect the fragments derived from different digital media formats. Discourse analysis shows that – despite the ever-present framing devices, such as timecodes, hyperlinks, shaky images and logos – the linearity of the narrative and discursive patterns are not that different from De Palma's earlier war film, *Casualties of War* (1989). As Pisters claims, 'history seems to repeat itself in terms of war crimes on film at least'.<sup>11</sup> However, the discourse analysis conducted here shows that *Redacted* and *Casualties of War* resemble each other not just on a thematic level, or in terms of plot (both deal with similar war crimes),<sup>12</sup> but also to some extent at a formal and structural level (through analogous storytelling methods). Moreover, in *Redacted*, many of the emotional elements, which war films conventionally present through visual cues, are explicitly verbalised by the soldiers and thus mitigate the effect of character engagement. The screenwriting motto of 'show, don't tell' now seems to have been replaced by the characters' verbal description of events; it would appear that De Palma shares the view of many scholars that immersion is diminished if the viewer is constantly aware of the form.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to define all that new visual technology and multimedia are capable of, or to denigrate the formal importance of new technology and the ways it is used by filmmakers and received by audiences. Rather, from the perspective of genre expectations and the function of persuasion, it seeks to examine the current relationship of new media to dominant and traditional methods of filmmaking in the anti-war film.

### **Disruption, Disorientation and the New Visual Grammar**

Several critical accounts of the new visual style in war films have focused on disruption and disorientation, in particular the disruption of the viewer's ability to predict the narrative, and of their emotional engagement. Discussing digital mediation in recent American war films, Garrett Stewart pinpoints a 'genre crash' caused by 'electronic overload' and 'hackneyed techniques of digital intervention, where the

crisis shows itself now in private camcorder files, each disembodied and impassive'.<sup>14</sup> The original narrative and emotional aims of a war film, such as depicting the reality of war and the maturation of the soldiers, is replaced by second-hand embedded footage, low-resolution infrared images and surveillance videos. In a similar vein, Provencher suggests that, on a formal level, *Redacted* 'replicates the fragmented forms of new media to disturbing effect, mashing clips together to force a reaction from a powerless "userbase" audience' and 'knowing that each and every clip will sooner or later switch to a different source, the viewer is constantly aware of the form; there is almost no immersion'.<sup>15</sup>

Both Stewart and Provencher call attention not only to the extensive use of digital images, but also to their disruption of the immersive effect, which was originally one of the main expressive goals pursued by anti-war films. Stewart coins the term 'digital fatigue' to describe the new digital aesthetic of violence with which the viewer must contend, which he discusses mainly in terms of the use of shaky, handheld footage with desaturated colours and of multiple frames in mediated formats.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Provencher points out that, for the first-time viewer, watching *Redacted* is an odd experience due to the formal discontinuity between scenes: every scene is a primary source clip and the viewer is constantly aware of the form, which leads to a lack of immersion.<sup>17</sup>

The theoretical relation between digital mediation (i.e. showing footage filmed by digital recorders used by characters in film) and the reduction of immersive effect has yet to be explored or tested empirically. Nevertheless, recent studies of media reception and appreciation have shown that a subtler distinction is required between the direct affective response and the evaluative appreciation the viewer experiences; it is now typical for researchers to recognise that material whose narrative form may not elicit an immediate emotional response may nonetheless be deeply gratifying.<sup>18</sup> For instance, films are often seen as more meaningful when they focus extensively on questions of human moral virtues and they make the viewer contemplate such virtues. The pursuit of an emotional response in the war film, in particular, rests exactly on this kind of meaningful, contemplative gratification. The war film is characterised as meaningful through its depiction of courage, heroism, guilt, trauma, and so on, and the gratification goes beyond direct affective responses such as the 'shock and awe' that viewers experience in reaction to traditional battle scenes.

Building on this empirical distinction between a direct affective response during the viewing process and a more general contemplative gratification based on meaning experienced after watching a film, I would argue that, despite their constant transitions between different digitally mediated sources, recent war films can still construct the kind of contemplative meaning-based response that the traditional war film has pursued for decades. This is achieved by adapting the functions of multimedia videos to fulfil the same purposes as more classical, straightforward forms of spatio-temporal narrative structure.

This contention can be related to the critical accounts of incoherence and disorientation in war films using the digitally mediated footage discussed. For instance, when analysing *Stop-Loss* (2008), Pötzsch argues that the entire opening sequence presents a rapid succession of disorganised and visually inconsistent images shot by

the soldiers themselves, which lack any establishing shots and indications of date, time or place to help orient the viewer.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, when describing the narrative strategies in *Redacted*, Provencher identifies a lack of spatio-temporal coherence across different scenes and claims that (first-time) audiences are left disoriented and distanced.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, I would suggest that, despite the shaky, low-resolution camcorder videos and the constant transitions between variously mediated images, coherent mechanisms of narration are mobilised to ensure that the viewer has a clear sense of space and time and can readily interpret the narrative. This hypothesis is tested in later sections through an analysis of scene transitions in *Redacted* and the opening scene of *Stop-Loss* discussed by Pötzsch.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of recent scholarship on digital media in the war film is the supposed emergence of a new visual grammar.<sup>22</sup> For example, Pisters coins the phrase 'logistics of Perception 2.0' to describe the multiscreen aesthetics of recent war films. She points out that in *Redacted* each narrative event is presented on a different type of screen and that these screens correspond to different aspects of combat.;<sup>23</sup> They each show one fragment and one perspective on the overall narrative and thus it becomes important to distinguish between the different screens and to understand how they relate to one another. She goes on to claim that this is a new viewing experience, a new logistics of perception, in which the viewer is not passively captured by the authenticity of war, but rather participates in a cinematic combat remediated through different platforms and screens. Pisters convincingly argues that the new culture of digital media requires us to be capable of distinguishing between different kinds of digital screens as well as digesting information distributed via multiple channels. However, within the context of mainstream cinema (and in particular war films which aim to achieve certain pragmatic visual goals), stable sets of discursive cues function under the surface of the multiple screens to help viewers construct a narrative in off-screen space.<sup>24</sup> I have made a similar argument elsewhere, distinguishing the 'material space' of multiple screens from the off-screen 'discourse space' constructed by the viewer.<sup>25</sup> Building on this distinction, this article demonstrates that digital mediation in the war film functions at the level of 'material space' but does not have a significant impact on the viewers' interpretation of the narrative at the level of 'discourse space'; thus films making use of digital media footage remain compatible with existing methods of narration within mainstream cinema.

### **Multi-media Formats in Pseudo-documentary War Films**

Before commencing our analysis, we must distinguish the different pseudo-documentary formats used in the war film, since these elements have different narrative and pragmatic effects and thus cannot be encompassed in a simple aesthetic category labelled 'digital mediation'.

The most salient of the multiple screens in recent war films is the video diary made by soldiers using handheld cameras. As we have seen, this is not a new invention. Ever since the emergence of the portable camera, war films such as *Georg* (1964),

*The War Game* (1965) and *84 Charlie MoPic* (1989) have made use of the pseudo-documentary style. This device allows the filmmaker to present a compilation of mediated first-person observations and, thanks to the widespread use of camcorders and digital recording devices, it has been widely used by Iraq war films. The use of footage from a mediated first-person perspective is a form of restricted narration: it confines the audience's knowledge to what a specific character knows.<sup>26</sup> One major affective function of such restricted narration is that it powerfully builds suspense and uncertainty (this is why handheld camera footage is widely used in horror films). The war documentary *Armadillo* (2009) exploits this effect by making use of a helmet-mounted camera, which allows the viewer to follow the soldiers closely in their daily life in the camp and eventually into the battlefield. As the film unfolds, the direct emotional impact created by the first-person experiences and restricted narration is quite striking, and this fact immediately contradicts Stewart's claims that shaky, low-resolution mediated footage results in a disembodied, distanced and non-immersive effect.<sup>27</sup>

Not all pseudo-documentary elements present themselves as a record of a character's observations, however; other types of mediated image can also produce a pseudo-documentary effect. In *Redacted*, for instance, the hidden camera of a psychologist dealing with his soldier patient and the surveillance cameras in the military base do not purport to embody a particular character's perspective. Similarly, news-reels, archive films, documentary footage and the like provide more wide-ranging, authoritative information about what is happening that transcends the characters' immediate situation. Another commonly used element in the pseudo-documentary is the mock interview with a peripheral character or the presentation of the opinions of the general public. For instance, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) used the protagonist's vocation as a military journalist to present a series of 'television interviews' with soldiers. In war films produced in the age of the Internet, like *Redacted*, such mock interviews are often channelled through online media, such as websites and YouTube videos.

Pisters is right to suggest that one trait of recent war films is the presentation of multiple perspectives on the entire narrative.<sup>28</sup> However, this is not a consequence of the omnipresence of digital media in war films; rather, it has been a characteristic of the pseudo-documentary genre for decades. As viewers, we are able to distinguish between the fragments and understand the relation between different screens not primarily because we are all familiar users of digital media but, above all, because the cohesive cues of typical mainstream films are at work to guide us through the different mediated screens.

### Multimodal Film Discourse Analysis and Narrative Coherence

This section illustrates how recently developed methods of multimodal film discourse analysis, and in particular the method for analysing *film cohesion*, can be effectively used to analyse narrative coherence in the digitally mediated fragments used in recent war films.<sup>29</sup> This method of analysis draws on the linguistic theory

of discourse analysis,<sup>30</sup> and the basic premise is that the different *discourse dimensions* of the film interact with viewer expectations in order to construct the film's narrative. These 'discourse dimensions' are distinct from technical features such as cuts, shots, camera angles and so on, and represent the means by which viewers interpret meanings in film. Discourse dimensions include at least the following patterns, which reflect the viewers' path of narrative prediction during film viewing: the spatio-temporal structure, the characters' actions and interactions, the orchestration of emotion and the cohesion of elements throughout the course of a film.<sup>31</sup> These discourse dimensions are mobilised through the co-patterning of multimodal film elements at a subordinate level. In the remainder of this section, I show how multimodal film discourse can be analysed through an examination of film cohesion to reveal how characters, objects and settings are realised multimodally and brought together into a coherent whole to guide the spectators' interpretation of the narrative. An analysis of the opening sequence from *Stop-Loss* provides a demonstration of this method and the most significant shots in this sequence can be seen in Figure 1.

This sequence – which Pötzsch regards as fragmented, inconsistent and incoherent – is constructed from a collection of footage and still images captured by the soldiers' handheld cameras. Toby Keith's song 'Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue' accompanies the entire sequence. In the beginning, we are presented with written text (frame 1), apparently edited by the soldiers into a music-video-like sequence conveying that they are returning home after 28 days. The song is played by one of the soldiers (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) (frame 2), sung collectively by other soldiers around him, and obviously recorded by the handheld camera (shown in close-up in frame 4) of one of the soldiers. As the song continues, we see more fragmented images of the soldiers loading their guns (frames 3, 5, 9) and a few still photos made by the soldiers themselves (frames 6, 7, 8). This is followed by further footage of the soldiers enjoying themselves in the camp (frames 11, 14) and with Iraqi children (frame 13). In the midst of this is an insert (frame 12), which appears to be a continuation of the first shot (frame 2) and suggests that the soldiers have continued singing. As the song ends, changes in video resolution and the pace of the editing (frames 15, 16) signal a transition from the soldiers' homemade music video to the next scene at a checkpoint, where the soldiers confront insurgents.

In this sequence, although the continuous soundtrack binds the frames together into a collection of visual memories, the spatio-temporal links between each frame are indeed loose and mostly undefinable. Pötzsch's contention that the music video sequence is disorienting seems to some degree plausible.<sup>32</sup> The remainder of this section employs the method for analysing film cohesion to explore whether, in fact, significant cues are used to direct the viewer to form a coherent narrative. Tseng and Bateman have conducted a similar analysis into narrative coherence in non-linear puzzle films, the results of which show that most Hollywood puzzle films, despite a temporally complex structure, have a highly robust and cohesive structure.<sup>33</sup> Drawing on their findings, the following analysis tests the hypothesis that this cohesively structured opening sequence functions to frame the narrative of



1.1



1.2



1.3



1.4



1.5



1.6



1.7



1.8

**Figure 1** Key frames (1–16) in the opening sequence of *Stop-Loss* (2008, Kimberly Peirce, Paramount Pictures/Scott Rudin Productions/MTV Films/Peirce Pictures).

the film and guide the viewers' narrative predictions rather than to disorient them as Pötzsch has claimed.

The theory of filmic cohesion concerns the way that characters, objects and locations are presented and tracked throughout the course of a film. These tracks



1.9



1.10



1.11



1.12



1.13



1.14



1.15



1.16

Figure 1 (Continued).

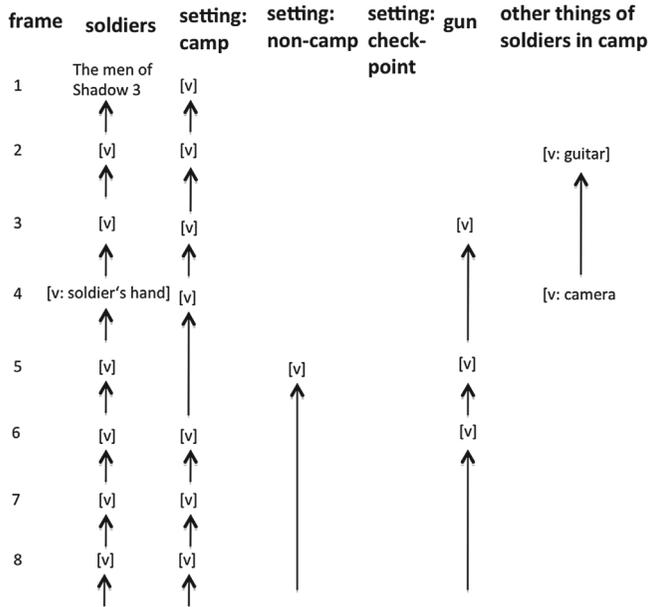
form cohesive chains, which link both visual and verbal information about salient characters, objects and locations. Cohesive ties between each (re)appearance of the characters, objects and locations provide important cues that guide the viewer along deliberate interpretative paths. An example of the way this process operates

in the opening sequence of *Redacted* can be seen in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. These show that six chains are established in this sequence: one relating to the main character type, 'soldiers'; three relating to locations; one relating to an object, 'guns'; and one foregrounding salient objects seen in this sequence. In this way, cohesive ties between multimodal elements are established across the sixteen frames. These ties can be constructed from any visual or verbal mode in the film, and hence each chain is cross-modal. In other words, reoccurrences of visual and verbal elements bind the sequence together, often through established continuity techniques.

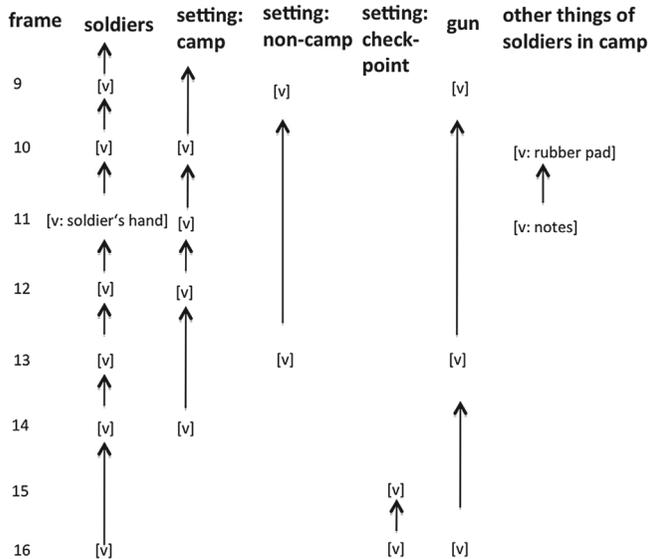
In this sequence, the most prevalent are the location of the camp and the characters of the soldiers, who are identified in the written caption in frame 1 as 'the Men of Shadow 3' and subsequently reappear either explicitly (through a frontal framing) or implicitly (through details of their hands and arms, as in frames 4 and 11). The implicit appearances are cued by the techniques of continuity editing. A further two chains relate to 'non-camp' locations, be they unspecified (as in frames 5, 9, 13) or the checkpoint (in frames 15 and 16) which will be the setting for the scene immediately following the music video sequence. In addition to the character and setting chains, two further chains structure the most prominent objects in the sequence, such as guns and several of the soldier's possessions (e.g. a camera in frame 4; a notebook in frame 11; and the rubber pads on the soldiers' arms as they box in frame 10).

More importantly, relations between these cohesive chains anchor them in relation to more abstract narrative configurations, which go beyond individual variations in shots and sequences. Thus, in frames 1–14, the interactions between the cohesive chains already identified construct a narrative event of the following form: [The soldiers of the Shadow 3] are in the [camp] and some [other places] using [guns, cameras and various other objects]. The construction of this configuration is robust and operates more or less independently of the temporal ordering employed or the particular shots presented. Thus, the narrative events are indeed tied together into a cohesive whole, which frames the narrative and cues the viewer to a particular line of narrative interpretation, despite the fragmentation of space and time.

This analysis highlights that, when analysing audiovisual media, we must take into account the important notion of *stratification*.<sup>34</sup> The idea of stratification provides the theoretical basis for the distinction between discourse dimensions and materiality mentioned at the beginning of this section; thus, narrative coherence and the interpretation of meaning rests on the stratum of discourse rather than on the stratum of materiality. As empirical film studies such as by Hochberg and Brooks,<sup>35</sup> and visual aesthetic perspectives such as Gombrich's and Eco's have long argued,<sup>36</sup> visual meanings are not constituted of independent units whose composition creates the meaning of the whole. Rather, Gestalt perception first achieves 'wholes' and then subsequently motivates the attribution of particular meanings and roles to compositional units. In brief, it is not the individual low-level properties of the material elements that enable the recognition of the whole, but rather the understanding of the whole that determines the distribution of meanings to the parts. Applying this notion to film, a general picture of the narrative meaning of a film is *not* directly constructed on the basis of the material perceived on the screen, but rather through



**Figure 2.1** The cohesive chains established from frames 1–8 in the opening sequence of *Stop-Loss* (2008). Note: [v] indicates explicit visual elements; and 'The men of Shadow 3' is a written, on-screen caption.



**Figure 2.2** The cohesive chains established from frames 9–16 in the opening sequence of *Stop-Loss* (2008). Note: [v] indicates visual elements.

more general discourse mechanisms that support the construction of a coherent narrative, which takes place off-screen. Drawing on the notion of stratification, we can see that, in the opening sequence of *Stop-Loss*, the stratum of discourse patterns, which connect characters, objects and locations, functions to guide the viewer through the sequence, despite the spatial and temporal fragmentation and the variations in the stratum of materiality (e.g. the mixture of printed text and moving images).

Thus, it becomes clear that a considerable number of recent analyses of film narrative focus on the surface materials at the expense the stratum of discourse, which provides the fundamental driving force of narrative coherence.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, they have arrived at the conclusion that unstable shots or digitally mediated footage have the effect of disrupting the narrative and disorienting the viewer, which leads to a breakdown in generic expectations.

### **A Discourse Analysis of Scene and Media Transitions in *Redacted***

This section presents a comprehensive discourse analysis of film cohesion in *Redacted*. As we have seen, the film has always been the centre of discussions about digital mediation in recent war films and most accounts stress how its disorienting sequences, edited together from different secondary sources, leave the viewer with no firm grounding in time and space.

*Redacted* is based on a real event that took place in Samara in 2006, when a group of young American soldiers raped and murdered a 14-year-old girl, killed her family and set their house on fire. In an interview at the 45th New York Film Festival, De Palma explained that he was adopting an experimental method to telling the story by using footage he found on the Internet. However, in bringing these fragmented media stories together, he had to fictionalise and restructure that existing material and it is this process that ultimately gives the film a classical narrative structure.

The film begins with a video diary recorded by Private Angel Salazar's camcorder, which provides the main media source for the events depicted in the film. This is followed by several other formats: a French documentary with voiceover narration, reports from Arab news channels, candid camera recordings played on Al Qaeda sites, embedded journalist reports, items from Western news channels, clips from *Soldiers' Wives* and the *Get Out of Iraq* campaign websites, military surveillance cameras, recordings of military hearings and Skype conversations. Pisters argues that 'all these different formats and screens are entangled in complex ways and present different points of view of the same events'.<sup>38</sup>

There are 35 transitions between different media formats in the film and most of these coincide with scene transitions. These transitions and their discourse relations are summarised in Table 1, which demonstrates that cohesive cues are present and serve to establish cohesive chains across the transitions. Figure 3 shows a sample pattern of these cohesive cues at work across two sequences in the film. Throughout the film, these cohesive cues are mobilised at each scene transition by the particular time and settings specified on different types of media frames – for instance, the

**Table 1** Summary of scene and media transitions and their cohesive relations in *Redacted*. The column 'Cohesion' refers to cohesive cues realised in multimodal elements; e.g. specific verbal descriptions or visual cues (such as the explicit reappearance of characters' faces and settings) which identify and anchor characters and settings across different scenes and media types.

Transition time	Media	Story events	Cohesion
(1) 00:01:31	video diary	First scene. In the camp, Salazar introduces his intention of making video diaries.	Verbal description
(2) 00:04:50	documentary	French Documentary Barrage illustrates the pressure on American soldiers at checkpoints to differentiate insurgents from civilians.	Visual reappearance of Salazar's face
(3) 00:13:44	video diary	Salazar films Blix reading a book on Samara.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(4) 00:16:19	video diary	Salazar films soldiers interacting with local children and being warned by Sergeant Sweet.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(5) 00:19:28	documentary	The same French Documentary Barrage reports about Iraqi civilians mistakenly killed and records a car racing through the checkpoint and getting shot at by the soldiers.	Cued to (2), visual reappearance and verbal description
(6) 00:21:50	ATV news	The ongoing event is recorded and reported by Arabic news, which shows that the victim in the car is a pregnant woman. The report is delivered by an ATV journalist interviewing the victim's brother and summarising the entire event.	Verbal description anchoring visual images
(7) 00:23:42	video diary	Salazar films the soldiers fighting over the event.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(8) 00:27:42	video diary	Salazar films a colonel announcing the extension of their stay in Samara.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(9) 00:27:47	video diary	Salazar films the soldiers, angry about the extension, complaining.	Visual reappearance and verbal description

(Continued)

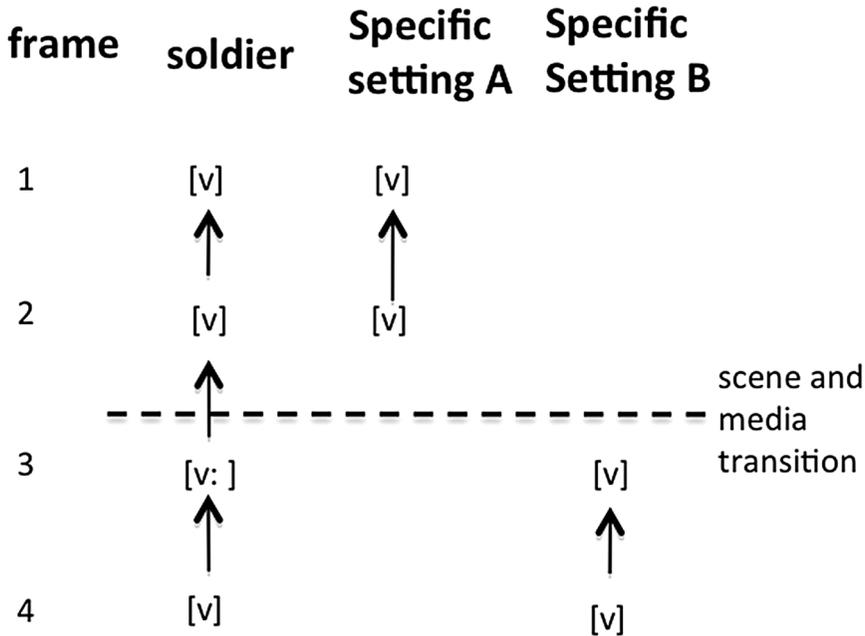
Table 1 Continued.

Transition time	Media	Story events	Cohesion
(10) 00:29:40	video diary	Salazar films himself reading Blix's book about Samara.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(11) 00:31:00	Al Qaeda website	Video embedded in the website, obviously a surveillance camera, showing a child secretly planting an IED near the checkpoint.	Visual reappearance
(12) 00:31:52	video diary	Salazar's video records the IED killing Sergeant Sweet.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(13) 00:33:58	Al Qaeda website	The same website video as in (10) repeats the explosion in (11). The chanting in the soundtrack celebrates the killing.	Visual reappearance
(14) 00:34:23	surveillance camera	Surveillance footage in the basecamp shows two soldiers named Rush and Flake full of rage over the IED explosion and Sergeant Sweet's death.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(15) 00:35:46	ATV news	An embedded ATV journalist follows the soldiers as they arrest a suspect in a local civilian's house.	Verbal description anchoring visual images
(16) 00:39:05	video diary	Salazar films the soldiers playing a card game and two soldiers, Rush and Flake, plan to raid the house again.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(17) 00:45:17	website	Embedded video in a website titled 'Just a Soldier's Wife' shows the wife of one soldier, McCoy, talking about her worries about her husband and about other fellow soldiers going looking for trouble.	Verbal description identifying characters in visual
(18) 00:47:10	video diary	Salazar fixes a mini-cam to his helmet.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(19) 00:47:28	surveillance camera	Surveillance footage in the basecamp shows Blix and McCoy threatened by Rush.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(20) 00:49:33	video diary	Footage from Salazar's helmet camera show a brutal rape and killing by Rush and Flake.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(21) 00:54:20	surveillance camera	Surveillance footage in basecamp shows McCoy being threatened again by Rush.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(22) 00:57:46	ATV news	An ATV journalist interviews the victim's father.	Visual reappearance and verbal description

*(Continued)*

Table 1 Continued.

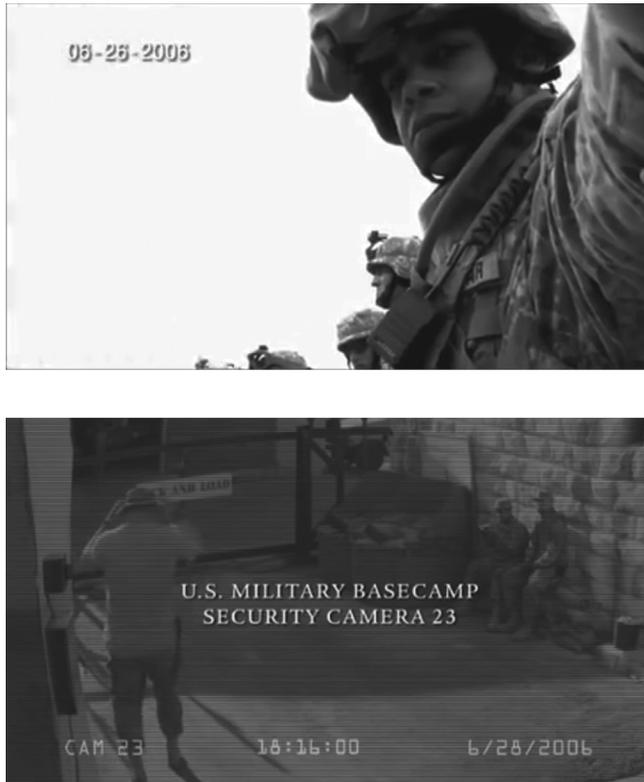
Transition time	Media	Story events	Cohesion
(23) 00:59:40	surveillance camera	Surveillance footage in a psychologist's office shows Salazar is depressed about witnessing the killing.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(24) 01:02:48	Skype	McCoy talks to his father online about the killing.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(25) 01:02:48	video diary	Salazar's camera shows him being kidnapped by Iraqi insurgents.	Visual reappearance
(26) 01:03:34	Al Qaeda website	The embedded video shows a shepherd finding Salazar's beheaded body.	Visual reappearance
(27) 01:04:00	Western news	A journalist reports the kidnapping and death of Salazar.	Verbal description anchoring visual images
(28) 01:04:36	ATV news	The ATV news anchor shows the video of Salazar's beheading released by Al Qaeda.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(29) 01:05:48	video diary	In front of Salazar's camera, Rush and Flake talk about Salazar.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(30) 01:13:24	YouTube	A YouTube site 'The Get Out of Iraq Campaign' shows a self-uploaded video, where a masked soldier (allegedly McCoy) reveals the atrocity of raping and killing an Iraqi girl.	Verbal description from a unspecified man
(31) 01:14:01	surveillance camera	Surveillance footage shows the criminal investigation of McCoy.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(32) 01:15:55	Western news	A journalist reports the rape and killing of the Iraqi girl and the ongoing criminal investigation.	Verbal description anchoring visual images
(33) 01:16:30	surveillance camera	Surveillance camera and surveillance footage shows the criminal investigation of Rush and Flake.	Visual reappearance and verbal description
(34) 01:19:27	YouTube	A YouTube site shows another self-uploaded video of 'The Get Out of Iraq Campaign.'	Verbal description from a unspecified woman
(35) 01:20:44	video diary	Back in the USA, in front of a friend's camera, McCoy talks about the trauma he has been through in Iraq.	Visual reappearance and verbal description



**Figure 3** A sample pattern of cohesive chains with specific cues across two scenes in *Redacted* (2007, Brian De Palma, HDNet Films/The Film Farm).

media column in Table 1 shows that the most frequently used medium is the video diary recorded by Salazar's camera (fifteen times), the surveillance camera footage (six times) and newsreels, either from Arabic or Western news (five times), and most footages of the video diary and surveillance camera are stamped with a clear date and time, indicating the linearity of the narrative structure, as exemplified in Figure 5. The newsreels present their stories in a very explicit fashion, indicating when, where and how their news stories took place. Apart from these highly coherent, linearly interconnected items, the footage in the online videos of the Soldier's Wives and the Get Out of Iraq campaign websites (Figures 5.1, 5.2) represent another standard pseudo-documentary element, revealing opinions from the public and side characters in the film. The Skype footage, shown in Figure 5.3, also explicitly identifies the two users and is reminiscent of the split screens typically used in scenes depicting telephone conversations in conventional mainstream Hollywood films. Finally, the embedded videos in the Al Qaeda websites (Figure 5.4), also obviously from surveillance cameras, clearly repeat and coherently participate in the development of the linear narrative.

The entire film is structured in a linear fashion. The only less-than straightforward spatio-temporal relation is transition (2) in Table 1; that is, the first extract of the French documentary, with an off-screen narrator stating some background facts. This transition is shown in Figure 6. Frame 1 is the last shot of the first scene,



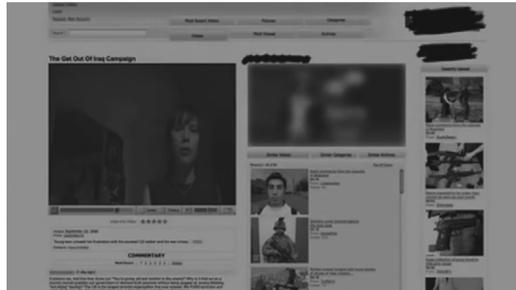
**Figure 4** Examples of images with clear indications of space and time in *Redacted* (2007, Brian De Palma, HDNet Films/The Film Farm).

the video diary of Salazar. This is followed by a cut to the beginning of ‘Barrage’ (Checkpoint). Here, the on-screen title clearly specifies the setting of the scene and after frames 2 and 3 depict silhouettes of soldiers and the setting, the next shot, frame 4, immediately cuts to a close-up of Salazar, the same soldier depicted in close-up in frame 1.

Figure 7 shows the cohesive chains of this transition. Here we can see that the same chain of ‘soldier’ is structured across the two scenes, starting with Salazar in frame 1, and cohesively linked to the silhouettes of the soldiers in frame 2, and then to Salazar in frame 4. In other words, although the written on-screen text is a non-diegetic, neutral voice, not directly related to particular characters and locations in the film, the visual track nonetheless shows close-ups of the main characters and this signals the contribution of the documentary footage to the overall narrative. This narrative compatibility is clearly highlighted in the transitions (5) and (6), when the shooting of a pregnant woman is first recorded by the documentary and, in the course of the event, taken over by the media of ATV news report. Interestingly, this is the only transition between different media in the entire film that maintains temporal



5.1



5.2



5.3



5.4

**Figure 5** Examples of online footage in *Redacted* (2007, Brian De Palma, HDNet Films/The Film Farm).



6.1



6.2



6.3



6.4

**Figure 6** The first scene and media transition in *Redacted* (2007, Brian De Palma, HDNet Films/The Film Farm).

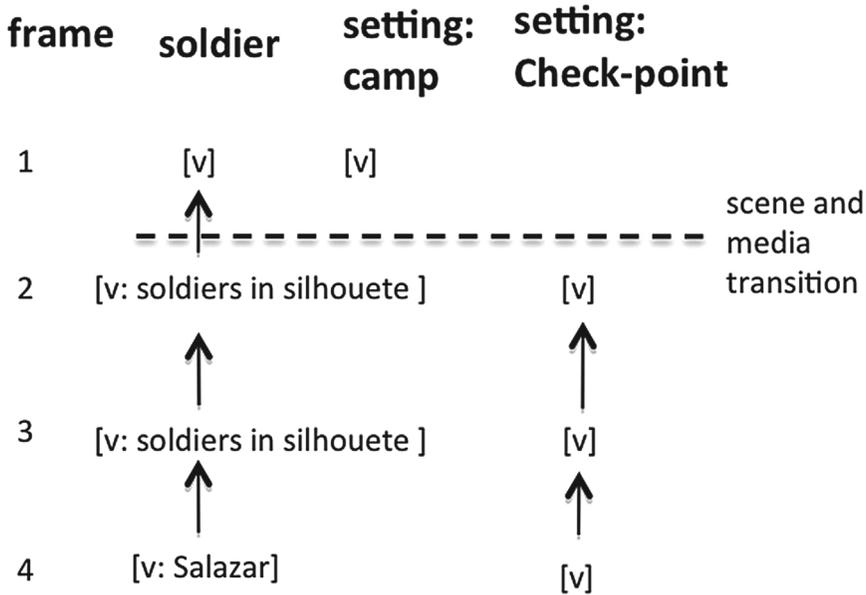


Figure 7 Cohesive chains established from the transition in Figure 6.

continuity, and this further emphasises the documentary footage’s compatibility with the film’s story.

To summarise, cohesion analysis reveals the major discursive strategies employed by the film: while the constant transitions between different media risk disrupting the viewer’s comprehension, the cohesive cues work to safely guide the viewer’s construction of a linear narrative.

Fiction that makes substantial use of first-person restricted narration often requires broader information from other media about what is happening outside the characters’ immediate situation,<sup>39</sup> such as newspaper reports and TV coverage of action occurring elsewhere. A classic example is Bram Stoker’s 1897 horror novel, *Dracula*, in which the entire story is composed of first = person diaries, letters and memos from the main and side characters. Here, newspaper reports providing information to which the characters are not privy regularly interrupts the first-person narration of events. *Redacted* does exactly the same; it revolves primarily around Salazar’s camera, and his first-person observations, while simultaneously using other media to broaden the information available to the viewer with details of events beyond Salazar’s immediate situation.

This becomes clearer if we compare the discursive structures of *Redacted* with De Palma’s earlier war film, *Casualties of War* (1989). Here Private Eriksson witnesses his comrades kidnap a Vietnamese girl from her village and take her on a scouting mission, during which she is repeatedly raped and finally murdered by her captors; subsequently, Eriksson attempts to ensure that justice is served. In general, *Casualties*

*of War* narrates these events through a single flashback by Private Eriksson and thus, like *Redacted*, it is also a first-person observation of a war crime; Eriksson provides the central focus and point-of-view shots, and this confirms that his first-hand observation is the main perspective of the film. Nevertheless, *Casualties of War* is definitely not a sustained first-person narration. As in *Redacted*, while attempting to confine the viewer to a single character's experience, the film has to widen the viewer's knowledge through additional objective shots, which are similar to *Redacted*'s surveillance camera footage or to the video showing other people's opinions.

John Trafton provides a detailed comparison between the two films at the levels of plot and character development and identifies one significant difference: *Redacted* presents both *internal* perspectives (the soldier's observations; e.g. video diaries, Skype) and *external* perspectives (which criticise what the internal perspectives fail to reveal, e.g. through documentary, news reports, YouTube video, etc.) on the events, while *Casualties of War* has only an internal perspective from Eriksson's point of view.<sup>40</sup> To some degree, this distinction supports the idea that *Redacted* employs a pseudo-documentary format and *Casualties of War* does not. However, what discourse analysis reveals is that, despite an apparent difference in format, the way in which the war crime is coherently presented, critically evaluated and emotionally responded to, is similar in both films. In both films, the war crime provokes an emotional reaction and is criticised verbally by the central characters: *Casualties*' Eriksson in close-up and *Redacted*'s McCoy and Salazar in surveillance cameras, video diaries and Skype chats all straightforwardly verbalise their trauma, pressure and guilt in witnessing war crimes. Particularly interesting is the soldiers' verbal expressions of emotion in *Redacted*. The motto *show, don't tell* seems to be replaced by explicit descriptions of feelings about witnessing an atrocity. Here the allegedly 'distanced, disembodied, non-immersive' low-resolution digitally mediated images are actually characterised by emotional, affective monologues. In short, although other pseudo-documentary voices strengthen the criticism of the war crime in *Redacted*, the overall depiction of the atrocity and condemnation of war crimes in the two films is presented in an analogous fashion.

### New Media Technology and Persuasion

For several decades, pseudo-documentary methods have frequently been used for the purposes of persuasion and propaganda. For instance, Oliver Stone's film *JFK* (1991) cuts between actual footage of the alleged assassin Lee Harvey Oswald and the staged images of actor Gary Oldman who plays Oswald. It mixes fact with fiction to propagate the idea that Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy. Phyllida Lloyd's *Iron Lady* (2011) uses a similar strategy, intercutting between close-ups of Meryl Streep and real news footage, which sometimes includes archival images of Margaret Thatcher, in an attempt to blur the boundary between fact and fiction. Similarly, I would maintain that one effective strategy by which war films seek to persuade viewers is through their employment of media technology contemporary to the war

depicted in the film. This contention derives from empirical findings as to the way that propaganda functions in terms of the capabilities of human memory, which tends to separate a message from its source or carrier.<sup>41</sup>

We have probably all experienced this before: you can remember the content of a certain piece of information but do not quite remember where you saw, read or heard it. A piece of information does not necessarily have an impact in the moment we perceive it, but its significance may grow over time. Applying this idea to the film viewing, it becomes clear how, over time, viewers of films such as *JFK* and *Iron Lady* might begin to integrate the fictional narrative elements with the factual footage from other media sources and conflate the two. Thus, the plausibility of a message may increase over time under the influence of the media's persuasive effect. In this way, a war film can effectively manipulate the credibility of the depicted events, using the pseudo-documentary format and mixing fact and fiction to augment the believability of a particular idea that has been planted in the viewer's mind over time.

### Conclusion

Many films on the Iraq war have used video diaries reminiscent of those self-uploaded war diaries available online, even if not all of them do so in such an extreme form as *Redacted*. In the future, it is likely that films will continue to use this format, employing new and up-to-date new media technology in the interests of narrative persuasion. This is not necessarily the result of a conscious directorial choice in the service of the propagation of a political idea; rather it is a result of media evolution and its consequent impact on visual pragmatics. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the course of this analysis, these formal strategies have had relatively little impact on either narrative coherence or generic expectations.

### Notes on Contributor

Chiao-I Tseng is a research fellow at the University of Bremen, Germany. She is the author of the book *Cohesion in Film: Tracking Film Element* (2013, Palgrave) and several journal articles and book chapters on the multimodal film analysis of narrative coherence, authorship, genre and digital materiality in film.

### Notes

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- 3 See David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Films', *Film Quarterly* 55 (2002): 16–28.
- 4 Garret Stewart, 'Digital Fatigue: Imaging War in Recent American Film', *Film Quarterly* 62 (2009): 45–55.

- 5 Jamie Russell, 'Lights, Camera, Incoming! How YouTube Rewrote the War Movie', in Jay Slater (ed.), *Underfire: A Century of War Movies*, Hersham: Ian Allen Publishing, 2009, pp. 257–68.
- 6 Patricia Pisters, 'Logistics of Perception 2.0: Multiple Screen Aesthetics in Iraq War Films', *Film and Philosophy* 14 (2010): 232–52.
- 7 Holger Pötzsch, 'Framing Narratives: Opening Sequences in Contemporary American and British War Films', *Media, War and Conflict* 5 (2012): 155–73.
- 8 See, for example, John Bateman and Karl Schmidt, *Multimodal Film Analysis: How Films Mean*, London: Routledge, 2012; Chiao-I Tseng, *Cohesion in Film: Tracking Film Elements*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Janina Wildfeuer, *Film Discourse Interpretation. Towards a New Paradigm for Multimodal Film Analysis*, London, New York: Routledge, 2014.
- 9 On the analysis of scene transitions, see Chiao-I Tseng, 'Audiovisual Texture in Scene Transition', *Semiotica* 192 (2012): 123–60.
- 10 Ken Provencher, 'Redacted's Double Vision', *Film Quarterly* 62 (2008): 32–8.
- 11 Pisters, 'Logistics of Perception 2.0', 237.
- 12 See John Trafton, 'The Anti-war Film and the Anti-war-film: A Reading of Brian de Palma's *Redacted* (2007) and *Casualties of War* (1989)', *Journal of War and Cultural Studies* 4 (2011): 113–26, and the comparison between these two films in the section 'A Discourse Analysis of Scene and Media Transitions in *Redacted*'.
- 13 See Provencher, 'Redacted's Double Vision', 33.
- 14 Stewart, 'Digital Fatigue', 47.
- 15 Provencher, 'Redacted's Double Vision', 32–3.
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- 20 Provencher, 'Redacted's Double Vision'.
- 21 Pötzsch, 'Framing Narratives'.
- 22 See, for example, Russell, 'Lights, Camera, Incoming!', 259.
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- 24 See Julian Hochberg and Virginia Brooks, 'The Perception of Motion Pictures', in Morton Friedman and Edward Carterette (eds), *Cognitive Ecology*, New York: Academic Press, 1996, pp. 205–93.
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- 27 Stewart, 'Digital Fatigue'.
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- 38 Pisters, 'Logistics of Perception 2.0', 238.
- 39 See Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Chapter 3.
- 40 Trafton, 'The Anti-war Film and the Anti-war-Film'.
- 41 See Jeffrey Zacks, *Flicker: Your Brain on Movies*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 101–7.