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To what extent does the new American crime film reflect hybridity of genre?

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'To what extent does the new American crime film reflect hybridity of genre?'

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Abstract

This commentary on my several recent published works discusses how my research on the recent crime film has revealed it to be an engine of genre hybridity, focusing on two directions: 1) the crime film's development of strands of other genres, and 2) the 'victim' figure's, as one of the crime film's principal archetypes, use to develop several other genres. This study incorporates my research of the broader trend of 'crime films' to analyze a greater fluidity of genres through use of the principal style. It also presents an overview of genre theory and how I develop one on crime hybridity. This commentary identifies and analyzes how each chapter of my book-length study, *The New American Crime Film* (see Appendix A), analyzes a new strand of crime hybridity used to develop another genre. In the shorter pieces I discuss (see Appendices B-E), I analyze how filmmakers use the 'victim' figure of the crime tradition to draw connectivity and reinterpret another related genre.

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1) Introduction

This commentary is on a series of works I have written over the last several years, each work focusing on a new direction in contemporary crime films, the most prevalent genre in contemporary cinema.[1] This commentary links together my book-length study, *The New American Crime Film* (McFarland, 2012; see Appendix A), along with four shorter works: 'Documenting Crime: Genre, Verity, and Filmmaker as Avenger' (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016; see Appendix B); 'Last Man (With)Standing: the Character-Disaster Film' (*Film International* 11.3-4; see Appendix C); 'Alex Cox and the Hybrid Western' (McFarland, 2016; see Appendix D); and 'The Service Tragicomedy: from Woody Allen to *Full Metal Jacket'* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016; see Appendix E). This project contextualizes and analyzes the works as a greater body on crime cinema and how it serves as a means to revise other genres through hybridization. While genres have crossed throughout cinema history, my groundbreaking research unveils how the crime film has recently served as a means to hybridize with other genres and revise them. As other scholars of genre cinema and crime movies, specifically, have ignored the concept, I show that the crime film, the most pervasive genre in contemporary cinema, is the sole style around today to offer such hybridization.

My works discussed here reveal how genre hybridity has been a mode of filmmaking for artists in two ways: 1) to use the crime film to develop strands of other related genres (for example, food science documentaries, the teen film, horror, etc.) within the former's framework, and 2) to draw connectivity between the crime film and other narrative styles, including the miscarriage of justice documentary film, the disaster film, the Western, and the war film, through featured use of the 'victim' figure as a central

character. In essence, my contributions to genre scholarship reveal the crime film, with its unique motifs, to be the only transformational genre to allow film artists to hybridize with other styles. In featuring styles that have hybridized with crime movies, I show that none have reached the pervasiveness and potential for hybridity that crime films have accomplished. My criticism also reveals an extremist trend in genre works that has been realized through crime film archetypes used in other genres.

To relate the thematic thread in my work, I have chosen to write this commentary in first person. While academic protocol mandates a removed third person voice, in my work the varied genres have interconnectivity with the broader one (the crime film) and therefore require my 'voice' to unpack and elaborate on them. The style also reflects the tone of my criticism and works I have referenced, such as those of Robin Wood[2] which are regarded as thorough in personal yet objective attention to the matter.

While criticism of crime films isn't new,[3] the dominant critical trend since 2000 has focused on separate crime-related genres treated individually.[4] Nicole Rafter and Thomas Leitch,[5] however, have treated established crime styles (gangster, noir, the cop film, prison film, etc.) as subgenres under the umbrella of 'crime film'. These two studies were preceded by *The BFI Companion to Crime* (Phil Hardy, ed.),[6] which includes an introduction by the editor that focuses on the historical development of crime in cinema history (the gangster films of the 1930s leading into film noir of the 1940s, which begat the heist film) and is a study that prefers 'inclusion'[7] with entries on films such as the science-fiction/noir *Blade Runner* (1982)[8] and the gangster-themed comedy *Some Like It Hot* (1959).[9] Instead of focusing on separate related crime genres, Rafter and Leitch acknowledge the fluidity among them to treat them as 'subgenres'. Each subgenre style

is connected through a given film narrative's use of criminal (the gangster, the loner in film noir who commits a crime), victim (the imprisoned innocent, a violated woman taking her perpetrator to court), and avenger (an unofficial investigator working as a private detective or journalist, or the law professional in a police thriller narrative).[10] By featuring the three figures in unique ways – with a given film either choosing to highlight one over the rest, having more than one connected in a unique fashion, or even having one figure transform into another – the crime film offers a variety of perceptions about loss, engagement, and criminality. Through the larger umbrella of 'crime films', this scholarship has revealed different dialogs with various themes and related genres. This recent trend of crime film criticism, which has covered the history of the broader genre, has inspired revised readings of focused crime cinema topics.[11] While I take up from these scholars in addressing subgenres of the crime film, I advance beyond their arguments to present the select crime film 'types', with their varied use of the three archetypes, as engines for genre hybridity.

My 2012 book surveys contemporary works in the genre. Each of the text's 19 chapters focuses on a recent crime film, or two-three related ones. The book's unique accomplishment is to discuss how crime subgenres have developed new strands in other related genres/film styles. In bringing these related but varied films together, I show how crime themes create a sense of immediacy demanding that the characters, related to the archetypes mentioned above, undergo a journey, which is essential to suspense narratives.[12] Unlike other crime film/genre scholars, who are concerned mainly with Hollywood history, I draw connections to simpler forms of suspense in popular culture, i.e., American football and professional wrestling, to note our need for

suspense at its rawest. Since these two forms of popular culture sacrifice ideas for the narrative drive, I reveal that crime films offer an immediacy in kind with thematic depth (while the horror film aims to trap viewers in terror, though using suspense as well). While American football, I argue, has its faceless players and wrestlers don costume for a crude, simplified comic-book-style character, the crime film offers the three archetypes to be used for various thematic ends. With a rich history behind it, the crime film as presented in *The New American Crime Film* serves as a flexible genre that continues to 'revive and reconstruct a (given) recognized form'.[13]

The first section of my book includes chapters on the paranoid thriller style used to revise established crime genres. In Chapter 1 on Spike Lee's *Inside Man* (2006), I reveal how this work's use of the heist film developed a new take on the paranoid thriller and the hostage crisis film. Working off the example of *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), in which a heist accidentally turns into a hostage crisis, I reveal Lee's film to be a pioneering heist in that it's conceived as a hostage situation, with the goal to expose the Nazi associations of the bank founder and board chairman, Arthur Case (Christopher Plummer). To follow the current trend in heist films, the robbers get away with loot – not the people's, but the corrupt leader's. Chapter 2 discusses *Michael Clayton* (2007) as an example of a more extensive use of the paranoid style. Featuring a fixer in a legal firm, the film reworks the legal thriller into a bleak take on a victim figure (the title character) who must turn avenger against his employer and their client as they try to silence/murder him. In Chapters 4 and 5 – on Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* (2010), and Gus Van Sant's films *Elephant* (2003) and *Paranoid Park* (2007), respectively – I reveal how crime film motifs – an investigation in Granik's film and criminal perspectives in Van

Sant's – offer new visions of the teen film, with the young protagonists caught in criminal situations – in Granik's bleak vision, as an unofficial investigator; in Van Sant's vertiginous ones, as teenage violators feeling the bliss of deviance mixings in, and inseparable from, emerging feelings of adolescence. The chapter on Granik also complements another on feminism and crime, on *Note on a Scandal* (2007).

My book's second section, 'Darkest Regions', discusses the most violently extreme of the films featured in my book. The first chapter focuses on David Fincher's two revisions of the serial killer film. By analyzing Fincher's serial killer patterned on the 'seven deadly sins' in *Se7en* (1995), I offer the new argument that the film conceives a discrete investigation that tantalizes and threatens investigators, leaving one to act as a rogue avenger. My analysis progresses to argue that the film presents a unique crime-horror hybrid in which the rogue avenger is punished, by the killer, for his own wrath. Groundbreaking for the serial killer film, it leaves the killer, even in custody, in absolute power – i.e., the slasher of the horror tradition not defeated. Doe's actions prove more masterful than Hannibal Lecter's in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), since Doe achieves the power desired before his execution (even if he yearns for the life of the detective who stalks him). The chapter also discusses Fincher's 2007 film *Zodiac*, which eschews sensationalism of the serial killer film to focus on the realism of the killer's actions. By 'reading' this as a journalistic account of the ordeal, I offer the new reading of the unidentified killer as normalized, in contrast to *Se7en*'s, while the film becomes an unlikely crime-horror hybrid: he achieves mass terror while beating the investigators.

In addition to *Se7en* and *Zodiac*, I reveal how crime also hybridizes with the horror film in the recent works of filmmaker Stuart Gordon (Chapter 7). *Edmond*'s (2005) white-

collar title character begins his journey by leaving his wife and their chic apartment, and

it ends with him, as a convicted murderer, in prison, regressed in the arms of his

cellmate/rapist. Desiring an infantile state, Edmond lurks the streets to express rage,

offering catharsis via terror to viewers, and murderous instincts to bring him to

confinement. As a crime film, it presents the common tale of everyman turning violent (a

la *Double Indemnity*, 1944); in becoming a horror-crime hybrid, it shocks viewers to

allow us to comprehend such a disturbed psychology and its own way of committing

suicide.[14] In Gordon's *Stuck* (2007), the ordeal of a young woman, who has struck a

homeless man with her car and left him lodged in her windshield, ironically mirrors the

victim's predicament. In an unlikely manner, the film uses criminality and terrifying,

violent imagery to awaken viewers to see beneath the moral implications and

understand her situation and point of view, while simultaneously urging us to root for her

victim.

In the following chapter, on the food science film, my reading of *Fast Food Nation*

(2006) is the first to reveal the film's use of crime motifs to present the troubling issues

of the industry. In offering this new treatment of the film as a crime-hybrid, I analyze the

film's crime motifs to reveal the film's three narrative strands: one on an internal

investigation, another from the perspective of Mexican immigrant workers, and a third

on teenagers working behind the counter. By featuring these three, this multi-

protagonist film,[15] I argue, fashions a dynamic revision of the crime genre, with the

perspectives of the criminal/failed avenger, victim, and avenger, respectively, to

represent the severity of Eric Schlosser's 2001 nonfiction study. The final chapter of the

section focuses on crime-surrealism hybridity in the works of David Lynch. By framing

his dreamlike narratives with crime motifs, Lynch creates a style of hyperrealism offering insight into motivation and psychology of murder and vengeance: in the case of *Blue Velvet* (1986), to offer an understanding of a suburban criminal underworld, and in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) to allow us to comprehend the motivation behind a jealous actor's murder of her ex-lover. My scholars have treated the crime motifs as convenient dressing, I break a new trend in presenting them as the actual schema – narrative pattern – central to his work and the means to construct his melodramatic surrealism.

The third section of my book ('The Oldschool Goes New') focuses on veteran filmmakers'/actors' contributions to revisionist crime cinema. In these examples we see veterans, known for their association to established genre traditions, challenge the myths and premises of classical genres. Beyond contributing to Cawelti's demythologization category, their films achieve such through hybridization of the crime film with other genres.

Chapter 11 focuses on films featuring Tommy Lee Jones as avenger. These crime/Western hybrid films present a near insurmountable ordeal, in which Jones' roles turn rogue to avenge deceased friends and family members. While his approach is nothing new, I argue that, since Jones's roles need to combat political corruption, his vengeance requires an extensive journey that proves the threats to be undefeatable, but ones he will continue to confront. Chapter 12 looks to the recent crime cinema of Clint Eastwood, and I offer a new reading of these works as hybrids of crime and social crisis. They present such crises (in films that address inner city growth, the abused recovering from trauma, and political corruption resulting from crime and scandal) while including the avenger's place in addressing these issues. *Gran Torino* (2008), in which

Eastwood also stars and revises his avenger role in early Westerns and police thrillers, features an aged military veteran standing up to help Hmong Chinese immigrants thrive and rebuild an area of Detroit. *Changeling* (2008), a period piece (set in the late 1920s), presents a mother avenging the loss and cover-up by the LAPD, with the help of a prominent minister. *Mystic River* (2003), Eastwood's most complex film of the three, presents an avenger removing the fear of child(hood) trauma, but killing off a former victim he believes had murdered his daughter. In Chapter 13 I look to another filmmaker who, in his 2005 film *Match Point*, has provided self-commentary on his earlier works. Like Lynch, scholars treat crime motifs as convenient dressing for his human comedies and tragedies. Though I argue that Allen's 1989 film *Crimes and Misdemeanors* is in fact crime cinema, in that it concerns an established ophthalmologist who uses his social standing to have his mistress killed. He maintains order, though remains troubled by his decision. In 2005's *Match Point*, I analyze how Allen revises the conceit with a social climber who himself murders his mistress to maintain his engagement to a wealthy woman. By building his narrative with motifs of the erotic thriller, I assert, Allen portrays the criminal's torment implied in the earlier film. I finish the section with chapters on David Mamet, who uses the duplicitous perspective of the con film to revise crime film archetypes, and one on recent, journalistic films portraying historical gangsters.

The closing section of my book begins with a chapter on crime films of the Coen brothers. I go beyond the common auteur treatment of the Coens to offer a new reading. I link a trilogy of their films – *Blood Simple* (1984), *Fargo* (1996), and *No Country for Old Men* (2007) – through the repeated motif of the roadside

apprehension/attack, which is an archetypal noir conceit.[16] With the motif central to

each film, I reveal how the films use the 'return of repressed' fear used in the horror film

to revise their crime treatment, an approach that helps the films channel the prominent

horror-comedies of the time (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978; *The Evil Dead*, 1981, on which

Joel Coen worked as an assistant editor; and *Basket Case*, 1982). My chapter on two

recent crime films by David Cronenberg also reveals their crime-horror hybridity.

Cronenberg's crime films use the psychological approach prominent in his principal

style (body-horror, which focuses on the despair of a lucid mind witnessing its own body

fail) by detailing the psychological effects of overcoming a criminal past (2005's *A

History of Violence*) or negotiating the criminal behavior (notably, rape) that an

undercover agent, infiltrating the Russian mob as a gangster, is required to commit

(2007's *Eastern Promises*). My chapter on the *Bad Lieutenant* films offers a reading of

Werner Herzog's ignored 2009 film to present its use of subjective realism. My chapter

discusses how the film presents a truer depiction of the title character who delights in

his amorality, unlike the punishment and turmoil in the tone of Ferrara's film (1992).

The other pieces I have included (see Appendix B-E), published after my book, make

new arguments of a slightly different nature: they draw connectivity between the crime

film and other narrative styles, and reinterpret these other trends, through use of the

'victim' figure. Due to the collective approach to genre revision in these pieces and how

it differs from my 2012 book's approach, I will discuss these works in a separate section

of this commentary. In these pieces I reveal the prominent use of the 'victim' figure, as

discussed by Leitch, in crime film treatments hybridized with other genres to revise their

stable treatment for contemporary viewers. The first piece of this set is my 2016 book

chapter 'Documenting Crime: Genre, Verity, and Filmmaker as Avenger' from *Framing Law and Crime* (see Appendix B). This text synthesizes crime film study with documentary film studies to analyze the latter in a completely new manner: how filmmakers serve as avengers behind the camera for real-life, wrongfully convicted victims of injustice. Filmmaker Errol Morris spearheaded this approach with his treatment of Randall Adams in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). With the film Morris serves as a meta-cinematic avenger to his subject, since one was not available to Adams at the time of the trial. With the avenger a prominent figure in the crime film tradition, the role has effectively moved behind the camera via documentary film. Other readings treat Morris as a postmodern seeker of truth,[17] but by focusing on his treatment of narrative (and his side career as a private investigator[18]), I reveal his more complex treatment of genre and nonfiction. This film inspired treatment of 1) other wrongfully accused figures in the films of Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky (*Brother's Keeper*, 1991; the *Paradise Lost* series, 1996-2011) and 2) misunderstood convicted criminals in the documentaries of Nick Broomfield (1992, 2003) and in Werner Herzog's *Into the Abyss* (2011).

In my journal article 'Last Man Withstanding: the Character-Disaster Film' (*Film International* 11.3-4; see Appendix C) I present the prominence of the 'victim' figure as he appears in a new cycle of disaster movies I describe as 'character disasters'. These recent films avoid the traditional disaster movie's approach of depicting a community in peril (see *The Towering Inferno,* 1974; *The China Syndrome,* 1979).[19] Instead, my argument reveals how they focus on one individual suffering a personal disaster, in both external forms (to his/her own body), which result in distress (*127 Hours,* 2010), or internal forms, in which disaster imagery reflects mental illness (*Take Shelter*, 2011).

This development of the disaster genre moves a generic tradition into personal perspectives, where it has more area to grow. With the advent CGI (computer generated imagery), the disaster genre proper has developed into a platform for spectacle, in which the world is immediately threatened either by natural disaster (*2012*, 2009) or alien invasion (*Skyline*, 2010). The personalized 'character disaster', I reveal, allows film artists to investigate the effects of personal annihilation to reflect on greater global fears. It presents a vivid use of the victim figure who must confront an immediate threat, of personal disaster, while offering a strand for a stagnant genre to develop. While the films in this style do not concern crimes proper, I clarify how the new 'disaster' is informed by the recent trend of 'new extremism' stemming from France and other European nations. As this style incorporates art house drama with crime and horror, the duress that these characters must overcome reflects the burden laid out against crime victims.

My chapter 'Alex Cox and Hybrid Western', from *The New Western* (edited by Scott Stoddart, Jefferson: McFarland, 2016; see Appendix D) mainly focuses on the filmmakers' use of Western motifs to shape his contrarian cinema, beginning with *Repo Man* (1984). The final film I discuss, Cox's *Searchers 2.0* (2006), is a post-Western. (Post-Westerns present narratives that take place in a Western milieu but feature characters conscious of the fact that, with these lands long settled by civilization, the myths of the genre are dead.[20]) In analyzing this film, I reveal the use of the victim to deconstruct the violence of the Western film tradition. The film features two victim figures, former child actors in Westerns, who seek, but struggle to achieve, revenge against the screenwriter who abused them on a movie set, in a context of the genre's

history. As a postwestern, Cox's film presents the victims, I argue, as genre participants (actors in Westerns as children). By 'reading' these victims (as well as their perpetrator) as those who have bought into the violent premises of the genre (using violence to 'civilize' the land at all costs, suppress any threats to the community, and oppress and annihilating racial outsiders), my chapter presents a new use of the crime figure to reassess a purely American genre (in its focus on civilization versus the individual, and manifest destiny) that is still very much a concern for contemporary filmmakers, producers, and genre audiences.

My last publication included, 'The Service Tragicomedy: from Woody Allen to *Full Metal Jacket*' (from *The Companion to the War Film*, edited by Douglas Cunningham and John Nelson [2016, Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell]: see Appendix E), reveals the importance of the victim figure in revising the war movie genre. In this piece, I lay out the framework of the traditional 'service comedy', in which a rebel in a training platoon threatens the success of the group. This 'comedian', while offering humor to viewers, shows a rugged individualism that the commanding officers redirect towards success of the group (to align to the greater genre's mandate for success on screen during World War II[21]). While service films eventually challenge this conservative framework (as I discuss below), an audience favorite like *Stripes* (1981), even with the film's witty style of humor (thanks largely to Bill Murray's performance), follows the conservative path by redirecting an *entire* group of misfits to success, in Cold War Eastern European theater! As a traditional genre, the war film endorses the status quo even more than other traditional genres, since it relies on unity of the group and a common interest for success to endorse the interests of the political system in power.[22] And yet the true

revisions of the service comedy, which I reveal develops into the service tragicomedy (and service tragedy), note that the outsiders can become victims to a violating system embodied by commanding officers. My chapter unveils how revisions of the service comedy in films directed by Woody Allen (*Love and Death*, 1975) and Stanley Kubrick (*Full Metal Jacket*, 1987) present the suffering of enlisted misfits (who serve the function of 'comedian'). With comedian turning to victim, the film style underscores the absurdist, nihilistic humor of Allen and Kubrick. By using the victim to reformat the tradition into the service tragicomedy/tragedy (the latter, in Kubrick's case), I uncover a postmodernist sensibility in the framework of hybridized film genre.

Before discussing each publication and how it relates to my research question, I summarize my methodological framework and then detail the context for this budding form of genre revisionism, in light of a cornerstone essay by John Cawelti.[23] I then expound on the two categories of revisionism in two following sections. My conclusion details how these developments in genre hybridity and revisionism have altered concepts of film genre and helped to create a recent trend, genre extremism.

2) Theoretical Framework

In developing the works of criticism that are the focus of this commentary, I have reviewed genre theory to clarify the few trends that point to, if not discussing, hybridization. By addressing these, I clarify how I use these to develop a method of genre hybridity, namely in the vein of theories by Robin Wood and John Cawelti, whose works I discuss at the end of this section.

But first, tracing the roots of genre hybridity requires that we assess different theories' stance toward genre *fluidity* and *variation*, which is required to produce hybridity. While some recent genre theories lead to such discussions (like those of Steve Neale, Barry Langford, and Rick Altman, discussed below), earlier foundational works (those of Thomas Schatz and Thomas Sobchak, also discussed below) are prohibitive about variation, since they are more concerned with fixing generic conditions. Thomas Schatz argues that genre films, though offering variety in different film projects for viewer interest, essentially condemn the threat to social order with a predetermined format.[24] For Schatz, genre films present contradictions in their attempts to 'challenge and criticize' culture while 'reinforcing' its ideas,[25] while their predetermined formats endorse the status quo, with little room for variation. Judith Hess Wright argues that all genre films celebrate a limited social structure of the past to celebrate a simpler world of conservative values,[26] essentially asserting that true variety is against the goals of producers of genre films.

In his early work in genre theory, Steve Neale offers a claim similar to Schatz's, but also develops a conversation about variation. Akin to Schatz, Neale argues that 'genres are instances of repetition and difference',[27] though Neale notes that 'difference is

absolutely essential to the economy of genre'[28] in that films must vary within the framework of the style. In his later criticism, Neale critiques Schatz's reliance on stasis, stating that Schatz regards change as 'additional extras, inessential options'.[29] Neale also discusses the 'shifting boundaries' of genres, noting how in their quest for difference, the styles overlap.[30] Here, he suggests hybridity resulting from shifting boundaries – when one style overlaps onto another – as occasional, and assumedly, accidental. Though he sees hybridity as not regular enough to categorize or analyze. Neale also emphasizes the fluidity of genre in early cinema, how several associations to *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) led to its success – the melodrama, the chase film, the railway film, and the crime film (Neale notes that all these styles were fixed in discussions of the reviewing press). While addressing this fluidity as an example of a problem of identification and classification for the early 'western' genre (the term was first used in 1910), his commentary, in turn, notes the early hybridity of established storytelling styles to create a new genre.[31] Neale notes that hybridity was a common practice from the beginnings of cinema.

While similar to Schatz, Thomas Sobchak firmly argues against variation in genre film (though it occurs), since it creates what he calls 'antigenre film'.[32] In this case, an ending is altered from expectation, in which the individual 'increases the distance between his values the values of the group,' which 'violates the basic principal of the genre film: the restoration of social order'.[33] Barry Langford legitimizes variation that leads to genres hybridizing with one another, stating that genres reemerge under 'altered (industrial or cultural) circumstances', noting the mutability of genres, but states this comes in playful, postmodern terms, missing the 'unselfconsciousness of the

"classical" period'.[34] While opening room for discussions of hybridity, Langford

contextualizes and limits genre variety to the postmodern referential gameplay in the

works of Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, and not the deeper transformations

of films like *No Country for Old Men* or *Michael Clayton* (both 2007).

Like Neale, Rick Altman's discussions on variation have opened room for theory on

hybridity, the latter resulting when a deeper structure related to an established genre is

used to develop another. In 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre', he clarifies

the 'semantic' approach to genre study, which focuses on relations to common surface

traits – i.e., the 'genre's building blocks' – and the 'syntactic approach', the deeper

structure which focuses on the 'structures in which they can be arranged'.[35] The

'syntactic approach' allows critics to read genre films for deeper structures in the works,

as connective tissue to other related genres. By separating the two approaches, the

critic has clarified how films related to other genres can borrow from the crime film to

develop treatment of narrative. This general but helpful consideration is important to

how I relate the work of crime film scholars (discussed below) and genre hybridity.

Altman's other work assesses theory arguing for genre stability and clarifies how genre

fluidity, transformation, and hybridity have and should occur. In "Reusable Packaging"

Altman rejects theories of permanence by focuses on 'explain(ing) what makes

difference possible',[36] though noting that there are problems with 'transience and

dissemination' of genre forms.[37] He focuses on studio influence in the early sound era,

where advertising of films invokes several genres for convenience without the studios or

print media clarifying how the genres have developed from one another or are related

clearly.[38] For Altman, genres work in 'cycles' (short-term popularity), though the

development of these leave room for change and intermixing[39]: 'Once a genre is recognized and practiced throughout the industry, individual studios have no interest in practicing it as such; instead, they seek to create a new cycle'.[40] Though based on the production form of classical Hollywood studio output, this observation establishes the need for constant change and evolution. Altman's theory of cycles allows for room of a hybrid cycle, though he stresses various types of genre change though this approach. (In fact, it would take other theories to establish a clearer picture of hybridity.) Altman moves further to establish a landscape for hybridity: 'not only are all genres interfertile, they may at any time be crossed with any genre that ever existed'.[41] Altman later expanded his comments on mixing: 'Hollywood has throughout its history developed techniques that make genre mixing not only easy, but virtually obligatory'…'mixing is necessary to the very process whereby genres are created'.[42] As Altman does not develop hybridity further, crime film scholars offer approaches that do so.

In discussing the crime film, Thomas Leitch shows how its various subgenres are linked together through three archetypes – criminal, victim, and avenger.[43] The flexibility he describes, and the ability for the figures to transform from one to another, allows them to work beyond the limits of the crime film. Though he doesn't address victims in a food science melodrama, disaster movie, or war film, he opens room to do so. Nicole Rafter also address variation of styles, noting a need to discuss 'subtypes' that have gone unnoticed.[44] She also acknowledges a revised style appearing since 1970 that rejects heroism and blurs the line between hero and villain[45] – essentially, John Cawelti's thesis of demythologization (whom she references elsewhere), which I discuss below. Rafter highlights pre- and post-Vietnam war era treatments without clarifying room for revision

of these styles, hence, offering a more restrictive conceptualization than Leitch's. Rafter defines change in the crime film as a betrayal to its form, since it results from 'moral ambiguity' in films that 'eschew genre clarity'. This change leads toward 'genre dissolution'.[46] Moreover, her chapters focus overall on justice-centered-themed crime films[47] – cop, courtroom, prison, and heroes – while Leitch focuses on criminal-centered styles, which Foster Hirsh argues to be more psychologically complex[48] and, I argue in *The New American Crime Film*,[49] offer room for growth, along with avenger ones.

Kirsten Moana Thompson follows Rafter's framework, noting the tradition from 1970 on refuses moral simplicity.[50] Thompson's survey of chapters is more complex, as she offers one which shows the fluidity between two distinct styles, the 'whodunit' and a heist film, which center on different perspectives, investigation and criminality (with thieves as protagonists), respectively.[51] Thompson also discusses how crime is central to other genres, which establishes a means for crime to hybridize with other styles (though she does not develop the point) and that, citing Nick Browne, violence is the 'signature gesture' of crime film.[52] In hybridity criticism, I will show how crime-themed violence has been used to develop sundry genres hybridized with the crime film.

James Naremore addresses how the crime film has hybridized with the 'art film', a helpful theory that leads to character-driven 'arthouse'-style genre films (*Underneath,* 1995; *Sling Blade*, 1997; *Mulholland Drive*, 2001), using crime motifs.[53] While Andrew Tudor discusses 'art movies' – thoughtful character-centered films for an educated middle class audience – as a genre,[54] Naremore uses it to clarify a style of crime appearing in the 1990s:

The best contemporary film noirs seem to me to come from the middle range of

the industry ("between superproductions for the masses and boutique pictures for

specialized audiences")…where modest production values and a relative lack of

hype allow directors to explore art-cinema values within the context of familiar

narratives…. Such films are roughly analogous to the hybrid thrillers of the

1950s, and they generate reasonable profits because they fill at least two niches

in the market: they appeal to a sophisticated audience, but at the same time they

serve as general entertainment.[55]

Naremore's theory presents hybridization of the plot-driven suspense thriller and

character-based drama as a mode for filmmakers to use crime film narratives and motifs

with other genres and styles. In turn, as I argue in my introduction, by creating

character-based narratives focused on crime, film artists may use the motifs of other

genres to develop characterization, and consideration of character psychology, in the

background of a mainstream crime story.

Robin Wood's critique of ideology in the horror film, focusing on victim figures, offers a

structure used by the crime-hybrid film. Working off the concept that genre films present

a threat to social order,[56] Wood sees the monster/monstrous threat as a victim to

dominant ideology: The monster is a societal outsider presented as monstrous to the

status quo and traditional family values in the films.[57] Based on Freud's notion of the

'return of the repressed', as well as blending Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and

structural theory,[58] Wood argues that this 'monster' (subtextually, an outsider in race,

gender, or class terms, including children and alternative sexualities), in conservative

horror films, is defeated, while the progressive ones show the traditional family unit and

family values as the source of the horror (*Psycho*, *Peeping Tom*, both 1960; *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, 1974).[59]

Wood's concept of the victim as outsider extends beyond the horror film. My research details how it applies to revised treatments of genres that, traditionally, also endorse the status quo: the war film, the disaster film, and the Western. Revised crime-hybrid films present the victim as an outsider punished for 'seclusion' from the dominant social order. Crime-hybridity is used to depict how this outsider must overcome various ordeals: for example, in crime-disaster hybrids, reconciling isolation with community; in the crime-war hybrids, navigating the system's orders (to kill) while navigating personal growth and identity'; in the crime-western hybrids, navigating a genre's violent ideology with its helpful insights about the individual and community; and in the crime-documentary justice film, comprehending the role of real-life avengers in storytelling beyond their screen counterparts.[60]

Altman argues that evolutionary models, like John Cawelti's 'four modes' (which I describe in detail below), stress 'predictability more than variation'.[61] Yet, in the following section, I argue that Cawelti's 'four modes' approach (especially his third, 'demythologization') clears room for a fifth: crime hybridity for extremism. This category, which I analyze in light of Robin Wood's structural criticism discussed previously, uses crime film motifs for characters to negotiate personal ordeals specific to the ancillary genres, though ones that have been left untouched by the traditional genre treatments. My synthesis of the two theories establishes the groundwork for the contemporary crime-hybrid film.

3) Genre 'Evolution' and Hybridity

While dismissed by Altman, John G. Cawelti's evolution theory shows how genres develop into treatments of 'demythologization'.[62] I analyze this treatment as an example of how genres transform, but also how his third stage deflates the genre tradition, with the 'myths' presented as dead and the genre dying out. I counter that Cawelti's framework challenges genre filmmakers to progress to a stage beyond 'demythologization': hybridization for extremism. My 'fifth' mode in the evolutionary framework offers film artists a new means to work within genre, and material for viewers desiring forms of apocalyptic cinema.

Genre films fit into several categories, thanks largely to John G. Cawelti's cornerstone 1979 essay, '*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films'.[63] But it's important to introduce the concept of the traditional genre film before detailing genre revision, the foundation on which genre hybridity rests. Then I will explain how recent crime genre hybridity, the scope of my research, fits into this framework.

In classical Hollywood genre film, the interests of the group – what Judith Hess Wright describes as the 'status quo' – are principal, in narratives that endorse conservatism (most prominently, interests of the traditional family unit).[64] While genre films have always experienced some form of change by filmmakers from the early silent era,[65] such treatment became prominent in the 1950s (for example, the psychological, revenge-based Westerns of Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher; the downbeat Korean War combat picture¸ *The Steel Helmet*, 1951, by Samuel Fuller) and widespread by the 1960s, in films sympathetic to the counterculture protesting the War in Vietnam and civil rights. Recent genre films have continued a dialog with the classical Hollywood style

(outlined in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson[66]), and for the most part use the established 'norms' of popular cinema as reference points for revision.

The critical discussion of genre film styles, and revisionism, began with Cawelti's 1979 essay, which argues that all genres progress through his four stages: *burlesque, nostalgia, demythologization, reaffirming myth* (each explained below). The first two categories Cawelti discusses are traditional renditions of genre films, even if they present some form of transformation. The first category, which he describes as 'Burlesque', offer humorous takes on the genre infused with an element of reality to offset the myth.[67] The category includes the genre parodies of Mel Brooks but also more straight-faced takes, like Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962), which includes humorous, if elegiac, moments depicting traditional generic motifs disrupted – in *Ride*'s case, a scene of a westerner no longer able to ride a horse due to rheumatism. 'Burlesque' genre films reflect that the older styles don't fit in the awareness that viewers now have of the traditional genres, while traditional elements are still on display. The second category is more directly traditional. Cawelti terms it 'Nostalgia', and it covers films that attempt to recall traditional genres of earlier films to evoke a sense of warm reassurance but also to offer an experience that is more than just returning to a classic film.[68] Films in this category highlight some difference between the past and present for viewers; his examples include Henry Hathaway's *True Grit* (1969), which presents the traditional quest of the Western avenger in a different context (namely, fueled by a character inspired by a contemporary take on adolescence), and *Farewell, My Lovely* (Dick Richards, 1975), in which Robert Mitchum

returns to the type of role he had in 1947's *Out of the Past*, but here as an aged, knowing gumshoe.

Cawelti's third category, 'demythologization' genre films, 'invokes the basic characteristics of a traditional genre in order to bring its audience to see that genre as the embodiment of an inadequate and destructive myth'.[69] In this mode, Cawelti notes the tendency for genre films from the 1970s onward (as noted by Rafter and Thompson[70]) to question the conservative myths of the classical genres. Noting this category to be the 'most powerful mode', Cawelti characterizes this discussion by analyzing the film central to his essay, *Chinatown* (1974, directed by Roman Polanski and written by Robert Towne).

Polanski's film appeared near the end of the New Hollywood era and just prior to beginning of what's termed the Return to the Myths, a return of classical-style storytelling in the wake of *Jaws* (1975)*, Rocky* (1976)*,* and *Star Wars* (1977). *Chinatown* appeared like a coda to the New Hollywood, very much in the tradition of the downbeat films like Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969). *Chinatown*, at first, appears to fall into Cawelti's nostalgia category, with vivid historical detail of its 1930s setting. Though the film proves to be an astute challenge to the standard practice of noir filmmaking focused on a private eye. The tradition, in films like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Out of the Past* (1947), centers on an unofficial investigator figure (namely, a private eye) underscoring the theme of ineffective police in the WWII/post-war era. Already in tune with a bleak worldview, as a hardened loner he slowly enters a world of underground crime with each new discovery and questioning of a witness/suspect.

Eventually, he learns the nature of the crime and helps to resolve it – it's one associated to, if not completely caused by, a femme fatale, regarded by most critics as a byproduct of the assertive women in the workforce during the wartime draft.

Chinatown delivers a hardened, loner private eye, Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson), fed up with divorce cases and ripe for a new type of assignment. When he's hired by a woman to spy on her cheating husband, to him it seems more of the same, until he realizes he was set up by an impostor, when the real Evelyn Mulray (Faye Dunaway) and her lawyer serve him court papers. When her husband, who works for the water department, is found dead in a runoff pipe near the ocean, we have a murdered nebbish husband, a plot move appearing in a classic film noir such as *Double Indemnity* (1944). Though, by the conclusion, we learn that Mulray is hardly the temptress leading to her father's death, but a victim of her megalomaniac, incestuous-rapist father, Noah Cross (his holy associations obviously ironic and played by John Huston, director of the films noir *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Asphalt Jungle*, 1950), just as Hollis was no stooge drawn in the plot just to get offed, but the protector of Evelyn and her daughter from rape-incest. The cruel embodiment of Cross's actions, in the backstory, underscored by the killing of Evelyn in the downbeat ending, highlight the political crime by Cross to exploit the city of Los Angeles and surrounding areas (by manipulating the water system to dry out outlying land that can be purchased and developed at a major profit). The unofficial investigator's quest doesn't just resolve a relatively small criminal ordeal – as in the versions of *The Big Sleep* or *Farewell My Lovely* – even if resulting in the death of the fatale that is rendered as tragic in *Out of the Past* (surely an inspiration to *Chinatown*'s treatment of the noir narrative). Chinatown offers the devastating concept

that the crimes presented in the classical style in fact have greater implications and that their presence, along with the role of the femme fatale (more of a victim than the tradition shows), are more than bleak fodder for a fun ride. And yet, *Chinatown* unhinges Gittes, the final witness who wants to help Evelyn and daughter escape her father before she's killed, from the tradition to leave him aimless and hopelessness, a wanderer like Nicholson's role at the conclusion of Monte Hellman's *The Shooting* (1966). The film ends with a crane shot showing him lost, in the film's eponymous city district, as Noah escapes with his grand/daughter, likely to continue familial and political acts of deviance. The film served as an ideal example of demythologization for Cawelti's essay, so compelling that it urged the scholar to close the case on possible generic transformational styles, to which others have agreed since (though Cawelti discusses a fourth, "affirmation of myth" – films in which the myths are questioned but then reaffirmed, like John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962 – as a less important mode). Other 'demythologization' films, such as *The Wild Bunch* and *Bonnie and Clyde,* present such hopelessness for characters in revised generic modes. In the former film, bandits turned avengers attack a group of *federales* with little hope of success. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, the gangster pair are aware of their approaching demise, while 1930s gangster onscreen enjoys the ride until the law catches up with him, after a betrayal by his 'side man'.

Cawelti's breakdown is comprehensive, and yet, today more than ever, scholars must account for the hybridity of popular genre films, especially via motifs of the crime film genre. The hybridity of genres offers methods for revision beyond the deflating potential of 'demythologization'. Hybridity of genres is nothing new – around since early

Hollywood, the blending of styles was especially prominent in the Return to Myths era of the late 1970s and early 1980s in the hands of 'film school brats' Steven Spielberg and George Lucas and their cohorts, who routinely blended a number of genres, which I discuss in my book chapter 'Alex Cox and the Hybrid Western'. (One example is 1985's *The Goonies*, from a story and produced by Spielberg, with screenplay by Chris Columbus and direction by Richard Donner, which blends *Bad News Bears*-potty mouth kids film, *Peter Pan*, the gangster film, *Frankenstein,* and atomic-age 50s horror.) Today, crime film motifs are used to develop narratives in other genres with a need to deliver combative, film brut-style[71] treatments of the related themes in post-9/11 times, mostly through use of the principal crime film archetypes (the criminal, victim, and avenger) to fuel variations on narrative. Crime film motifs have hybridized with the Western (*No Country for Old Men*, 2007), teen film (*Paranoid Park*, 2007), food science expose (*Fast Food Nation*, 2006), paranoid thriller (*Michael Clayton*, 2007), social drama (*Mystic River*, 2003), surrealism (*Mullholland Drive*, 2001), and the horror film (*A History of Violence*, 2005), while motifs of the victim-centered crime film, with their use of the victim, have informed revisions of the miscarriage of justice documentary, the disaster movie, the Western, and the war film genre.

4) Genre Hybridity within the Crime Film

My 2012 book, *The New American Crime Film*, identifies and analyzes hybridized crime films. The project surveys what I saw to be a new wave of crime cinema that overall was probing and diverse in its content. Though committed to invoking traditions in the crime film genre for fans, such as the gangster figure and the noir style, these films recognize the crimes genre's unique ability to develop other genres. My criticism in these chapters closely reads each film to address the crime film troupes used to offer a probing reassessment, 'extreme' in the sense of new French/European extremism I noted in my introduction.

I begin with a discussion of Spike Lee's 2006 film*, Inside Man*, which on the surface is a tribute to the heist film-*cum*-hostage crisis picture, *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975)*.* While offering a clever reading of how *Dog Day* would play out in the new, post-9/11 century, *Inside Man* also revises the treatment of the paranoid thriller popularized in the 1970s, such as *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) and *Marathon Man* (1976), which also made a reappearance in the bleak post-2001 cinema.[72] A regimented style of the crime film, the heist picture focuses on the rule-bound execution of an ordered plan. From the criminal's perspective, the film traditionally ends on a downbeat note, with the crime-cannot-pay mandates of the Production Code Administration (PCA, 1934-1968). Today's heist films, of course, have the freedom to have the gang get away, such as the 2001 remake of *Ocean's Eleven*. *Inside Man*, however, avoids the given deviation for a deeply rooted revision via hybridizing the 1970s paranoid thriller. With the film's direct reference point being *Dog Day Afternoon*, Lee invokes the 1975 film about a bank heist-turned-accidental hostage crisis, which is a platform to reveal the character of Sonny (Al

Pacino) and others connected to him. Instead, Lee presents a planned hostage situation.[73] With the robbery/hostage ordeal eventually revealing Arthur Case as a former Nazi profiteer (the robbers just want his hidden diamonds), the film presents the paranoia of extreme evil at the head of capitalist commerce, who also has high-ranking political connections. The film precedes the revelation by channeling extreme violence of post-9/11 era by staging an execution (actually fake, with plastic weapons). The threat isn't coming from racial outsiders (while a Sikh man in profiled and detained by police outside the bank), but the crimes of older systems (tied to the Nazis) and Case's fixer, Madeleine White (Jodie Foster). It's a lot to handle for Detective Frazier (Denzel Washington), playing a figure usually not a focus in the heist pic and who finishes the film on a new hunt: for the Nazi's capture by the Office of War Crimes Issues.

With the robbers escaping (disguised as hostages) and nothing apparently missing from the bank, no crime can be investigated, and the lines between criminal and avenger are creatively and effectively blurred (the ploy itself a comment on the imaginative possibilities of today's heist tradition). The criminals instigate the reckoning of Case, by leaving a note to Frazier to 'follow the ring' (he will continue the hunt), and thus avenging a larger crime while sneaking away with Case's loot from his safe-deposit box. The paranoid thriller elements largely spurn from allusions to *Marathon Man*, with the return of a Nazi dentist/torturer Christian 'The White Angel' Szell (Laurence Olivier) terrorizing the brother of an associate (Dustin Hoffman). While the 1975 film presents contemporary Americans, especially Jews, facing the lasting effects of Nazism, *Inside Man* presents the crimes confronted (if yet to be resolved).

The tone of *Michael Clayton*, a 2007 film written and directed by Tony Gilroy, invokes the paranoid thriller though its outer motifs directly relate it to the legal film. Focusing on the doomed predicament of the title character/'fixer' (George Clooney), the film is an effective hybridization of the two styles.[74] Clayton is homo sacer[75] once he opposes the interests of his firm. Thus, he becomes an avenger to help his fellow counselor, Arthur Eden (Tom Wilkinson).[76] Eden's manic episode signals an epiphany for Michael to help a victim in the case and leave his own dismal life assisting corporate corruption. Eden's schism represents the duress in reaction to the powerful system, which also effects Michael more as the film progresses – it's a system ready to take him down (Michael perceptively describes him as a 'killer' in court, when serving UNorth), and his new desire to serve justice: i.e., his true role as a trial attorney. At first attempting to return Eden to work, Clayton acknowledges that Eden's situation reflects his own (Clayton is also a gambling addict, seemingly to escape the pressure of his role as fixer).[77] UNorth's Karen Crowder, who sets henchmen on Eden, depicts oppressive actions that leave professionals like Eden and Clayton in thrall and facing death. Wisely, the film portrays her with some sympathy, under pressure by a patriarchal corporation, even if her actions are deplorable.

To get the money to save the family business, Clayton must borrow $80,000 from a sympathetic boss (Sidney Pollack – director of the 1975 spy thriller, *3 Days of the Condor*) – though, in order to receive it, Clayton has to sign a confidentiality agreement, which he violates by unmasking Crowder; her direct boss, Don Jeffries (Ken Howard); and UNorth. Even if he avenges Eden and indicts the conglomerate, Clayton finishes film riding aimlessly in a cab, knowing he will be doomed in the hands of 'killer' lawyers

like the backstory Eden. By using the lawyer figure as a cleaner who's easily abandoned and hunted by his firm's client, the film refashions the legal thriller as a bleak spy piece that reflects the isolation of the individual living under corporate domination.

Two recent films use feminist perspectives, in which women address ordeals through use of crime film motifs: one, a musing on sex scandal fodder, and the other, a bleak coming-of-age story fashioned as a noir investigation. The former, *Notes on a Scandal* (2007), focuses on the relations Sheba Hart (Cate Blanchett), a married art teacher at a comprehensive school in London, and her male student. Knowledge of the affair moves a long-time history teacher, Barbara Covett (Judi Dench), to exploit the secret to get closer to Sheba, whom Barbara appears to desire sexually.[78] A criminal who eventually gets ten months in prison, Sheba becomes a victim who must vindicate herself against the predatory Barbara. But the cycle continues, as Barbara meets a new young target as the film closes. Barbara takes the role of femme fatale as spinster, in a film that questions the passivity of earlier renditions of the figure (see *Now, Voyager*, 1942). With the traditional fatale invoking violence to be punished for it at a narrative's end, Barbara personifies the fatale as a collected schemer trying, however she may, to break the patriarchy's prohibitions on her active desire to live out her sexuality.

Winter's Bone (Debra Granik, 2010), the second feminist crime film, is also the first of two chapters on teen coming-of-age motifs (the second, and final chapter in the second section, is on Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*, 2003, and *Paranoid Park*, 2007).[79] Searching for her father to save her home, Ree (Jennifer Lawrence) becomes an unlikely unofficial noir investigator searching through the rural area and questioning members of a meth

cooking and dealing organization. The film has a mock-fairy tale tone, with children leaving home and venturing into thick woodlands. Though the film is a decidedly bleak vision of Ree leaving innocence to learn of her harsh environment and her father's damning legacy, while director Debra Granik's aligns the perspective to Ree to offer an active woman at the center of an investigative piece. Meanwhile, Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* and *Paranoid Park* use teen perspectives in crime-related tales (the former, about a high school massacre; the latter about a teenage skateboarder who accidentally kills a freight line guard) to portray the vertiginous exhilaration for teens suddenly involved in deviance.

The second section of *The New American Crime Film* discusses some of the most violently extreme films featured in the book. In addition to the films of David Fincher (see page 7), the section also includes Stuart Gordon's hybrids of crime-horror (*Edmond*, 2005 and *Stuck*, 2007), a journalistic account of true crime by documentarian Andrew Jarecki (*All Good Things*, 2010), and David Lynch's surrealist crime film, *Mulholland Drive* (2001 with attention to his first 'crime nightmare', 1987's *Blue Velvet*). This section also includes a chapter on the crime motifs used in the food-science/terror film, *Fast Food Nation* (2006); while a journalistic film, *FFN* also relies on crime film conventions to transform Eric Schlosser's 2001 nonfiction book into a film narrative.

In my chapter discussing Fincher's two serial killer films, I outline how the serial killer has developed into a severe threat for crime investigation. A new wave of serial killer-themed films of the late 1960s/70s – namely, *The Boston Strangler* (1968) and *Dirty Harry* (1971), based, if loosely, on real-life cases – present, in the first example, the serial killer as a terroristic threat to society's members, and in the second, how the

figure motivates the actions of rogue cops. In the decade following *Dirty Harry*, *Henry:*
Portrait of a Serial Killer appeared (1986, though it did not get a wide release until
1990). This film removes the investigation, and largely the widespread panic that such
serial murderers spread. In doing so, it reveals the routine, and often emotionless,
actions of the killer as an extreme in evil's banality, while also portraying his effects as a
source of absolute despair for contemporary society. By treating Henry's life as a
character study, the film quietly critiques the moralism of earlier works for presenting
such evil not for inquiry but rogue vengeance. Fincher's two films reintroduce the
investigator to the serial killer film and largely restrict the narrative to the investigator's
point of view. This framework reflects social organization during mass duress (in light of
Henry, especially) while offering an alternative portrayal of the criminal psychology.

Fincher's first serial killer film, *Se7en*, is a contrivance in its mythical structure, with an
investigation of a serial killer working in the pattern of the 'seven deadly sins'.[80] With a
rush as if to beat fate to its punch, rogue police actions a la *Dirty Harry* are put in check,
as the killer and his methods control the investigation. With his control, the madness of
the slasher in that horror tradition outweighs the procedural's detection. His
manipulation pushes Mills to act as a rouge avenger:

> After a scene in which they chase the man who proves to be John Doe, Mills becomes
> ruthless by entering the killer's room without a warrant… The counterforce (i.e., the
> killer) turns Mills into a renegade cop while Somerset remains restrained, cultured, like
> an evolved hunter working aside this new Dirty Harry.[81]

The serial killer, who already manipulates the press (since Jack the Ripper and
especially the Zodiac) and thus the population, reveals that (in the words of my text), the

rogue investigator's 'wrath…now fuels self-destruction'.[82] Killer John Doe (Kevin Spacey), after he's apprehended by them, puts a mirror to Mills' wrath by presenting proof that Doe murdered his wife.

Fincher's 2007 film presents a poetic take on the journalistic accounts of news cartoonist-turned-investigator Robert Graysmith (Jake Gyllenhaal). As a faithful portrayal of Graysmith's account of the search for the Zodiac Killer (in his books *Zodiac,* 1986, and *Zodiac Unmasked*, 2002), the film doesn't offer the sure, though bloody, path to a threat in *Se7en*. A labyrinthine journey, the 2007 film invokes *Dirty Harry* as a wish-fulfillment for investigators who viewed the film and the title character's violation of due process to catch the Scorpio killer (based on the Zodiac killer). While the police are unable to find the killer, Graysmith's unofficial investigation, as detailed by the at times subjective, but detailed, realism of Fincher and cinematographer Harris Savides leaves nothing but a taunting suspect authorities cannot apprehend.

Originally a stage director, Stuart Gordon (the subject of the next chapter) entered film via the horror genre with the 1985 splatter-comedy *Re-Animator*, which set him on a course for more films in the genre, with occasional steps in others (the children's film, action, magical realism). After first embarking on crime-horror hybridity with *King of the Ants* (2003), in 2005 Gordon released his film adaptation of *Edmond*, based on a 1982 play by David Mamet. The film concerns a man discontent with upper-middle-class life, who leaves his wife to lurk in the nighttime city. His journey becomes his descent, into rage, murder, and, at the end, incarceration.

The mock-adventure shows the title character (William H. Macy) slowly regressing to a childlike state, as he demands simplicity in the adult world consisting of challenging,

harsh environments. His indulgences emerging to the forefront of his mind, he grows more ready for murder until he commits it.[83] It's as if the expected routine of Edmond's content life has left left him too cushy, to lead him to rage and, at the conclusion, contentment being held in the arms of a large fellow prison mate (Bokeem Woodbine), who had previously raped him, dehumanizing him to contentment. The blissful Edmond presents a horrifying irony: the previous full bodied dread, a product of criminal-centered suspense narrative, leaves Edmond infantile and submissive.

Stuart Gordon's 2007 film, *Stuck*, focuses on two people in more trying circumstances than Edmond's, at this tale's onset: Thomas Bardo (Steven Rea), who's recently become homeless, and Brandi (Mena Suvari), a medical assistant at a nursing home who's soon a kind of fugitive. Both 'stuck in life', as Gordon describes it,[84] Brandi panics when her car hits Thomas late one night while she's under the influence after club-going, and she leaves him in her windshield after parking the car in her garage. In a film based on a true story about Chante Mallard hitting Gregory Biggs in Fort Worth, Texas,[85] Gordon doesn't spare us the gore of Bardo's suffering, in an absurdist portrayal of his attempts to escape. While detailing his extremely painful attempts, the film also challenges viewers to sympathize with Brandi, as a life-changing promotion is on the line.

The food science terror film (which descends from the school scare film) is a genre I cover in a chapter with a special focus on *Fast Food Nation* (2006), which dramatizes the issues discussed in Eric Schlosser's 2001 non-fiction book.[86] Schlosser, working as co-writer with writer-director Richard Linklater, uses melodrama to bring the book's issues to viewers, since they chose not to make the usual documentary film that results

from such material.[87] *Fast Food Nation* incorporates three narratives, each built on crime motifs, to expose the themes of food safety and other dangers and liabilities of the industry. The first focuses on Don Anderson (Greg Kinnear), an executive charged by the company employing him ('Mickey's') to investigate health issues in the company's meat production. Based on a lead he receives from the manager of one of restaurant locations, Don visits a local rancher who has been affected by the mass cattle farming that supports fast food companies. Don eventually finds Harry Rydell (Bruce Willis), a beef supplier for Mickey's who openly admits to meat contamination that's hidden by careful instructions to cook meat to certain temperatures – all while comping on a hamburger. The ignorance he shows fuels profits, essentially keeping the megacompany just on the safe side of the law. The film also details the oppressed lives of Mexicans snuck across the border to work in a fast-production meat packing plant. Its harsh conditions include dangerous equipment and cleaning practices, which leave one immigrant worker mangled and another with a back injury, hence, their presence as the main victims in this crime narrative. The company, in order to avoid culpability, reports that methamphetamines were discovered in the latter's system, the film suggesting that they were injected into the worker when hospitalized, or possibly distributed by an immoral floor chief, Mike (Bobby Cannavale), who rapes the victim's wife, as quid pro quo since she now needs a job at the plant. The third narrative strand focuses on the teenage employees that are the 'face' of the restaurant locations, working behind the counter. They decide to rebel by attempting to let out cattle from a pen. When the cattle don't move, the teenagers are stuck – while the Mexicans are locked up, even worse – in a culture and society upon which big business has a tight grip.

My chapter on noir and true crime looks to the films of Andrew Jarecki, his high-profile

documentary *Capturing the Friedmans* and his narrative follow-up, *All Good Things*

(based on a true story). The chapter details how Jarecki's true-crime documentary led to

his narrative treatment of true crime. While detailing the move as a failure in its attempt

to challenge the crime genre's limits in portraying justice, this chapter was largely

important for shaping my ideas for the book chapter, 'Documenting Crime' (see

Appendix B), which I discuss in detail later.

In my chapter on David Lynch that closes this section of the book, I argue that Lynch,

noted most often as a subversive artist using the surreal, has used crime motifs to

hybridize with his surreal treatment to shape his contemporary film style of

'hyperrealism'.[88] He began with an intriguing style of the surreal for arthouse audiences

in his short *The Grandmother* (1970) and the midnight movie classic *Eraserhead* (1976).

But after his frustrating project to adapt Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1984), Lynch decided to

do an astute reading of classic noir for the surreal/neo-noir 1986 modern classic, *Blue*

Velvet. This film returns to the concept of classical Hollywood narrative structure, which

Lynch directly subverted in the two films previously mentioned, to loosen the structure

and reveal the excessive sex and violence that remained in the 'unconscious' of

traditional film noir. The film's audience-surrogate, Jeffrey (Kyle MacLauglin), yearns for

the traditional 'blond' Sandy (Laura Dern) to seek the Hollywood 'mush factor' of various

action-related genres. And yet he has an encounter with a revised femme fatale figure,

the likely permanently troubled Dorothy (Isabella Rossellini). The film's criminal, Frank

Booth (Dennis Hopper), embodies the most sinister of noir threats, as a bizarre alt-

father figure who possesses Dorothy and aims to consume the moral education of

Jeffrey (who is also undoubtedly a surrogate for Lynch himself, thought the artist has been quiet on such matters).

Lynch's 2001 contemporary classic *Mulholland Drive¸* a surrealistic noir, will be the cause of continuous reinterpretation. While *Lost Highway* (1997) proved even more challenging than his 1986 film, Lynch's 2001 work proved to move further and, I'd argue, more successfully than the previous entry. My reading connects *Mulholland Drive* to *Blue Velvet* by discussing the former as an introspective neo-noir that further unpacks the femme fatale figure. The narrative divides the figure into two consciences that eventually double each other in the film's latter section. The film's latter part reveals the actual waking life of Naomi Watts' character, a working actress, who has been abandoned by her girlfriend (Laura Harring), also an actress seduced by her director. The desires and nightmares of the earlier narrative reveal the mental logic of Watt's character, presenting her as passionate then betrayed, an internalized noir tale that leads her to hire a hitman to get her girlfriend.

Chapter 11 concerns the recent films starring Tommy Lee Jones, as an avenger in Western-related narratives attempting to right injustice related to deceased friends and family members. In these films Jones plays, essentially, a rogue avenger – the product of films of the 1970s like *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Death Wish* (1974). Due process prevents the title character in *Dirty Harry* (Clint Eastwood) from stopping a serial killer in lawful means, while *Death Wish's* Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson), unable to face the muggers that attacked his wife and daughter, begins taking on others in the streets. Though in Jones' films, *corrupt* official investigations preclude justice proper, necessitating his characters' rogue investigations.

After discussing Jones' role in the *Fugitive* (1993), his Oscar-winning role which made him into a popular (though official/lawman) avenger, I discuss *Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Jones, who also stars.[89] After Perkins demands that the local sheriff Belmont (Dwight Yoakam) arrest Norton for the death of his friend, Melquiades, which Belmont refuses to do, Perkins kidnaps Norton to force him, on horseback, into an absurdist, Samuel Beckett-style journey to return Melquiades' body to the burial place he desired. Focused on honoring Melquiades by returning him to his homeland, Pete kidnaps and tortures Mike in a mission fueled by bloodlust, while the journey's aim itself proves questionable (Melquiades may have lied about having a family there and it being his rightful burial place).

From there, I discuss Jones role as an unofficial avenger in *In the Valley of Elah* (2007).[90] After soon learning that his son is dead, Hank (Tommy Lee Jones) pursues leads with the help of Detective Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron), at one point thinking that drug dealers are guilty. Hank is in disbelief that Mike's fellow soldiers could have done it. As a vengeance-driven avenger in the style of 1950s psychological Westerns (by Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher), Hank accosts suspects, attacking one of Mike's associates who has a criminal record, and demeaning him by calling him a 'wetback'. Eventually, his investigation reveals an inversion of frontier justice, since the villains aren't strange and removed from Mike: his friends did kill him after a fight broke out off base one night. From their description of the event, it's evident that the killing resulted from their trauma (possibly post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD) and/or desensitization from exposure to combat. Mike, himself, gained the nickname "Doc" for

his tendency to torture captives. (In Chapter 16, I return to Tommy Lee Jones in his role of an overwhelmed Western avenger in *No Country for Old Men*.)

In Chapter 12, I move to Clint Eastwood's recent crime films. His work behind the camera, and in front of it, revises his early roles as a lone avenger in the Westerns of Sergio Leone and crime films like the aforementioned *Dirty Harry*. In his recent works, Eastwood uses crime film motifs to create narratives of social crisis and address the issues. While positioning Eastwood's role as an urban avenger in *Gran Torino* (2008),[91] ridding the streets of 'trash' a la *Death Wish* and his earlier role in *Dirty Harry*, the film invokes Eastwood's sure-firing man of action in the early Westerns to assist a community. By welcoming (though resisting, at first) a city's multicultural transition from its predominantly white, working class roots, Walt Kowalski (Eastwood) faces local hoods in a personal sacrifice, by pretending to pull a gun, so their killing of him will take them off the streets for the community to thrive. His mock-shootout/death scene is a tribute to the swift triple-shot of Eastwood's Joe in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), and a 'demythologization', in Cawelti's sense, of the classic scene. And yet by invoking the Western in a contemporary scene of community building, genre hybridity shows how the old hybridizes into change. Beginning the film with a fatal illness, Kowalski is initially not in tune with multiculturalism, seeing only conflict between and related to different racial groups. But he soon sees the plight of Hmong neighbors next door trying to establish themselves in a repressive white society and decides to remove the criminal threat.

Eastwood's *Changeling*, released the same year, focuses on a victim of the late 1920s Los Angeles Police Department, as an example of a long history of the organization's corruption. Christine Collins (Angelina Jolie) turns active to find her son when police

return another in place of hers. She uses the help of an unlikely but very active avenger, Rev. Gustav Briegleb (John Malkovich), who uses the new medium of radio for his religious message and as a means of social justice. With the help of community organization, Collins unveils the local corruption when she discovers the actual, horrifying truth of her kidnapped boy.

Mystic River, Eastwood's 2003 film, adapts a rich, complex crime novel (2001) by Dennis Lehane as a multi-protagonist drama. In the thriller format, the film depicts the investigation of a murder of a young woman, whose father, Jimmy Markum (Sean Penn), has a criminal past.[92] Jimmy's childhood friend residing nearby, Dave, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (due to an abduction in his youth) and is suspect when Jimmy's daughter is found missing. The film presents Jimmy, Sean, and Dave as part of one fractured consciousness, one that is trying to deal with memories of abuse. When Jimmy executes Dave, declaring him guilty through his own rogue vengeance, he attempts to repress the memory of his friend/victim's abuse with psychological violence – Sean hasn't reached the truth, while his partner, a standout Lawrence Fishburne playing a persistent investigator, disappears from the narrative. The rogue avenger does not bring the kind of justice that due process prevented, as in *Dirty Harry*. Essentially, justice for Dave, and Jimmy's daughter,[93] is impossible in Eastwood's undercutting of his own, former role of the avenger onscreen. The film offers insight into complex psychology, especially abuse, and how it must be considered in criminal investigation.

Woody Allen also provided self-commentary on his career with his 2005 intriguing thriller, *Match Point*. With a long history in crime films, stemming to his early farce *Take*

the Money and Run (1969), Allen opted to revise his 1989 comic-suspense drama *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, which concerns an aged ophthalmologist, Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau) attempting to maintain his social standing by having his mistress murdered. (She threatens to reveal his financial indiscretions.) In *Match Point*, Allen also depicts an attempt to 'kill away' the desire for infidelity and its ramifications. The film revises the concept, by way of the erotic thriller (a 1980s post-neo-noir cycle of films[28]) to feature social climber Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a tennis pro who grows bored with his rich intended (Emily Mortimer) who will bring him stability and a comfortable career in finance. His mistress, Nola (Scarlett Johansson), is in the femme fatale mold, with viewers expecting her to bring down Chris for a moralist conclusion. Instead, Allen revises the classic noir motif to have Chris brutally kill both her, and her landlord on site, while staging it as a robbery gone wrong. His impulsive, though premediated, act stems from his sexual drive running out of control. The film concludes with Chris still bored and distracted as his family celebrates the birth of his child, with Allen suggesting that his attempt to repress his desires, with psychological violence (depicted as actual violence, as in Eastwood's *Mystic River*), leaves him discontent, more likely to stray again.

David Mamet famously began his career as a playwright, with *American Buffalo* (1975, Broadway in 1977; film in 1996) and his 1984 play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize (filmed in 1992). Both trademark plays involve criminal enterprise (in *Buffalo,* the theft of the title buffalo nickel; *Glengarry*, the theft of prized sales 'leads'). His screenplay for *Edmond*, based upon his 1982 play, became the grounds for Stuart Gordon's 2005 crime-horror film, discussed previously. Mamet's first foray into film was

his adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) to serve as Bob Rafelson's

1981 remake of Tay Garnett's 1946 film. In 1987 Mamet delivered his first film as

writer/director, *House of Games*, which uses material related to both plays: the con job.

In this film and following works, Mamet uses crime motifs to present the film medium's

ability to provide illusions of reality – essentially, crime meets epistemological cinema. In

House, Mamet uses the medium of film to present the fabricated reality of the long con,

in which the audience surrogate, Margaret Ford (Lindsay Crouse), gets pulled into a

scam in which Mike (Joe Mantegna) first appears to teach her the game, and then

brings her on a job that turns disastrous. From there he asks for her funds to help his

con team complete the job, only for him to actually rob her. Once she discovers the

ruse, Mamet includes a prominent political issue when she tells him that it wasn't just a

financial crime, but rape as well, since their sexual encounter happened under false

pretenses.

Mamet's recent crime films since *House of Games* also focus on perspective and the

con, and one, *Spartan* (2003), looks to a professional institution to detail their corruption

and criminal activity. The film features the Delta Force to situate the motifs of the

political thriller, and, in turn, a long con. The daughter of the U.S. president is kidnapped

by sex traffickers since her protection was taken away by her father to help cover his

affair. Agents stage her death, with the help of a professor, to cover the problem for

political expediency. *The Spanish Prisoner* (1997), itself named after a con stemming to

the 18th century, also uses the long con genre to question audience perception with

retroactive continuity, while *Redbelt* (2008) presents short cons and a major one with

blackmail, in a film featuring the sport of mixed-martial arts to investigate the power structure of the business.

I finish this section with a chapter on recent gangster films. While crime films of this style are frequent, the two featured in my chapter continue the classical tradition adapting journalistic accounts of a 1930s gangster, John Dillinger (Michal Mann's *Public Enemies*, 2009) and a 1970s drug lord, Frank Lucas (*American Gangster*, 2007). These two films use fact-based source books (similarly to how Fincher's *Zodiac* stays faith to Robert Graysmith's texts) to revise the mythologized gangland hoods of the movies, originally mediated to the screen via tabloid journalism. By working thus, the two films hybridize the gangster style with the historical film while commenting on the genre's reliance on the rise-and-fall structure. Dillinger (Johnny Depp) in *Public Enemies* realizes his 'fall' is coming in the opening minutes, which features his famous escape that leaves one of his gang dead. Facing his own fall, Lucas (Denzel Washington) in *American Gangster* turns himself in to provide evidence and help take down the larger ring.

Part Four of my book begins with a chapter on the Coen brothers, whose style of crime comedy serves as an interesting take on the noir style. Though the filmmaking pair, essentially, uses noir to present a 'return of the repressed' – in their case, a classic noir motif revised by them to reflect the playfulness of noir and its hybridity with the horror film. Their 2007 film, *No Country for Old Men*, is a standout among the wave a crime films post-9/11. The film completes their triad of a crime cycle, as the most extreme in violence and nihilism of the three (1984's *Blood Simple,* 1996's *Fargo*, and *No Country*). All three films depict an interrupted journey (the motif returning) as violence emerges.

The terror originates in the shocking murder in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (novel by James M. Cain, 1934; film directed by Tay Garnett, 1946), of a husband by the lover of his wife. In borrowing the motif for *Blood Simple*, the Coens turn it on its head.[94] A twisting tale of laughter and dread ensues, in a film that is part neo-noir and part of the horror-comedy cycle of the 1980s (i.e., *Re-Animator, Return of the Living Dead,* 1985). The Coens return to the motif in *Fargo* (1996), in which one of two bumbling crooks, who have a kidnapped woman in the backseat, suddenly murder a patrol officer (a murder that eerily recalls the killing of a Dallas patrolman in Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line*, 1988). In *Fargo*, the murder is an opportunity to lay down the cards of how violent the film will be as their piece stems from crime film to horror pic. Again, in their 2007 film the Coens 'lay down the cards' when a detained Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) strangles a police officer with handcuffs. To invoke the earlier films, the Coens film Chigurh captured on the highway. With Chigurh a haunt invoking Grimsgrud, the dreaded hood in *Fargo,* and Judge Holden in the 1985 Western novel *Blood Meridian* (written by Cormac McCarthy, who wrote the source novel of *No Country*), the film hybridizes with horror and the Western genre: as Chigurh goes free at the end, Ed Tom Bell (Tommy Lee Jones) is haunted by his dream of conquering the Texas wasteland.

As a specialist in the horror genre, David Cronenberg has recently moved into various styles: historical biographical film (*A Dangerous Method*, 2011), capitalist critique (*Cosmopolis,* 2012), and Hollywood satire (*Map to the Stars,* 2014). In the mid-2000s he made a fascinating turn to the crime film with *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007). In doing so he revises his trademark style of body horror (i.e., visceral terror concerned with the body failing itself) which details its psychological effects. Prior

to his crime films, Cronenberg adapted literary properties using visual references to highlight the effects of inner turmoil. These works served as pathways to crime-meets-psychological terror.

By invoking the gangster film early in the narrative, Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* promises a revisionist take to follow films like *Road to Perdition* (2002), which is also an adaptation of a graphic novel.[95] As Tom Stall must return to the darker world of the Eastern US, Philadelphia (also prominent in *The Killers*), his inner criminality must reemerge as the film questions the placid façade mandated by the status quo and family values. Instead of horror invading from the outside (which appears to be the case, at first), the dread rises from within, in the form of his criminality, as he defeats the horrifying threats coming after him and his family. In turn, by the resolution – what should be the restoration to normality – his family fears he's too much the criminal, themselves trapped in binary, black-and-white thinking.

Eastern Promises also stars Viggo Mortensen (Cronenberg's muse for a while), this time playing Nikolai Luzhin, a gangster rising into power in the titular organization (the Russian mob in the UK). Naomi Watts' role as Anna serves as an unofficial investigator.[96] The mob's driver, Nikolai, rises in the criminal underworld and ends up killing Chechens out for vengeance against Kirill. Nikolai is soon revealed to be a Russian Federal Security Service agent who, while infiltrating into the gang under cover, has committed severe criminal acts of rape (with women in the sex slave trade) in addition to murder. Representing the dark fluidity between investigator and criminal, he appears very ambiguous at the end of the film, like *History of Violence*'s Joey.

Presenting challenging perspectives that blur the lines between avenger and criminal, Cronenberg's crime films lead to my discussion of Werner Herzog's *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* (2009), which serves as a crime film hybridized with subjective realistic drama (I argue it to be a major improvement from the 1992 film of the same name by Abel Ferrara). Herzog's film is a tonal improvement to Ferrara's, which depicts the guilt of the title character, LT (Harvey Keitel), repeatedly with little insight about his perspective. Herzog's film explores sundry ways to portray the amoral glee of Sergeant Terrence (Nicolas Cage), as he commits violent, destructive acts repeatedly, while donning a badge. The film tells us why the 'Bad Lieutenant' is who he is, while Ferrera's film gets overwhelmed with moralism in attempts to present LT's subjective experience. Herzog's is more probing in its truth, and more of a personal, honest cinema.

By hybridizing the crime film with other genres and styles, in *The New American Crime Film* I reveal the genre's universal relevance and its power to help develop genres in the future.

5) Crime Hybridity and the 'Victim' in the Documentary, Disaster Movie, Western, and War Film

Following the publication of my book, I focused on the victim figure of the crime film first in the crime documentary (in 'Documenting Crime: Genre, Verity, and Filmmaker as Avenger', *Framing Law and Crime*, edited by Caroline Picart et al., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016; see Appendix B), and then in other revisionist genre films (discussed below). An important aspect related to the victim is that this figure rarely stays passive, since American viewers don't like passive protagonists.[97] Their inclination to avenge themselves, as I discuss, creates unique, extreme takes on victim-based crime hybrid films.

The victim figure in the crime documentary (e.g., *The Thin Blue Line*, 1988; *Paradise Lost*, 1996; *Into the Abyss*, 2011), however, remains wrongfully accused and/or misunderstood. While the avenger figure is prominent in traditional crime films, either as a lawman, unofficial avenger, or victim-turned-avenger, there are none present in these true tales of miscarriage of justice. In *The Thin Blue Line*, filmmaker Errol Morris documents the story of Randall Adams, who was wrongfully convicted and imprisoned (originally with a death sentence, which was later commuted to life). By detailing the case and getting the guilty, David Harris, to admit culpability, Morris managed to help reopen the case and exonerate Adams (Harris was already on death row for another murder, and executed in 2004, at 43 years old). The film sets a high bar for success in the crime documentary, though others, like Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky, Nick Broomfield, and Werner Herzog continue the tradition. Herzog's is especially unique in

Into the Abyss (2011) (one of the works in the 'disposition film' category[98]) as he

interviews a death row inmate, found guilty in a case with little doubt in the conviction, to

assess his state of being while knowing that his life will end early. Broomfield uses a

similar approach, highlighting how Wuornos was a victim of a rough childhood which

brought her to working as a truck-stop prostitute. Though his films differ in that he

shows Wuornos as a victim of media sensationalism, which highlighted the unique

situation of a 'female serial killer' and assumed her guilt (while the 2003 narrative film,

Monster, presents her case). Berlinger and Sinofsky filmed actual justice for Delbert

Ward, an uneducated farmer cleared of murdering his brother, and for the 'West

Memphis Three', who with the help of the films' awareness were offered to make the

troubling 'Alford Plea', a guilty plea where the defendant still asserts innocence, in order

to free themselves.[99]

I also focus on the victim figure in the revisionist (e.g., smaller scale) disaster film in

"Last Man (With)standing: the Character-Disaster Film" (*Film International,* 11-3.4; see

Appendix C). Traditionally the disaster film focuses on an entire community in peril

under an impending natural or human-made disaster.[100] Under duress, a group bands

together to avert the problem (*The China Syndrome*, 1979) or survive (*The Poseidon*

Adventure, 1972; *The Towering Inferno,* 1974). The genre deals with outside actions

more than inner drive or psychology. Hence, the genre is especially melodramatic, in its

focus on action and interests of the status quo. Recent disaster films, however, move

from attention to the community and its interests to focus on the psychological struggle

of an individual facing physical suffering in a condensed scenario of disaster. With the

internal focus of *127 Hours* (2010), *Stuck* (2007), *Grizzly Man (2005),* and others, I

analyze the style to be a hybrid of New European Extremism[101] and the traditional genre. The connection to Extremism is especially prominent in films that I describe as 'internalizing disaster': *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Stephen Daldry, 2011), *Take Shelter* (Jeff Nichols, 2011), *Compliance* (Craig Zobel, 2012). 'The new character-disaster film opts for a personalized – and hence, more immediate – threat and humanity's individual fight in lieu of the communal'.[102]

My chapter 'Alex Cox and Hybrid Western', included in *The New Western* (edited by Scott Stoddart, McFarland, 2016) also notes how a film in the Western style, *Searchers 2.0*, uses the victim figure to deconstruct the genre. In question are the fans of the genre who, in living out the brutality in the movie, victimize others.[103] The desire of Mel (Del Zamora) and Fred (Ed Pansullo) for blood recalls the revisionist Westerns of the 1960s and 70s, but also the psychological Westerns of the 1950s (especially in the film's reference to John Ford's 1956 vengeance classic featuring Ethan Edwards, John Wayne's character possessed by vengeance and violence more than justice). These films reveal the repressed violence of 'nobler' men of action before them. The former child actors in *Searchers 2.0* had experienced non-diegetic pain and abuse to show how the violence of the tradition inspired brutality in reality.

On Mel and Fred's journey, they meet several roadblocks in a film full of Westerns references. In one sense, *Searchers 2.0* portrays the confusion of fans trying to live by the genre's codes, or in the case of Mel and Fred, invoke them for vengeance. Hence, the two avengers struggle to find the satisfaction of their fandom in Cox's 'rendering of frontier travel reduced to inaction'.[104] When approaching their mark, Mel and Fred are

clueless as to how to get revenge, with the memory of victimization alive and leaving them aimless in a post-Western wasteland.

The last genre that I consider is the war film. In a genre usually preferring heroism, I nonetheless discovered a revisionist rendition that uses the victim figure, in what I call the 'service tragicomedy'. Just before a boom of combat movies during World War II mandated by the Office of War Information (OWI), the service comedy grew in popularity (though it was soon curtailed for more serious portrayals of heroism in war[105]). It began as early as Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* (1918) and became a recurring mode of practice just prior to and during the War (Bob Hope in *Caught in the Draft*, Abbot and Costello in *Buck Privates* and *In the Navy*, all 1941). The classical service comedy presents an enlisted rebel (or a duo) in training whose actions disrupt the system to produce comedy. Hope and Abbot and Costello revise and expand on many of the sight gags by Chaplin in his short film, such as falling out of lockstep, rifle mishaps, etc. By the end of a given film, the service comedy redirects the rebel's rugged individualism toward helping the platoon succeed, essentially subsuming him for success of the group in a 'hierarchically structured community of men'.[106] Since the war film is, of all genres, one to celebrate interests of the status quo and group success, the triumphant ending in the classical Hollywood style mandates the rebel's success for the platoon.

Service comedies of 1970s and the 1980s, however, add a tragic tone, even if the earlier classical genre was the most communal and success-based. These films present the military as a repressive system that 'destroys' enlistees who are unable to align to the group's needs. The misfit rebel begins the film trying to turn into an active agent for

the military, but remains out of step, abused, and either psychologically transformed or destroyed. Woody Allen's *Love and Death* (1975) is an unlikely service tragicomedy (more often noted as a parody of Russian literature and Ingmar Bergman) but important in the tragicomedy's development. In the film's first half, writer-director-star Allen parodies traditional service comedies with his unlikely success in battle as a former Russian peasant conscripted. True to the sight-gag tradition of Chaplin and the cynicism of Bob Hope (whom Allen notes is his biggest film comedy inspiration[107]), Boris (Allen) defeats a French general after being shot from a cannon onto the leader's tent. This first narrative movement is a parody service comedy. Then, in the second half, when Boris attempts to assassinate Napoleon, he fails and faces execution, in a movement that plays as a service tragicomedy.

Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) also uses a two-part structure to revise the service comedy: Part I offers a more damning service tragicomedy, in which the comedian is divided into a twin consciousness: the aptly named Joker (Matthew Modine) and Leonard Lawrence (a.k.a., Private Pyle, referring to a popular television program but also to his status as 'shit'). Pyle fails and redirects the pressure to violence, in the murder of his drill instructor, Sgt. Hartman (R. Lee Ermey) and suicide, while Joker witnesses the acts and must remember them forever as he's subsumed, just as he will have to remember his killing of a defenseless woman sniper at the end of Part II. By implying the lasting effects of the victim who survives, Kubrick fashions Part II into a service tragedy.

With the 'victim' becoming prominent in non-crime-film genres, this crime film figure has the potential to help continue the development of hybridity in genre film.

6) Conclusion

In my work of criticism, I have clarified a means for genre hybridity through the use of crime motifs and use of the victim figure. Genre theory prior to my work either treated hybridity as impurity or presented rare cases of its occurrence. I have moved to present hybridity as a regular practice in recent films. My criticism analyzes how the crime film, with it widespread appeal and usability, has helped developed various genres enter extreme modes, which appeal to post-9/11 filmmakers, producers, and viewers. My writing on the new American crime film shows that, in its various modes, the genre reflects hybridity throughout the universe of genre movie storytelling.

Endnotes

1) As defined by Leitch, Thomas (2002), *Crime Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), the study which spearheaded this trend, the crime film is a fluid genre which covers related sub-genres that employ the criminal, victim, and avenger, including the gangster film (criminal centered; *Little Caesar, Scarface, The Roaring 20s, Bonnie and Clyde*), film noir (criminal or unofficial avenger: *Double Indemnity, The Maltese Falcon, Kiss Me Deadly*), the heist film (criminal; *The Killing, Violent Saturday, Dog Day Afternoon*), policier (official avenger; *Dirty Harry*), the victim film (*I Am A Fugitive From a Chain Gang, Fury, The Accused*).

2) See the several stand-alone chapters in Wood, Robin (2003), *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan…and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP).

3) Clarens, Carlos (1980), *Crime Movies* (New York: Norton).

4) See Nochimson, Martha P. (2007), *Dying to Belong: Gangster Movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell); Dixon, Wheeler Winston (2009), *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP); Yau, Esther and Tony Williams, eds. (2017), *Hong Kong Neo-Noir* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP); Lee, Daryl (2014), *The Heist Film: Stealing with Style* (London: Wallflower). While 'the prison film' could certainly be included as a 'narrative' crime film category, and is a focus in Rafter, Nicole (2006), *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP), I have not treated it as such, since the prison film has not been hybridized in the 'new wave' of crime films that is my focus. See also Kehrwald, Kevin (2017), *Prison Movies: Cinema Behind Bars* (New York: Columbia): 12, in which he defines prison movies as a genre in which 'the imagery and effects of incarceration overshadow all other aspects of the film' and shows the crime is more of a premise than a focus in such films, with crime in prison something very different that deviance on the 'outside'. Prison is a setting of the crime documentary, which I focus on in (2016), 'Documenting Crime: Genre, Verity, and Filmmaker as Avenger', *Framing Law and*

Crime, ed. Picart, Caroline Joan 'Kay' S., Michael Hviid Jacobsen, and Cecil Greek (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP) (see Appendix B), though not a main angle of the book chapter's argument.

5) Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror*; Leitch, *Crime Films.*

6) Hardy, Phil (1997), *The BFI Companion to Crime* (Berkeley: U of California P): 24

7) Ibid., 52.

8) Ibid., 308-09

9) Leitch, *Crime Films,* 14.

10) For example, see Sargeant, Amy (2016), *Stings, Grifts, Hustles and the Long Con* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), which shows the connectivity among the heist film and styles of con movies.

11) This approach is novel, since traditional genre scholarship, while noting that change is inherent in genres (in their 'dynamic' nature), assert their 'static' nature – see Schatz, Thomas, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1980): 16.

12) Sorrento, Matthew (2012), *The New American Crime Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland): 5.

13) Ibid., 7.

14) In one entry of his series *On Death Row* (2012), Werner Herzog interviews the mother of a convicted 'rampage' killer, Douglas Feldman. She relates that, during her counseling, her therapist suggested that her son's killing spree was his method of committing suicide.

15) For more information on this style, see del Mar Azcona, María, *The Multi-Protagonist Film* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010).

16) In this chapter, I relate how the roadside murder in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (James M. Cain novel, 1934; film, 1946) has served as an archetype for the Coens thus.

17) Williams, Linda (1993), "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 46 (3): 9-21. Collected as "Mirrors without Memories: Truth,

History, and *The Thin Blue Line*." In *Documenting the Documentary*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 379-396. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1998.

18) Criterion Collection (2015), "Interview with Errol Morris," Supplement to DVD Release, 2015.

19) Keane, Stephen, *Disaster Movies: the Cinema of Catastrophe* (London: Wallflower, 2006): 47.

20) See Campbell, Neil (2011), "Post-Western Cinema," *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West*, ed. Nicolas S. Witschi (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell).

21) Schatz, Thomas (1988), *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon): 347

22) Hess Wright, Judith (1974, 2003), 'Genre Films and the Status Quo', *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: U of Texas P): 50. Originally published in *Jump Cut* 1 (May-June 1974): 1, 16, 18.

23) Cawelti, John (1979, 2003), '*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent Genre Films', *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: U of Texas P): 243-261. Originally published in *Film Theory and Criticism* (1979), 2nd Ed, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP).

24) Schatz, Thomas (1980), *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York; Random House): 30.

25) Ibid., 35.

26) Hess Wright: 43.

27) Neale, Steve (1980), *Genre* (London: British Film Institute): 48.

28) Ibid., 50.

29) Neale, Steve (2000), *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge): 211.

30) Ibid., 43.

31) Ibid., 44.

32) Sobchak, Thomas (1975, 2003), 'Film Genre: the Classical Experience', *Film Genre Reader III,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press): 112. Originally published in *Literature/Film Quarterly* 3.3 (Summer 1975): 196-204.

33) Ibid., 113.

34) Langford, Barry (2005), *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP): 24.

35) Altman, Rick (1984, 2003), 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre', *Film Genre Reader III,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press): 31. Originally published in *Cinema Journal* 23.3 (Spring 1984): 6-18.

36) Altman, Rick (1998), 'Reusable Packaging: Genre Products and the Recycling Process', *Refiguring American Film Genres*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: U California P): 2. A revised version of the essay is included as Chapters 4-5 in Altman (200), *Film/Genre* (London: BFI/Palgrave MacMillan): 49-78.

37) Ibid., 2.

38) Ibid., 11.

39) Ibid., 15.

40) Ibid., 15.

41) Ibid., 24.

42) Altman, *Film/Genre*: 143.

43) Leitch, 16.

44) Rafter, 5.

45) Ibid., 3.

46) Ibid., 231.

47) While already having a chapter on 'Prison and Execution Films' in her 2000 edition of the book, Rafter added a chapter on "Slasher, Serial Killer, and Psycho Movies' in her 2006 second edition. This inclusion adds films of criminals in action and their psychology to her focus, like Leitch's.

48) Hirsch, Foster (1983), *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen* (New York: De Capo): 172.

49) Sorrento, *Crime Film¸* 7. Like Hirsch, I argue that the criminal-centered crime film – gangster film, film noir, the heist film – offers a more complex psychology in its depiction of the criminal' perspective, while many avenger films limit the perspective to clean moralism.

50) Thompson, Kristen Moana (2007), *Crime Films: Investigating the Scene* (London: Wallflower): 3.

51) Ibid., 29-48.

52) Ibid., 3.

53) Narmore, James (1998, 2008), *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: U California P): 267.

54) Tudor, Andrew (1974), *Theories of Film* (London: Secker and Warburg): 145. Quoted in Neale, 19.

55) Naremore, 267.

56) Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, 16.

57) Wood, Robin (1986, 2003), *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan…and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP): 71.

58) Grant, Barry Keith (2007), *Film Genre: from Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower): 47.

59) Wood, 75-84.

60) Wood also argued for genre fluidity (see 104) and used a Western, *Man of the West* (Anthony Mann, 1958; see 71) to explain his theory of horror, thus reflecting the theory's pervasiveness in different genres.

61) Altman, *Film/Genre*, 21.

62) Cawelti, '*Chinatown'*, 254.

63) Ibid.

64) Hess Wright, 'Genre Films'.

65) Gallager, Tag (2003), 'Shootout at the Genre Corral: Problems in the "Evolution" of the Western', *Film Genre Reader III,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press): 262-276.

66) Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (1985) *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press.

67) Cawelti, 251.

68) Cawelti, 253.

69) Cawelti, 254.

70) Rafter, 3; Thompson, 3.

71) Stam, Robert (2015), *Keywords in Subversive Film* (Hoboken: Wiley): 162.

72) Douthat, Ross (2008), 'The Return of the Paranoid Style: How the Iraq War and George W. Bush sent the movie industry back to its favorite era – the 1970s', *The Atlantic,* April, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/04/the-return-of-the-paranoid-style/306733/, accessed 12/1/16.

73) The hostage situation is fronted by a ruse-bank heist, in which the robbers, led by Dalton Russell (Clive Owen), aim to steal a safe deposit box containing incriminating evidence about bank founder and board chairman Arthur Case (Christopher Plummer), who profited from dealings with the Nazis, along with a collection of diamonds.

74) Clayton is a "cleaner" for a large legal firm – the narrative begins with Clayton, at late night, arriving to a client who's just committed a hit-and-run.

75) As described in Agamben, Giorgio (1998), *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City, Stanford UP).

76) Eden has a breakdown while working on a multi-billion-dollar case for an agricultural company, UNorth, and hence, jeopardizes the results. The firm's client hires blonde hitmen (another form of 'white angels') to go after Eden, with Clayton soon hunted by them, as well. He must take the client down by gaining evidence against UNorth's general counsel, Karen

Crowder (Tilda Swinton), but in the end Clayton is lost, having broken the gag order he signed with his firm in a deal for a cash advance to save his side business.

77) After discovering Eden's location and reasoning with him, Michael learns that he has been murdered (the viewer earlier sees the blonde henchmen working in cold, routine precision).

78) With both fired from their jobs and Sheba kicked out of her house, she movies in with Barbara, and when reading her diary, Sheba learns Barbara was the one who leaked news of the affair.

79) *Bone* focuses on the 17-year-old Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence), who lives in the Ozark Mountains and is the de-facto guardian of her two younger siblings, with her mother severely ill and her father, Jessup, missing.

80) After investigating the first two murders (invoking gluttony and greed), two detectives, David Mills (Brad Pitt) and Lieutenant William Somerset (Morgan Freeman), reason out just how many deaths are scheduled and race to stop a seemingly inevitable future string of terror (all of which has, to this point, been vividly portrayed in their discovery of the killer's victims).

81) Sorrento, Matthew (2010), *The New American Crime Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland): 64.

82) Ibid., 65.

83) After taken by a card sharp, Edmond attacks him, and later, after meeting a bigoted waitress, murders her in an impulsive move that implies gory bloodshed on the soundtrack, while Macy's facial performance portrays equal parts dread and empowerment.

84) Sorrento, Matthew (2008), 'Object in Mirror May Be Closer Than It Appears: Stuart Gordon Talks about Horror, the Absurd, and *Stuck*', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, July 31, 2008, http://brightlightsfilm.com/object-in-mirror-may-be-closer-than-it-appears-stuart-gordon-talks-about-horror-the-absurd-and-stuck/#.WRwe5vnyvIU, accessed 5/1/2016.

85) Associated Press (2002), 'Man Stuck in Windshield Left to Die', *LA Times,* March 8, 2002, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/mar/08/news/mn-31784, accessed 5/13/2017.

86) One category of films I discuss in 'Last Man (With)Standing' (see Appendix C) are described as films in the 'Disaster by Diet' category – food science films that portray a form of 'personal disaster'.

87) Nelson, Rob (2006), 'Grazed and Abused (Interview with Richard Linklater)', *Mother Jones* (November-December), http://motherjones.com/media/2006/10/grazed-and-abused, accessed 5/10/2016.

88) Sorrento, *New American Crime Film*, 100.

89) Playing Pete Perkins, a Texas rancher, Jones' role avenges the wrongful killing of his friend, the immigrant laborer of the title (Julio Cesar Cedillo), by the careless actions of an American Border Patrol officer, Mike Norton (Barry Pepper) which results in a cover-up by the Border Patrol and local police.

90) Here Jones' character (Hank Deerfield), a contemporary military police veteran, investigates the disappearance of his son, Mike (Jonathan Tucker), a private who goes missing from a New Mexico military base after he returns from combat in Iraq.

91) *Gran Torino*, in which he also stars, was rumored to be his last onscreen role (which turned out to be not true, since he starred in *Trouble with the Curve*, 2012, directed by his long-time first assistant director, Robert Lorenz).

92) When young, Jimmy and his childhood friend Sean Devine (Connor Paolo) witness the abduction of their friend Dave Boyle (Cameron Bowen), who escapes from sexual abuse for the crime to be repressed, depicted in the closing of a window shade of his upstairs room when onlookers wonder about the extent of his trauma. Years later, Dave (now played by Tim Robbins) is the friend who hasn't made good (Sean, played by Kevin Bacon, is a detective and Jimmy, Sean Penn, a small business owner) in their Boston neighborhood. Plus, Dave shows evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related issues.

93) Katie's actual killers confess the morning after Dave's death – the killer Jimmy tells cop friend, Sean, upon learning the news, 'if only you had been a little faster'.

94) A shifty PI (M. Emmet Walsh) is hired by a husband (Marty, played by Dan Hedaya) to kill the lover, Ray (John Getz), of his wife (Frances McDormand). Though the PI ends up faking the murder by doctoring a photo. This leaves Ray attempting to bury the body of Marty (whose murder was attempted by the PI in a double-cross) roadside – reflecting the location of *Postman*'s murder – only to find him not dead.

95) Cronenberg's film features a small business owner, Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen), in the Midwest to reveal his life as one of repression. When he stops a robbery of his diner by two thugs, in a scene invoking the opening of the noir classic *The Killers* (1946), former underworld associates recognize Tom in news coverage and demand he pay past dues.

96) While working as a midwife, Anna finds a diary of a 14-year-old girl who has died in childbirth. While searching for the baby girl's family to give her a home, Anna learns of the teen's rape by an old 'Vor' (criminal boss), Semyon (Armin Mueller-Stahl) and his son, Kirill (Vincent Cassel).

97) Leitch, *Crime Films*, 146-47. This tendency appears, in some degree, in *I Am A Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Fury* (1936), *Death Wish*, and *The Accused* (1988).

98) Greenfield, Steve, Guy Osborn, and Peter Robson (2010), *Film and the Law*, Second Edition (Oxford: Hart): 47.

99) Shargel, Gerald L. (2011), 'West Memphis Three Freed Using Rare Alford Plea', *The Daily Beast,* August 21, http://www.thedailybeast.com/west-memphis-three-freed-using-rare-alford-legal-plea, accessed 06/14/16.

100)   Keane, Stephen (2006), *Disaster Movies: The Cinema of Catastrophe* (London and New York: Wallflower Press): 47.

101)   This style includes transgressive films from France and Europe which blend arthouse character development with visceral horror. See Horeck, Tanya C. and Tina Kendall, eds. (2011), *The New Extremism in Cinema: from France to Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP).

102)   Sorrento, Matthew (2013), 'Last Man (With)Standing: the Character-Disaster Film', *Film International* 11.3-4: 36.

103)   The film features two victim figures who seek, but struggle to achieve, revenge in a context of the genre's history. Mel (Del Zamora) and Fred (Ed Pansullo) meet and learn that, when they acted together as children in a Western, they were both abused by screenwriter Fritz Frobisher (Sy Richardson). To find Frobisher, Mel and Fred travel to a Western movie convention, which situates the film firmly in genre's afterlife, where the frontier vengeance they seek is unlawful, if also unlikely.

104)   Sorrento, Matthew (2016), 'Alex Cox and the Hybrid Western', *The New Western*, ed. Scott Stoddart (Jefferson, NC: McFarland): 204.

105)   Schatz, Thomas (1988), *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*, (New York: Pantheon): 347.

106)   Krutnik, Frank (1995), 'A Spanner in the Works?: Genre, Narrative, and the Hollywood Comedian', *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (New York: Routledge): 30.

107)   Lax, Eric (1975), *On Being Funny: Woody Allen and Comedy* (New York: Charthouse Press): 174.

Appendix A: *The New American Crime Film*

Appendix B: 'Documenting Crime: Genre, Verity, and Filmmaker as Avenger'

Appendix C: 'Last Man (With)Standing: the Character-Disaster Film'

Appendix D: 'Alex Cox and the Hybrid Western'

Appendix E: 'The Service Tragicomedy: from Woody Allen to *Full Metal Jacket*'