

Dodging Bombs & Dodging Hollywood

Introduction

THE HURT LOCKER (2009) is the first major feature film to address the nastiness of combat in contemporary Iraq; showing the inhospitable combat environment from a gritty, boots-on-the-ground perspective. Previous films have in a roundabout way taken up the subject of the War on Terror, but never in such a direct manner as THE HURT LOCKER. There's been a slew of films that have tackled various socio-political issues surrounding the legislation, quasi-legal practices and courses of action that have emerged after 9/11, but none of these address the actual fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan. STOP-LOSS (2008) is about the controversial military 'stop-loss' policy, whereby service members undergo additional combat deployment beyond their term of service; IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH (2007) deals with prisoner abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder; RENDITION (2007) with the questionable CIA practice of extraordinary rendition; and LIONS FOR LAMBS (2007) is about bureaucrats making political decisions while young soldiers do the fighting and the dying.

More action-oriented films about the War on Terror, such as THE KINGDOM (2007) – about a team of FBI agents investigating the terrorist bombing of an American housing compound in Saudi Arabia – and BODY OF LIES (2008) – where a CIA operative attempts to catch a fictional jihadist terrorist – are spectacular blockbusters whose flamboyant style and improbable narratives leave no doubt that they are flagrant dramatizations of the real thing. RESTREPO (2010) and ARMADILLO (2010) are found on the other end of the spectrum of mediacy and stylization; they were cut together from raw footage shot on camcorders by troops in combat zones in Afghanistan. This practice is gaining popularity and invites a line of research that would tie neatly into this thesis. Unfortunately the limited scope of this study does not allow for the inclusion of an analysis of these texts.

THE HURT LOCKER is not as stylized or rigidly protocolled as films like BODY OF LIES or THE KINGDOM, or as overtly political or explicitly themed as a film like RENDITION. It has relatively little known actors, and lacks traditional hero and villain roles. It is shot in a style that is half Hollywood, half documentary, situating it somewhere halfway between the more bombastic and saccharine Hollywood epics such as BODY OF LIES, and the gritty, unmediated documentaries like RESTREPO and ARMADILLO.

The film's use of a range of documentary staples may potentially communicate a more or less authentic depiction of the realities of combat in the contemporary war zone of Iraq – even though experts point out some gross inaccuracies.¹ I contend that whatever the degree of actual conformity with reality, the stylistic and structural methods employed by the film are suggestive of the documentary form, which in turn grant the film a sense of authenticity. It achieves this not only via its distinct style, but also by means of the selective adoption and evasion of various Hollywood conventions. The study thence addresses issues concerning the power of film style and structure. I will explicate firstly how *THE HURT LOCKER* deviates from the standard layout of main- and supporting characters as seen in most feature film productions; this ties into a section on the film's distinct documentary style; followed by a third part on how the film is not propelled by the traditional pillars of pursuing goals and resolving conflict; and a fourth one pointing up that cinematic tradition cannot be shunned entirely.

There is no 'I' in Team

THE HURT LOCKER opens with a quote from Chris Hedges' 2002 bestseller *War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*: "The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug." The first couple of words then fade, leaving only the last four.² The subsequent film is a portrayal of that addiction and its effects on both the addict and the people around him. It is in many ways a portrait of a group of people in a particular, fixed situation, rather than a story with a clear beginning, middle and climactic ending. The film observes an EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) unit lead by Sergeant First Class William James, and further comprising Sergeant J.T. Sanborn and Specialist Owen Eldridge, as they spend the last 38 days of their tour in Iraq disarming bombs.

Although it is clearly James who is the addict – and he gets the most screentime – it is nevertheless unclear just who the main character is. At the start of the film we see Sergeant Sanborn and Specialist Eldridge accompanied by their team leader Staff Sergeant Thompson. The scene is shot from a whole range of sides and distances. The camera favors no one character more than another, but since Thompson is both the leader and the most well-known or recognizable actor (Guy Pearce), it makes sense to assume that he is the main character or at least figures prominently throughout the feature. At the end of this scene however, he is suddenly killed by a bomb blast. We next see Sgt. Sanborn alone in a hangar, having a personal moment of silence as he handles Thompson's personal belongings. Since it is confirmed that Thompson is indeed dead, and since Eldridge is not in the scene and no other character has been introduced, it becomes logical to now assume that Sanborn is in fact

¹ B. Friedman, 'Movie Review: The Hurt Locker', VetVoice, 2009, <http://www.vetvoice.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=2975>.

² K. Bigelow, Director, *The Hurt Locker*, 2009.

the main protagonist. We follow him to the barracks where he meets Sergeant James, who is to replace Thompson as the unit's leader, and when they're done getting acquainted we cut to the three of them riding in a HMMWV, answering a 'possible IED' call. Once on the scene the perspective shifts entirely to "the new guy", James.³ He is the one tasked with the physical disarming of the bombs, and we follow him for the duration of this nerve-racking scene. Later on in the film the focus shifts to the third team member, Eldridge, as we see him struggling with Thompson's death in a conversation with the camp's psychiatrist. The film is not a triptych but keeps switching back and forth between these perspectives.

THE HURT LOCKER is of course not the first movie to adopt this multiple-character narrative; the ensemble picture is a Hollywood mainstay. Moreover, although David Bordwell argues that even when films "contain two or more protagonists, [...] plotlines don't much influence one another",⁴ Evan Smith has pointed out that movies are increasingly violating this principle in imaginative ways. For Smith, modern day Hollywood has broken free from the linear structure of storytelling and evolved into a 'thread structure' that "features several bona fide protagonists, each the hero in his or her own story".⁵ THE HURT LOCKER clearly exhibits this quality. It adds and subtracts characters throughout the movie, without them having run the proper classical development course, much like Smith describes: "[m]eet Character A, after he has already launched into his second act and is already pursuing some quest to its final resolution. [...] Meet Character B, sample her life, witness the event that sent her running, and then... her story suddenly ends, just stops, without resolution".⁶ In fact, THE HURT LOCKER punctuates this structure by having the most well known actors fulfill the lesser roles. Pearce is killed right away, Ralph Fiennes is killed shortly after being introduced, and David Morse makes but a brief cameo appearance. Meanwhile Anthony Mackie (portraying Snowborn) and Brian Geraghty (Eldridge) are relatively unknown actors, and Jeremy Renner (James) has gained only nominal fame. Kathryn Bigelow verifies this dynamic as she recounts being "determined to use emerging talent. [...] I think it underscored the tension because with the lack of familiarity also comes a sense of unpredictability, as we find from the beginning: 'Wait a minute, now anything can happen... I thought it was one thing, now it's something else'".⁷

³ *The Hurt Locker*, 2009.

⁴ D. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It : Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 39.

⁵ E. Smith, 'Thread Structure : Rewriting the Hollywood Formula' *Journal of Film and Video* 51 (Fall-Winter 1999-2000): 90.

⁶ Smith, 89.

⁷ N. Dawson, 'Time's Up: Kathryn Bigelow's The Hurt Locker', *FilmMaker : The Magazine of Independent Film*, 2009, <http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/news/2010/03/times-up-kathryn-bigelows-the-hurt-locker-by-nick-dawson/>.

Moreover, in more conventional moviemaking, scenes are fairly clearly separated, reserved for a particular character, until a decisive cut to another storyline establishes a new perspective 'belonging to' another pro- or antagonist. But in more modern films this is not so clear-cut. Ones illustrating the chaos of combat, especially, like to convey that chaos by switching more rapidly and haphazardly across places and characters, effectively communicating the soldier's confusion to the viewer. As Mark Lacy points out, Ridley Scott was already implementing this contrivance with *BLACK HAWK DOWN* (2001): "[i]ntrinsic to his attempt at cinema verité is the fact that we never get much intimacy with the characters. Indeed, *Black Hawk Down* becomes so chaotic that as events unfold we begin to lose a sense of who is who."⁸

The Fog of War

But *THE HURT LOCKER* branches off from classical Hollywood doctrine more profoundly. In the films that according to Smith transcend the ensemble feature, the main characters are meticulously framed and followed, and this holds for *BLACK HAWK DOWN* as well: although in the thick of the action the barrage of changes in perspective creates a hectic cinematic whole, the camera never loses sight of its subject. It never has trouble keeping up with an advancing squad of soldiers; every shot is tightly framed and perfectly focused. The camera effortlessly arcs around helicopters in mid-air, producing a flawless stream of matches on action.

In *THE HURT LOCKER*, by contrast, the camera's focus, both literally and figuratively, is fickle. Camera and subject are much more separate, to the point that there's a sense of them existing independently of each other. The camera draws attention to itself as it appears to have trouble keeping everything properly framed and focused. It becomes a separate entity that has to 'work' to obtain its images. The viewer equates this to a sense of realism, which was a conscious aesthetic choice by the filmmakers.

"You want to make it as real and as authentic as possible, to put the audience into the Humvee, into a boots-on-the-ground experience. How do you do that? You do it by finding a look, a feel and a texture that is very immediate, raw and vital, and yet also is not aestheticized. I wanted, as a filmmaker, to sort of step aside and let just the rawness and integrity of the subject be as pronounced as possible and not have it feel sort of 'cinematic.'"⁹

– Kathryn Bigelow, director

⁸ M. Lacy, 'War, Cinema, and Moral Anxiety' *Alternatives* 28 (2003): 619.

⁹ Dawson, 'Time's Up: Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker*'.

“[...] the first question [cinematographer Barry] Ackroyd faced was how to make it feel real. The second was how to do that on a limited budget. He recalls telling the director, ‘Let’s turn that into an advantage. We’ll shoot Super 16, make it physical. The film will be handheld in a real documentary handheld way—that is, we’ll probably carry the cameras 90 percent of the time, which we did.’”¹⁰

Following André Bazin’s musings on the essence of film, where he posited “the ‘integral realism’ mechanically produced by the apparatus”, documentarists in the 1960’s began to avoid interaction with their subjects in an effort to uphold their claim to objectivity.¹¹ If it was the camera that constituted objectivity, the reasoning went, what was required to maintain that objectivity was simply as little human interference as possible. This approach came to be known as ‘direct cinema’, and it eschewed interviews and other cinematic instruments that pointed to the mediation of a director, ostensibly allowing the viewer to make up his own mind. The lack of control meant that cameras were usually handheld instead of mounted, because events had often already transpired before a steady shot could be properly set up. This gave birth to the distinct wobbly style that is nowadays implemented artificially in a range of media to evoke that same lack of mediation.

Amy West explicates the power of a perceived lack of sophistication of imagery in discussing ‘caught-on-tape’ videos – footage inadvertently captured by people who happened to have their camera phone running as something of interest was taking place. “The poor quality [...] becomes a marker of realness because it signals certain circumstances of production.”¹² The haphazard quality of the camerawork offers the mental suggestion that the footage isn’t staged, for if it was, the cameramen would have had a chance to set things up properly, and done a better job filming. The sense of realism is “heightened by evidence of human error [...] which testifies to the amateur authenticity of production”.¹³ Geoff King reiterates the point. “Absences or reduced quality of images – such as shaky camerawork, dodgy focus or awkward zooms – signify that events have not been

¹⁰ P. Thomson, ‘Risk and Valor: The Hurt Locker’, *American Cinematographer*, 2009, http://www.patriciathomson.net/AC-Hurt_Locker.html.

¹¹ B. Winston, *Claiming the Real II : Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 130.

¹² A. West, ‘Caught on Tape: A Legacy of Low-Tech Reality’ in *The Spectacle of the Real : From Hollywood to ‘Reality’ TV and Beyond*, ed. G. King (Bristol: Intellect, 2005): 85.

¹³ West, 85.

staged for the convenience of the production of images,” obfuscating the fact that every scene is in fact staged and under complete directorial control.¹⁴

The *Hurt Locker* invokes this style in that the hand-held, erratic (multiple) camera movements, snap zooms and whip pans, focus adjustments, repeated crossing of the 180-degree line, use of location sound and lack of special effects convey that sense of amateurism in trying to capture the action. A character is never steadily settled on, but continuously reframed and ‘picked up’ by another camera, as if out of necessity. It is as if the cameras, and therefore the filmmakers, have no control over what they’re filming and are scrambling to grab what they can. The camera – and therefore the viewer – becomes sort of a journalist trying to get a glimpse of his subject.

Accordingly, in direct cinema, waiting for the action to happen meant “hanging around always ready to shoot”,¹⁵ and Ackroyd echoes this approach: “[...] with a film like this, I approach every scene thinking, ‘If this was a documentary, what would I do?’ And the most crucial thing is not to get in the way, and really *watch* what’s going on in front of you. You can feel when something special is going to happen.”¹⁶ Chris Innis, editor for *The Hurt Locker*, points up the outcome: “the film crew ended up canning an astounding 200 hours of Super-16mm. This was no surprise considering that there were always at least three or four hand-held cameras and many times five, six, seven or more cameras running all day, every day.”¹⁷ Hence the resulting footage was not a collection of carefully composed and selected shots but “a hodge-podge of disconnected, nausea-inducing motion that was constantly crossing the 180-degree line. This was not fancy Hollywood movie cinematography—it was raw, blemished documentary footage gathering, with several guys running around stuffing magazines with film and shooting in every direction”.¹⁸

To compound the documentary effect, *THE HURT LOCKER* sees virtually no shots of events happening elsewhere. We follow the three EOD operatives, alone or as a unit, but nobody else. The film almost never shows someone in a completely different locale, period. Apart from the end of the film – where James rejoins his wife and infant child after his tour has concluded – there is only one clear instance of this: a brief cut to James’ wife back home in the U.S., when he calls her up from the army base. Her intrusion upon what up to this point has been a singular space is underlined by it being cut short: James hangs up the phone before saying a word, and retreats to the confined reality that is combative Iraq. This restricted point of view strengthens the idea of the cameras being

¹⁴ G. King, “‘Just Like a Movie’? : 9/11 and Hollywood Spectacle’ in *The Spectacle of the Real : From Hollywood to ‘Reality’ TV and Beyond*, ed. G. King (Bristol: Intellect, 2005): 50.

¹⁵ Winston, 155.

¹⁶ G. Lodge, ‘Tech Support Interview: The Crafts of “The Hurt Locker”’, InContention.com, 2010, <http://www.incontention.com/2010/01/07/tech-support-the-crafts-of-the-hurt-locker/>, emphasis in original.

¹⁷ C. Innis, ‘Between Iraq and a Hard Place, Part 2’, Motion Picture Editors Guild, 2010,

<https://www.editorsguild.com/FromtheGuild.cfm?FromTheGuildid=85>.

¹⁸ Innis, ‘Between Iraq and a Hard Place, Part 2’.

operated by a group of embedded journalists, or at least as being a separate entity existing in the diegetic space, and thus being bound by locale. The collective of cameras can scurry around and spy on the EOD unit from various viewpoints, but not magically leap to far away perspectives that include family back home in the U.S.; commanders on the base; or even the enemy in the building across the street, who are almost exclusively seen through the rifle scopes of the three main characters.

By comparison, the perspective in *BODY OF LIES* constantly switches between the characters of Leonardo DiCaprio, who is in the Middle East, and Russell Crowe, who is in the United States. Even *BLACK HAWK DOWN* – a boots-on-the-ground film much like *THE HURT LOCKER* – switches freely between the different groups of soldiers moving on foot through various parts of Mogadishu; the commanders directing the action in their Black Hawk helicopters; the top commander back at the base; and the Somali militia mounting their counterattack.

A Slice of Life

Like the camerawork, the narrative structure in *THE HURT LOCKER* is less than stable. Bordwell outlines the basic principles for feature films that screenwriter manuals have come to agree upon over the years: “[a] film’s main characters, all agree, should pursue important goals and face forbidding obstacles. Conflict should be constant, across the whole film and within each scene. Actions should be bound into a tight chain of cause and effect”.¹⁹ Kristin Thompson, in her four-Act revision of the three-Act structure, sketches a similar adage: “a cause should lead to an effect and that effect in turn should become a cause for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film”.²⁰

Although *THE HURT LOCKER* obeys many continuity conventions, it does not adhere absolutely to the above maxims. Conflict is not a constant, driving narrative force; there is no singular antagonist or objective that guides the narrative and keeps the action going in conventional, arcing fashion. There is constant tension, emanating from both the dangerous combat situation and the uncertainty over James’ volatility, but this is a given; a backdrop. Neither antagonist can be vanquished, nor does the narrative suggest that they should be; there will always be another bomb, and James functions as both friend and foe.

Jeremy Renner’s capricious character constitutes much of the focus of the film, and in a way he is the obstacle that the other two main characters must traverse. But he does not represent a classical antagonistic force. James goes about his job with reckless abandon. He is obviously a battle-tested veteran – in one scene he reveals to his team members that the box he keeps under his bed contains relics of bombs he’s disarmed over the years – yet at the same time he displays an

¹⁹ Bordwell, 28.

²⁰ K. Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood : Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.

unsettling audacity that borders on heedlessness. “He’s a rowdy boy”, comments Eldridge when, on their first outing, James ignores standard procedure and dons the bulky protective armor instead of sending in the remote-controlled bot to check out the bomb from a safe distance; to which Sanborn answers “he’s reckless”.²¹ James’ maverick nature does not sit well with Sanborn – who likes to stick to tried and trusted procedure, especially after his former team leader was killed – and makes Eldridge even more nervous than he’s already prone to be. But James is not just a source of anxiety. His experience pays off when, in a scene where they’re pinned down by a sniper, he patiently and caringly guides the other two out of the predicament; making sure Sanborn keeps himself hydrated, and putting Eldridge at ease as he becomes increasingly frantic.

If James were the obstacle, that would make him at once pro- and antagonist. This is not outside the realm of Hollywood convention per se, but a more plausible interpretation is that the film simply does not conform to the Hollywood axiom of goal-oriented narrative. Typically, “the protagonist’s goals define the main lines of action”.²² But in *THE HURT LOCKER* the action is fixed, as the characters are held captive by their environment. They’re constricted to bomb disarmament, and can do nothing but sit out the remainder of their tour of duty. James revels in it, while the other two can’t wait for it to be over, but none of them can exert any influence on the situation.

Since the characters cannot advance the narrative, it makes sense that the individual scenes stand alone. Brian Winston has extensively studied documentary and, following Gérard Genette, he makes a distinction between scenes that show “iterative” actions, i.e. those that are representative of “a typical instance of that event or activity”, and longer ones that exhibit a story arc like those in feature films.²³ In documentaries depicting specific professions or the lives of a certain group of people, these iterative scenes are ones that illustrate the routines characteristic of the documented subject(s). A documentary about the Inuit might show a typical day via a montage where we see an igloo being built, a fish caught, and a fire started. These events stand alone; there is no sense that what is being shown sets up or continues a narrative arc. They don’t have – borrowing a term from Roland Barthes – “a clear hermeneutic”; they don’t “formulate a question or delay its answer”.²⁴ There is no continuity across these scenes and hence no build-up of expectation.

Despite all the action and tension in *THE HURT LOCKER*, the film is imbued with this same ‘slice-of-life’ quality. The men routinely jump into their HMMWV, off to deal with another suspected bomb threat, with as little clue as the viewer as to what may cross their paths next. When Thompson dies at the end of the film’s first scene, that chapter ends categorically. It is not a turning point that initiates a revenge plot. All subsequent scenes are equally autonomous. The succession of hostilities

²¹ *The Hurt Locker*, 2009.

²² Thompson, 14.

²³ Winston, 108.

²⁴ Winston, 109.

is episodic much like the iterative actions of a documentary; each evokes tension anew. Bigelow corroborates that besides the documentary style, *THE HURT LOCKER* also exhibits this trait of documentary structure: “I really look at it as a character study and also as an observation of the day in the life of a bomb squad [...]”.²⁵

Stick to Procedure

But for all the documentary qualities that *THE HURT LOCKER* displays, many cinematic conventions are nonetheless adhered to. Although the film is unconventional in that Jeremy Renner’s character isn’t introduced until after the first two scenes, the film clearly ends with him, and it technically conforms to the dictum which holds that “the fate of one or two characters is likely to dominate”.²⁶ It offers some narrative closure and in a sense comes full circle: back home James spends time with his wife and baby, and in a monologue to his child admits that it’s “just one thing” that he really loves. The final shot shows him walking into another bomb-ridden street in (presumably) Iraq, wearing the protective suit, with the intertitle reading “Days left in Bravo Company’s rotation: 365”; i.e., he has acknowledged that he has a precious family back home, whom it is worth staying alive over, but in the end he favors the life of risk and danger.²⁷ In a way this last scene turns the film into a classical narrative. The story being that we observe a man who, for better or worse, seeks out danger to get his fix; he is then put in charge of two men who over the course of the film attempt to curb his behavior and show him a different attitude and point of view; they may or may not succeed in winning him over (their ‘conflict’ or ‘goal’), and ultimately fail, as James proves a true adrenaline junkie, hooked on the rush of combat that he cannot let go. As such it can also be read as a cautionary tale.

Still, there is not much, if any, of a character arc. The scene with James’ family is tacked on, and at the end of the film neither James, Eldridge or Snowborn seem to have come away from the experience having picked up any particular wisdom, or changed their outlook following some type of fundamental insight. They’ve just had to endure each other for the duration of their deployment. Moreover, it is not at all clear that the ‘goal’, if there is any, is to get James to behave or operate differently, especially since James himself is the most commanding character in the film, and Sanborn and Eldridge are mainly annoyed with him. Then again, James’ character does induce the notion of “[...] an antihero who lacks a clear-cut goal”. A concept that is by no means new to filmmaking, as

²⁵ Dawson, ‘Time’s Up: Kathryn Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker*’.

²⁶ Bordwell, 40.

²⁷ *The Hurt Locker*, 2009.

“[c]haracter-driven films of the New Hollywood [...] made filmmakers aware of alternatives to the ‘externally’ driven protagonist”.²⁸

THE HURT LOCKER also conforms to expectation in a more formal sense. Amy West illustrates that the more chaotic the video, the more you need to compensate in terms of classical Hollywood devices in order not to confuse the spectator. In discussing the caught-on-tape videos, she notes that really obscure, indecipherable sequences – such as the unintelligible imagery of someone running with the camera by his side – in those tapes are often left in for the sake of realism. This type of footage is notably absent in THE HURT LOCKER. For all its shakiness, jump cuts, whip pans and lack of matches on action, as a viewer you’re never disoriented, a point Kathryn Bigelow corroborates: “[e]ven though the camera’s moving, even though the shot might be very short, if there’s a lack of orientation, it’s instantaneous and you recover from it, or you never lose it”.²⁹

By the same token, Thompson comments on how even the most modern, avant-garde filmmakers cannot ignore some of the most basic cinematic devices that are now ingrained in the Western public raised on Hollywood movies. “Shot/reverse-shot passages still abound in conversation sequences, and the axis of action is typically obeyed in skillfully made films.”³⁰ THE HURT LOCKER is no exception, and it adopts these and other formulas, like the sound being layered and edited so that it carries over smoothly from one shot to the next.

Conclusion

Certain cinematic principles are unavoidable, but THE HURT LOCKER has demonstrated that an increasingly learned viewer permits ever novel ways of tweaking film style and structure. The film is a fantastic example of a successful merging of two extremes: classical narrative continuity is being pushed to its limits by the extraction of clearly defined goals, conflict, and protagonists, and it is effectively combined with an onslaught of discordant images. The resulting film is easily devoured by a modern audience raised on MTV.

Consequently, a film like THE HURT LOCKER further diminishes the power of handheld footage to connote realism or authenticity. The script is flipped and hypermediacy becomes immediacy because, as King notes, “the fictional type of assemblage of images can become less noticeable in itself, precisely because of its familiarity”.³¹

The film evinces that the documentary style can be creatively matched with certain narrative conventions, while avoiding others in order to maximize a sense of realism. The Hurt Locker exposes the line that separates the not-so-essential elements – lack of a traditional arc that introduces a clear

²⁸ Bordwell, 84.

²⁹ Dawson, ‘Time’s Up: Kathryn Bigelow’s The Hurt Locker’.

³⁰ Thompson, 19.

³¹ King, 54.

goal, obstructed by an identifiable conflict, resolved over the duration of the film and ending in a climax – from the essential ones – continuity both in image and narrative, and a sense of closure. Narrative is inherently opposite a sense of realism, because narrative equals structure and structure means mediation. Thus we can only make sense of film when it incorporates at least some degree of narrativity, which is true even for the documentary, but *THE HURT LOCKER* does a damn fine job trying to camouflage it.

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