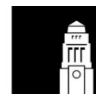

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Article:

Murray, S (2017) Disability and Memory in Posthuman(ist) Narrative: Reading Prosthesis and Amnesia in Hollywood's Re-membering of the 'War on Terror'. Parallax, 23 (4). pp. 439-452. ISSN 1353-4645

https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1374514

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Disability and Memory in Posthuman Narrative: Reading Prosthesis and Amnesia in Hollywood's Re-membering of the 'War on Terror'.

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I

What kinds of memory does a critical posthumanism enact in its perspectives on the legacies of a humanism it seeks to move beyond? And how does disability – in its various states – affect the formation and meaning of such memories? While it is possible to address the first of these questions without exploring the second, it is my contention that it is critically productive to read the posthuman, and especially narratives of the posthuman, through a disability lens, and especially one associated with memory. A number of suggestive critical reasons present themselves as possibilities if we follow these questions through. First, although frequently absent from critical discussions around the posthuman (and indeed from those surrounding memory), the differences that disability entail exemplify the processes of revising and de-centring central to much writing on posthumanism in its critical anti-humanism methods. Second, humanism is central to the constructions of the norms and standards that define 'acceptable' human bodies and minds, and therefore – conversely – their disabled counterparts. When, in his study Posthumanism, Pramod Nayar notes that a posthumanist critical humanism 'proposes that the very idea of the universal human (or Human) is constructed through a process of exclusion', it is straightforward to see disability as one of the sites of exclusion implied.[1] Equally, as numerous disability studies scholars have shown, the definitions of 'the human' inherent in humanism gave rise to the whole series of associated but disavowed embodied states that became labelled through vocabularies of disability or illness.[2] Disability, then, is inexorably intertwined both with humanism and the posthumanist methods that unpick and expose its methods.

In this article I want specifically to explore the intersection of amnesia and prosthesis, particularly as they articulate a configuration of the posthuman, disability and memory. Both terms are the occasion of disability subjectivities grounded in lived experience and implicated in social and cultural, as well as personal, discourses. Both are, however, equally central terms in memory studies, where ideas of 'prosthetic memory' and 'cultures of amnesia' have significant histories and ongoing traction. And, in the manner in which each term suggests a revision of classic humanist formations of wholeness, they offer the opportunity to illustrate those posthumanisms and critical anti-humanisms that seek to redraw our understanding of what Rosi Braidotti has called 'life beyond the self'.[3] I will situate this exploration in the analysis of three contemporary Hollywood film narratives – Paul Greengrass's Green Zone (2010), Duncan Jones's Source Code (2011) and Kathryn Bigelow's The Hurt Locker (2008)– which depict the Iraq war and the wider 'war on terror'. I do so in order to try to achieve two ends: first, hesitantly, to move towards the consideration of what a disability- and memory-inflected critical posthumanist methodology might look like; and second, to articulate some specific ideas around disability, memory and the war film. The war in Iraq and idea of conflict that arose from it need to be understood as both disabling and posthuman events. The use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) created literal disabilities, especially limb loss, that produced its own specific narrative of loss and, subsequently, prosthetic replacement; the disabilities of veterans become one of the ways that the war was seen and understood. The conflict itself was fought, from the American point of view, in terms of a technological commitment that Derek Gregory, in his analysis of contemporary drone warfare, terms an 'optical detachment'.[4] The Iraq war was a networked war, fought in the command centres of the continental U.S. as well as the streets of Baghdad, as part of what

Paul Virilio has described, in his seminal work on the visualization of war, as a 'logistic of electro-optic perception'.[5] It mobilized a power assemblage and ordnance thatproduced the combatant as a biohybrid figure, where the human was intrinsically linked to the technological and where 'power' itself can be understood as a prosthesis. As I will show, the tension between the portrayal of such technologized power and a standard Hollywood narrative of humanist individualism, especially strong in the context of the war film, is at the heart of the films I will analyse, while Gregory's and Virilio's stress on 'optics' invite a reading of visual aesthetics the texts produce.[6]

The terms 'posthuman', 'disability' and 'memory' evoke a terrain in which intersections and crossings abound, given that none possesses a singular configuration or meaning. Such is the diversity of opinions that surround the concept it is better to speak of critical posthumanisms, with viewpoints ranging from the abstractions of transhumanist philosophy to those who feel the term has a practical and activist dimension. For its part, and as Ellen Samuels has observed, disability is a manifestly insufficient word to describe the variety of states and experiences it covers. 'The overmastering fantasy of disability identification is that disability is a knowable, obvious, and unchanging category' Samuels writes, adding: 'Such a fantasy permeates all levels of discourse regarding disabled bodies and minds, even as it is repeatedly and routinely disproved by the actual realities of those bodies' and minds' fluctuating abilities'.[7] Equally, as critical work has shown, memory needs to be thought of as plural and porous.. For all that memory studies scholarship in the wake of the Holocaust might appear inexorably wedded to a humanist idea of the subject, for example, its stress on discontinuities finds common cause with that strand of critical posthuman studies that seeks to de-centre notions of the 'whole' human individual or character.

I am interested in the ways that a consideration of disability might revise the practices of both memory and a critical posthumanism in critiquing humanism; but in parallel, the extent to which memory studies can inform critical disability approaches to current conceptions of bodies and minds is a welcome addition to the growing sophistication of narrating disability experiences. As it stands, a full critical understanding of the workings of memory is missing from contemporary disability theory, while until recently ideas of disability have traditionally been absent from critical conceptions of the posthuman. It is the possibility that the conjunction of critical memory, posthuman and disability studies might activate new sites of critical inquiry that interests and excites me here: might memory, for example, help in providing an optic through which to read the persistent humanism that still pervades many disability narratives? And what kinds of memories of selfhood are enacted when disabled difference forces a revisions of embodied and cognitive norms?

In addressing these questions, this article will use a broad conception of 'memory', one that sees it both as a critical trajectory and collective and personal property. I will analyse the workings of the three films' representation of prosthesis and amnesia as they enact a scopic regime that depicts social, historical and narrative concerns around the conflict in Iraq and consequent 'war on terror'. My readings will posit the possible shape of, as well as challenges to, disability- and memory-informed posthuman cinematic cultural production. Cinema, as Paul Grainge has observed, has 'become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life' and this is especially true of the war film, which processes the trauma of conflict into texts of cultural memory.[8] It is what Grainge terms the 'rituals of remembrance' that 'surround the culture of film' that interest me here, particularly as they are manifest in the visual narratives my chosen films display.[9] Such 'rituals' narrativize both individual and

collective memory in the films I will examine, but also offer specific conceptions of disability states and their relationship to questions of self and society.

My questions, primarily oriented as they are from with a tradition of critical disability studies, involve processes that are aligned with other hermeneutic modes operating in memory studies. To draw lines between memory, disability, and the human/posthuman, particularly in the representation of war, is also to call to mind issues relating to narrative, history, technology, cultural politics and the critical/theoretical framings that work to understand the past.[10] Do, for example, obsessions with cyborg and biohybrid identities, seen through a concentration on prosthesis, suggest a particular memory of the non-technological body it appears to leave behind? Equally, might contemporary representations of amnesia, especially accentuations of neurological difference and multiple mental states, speak of a productive disability-inflected posthuman state, or do they rather reinforce a 'culture of forgetting' that frequently, when disability narrativised, invokes core humanist notions of wholeness? The nexus between disability and memory is richly suggestive of ways we might read the negotiations between the human and posthuman, though such readings might not always be considered progressive. It will be the central thesis of this article, for example, that although the performative narratives of film can create modes of embodiment and memory that shape particular posthuman versions of the contemporary, they frequently still work to reinforce standard humanist orthodoxies of body, mind and community. For all of the exploration o difference in the films in question, and the ways in which bodies experience conflict, the 're-membering' at work in their narratives often suggests a return to humanist notions of wholeness and centred individualism.

II

Seen through a disability optic, certain ideas popular in memory studies become more than metaphorical or tropic. This is especially true of amnesia and prosthesis. Andreas Huyssen's Twilight Memories develops Adorno in asserting that a 'culture of amnesia' (a term that makes up part of the book's subtitle) was vital to a consideration of the workings of time at the end of the twentieth century; the 1990s, Huyssen notes, offered 'a deepening sense of crisis often articulated in the reproach that our culture is terminally ill with amnesia'.[11] In so doing, Huyssen makes what many would have understood as a relatively straightforward association between amnesia and illness. He takes the medical analogy further, first observing – with a twist on a Nietzsche's idea of 'historical fever' – that the 1980s and 1990s saw a 'mnemonic fever caused by the virus of amnesia that at times threatens to consume memory itself', and then noting that, in public culture, 'our symptom would seem to be [the] atrophy' of historical consciousness.[12] Positing amnesia as a 'virus' is a medical category confusion of course, but Huyssen is not concerned with such specifics. Rather his explorations of how 'the past must be articulated to become memory' take on a particular inflection when seen in the context of the end of the twentieth century, a period Huyssen categorises as one of 'indescribable catastrophes and of ferocious hopes'.[13] Here, then, the idea of a virus combines with the notion of twilight to give a clear value judgement about the status of amnesia: it is the problems of forgetting and the nightmares of contemporary history that 'keep haunting our present'.[14]

Like Huyssen, Alison Landsberg, in her book Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture, uses an idea of disability to speak to a notion of memory that, as her subtitle makes clear, is primarily social and cultural. The specific meaning of prosthesis in her formulation allows for the articulation of the 'interface

between a person and a historical narrative about the past', especially when mediated through the technologies of modernity and mass culture in a form such as cinema.[15] Such moments are prosthetic because they involve a join, what Landsberg terms an 'experience', through which 'the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history', one that is not personally known but is nevertheless 'deeply felt'.[16] Prosthesis here, then, speaks of and for the distance and difference of the history involved, but equally, through the idea of 'suturing', the connections made to it.

Developing her idea, Landsberg observes that: 'With prosthetic memory, as with earlier forms of remembrance, people are invited to take on memories of a past through which they did not live. Some of the strategies and techniques are similar too. Memory remains a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body, and it continues to derive much of its power through affect. But unlike its precursors, prosthetic memory has the ability to challenge the essentialist logic of many group identities'.[17] In asserting the possibility of such a challenge Landsberg suggests that 'prosthetic memories do not erase differences or construct common origins […], prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the "other"'.[18] What intrigues me here is if Landsberg is aware that the experience of 'prosthetic memory' by someone with a disability – a war veteran with a prosthetic limb, say – might modify the affect of which she speaks. If prosthetic memory can challenge essentialism through its production of more ethical critical thinking, and connect to divergent communities, does it do so through speaking with knowledge of different bodies? Might bodies with disabilities produce experiences that revise what we understand to be 'sensuous' for example? In their classic study of disability in narrative, Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder explain their title through observing that 'narrative prosthesis is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight'.[19] And though their focus is on the literary, we might add that the above is also true of critical narrativel. Mitchell and Synder are knowing in their use of the word 'crutch', speaking to heritage of disability representation; Landsberg is arguably less so in her evocation of prosthesis as metaphor.

But it is possible to bring situated and abstracted ideas of prosthesis together, and to theorize them in a way that enables future cultural criticisms. The 'prosthetic imagination', to use Sarah Jain's phrase, is a powerful contemporary phenomenon., She observes that it 'establishes oscillating references of mutual effect, affect, dependence and extensions' and while there is always the risk that it might be no more than a 'tempting theoretical gadget', it should be seen as a 'useful, if limited, trope' because of the ways it can highlight questions of supply and deficiencies.[20] This idea of lack and excess is very much on display in the three films under discussion here, and I intend to propose that it offers a productive way to frame an initial reading of my chosen texts, while the resulting idea of 'limits' is equally a good one to carry forward. Building on this, Vivian Sobchack presents a brilliant reading of prosthesis that displays how it can be read productively both as metaphor and material reality. Addressing what she calls the problem of prosthesis as a 'fetishized and "unfleshed-out" catchword that functions vaguely as the ungrounded and "floating signifier" for a broad and variegated critical discourse on technoculture that includes little of […] prosthetic realities', she describes and theorizes her own experience of using prostheses to point to its situated location in the reality of her body, but also its multiple meanings through its signification.[21] Concluding that her own prosthetic limb is 'dynamic and situated but also ambiguous and graded',[22] Sobchack offers a space to think prostheses in which we might not have to resort

to a reductive position where the somatic cannot also be narrativized and the theoretical not grounded. Jain's enabling/disabling spectrum, and Sobchack's meeting of the materiality and metaphor of prosthesis are part of the way we can fit memory, disability and the posthuman together in shaping new critical approaches to cultural texts and events.

While it is still the case that many studies of the posthuman are silent about the ways in which disability and memory might inform our concept of the category, there are signs in some recent scholarship that such positions are being countered.[23] Nayar's Posthumanism contains a chapter on disability and ethics, giving eight pages over to a consideration of the posthuman as seen through a disability optic. Nayar recognises that it is precisely the 'issue of boundary-marking and personhood that brings disability studies and bioethics into the ambit of critical posthumanism'.[24] His discussion cites a number of cultural examples of disabled characters – from Moby-Dick to James Bond villains – and the ways in which they present images of subjects and bodies that shape how disability is seen. That this then becomes fertile ground for thinking about the posthuman is something Nayar makes clear. He notes that 'disability studies proposes that we see so-called 'normal' bodies as always already networked and co-evolving with technology. There is no 'natural' body in this interpretation, one that holds much value for posthumanist thought'.[25]Nayar's study does not have enough room to explore this idea of 'value', given that he is writing about the posthuman across a number of its instantiations, but his ideas about disabled bodies and networks in particular are highly suggestive in thinking through the specifics of posthuman disability. They provide a productive link to the frame established by Jain and Sobchack as to how we might use the idea of 'prosthesis'. Nayar's connections are more valuable than those of Cary Wolfe, who includes a chapter on disability studies in his 2010 study What is Posthumanism?, but who sees work in the area caught in a 'blockage', centred around issues of rights and agency.[26] The centrality of these terms to discussions of disability notwithstanding, Wolfe's thinking lacks the subtlety or generosity of Nayar, Jain and Sobchack.

Mel Chen's work in her 2012 text Animacies is far more enabling. For Chen, what she terms 'posthumanist subcultures' are made up of a variety of 'social and cultural formations of "improper affiliations"' that include multiple human and non-human interactions and intimacies.[27] The ways in which disability focuses on the redefinition of 'given conditions of bodily and mental life' is precisely one such affiliation, and the kinds of 'fluidities' that Chen sees running 'across borders of animate and inanimate' can be understood to extend to practices of memory that refuse to reduce events to simplistic categories of 'human', 'the body' or 'the past'.[28] Chen works through what she terms a 'shifting archive' in pursuing the range and reach of a biopolitics that eschews standard identity positions or configurations of bodies and minds.[29] This idea of 'shifting' is highly enabling when considering the way memory sorts its material, or disability reconfigures 'human' norms, and in what follows I add it to the insight provided by Jain, Sobchack and Nayar to frame the ways in which we might read bodies, minds and memories in the cinema of conflict.

In the remainder of this article then, I wish to bring memory and disability together – with my focus on prosthesis and amnesia – to look at examples of invention, representation and fabrication, but also questions of history, community and the past, in films that combine my topics within their focus on war and terror. In so doing, I want to see what the portrayal of disability in contemporary commercial cinema might offer to the consideration of both disability and memory studies after humanism, whether it might – in Jain's terms – 'enable' or 'disable', or what – following Chen – might 'shift' as a consequence. Framing thisis the knowledge that such cinema, as one of the most capital-driven forms of cultural production

on the planet, is heavily invested in narratives that espouse humanist concerns and reproduce a legacy of cultural humanism. Is it possible to disentangle disability and memory from simplistic ideas of 'the body' or 'the past' when conceiving of how embodiment and cognitive states are represented? And might cinematic form itself – visual narrative seen as prosthetic or amnesiac – suggest aesthetic moves beyond humanist orthodoxies, even as the power of humanist categories re-assert themselves?

III

There is a pivotal scen a third of the way through Paul Greengrass's 2010 feature Green Zone. Freddy (Khalid Abdalla), an Iraqi translator employed in Baghdad by Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller (Matt Damon) and working for the US Army, runs from a conflict scene carrying a notebook of information about the non-existence of weapons of mass destruction. Pursued by Miller and his unit, Freddie is cornered in an alleyway. As he attempts to climb a wall, a soldier grabs him, only for his crude prosthetic leg to come off as he is manhandled. 'What more I have to do for you?' Freddie then shouts, as he hops on his one leg, his anger suddenly exploding. In response to Miller asking him how he lost his leg, Freddie replies: 'My leg is in Iran, since 1987', before giving an impassioned speech that, in its controlled emotion and relative quiet, contrasts starkly with the violence – helicopter assaults, screamed interrogations, fast-paced editing – that has come previously: 'Me too I fight for my country,' Freddy says. 'Reward? You think I do this for money? [...] You don't think I do this for me, for my future, for my country, for all these things? Whatever you want here I want more than you want. I want to help my country.' Miller, who has been all masculine able-bodied dynamism up to this point, stands speechless.[30]

The scene enacts a complex intersection of memory and history through its sudden and surprising focus on disability (Freddy has been in several previous scenes with no hint as to his limb loss). The prosthetic limb itself is first an indexical personal and historical marker, a permanent reminder for Freddy of his part in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. But it is also iconic, in that it breaks the logic of Miller's insertion in the military/technological (posthuman) infrastructure of the US presence in Iraq with its revelation of what is clearly presented as a core humanity, forcing him to revise his allegiance to his mission. Here, Freddy's prosthesis performs the double movement common to disability signification; it signals both loss, in that Freddy's body is 'incomplete' and as such stands in for the trauma of the Iran-Iraq war and pity for its victims, but also an excessively humanity, producing a powerful overflow of emotion encapsulated in Freddy's speech and Miller's arrested response. It is, to return to Sobchack, an example of the dynamic/situated-ambiguous/graded prosthetic, though here refracted through a negative prism of absence. For Miller, it is when facing Freddy's disability that he is forced to confront the 'cost' of his participation in what the film, from this scene onwards, will show to be the fruitless search for Iraqi chemical and nuclear weapons. Miller turns from a cog in the military machine to an idealist searcher for the truth in confronting his superiors with the details of their cover up. In a time of what Edward Luttwak has called the new 'post-heroic war' (2002), Green Zone re-writes the soldier as a liberal humanist.

Beyond the immediate context of the narrative the humanism expressed through Freddy's disability becomes the vehicle for a consideration of the memory of the catastrophic intervention in Iraq. Miller is a surrogate in the articulation of the liberal view that wishes the 2003 invasion had not taken place and that, in its imagining of history, seeks to rewrite the events of the war. His humanity, conveyed by a powerful yet fragile body (he is frequently

beaten), counters the post-truth rationale of his CIA and military superiors. The film's humanism is, in narrative terms, brought to the fore through the focus on Freddy's disability and then, beyond the narrative, sanctioned by the consequences that flow from this representation.

If the use of prosthesis enables narrative here, however, it also disables and limits a productive reading of disability and memory that might result from this. In Green Zone, it is crucial that the audience understands Miller's humanity and the resulting humanist re-membering of the war in Iraq to be in opposition to the posthuman assemblage of the military machine, whether this is understood in terms of technology or the depersonalised systems that demand obedience in the perpetuation of state falsehoods. A similar humanism is at work in Source Code, where US Army pilot Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhall) wakes abruptly on a Chicago commuter train, having no idea where he is and seemingly not himself but rather a schoolteacher called Sean Fentress. As he begins to process his situation the train explodes, killing everyone on board. The film's narrative unfolds to reveal that, in fact, Colter has been fatally injured in a mission in Afghanistan and his death reported to family and friends. Rather than being allowed to die, however, Colter has been turned into a biohybrid figure – his maimed body wired into a technological matrix in what is very much an example of posthuman assemblage – as part of an experimental intelligence project called 'Source Code'. Connected to military handlers through both physical and cognitive prostheses that establish his selfhood as a networked presence, Stevens is enabled by Source Code to enter an alternative timeline in which he can experience the final eight minutes of another person's life. Informed that the explosion on the train was due to a terrorist attack, Stevens is ordered to re-enter the time immediately before the blast, locate the bomb, and apprehend the perpetrator, something he manages to achieve after multiple separate returns into the eight-minute timeline before the explosion.

Source Code is many things. Although it never makes any explicit comment on contemporary politics it is obviously a 9/11 fantasy in which the attacks on the World Trade Centre are prevented: as in New York, the bomb on the train explodes during a morning rush hour dominated by a bright blue sky. But more important for my arguments is that the film is a disability narrative that works with memory to address both posthumanist explorations of the interaction between man and machine, and a humanist validation of individual agency and will. Although Stevens' body is dismembered to the point that the Source Code machine functions as a life support mechanism (a late scene reveals, in powerful visual detail, that his actual body consists of his head, torso and one arm, so the moment of combat is all along one of a technologised prosthesis), the narrative revolves around an explicit idea of re-membering human wholeness. Equally, in terms of memory, Stevens' opportunities to continually revisit the moments immediate prior to the catastrophe allow him, in effect, to overwrite memory on each occasion, building the meaning of time through the added knowledge and control the additional experiences provide. The film charts his progression from a terrified amnesiac opening to a position of final personal control.

Stevens averts disaster through his belief that, contrary to all understandings of how Source Code works, a final entry into the timeline will allow him not only to alter the nature of the event itself, in effect producing an act of faith in his own ability to effect change, but also to survive as Sean Fentress. He argues for, and is allowed, this last return to the train, and saves those on board, a move followed by the 'death' of his original self in the military installation when the machine to which he is connected is turned off by a sympathetic handler. Aligned with this assertion of agency, Colter enacts other recognisably humanist plot devices:

pursuing a romantic narrative with a fellow commuter, Christina (Michelle Monaghan), whom he convinces of his 'true' identity; and even managing to have a farewell phone conversation with his grieving father, in which he poses as a friend who confirms how much Stevens loved his family.[31]

Source Code appears in many ways to be a paradigmatically posthuman film, suggesting enabling ways to think about embodiment, technology and selfhood through a series of complex assemblages. Its narrative is founded on the imaginative possibilities offered by the integration of human and machine as a consequence of radical destabilisations of corporeal integrity and wholeness, while its treatment of time evidences a move away from standard linear conceptions of storyline progression and the memory of event. But the cyborg identity and disruption of narrative fail to lead into an actual exploration of how a posthuman memory might be formed, and what it might mean. Rather they operate merely as flat visual/narrative markers in a story where the real depth lies in standard humanist tropes: individual achievement, civic responsibility, romantic completion and familial affiliation. The personal values then map on to social equivalents: military personnel are still heroic, fighting 'terror' is just, and an appropriate morality can repair collective trauma. As with Green Zone, interventions are seen to be fundamentally a question of character.

Kathryn Bigelow's The Hurt Locker also works to articulate connections between technology and selfhood, but with greater sophistication in its exploration of the nexus of prosthesis, the human and the memory of event. The film opens with a long scene in which a US Army bomb disposal team led by Sergeant Matthew Thompson (Guy Pearce) attempts to render safe an IED in a Baghdad street. Following protocol, Thompson and his team deploy a robot to disarm the bomb (the film actually opens with footage from a camera mounted on the robot), the technology functioning as a prosthetic extension of military capability and the externalising of force beyond the body of the combat soldier. When the robot breaks down, however, Thompson has to intervene, inserting his own body in a Kevlar protection suit and attempting to manually dismantle the bomb. The action fails, the device is detonated remotely, and Thompson is killed.[32]

The need for Thompson to use his own body creates a vulnerability that leads to his death. The human, the film's opening makes clear, is a fragile entity, a state that fits an understanding of the Iraq war as a conflict where the rules of engagement lack clarity and definition. As Robert Burgoyne observes of Thompson, encased in his protective suit, the 'laboured breathing, the physical effort of moving, the sensation of paralysing weight' create a precarious humanity that contrasts with the 'speed and fluency of the camera work' in the opening scene.[33] But, it should be stressed, Thompson only has to intervene because of faulty technology; the trolley carrying the camera loses a wheel. For all the vulnerability of the human then, the complexity of the military machine offers no better protection. Here, US Army ordnance appears as exposed and thin as the human body.

Thompson's death is, however, only the prequel for a longer meditation on the qualities of the human as seen through the actions of his replacement, Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner). Where Thompson followed protocol and worked closely with his team, James is a renegade; he ignores orders and the safety of the men he works with, rejects using technology, and deactivates devices through intuition. In place of what should be an efficient and developed technological system, in which danger is externalised through the prosthetic extension of engagement – Gregory's 'optical detachment' – James is the human run riot. His

risk-taking is unplanned and beyond programming; it disrupts the logic of assemblage central to the systems of a posthuman war fought at distance. James literally climbs into the devices he deactivates, overpowering their improvisation with his own. His human capabilities are victorious over an opponent that would kill by stealth.

As such, James should function – within a standard cinematic narrative trajectory of individual achievement – as an exemplar of humanism. And criticism on the film highlights this element of the personal. For Burgoyne, 'The Hurt Locker foregrounds the idea of private experience and pleasure as a somatic engagement that takes place in war, rendering war as a somatic engagement that takes place outside any larger meta-narrative of nation or history'.[34] But while this seems to me to be a valid reading of the film, the critiques provided by disability and posthumanist perspectives revise the notion of 'private experience and pleasure'. For James is clearly disabled, a psychologically damaged figure who is, completely alienated from several core elements that should underscore his human presence. He is distanced from his family and accompanying idea of home, for example, rejecting his son during a brief visit back to the US in order to return to Iraq and another tour of duty; and he is incapable of bonding with his peers and is portrayed as profoundly anti-social. In The Hurt Locker then, qualities seen as specifically human, particularly individualism and embodiment, and humanist, especially familial/social affiliation, become stripped of accompanying value and, ironically, are projected in terms of emotionless automata. By having the narrative end with the powerful visual image of James starting his new tour, again striding down a Baghdad street, The Hurt Locker eschews notions of teleology and progression; rather James is caught in a loop that signifies disconnections, alienation and pathology more than any conventional sense of 'pleasure'.

In addition, James' 'private experience' is still about processes of public memory. Although Burgoyne reiterates that, in The Hurt Locker, 'the figure of the combat soldier is divorced from any national or social meta-narrative. Instead, a mood of pure visceral excitement prevails', the film's move towards a pattern of repetition stresses forgetting.[35] If Green Zone and Source Code assert that there are still narratives of ethics and citizenship to which individuals can connect, basically that good is still possible in the world, The Hurt Locker – read as an 'enabling' posthuman narrative – erases such possibilities. 'Visceral excitement' is in fact more a numbed amnesia, a state that has a powerful connection to a social narrative in which the American public wishes to forget the war in Iraq. For all that disability and memory appear peripheral in Bigelow's film, they actually make possible a posthumanist argument of prosthetic distance and cultural amnesia that reads both individual and collective in terms of a situated and abstracted difference.

As disability experiences, prosthesis and amnesia create alternative conceptions of bodies and selves, states that – when considered as posthuman(ist) – could offer vocabularies for the development of a memory after humanism. It is clear to see, for example, how they extend the notion of 'transcultural' and 'travelling memory' that Astrid Erll outlines, with its focus on what she terms specific issues of 'research perspective' that transcend 'the borders of traditional "cultural memory studies" by looking beyond established research assumptions, objects and methodologies'.[36] As I have shown through my discussion of the work of Jain, Sobchack, Nayar and Chen, the platform for such critical moves exist, although they have arguably yet to be fully articulated. But, in the highly public creative texts I have analysed, the prosthetic is for the most part pulled back into the body, and forgetting becomes a catalyst to again introduce familiar processes of memory and memorialisation. My reading of The Hurt Locker suggests how specific elements of cinematic narrative and visual aesthetics can

come together to challenge such trajectories, but this text appears as the exception rather than the norm. Given the ever-increasing focus on the augmentation and enhancement of bodies and minds, and ongoing openness to the new ways in which we experience time and event, it should be that we can create high-profile creative and critical visual narratives that take us beyond traditional boundaries of human recollection and allow us to view the difference disability and memory produce in our posthuman present. But it appears that time is not yet fully here.

Notes

I am grateful to Matt Boswell for his reading and comments on a draft of this article.

[1] Nayar, Posthumanism, 11
[2] Davis, Enforcing Normalcy, 23–49; Garland-Thomson, Extraordinary Bodies, 19–53)
[3] Braidotti, Posthuman, 13–53.
[4] Gregory, 'From a View', 191.
[5] Virilio, Desert Screen, 107.
[6] I choose to focus on high profile Hollywood films, and not other types of cinematic or visual narratives, precisely because of the power of their global reach. It is in such texts that many cultural understanding of disability (bodies/minds) and memory (past/event) are formed, so they provide an especially important set of reference texts.
[7] Samuels, Fantasies, 121.
[8] Grainge, Memory and Popular Film, 1.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Eberwein, Hollywood.
[11] Huyssen, Twilight Memories, 1.
[12] Ibid., 6–7.
[13] Ibid., 2–3.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 2; cf. Lury, Prosthetic Culture.
[16] Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 2.
[17] Ibid., 8.
[18] Ibid., 9.
[19] Mitchell and Snyder, Narrative Prosthesis, 49 (emphasis in original).
[20] Ibid., 49–50.
[21] Sobchack, 'Prosthetics', 21.
[22] Ibid., 27 (emphasis in original).
[23] It is regrettable that important studies that have marked the field's development, by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, Elaine Graham, Neil Badmington, Bruce Clarke and Cary Wolfe, have nothing to say on either disability or memory, despite both being – because of the ways in which they offer powerful critiques of humanism – clearly suited to the ways in which the posthuman can be understood. New critical monographs, for example by Rosi Braidotti, Stefan Herbrechter and David Roden, are equally silent, despite the strong presence of critical disability and memory studies as disciplines. The reason for the absence of disability in particular is obvious, if routinely disheartening: such critical forgetting is part of a wider process by which disability contributions are consistently written out of accounts of change, whether viewed historically or as critical/theoretical perspectives on the present and future. For similar issues surrounding memory studies, see Radstone, Memory and Methodology, 6.
[24] Nayar, Posthumanism, 101.
[25] Ibid., 106.
[26] Wolfe, What is Posthumanism?, 139.
[27] Chen, Animacies, 104.
[28] Ibid., 17.
[29] Ibid., 18.
[30] Greengrass, Green Zone. DVD Chapter 7.
[31] Jones, Source Code. DVD. Chapter 11. What happens to the real Sean Fentress is something the film cannot explain. In theory he should, with all the other passengers, survive the explosion. But Stevens steals his identity and, in effect, obliterates him, a powerful statement of quite how this particular centred, individualist, humanist narrative functions.
[32] Bigelow, The Hurt Locker. DVD. Chapter 1.

[33] Burgoyne, 'Embodiment', 14.
[34] Ibid., 13.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Erll, 'Travelling Memory', 9.

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