This excerpt comes from a book entitled *American Cinema/American Culture*, writtenby John Belton, chapter 9, “War and Cinema,” 218-219.

*The Hurt Locker* (2009), winner of six Academy Awards including those for Best Picture, Best Director (Kathryn Bigelow), and Best Original Screenplay (Marc Boal), differs from these earlier films in that it is not about PTSD. Nor does it “explain” the war. Instead, it immerses the audience in the experience of war through a series of suspensefully staged combat sequences that alternate with scenes of the three protagonists’ down time back at the base. Combat, for the most part, consists of disarming bombs and IEDs in the streets of Baghdad while Iraqi civilians and insurgents look on, hoping to see the bomb techs die in an explosion. Here the enemy exists as a kind of absence, embodied in the bomb that any one of the surrounding crowd may have planted. In these situations, the combat team is dysfunctional with S.Sgt. James (Jeremy Renner) refusing to follow conventional protocol to the dismay of his teammates, Sgt. Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Eldridge (Brian Geraghty). Actual combat, seen in a desert battle with a group of snipers, emerges as cathartic. For the first time, the three function as a team as James directs Sanborn’s fi re while Eldridge provides ammo and watches their backs. A “danger junkie,” James thrives in combat situations while Sanborn perfunctorily goes through the motions and Eldridge fears for his own survival.

Unlike *The Green Zone* (2010), which reveals the threat of “weapons of mass destruction” to be a myth generated for political purposes by the Pentagon, *The Hurt Locker* has no ideological axe to grind. The war is what it is for each individual combatant. For James, whose return for yet another tour of duty at the end of the fi lm gives him “ownership” of a war that Sanborn and Eldridge have disowned, combat becomes a means of self-actualization. He comes alive through his confrontations with death. Walking in his bomb suit down a deserted Baghdad street towards an explosive device, he is a man alone in the universe facing off against the possibility of immediate death. Life is an existential crapshoot in which one can only live for the moment. Bigelow captures this with a remarkable image that haunts the fi lm—that of a spent bullet casing that somersaults end over end in slow motion as it falls from Sanborn’s sniper rifle

to the ground. That’s what combat is really like—indeterminate suspension in a void.