

Theatres of Representation

Discourses of War and Cinema

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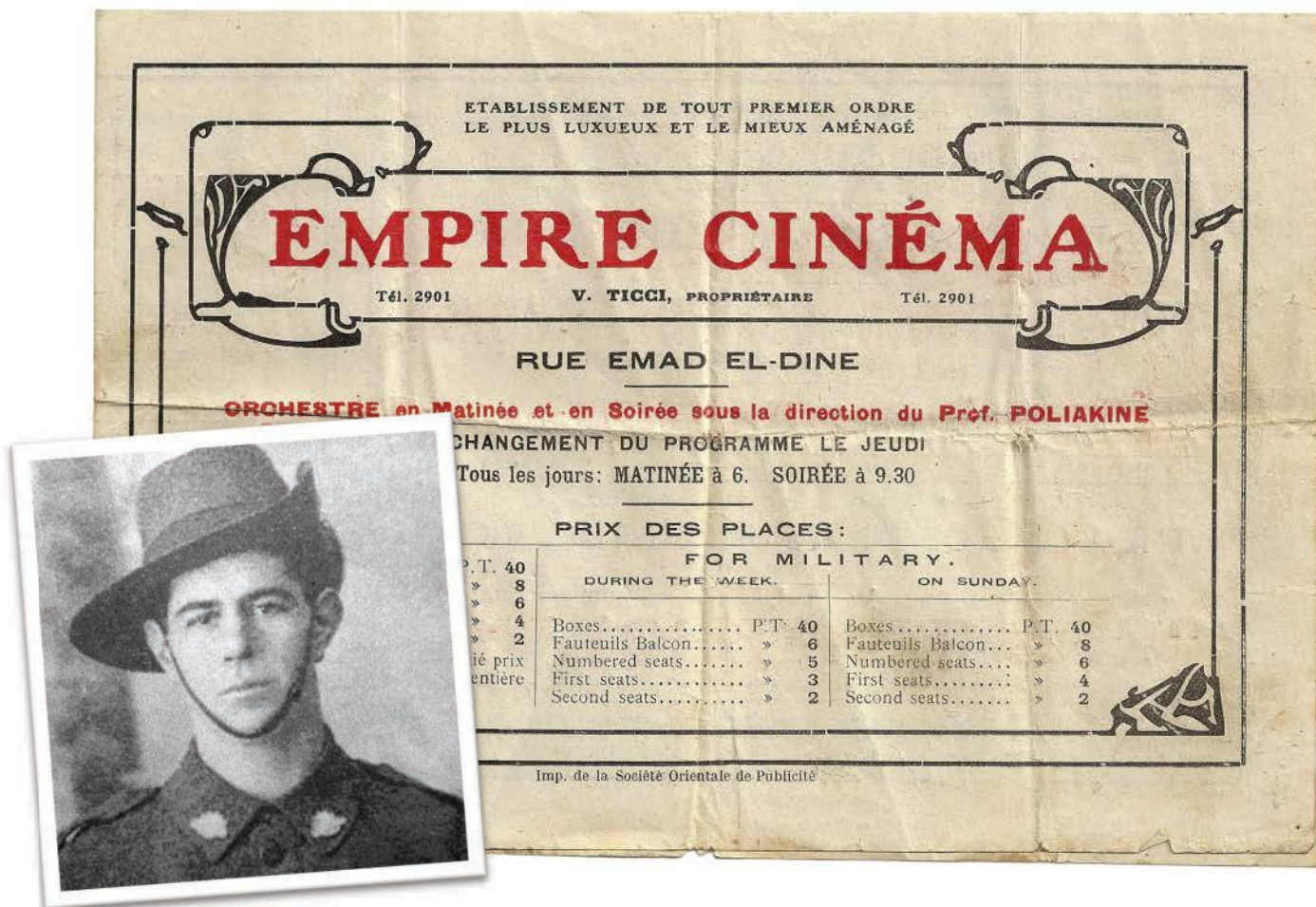
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Charles 'Charlie' William Binns (1897-1974), my great-grandfather, was enlisted as a private in the 6th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force on July 16, 1915. Charlie trained in Egypt before sailing to France, disembarking at Marseilles then travelling by train to the war zone in the north. He saw action in Estanes, Messines Ridge and Aldershot - on one occasion his unit participated in a raid where they took six German prisoners. The unit was then sent to Pozieres, where it saw heavy fighting in one of the key tactical struggles of the First World War. Charlie was wounded on the night of July 25, 1916, taking shrapnel to the right arm, chest, and lungs. Initially listed as missing, he was discovered by the unit chaplain and taken to a field hospital. On recovering sufficiently, he was moved from France to England, where he convalesced for some three months, spending time with relatives. Charlie went to the pictures almost every day while recovering in England. For me, these ticket stubs represent the strongest link between cinema and war.



Abstract

Considering three periods in history – World Wars I and II and their interim, the Vietnam War, and the wars in the Gulf – **Theatres of Representation** reflects on changing representations of war and conflict, and maps discourses therein, highlighting the tendencies that emerge. The following key films are examined: *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930), *PATTON* (1970), *APOCALYPSE NOW* (1969), *FULL METAL JACKET* (1987), *THREE KINGS* (1999), *JARHEAD* (2005), and *THE HURT LOCKER* (2009). Select scenes are subjected to a multi-modal analysis – adapted from the work of O'Halloran, Iedema, Bateman, and Schmidt – revealing repeated patterns in editing (and pacing), use of camera and sound design. Further formal analysis has taken place in the context of a discussion around key findings. Foucault's work on knowledge and regimes of truth, Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation and the studium and punctum of Barthes' 'photographic message' inform analyses of the texts. Arguments around similarities and differences in representation consider the 'character' of these eras, identifying sets of approaches through which the multifarious horrors of particular conflicts are approximated. A final chapter is devoted to representations of war and conflict in video games and comic books: key texts are the video games *CALL OF DUTY 2* (2005), *SPEC OPS: THE LINE* (2012), and the long-running comic series *Captain America* (1941-present).

Chapter 1 -

Introduction – War and Cinema

'As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular.'

Oscar Wilde (1969, p. 405)

Conflict has propelled human evolution: while survival of the fittest may be a law of species, mankind's intra-species battles have shaped the course of history. The nature of warfare – its unpredictability, its heroism, its absurdity – and the willingness of men to do unspeakable evil to one another has inspired the composition of compelling stories: *Heart of Darkness*, *Catch-22* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* are but three novelistic examples. Niall Ferguson (2006) presents the 'descent of the West' as never-ending:

'As long, it seems, as men plot the destruction of their fellow-men – as long as we dread and yet also somehow yearn to see our great metropolises laid waste – this war will recur, defying the frontiers of chronology' (p. lxxi.).

As the War on Terror becomes the defining conflict of the Twenty-First Century, people are increasingly aware of the effect that war narrative – alongside the history, politics, and machinations of war – can have on their everyday lives. In a world so mediated and remediated, war may seem the only constant. Over the past century, the nature of mass media has undergone several major transformations, from print and radio, through

television, to the advent of the Internet and truly global instant communication (Dewdney & Ride, 2006, p. 4-5). Furthermore, there have been seismic shifts in the distribution of creative and economic capital, from an institutional and industrial model to one that is considerably more democratic and collaborative (Herman & Chomsky, 1994, p. 1-2; Schaefer, 2011, p. 41). The importance of mythology in communicating compelling, emotional, personal stories, has changed the way content is shaped, and the way it is received. With greater access to resources, an increasing number of people are taking advantage of the medium of film to tell their story. Furthermore, producers and directors continue to look for stories that engage, inspire and entertain – realising that many such tales may be found in real life, and in histories recent and distant. Such a vast range of material entering the public sphere comes with advantages and drawbacks. As independent filmmakers push the boundaries of what is accessible, what is relevant, and what can be done with the medium, the film world and the creative canon is benefited by an increase in sources and inspiration; the drawback is that there is no longer a clear delineation between fiction and fact.

From the earliest newsreels, through feature films about World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam and the continuing conflicts in the Middle East, the ‘war film’ has become a mainstay of modern cinema. With unique tropes and conventions, techniques and story structures that set it apart from other film styles, the war film encompasses history and fiction in a way no other narrative style can. This thesis contends that the history of dramatic feature films about war and conflict can be traced as divergences from, or returns to, a nationalistic narrative that takes a ‘big picture’ view of war and conflict, distracting focus from individual interests: a ‘grand narrative.’ While in part a metanarrative that underpins the representation of war on film, the grand narrative can also be seen as the quintessential war story, with recognisable tropes and conventions that set it apart from many others. In particular, the grand narrative aligns itself with the classic World War II combat film, which has a unique place not only in the history of war cinema, but in cinema as a whole. The study of genre in cinema calls into question concepts of originality, and reinforces a populist view of filmmaking and film-viewing. ‘[T]he idea of genre,’ Grant (2007) writes, ‘informs every aspect of popular cinema from production to consumption’ (p. 1-2). Elsewhere, Grant makes his case much more concertedly: ‘Stated simply, genre movies are those commercial feature films which,

through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations' (Grant, 2003, xv). What this research does, then, is trace the evolution of a genre and its dynamic relationship with visual modalities. Jeanine Basinger (1986) and Kathryn Kane (1982) were among the first to contend that combat films emerging from within the years 1939 to 1945 had their own unique take on conflict, camaraderie, and the national spirit. More recently, Bronfen (2012) and Bender (2013) consider the aesthetic and ideology of these films, as well as their relationship to memory. What this thesis calls the 'grand narrative' – like themes or stories revisited or revived in certain periods of painting or literature – is dependent on a formula. One might think that this would change, would alter and shift over time. In fact, as the war film evolved after World War II, and as filmmaking technologies advanced, the narrative formula became increasingly crucial to presenting any story of warfare. These story elements include, but are not limited to: an objective that must be achieved; conflict among the main characters; a climactic battle; and death. The content changed with the conflict, but the conventions were more strictly adhered to than ever. This research draws on a number of key theoretical drivers in order to look at how the adherence to – and divergence from – a grand narrative can be seen as attempts by filmmakers to come to terms with the 'essence' of conflict. These drivers also underpin how sometimes a striving for 'realism' is not the most efficient way to achieve this.

The key films chosen – *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930), *PATTON* (1970), *APOCALYPSE NOW* (1979), *FULL METAL JACKET* (1987), *THREE KINGS* (1999), *JARHEAD* (2005), and *THE HURT LOCKER* (2009) – not only reflect different conflicts, but changing social attitudes to warfare. These changing attitudes are reflected in how the filmmakers portray combat: either supporting or opposing the status quo. Individual scene analyses were done on each film, with a methodology drawn from the work of Kay L. O'Halloran (2004) and Rick Iedema (2001). The method incorporates a comprehensive multimodal analysis of how each choice made by the filmmakers creates a new sense of pace, or of drama, or of paranoia – how the film causes an affective response in the viewer. This adapted social semiotic method, then, becomes an analytical lens through which it is possible to observe how filmmakers satiate or subvert the conventions of the war film genre and, further, how a director's attitude to war is directly inscribed in the very construction of their film. Through a close textual analysis of some key war

films, this thesis unpacks that inscription, and the ways in which each film changes the genre. Multimodal analysis forms a methodology, then, for interrogating the field. A dynamic model is thus identified and demonstrated, wherein genre is posited as an iterative, rather than restrictive, mode of categorisation.

Due to this thesis' alignment of cinematic representation with a dominant ideology (or 'grand narrative'), a number of high-budget American films, with their in-built viewership due to wide distribution and strong corporate ties have been chosen for discussion. The key films were chosen because they were made in the very commercial system to which scholars such as Klinger (2003, p. 75), Moine (2008, p. 64), and Grant (ibid.) refer. Acknowledging that some eighty years of film history is quite a span, the study restricts itself in scope to those films that have been made within the Hollywood system – if not necessarily by Hollywood directors (e.g. Stanley Kubrick and Sam Mendes). The conflicts depicted in these films involved the United States of America as primary (or intervening) belligerents. The films also signpost a traceable history of the genre: *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, for instance, while not made during World War II, displays several of the tropes that Basinger (ibid.) describes in her crucial analysis. Issues of scope have prevented the deep coverage of documentary representation, though a few examples are discussed throughout.

As I worked through a great number of war films, I found that the most notable break with the formula – and with the grand narrative itself – was the cinema of the Vietnam War. As noted above, these breaks from the formula, from the grand narrative, are marked by various semiotic approaches. The wider lens of the early World War II film moves in to a much more intimate point of view: the films of the Vietnam War were much more about individual experience, about the psychology and personal effects of warfare. The cinema of Vietnam made use of a great deal of estranging techniques; but over the coming chapters it can be seen that almost any film about warfare makes use of defamiliarisation to get closer to the 'essence' of conflict. Viktor Shklovsky's (1998) essay 'Art As Device' is seminal in establishing the concept of 'defamiliarisation' as an artistic principle, and as a set of techniques that artists might use to unsettle an audience. Shklovsky writes that in separating art from reality, in presenting the everyday or the very abstract in a new way, an artist gets closer to the truth of such phenomena.

'The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.' (ibid., p. 12).

The notion of defamiliarisation – though at the time unnamed – was signalled as early as the mid-18th century, when Laurence Sterne (1999) wrote *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Sterne's work was radical for its time, with its scrapbook-like composition, mixing multiple written forms including letters, notepad and diary entries alongside standard prose. This avant-garde approach was a great inspiration to many literary figures including James Joyce (2000), whose *Ulysses* became the quintessential modernist novel. Shklovsky suggested that by prolonging the 'length of perception', audiences were forced to truly think about what they were seeing. In this way, a composer or artist facilitates a new way of perceiving reality. The object, Shklovsky argues, is not as important as the perception, as the way of seeing the object. Both *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* (1998) and *APOCALYPSE NOW* (1979) demonstrate estranging effects in film. Where *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* takes the audience apart from the desolation of the battlefield in the epilogue to its harrowing opening scenes, Francis Ford Coppola uses audio and vision to separate the film-present, that is, Captain Benjamin L. Willard's time in Saigon, from the film-past, Willard's past missions, which have left him haunted and deeply troubled. This also establishes the unsettling nature of the film proper, which sees Willard embark on a mission quite unlike anything he has experienced previously. In Spielberg's film, the lenses were manipulated to give the film an eerie, washed-out look: a frame drained of most of its colour. While at once an attempt to replicate the raw imagery captured by the Signal Corps cameraman, it is also a dream-like portrayal of an experience with which most filmgoing audiences will never become acquainted (Binns & Ryder, 2013). The paradox of this use of camera is that it creates a new mode of seeing – washed-out vision and streaks of light and dirt across the lens – in order to grasp something very real: the chaos and horror of combat. This very paradox is just one example of the use of estranging techniques in war cinema. Defamiliarisation creates a means of seeing things anew; the ubiquity and omnipresence of war means composers and creators of content about war and conflict must make use of

defamiliarising techniques to disrupt the automation of reception, make audiences think about what they are witnessing, and how it is being presented. In this way, the techniques described from hereon in as ‘estranging’ or ‘defamiliarising’ become indexical for the horror – the essence – of conflict. Defamiliarisation can be observed in literature, but has its origins as far back as the Ancient Greek Theatre.

Borne of a desire to propagate a singular cultural identity, the Greek theatre was institutionalised very early on; whether tragedy, comedy or satyr (a blend of the former two – a bawdy satire, or dark comedy), the Greek administration supported art in all its forms, even if that art poked fun at or criticised those in charge (Sommerstein, 2002, p. 3-4). Euripides’ *Cyclops* and *Medea*, the *Prometheus* trilogy by Aeschylus, and Sophocles’ *The Trackers* – however fragmentary their current state may be – all speak to an artform and a culture that flourished under government subsidy (ibid., p. 8). Criticism of government was not just expected: it was actively encouraged. As the Romans were inventing democracy and transparent ruling by the people for the people, the Greeks knew the value of an open society in which speech was free. The Greek administration also knew the morale-boosting, nostalgic, and reassuring value of mythologies, and playwrights often drew inspiration from old stories from legend. In ancient Greek theatre, the device of the *deus ex machina* was instrumental in intervening in conflict or chaos, to restore order, to wipe the slate clean, to return to world to equilibrium. This *deus ex machina* appears in *Medea* (as in much of Euripides’ work), in the form of a chariot sent by the Sun-God to save his granddaughter from Jason and prison (ibid., p. 10-11). A *deus ex machina* is a purely poetic device, and cannot be claimed to exist – except accidentally – in any real conflict. However, the device is sometimes used in a more subtle way to resolve a seemingly unresolvable situation in modern war cinema: for example, a unit, pinned down under heavy fire, unable to move, is saved by the sudden appearance of reinforcements. Further, the notion of war itself as theatre is not new – Basinger (1986) notes that ‘war by its nature is a kind of theatrical event’ (p. 257).

‘We even refer to the theater of war. World War II had the ETO and PTO – European and Pacific Theaters of operation. People have roles to play with titles and appropriate costumes, insignias, and prescribed behavior. There are “leads” (generals) and “bit players” (privates), and

when it is all over, there are the inevitable reviews – by historians’ (ibid., p. 257-8).

Inversely, war has long been a setting for storytelling of all kinds. William Shakespeare made perhaps the greatest theatrical contribution to a common understanding of war – over the course of his eight plays about the English civil wars between 1455 and 1485, Shakespeare articulated not only historical events, but the timbre and feeling of his own times. Henry VI, Part III, for example, examines the shifts in power among the competing dynasties during the First Battle of St Albans, the Battle of Wakefield and the Battle of Towton. Having dealt with the inevitability of conflict in the preceding Henry VI, Part II, Shakespeare here depicts the horrors of these battles, with great flourish.

*O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!
Whiles lions war and battle for their dens,
Poor harmless lambs abide their enmity.
Weep, wretched man, I'll aid thee tear for tear;
And let our hearts and eyes, like civil war,
Be blind with tears, and break o'ercharged with grief.*

(Shakespeare, 2011, 2.5.73-78)

Here, Shakespeare uses poetic (and, by definition, estranging) language to depict a monarch's struggle with the realities of conflict. Shakespeare's poetic reinterpretation of history set a standard for representation of conflict in the Western world. In and of itself, the theatre is an environment of artifice: from the stage and its dressing arrayed before an audience; to the audience itself, constantly present and receptive; to the actors, who must engage not only the audience but each other, drawing out performances that entertain and affect; and finally to the words of the text itself, the script, that must be conveyed in the same affecting manner. Within Shakespeare's scripts were techniques that, while sometimes seen before, had never been used together, or to such great effect. One of these techniques was the aside, where a character speaks directly to the audience – in Shakespeare's work this was used to give voice to a character's thoughts and motivations. In the soliloquy that precedes the above quote from Henry VI, Part III, Henry considers what life might be like if he were not king.

*O God! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run,
How many make the hour full complete;
How many hours bring about the day;
How many days will finish up the year;
How many years a mortal man may live.*

(Shakespeare, 2011, 2.5.21-29)

The audience, here, gets an insight (albeit, an invented one) into a king's thoughts on the field of battle. The aside takes place apart from the main action, often in a moment of quietus, with the character alone on the stage. It is unique, in that the thoughts are directed to the audience itself – it is a technique with an awareness of the artifice of the play. This awareness – and the toying with the medium that it allows – is central to the notion of defamiliarisation. In the case of Henry VI, Shakespeare takes the audience apart from the almost non-stop slaughter, to give voice to the thoughts of a king who is playing a central role in history. This is how Shakespeare decides to represent historical events: through estrangement. The technique of defamiliarisation – not to mention the portrayal of history – works in a similar way on film.

The presentation of war on film calls for a shift in perspective, certainly with regards to history. Robert A. Rosenstone (2006) suggests that the study of film history requires not only an adjustment of historical methodology, but also a shift in perception of the past. History, Rosenstone argues, is not only a chronology, but also a non-linear combination of the events, opinions, cross-references, socio-political links, movements and forces that structure society. The portrayal of past events on film is, therefore, a controversial issue, because not all historians are convinced that it can ever be done accurately. 'A world that moves at an unrelenting twenty-four frames a second provides no time or space for reflection, verification, or debate,' Rosenstone writes (p. 33). He asks, however, whether an historical work must be so ensconced in its own debate, that the debate itself becomes a part of the work's value. 'To this, the answer is no. We can all think of works that

represent the past without ever pointing to the field of debates in which they are situated' (p. 34). A central concern of this thesis is representation: is this defamiliarised pointing to the past a valid means of writing or portraying history? Rosenstone not only compares filmed history – in both spectacular narrative and documentary form – to written history, but considers it in terms of cinema theory itself, arguing that no existing theoretical framework ('structuralist, semiotic, feminist, or Marxist', p. 37) can fully address the factors and concerns that inform the historical debate. Rosenstone also argues against the notion that a modern filmmaker cannot be considered an historian.

'If almost no film-makers have wished to claim the title, historian, it may well be that they, as much as the public and the scholars, have been acculturated into traditional notions of history as a written discourse.'

(ibid., p. 115).

Haggith (2002) notes that despite their superiors' desire to 'preserve history,' the vast majority of filmmakers actually working in war zones were merely technicians. While these camera operators could not nearly hope to 'claim the title, historian,' their approach, though, was almost literary. During training, 'they were shown how to develop a simple story and use a logical structure of shots' (Haggith, 2002, p. 337). 'The only instructions were to stay with the unit to which they had been assigned, secure a comprehensive record of its activities and to get as close to the fighting as possible' (ibid.). They also took creative licence, choosing on occasion to omit particularly graphic images (ibid., p. 346). These brave cinematographers were perhaps the true originators of the depiction of violence on-screen – or at least its effects. Haggith, for one, sees parallels between the methods of the Signal Corps cameramen (and their British equivalents, the AFPU) and the directors who brought feature narratives of combat to audiences worldwide – indeed, as Bender notes, several Hollywood productions themselves included documentary footage in order to heighten a sense of currency and realism (Bender, ibid., p. 90). The inclusion of documentary footage is but one of the modal and semiotic choices made by some directors in order to achieve historical verisimilitude; this study analyses films as texts in order to understand the effects of these choices in presenting a more visceral understanding of war and conflict.

Bateman and Schmidt's (2012) multimodal analysis techniques – as well as those systems devised by Iedema and O'Halloran – rely on a textual understanding of how film operates; they paraphrase Bordwell in stating that their methodology is 'an investigation of "the textual logic of understanding a film's narrative"' (Bateman & Schmidt, p. 5). This textual approach allows an investigation of how films intersect with other forms, including poetry and literature. Discourses of war may be mapped according to a consistent use of estranging techniques. While the formal aspects of each technique may vary, they all represent an attempt by the composer, filmmaker, writer – *creator* – to communicate not only a slice of history, but an *essence* of that history, of the experience of war itself. Where Shakespeare did it with words and staging techniques, filmmakers achieve similar effects by toying with audience expectations of genre and cinematic representation. This work attempts to trace some kind of history of this evolution of genre, re-texturing the cinematic character of certain historical periods, and presenting a dynamic analytical model through which other genres might be similarly researched. This tracing of generic discourse, mapped against ideology, depends in part on the work of Michel Foucault.

A need to categorise groups of discourse and their overarching classes led Foucault to produce *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). In this cornerstone work, he redefines historical enquiry and the acquisition of knowledge as a study of the gaps between events and the factors that link documents and records. The 'ordering of objects' is the interpretation of those events, writings, speeches or monuments within the matrix of their dispersion. Foucault outlines two historical presumptions: (a) that an event comes from a secret, ever-cloaked point of origin that no amount of research or interrogation can ever define; and (b) that all written or spoken word, or performed action, 'all manifest discourse,' is based on a hidden undercurrent of pre-existing thought. In suspending these presumptions, Foucault suggests that the entirety of historical discourse is set free; that instead of being ordered by chronology or causality, the material of history is 'a population of events in the space of discourse in general' (Foucault, p. 29). Once the material – the events and objects, the very *stuff* of discourse – is freed in such a manner, an interpreter is able to 'describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it' (ibid., p. 32), and also to observe new relationships in terms of the object that exists due to 'a group of controlled decisions' (ibid.). It is just this group of decisions, and the associated

‘interplay of relations’, that Foucault calls ‘discursive formations.’ Further, Foucault suggests that these discursive formations are governed by the system which gives rise to them (ibid., p. 120). Thus, the dominant ideology will be represented by whatever discursive formation or formations are most prominent. Language, discourse, and discursive formations, then, become tools and indicators of power relations and the ideological paragon.

Foucault’s description of historical ‘material’ can readily be applied to film. If a particular film is examined free of its obvious tethers to chronology, social context and genre, it can speak to new parts of discourse previously ignored. Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991), for example, is very obviously a depiction of Jim Garrison’s investigation of the 1963 murder of John F. Kennedy. It is a courtroom drama with a series of flashbacks and speculation on dubious ‘facts’ often debated by conspiracy theorists. *JFK*, however, was released in the early 1990s, a period just as rife with political furore; the USSR collapsed into several separate nations (and the KGB ceased operations, being replaced by the SVR), the Gulf War raged on in Kuwait, South Africa repealed policies of racial classification at birth, and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. Freed from its story and genre constraints, *JFK* can be seen as a comment on political punditry, governmental procedure and the importance of the mass media to democracy. In this way, films can fit into new and more relevant discursive formations. Further, Foucault describes ‘statements’ as the documents of culture, and that they fit into a discursive formation like a sentence does in a paragraph. The selection of statements for inclusion in a given formation, and the subsequent interplay between these statements, is based on a relationship of power. The importance of a given statement is measured firstly by the power of its originator (or originators), then by the relevance of its content (Foucault, p. 25). In the film world, and in the context of this research, ‘the power of the originator’ is interpreted as an amalgam of the prominence or success of the director, the critical or box office success of the film itself and the budget and accessibility of the film. Further, the ‘power of the originator’ is seen as a measure of the presence of the dominant ideology in the film. *THE HURT LOCKER* was released at the Venice Film Festival in 2008, then in the United States of America in 2009 (IMDb, 2013a). It was produced by a group of studios that included Summit Entertainment in Los Angeles, and distributed by another group including both Summit and Universal Studios. The film had a budget of just \$15 million (ibid.). With its focus

on American involvement in Iraq, *THE HURT LOCKER* puts forward a powerful statement about war – that it is inevitable and, to a certain degree, essential (see Chapter 5). Theatrically, the film took just under US\$50 million worldwide (Nash Information Services, LLC, 2013). It also won the 2009 Academy Award for Best Picture, which brought it a much wider viewership than it may otherwise have had (IMDb, 2013b). Inversely, 2008's *DEFIANCE* paints a bleak and harrowing picture of war, where survival – merely finishing the war alive – is paramount. Despite having a budget almost three times that of *THE HURT LOCKER*, being directed by Edward Zwick (*LEGENDS OF THE FALL*, *COURAGE UNDER FIRE*, *BLOOD DIAMOND*), and starring big-name stars Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber, the film has yet to make its budget back (as at early 2013; Box Office Mojo, 2013a). The wide opening weekend made just \$8 million¹. The film's lack of success could be attributed to any factor, but its independent production (by Zwick's own company Bedford Falls) and limited distribution (made possible only by the involvement of Paramount Pictures' independent arm, Paramount Vantage) certainly contributed. A small viewership means a small permeation of ideas: the central themes of the film – survival, bravery, and fear – simply were not allowed to penetrate a wide market. Jonathan Rosenbaum's (2000) critical comparison of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* and *SMALL SOLDIERS* (1998) neatly demonstrates the above phenomenon. Rosenbaum states that the central dilemma of his comparison is 'what a movie consists of – a viewing experience or the central object in a marketing campaign' (p. 67). What intrigues, however, is Rosenbaum's extension of the discussion into the ideological and, however perfunctorily, into genre. An odd melange of childrens' action-adventure, conventional war film, and biting cultural satire, Joe Dante's *SMALL SOLDIERS* was released in the same year as Steven Spielberg's *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*; Spielberg also produced the former. Rosenbaum's argument centres around criticism of both films that he feels was misguided. Where *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* was held aloft as a shining beacon of American triumphalism and patriotic fervour, *SMALL SOLDIERS* was dismissed as a summer child-magnet of little cultural consequence.

¹ A wide release means the film was released in over 600 theatres nationwide, and includes simultaneous international releases. Inversely, a limited release means a release in less than 600 theatres, and only usually in a single market (Box Office Mojo, 2013b).

'No doubt part of the failure of many American critics to perceive SMALL SOLDIERS as satire can be attributed to the habit of perceiving satire strictly according to the Swiftian model – the contempt for humanity in general and the audience in particular that infects, for instance, DR. STRANGELOVE, WAG THE DOG, and THE TRUMAN SHOW.' (ibid., p. 76).

This crucial distinction illustrates the commercial-cultural tension underlying this study, and further underscores the necessity of examining each film according to its adherence to – or divergence from – generic conventions. As aforementioned, for this the thesis turns to a relatively recent addition to the critical oeuvre: multimodal theory.

This method of discourse analysis has a number of key exponents, including Gunther Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, and Kay L. O'Halloran. Carey Jewitt's (2009) work outlines the essentials of multimodal analysis, with a contextual introduction, methodology and a range of applications from reading art, text and film, to using multimodality in primary and secondary school classrooms. Echoing Foucault's notion of discursive formations, multimodal thought frees a text from the simple connection – and analytical framework – of language and communication (method and message), instead allowing an analyst or viewer to observe and define a text in its entirety, as a selection of *semiotic resources*. These resources and their selection are governed by the mode of communication itself, a notion first advanced by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. Multimodality looks beyond language, taking textual (or image) analysis back to the *signifier* and *signified*, while situating all these semiotic resources in the logic or framework of the text. In this way, the composer of a text is restricted or freed by the mode he chooses: some have a large range of semiotic resources from which to select; others have few. For example, use of camera is a semiotic resource. A director might choose to use an upward-looking shot at a character to signify power. Similarly, the character might be lit from a limited, directional light source, which only shows half of his face. This choice signifies that the character might have a darker side, or that his true motives remain a mystery. The lighting of Adolf Hitler in *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS* (2009), for instance, despite being incidental (the scene is set in a movie theatre), supports the dominant notion that he is a truly evil character. Thereby it would seem the dramatic mode, particularly in the hands of

someone like Quentin Tarantino, allows for a great deal more creative interpretation of words and actions. Multimodal theory echoes Foucault's formations, and the focus on the totality of what is signified in a given text resonates with Sontag and Barthes' thoughts on photographed and filmed images. What is *signified* by Barthes' *signifiers* lends each piece of material (in this case, each film) its key characteristics – these characteristics, when examined and correlated with similar traits in other works, give rise to groups of material. Bateman and Schmidt, in turn, devised a methodology whereby films might be analysed in terms of a semiotic model. This model, though, takes into account certain intertextual characteristics of any given film, as well as the physical experience of watching a film – either at home or at the cinema. This also includes some paratextual artefacts of the distribution and critical process: press kits, screenplays, blog posts, news articles, for example. These intertextual and paratextual elements are important, as they identify how a film speaks to its audience, to its contemporary context, and to contexts yet to come. The influence of *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930), for example, must consider each semiotic choice the filmmaker made in its composition, the effect it had on audiences at its release, and the effect it continues to have on audiences to this day. In Chapter 3, for instance, I look at the similarities between the cinematic composition of group shots, and Rembrandt's 'conversation' paintings. The multimodal analysis also considers the semiotic choices employed by some of these paratexts. For instance, *APOCALYPSE NOW* (1979) was based on the Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*. Any interpretation of *APOCALYPSE NOW* must consider how Francis Ford Coppola adapts Conrad's specific literary techniques in his film, if they are appropriated at all.

Of course, in doing such close textual, inter-textual, and quasi-structuralist analyses, one cannot help but wonder at the filmmakers' intentions. This combination of Foucault's theory of discursive formation and discourse analysis expose intent in narratives and dialogues from sampled films in nuanced ways. For example, Robert Altman's 1970 film *MASH* was set during the Korean war, but is widely renowned as a metaphor for, and statement on, the contemporaneous Vietnam conflict. As a social commentary, the characters of Hawkeye Pierce, Duke Forrest and Trapper McIntyre, for example, become conduits of the filmmaker's opinions on the frailty of human life, military procedure and racial issues ('We're all the same here on the playing field, officers and men alike.'), and

the character's comments on the Korean landscape become grander assertions on American foreign policy – a metaphorical transference that continued in the television series that followed Altman's film. Similar tropes, techniques and patterns of signification can be found in almost all war films, and a number will be highlighted in this research.

Having established the theoretical principles that make possible a more nuanced 'reading' of dramatic feature films about war and conflict, the thesis will scrutinise the techniques utilised by their creators to estrange the perspective of the viewer. To do this, the thesis establishes several of the basic compositional tools – modal and semiotic resources – utilised by all filmmakers. This exploration of technique begins by asking, as film theorists such as Andre Bazin and Gilles Deleuze have done, 'What is a film?' Bazin or Siegfried Kracauer might suggest that film's entire being is oriented towards recording reality as faithfully as possible². Deleuze, however, goes further:

'Cinema... works with two complementary givens: instantaneous sections which are call images; and a movement or a time which is impersonal, uniform, abstract, invisible, or imperceptible, which is 'in' the apparatus, and 'with' which the images are made to pass consecutively. Cinema thus gives us a false movement – it is the typical example of false movement.'
(Deleuze, 2005, p. 2)

This is a concept of cinema stripped of any intent – it focuses purely on the medium. Later in Deleuze's *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, he dissects the potential ideology of film, but it is worth reflecting on the medium itself, for cinema could not exist without it. To 'film' something, such as a person or event, a camera lets light through a shutter. The reflected light creates an impression on unexposed film. The rate at which film moves through the camera was, for many years, dictated by the minimum speed at which the human could not detect individual frames: 24 frames per second (or FPS; Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p. 3). Different framerates are used for varying purposes (television broadcast, for example, requires varying framerates for different regions) but for the most part, 24 FPS remains the standard³. As at 2013, the transition to digital

² Though Bazin himself warns of the dangers of equating the origins of cinema solely with the technological advances that allowed for its development (Bazin, 1967, p. 18).

³ At the time of writing, Peter Jackson's *THE HOBBIT* (2012) is still in the cinemas. This film was the first experiment in a new 'high frame rate' technology. The film was played in selected cinemas at 48 frames per

cinema (both in terms of production and distribution) is underway, and it is by no means an easy journey⁴. Debate still rages about the benefits and drawbacks of digital filmmaking, but with the decline in photographic processing in both stills and film formats almost absolute, there may not be an analogue product to defend for much longer (Kent, 2012; Tooth, 2009; Kaufman, 2011; Tartaglione & Liberman, 2012). Still, celluloid devotees claim that the analogue format maintains a higher resolution – even after digital processing – and that with proper storage, film reels may last over a hundred years, while hard drives are prone to all manner of errors and malfunctions (Reeves, 2012). On the other hand, those who prefer digital media attest to the fidelity of the image, the medium's complete lack of decay over time (as it is purely digital information – ones and zeros), and much more control over various aspects of the image in post-production (ibid.). Digital cameras are certainly becoming smaller and more mobile: this grants documentary makers the capacity to capture more immediate, realistic, and objective imagery, and dramatic filmmakers the opportunity to emulate the same. Regardless of the technology used, be it analogue or digital, the product itself – the cinematic image – remains laden with meaning.

Irving Singer (1998) neatly bridges the gap between a 'realist' vision of cinema and a more artistic sensibility. Singer believes that the view of film as being close to reality is immediately misguided. For it is not reality we see on screen, but a retinal reception of it.

'In perceiving the world, we have a retinal image of something that might be called surface reality, plus brain action upon that retinal image. When we see the photographic image, however, we have a retinal image not of the world but of the camera's quasi-retinal image plus brain action on our image of the camera's image.' (Singer, p. 83).

So it does not matter *how* realistic a filmmaker tries to be – the film-image will always be a representation of reality; a 'transformation of what appears as physical reality' must necessarily take place even before an audience views the recording (ibid.). This research seeks to prove that in using techniques of estrangement, filmmakers bring audiences

second. Jackson claimed this makes the film 'much more lifelike, and it is much easier to watch, especially in 3-D' (Jackson, 2011).

⁴ According to Digital Spy, 'Use of traditional 35mm print projection is expected to cease in the US by the end of 2013, with a "global cutoff" likely to happen at the close of 2015.' (Reynolds, 2012).

closer to an 'essence' of the realities of warfare and conflict. If Singer's 'transformation of reality' is inevitable, how might a filmed representation of any event be distilled to an essence of the real thing? Singer's quote, above, offers a starting point: audiences decode filmic images in a similar way to how they receive and decode physical reality. But, as Singer touched on, the audience understands that the filmic image is laden with ideological meaning and authorial intent – it is a created or transformed reality – so they must decode in terms of representation. To appreciate the 'realities' of war – the horror, the heartache, the boredom, the thrill – intertextual relationships become all the more important. The relationship between texts allows for appropriation not only of techniques but of the contracts that pre-exist between the original user and the present audience. To some degree this is an appropriation of genre, but it is also an understanding of how the audience will *feel* when a particular technique or story structure is used. This is also dependent on the audience's imagination, as Singer notes.

'When the imaginary creates meaning in its distinctive manner, it imposes an ad hoc explication of what is being made intelligible. Finding no literal way to comprehend how even a poet could feel like something that is, by definition, impossible, the imaginary scans and then highlights alternative readings that might be coherent with the mentality of an "imaginative" individual.' (ibid., p. 96).

By extension, the transmission of an 'essence' of a phenomenon – such as combat – is reliant on cognition: the experience of that phenomenon is created in the mind of the filmgoer based on cues presented by the filmmaker. Daniel Frampton's *Filmosophy* (2006) – explored in relation to cognitivist theories in Chapter 2 – posits that although the filmmaker constructs a film, it is the film itself, through its medium and its presentation, that acts on the filmgoer. He suggests that in thinking of the film as a thinking entity, with its own eyes, mind, and motives, filmgoers open themselves to a much purer engagement with the underlying themes (p. 149). Acknowledging but ultimately refusing a cognitivist view of spectatorship, Frampton eschews any talk of realism and imagination to instead focus on how films affect an audience's mode of thinking.

'Films give us new emotions, new thoughts, and engenders its own type of responses. And by engaging with the film the filmgoer helps this engendering of new responses – we go to the cinema to see new things, learn about new things and get new experiences... films suspend our normal beliefs and desires, filmgoing becoming an ecstatic arrival into an openness, changing our view of the world.' (ibid., p. 155).

Film works, Frampton argues, by presenting images and ideology simultaneously. The viewer does not work consciously or unconsciously to deduce meaning from the images, because the film is doing that work already. The 'filmosopher' thinks as the film thinks, and this dual, entwined thinking creates meaning and experience. In *The Essence of Truth*, Heidegger, too, puts forth a dichotomy of thought as being the only way to be truly 'free.' Ruminating on Plato's cave, he suggests that the truly free are not only aware of the truth, but of the mechanics of its concealment.

'Only on the basis of the divorce between the true and the untrue does it become clear that the essence of truth as unhiddenness consists in the overcoming of concealing, meaning that unhiddenness contains an essential connection with hiddenness and concealing... Untruth belongs to the essence of truth.' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66).

The artifice of film, then – the inscription of transformed reality onto the medium of celluloid – forms part of a contract between film and audience. The film will impart the essence of truth – and the audience can access that essence – if the audience agrees to share the thinking with the film. It follows that film's very own discourse is examined in this thesis, alongside the discourse of literature, video games, and graphic novels. What emerge are patterns that remain across these various media (and in the context of particular periods), and present the essence of war and conflict in ways that can be similar, but also profoundly different.

World Wars I and II are examined in Chapter 3, with a close reading of *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930) and *PATTON* (1970). The World Wars saw the establishment of the grand narrative. Basinger contends that World War II combat films – made during the conflict itself – established the tropes and conventions of war films for

decades to come. *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* was chosen because it is a highly realistic and honest portrayal of war, for such an early film. It was also one of the first 'talking' war films to emerge in the decade or two after Griffith's silent *BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915). The film is also unusual in that it presents a very human side to German soldiers, at a time when the Weimar Republic was breaking down, and the National Socialist Party was rising to power. In terms of adherence to Basinger's conventions, it could be argued that *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* does so, but retains a sense of disjuncture from any kind of grand narrative. *PATTON* is a biographical film about a single man, so the notion of a collective vision of war is immediately fractured. However, through the figure of George S. Patton (who could himself be considered a one-man army) and his interaction with those around him, we get a sense of what war means to those in charge. Also, the film's treatment of the military aligns it squarely with World War II combat film conventions. Patton moves focus away from himself and onto his platoon, the army as a whole, even the nation – this tendency eschews an introspective viewpoint in favour of a portrait of a man as part of his army. Also discussed in Chapter 3 is *CASABLANCA* (1942), an extraordinarily important film not just for war narratives, but also for cinema as a whole. Frequently cited as one of the greatest films of all time, it also perpetuated a nationalist view of war. The *CASABLANCA* perspective of war is that it is far from great – it destroys lives and tears people apart – but it is necessary for the greater good. Further, *THE DESERT RATS* (1953) and *THE DIRTY DOZEN* (1967) make use of many of Basinger's tropes, and reinforce the notion of a shared experience of war being much more important than a solitary, introspective point of view. The narrative format and *mise en scène* of both *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* and *PATTON* are analysed in order to observe the discourses within and around both films. The conclusions drawn are that films about World War I and World War II favour a wider perspective – both in terms of cinematography and narrative structure.

Chapter 4 examines *FULL METAL JACKET* (1987) and *APOCALYPSE NOW* (1979) in terms of how Stanley Kubrick and Francis Ford Coppola took an entirely new approach to representing war on screen. Coppola's new sensibility was borne of the paranoia of the Cold War, and emerged in the midst of the Hollywood New Wave. In Kubrick's case, his film was a reaction against the high-concept blockbuster films of the late 1970's and 1980's. The result in both cases is what Robert Kolker calls 'a cinema of loneliness'

(Kolker, 2000). The chapter examines key scenes from each film – the sniper sequence from *FULL METAL JACKET*, and the ‘Ride of the Valkyries’ attack from *APOCALYPSE NOW* – in terms of how they diverge from the grand narrative, presenting a much more personal, solitary, perspective on war and conflict. These films are also examined in terms of a Nietzschean ‘flux metaphysics,’ against which Conard (2007) reads military protocol and training, the character of Leonard Lawrence (aka ‘Gomer Pyle’), and problematised morality as they are represented in Kubrick’s film. I take Conard’s work further, applying key themes from Nietzsche’s work in close readings of the above-mentioned sequences from both films. Hence, in films about the conflict in Vietnam, there can be discerned a significant deviation from any kind of nationalistic or propagandist characteristics. Instead the stories focus on individual experiences of war – in Kubrick’s film, the green recruit turned into a heartless killing machine with the ‘thousand yard stare,’ in Coppola’s the assassin sent to dispatch a Colonel gone rogue deep in the jungle. In both films authority is questioned, rather than glorified. These are stories of uncertainty, of loss, loneliness, with an insufficient sense of closure, much like the Vietnam War itself. The research identifies that, rather than the wide-angle cinematography of World War I and II, these films tend towards a more intimate perspective, preferring mid-shots or close-ups. Further, the narrative structure is narrower: as the story follows a single person, the audience is invested in that character’s journey on a much deeper level. This intimacy lends a more contemplative, introspective character to the cinema of the Vietnam War, and, thus, to that period of history itself.

With the arrival of 24-hour news channels, and the influence of location reporting and transparent documentaries, the character of war films was changed forever. Corporate interests aligned with those of the military, and Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex suddenly became a military-industrial-media entertainment network (Der Derian, 2009). Chapter 5 examines the impact of this changing world on films about the Gulf War (1990-91) and the US-led invasion of Iraq, leading to the Iraq War (2003-2011). These were conflicts in the Middle East arising from an ambitious American foreign policy that, to many (including Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard), smacked of the same country’s involvement in Vietnam. On the one hand, the objective of the 1991 US incursion into Kuwait was to free those oppressed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, but, on the other hand, it was clear to many at the time (including Robert Fisk, whose reporting from both

the Gulf War and the later 2003 invasion of Iraq frames much of Chapter 5) that there were other interests at play: namely that the Gulf was one of America's primary sources of oil. What is striking about dramatic feature films about these conflicts is that they herald a return to a view of war as essential. War is not romantic as it once was, of course; the public understand well enough that war can be a harrowing, horrific experience. But war is in some senses inevitable, and these three films – *THREE KINGS* (1999), *JARHEAD* (2005), and *THE HURT LOCKER* (2009) – all give some sense of that inevitability. Though the semiotic resources available to filmmakers have advanced with technology, and have been influenced strongly by news reportage and documentary, the stories return in key ways to the conventions of films about the World Wars. The cinema of the Middle East conflicts are thus typified by a combination of new and old: a disjointed image syntax (handheld cameras and an occasionally discontinuous editing style) that often draws on the wider lens of World War II films for inspiration, plus a return to the combat group first seen in the cinema of the World Wars – small groups or units seeking to achieve an objective. This change represents a new kind of cinema for a new, image-driven, character of war.

The final chapter of the thesis – prior to the document's conclusion – will investigate how war is represented in interactive media. This section will focus on the video games *CALL OF DUTY 2* (2005) and *SPEC OPS: THE LINE* (2012), and also the comic book series *Captain America*. The video games will be explored from a narrative-historical standpoint – how do you accurately represent history (both contemporary and long-past) while leveraging interactivity? *CALL OF DUTY 2* is set during World War II – this war has an established and well-known chronology. Beyond the novelty of situating players within some of the definitive battles of modern history – D-Day, Normandy, Market Garden – the game designers also faced the issue of ensuring the player felt they had some kind of control over events. Characters in *CALL OF DUTY 2* are based on actual soldiers involved in the combat depicted; *SPEC OPS: THE LINE* presents unlikely scenarios featuring wholly fictional characters. The thesis will interrogate what each of these games can tell modern audiences and offer historians and social theorists about warfare and mass culture – how do filmic techniques of estrangement and other sign systems translate to evolving media? How can further truths and experiences of war and conflict be presented and portrayed

in the realm of interactive media, and to what extent is this dependent on an understanding of cinematic modalities?

The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 changed the nature of politics and warfare. An ambitious American foreign policy paved the way for a return to the nationalist ideologies that permeate more recent films about conflicts in the Middle East. While I make some mention of writings around the 9/11 attacks, in particular those of Slavoj Žižek, I do so only in that an appreciation of the media approach to the attacks can furnish a deeper understanding of the construction of recent war cinema. I have very deliberately avoided any deep analysis of films made about the attacks themselves and America's recovery from them, as this tends to be a grey political and ideological area. The attacks, and the subsequent War on Terror – which at the time of writing is almost mid-way through its twelfth year – have irrevocably changed the way society views itself. There is an air of caution and paranoia that rivals that of the climax of the Cold War in the 1960s. While the combat in these 'new' conflicts might be sparse, the political machinations that underlie them has had a great deal of influence on the presentation of war on film. That noted, what was written about early war films, in defining this particular genre, still holds true. This thesis examines three distinct periods of conflict, alongside the development of film technology and its accompanying narrative structures. It examines the language, and grammar, and various discourses of war, establishing that narrative feature film, throughout the history of cinema, portrays new, unique, and often disturbing, visions of combat.

Chris Hedges (2002) offers this:

'The potency of myth is that it allows us to make sense of mayhem and violent death. It gives a justification to what is often nothing more than gross human cruelty and stupidity.' (p. 23).

Each war film is an attempt to make sense of the horrors of conflict. The mythmakers and storytellers of the modern world have made use of new tools to present their world-views. In making sense of the incomprehensible, they offer new truths about humanity – and its inhumanity.

Chapter 2 -

Survey of the Field & Analytic Narrative

Before Roland Barthes dissected the photograph, it was André Bazin who suggested that the need to preserve life, even in death, is central to art. '[A]t the origin of painting and sculpture,' he writes, 'there lies a mummy complex' (Bazin, 1967, p. 9). But the evolution of civilisation has stripped religious connotations from the recreation of life – what is left is a model of representation based on realism (ibid., p. 10). Where the realism of any given painting is measured somewhat by human involvement (the artist's brushstrokes, use of colour, overall perspective and control of the image), Bazin suggests that photography possesses 'a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced' (p. 13). While Susan Sontag would soon disagree with this interpretation, Bazin offers a conception of the photographic image as separate from all other forms of representation – an embalming in space and time unlike any other. Cinema is the natural evolution of the static photographic: as Bazin puts it, 'the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were' (p. 15).

Roland Barthes (1982) goes further, writing that a photograph is a 'perfect analogon' of reality (p. 196). In this way, no analysis based on the assumption of subjective composition can be performed; the photograph has no signs or codes to deconstruct. Barthes calls cinema – alongside painting, drawing, theatre – an 'imitative' art form: with each of these representations comes the 'analogical content,' i.e. the *mise en scène*, but also

a 'treatment' of that content. Most importantly, he draws connections between this treatment and its spectator (p. 196-197).

'... all these "imitative" arts comprise two messages: a denoted message, which is the analogon itself, and a connoted message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it.' (ibid., p. 197).

Barthes suggests that the audience must work harder to infer the 'message' of a photograph, as opposed to more stylistic art forms. But in providing a framework for doing just such work, Barthes unlocks methodologies that may be readily applied to cinema. Trick effects (or image modification), pose, and objects are considered to be modifications of reality, or at least the imposition of some kind of artifice on what is before the camera. Photogenia, aestheticism, and syntax refer to the inherent qualities of the image – still subjective presentations, but all contributing to the connoted message (ibid., p. 200-204). Barthes suggests that even with human involvement in the taking of a photograph, it is still a capturing of reality, rather than a re-stylisation. The coding of that reality is near invisible, because the objects appear in the image the same way they do before our eyes in real life.

'In the photograph – at least at the level of the literal message – the relationship of signifieds to signifiers is not one of 'transformation' but of 'recording', and the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic 'naturalness': the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly... Man's interventions in the photograph (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) all effectively belong to the plane of connotation.' (ibid., p. 44).

This indicates a secondary line to Barthes' thought. The camera captures reality – his perspective here does not change. The photograph denotes its subject, and nothing more. But he does acknowledge that from the 'brute photograph' – the simplest possible composition, the *ur-photograph*, if you like – man twists, adapts, changes, creates, a new image, a stylised image, that connotes a message (ibid., p. 44).

Susan Sontag (1977), agrees that the very act of photographing is an act of composition, but she takes it further. There may be an intention to record reality untainted, but in that very recording all possible impartiality fades away. 'Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention,' Sontag writes, '[though] the act of photographing is more than passive observing' (p. 11-12). Every photograph, she suggests, is an attempt 'to contact or lay claim to another reality' (p. 16). The freezing of time is in and of itself unnatural. In coping with this unnaturality, the spectator intensifies their gaze, creating an altered mode of perception to decode this 're-presented' world, this 'other reality.' Whether the photographer intends it or not, the subject of the photograph will be observed in relation to other elements of the image: its background, film grain, use of colour, lighting, and so on. The title of the photograph in Figure 2.1, for example, is *0% interest*, which would suggest that the main subject is the lit sign in the middle ground. But the treatment of other elements in the photograph – the shopping trolley, the Ford truck, and the varying depths of the car park in the background – speak to a more complex relationship within the composition. The exclusion of certain elements may be questioned with reference to what was included – why cut out the second sign on the left? And then why include part of it, and not cut it out entirely? The perspective – not only visual, but also ideological – of the photographer is inscribed in the techniques used to compose the image.



Figure 2.1: *0% interest* (Plumridge, 2012).

Film, too, takes a 'snapshot' of reality, recasting the everyday world in a necessarily subjective image. The filmic snapshot, though, adds a crucial element – that of duration. Duration allows more techniques, more options for composers to consider, and complicates notions of static encoding and decoding as per Barthes. Bill Nichols (2010) echoes Barthes in stating that the sign is the 'basic unit of cinematic communication.' Nichols writes that the transmission of the cinematic message, and its decoding by the spectator, is dependent on the sign. This sign could be a sequence of shots, an entire scene, or something much smaller: a longing look between characters, or the choice to show the spurs on an enemy's boots as opposed to his face. The sign makes possible a range of different cinematic effects: persuasion, poetry, drama, conflict, action; e.g. in *THE KILLERS* (1943), the opening shot of the two men stalking through the night creates tension and curiosity. The camera does not move, nor does the lighting change, but still these effects are created. Barthes and other semioticians call the effects of a given sign the *signified*. Certain signs are utilised in certain ways: for example, in action films, the hero will often give a determined glance back over his shoulder, at his enemy, at his peaceful past, or at what he is heading off to defend. This is often accompanied by a swooping camera shot or slow, deliberate pan⁵ or dolly⁶ to capture his conviction. Thus the hero's look becomes a *convention* of the action genre. Conventions are often grouped thus – according to genre – but can also be aligned under a certain *mode* of communication.

From cinema's earliest days, there has existed a tension between realism and formalism. The first examples of film realism were the documentaries of the Lumière Brothers. Their primeval forays into the representation of reality on film were not only seminal to the foundation of cinema technique, but also to the philosophy surrounding the cinematic arts. The Lumières and Dziga Vertov were amongst the first realists: filmmakers who believed that the essence of cinema was in its direct recording of reality. The effects of realism were seen firsthand with the premiere of the Lumières' *L'ARRIVÉE D'UN TRAIN EN GARE DE LA CIOTAT* (1896): popular legend has it that people screamed and ran to the rear of the cinema on seeing the train move towards the camera. Whether or not this occurred, people were legitimately amazed and disturbed by this new rendering and

⁵ Side-to-side camera movement, while the axis of movement remains static.

⁶ Sliding camera movement; the angle remains the same, but the camera's base, usually a tripod, moves, often along tracks laid on the ground.

representation of an everyday event. Vertov's *MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA* (1929) set the benchmark for innovative positioning of cameras to record movements and impart deeper meanings and connotations to shots.

One of the foremost realist film scholars is Siegfried Kracauer. In *Theory of Film* (1960), Kracauer treats every notion, concept and technique in relation to physical reality. In summing up his theory – and, by extension, realist theory in general – he writes:

'It may be assumed that the achievements within a particular medium are all the more satisfying aesthetically if they build from the specific properties of that medium.' (p. 12)

Kracauer also states that the major achievements within the medium of cinema are all directly due to the cinema's interaction with, relationship to and distortion of the real world. However, even distortions of the 'real,' and forays into fantasy, he claims, need to 'acknowledge the supremacy of physical reality' (p. 85).

Realists are generally unwavering in their view of cinema: that the great value of film lies in its direct representation of the real world, and that any resulting artfulness is due to the physical properties of the medium itself. Film formalism was a reaction to this resolute perspective, and began not with exclamations and proclamations, but with a series of whispers. Formalist theory holds that the magic of cinema lies in its deeper meanings, its connotations, and its ability to distort reality and subvert its rules. A jump cut, for example, between a bone tossed in the air, and a spaceship whirling and spinning through space evokes connotations of advancement, evolution and the passing of many eons⁷. A jump cut is a direct manipulation of realist film technique, which would usually make use of a continuity edit or a dissolve to achieve the same effect without jarring the viewer as dramatically. A continuity edit cuts between two shots in a way the audience would expect. Note that the audience's expectation of the 'shot/reverse-shot' formula is borne of many years of editing films in the same way. The example cited by Bordwell and Thompson (2004) is the opening of John Huston's *THE MALTESE FALCON* (1941). The space of the office is established by a sweeping shot from the window down to Sam Spade at his desk. We hear the office door open, then cut to a reverse of the shot of Spade, from

⁷ One of the opening sequences from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968).

behind his chair, revealing his secretary, Effie, entering the room. This second shot establishes the space of the room, and cuts it in two. The 'line' between the two halves is known as the 180° line. The characters will converse, and the editing will switch between the two once this line is established. The matching of eyelines also aids in this 'invisibility of style.' By aligning the eyelines along the a line within each shot, the audience sees the edited sequence as a natural, typical conversation. See Figure 2.2, which demonstrates the matched eyeline between Captain Maddox and Admiral Nimitz in MIDWAY (1976).



Figure 2.2: Shot/reverse shot, eyeline matching in MIDWAY.

A dissolve is a gradual fade between two images that often signals the end of a particular scene and the beginning of another. Films of the classical era would often fade to black, and then fade up into the subsequent scene (Cutting et. al., 2011, p. 151). Dissolves indicate that time has passed, or an 'ellipsis between shots' (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p. 332). This construction is often used in more contemporary films to reinscribe a classical aesthetic, such as in ENEMY AT THE GATES (2001), or BLACK BOOK (2006). This classical aesthetic remains key even to post-war films: the pre-occupation with nostalgia is native to both war storytelling and to cinema (Binns, 2013a). Further, this visual character was borne of the limited options available to early filmmakers: the dissolve was merely replicated from the magic lantern slide shows of the 19th Century (Cutting et. al., p. 150). The workings of film evolved to include a greater variety of options, and with this evolution came the opportunity to become more creative with cinematic storytelling. This creativity, in turn, led to a climactic disjuncture in the popular grasp of cinematic reality, and the rise of formalism as the prevalent perspective on filmic representation.

In the selection of cast, the writing of dialogue, the direction of the action, the inclusion of props, the composition of music, form is highly visible, as is the filmmaker's signature. Mainstream narrative films are constructed using five main devices: the story and plot, the camera, *mise en scène*, sound and post-production (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004).

The story is the entire arc of a film, including any presumed elements the audience may infer from the action on-screen, such as a particular character's back-story; the plot is comprised of the specific filmed events of that story in chronological order (or not, such as in *SLIDING DOORS*, 1998, *RUN LOLA RUN*, 1998, or *BACK TO THE FUTURE*, 1985). The camera is used either as the eye of an observer, or as that of a character or prop; the cinematographic qualities of a given sequence or entire film involve the photographic aspects of the shot, the framing of the shot, and the duration of the shot (ibid., p. 229). The photographic aspects are the characteristics of, or effects applied to, the film itself. These may include tinting, scratching or digital grading (the use of grading in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* is examined in Chapter 3; see also Binns & Ryder, 2013). Framing a shot involves how the camera is pointed at the subject. Different camera angles and lenses confer varying connotations about a person or object: if the camera is looking up at a character from below, it could be inferred that the character is powerful; if the camera is observing a vast landscape through a wide angle lens, the filmmaker wants the audience to see the expanse of nature, or the city, or a deserted street. The duration of each shot can change the tone or feel of a sequence. Stanley Kubrick was an advocate and avid practitioner of the long take. In *PATHS OF GLORY* (1957), several of the dramatic scenes that occur whilst Generals Broulard and Mireau are negotiating make use of wide angle lenses and extended takes to draw out the action, increase suspense, and unsettle the audience. *Mise en scène* is the conscious arrangement of elements within the frame: props, background objects, set design and dressing, even costumes are included here. *Mise en scène* contributes to realism, authenticity and credibility. Sound design and sound editing are critical to continuity and credibility. The sound design in *THE HURT LOCKER* was widely lauded for its authenticity, and this is one of the reasons for its visceral quality (Grove, 2010). Post-production consists of many elements, the primary crafts being editing, visual effects, and sound mixing. This thesis understands all these stages and crafts – from concept development, through scriptwriting, to shooting and post-production – not necessarily in terms of expressing a creative signature as per auteur theory⁸, but rather as being a conscious choice made by one or more of the people involved in the production of a film. That said, throughout this work I will refer to

⁸ See Bordwell & Thompson (2004) on the French and Hollywood New Waves, p. 486-493; Nichols (2010) looks at auteur theory from an interpretative perspective, p. 150-153, 158-160; Moine (2008) considers the relationship between auteurs and genre, p. 104-108.

certain choices being made by the director – this is done not to espouse auteurism *per se*, but rather to position the director as representative of the filmmaking collective.

Singer (1998) contests Bazin – and, more specifically, George Santayana – in saying that even if photography is not perceived as a visionary art (in the realm of, for instance, painting and sculpture), then this does not necessarily preclude cinema from the same consideration (p. 30-36). ‘For the filmmaker,’ he writes, ‘the camera is something to be looked *through* in order to see what one is looking *for*, and how one is looking for it. This constrains what the cinematic artist can do aesthetically, but it also yields new opportunities for expressing a complexity of feelings and ideas that are able to attain visual articulation’ (ibid., p. 134). Singer acknowledges that in transmitting these feelings and ideas, a necessary ‘alienation’ must take place. Where musical recitals and stage plays are different each time, the audience buys into the performative communication that is taking place. The suspension of disbelief in theatre is sufficient to allow the audience to connect with the characters embodied by the actors on stage. In cinema, Singer writes, there is no such constructive pact with the audience. Further, the negation of this pact creates communicative issues beyond that of the transmission of meaning.

‘However natural a character in a movie may seem, however familiar to us the actor who portrays that character may be, we in the audience are conscious of being isolated from both the character and the actor in a manner and degree quite different from stage productions. Though we are not allowed to converse with live actors while they perform, we always know that we could do so, even if that meant violating the rules of this particular art form. But as members of a film audience, we cannot interact with either the performers or the characters, much as we might like to. Within our aesthetic experience we are alienated from them by the very technology that makes them imagistically present to us’ (ibid., p. 138-9).

Cinema, then, in its very workings, is already alienating its audience. By making use of more radical filmic techniques, and by defying cinematic or generic conventions, filmmakers combine communication and alienation to attempt to reveal universal truths about life and society, such as the playing out of war and conflict. Film formalism, then, but more specifically artifice, is innate to cinematic estrangement. Formalism and artifice

are driven by innovation: the further a film's subject is from reality, the more tricks and techniques the filmmaker must utilise or invent to represent or re-create it on the screen. Georges Méliès was a cinematic pioneer, and the inventor of many of the techniques that would later become known collectively as 'special effects.' His spectacular and fantastic films – such as *LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE* (1902) and *VOYAGE À TRAVERS L'IMPOSSIBLE* (1904) – were the first to make use of jump cuts, stop tricks (stopping the film, changing elements within a scene, and restarting the film, to give the magical effect of sudden appearance, disappearance, or substitution), multiple exposures (leaving film exposed for longer than a single frame, to give the effect of continuous movement⁹) and the aforementioned dissolve transitions, based on early moving picture technologies such as the magic lantern (Wakeman, 1987, p. 747-765). Méliès' innovations paved the way for the ultra-modern special effects seen in contemporary big-budget blockbusters: the substitution principles behind the use of green-screen echo those of the stop trick, for example.

'The cinema ... aims at transforming the agitated witness into a conscious observer. Nothing could be more legitimate than its lack of inhibitions in picturing spectacles which upset the mind.' (Kracauer, p. 58)

Méliès' work highlights that the origins of formalism – and, to a degree, the alienation inherent in the cinematic medium – were apparent even in cinema's infancy. As film technology advanced, so too did the complexity of the stories it told, and the messages it attempted to impart. Shklovsky's 'Art as Device,' as noted in the Introduction, was crucial in exposing, in concrete terms, the notion of defamiliarisation to literary circles. The concept was not new, but it was Shklovsky's essay that made it visible to creators and consumers alike. There are few media more suited to discombobulating an audience than film. 'It is the unique way that film takes and refigures reality,' writes Frampton (2006), 'that seems to be behind this effect on the filmgoer' (p. 3). In its short history, cinema has established a repertoire of representational conventions and concrete audience expectations faster than almost any other form of creative expression. By using techniques that defy those conventions and expectations, filmmakers halt the 'automation of perception,' and force the viewer to carefully consider what is being portrayed on screen,

⁹ This technique has been developed in photography to create streaks of light across the frame.

even if it is a mundane or everyday activity or object. In *JARHEAD* (2005), for example, several segments open with a quiet, static shot of the mountains in the dawn light, during the day or before sundown. The viewer is thus made aware of the beauty of the Kuwaiti landscape, and the tragedy that it should be the site of brutal slaughter; the shots also contrast with the concatenated, predominantly handheld visual character of the other parts of the film. Defamiliarisation is not only limited to filmmaking technique, however. Toying with narrative, too, can unsettle an audience. In *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930), Paul Bäumer has a quiet conversation with another soldier in a mortar crater. The conversation is shot and edited in the typical manner of the early Hollywood ‘invisibility of style.’¹⁰ What is strange is that the other soldier is dying, having been stabbed at the beginning of the sequence by Bäumer himself. Time passes, and Bäumer becomes increasingly anxious. The man is breathing shallowly, and Bäumer alternately yells at him and cares for him. At the death of the enemy soldier, Bäumer then engages in a ‘dialogue’ about desertion and why he had to kill. This is a particularly eerie and unsettling sequence in this harrowing early depiction of war (see Chapter 3).

Defamiliarisation in film, then, is achieved by way of subverting audience expectations of genre, and using conventional cinematic techniques in new ways. The techniques employed by contemporary war filmmakers are as varied as their effects. A case in point would be Kathryn Bigelow’s *THE HURT LOCKER*, which utilises almost every war film convention and trope developed over the last half-century, as well as introducing some of its own. In one sequence, Sgt. First Class William James (played by Jeremy Renner) must disarm what he thinks is a single explosive, but is revealed to be a multiple connected explosives with a remote trigger that could detonate at any time. The tone of the sequence is by its very content suspenseful, but the novel utilisation of camera angles and editing gives the impression of several eyes watching events unfold, rather than a standard one (or two) camera coverage, which is what audiences might expect from such a sequence. This technique has become commonplace in the war films of the early twenty-first century, including *BLACK HAWK DOWN* (2001), *GREEN ZONE* (2010) and *THREE KINGS* (1999). In Stanley Kubrick’s *FULL METAL JACKET* (1987), the beginning of the Tet Offensive is treated almost theatrically. As Private Joker – played by Matthew

¹⁰ See Bordwell & Thompson’s (2004) outline of the classical Hollywood cinema (p. 468-471; also Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson’s (1985) monograph on the subject of form in classic Hollywood.

Modine – prepares for action in the machine gun nest, the camera cuts between the nest and the front gate of the Marine base, where the assault is expected. A jeep smashes through the base's gate, and explodes under the Marines' fire. The following Vietcong troops then advance, and are mown down under the base's bright floodlights. The single light source is reminiscent of a spotlight, and there is a connection in this lighting set-up with theatrical staging. Shakespeare was discussed in the Introduction, as a frequent contributor to theatrical discourses of war: the staging of battle in Shakespeare's plays is often accompanied by a soliloquy that places the speaker apart from the action, yet still able to observe and comment upon it. Ko (2005) notes that modern appropriations of Shakespeare often make too much use of advanced technology, when the language of the play itself is more readily accessible with simpler staging. Shakespeare himself was writing for much more primitive staging techniques, so the privileging of the verbal over the visual lets the audience aid in creating the scene (p. 35). In 1987, Kubrick had access to a vast array of film and lighting technology, yet chose to present the beginning of the Tet Offensive with simple, singular lighting. The throwback to theatre, then, forms part of the filmmaker's intent – the presentation of war as 'a kind of theatrical event' (Basinger, 1986, p. 257). It also brings to the audience's mind the artifice of cinematic representation, removing form from reality, and asking the viewer to consider the underlying meaning, or 'essence' of the scene.

In proving that war films share several formations and archetypes, the conventions of the genre must be outlined. The war film occupies a unique space in the history of cinematic storytelling. In order to analyse the tropes and conventions of the genre, the thesis examines existing literature on the subject. Basinger's definition of the World War II combat film outlines the criteria of this niche genre, but adherence to this rubric can be unearthed in many contemporary representations of warfare and conflict. In viewing *THE HURT LOCKER*, for instance, one cannot help but draw comparisons to Basinger's descriptions of death, heroism and sacrifice as they are acted out in the 1943 film *BATAAN*. In what amounts to a high structuralist examination, Basinger lists sixteen key requirements for the World War II combat film, including a key group with a democratic ethnic mix, an objective, group conflicts, a faceless enemy and death. Basinger states, importantly, that *BATAAN* does not invent any kind of genre, but that '[i]t puts the plot devices together, weds them to a real historical event, and makes an

audience deal with them as a unified story presentation' (1986, p. 39). Basinger discusses the formation of the genre, but also its evolution after the Second World War. Elisabeth Bronfen (2012) identifies with Basinger's tropes, but suggests that modern society is haunted by its past: these war film conventions possess a pathos that connects directly with a viewer's emotions. These emotional responses to filmic conventions affect how we perceive war in the real world – we are a species consistently haunted by war. Bronfen's detailed work on the 'choreography of battle' draws links between art and cinema, but, importantly, examines how filmmakers structure battle scenes around emotional events. What are remembered, Bronfen argues, are not the political rationalisations and military stratagems, but rather the 'emotional intensities and traumatic affects' (p. 113). In removing any kind of logistical detail, as well as the true horrific carnage of armed conflict, filmmakers are able to apply what Bronfen calls a 'visual logic' to the utter chaos of the battlefield. The successful representation of the 'irrepresentable' is based on a level of distance, i.e. 'Hollywood's resilient and inventive fascination with the theatricality of warfare is predicated on the fact that the actual scene of battle is safely gone from any belated film narratives recalling it' (p. 111). This thesis disagrees, to a point. While detachment is certainly necessary to take in the wider horrors of a given historical event, what is necessary for historical narrative feature films is, yes, to give some sense of the wider view, but also to zoom in (with the camera and with the written script) and gain an understanding of the individual experience of war. What this dissertation argues is that the character of historical eras is shaped by the alignment of films with a wider or closer perspective.

Frampton (2006) positions film as a living, thinking entity, wherein shot, sequence and scene, are not the choices of the filmmaker, but the active thought processes of the film itself. If film is thought of as a thinking entity, then the semiotic choices are those of the film itself. The notion is radical, but allows for a deeper analysis of the way film works on the minds of its audience. In particular, Frampton's theory has similarities with multimodal theory, which states that the creator of any communicative work chooses from various semiotic resources at their disposal, creating a series of relationships between the chosen resources which lead to a number of potential meanings being placed in the mind of a prospective viewer. Frampton holds that the camera is the film's eye, and the characters' thoughts that of the film itself. Consider *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*'s (1998)

memorable opening sequence, depicting the harrowing landing on Omaha Beach in Normandy. In this instance, it is the film showing us the soldier's point of view from within the landing boats, then choosing to take us apart from the intensity of the battle: flying the audience over the corpses, the body parts and the mayhem from a distance, an eerie quiet and depressing blue wash pervading the spectacle. This perspective – overwhelming and intense – creates an understanding of the experience of conflict in the mind of the viewer. Subjective though it may be, the techniques used by the filmmaker create a particular perspective of war that the audience will interpret in one of a limited number of ways. Cognitive film theory determines that the visual presentation of a story, combined with the soundtrack, has profound psychological effects on a viewer.

'In general, cognitive theory wants to understand such human mental activities as recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgment, memory, and imagination... [T]he cognitive frame of reference posits the level of mental activity as an irreducible one in explaining human social action.' (Bordwell, 1989, p. 13).

Humans interpret other humans based on sight – it is innate to our nature. A man in shabby clothes, for example, might be instantly taken as poor, or a drunk. Likewise, a series of events will be interpreted a certain way. Bordwell gives the example of a small boy hearing the ice-cream truck, and coming downstairs with his wallet in his hand. Anyone viewing this event would interpret it as the boy wanting ice-cream, and coming downstairs to go and buy some (p. 13). Filmmakers frequently understand these modes of thinking, and use them to their advantage. The casting of popular stars, for instance, will give an instantly recognisable face to what may be a quite unrealistic scenario. The presentation of a character in certain clothes, or with a certain hairstyle, will give the audience an instant perspective, as will a particular character trajectory. This, of course, can become yet another tool in the hands of a shrewd filmmaker. In *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* (1995), for example, the audience is led to believe that Roger 'Verbal' Kint is a bit-player in a large criminal scheme, but in the final minutes of the film, that entire narrative falls away. Cognitive film theory, then, is about what meanings will be created in the minds of the audience, based on the cues given by the filmmaker. In a sense, genre

is itself an example of this, and it is the contract – the mutual understanding – that genre creates between filmmaker and viewer that will be interrogated in this thesis.

Fewer film genres have lasted as long – or been so repeatedly re-worked, re-shaped, re-conceived – as the war film. Grant (2007) charts the history of film genre studies, as it has moved away from an indexical understanding of symbols and signs (per Barthes' understanding) and towards a more interpretative relationship between what is portrayed on the screen and what is in the mind of the filmmaker. 'Although a crucifix in a horror film is an icon of Christianity and dominant ideology,' Grant writes, 'the film itself may either critique or endorse that ideology' (p. 13). This understanding of genre is more broadly conceived than, for instance, Tudor's (2003), where the very definition of the term is problematised. Is the study of 'genre' some 'abstract exploration of the cyclical recurrence of certain themes' (p. 4)? Or is it a deeper analysis of why such themes recur? To be fair, Tudor includes broader society in his definitions when he suggests 'the exploration of the psychological and sociological interplay between filmmaker, film, and audience' (p. 7). He finishes in writing that 'genre terms seem best employed in the analysis of the relation between groups of films, the cultures in which they are made, and the cultures in which they are exhibited,' (ibid., p. 10) which is precisely the character of analysis that this thesis has undertaken. But what is that analysis? How does one analyse a genre? Rick Altman (2003) suggests some combination of semantic and syntactic approaches and, I would argue, multimodality represents some apposite qualities of each. In sketching some possible applications of a semantic/syntactic approach, Altman acknowledges that further work could be done as far as the role of the cinemagoer:

'Spectator response, I believe, is heavily conditioned by the choice of semantic elements and atmosphere, because a given semantics used in a specific cultural situation will recall to an actual interpretive community the particular syntax with which that semantics has traditionally been associated in other texts.' (Altman, p. 39)

That is to say, the reaction of a given audience member will be determined by exposure to a particular genre and its conventions. This recalls Frampton's work on the film's independent, almost sentient engagement with the viewer. Most importantly, Altman's thoughts here have been brought to bear on the use of war film conventions across

multiple conflicts. Does the repeated use of a 'lone warrior' character, or the platoon with token ethnic diversity, condition the audience to expect a certain meaning? Does it change what the audience takes away from a given film, or does it bring a viewer closer to some conception of the 'essence' of combat?

There is a long and complicated history between the backlots and the battlefield. Doherty (1993) charts this relationship from pre-World War II through to more recent depictions of that conflict. The newsreels and films of World War I and II, Doherty writes, 'are a vivid cultural heritage and a vital historical link' (p. 2). However, few can deny that they go to lengths to lessen the horrific impact of the truth of combat. 'Hollywood's wartime work is portrayed as a stiffly staged show of parading toy soldiers and tightly wound dolls' (ibid.). Doherty blames this largely on the highly restrictive production codes and government oversight of the time which, he says, '[s]traightjacketed' screenwriters, directors, and producers alike (ibid.). Doherty characterises the cinema of World War I and the years between the wars as melancholy affairs. 'The doom of the battlefield and the gloom of the homefront were the dominant shadings until the very eve of the Second World War,' he says (ibid., p. 99). He then, crucially, underscores the turning point between the wars. The downcast character of these early films had to be reversed, he suggests: 'Despair, meaninglessness, pacifism – the dominant legacy of the suicide of Europe – had to be erased, rejected, or revamped' (p. 100). Through succinct summaries of *SERGEANT YORK* (1941) and *AIR FORCE* (1943), Doherty neatly outlines the early evolution of the war genre. The major problem faced by these films, he argues, was the lack of any 'mythological precedent' (ibid., p. 104). This was partly due to the notable increase in aerial combat: 'Unlike the man-to-man jousts of the Great War, the flying fortress bombing runs – the quality of the courage, the skills of the warrior, and the nature of the mission – required that a new mythos be created from the ground up' (ibid.). Doherty shares Basinger's conception of these early genre pieces as heavily reliant on the group dynamic, with the thematic concerns strongly weighted in favour of collective victory. However, Doherty revises this view when considering films made towards the end of the Second World War, arguing that audiences favoured the strong protagonist, giving the example of Rick Blaine in *CASABLANCA* (ibid., p. 105-6). Doherty further charts the depiction of World War II through the lenses of gender and racial studies, then explores the legacy of these early

works by examining more recent war films about other conflicts, including APOCALYPSE NOW and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (ibid., p. 293-310).

Bender (2013) moves from the mythological into the formal and aesthetic, charting a visual history of the World War II combat genre. Bender outlines Basinger's rubric, detailing the five 'waves' of combat films that she outlines in *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. He problematises her later revisions, and her wholly genre-based perspective: '[S]ince the *genre* conventions are her focus, the discussion in her book centers on narrative aspects and character, leaving no room for analysis of the stylistic conventions.' While I draw on Shklovsky's notions of *estrangement*, Bender incorporates the work of Bordwell (1989) and Hunter (1988) into a radical re-conception of combat as a production problem. To this end, Bordwell's work is used to orient interpretation around film production practices (as per Bordwell's groundbreaking 1989 work *Making Meaning*, as discussed on p. 35), while Hunter's work on governmentality is used to explore the meaning that it made in ideological terms. Rigorous statistical analyses of the depiction of combat (*only* combat, and then only combat featuring infantrymen, i.e. no aerial or naval battles) underscore Bender's work. The tables included in his book detail, among other things: camera movements; inclusion of the character pulling the trigger in death shots; average shot length during combat sequences; and types of gunshot deaths. Handheld camera is examined in terms of its effect on the audience, and Bender finishes by pointing to some transtextual directions from his work, particularly into video games. Bender very consciously limits his scope to a specific type of combat in a specific type of film, but his methodology is similar in parts to this research. This thesis demonstrates that the ideological implications of an inferred meaning can re-texture an historical period for future generations; Bender's work is an example of how close textual analyses can demonstrate stylistic links retrospectively. This research has extended Bender's model, drawing connections between stylistic and narrative patterns across many years of cinematic history.

Basinger herself saw fit to revisit her own work in light of the critical acclaim bestowed on Spielberg's SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. She writes that despite a more harrowing and horrific portrayal of combat violence, and a more concatenated story structure, the tenets of the genre still hold firm. Films during the war were about putting 'aside ... doubts and

fears' (Basinger, 1998). Post-war films sought to gain a wider understanding of why the conflict took place, and what society could learn from the successes and failures of the past. These later films were not only about justifying conflict, but also about putting the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of men within a greater historical context. '[The] evolution of purpose shows how a genre, once it is fixed, can be used over time as the culture needs it to be used' (ibid.). Doherty's (2002) analysis of *WE WERE SOLDIERS* (2002) and *BLACK HAWK DOWN* justifies the modern combat film using many of the criteria laid out by Basinger. He notes the reverence of the two films in their adaptation of their respective source texts, and the techniques they use to depict the chaos of post-1945 warfare. The essay makes an analysis of these early twenty-first century films in terms of prevalent social attitudes towards the military and conflict, explaining how an expression of these attitudes in film has driven new cinematic technologies. Doherty notes the change in attitudes towards military power:

'[T]he nitwits, psychos, and conspirators that served so long in Hollywood's military ranks have been supplanted by a duty-honor-country cadre recruited from chapel hour at the Citadel.' (Doherty, 2002, p. 4).

Doherty's work serves as a bridge between the analysis of films like *PATTON* and *THE DIRTY DOZEN* (1967), and the post-9/11 consideration of such films as *THE HURT LOCKER* and *JARHEAD*, by outlining how films expose hidden values and truths about war and the social awareness of conflict.

Advancing Doherty's thinking, Stewart (2009) interrogates the link between technology and politics. Particularly relevant for this thesis are Stewart's assertions about the role of mediation *within* the scope of a film, and the effects this has on an audience. Modern combat utilises technology at every turn: targeting computers, radar and sonar systems, and unmanned aerial surveillance drones squaring off against a faceless enemy. The resultant jumping between live action and that screened on a computer or mobile phone means that plot can be seemingly ignored.

'Narrative agency is subsumed to technology at every level, from aerial tracking, where characters are just faceless pawns on a monitoring grid, to eye-level confrontations, where any human posture toward an encroaching

violence, from suspense to panic, often feels as virtual, as permeated by mediation, as computer interactivity in some low-resolution videogame.'
(Stewart, p. 45).

Further, Stewart acknowledges the effect that a constant re-working and re-conception of the war film genre has had on what is arguably the key ingredient of cinematic storytelling: the story itself.

'While seizing on [the] linked aspects of current Mideast violence, ideological and optical, American films about Iraq or Afghanistan keep failing at the box office. We're told in the press it's too close for comfort, too soon for analysis, too much like free TV to warrant ticket prices. The real problem is that it's too shapeless for plot.' (ibid., p. 45).

Stewart goes on to draw on the link between technology and cinema, at once heralding the former's incorporation into storytelling, but also bemoaning the loss of the grand scenes of war films of old.

'Gone are the choreographed and panoramic staples of the combat genre, beachheads to be won, fortresses held. We get instead random checkpoint suicides, grenade and mortar ambushes in blind alleys, frantic house searches, impromptu firefights – all of it saturated by video.' (ibid.).

There has been a return, in the war cinema of the early twenty-first century, to a *verité* style. The trend is for filmmakers to maintain accuracy as much as possible: from military protocol to weapons and technology, down to the sounds and sights of war. This is partly a cinematic and stylistic trend, but it is also a reaction to and alignment with the military-media complex so prevalent in contemporary society. Stewart calls this phenomenon '[n]ot just a stylistic tic but a political symptom' (ibid., p. 47). There is also a need to mimic actual images being broadcast from current theatres of war. Reporters broadcasting live from firefights and sieges in Iraq, documentarians and photojournalists capturing battles as they happen: the steady stream of images and film from war zones forces filmmakers to step up their game in terms of maintaining a visual grammar that audiences will expect and understand. That noted, it also encourages cinematic storytellers to think creatively about the portrayal of war and conflict, and that is the crux

of this research: by manipulating the techniques that create a realistic point of view – in Shklovsky's words, 'to make objects "unfamiliar"' – filmmakers reveal new truths and perspectives on war and conflict that may have remained unheard.

The role of technology in modern warfare, and the subsequent effect on cinematic representations of the same, is dissected in depth by Paul Virilio (1984) in his *War and Cinema*. Taking Stewart's parallels one step further, Virilio examines propaganda and disinformation in warfare itself, and the concurrent advancements in imaging, cinema and weapons technology. Virilio places the development of image capturing devices – and projection technology – alongside that of weapons and war machines. Both, he suggests, feed into each other, and as conflicts have become more remote, wars of light – based on pure perception and the manipulation of same – are the norm. Virilio is revisited later in the thesis, but his work on technology, mediation and warfare advances the concept of a dynamic and changing cinematographic grammar, particularly with regard to the war film genre. Where once film theorists such as Bordwell, Thompson, Bazin and Deleuze could content themselves with shot, sequence and scene (as word, sentence and paragraph respectively), imbued with the effects of music, lighting, *mise en scène*, and so on, there are now the new techniques of the remediated gaze, the filmed screen (a targeting computer, for instance, or the viewfinder of an unmanned plane), and the new point-of-view shot, from the perspective of a bullet, bomb or missile, rather than of a human being (as in PEARL HARBOR). This new grammatology of cinema – a re-working of modalities – allows filmmakers a broader scope of techniques to convey meaning. It also allows for a deeper ideological engagement with more contemporary conflicts in far-flung corners of the world.

Markert (2011) charts the war film as it enters a new era. He draws parallels between the stunned silence following the devastation of the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001, and the same reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor sixty years earlier (p. vii). He examines the first films to be released in the wake of the attacks in terms of their clear depiction of 'villains' or, more specifically, named enemies of the United States of America, such as Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. 'People,' Markert writes, 'like the face of evil to be clear and unequivocal' (p. 7). He goes on to suggest that with the benefit of some time, films then began to explore deeper themes,

debating justification for the War on Terror, for instance. Michael Moore's documentary *FAHRENHEIT 9/11* (2004) is seen as exemplary of these first 'volleys' against the government's actions, though Markert is quick to question whether Moore's profile and the timing of its release had more to do with the film's success than the content itself (p. 69-71). Other films examined include *WMD: WEAPONS OF MASS DECEPTION* (2004), *WHY WE FIGHT* (2005), and *THE WAR WITHIN* (2005). Markert suggests that the vast majority of films made about these latter conflicts (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn) in the 2000s were documentaries (p. 209). Some fictional narratives began to emerge from around 2005 onwards. Their failure to permeate the public consciousness, Markert argues, can be put down to box office failure (p. 210-211). But it is Markert's concise analysis of *BATTLE FOR HADITHA* (2007) – based on comments made about the film by a US Marine on Netflix – that seems to justify the proposition of this thesis, i.e. that later, more contemporary war films have returned to a nationalistic, propagandist 'grand narrative,' wherein victory for the group and the nation is more important than for the individual. I want to be clear, though, neither to misread Nick Broomfield's film nor Markert's comments. *BATTLE FOR HADITHA* depicts the killing by US Marines of 24 unarmed Iraqi civilians – including men, women, and children – that took place on 19 November 2005 in Haditha, in western Iraq (Shaw, 2008). Across 2007 and 2008 the charges against the Marines involved were dropped (Perry, 2009). Markert, interestingly, analyses the film, and the backlash against it, in terms of 'groupthink.' He outlines the conditions under which groupthink and group behaviour is likely to flourish, and notes similarities between the Haditha incident and the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968 (Markert, p. 223-4). He summarises the Haditha incident thus:

'[T]he worst-case groupthink scenario: a group of strongly bound individuals whose lives depend on each other and who are in a highly stressful situation with a common, extremely hostile view of the enemy – which is considered to be everyone of the same broad category.' (ibid., p. 225)

There is a subversion here of Basinger's diverse platoon trope, wherein the actions of the many are suddenly thrust into moral turmoil. This subversion nevertheless necessitates

analysis of Broomfield's film in terms of the group dynamic. These modern films play with ideology and with morality, but their composition is still markedly dependent on older narrative conventions, i.e. the war film genre.

Weber (2006) examines the post-9/11 cinema in terms of what she sees as a fundamental question: '[W]hat does it mean to be a moral America(n)?' (p. 2). Film, and the feeling of the cinematic, she argues, 'functioned as a metanarrative for experiencing September 11' (p. 3). Going further, and discussing films such as PEARL HARBOR and BLACK HAWK DOWN, she writes:

'This selection of post-9/11 films marks a site in which official US foreign policy converged with popular symbolic and narrative resources to confront the "United States" with questions about its individual, national, and international subjectivities, especially in relation to the war on terror.' (p. 4)

Weber begins by charting a course not dissimilar to Markert, in her suggestion that films released soon after the September 11 attacks conformed to the triumphal and victorious self-perception (perhaps self-delusion) of an America in need of a happy ending. Her analysis of Pearl Harbor points to the three lead characters: one, a paragon of moral virtue; the second, his younger, less assured best friend; and third, the woman through which this moral spectrum is tested. 'A parallel logic runs through the film's representation of Pearl Harbor,' Weber writes:

'In the film's accounting, Pearl Harbor (itself/herself a fallen woman thanks to the surprise attack) is the location that provides the symbolically feminized [sic] flyers who avenge America's moral mistreatment by the hypermasculine Japanese with the Doolittle Raid. By acting on their moral certainty, these US flyers emasculate Japan, thereby symbolically restoring America's and their own security and masculinity.' (p. 18)

This reading of Pearl Harbor certainly aligns itself with the positive, idealised view of America as seen through retrospective accounts of World War II such as PATTON and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. Weber goes on to examine WE WERE SOLDIERS and THE QUIET AMERICAN in the context of a chapter entitled 'Who we wish we'd never been.' I

certainly understand there are questionable aspects to the behaviour of belligerents on all sides during the conflict in Vietnam. This thesis differs from Weber's work by focusing on the 'narrowing' of perspective that occurred in the cinematography, editing, and narratives of films about Vietnam, as this seems to be an area of research somewhat unexplored.

Modern technology affords filmmakers a great deal of artistic and narrative flexibility. With this freedom, though, comes a range of problems for scholars and critics seeking to dissect meanings and intentions. The notion advanced in this thesis is that each semiotic choice – whether from grammars old or more recent – reinforces adherence to certain discursive formations that find expression in varying films and film styles from a range of eras. Newer film techniques, such as the bleached, staggered vision used in *THREE KINGS* or the multi-angle camera set-ups of *THE HURT LOCKER*, do not necessarily separate the viewer from the 'essence' of what is being communicated. Foucault writes that each discourse speaks to a universal truth, but also possesses the power to impart many messages, and thus 'embrace a plurality of meanings' (Foucault, 1972, p. 118). Graphically, this research conceives of Foucault's model as in Figure 2.3.

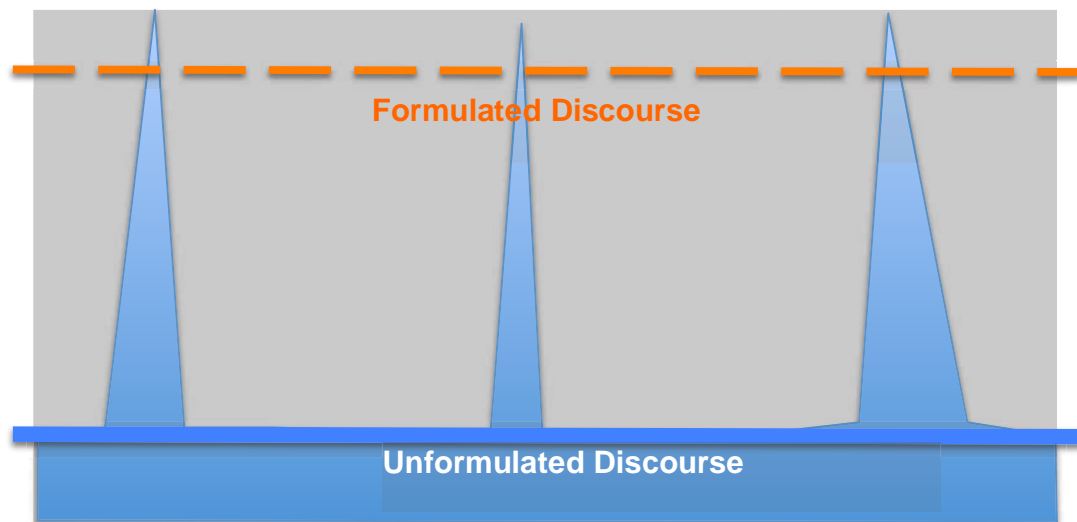


Figure 2.3: Foucault's model of discursive formations

The unformulated discourse is the accepted universal understanding beneath all formulated discourse. That discourse which is formulated – the blue peaks in the graphic – rise above the plurality of meanings that could occur, i.e. beneath the blue and orange horizontals. The unformulated discourse – that which is not said – remains crucial to

Foucault's conception of knowledge and, indeed, truth. For it is often the unsaid or omitted that links one text to others – for example, *THE HURT LOCKER* places a high level of emphasis on the platoon at the centre of the story. This, obviously, is a narrative technique – focusing the audience's attention and driving the narrative forward. However, the omission of other perspectives – that of the enemy, for instance, who is only ever shown hiding in the shadows or watching from afar – belies a view of the Iraq War as essential for the security of the United States of America.

'To analyse a discursive formation therefore is to deal with a group of verbal performances at the level of the statements and of the form of positivity that characterises them: or, more briefly, it is to define the type of positivity of a discourse... The positivity of a discourse ... characterises its unity through time, and well beyond individual oeuvres, books, and texts.'

(Foucault, p. 125-6)

The positivity of a discourse is an indicator of its longevity. We could take to mean by 'positivities' those statements that rise above the line of formulated discourse, but also to mean the links between them – a means of mapping that discourse across time. This model by its very nature historicises discourse, and Foucault does not shy away from this implication, stating unequivocally that 'discourse has not only a meaning or a truth, but a history, and a specific history that does not refer it back to an alien development' (p. 127). This history, this positivity, can be seen as a 'form of dispersion in time, a mode of succession, of stability, and of reactivation... that belongs to it alone, even if it is not entirely unrelated to other types of history' (ibid.). Foucault sees identifying the relationship between discursive formations not as a unifying, but as a diversifying endeavour (p. 160). Thus, Foucault's model would seem to directly oppose Basinger's high structuralist mapping of the tropes of the World War II combat film, and indeed Bronfen's notion of a universal past that haunts the present. But in the very deconstruction of the key texts of the thesis, one can see patterns that overwhelm any sense that the war film has diminished in character or importance over the last century of cinema. Utilising a combination of structuralist and post-structuralist theory, the thesis re-textures eras according to the discourses about those eras that have found formulation. Key questions asked about a given film may include:

- What version of history is presented?
- What can be gleaned about the character of the time?
- Do the filmic techniques distance the audience or bring them closer to the presented history?
- In unsettling the audience, what truths are revealed?
- How can these truths affect readings of other films/texts?

This intertextual and historicised methodology is a surprisingly recent development in film theory. Nichols (2010) outlines a formal analysis supplemented by an understanding of the socio-historical context of the film in question. In introducing the research, Nichols writes:

Engaging Cinema *champions, and strives to demonstrate, the value of a dual formal-social analysis. The power of film stems from the art of film but, ironically, this art, studied in isolation, loses its social power.*'
(Nichols, 2010, p. xxi)

From this grand aim, Nichols revisits cinematic representation from signs and semiotics to grand narratives, from shot composition to camera angles, editing and the effects of music. The victory of form over a strict adherence to reality is clear in this methodology and in the quest to fuse content analysis and form analysis into a single paradigm. But cinematic meaning is often so complex that no single methodology could hope to unlock it. In observing how cinema portrays people and places, for instance, it is enough to analyse the most straightforward filmmaking elements: costume, dialogue, set dressing and *mise en scène*. To construct a notion around the representation of events one might consider plot, treatment of chronology and character motivation. Developing a thesis around the representation of ideas, however, and the transmission of an underlying truth, necessitates the introduction of multimodality as an analytical lens.

Multimodality is a methodology based on semiotics and discourse analysis. While it is dependent on breaking images, graphics, films, down into their component parts for analysis, it examines also the combined communicative power of the whole. David

Machin's (2007) exceptional introduction to this recent analytical tool spans some twenty years of developing research. Breaking this down into its component parts, Machin presents multimodal analysis as an evolution of linguistics and semiotics, now placed within a social context. 'Multimodality,' he writes, 'describes the grammar of visual communication... [it is] an analysis of the rules and principles that allows viewers to understand the meaning potential of the relative placement of elements' (p. ix-x). Machin's image analysis of news photographs from Iraq, for example, uses Barthes' notion of pose – as outlined in the Introduction – to decode the connoted meaning. One photograph shows an American soldier with a machine gun; the other shows a group of Iraqi militia with their guns held high above their heads. Speaking of the latter image, Machin writes:

'If we look at photographs of the US soldiers in Iraq it is unlikely that we will find any depicted holding their guns in this way. Nor do they stand with their chest out to show pride. They must strike poses that connote discipline or calmness.' (p. 30).

On a more abstract level, the difference between the poses in the two photographs is one of ideology – the distance between chaos, in the case of the militia, and civilisation, in the case of the calm US soldier. This is the dominant ideology, the American political stance as framed by the mass media. But Machin warns against taking that particular message at face value, at the expense of others.

'These poses play their part in connoting meanings from a particular discourse of terrorism where chaotic enemies of freedom need to be kept in check by the civilising forces of democracy. Of course, the men depicted as militia may have had all their families killed in US bombing. They may recall the brutality of a century of colonial meddling and atrocities by the British. They may remember the way that the US supports dictators at certain times depending on the necessity of maintaining access to oil resources. This is discourse that is not connoted.' (p. 30).

Machin does not take one side or the other; rather he is merely hinting at the power of the connotation of images, and the sheer number of semiotic resources that might be

deployed to alter the perspective of a viewer. Iedema (2003) suggests that multimodality is not an arbitrary system.

'[A] multimodal account does not a priori privilege any one semiotic over another, although the practice itself may of course foreground one particular one. The foregrounding of one is often accompanied (or achieved) by the backgrounding or "automatization" of other semiotics, to the point where they appear so normal and natural as to become "invisible".' (ibid., p. 39-40).

Elsewhere, Iedema uses a social semiotic approach to analyse the construction of an argument over a sequence of film (2001). His methodology 'aims to enable [him] to question the ways in which the tele-cinematic text presents 'social reality', and should provide means for [Iedema] to 'talk back'' (p. 187), that is, to speak to and about what is being represented. This approach strips visual representation to its 'bare bones,' in the hopes that an analyst might be able to engage directly with the machinations of the medium and their effects on the viewer. Iedema examines a short sequence from a documentary on a hospital in Melbourne, Australia. His method draws on the principles of social semiotics in explaining the ramifications of what is shown or not shown. For example, in a naturalistic documentary such as this, the contraction of time is executed around what could be deemed *assumed* amongst the common viewer. The documentary shows five months in the life of a hospital, but is only itself an hour long. The common viewer would assume several things go on in a hospital everyday: doctors do rounds, X-rays and CT scans are taken, prescriptions are given. The documentary shows only what is necessary to put its message forward; the rest is supposedly a given.

'Social semiotics focuses on these techniques to highlight not only what was edited in and how, but also to show what was left out and thus constructed as unimportant or as natural and taken-for-granted. ... [S]ocial semiotics is also crucially concerned with reasoning about the choices film and television producers make in relation to the sociocultural fields which they decide to hone in on.' (Iedema, 2001, p. 188)

Iedema combines film and genre research with his six levels of analysis: frame, shot, scene, sequence, generic stage, and work as a whole. The semiotic questions of representation, orientation, and organisation are then introduced as reasoning for these choices of focus. These three focal points of interrogation work to break down the findings at each of the six levels, and analyse how the film influences a viewer from a singular point, i.e. choice of camera angle, or from the point of view of the film as a whole. The point of metafunctional questions, Iedema suggests, is to give analysts some kind of notion of what consistent patterns, conventions or tropes emerge (p. 192). Orientation, for instance, places focus on a certain character or class of character. In many modern war films, the focus will be placed on the 'Everyman' and his unit, the 'band of brothers' with whom everyone may identify. These are soldiers that left their jobs in the factories or offices to defend their nation and its interests; these are men with girlfriends, wives, children, families at home; some are young, naïve, brash; others are – for better or worse – older, either bitter and twisted, sent insane, or paternal and wise. Representation situates meaning in character behaviour, amongst other things. Captain Miller (Tom Hanks' character in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*) is a caring soul, keenly aware of the atrocities that surround him. This is shown by his long looks into the distance – accompanied by a long, slow, zoom into his eyes – and the symbolically shaking hand that persists throughout his tour of duty. The third and final metafunction is organization: the arrangement of the elements that combine to make a film, and the relation of those elements. Metafunctions serve two purposes: they explain why patterns emerge, and they also enlighten us as to why tropes persist.

'The point is that these organizational, orientational and representational patterns and choices enhance and reinforce each other.' (ibid., p. 193)

Step in the argument	Scene	Visuals	Relevant talk
A1	Introduction of the patient: Mick	Mick driving a car delivering mail; Mick entering the hospital	Voice-over: 'To balance the books the hospital must treat more patients. Those who will benefit most of this plan are people sitting on waiting lists, people like Mick, the local post man . . .
B1	Meeting where David Hillis (manager) gets Keith Stockman (clinician) to explain his budget overrun	DH at whiteboard; KS seated; DH and KS never in the same shot	DH: 'We can't afford stenting for the rest of the year'; voice-over: 'Keith Stockman is on the line.'
A2	Operation: doctor speaking to Mick	Mick in bed, doctor and nurse talk to him	'We'll try and make you run on six cylinders.'
B2	KS and DH on their own; KS proposes 25% operation level	KS and DH seated in DH's office sharing desk space	DH: '20% is where I'll try and make it sit for the rest of the financial year'; 'what I'll do is just go bang and stop the lot.'
A3	Female clinician (SG) monologue	Camera follows clinician through corridor	'They're still somebody's mother or father, they're still deserving the respect to be treated.'
B3	Clinician points out cost of stents in cupboard	Clinician pointing at boxes in cupboard	'So there's an awful lot of money in this cupboard, well over a hundred thousand dollars I'd say.'

Figure 2.4: Iedema's (2001) sequence analysis.

Iedema's tabulated sequence analysis presents the filmic elements as steps in an argument. Certain similar elements are grouped together as denoted by the letter 'A', e.g. personal segments introducing the key people in the story, moments of conflict involving these people, and so on; the 'counter-points' in the argument are denoted by the letter 'B': administrators arguing about funding, doctors disagreeing about treatment options, ethical dilemmas as posed by people that are not directly involved in treatment. This methodology is ideal for documentary, where an argument is posited and driven home in almost every sequence and scene. For narrative feature film, however, Iedema's system is less effective: an awareness of timing and pacing, shot selection, and audio mixing, is not apparent.

Kay L. O'Halloran (2004) proffers a slightly different approach, combining seemingly disparate elements of multimodal analysis and visual semiotics. O'Halloran's notion of film is linked heavily with the human experience of the world.

Film... involves playing with time sequences in a two-dimensional frame to represent our three-dimensional lived-in material experience of the

world where the faculties of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch are sources for sensory, and therefore, semiotic, input.’ (O’Halloran, p. 109)

In O’Halloran’s method, the onus is well and truly back on the filmmaker and the choices he or she makes in order to drive narrative. Iedema writes that the patterns between filmic elements enhance and reinforce each other; O’Halloran goes further:

‘... it is not only the culmination of choices made across semiotic resources in their interaction with other resources that makes meaning, but also the temporal and spatial unfolding of these choices.’ (ibid., p. 109)

Linguistic approaches to cinematic analysis fall short, according to O’Halloran, in that they cannot accurately define or represent the impact of the semiotic choices made by filmmakers. These methods also fail ‘to map visually the choices as a sequence of continuity and change’ (ibid., p. 113). O’Halloran suggests the use of video-editing software to annotate directly onto the film, e.g. a digital mask can hide unimportant elements of a frame to focus an analyst’s attention on a key piece of set design, or character’s gaze, or use of text or animation. However, the quasi-structuralist approach suggested by this research applies certain discourse analysis techniques – drawn in part from linguistics – to interrogate apparent and emergent patterns in the representation of war across different eras and conflicts. For example, the application of the ‘diverse ethnic group’ convention (drawn from Basinger’s work) is examined according to the presentation of each member of the group on screen. Are some characters privileged over others? Are there members of the group whose presentation appears tokenistic? Similarly the duration of each individual shot gives a sense of the pace of the editing. The heist sequences in *THREE KINGS*, for example, are cut quickly, with rough, handheld camera shots; the same could be said of the rat infestation in the bunker in *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. Compare this to the editing of the oil cloud sequences in *JARHEAD*, which are much slower and deliberate. This analysis is done via a revision of the systems of both O’Halloran and Iedema: a tabular system, based on repeated scene viewing, that positions shot selection alongside shot duration and audio content. While often not referenced directly in the thesis itself, the tables constructed not only give an instant graphic representation of the pacing and shot selection of a number of key sequences

from the flagship films, but also reveal similarities in the presentation of certain war film conventions.

Foucault states it is not the choices that define a text, but rather what is *not* chosen. Foucault hints that once a discursive formation has been delineated around a given era, subject or area of expertise, each enunciated text draws from the ‘great, uniform text, which has never before been articulated’ (Foucault, p. 118). Foucault is quick to assure that it is not this great ‘unformulated discourse’ that we should be analysing, but I would contend that the ‘unformulated discourse’ represents a kind of *urtext* – in this case, perhaps, the quintessential war film. Foucault calls the gaps between the wealth of created discourse ‘enunciative poverty,’ and suggests that a lack of formulation in the case of the ‘not said’ adds value to the statements that do exist (ibid., p. 120). The statements that exist are the elements of ‘unformulated discourse’ that have been given voice. Those elements, therefore, possess *power*, akin to Machin’s notions of ideology in Iraq war photography. Foucault writes that if one finds several statements on the topic of madness, for instance, one would concede to having discovered a ‘discourse, concerning madness.’ The discourse, though, is not the content of the objects themselves, but rather ‘the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given time’ (ibid., p. 33). In this respect, one cannot remove a statement – or, in the case of this thesis, a film – from its time. Initial drafts of the work considered films solely in terms of selected estranging tropes or techniques, but a revisiting of Foucault’s ideas inspired the change to an era-based analysis. The historical undercurrents seething below the events of Vietnam, for example, allowed for the establishment of a series of principled perspectives and narrative themes – e.g. war being wrong, ‘war is hell,’ the true horrors of conflict, unflinching determination in spite of unending barrage – that, no doubt, inspired filmmakers like Robert Altman and Francis Ford Coppola. As noted above, the thesis aims to re-texture major eras of conflict according to the dominant cinematic statements made about those eras. *MASH*, for instance, depicts the horrors of a frontline Army hospital during the Korean War, but uses this premise as a platform to critique America’s involvement in Vietnam. *APOCALYPSE NOW* moves away from a group-based narrative to focus on the journey of an individual into the darkness at the heart of the jungle and of humanity itself. On the other hand, *JARHEAD* presents war as a desirable experience that inevitably disappoints: a return to WWI modalities and meanings. THE

HURT LOCKER depicts a protagonist who is addicted to the thrill of combat. What results from these depictions is a discernible ‘character’ of an era that might support popular conceptions, but can also affect those conceptions in unexpected ways.

‘The potency of myth is that it allows us to make sense of mayhem and violent death. It gives a justification to what is often nothing more than gross human cruelty and stupidity.’ (Hedges, p. 23).

Style, representation and technique, in war cinema, are in constant flux. It is the treatment of war as myth that allows filmmakers to create and recreate stories set in the most dangerous of environs. The gritty *verité* style of reporting emerging from the Middle East in the First and Second Gulf Wars influenced the intimate, handheld, frenetic camera work used in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, which has influenced combat sequences ever since. Its use in such grand narratives transforms a technique of realism into a means of myth-making; the tools of cinematic mythology are also used in factual presentations such as documentaries and news reports: nowhere is the grand narrative of the headlines more prevalent than on America’s Fox News channel. Thus, revealing hidden truths is achieved not only by subverting existing techniques and defying audience expectations, but also by looking outside the chosen style or form. Importantly, though, Stewart notes that in order for a film to present a negative view of war and conflict, it must possess some level of editorial detachment. ‘Retrospection is invaluable,’ he writes, ‘but also needed is another kind of distance, technical rather than historical: a stylistic distance lately telescoped or vanished altogether in the new Iraq regime of participant record’ (p. 47-8). By this logic, then, the recent war film could be perceived as a frenetic reconstruction of the concatenated nature of modern warfare: a visceral, videogame-like presentation bereft of any poetry¹¹. This thesis, however, contends that rather than being characterised by a lack of poetic flourish, the modern war film instead changes the nature of the very poetics of cinema – inspiring revised perspectives (and greater awareness) of the locales, people, and politics of these conflicts.

Basinger (1986) began by outlining the conventions of World War II combat films. Bronfen (ibid.) considers issues of memory and remembrance across a range of films and

¹¹ All the more bizarre, then, that a videogame should be poetic enough to cut through all this white noise – see discussion of *Spec Ops: The Line* in Chapter 6.

eras. Bender (ibid.) examines the aesthetic traits of World War II films. Doherty has discretely examined the aesthetic and ideological qualities of both World War II (1993) and more recent conflicts in the Middle East (2002), while Markert (ibid.) and Weber (ibid.) look at ideological shifts in post-9/11 cinema. This dissertation takes a more direct approach, aligning a retrospective assessment of conflicts and their historical contexts with the evolution of a genre. Within this proposition, I focus more holistically on how periods of combat interact with quiet, less active sequences; how the perspective of soldiers and their experiences shifts and changes through cinematic eras. Furthermore, this research works through representations of various conflicts – through the lens of multimodal analysis – charting the development of the war film genre, but also demonstrating that Basinger's criteria can be applied not only to movies about World War II, but also to those depicting many conflicts.

* * * * *

On Documentary

Audiences are growing more intelligent, and more aware of how films are constructed. Part of this is due to the capacity of distributors to include behind-the-scenes documentaries and featurettes as special features on DVDs and Blu-ray discs (BDs). Additionally, niche distributors – such as Dogwoof Pictures in the UK, Drafthouse Films in the US, and Madman Entertainment in Australia – are allowing a greater audience to view non-mainstream cinematic fare such as anime, documentary, shorts, and feature films from around the world. While documentary films were omitted from the bulk of this research, in concluding this chapter, I will discuss this 'wisening' of the filmgoing public in terms of the convergence of drama and documentary in *RESTREPO* (2010) and *STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE* (2008).

'By its very nature, dramatized documentary makes special claims to accuracy, and such claims are often heightened by the deliberate

deployment of techniques and mannerisms derived from factual documentary.' (Woodhead, 1999, p. 108).

Woodhead, above, is speaking in particular about the portrayal of real events on television, in a 'docudrama' style, but his sentiments are echoed across all visual media, including film. A need for veracity, credibility and realism are now paramount in the production process. In many cases, the only way to achieve such authenticity is to adapt the techniques of another form, e.g. the use of a handheld camera style in dramatic feature films. But the importance of purely *dramatic* anchors – drawn from fiction – cannot be ignored.

Errol Morris's *STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE* examines the events at Abu Ghraib prison in late 2003. The global media obtained several photographs in 2004, that depicted US military police humiliating and abusing prisoners. A public scandal resulted, but questions were also raised about the regulation of prisons in war zones, and the treatment of prisoners of war. Morris's documentary explores these questions, but also what the photographs means in terms of being symbols of abuse, of chaos, in what is meant to be an ordered, disciplined, military operation. 'Photographs don't tell us who the real culprits might be,' Morris says. 'They can also serve as a coverup, they can misdirect us... Photographs reveal and conceal, serve as [both] exposé and coverup' (Morris, 2008). *STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE*, like most of Morris's documentaries, makes use of file footage and archive photography to add colour and verification to the events discussed. Another of Morris's signature techniques is the use of slow-motion dramatic reconstruction, used early on in *THE THIN BLUE LINE*, which told the story of the murder of a police officer in November 1976. The crime is re-enacted a number of ways, in order to reflect the varying testimony of those involved. Morris himself justifies his re-enactments thus:

'Memory is an elastic affair. We remember selectively, just as we perceive selectively. We have to go back over perceived and remembered events, in order to figure out what happened, what really happened. My re-enactments focus our attention on some specific detail or object that helps us look beyond the surface of images to something hidden, something

deeper – something that better captures what really happened.’ (Morris, 2008).

So it is in the repetition of past events – in different lights, with different details – that brings attention to crucial elements of a narrative that may have previously been ignored. A documentary is necessarily a narrative – re-enactments dislocate themselves from that narrative to focus a viewer on a specific event or detail. This dislocation is a technique of estrangement. Similarly, Morris has devised a way of interviewing people such that they appear to look straight down the lens of the camera. This is incredibly disconcerting for the viewer, particularly when the interviewee is rationalising the deployment of napalm in Vietnam, or the torture of prisoners in Iraq (Morris, 2003; Morris, 2008). These techniques, though, draw the viewer in, and challenge their perception of events and personalities in a new way.

RESTREPO documents the year its filmmakers spent in the company of a US Army platoon in the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan. The platoon must establish themselves in one of the most dangerous locations in Afghanistan – at one stage, a fifth of all daily combat in Afghanistan took place in this single valley (Junger, 2008). While in their company, the filmmakers observe the daily struggles of the men on the ground as they balance individual hopes and opinions with orders from their superiors. Interestingly, the film captures the regular negotiations between the US soldiers and the local elders – a customary intercourse that the soldiers doubt will have any meaningful effect. The two significant missions shown in the film are the establishment of an advanced observation post in the valley, and Operation Rock Avalanche, which resulted in the deaths of several local Taliban leaders (in addition to three American soldiers and at least ten Afghani civilians; Rubin, 2008). What struck me in watching the film early on during this research, and again more recently, are the ways in which the story is structured like a war film. Tropes from the World War II combat film are used to shape a discernible narrative from the natural chaos of daily involvement in a conflict. These include relatable, ethnically (and socioeconomically) diverse characters, the need for inaction or rest between periods of depicted combat, and the discussion of home. While some of the comments made by the soldiers do not adhere to a strictly ‘nationalist’ ideology or ‘grand

narrative,' it is significant for this thesis that the filmmakers would choose to structure their documentary in this way.

On the one hand, documentary innovates, particularly in the hands of a filmmaker like Errol Morris. On the other, it requires a recognisable generic structure to communicate its message. Documentary purports to be a presentation of reality, but it is just as much of a re-presentation as feature film. The interpretation of the techniques used is predicated on the same questions of the image that have dogged film theorists for over a century. What is crucial though, is that documentarians have the same aim as filmmakers creating narrative feature films about war and conflict. Both seek to transmit some kind of 'essence' of truth. Both seek to take the viewer out of their comfort zone and show them something of the 'reality' of what soldiers and commanders experience both in battles, and during the long silences in between. These goals require the same fundamental kind of technique: estrangement. In the case of feature film, disrupting continuity, or changing the structure of a lens, will create the desired effect, discombobulating an audience and de-automatising their perception. In the case of documentary, it is the imposition of a recognisable narrative structure and cinematic devices that allows the audience to gain an understanding of a given phenomenon. In Morris's films, his use of re-enactment is a removal from 'realistic' representation that lets a viewer closer to a conception of the truth. In *RESTREPO*, Basinger's tropes are almost instantly recognisable. In documentary, the inverse of the defamiliarising techniques used in feature film, has precisely the same effect. The key is that it is in using estranging techniques on an audience that filmmakers give some sense of what war is like.

Chapter 3 -

For Glory: World Wars I & II

World War I's opening shots were, ostensibly, the practice rounds fired into a tree by Bosnian Serb student Gavrilo Princip in May 1914. Just over a month later, on 28 June 1914, Princip repeated the action with consistent accuracy: this time, however, the bullets killed the Archduke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie. This incident caused Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia on 28 July: a mere seven days would pass before the First World War – known initially as the Great War – was underway. Hindsight has prompted historians such as John Keegan and Jeremy Black to observe that the Great War was caused largely by diplomatic tensions – predicated on a series of insular and obsolete charter documents – that boiled over. The exact cause remains under intense historical and critical scrutiny, but the cost was staggering: even the most conservative of estimates places the total death toll (both military and civilian) at over fifteen million. This does not include the twenty million wounded, and over 7.5 million missing in action (Black, 2011, p. 216-17). Upon its conclusion, World War I was the costliest conflict in human history in terms of casualties, and this was largely due to the changing nature of warfare. The advancements – and refinements – in weapons of destruction was great, but similar advancements were not made in armour, protective equipment or building reinforcements (*ibid.*, p. 230-33). So it was that hundreds of thousands of young men willingly rushed into the fray – called upon by King or Kaiser – only to find the glory of war rendered a hellish nightmare, from which many of them would never return. The need to inspire such patriotic fervor often fell to the arts, and

the music, poetry, and visual art of the Great War is laden with nationalistic ideals, tales of great heroes and their justifications for fighting. 'It's A Long Way to Tipperary,' written in 1912 by Jack Judge, was often sung by the troops as they marched between towns, as was 'Pack All Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag.' World War I was the first conflict where governments appointed Official War Artists to accompany units to the front line and paint what they saw. Artists such as Wyndham Lewis, John Singer Sargent, and Arthur Streeton often learned much of their craft in the trenches, and presented works that captured the atmosphere and tension of battle. Lewis's *A Battery Shelled*, an abstract rendering of a unit under attack, uses harsh lines and featureless men to depict the all-consuming chaos of battle.

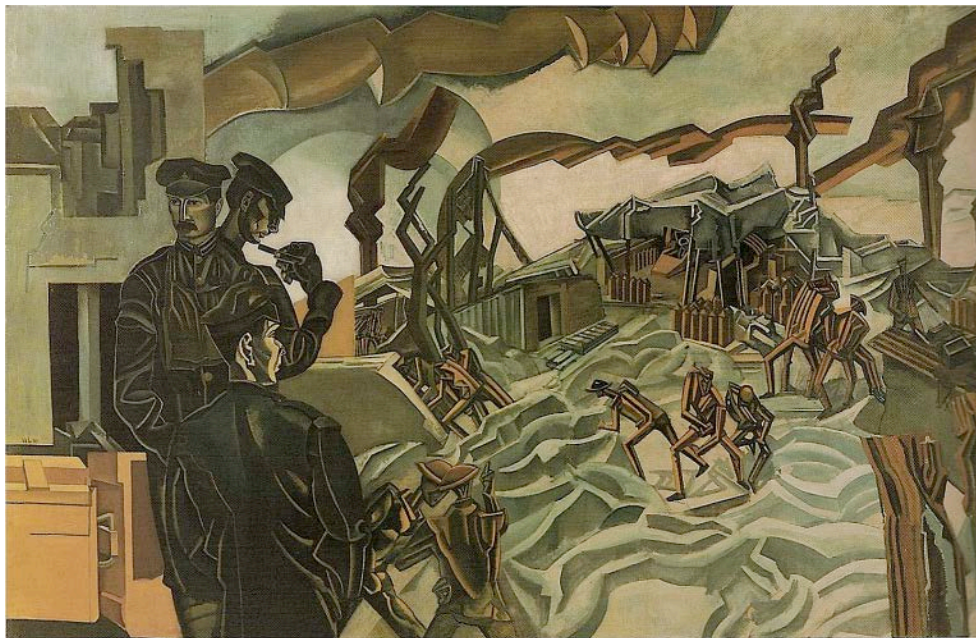


Figure 3.1: A Battery Shelled, Wyndham Lewis, 1919.

Solely because of less-developed filmmaking technology, it might be assumed that films released between 1914 and 1918 are different to those of the Second World War and beyond. This is partly true: films of this era were silent – sound in film was not prevalent until the late 1920's. But the real tension of the time was between what Gunning (1986) calls 'actuality film' and 'the cinema of attractions'; the two most prevalent genres of the era were documentary and comedy (*ibid.*). The years of the Great War fell during the prime of Charlie Chaplin's career, and the 1910's saw the beginnings of such Hollywood giants as John Ford and Raoul Walsh (Alvarez, 2010). That noted, war films were indeed

made. In 1915, Griffith himself made *BIRTH OF A NATION*; 1918 saw Will S. Davis take the helm on the naval thriller *NO MAN'S LAND*; while in 1919, in *THE LOST BATTALION*, Burton L. King reconstructed the entrapment and subsequent bravery of the men of the 77th Infantry Division. However, the great majority of films about World War I were made well after the armistice, and well into the era of sound. These include *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (1930), *THE ROAD BACK* (1937), *FORTY THOUSAND HORSEMEN* (1940) and, more recently, *A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT* (2004) and *PASSCHENDAELE* (2008). In the films produced during the conflict, there very much remains the notion of higher moral fibre, and the films are propagandist in the sense that they privilege the well-being of the nation and the world-at-large over the safety or importance of individuals: the 'grand narrative.' Cinematography was wide; editing was sparse: the cinematic message of the First World War was geared towards the glorification of combat and the sweetness of victory.

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the original delegation of two representatives from each of the five victorious nations (Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States) proved diplomatically and logistically cumbersome. The Prime Minister of France, Georges Clemenceau, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando, and the British Prime Minister Lloyd George emerged as an informal Council of Four (Steiner, 2005, p. 291). These four men held the balance of peace in their hands – the hard-won victory of the Allied Forces. While all were determined to broker a universal charter for European stability, each had their own conditions to incorporate, none more so than Wilson, Clemenceau, and George. Each of these three men held Germany responsible for the war, and sought to punish it. However, as Zara Steiner puts it:

'Germany was not dismembered nor was its capacity for revival destroyed. The country remained basically intact and potentially, given the disappearance of the empires on its borders, the most powerful state on the continent. The treaty terms were harsh but not unduly so given the length and destructiveness of the war and the completeness of the allied victory.'
(ibid., p. 295)

Clemenceau wanted guarantees that its border with Germany would be protected, and for France and its neighbour to become more equal in power than before the outbreak of the conflict. George tempered Clemenceau's fervour: while still wanting to punish Germany, George advocated a more universal peace, and one that would not utterly debilitate the German state and create an impoverished populace. Wilson advocated the formation of a League of Nations that would hold the balance of peace, seemingly, in perpetuity. All had to make sacrifices, and the resulting Treaty of Versailles made the existing peace somewhat uneasy. Germany had to cede small territories to then-Czechoslovakia, France, and Denmark, among others, but the concession that rankled most was that of land back to the reconstituted Poland (ibid.). Clemenceau had wanted to annexe the Rhineland, but George opposed this, stating such a reclamation would destabilise the continent. As something of a consolation, France was granted the resource-rich region of Alsace-Lorraine. While Germany conceded this reasonably amicably, the loss of Poland was a somewhat harder sacrifice to bear (Sharp, 2010, p. 48). The Treaty also granted France an occupation of the left bank of the Rhine, dependent on German cooperation. This, and all other concessions to Germany, however, were dependent on a number of conditions, as Sharp explains:

'The Allied benchmarks for measuring Weimar Germany's credentials as an honest post-war partner required it to acknowledge three things: that its pre-war behaviour was the main cause of the war; that it had fought the war using foul means; and that the military outcome was a decisive defeat.'
(ibid.)

At the last minute, though, George made the French occupation of the Rhine dependent on American support, which never came. The inter-war period, for Clemenceau, was spent trying to reverse this refusal. In this way it was perhaps Clemenceau who saw most clearly the dangers to come. The German military was severely restricted, and the government had to pay reparations to the victors, which took a harsh toll on the national economy (Black, 2011, p. 251). The Paris 'peace,' then, was more of a ceasefire, and German resentment could only simmer for so long (Sharp, p. 48-9).

The Second World War can be seen, or so Jeremy Black has put it, as 'a product in part of the factors that had caused and sustained that conflict and, more particularly, of the

unfinished business its unsatisfactory close had left' (Black, 2011, p. 249). However, Antony Beevor (2012) is quick to assure that there was no way of knowing how this second global conflict would play out. There was certainly no way of foreseeing the iron will, insanity, and malevolence of its chief instigator.

'The aftermath of the First World War had certainly created unstable frontiers and tensions across much of Europe. But there can be no doubt that Adolf Hitler was the chief architect of this new and far more terrible conflagration, which spread across the world to consume millions, including eventually himself.' (Beevor, 2012, p. 10).

Hitler grew up in Austria-Hungary, on the Bavarian border, then spent his early adulthood in Vienna and Munich, working as a casual labourer and artist. Becoming destitute in 1909, Hitler lived in homeless shelters when fear of Eastern European immigration was at an all-time high. Living in this hotbed of prejudice, combined with a nationalism inspired in him at an early age, fuelled political ambitions that were inflamed further by his involvement with Anton Drexler after serving – with no small amount of distinction – in the Bavarian Army during World War I. Drexler was a fierce anti-Semite, anti-Marxist, and anti-Capitalist, who mentored Hitler through his introduction to political life (Kershaw, 2008, p. 82). Originally assigned by military intelligence to infiltrate and spy on the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (DAP), or German Workers' Party, Hitler was inspired to join on meeting Drexler, and did so in 1919. Hitler rose in prominence in the DAP, eventually replacing Drexler as its Chairman. Hitler was, by many accounts, a fierce orator, and used words and addresses to great effect. Those in attendance often called his presence hypnotic, and even in small groups his eyes were renowned for their piercing qualities (Kressel, 2002, p. 121). Hitler used these persuasive powers to whip up support for a radical new direction for the party, wherein reparation payments for the Great War would cease, and the perceived injustices of the Treaty of Versailles would be reversed. The annexation of land was crucial to the rise of the Third Reich, and the invasion of Poland by German forces on 1 September 1939 was the first in a series of military actions oriented towards this end. Two days later, on 3 September, Britain, France, and the independent nations of the British Commonwealth declared war on Germany. The Second World War was a truly global war that involved over thirty

separate states and resulted in the deaths of between sixty million and eighty million people, between 3 and 4 per cent of the world's population (White, 2011). These figures include the calculated genocide of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, and the concurrent state-sponsored extermination of the Romani and many disabled people and homosexuals, among others (Snyder, 2010, p. 384). This meant that the Second World War eclipsed its predecessor as the deadliest conflict in recorded history.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, society had become highly industrialised, and geared towards the production of goods and munitions in aid of the war effort. The Atlantic Charter of 1941 laid out a set of guidelines for the post-war world as envisioned by the Allies, and among its elegant and simple directives were that all people had a right to self-determination, and that there was to be global economic cooperation and advancement of social welfare (Brinkley & Facey-Crowther, 1994, p. xvii.). The Atlantic Charter paved the way for a widespread policy shift both during World War II and in its aftermath. During the war, however, hard decisions had to be made. The issue of conscription was brought forward once more in various Western democracies, including Australia, but it was quelled through popular outcry. Food rationing was prevalent worldwide, particularly amongst the Allies. Women took to typically male occupations during the war effort, and this paved the way for the women's liberation movement of the 1960's; the seeds for this movement had been sown in World War I, where a similar gender shift in the workforce had occurred (McAndrew, Thomas, et. al, 2005, p. 218). Propaganda was rife on both sides, and the awareness of attempts at social conditioning spawned some of the greatest and most controversial literature of the twentieth century, including *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984*.

Art played a significant role in World War I, in terms of reporting and representing the conflict, and the same was true of the Second World War. The official war artists again accompanied the troops to the frontline, this time with much more extensive government support. The War Artists Advisory Committee, established in Britain by Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery, sought to capture the essence of warfare. As Clark put it, 'the camera cannot interpret, and a war so epic in its scope by land, sea and air, and so detailed and complex in its mechanism, requires interpreting [by artists] as well as recording' (Tolson, 2005). Music again was used by the troops to maintain morale and

keep home in mind, and at home to keep spirits high. Edith Piaf and Marlene Dietrich rose to prominence, both as consummate entertainers but also as sex symbols for the men on the front, alongside popular actresses such as Ava Gardner and Ingrid Bergman. This conflict was layered, however. It was not just the military cost that art sought to grasp, but also the deep psychological trauma of the Holocaust. Very little art was produced in the ghettos or concentration camps, and the Nazi officers often confiscated what was made. It is in remembrance of experiences that the most poignant Holocaust art has been created. This includes poetry, painting, film and even, in the case of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, comic strips.

Politically, socially and economically, the world changed during and in the wake of the Second World War: such monumental shifts manifested themselves culturally in large-scale, high-concept, broad-perspective art, literature, and, of course, cinema. From the midst of a society at war came films such as *Casablanca*, and filmic discourses of war were fundamentally altered. Like films made during the First World War, these were about big ideas, high concepts and about keeping aloft the spirits of those on the home front. The concepts of nation, victory, bravery, and duty, were again at the fore, and filmmaking techniques including camera angles, editing and set dressing were used to foreground these concepts in the mind of the viewer. The 'grand narrative' is (in essence) an archetypal story structure that takes in these monumental notions, portraying them as seen through the eyes of a few central characters. Largely, these characters are accessible and engaging, but their individual stories are irrelevant, and they are also highly expendable.

In Lewis Milestone's *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, the focus shifts from nation, from high politics and grand strategy, to that very group of central characters. This is a story of men grappling with their position as pawns in a chess game where the most likely outcome is that they will be taken. From their indoctrination at high school, and their subsequent enlistment, it follows the course of consciousness from the boys' initial naïve enthusiasm and excitement, through their awakening and enlightenment to the horrors of war. In many cases, the narrative traces their journeys to death. It introduced themes that would later be expressed in satirical works about war, including Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* (the 1970 film adaptation was directed by Mike Nichols), Stanley Kubrick's

DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB (1964), and Robert Altman's MASH (1970). In order to try and grasp its importance and futility, these offered a cynical view of war and its political machinations, as well as a comedic approach to certain aspects of warfare. It also introduced an awareness of the enemy that had never before been seen – there was a tendency to make the enemy faceless, devoid of identity, and of humanity¹². Hollywood was taking a bold step by showing Germans as protagonists; as ordinary people grappling with the totality of war, just as all Americans – and indeed, soldiers from all nations – had done during World War I. Further, the film showed the Germans' enemy; there is a long scene in which Paul Bäumer, the main character, is alone in a foxhole with a dead French soldier. Examining the contents of the dead man's pockets, his diary and papers, reveals that he and Bäumer are very much alike.

While ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT changed war film in subtle ways, its legacy echoes through the genre to this day – most notably the use of wide, sprawling landscapes captured with 35-millimetre film, and its introduction of a small, ensemble cast, drawn from the diversity of German society¹³. ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT took the traditional propagandist notions of state, King, President, liberty and country, and projected them through the poignant tales of men in the trenches:

'You still think it is beautiful to die for your country. The first bombardment taught us better. When it comes to dying for country, it's better not to die at all.'

Throughout the film, the focus remains on Paul Bäumer, the major character, and his compatriots. The treatment of Bäumer is very different to a contemporary main character, through which the audience can experience the storyline. Bäumer remains a central figure, but it is through him that the audience experiences war in its totality, both through his encounters with his friends, and in the film's portrayal of battle. But despite its concentration on an interesting and diverse group of soldiers, ALL QUIET ON THE

¹² This tendency recurs in cinema of the post-September 11 world. See Chapter 5 for more.

¹³ At the time of its release, and despite its winning two Academy Awards – audiences in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other anti-Nazi nations were reluctant to accept the portrayal of Germans as 'more humanised' or 'just like you and me.' It was only years after the conclusion of the Second World War that *All Quiet* began accruing accolades such as inclusion in the AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies (American Film Institute, 2013).

WESTERN FRONT aligns with other films of its kind, especially in terms of its generally 'wider' cinematographic approach, and its preference for longer takes. Each of these elements will be examined in detail in this chapter, alongside the same cinematic elements as found in PATTON (1970).

PATTON tells the story of General George S. Patton, Jr., from the moment he seizes control of the American troops in North Africa following their humiliating defeat at the hands of the Nazis along the Kasserine Pass. Having instilled discipline into his troops, he leads them to victory at the Battle of El Guettar, and then moves on to participate in the invasion of Sicily. Patton defies orders to be cautious, and – instead of waiting for Montgomery's Eighth Army – captures both the city of Palermo and the port of Messina. He is stripped of his command when he slaps a convalescing soldier, and is forced to sit out the landings at Normandy. He pleads for, and is granted, another command, this time of the Third Army, and sweeps rapidly through France until, due to lack of fuel, his assault cannot continue. He then moves through Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, and into Germany. More outspokenness, including insults to Russians and American politicians, results in his loss of command, but he remains to oversee the rebuilding of Germany after the war.

PATTON is a 'bio-pic': a film that tells the story of one man. In format, initially, it is different from many World War II films that tend to focus on the activities of an ensemble or platoon (as representative of the army or nation as a whole). However, the film directs the viewer's attention away from the central character – and towards grand strategy – at many key moments, and therefore is well and truly fitting in the World War II cinematic canon, eschewing a close character analysis in favour of a wider view. Patton himself was a controversial figure. A distinguished soldier, he rose steadily through the ranks, fighting in the Mexican Revolution, and in both World Wars. The film amplifies some of the more controversial of his characteristics, such as his candour and brashness. While the real Patton was indubitably driven and ambitious, he was nonetheless less neurotic than the film makes out. The film is based on two observations of Patton and his exploits, by General Omar Bradley and Ladislav Farago, respectively. Both Bradley and Farago noted the man's forthrightness and ambition, but also that he was a brilliant tactician who cared about the men under his command. Francis Ford Coppola – who

later went on to write, direct and produce 1979's *APOCALYPSE NOW*, examined in detail in Chapter 4 – and Edmund H. North, who wrote the film's screenplay, did not intend to parody the man, as some have claimed; rather, they wanted to paint an entertaining and enlightening portrait of one of the 'characters' of the Second World War. They did this by deviating somewhat from the facts: Patton, rather than being tall and broad, like George C. Scott, was quite thin and small; rather than being a strong, confident orator, as portrayed in the opening sequence of the film, he was softly-spoken and measured in conversation. In keeping with bio-pic conventions – rather than adhering strictly to Basinger's notions of what constitutes a World War II combat film – *PATTON* attempts more to show the different sides of the man's personality. But it is *PATTON*'s treatment of the military that firmly ensconces it in the traditions of World War II cinema. Although Patton is a central figure, the film consistently moves focus away from his character, and more onto his interactions with his men, his role within the military system, and the outcomes of the battles he oversees. The depiction of the battle at El Guettar, for instance, makes consistent use of a wide shot of the battlefield – inter-cut occasionally with shots of men advancing and retreating – always keeping the environment in view (Figure 3.2). It is this tendency to privilege the wider context of a narrative scenario, a preference for a wide, panoramic view of landscape and battlefield, and an appropriately protracted approach to editing, that ensconces *PATTON* as exemplary of cinema of the World Wars.



Figure 3.2: The army advances in PATTON.

Films about World War II fall into just a few categories, and adhere – more or less – to a set of conventions established from within the period of the war itself to the mid 1960s

(Basinger, 1986, p. 7). Basinger's list of key 'requirements' for the World War II combat film is helpful in identifying the tropes that emerged during this period. This list includes such conventions as a group of central characters from different ethnic and social backgrounds, a strong but likeable leader, or a reluctant leader who must bring together the disparate soldiers into a cohesive fighting unit. Basinger's work centres around the 1943 film *Bataan* which, she argues, establishes the conventions of World War II combat film that have been seen ever since. On the establishment of these conventions in *BATAAN*, she writes:

'In film history, BATAAN is rather like CITIZEN KANE. It wasn't that audiences had not seen KANE's devices before: Deep focus photography, out-of-sequence narrative, low ceilings had appeared in Hollywood before. But KANE fused them together in one film, and told a powerful story by using all of them to one purpose ... what KANE did for form and narrative, BATAAN does for the history of the combat genre. It does not invent the genre. It puts the plot devices together, weds them to a real historical event, and makes an audience deal with them as a unified story presentation – deal with them, and remember them.' (Basinger, 1986, p. 61-62).

There is a revision necessary here to Foucault's notion of discursive formations, when one looks at film genre. It is not just the formations of discourse, but rather their arrangement, that gives war cinema its distinctive characteristics. True enough, Foucault himself examines the arrangement of discourses, in the sense that he studies what he calls 'systems of dispersion.' He believes that by studying them, one can find a collection of rules:

'[The dispersion] can be described in its uniqueness if one is able to determine the specific rules in accordance with which its objects, statements, concepts, and theoretical options have been formed.' (Foucault, p.72)

Foucault's 'rules' of dispersion – like Basinger's list of conventions – are not just based on the language of the formation, but on the character of the time that allowed for it. In this

sense, the films of the World Wars – i.e. films released during or shortly after their duration – could *only* have been produced and distributed at that time. That said, a truly canonical war film would *transcend* its own time, and speak to others. Further, Basinger extrapolates her story requirements into an outline form; she says that this outline can be used to determine the relationship of a given film to the genre of the World War II combat film.

‘Also, its position in the evolutionary process is established, as well as its overall relationship to history and reality. It demonstrates how a primary set of concepts solidifies into a story – and how they can be interpreted for a changing ideology.’ (Basinger, 1986, p. 78)

As adumbrated in the opening chapters of this dissertation, Basinger’s outline has been used (alongside a scene analysis methodology drawn from the work of Iedema and O’Halloran) not only for films of World War II, but for films concerning all other key conflicts addressed in this thesis. The framework is readily adaptable to all war films, not least for its comprehensive consideration of all the elements that make any war film part of the wider genre: the hero; the enemy; the portrayal of women (if any); the setting; narrative structure; cultural attitudes to death, propaganda, the conflict itself; and the ways in which ‘the tools of cinema are employed to manipulate viewers into various emotional, cultural, and intellectual attitudes’ (ibid., p. 62).

In earlier war cinema, there is a strong focus on overall tactics, rather than the experience of individual platoons (Westwell, 2006. p. 23; Allison, 2010b, p. 88) – reinforcing Westwell’s (2006) declaration that ‘the cultural imagination of war during World War I insisted that war be understood in relation to a chivalric code of honour, a Christian rhetoric of sacrifice and a powerful discourse of nationalism’ (p. 6). This focus on the collective experience of war is emblematic of the grand narrative. There are a great number of World War II-related films that fall into this timeframe (from many different nations), but for the purposes of examining Basinger’s tropes, the thesis will examine *CASABLANCA* (1942), *THE DESERT RATS* (1953) and *THE DIRTY DOZEN* (1967).

CASABLANCA is frequently rated amongst the greatest films in cinematic history. The reasons for this, according to the Los Angeles Times-News, are ‘the purity of its Golden

Age Hollywoodness [and] the enduring craftsmanship of its resonantly hokey dialogue' (Strauss, 1992). *CASABLANCA* is unique in war cinema in that it tells a story outside the combat itself; a tale at the periphery of war. The film's protagonist, Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), is obviously quite apathetic to the war effort itself, but nonetheless is a star profiteer from it; his nightclub makes a great deal of money from the soldiers, travellers and auxiliary staff of the conflict. But *CASABLANCA* adheres to Basinger's conventions nevertheless. Amongst the ensemble cast are an American expatriate who owns a bar in Morocco, his Norwegian ex-lover, her new Czech husband, and two Italian mobsters (with – more or less – hearts of gold). This rich and intriguing mix of nationalities, sensibilities and occupations sets up *CASABLANCA* to be a story of cultural interaction amidst the hustle and bustle of the Moroccan nightlife during the Second World War. The enemy remains faceless for much of the film, despite the audience being well aware of the war being fought on many fronts in Northern Africa. The combat of *CASABLANCA* takes place largely off-screen, and is alluded to in dialogue. However, the war is ever-present in the minds of the characters. Ilsa Lund's new husband Victor Laszlo is a concentration camp survivor. The key MacGuffins¹⁴ of the film are letters of transit that are brought into Rick Blaine's nightclub; these are documents that would allow the holder free travel around Nazi-occupied Europe, out thereof and back to America. Nazi officials frequent Rick's Café Américain. Cinematographer Arthur Edeson makes extensive use of medium shots through the film – framing the subject from the waist or midriff up¹⁵. According to Bordwell and Thompson, the medium shot is particularly useful for showing character traits and emphasising conversations, as 'gesture and expression now become more visible' (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 262). The editing, too, is protracted, as in much cinema of the World Wars – the lengthening of takes grants the characters and conversation priority, thereby making them the key vehicles of the narrative. *CASABLANCA*, though, will always be a love story set against the backdrop of a global conflict. A greater grasp of the grand narrative and its implementation can be observed in *THE DESERT RATS*.

¹⁴ 'MacGuffin' was a term coined by Alfred Hitchcock to describe plot devices that drive the story without really being key to character motivation, story elements or narrative meaning (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

¹⁵ Edeson was also cinematographer on *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

THE DESERT RATS also brings together a diverse group, this time a band of Australian soldiers, under the command of British Captain “Tammy” MacRoberts. The film tells the story of the Australian 9th Division, who were tasked with holding off the Germans at Tobruk in Libya. The mission was meant to last two months – English command later admitted to that being a conservative estimate – but instead the Australians dug in and held the town for eight months. The film was an American production, but showcased some Australian acting talent, namely Charles “Bud” Tingwell and Chips Rafferty, alongside Hollywood stalwarts Richard Burton and James Mason. The combat is largely staged, and like Basinger’s exemplar film BATAAN, the film itself is shot predominantly on set-pieces. It is in the quiet moments between comrades, and between command and infantry, that the film situates itself in the World War II combat film template. There is a need, according to Basinger, for the intense combat sequences to be offset by periods of calm, where the introspection and reflection of the characters becomes a lens through which an audience might come to terms with the inevitability of combat. Basinger calls this duality ‘action and repose’ (1986, p. 74). “Tammy” MacRoberts is a hard-nosed English Captain, who reluctantly accepts command of the Australian forces. He is a disciplinarian, and resents the lazy attitude of the Australian troops; the feeling is inversely mutual. It is in MacRoberts’ acknowledgement of the hardiness and courage of the Australians, and in their acceptance of his leadership – and therefore a completed, Hollywoodised narrative arc – that the film adheres to Basinger’s rubric. Once again the conversations and characters are key, as evidenced by the use of long and medium shots, but the portrayal of combat as inevitable, unending, and unrelenting, firmly ensconces THE DESERT RATS in the World War II combat film canon.

As in THE DESERT RATS, the group of convicts in Robert Aldrich’s THE DIRTY DOZEN are also from various ethnic and religious backgrounds: Polish, Italian, Spanish, Jewish and even the (almost racial, certainly spiritual) division between the East and West coasts of the United States. The group are all in prison with sentences ranging from many decades in prison to execution, and are placed under the command of Major John Reisman, who must train them in preparation for a dangerous assault on a Nazi retreat. Once again military protocol is a feature of the story, and the convention of a reluctant leader taking a rag-tag group of soldiers – often undisciplined or lacking in military training – on a dangerous mission is established. The film also attempts to show

something of the reality of war in the deaths of many of its main characters. The only survivors after the attack are two military men, Major Reisman and Sergeant Bowren, and one of the convicts, Joseph Wladislaw. There are also dirty games being played: one of the convicts alerts the Germans, and one of them kills the wife of one of the Nazi officers, which further exposes their presence. When the Nazi officers and their wives retreat into an underground bunker, the convicts drop grenades and gasoline through the air vents, killing all the officers and accomplishing their mission, but also killing several innocent women in the process. The moral, more or less, of *THE DIRTY DOZEN*, is that war is tough, and sometimes you need to think outside the box in order to get things done. Whether this is a good approach is not up for question, but the theory is that it makes entertaining films, a theory supported by an array of similar films: *THE GREAT ESCAPE* (1963) and *KELLY'S HEROES*, to name two. The same narrative also holds appeal to contemporary cinema. Quentin Tarantino's *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS* unabashedly tampers with history in order to tell the story of a group of men self-tasked with collecting as many Nazi scalps as they can. It is a heavily-stylised reworking of history in signature Tarantino style, full of violence, canny dialogue and larger-than-life characters. In Tarantino's alternative timeline, the Basterds plan to suicide bomb a screening of a Nazi propaganda film. However, unbeknownst to them, the theatre is owned by the one surviving member of a Jewish family killed in a Nazi raid several years earlier. The survivor plans to ignite several thousand feet of film behind the screen, sending the theatre up in flames. Hitler himself attends the screening, and, in the ensuing chaos, is mauled by close-quarters machine gun fire. However, in both *THE DIRTY DOZEN* and *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS*, there remains a clear and diverse group of soldiers under the leadership of a high-ranking officer, reluctant or otherwise. The modernisation of the 'eccentric group of characters single-handedly changing history' narrative carries with it a level of absurdity and gratuitous violence akin to video games, in particular the *WOLFENSTEIN* series. The cinematography, too, has evolved from mostly medium and longer shots to involve complex crane and dolly movements, alongside extreme close-ups and strange angles¹⁶. But it is the narrative itself that justifies the inclusion of both *THE DIRTY DOZEN* and *INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS* in the World War II combat film canon.

¹⁶ This mish-mash style of filmmaking betrays Tarantino's many and varied influences, from classical cinema, through Kubrick, Scorsese, to the artistic and experimental films of Asia and Europe.

Both films subvert the historical record, but maintain the basic structure of a diverse group of men carrying out a mission in order to advance the Allies' cause. The characters, however eccentric or unlikely, remain vessels of the audiences' point of view, and it is through them that we see the atrocities of war in all their brutality.

CASABLANCA and THE DIRTY DOZEN are different to many other war films in that they do not claim to be based on actual events. CASABLANCA is a fictional story set within an historical context, as is THE DIRTY DOZEN, also the latter is based on a World War II legend. There was also an airborne demolitions unit called the Filthy Thirteen that was sent on a similarly risky mission; the author of the original novel of THE DIRTY DOZEN, E.M. Nathanson, claims to have drawn inspiration from the exploits of this group of men (Nathanson, 2002). Yet both CASABLANCA and THE DIRTY DOZEN are repeatedly included in the war film canon. War film, then, encompasses films about war, and not just those featuring graphic combat. Manipulation of standard narrative structure – and, by extension, the tampering with audience expectations of war cinema – was not prevalent until much later – in fact, this phenomenon came about largely during the Cold War, in films such as DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB (1964), CATCH-22 (1970), and THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE (1962). It is interesting, then, to observe the narrative format of ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, which is a very standard filmic narrative, in the sense that it reflects chronologically 'a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space' (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 69). This is examined alongside PATTON, release some forty years later, and some time beyond the most tense days of the Cold War. Despite some jumps forward in history, PATTON, too, adheres to the chronological presentation of events, in order to show the progression of the character as well as the plot.

In terms of narrative, as noted above, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT is conventionally chronological. The film begins in a German township, with the military marching through the streets. A mailman seems overjoyed that the next day he will be re-enlisting in the army. The camera then sweeps over the marching soldiers, before backing (in a single shot) through an open window into a high school classroom, where students are listening to an inspirational speech from their elderly teacher about war, glory and

military service. Inspired – or indoctrinated – to sign up, the men scramble to basic training. In their training they encounter the mailman, now transformed into a barbarous drill sergeant. At first, none of the boys take him seriously, but are soon made aware of his sadistic tendencies as he constantly parades them around the field, and makes them muddy their fatigues so they must spend their recreational time washing their uniforms. Once the boys finish training they are almost immediately sent to the front, where they are put under the command of Stanislaus Katczinsky, a kindly but hardened older soldier who understands the naivety and innocence of the new recruits, but also the harsh realities of combat. Over the course of their first few deployments, Katczinsky and the boys become quite close. From here onwards, the film takes on an episodic structure. Each ‘episode’ is a particular deployment or battle, interspersed with sequences where the boys rest between engagements. As the film progresses, fewer and fewer boys return from the battlefield.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT is a film that attempts to portray war for what it is: violent, hard, and futile. This was certainly unusual in a time when portrayal of direct combat was often minimal or off-screen: of course, later, SAVING PRIVATE RYAN would shock audiences from a complacent notion of war as a distant, abstract, phenomenon. Attempts are made throughout the film to impart lessons or opinions about war: that all men are equal – and mortal – no matter what side you fight for; that those in power know little of the reality of combat; and that the experience of war never leaves a soldier. When compared to the grand narratives of Howard Hughes’ HELL’S ANGELS (1930), released in the same year as ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, and the silent TELL IT TO THE MARINES (1926) a few years earlier, we see that these films rarely showed injury, death, or madness close-up. HELL’S ANGELS was about the glory of aerial combat, and the bravery and determination of those who took to the air in defence of their homeland. TELL IT TO THE MARINES is a film that describes two phenomena: a soldier doing his duty, serving his country, then returning home to a happy family life; and a soldier essentially ‘married to the Marine Corps.’ In each case war is never demonised or portrayed negatively. This had a great deal to do with the difficulty of making any kind of military-centric film if it were not supportive of US foreign policy. Two bodies held sway over the distribution of funds and support for motion pictures about war between 1939 and 1945: the Production Code Administration, or PCA, and the Office of War

Information (OWI). Combined, the PCA and the OWI formed an essentially propagandist wing of the American government, weighing all visual media against a strict code of ethics and interpretation. As Westwell writes:

'The powerful influence of the two agencies ensured that moral propriety and selfless patriotism would be central to the cycles of films produced within the war movie genre during World War II.' (p. 32)

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT was the first in a short run of anti-war films of the 1930s and early 1940s, which included THE ROAD TO GLORY (1936) and Jean Renoir's LA GRANDE ILLUSION (1937). Rather than offer the grand perspective – the machinations of war, politics, strategy, the struggle of nation against nation – these were personal tales of war; at once tales of individual soldiers, but also parables for society during wartime. A small part of the war film canon, they took it upon themselves to ask questions, to challenge the status quo, and to bring to audience's minds doubts about what the world was doing; about what they were all being swept up in. This is perhaps best encapsulated in the sequence where the soldiers are having lunch under a tree. Old, young, high- and low-ranking men all sit together, arrayed around the frame, discussing the machinations of war.

TJADEN: Me and the Kaiser felt just alike about this war. We didn't either of us want any war, so I'm going home. He's there already.

SOLDIER: Somebody must have wanted it. Maybe it was the English. No, I don't want to shoot any Englishman. I never saw one 'til I came up here. And I suppose most of them never saw a German 'til *they* came up here. No, I'm sure *they* weren't asked about it.

BÄUMER: No.

DETERING: Well, it must be doing somebody some good.

DETERING: Not me and the Kaiser.

SOLDIER: I think maybe the Kaiser wanted a war.



Figure 3.3: The unit discusses the war, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT.



Figure 3.4: Rembrandt van Rijn, Syndics of the Clothmakers' Guild, 1662.

The camera does not move during the sequence, allowing the audience to focus on the words the characters are speaking; in this scene, the conversation is the thing. The arrangement of the men in the frame even recalls many of Rembrandt's commissioned group portraits (see Figure 3.4), or the conversation paintings of Zoffany. These paintings were about moments in the lives of – often wealthy – people or families; class

statements. These statements were highly arranged and stylised: this formality is ever-present in the representation of war, as it too, particularly in Germany, was a class issue. Many young Germans were poor, or still in school, and had never had gainful employment, and the war gave them an opportunity to make something of themselves. The above dialogue is preceded by a sequence where the men wait in line for their food. There is more than enough for the men to have extra: rations have been made for the platoon's 150 men, but only 80 men are left alive. The cook, though, refuses: 'It's all wrong. I should have been notified!' This absurd adherence to military protocol in the face of the stark reality of war causes the men to discuss the Kaiser's role and the machinations of conflict. In doing so they position themselves as synapses of the viewer's brain. Having begun by being swept up in the national pride and excitement of enlistment, the viewer, like the characters, has been downtrodden by training and the grueling reality, boredom, and paranoia, of the soldier's experience. The viewer, like the men, would at this point be thinking about why it all happens in the first place. In moments like these, cinema becomes the coffee-houses of the eighteenth century. The notion of a cinematic public sphere in the vein of Habermasian thought becomes a reality, particularly when thought of in terms of war film. Habermas' public sphere is one that disregards status, centres around a domain of common concern, and is highly inclusive (Habermas, 1989, p. 36). Monaco (2000) writes of political cinema:

'Hollywood film is a dream – thrilling enthralling, but sometimes a political nightmare. Dialectic film can be a conversation – often vital and stimulating.' (Monaco, p. 283)

It may be suggested that nowhere are the dialectical, political possibilities of cinema more apparent than in this seemingly innocuous conversation between soldiers in *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. It is in the film's structure – its alternation between harrowing combat and quiet reflection; its juxtaposition of the fleeting joys of life and the endlessness and pointlessness of death – that the true potential of anti-war cinema is realised. What makes the film even more remarkable is that it delivers its message within the rubric of a combat film.

Later war films revisit history within a new cultural context. Of the evolution of the combat film genre, Basinger writes that later films create a certain reality: that they relate

their filmed reality to history by replacing reality with their filmed version, and that they ‘invert and thus test the filmed reality’ (1986, p. 214-215). In order to frame more modern ideas about war, soldiers, the military, and death, within a recognisable conflict, World War II remains a mythic staple to which filmmakers consistently return. Not every return to the conflict is serious in tone: KELLY’S HEROES, CATCH-22 and INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS inject dark humour into what might otherwise be an unrelentingly macabre subject matter. World War II is also used briefly in 2011’s SUCKER PUNCH; the visual metaphors of Nazi soldiers, zeppelins and trench warfare being an instantly recognisable snapshot from history, albeit somewhat caricaturised by director Zack Snyder. It is perhaps just this recognisability that ensures filmmakers return to the shores of Normandy, the fields of provincial France, the streets of a smoking Berlin. Schubart (2009) writes:

‘We need myths to make sense of the world, to turn random events into comprehensible stories, and to supply such stories with a recognizable narrative structure, familiar emotions and an already-known content. Once an event has been turned into a mythic story, we experience it as true and meaning. And only then can we use it to guide us in future actions.’
(p. 61)

The 1990s were tumultuous years in politics, with the ramifications of the Gulf War taking their toll on popular opinion, the Yugoslav conflicts on the rise, and high-profile terrorist attacks on American soil. 24-hour news coverage, heavily-biased opinionated journalism (on both the left and right), and the exponential growth of the internet meant that information and perspectives could be fired across the world with the click of a button. 1995 marked the fifty-year anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and a renaissance of dramatic reconstructions of that conflict, including THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN (1995), THE ENGLISH PATIENT (1996), LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL (1997), and 1998’s SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. Nostalgia is a powerful muse – and World War II so full of imagery and memory – and the temptation to look back proved too great for Markowitz, Minghella, Benigni and Spielberg.

There is a moment early in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN where – having survived the tiny boats in the turbulent sea, having survived the horror of Omaha Beach, and having

fought with his battalion over the dunes and into the trenches along the Normandy coastline – Tom Hanks’ character, Captain John H. Miller, sits completely still, and the camera zooms in, very slowly, on his eyes. In his eyes we can see the reflections of the carnage still being wrought on the beach, but, in that moment, there is silence. There is a fusion in this sequence that only began in World War II films some fifty years after its conclusion. Following the introspection and solitude of Vietnam cinema – see Chapter 4 – there was a return to the ‘grand narrative’ in World War II films of the 1990s and early 2000s. This may have been a subconscious reaction to the paranoia and media mayhem surrounding the Gulf War, but the blending of the grand, nationalistic narrative with a smaller, personalised sub-story, characterised films like *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* and, later, Clint Eastwood’s *FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS* (2006). What follows the harrowing twenty-minute opening sequence of Spielberg’s film is a fly-over of Omaha Beach after the battle has been fought. All is silent but for the waves crashing on the sand and the distant screech of a seagull or two; the visuals show the bloodied beach, with bodies (and parts thereof) littering the sand, weapons and torn pieces of clothing strewn all over. This all-encompassing vision is the grand narrative embodied on screen: war is about death, and about sacrifice, about laying down one’s life for one’s country. This is the bigger picture of war, and the frame widens, soars over the carnage, to allow the audience to absorb this meaning. The camera finally settles on the name stamped onto the pack of a dead soldier: Ryan. From here we cut to a busy military office where calls are being directed all over the United States. A young clerk takes the call and informs her superior that another of the three Ryan boys has been killed. It is decided that a platoon should go and rescue the remaining Ryan brother from the front and return him safely to his family: thus the plot of the film is established.

These early moments in the film serve a dual purpose: firstly they introduce the plot and most of the main characters through the depiction of the landing at Normandy, and secondly they establish a visual palate and style that informs the audience as to how the battles, skirmishes, dramatic moments will be played out. The film is relentless in its attempts to realistically portray the violence, blood, sounds and immediacy of war, but also its capacity to engender friendship, camaraderie and courage. Throughout the history of war cinema, the idea of hope has been a resounding theme: hope for the future, hope for the nation, and hope to return safely to loved ones. Hope has been an

overarching theme of war film since it first rolled through a projector, but the increasing need for credibility, and the advancement of cinematic storytelling technology, means a balance has needed to be struck between dramatic momentum and realism. Steven Spielberg himself acknowledges this when speaking about the need for happy endings:

'In all great drama there's redemption. Without redemption there is no hope. And the one thing I'm never going to give up on is hope.' (Total Film, 2004).

The scene described above comprises the opening twenty minutes of the film, which has a total running time of 170 minutes. *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* garnered tremendous critical acclaim, five Academy Awards (Best Cinematography; Best Director; Best Effects, Sound Effects Editing; Best Sound; and Best Film Editing) and a total lifetime gross of \$481,840,909 (Box Office Mojo, 2013c). Spielberg dedicated his film to the veterans, and even they admitted that it was one of the most realistic portrayals of battle to be displayed on the movie screen (Haggith, p. 333). The film was praised for its narrative cohesion and strong and considerate storyline, the technical achievements of its crew (in special effects, cinematography and editing), and its lasting influence on war cinema, and cinema in general, through the early years of the Twenty-First Century. Spielberg and lead actor Tom Hanks went on to develop and produce the multi-award winning and highly critically acclaimed television series *BAND OF BROTHERS* (2001) and *THE PACIFIC* (2010).



Figure 3.5: The 'D-Day shot', SAVING PRIVATE RYAN.

Although Spielberg's film is tied together with a continuous story thread – the mission to retrieve Private Ryan – it echoes the episodic structure of earlier war films, and that included in Basinger's work. There is a clear progression of 'episodes': Omaha Beach; marching through the fields of France to the town of Neuville; entering Neuville and Caparzo's death; the machine gun nest assault; Ramelle, and the discovery of Ryan; the battle of Ramelle and Miller's death. The episodes are set within a framework of nostalgia; the prologue and epilogue of the film show a now elderly Ryan visiting Miller's grave with his family. The notion of 'looking back' is a common convention in modern film and literature; the time since certain conflict necessitates an element of recollection or reflection in order to justify the action that follows. It is perhaps a credit to Spielberg that he includes nearly all of Basinger's key conventions in his film. Three key moments, all outlined briefly above, align with Basinger's rubric, and situate *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* as a classic World War II film. Technically, it is worlds (and many years) apart from what might, in this way, be called its contemporaries – *BATAAN*, *THE DESERT RATS* – and these estranging techniques allow Spielberg to tell something of the truth of combat.

'A group of men, led by a hero, undertake a mission which will accomplish an important military objective.' (Basinger, 1986, p. 73-74)

Following the harrowing events of Normandy, Captain Miller is given orders to find Private Ryan. Miller chooses his men based largely on the group that survived the beach landings, and worked with him to break the German lines. The 'important military objective' in the case of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* is not strategic, but rather almost propagandist. In returning the boy to his family, the military will appear to care greatly for its men; certainly for those on the home front. Captain Miller is not, necessarily, a hero, but he is a strong leader, firm but fair, and he cares about the men under his command.

'Members of the group die.' (ibid., p. 75)

Death is ever-present in war film, and *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* is no exception. For the first time in war cinema, the landings at Normandy were shown in all their horror. Beige, red, and forest green form the colour palate, as blood, sand, and uniforms litter the beach. Spielberg shows much death and dismemberment in this opening sequence, but

refocuses our attention when Miller takes the men up to the machine gun nest. Once this smaller group of men begin to interact, the audience begins to empathise with them. They are by turns funny, brave, and terrified, so appear at once heroic and 'normal'. It is the audience's empathy with the group that almost ensures that not all of them will survive the film. Caparzo is taken by a sniper in Neuville; Wade, the medic, is killed when Miller's men assault the machine gun nest past Neuville; in Ramelle, Jackson, Mellish, and Horvath, are killed; and in attempting to destroy a key bridge held by the Germans, Miller himself is shot and killed. By the time credits roll, only Reiben, Upham, and Ryan himself are left alive.

'A climactic battle takes place, and a learning or growth process occurs.'

(ibid., p. 75)

The above-mentioned battle at Ramelle is the climax of the film; it occurs in the film's last hour, involves every major character and results in Miller's death. The action itself is harrowing, from long-range sniping to close-quarters combat: one notable shot involves Miller's men opening the hatch of a tank and firing a round into the chest of the German driver trying wearily to escape. The camera is almost entirely hand-held – indeed, mechanically shaken (Binns & Ryder, 2013). This makes the audience part of the action – almost a part of Miller's platoon. The soundscape is sparse beyond gunfire and the men yelling at each other; the exclusion of all other sounds lends gravitas to every moment, reinforcing the scene's ultimate nature. Private Ryan himself undertakes the 'learning process'. At the beginning of the battle, he is determined to stay in France, particularly when he hears of the death of his brothers. 'When you found me here,' he says, 'I was here, and I was with the only brothers that I have left.' At the battle's end, though, as the smoke rises from the craters, as the buildings and bodies burn, and as Miller dies in his arms, Miller entreats Ryan: 'James... earn this. Earn it.' His 'earning it' was to return home and live a long and good life; it is the release of this debt that Ryan accepts as an old man at Miller's grave. His life *had* to be well-lived. It is imperative to any film of the World Wars that the sacrifice made by the men on the battlefield is earned by those who survive: a wide, collectivist perception of the implications of war.

Spielberg's film, too, presents a conventional, chronological narrative, but situates this within the framing device of the older Ryan looking back. The film presents individual

character traits as indicative of the character of the conflict as a whole, of the grand narrative: Miller's shaking hands, Horvath's collection of sand or soil from every battlefield, and Upham's constant nerves and fear, are interspersed with the military's motives in returning Ryan to his home, and the backdrop of the war as an enormous, complex undertaking. There are reflections amongst the men not only on the point of their mission, but on the war itself; the two seem to be inseparable.

HORVATH: 'It isn't going to be easy trying to find one soldier in the middle of this whole goddamn war.'

MILLER: 'Like trying to find a needle in a stack of needles.'

It is clear that *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* both works within and re-works the conventions established by *Basinger*. It has an eclectic bunch of characters from different backgrounds, each with different motivations, perspectives and ways of reacting to situations. There is a clearly-defined objective in mind throughout: that of locating Private Ryan and returning him to his family in the United States. And throughout the entire film, death is omnipresent, both in an instant, absolute, form and in a slow, graphic, agonising seizure of the human form. The violence of the film is one of its most-discussed elements, largely because it was one of the first big-budget Hollywood features to attempt to realistically portray the nightmarish reality of combat. The opening scene on Omaha Beach features internal organs, discarded limbs, armless soldiers, and a great deal of blood. But the vividness of the displayed violence is also what sets *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* apart from other World War II films. *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* was the first film to portray graphic, but realistic, war violence on screen, and in so doing, influenced a number of films in subsequent years, such as *BLACK HAWK DOWN* and *ENEMY AT THE GATES* (2001), both of which portray equally – sometimes more – graphic violence and death on screen. Thus, in diverging from the conventions of the war film genre, *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* created one of its own. Foucault would call graphic, but realistic, screen violence, an 'unformulated discourse' of signs that was given accent by *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, and has become a fixture of war cinema ever since.

The moments of tranquility interspersed throughout the intense combat sequences allow the audience to pause and absorb, digest, what they have seen. From a narrative point of

view, to lighten the mood, humour is often used in these moments. But, in the context of war, this humour often tends to the absurd. In *PATTON*, there is absurd humour in the sequence at the Carthaginian ruins, and it comes from the tension between General Bradley and Patton throughout the film. In actuality, Bradley and Patton got on reasonably well professionally, and little is written of any private disagreements between them. In the film, much artistic license is taken by embellishing the personal relationship between the two Generals. Aside from Bradley, Patton has 'relationships' with two other men in the film: German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, and British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, both of whom Patton deeply respected, admired, and wanted nothing more than to conquer (Rommel by pummelling his troops; Montgomery by seizing more land and killing more enemy soldiers than he). But Bradley's link to Patton is different; it is almost paternal – certainly supervisory – in nature, but, in many ways, fraternal as well. There are several instances in the film where Bradley has to reign Patton in for a misdeed or misadventure, for example, in order to beat Montgomery to the north-eastern port of Messina, Patton defies orders by taking his troops across Sicily. He must also be reprimanded when he slaps a shell-shocked soldier, accusing him of cowardice (an event that I revisit later). Nevertheless, Patton has a great deal of respect for Bradley, and treats him almost like a brother (certainly a battle-brother); the mutuality of this feeling is never more apparent than in this scene at the ruins, where, while Patton waxes lyrical about his delusions of past glory (Patton believed in reincarnation, and fancied himself as an eternal warrior), General Bradley sits in the jeep, listening and watching. On his face is not, as one might expect, a look of shock, horror, or disbelief, but merely one of calm observation, contemplation and – perhaps slightly bemused – admiration for this strange and wonderful man. The characterisation and juxtaposition of these two Generals is not unique to *PATTON*, but it was certainly one of the first films to situate such a relationship alongside that of two competing – but allied – field commanders (Patton and Montgomery), *and* one of two mutually admiring – yet opposing – commanders (Patton and Rommel). The relationship between Patton and Bradley is an important one for the film, as their encounters vary from the friendly to the downright hostile. The absurdity of the sequence does indeed lighten the mood, but speaks to a cosmic understanding of war as a continuous, unstoppable show. In Patton's

reckoning, he is an eternal warrior: one who has seen many centuries, many battles: a wider view of the essential, endless nature of combat.

Throughout the film, the character Patton maintains a pragmatic approach to military command, logistics and protocol. Whether or not this is true of the man in real life is not the focus of this thesis. Patton was a unique character, certainly a pivotal figure in the Second World War; one whom the producers (and, subsequently, critics) deemed worthy to devote an entire dramatised biographical feature film. In reality, Patton was one of the greatest military leaders of the twentieth century. His efforts, while often audacious and carried out on minimal or sketchy intelligence, were amongst the most successful in the war. As noted in the film on several occasions, Patton was a history buff, and believed – in most cases – that what worked for, say, Napoleon, or the Ancient Carthaginians, will work for him, despite the advances in weapons technology and military tactics. He certainly trained his soldiers in the method of the ancient generals, enforcing strict discipline, but engendering a deep mutual respect between leader and soldier. His men knew that Patton had fought in several conflicts all around the world, that he had been on the frontline, and Patton himself, once his men had been trained, considered himself one of them. At several points during the film, Patton's affinity with his men is displayed. As his army pushes through the French countryside at Bastogne – after a several-hundred mile trek through adverse weather and terrain – he turns to his aide, Codman, and says, 'God, I'm proud of these men.' He then descends the short hill where he stands, observing them, and walks amongst them. The men smile at their general, and he chats with them in an animated fashion, keeping morale and spirits high. At many points in the film the General must sort out logistical issues with his arsenal: at one point while his tanks are moving through the European countryside, Patton steps up on a tree stump and gleefully directs the traffic. When two arguing carriage drivers on a bridge stall his tanks, Patton shoots both their horses and orders them to clear the way. Patton, thus, believes in the logistics and protocol of the military in the same way he believes in the underlying strategic principles of warfare, that have pervaded military history from ancient times. While at times shifting between the universal and the personal, it is perhaps ironically the General himself, in Schaffner's film, that anchors it in the grand narrative tradition, in his favouring his men, his army, his nation above petty personal concerns.

As noted earlier, Patton was an eccentric who believed in reincarnation. This is demonstrated in the scene where Patton orders his driver off the road, claiming to have sensed the battlefield. They arrive at a field of ancient ruins that have almost entirely crumbled away. Bradley is about to head off, when he is stopped by Patton, who has a faraway look in his eyes. Patton recounts the ancient battle fought in that place long ago, firmly and unwaveringly of the belief that he was there. It was one of many battles in which he believed he participated, each of them more grand and desperate than the last.

'I fought in many guises, many names, but always me.'

Incidentally, the Carthaginians that Patton so idolises were often victorious in battles that were deemed unwinnable. The camera barely moves in this scene. There are three shots in total – a wide shot looking past Patton (who is facing the other way) out beyond the ruins into the vast valley below; a slightly different angle, this time a close-up, that takes in the details of George C. Scott's facial performance; and a third, a reverse medium shot, that looks back towards Patton, and past him, at General Bradley sitting in the jeep. The takes are long, and Patton is the character with most of the lines, as he recounts the battle as he believes he experienced it. The music is eerie, mystical almost, but with echoes of the opening few bars of Jerry Goldsmith's leitmotif-riddled theme for PATTON, that is used throughout the film¹⁷. Musical motifs play an important role in older war films, particularly those of the First and Second World Wars. After the coming of sound in film, music was quickly grasped as a means of imparting emotional impetus and supplementing the visuals. The leitmotif is often applied to an individual character or setting, and these can be compounded to increase the aural depth of a given scene, or to foreshadow a given character's arrival (Bordwell & Thompson, p. 357). In the cinema of the World Wars, the music is an important part of the narrative structure, as it gives a greater thematic resonance to parts of the film. David Broekman's score for ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, for example, begins with upbeat enthusiasm that matches the boys' excitement about enlisting for the Army. When in the trenches and bunkers, the music is ominous, tense, and uneasy. And for the boys' spiritual retreat into the distance, before the end title card, the mood turns reflective, as though inviting the view to reflect

¹⁷ A *leitmotif*, in a cinematic context, is a phrase of music particular to a character, place, situation, or object in a film. It recurs whenever its subject appears (TV Tropes Foundation, 2013).

on what they have just been told about war and its participants. In PATTON, though, there is a consistent use of the main theme, in whole or in part, and variations on its volume and the instruments used impart different feelings and moods on the film's visuals. In a quiet moment, for example, a high brass and soft drum might allude to Patton's intervention in a discussion, whereas on the battlefield, or on the way there, the full orchestra is used, reflecting the bravado and enthusiasm Patton feels. It could be said, then, that music in the cinema of the World Wars reinforces a grander perspective: it is used for great dramatic effect, in the style of later blockbuster composers John Williams and Hans Zimmer. A grand, orchestral score speaks to high concepts of nationhood and glory, whereas a softer, subtler, quieter music bed turns attention away from itself, presenting a cinematic tone that is much more inward-looking. World War I and II films often alternate between these two opposing styles – such as in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN or ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT – in order to suggest that the individual perspective is subsumed into the larger, much more important grand narrative.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT attempts to grasp certain realities of war, which is rare for such an early film. In terms of cinematography, the camera makes use of wide shots – in combination with complex scene blocking and *mise en scène* – to present action in its totality. Similarly to nearly all other combat films, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT grants screen time to several moments of peace. Despite this, the young soldiers face constant bombardment at the front, poor – or, more often, no – sanitation, rat infestations, and malnutrition: many of the young men almost starve to death before they see any sign of the enemy. There is a protracted scene in a bunker, lasting seven minutes from the film's 35-minute mark, during which all of the aforementioned trials are portrayed in detail, along with each of the men going through varying stages of mental trauma. At one point a soldier exclaims:

*'Why don't we fight?! Why don't we go over?! We'll go crazy staying here!
Let's do something! Let's go after 'em.'*

When a shell explosion shakes the bunker's roof, another of the boys screams and makes a break for the trenches, only to be caught by one of his comrades. Yet another, Kemmerich, is not so lucky: he escapes out into daylight, only to be cut down by shrapnel from another blast. This scene makes use of long, drawn-out shots, strung

together with cuts between a wide shot taking in the majority of the bunker and two-shots when two characters are conversing (Figure 3.6). The occasional moments of action, such as the rat invasion or when Kemmerich runs outside, are defined by close-up shots of faces and feet shuffling about the room. Following these moments there is always a collapse, when exhaustion compounds exhaustion, and a general malaise settles on the men, as the lens returns to the wider angle. This alternation between action and repose is crucial to Basinger's thinking of the combat film as a whole, but it is rare that this duality would be imposed on what is – the bunker scene in its entirety – a quiet part of the film. When not beset by rodents or under attack from above ground, the view of the bunker resembles a box – the viewer appears to look on the men from a window in the front wall. The men seem arranged as though on a stage, but all cramped in the singular space.



Figure 3.6: The bunker sequence, *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*.

It seems to be Milestone's intention to use the camera to enclose the men in the same way the bunker does; by extension, the viewer feels cramped as well. They are allowed glimpses of what is going on outside: a memorable momentary shot lasting but a second (at the film's 36-minute mark) shows a mortar exploding above, before cutting to a three close-up of three soldiers' terrified reactions, before returning to the 'tableau' or boxed-in wider angle detailed above. The other cuts are between the wider angle and a two-shot of two or more men conversing – these are practical shots designed to focus the viewer's

attention on the conversation rather than the tableau as a whole. The cinematography of the entire bunker sequence seems designed to reinforce the smallness of the space, and to re-orient the viewer in a theatrical setting: again, formalising the representation of war within artistic parameters. Typically of the 1930s, the acting is melodramatic, but the shots used change the perspective of the audience from a static observer to almost an active participant, able to see the expressions on the faces of the men as they react to each new horror. *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, then, anticipates a focus on the individual that was not germane to its contemporaries. According to Eksteins (1980), 'Milestone's film gave the "talkie" a pictorial flexibility at a moment when sound films were little more than photographed plays' (p. 62). Indeed, I would contest that the bunker sequence plays out like a scene would in the theatre, moving from person to person, driven by dialogue with only allusions to the events going on outside, and all beneath the bunker's wooden proscenium arch: where outside events would be referenced with speech in theatre, Milestone cuts to an exterior shot where a mortar is exploding. In its position in the early days of cinema, *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* was fated to have theatrical influences, but in those influences we find the foundations, the conventions, of the sequences of repose, of reflection – even of boredom – that permeate war cinema to the twenty-first century.

Following the bunker sequence, there is a long battle sequence, in which many men are killed. The editing of this sequence is covered shortly, but the framing of the individual shots is worth some analysis. The lead-up to the combat itself sees the men take up positions along the trenches. This is shown in a tracking shot running along the trench. Once the men have settled and taken aim, there are repeated cuts between three shots: the first is a continuation of this medium-long tracking shot; the second, a static frame in which we see a man crouched beside a machine gun, ready to feed it with an ammunition belt, another man hunkered down behind the gun, his finger on the trigger; the third, a medium shot of Paul Bäumer, facing the camera and pointing his gun just below the lens. The tracking shot lends a sense of movement, of action, to the sequence. The consistent slow movement adds to the tension, and increases the scope of the scene as more and more men are revealed. The audience has not been introduced to the machine gunners: we do not know their names or who they are. All the audience is aware of is that they are fighting for Germany. In this instance the shot is included to allude to the many

hundreds of thousands of anonymous soldiers that fought in the war, for whichever side. The shot shows their preparedness, their readiness, their bravery, but also emphasises their fear, offering a sense of 'truth,' and contributing to a feeling of realism. With each cut back to the gunners, their facial expressions change from pure practical concentration, through readiness, through hesitation, and then anxiety and distress. This is mirrored in the shot of Paul Bäumer, as we look down his gun at his face, his eyes wide, fearful, sweat running over his brow. The camera sits on the land next to the trench, so the angle is high, looking down on Bäumer; he looks small, insignificant, and very afraid.

The conventional cinematography of *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* bestows a sense of realism on the scenes depicted – the men are afraid. This is a realistic response to the horrors of war, and the cinematography allows this perspective, this 'truth', to be shown. Steven Spielberg, in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, visually negotiates the distance between representation and reality in a different way. Elements of the visual style pioneered by Spielberg and cinematographer Janusz Kaminski in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* can be seen in Spielberg's later work *WAR OF THE WORLDS* (2005), and developed further in other films such as *BLACK HAWK DOWN* (2001), *WE WERE SOLDIERS* (2002), and *JARHEAD* (2005). This visual style is unique, in that Spielberg wanted to emulate the cinematography of the Signal Corps cameramen, who 'tried to save themselves while documenting the combat that surrounded them' (Total Film, 2004). Shots that, typically, would remain on the cutting room floor, such as the camera being knocked over by a rushing soldier, or being tossed by a mortar blast, were left in the film. These shots are used often in the film's opening sequence to recreate the sense of chaos and mayhem that has been relayed by survivors of the attack on Omaha Beach. The camera angle is often off-level, which further illustrates the emulation of the on-the-ground feel of camera usage. Not only does this lend a sense of immediacy, it introduces the influence of the signal corps to mainstream cinema. Following the dissemination of 24-hour news in the 1990s and 2000s, the portrayal of journalism in modern cinema became a widespread phenomenon. Indeed, the role of the press was often a key theme or subject, as in *TOMORROW NEVER DIES* (1997), *THE INSIDER* (1999), and *STATE OF PLAY* (2009). The effect of contemporary journalism on war cinema is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

While it does focus, partly, on the individual, PATTON is predominantly a film about the wider conflict of World War II – the machinations of combat, the grand strategy of the battlefield. This duality, though, is neatly contained in the opening of the film, where the General delivers his inspirational address to the Third Army. Patton orates before an enormous American flag, and in every shot and angle (wide, mid and close-up), there is some part or element of the flag surrounding Patton's face. This remains in keeping with the World War II tradition of one's nation always being front and centre: the interests of the individual are secondary to those of the state. The flag is at once a symbol of the dynamism and strength of America's military and her ideals of liberty and peace. To have some part of it present in almost every frame constantly reinforces the ideas it represents. The extreme close-up shots of Patton's ring, his revolver, and medals accentuate the prowess of the individual; the flag is not present in these frames, but the symbols serve to situate the General within a military chain of command and system of protocol and reward. George C. Scott's delivery is measured, considered, and deliberate. He is delivering a speech given by all leaders at some point in their command, but Patton does it in such a way as to conjure the glory of the great ancient civilisations, alongside the raw brutality and honest, actual, contemporary pain he wishes his men to inflict on their enemies.

'We will use their living guts to grease the treads of our tanks!'

The selection of shots for the opening sequence is conventional for films of the era. The first is a wide angle, showing the entire American flag, with Patton's body fully visible (head to toe) pacing in front of it. The camera does not deviate much from this initial position; occasionally it moves slightly to one side to keep the General within the vertical centre third of the frame. The second shot is a mid-shot: Patton is shown from roughly the waist up, with an element of the flag – for example, the stars – slightly out of focus behind him. The camera follows Patton if he moves; but for most of these shots he remains in the centre of the frame or slightly to one side, glancing around the room, every now and again locking on to the eyes of one of his men. The final shot is a close-up – the frame shows Patton's face as he delivers a line in a particularly impassioned way, or as his eyes scan the room.

This is an iconic scene, but how does a scene or sequence become iconic? A scene may possess any number of characteristics that would cause it to stay upfront in the mind or in the public consciousness. These include 'a striking, cinematically-beautiful image,' plot twists, innovative use of special effects or cinematography, or a particularly surprising or emotional ending (Dirks, 2011). Umberto Eco (1985) suggests that any cult object must be able to be 'unhinged' or separated into memorable moments or images (p. 4). 'To become cult,' he writes, 'a movie should not display a central idea but many' (ibid.). The opening sequence of *PATTON* has become iconic in part due to its strong imagery: a tall, broad-shouldered General addressing his troops with conviction, before an enormous American flag. It is also memorable, and has become archetypal, due to this imagery's link to the notion of the 'grand narrative.' In every frame of the coverage of the General's speech, there is a reminder of America as a nation, as a symbol of power, and the American military as the upholder of international order and supremacy; this cinematography underscores the notion of the 'grand narrative' in cinema depicting World War II.

Beyond the opening sequence, the film rapidly employs the conventions of more traditional war cinema – these wider shots and traditional camera movements speak to a 'big picture' appreciation of combat within the wider political sphere. The first shots show a vulture atop a crag (a foreshadowing of visuals forthcoming), then the camera slowly pans to take in the vastness of the North African desert. The aftermath of the massacre at Kasserine is then arrayed before the camera: grand and sweeping shots, contemplative, and taken on a wide lens, with slow pans across the devastation, bodies and the debris of battle. The glory of the American army has been reduced to rubble – rubble being picked at (not unlike by vultures) and stolen by the locals to sell at flea markets or to keep for themselves. The locals then scatter when the American command drives in on their Jeeps, led by Omar Bradley. Bradley serves as Patton's foil on his own side throughout the film. Almost the conscience whispering in his ear at times, Bradley is at once admiring and despairing of the charismatic titular commander. Following Bradley's survey of the devastation at Kasserine, he arrives at the II Corps forward command post in North Africa, where he observes the few survivors of the battle looking dejected and exhausted. An exchange then takes place between Bradley and Brigadier General Hobart Carver.

BRADLEY: For the American army to take a licking like that, the first time at bat against the Germans. Tsk. Up against Rommel what we need is the best tank man we've got, somebody tough enough to pull this outfit together.

CARVER: Patton?

BRADLEY: Possibly.

CARVER: ... God help us.

These few lines of dialogue introduce the enigma of Patton, and prepare us for his arrival. They are edited in a shot/reverse shot sequence showing the speaking characters from the waist up, outside the barracks that acts as command post. The locals and soldiers are gathered around watching the commanders in discussion. Birds and animals jostle everywhere. It is into this scene, very early the next morning, that Patton rides, sirens blaring, standing at attention in his jeep the entire journey. On his arrival at the command post, Patton asserts his authority as his aides unpack his gear. In an attempt to stop Bradley's reporting his eccentricities to President Eisenhower, he appoints Bradley as his immediate second-in-command. This interior sequence is comprised of long, steady takes, edited in a shot/reverse-shot configuration (Nichols, 2010, p. 44). These films, like *PATTON*, employ traditional stylistic techniques in order to maintain the grander perspective – even in typical character dialogues such as this. The wider shot contains the two conversing characters within the frame (Figure 3.7), before moving in to treat the two characters individually (Figures 3.8 and 3.9).



Figure 3.7: Two-shot – the two conversing characters contained within the frame.



Figure 3.8: Shot A – Bradley, mid-shot, eyes right.



Figure 3.9: Shot B – Patton, identical mid-shot, eyes left.

The pursuit of verisimilitude means more than simply replicating the manifold horrors of the battlefield. Throughout *PATTON*, conversations move from location to location in a room, as they would in reality. Once a location is established, a two-shot reverts to the standard shot-reverse shot system. The colour palate is beige and khaki, once more highlighting the setting of North Africa and the army's constant presence within that setting during World War II. The colour palate thus, in turn, serves to remind the audience that the film concerns military power, one nation's journey through the fighting of a war, and the roles and responsibilities the military has to its own members, the

relationship between those members, and its responsibilities to the public it ostensibly serves: all key tenets of the 'grand narrative.'

As observed earlier, *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* was one of the first war films to juxtapose action sequences with quieter moments, and set the benchmark for films like *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* and *JARHEAD*. The reasoning behind this technique is often to give the audience some breathing space between high-intensity combat scenes. After the bunker sequence there is a prolonged session of harrowing combat, showing trench battles and continued artillery bombardment, as well as man-to-man combat on open ground. Up until *All Quiet* was released, the length and brutality of this sequence was unheard of in war films. It is truly an embodiment of Shklovsky's (1998) principle of defamiliarisation, whereby unusual presentation of a known phenomenon unsettles an observer, forcing him or her to perceive the phenomenon as though they have not seen it before (p. 12). The selection of shots in this sequence set the standard for many war films to come, but also surprised with a few non-conventional choices. The scene begins with the men rushing out of their bunkers and taking up firing positions along the trench. As the many men dash out of their hiding-holes, the camera sweeps along the trenchline. Once the men have their positions, the camera continues its sweep; instead of being purely functional, however, the camera now aids in establishing a credible, tangible, sense of foreboding. A deep rumbling in the soundtrack fuels this sense of unease. As it grows louder the tracking shot cuts to frames capturing the men's expressions; some show steely determination, while others look apprehensive or anxious. The other significant shot in this pre-battle sequence is one taken from behind the trench, over the men's heads, looking towards the enemy. After an almost painfully long period of time, in the distance the first bombardments begin. We can hear them over everything, but only see them in this latter frame. The exploding shells get closer and closer, until a few of them hit home in the trenches, tossing men and debris into the air. In keeping with the tactical imperatives of modern warfare, following the bombardment come the infantry, moving in waves across the open battlefield. The camera tracks laterally along their line of advancement, cuts to the trenches as the Germans open fire, then returns to capture many of the enemy being mown down while advancing. Then, as the surviving enemy troops near the trenches, the Germans toss grenades over the top, while still laying down a barrage of fire across the enemy line. In these moments the faces of the Germans

manning the machine guns can be seen via a static closeup – now contorted in a battle-frenzied snarl – then, in a reverse shot, as the gun fires countless rounds into enemy troops, those troops fall down, dying. Many shots are sped up to increase the sense of intensity, and some shots are even used repeatedly. Suddenly, and shockingly, the enemy is in the trenches, spilling over the lip like water, bayonets driving into German chests, necks and shoulders. Germans move back and begin sprinting down the line of the trench itself, taking as many of the enemy down as they can without being killed themselves. The two key shots here are a high shot looking down so as to emphasise the masses of the enemy falling into the trenches, and a shot from the Germans' perspective, looking up as they desperately try to defend themselves against the onslaught. The close-quarter fighting here is vicious. Through the use of close-ups and rapid cutting, director Lewis Milestone captures the ferocity and brutality of hand-to-hand trench warfare. The men are almost face-to-face, armed with guns and knives and with whatever they can lay their hands on: shovels, poles and cutlery, among other things. This direct portrayal revealing combat as harrowing, relentless, and tough, was amongst the first in cinema. The visceral sense of immediacy confronts and shocks the viewer – bringing the grim realities of war to startling life.

This is a remarkable departure from the otherwise stoic and formal representation of war as adventure, the focus being upon the group mentality and the movements of the platoon as a unit. The grand narrative falters here, momentarily: the trenches are eventually overrun and the Germans are forced to retreat. At one point the men stop in a foxhole, and we get a close-up of their faces: each is exhausted, horrified, and afraid. Once back in a rearguard trench, one of the older men finds some bread, but he must cut a bloody end off it before the men can eat it. He also finds some Hennessy gin, which is passed around. The notion of 'small mercies' is one returned to throughout the film: any moment of respite from the horrors of the battlefield is embraced. Drinking in a public house, finding solace in the arms of local women, eating double rations, or even a swig of gin, all become metaphors for and symbols of life without war. Not only this, there is a conscious decision on the part of the filmmaker to give the audience some relief from war's relentless brutality: further, the trope of 'repose,' as explained earlier, is exemplified by these episodes. War *does* alternate between action and inaction, and the inclusion of the same in representations of combat imparts a further sense of realism.

Perpetuating the occasional departure from the grand narrative alignment of story and cinematographic tools, the arrangement of shots in PATTON's opening sequence is highly unconventional. The editing of this scene reflects a more relaxed approach to the visual syntax established by the grand narrative war cinema of old, but is designed to give more impetus to the words of the main character, and their delivery. It is unsettling for the audience, though, as some words are left to hang in the air; this is an oratory technique, but the translation of this to cinema leaves Patton alone – almost awkwardly – on stage. The effect is amplified when we cut from, say, a mid-shot to a wide after the delivery of a line – empty space surrounds Patton in the wake of his statement. Patton's statements are bold, nationalistic sentiments designed to inspire his troops; they are notable also in that they shift attention away from himself.

Americans, traditionally, love to fight. All real Americans love the sting of battle. When you were kids, you all admired the champion marble shooters, the fastest runners, big league ball players, the toughest boxers. Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser.

This realignment of focus is asking the men to see through his words, to the greater cause beyond. Patton makes it personal, in the sense that he speaks to every individual man, asking for their bravery and their determination, but he situates his words within the context of America's victory. While the camera's focus is on the individual, the words used by that individual widen the narrative focus to the greater context of the conflict. In older war films, there is a tendency to let the conversations speak for themselves: there is more pressure on the script to 'hold' the story, rather than the actions of the characters. An action-based film tends to make use more of close-up shots, both on actions being performed and the faces or hands of the characters performing them. In PATTON, the characters are well and truly at the fore, but it is their words that drive the plot: to this end, not only the opening speech but every conversation is allowed to spin, languish, and broil in the open air of a wider frame, letting their meaning settle on their participants, and on the audience. Patton ends one particular rant with the words:

'They'll lose their fear of the Germans. Better hope to God they never lose their fear of me.'

By letting the words hang in the frame, leaving a cut until the last bearable second, the editors of *PATTON* have created as lasting and memorable an image of American militarism and patriotism as the flag itself, with the General at its centre. Patton is therefore situating *himself* as the ultimate grand narrative: the embodiment of military might, justice, and power, single-handedly leading his army across the world to defeat the enemy. Every detail chosen for the film, from the General's immaculate uniform, the measure and timbre of his speech as directed by Schaffner, to the way he is included and filmed in conversation, orients the viewer to the centrality of Patton's character as a channel for the myth of the glory of war.

The depiction of combat in *PATTON* is less like its contemporaries, which include *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS* (1965), *THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN* (1969), *THE GREEN BERETS* (1968), and *WHERE EAGLES DARE* (1969). There are two major battle scenes in the film: one depicts Patton's victory at El Guettar, and the other a night battle in which the US forces are defeated. In the first, long takes and elaborate set pieces betray detailed planning, careful research, and the film's extensive budget. American and German soldiers – portrayed by hundreds of extras – march to their fates across the wide valley. The cinematographer makes great use of static wide shots, taking in tanks moving across the desert, or multitudes of men running into battle, armed with their rifles; the focus here is on military strength and power. Again, this broad focus ties itself to the idea of a strong nationalism, with men willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Those men, though, fight in their platoons, in their army, so in the El Guettar sequence we rarely see the faces of any individual men; only glimpses of those cut down by machine gun fire or tossed into the air by mortar explosions. There are cuts back to the command post on the hill overlooking the vast plain, with the commanders observing through binoculars, their aides scurrying back and forth, while mortar fire careens overhead. These shots, though, are still quite composed, and long, which connotes a self-assured American attack, and confidence of victory for the Allies. The second battle is a ferocious night engagement, again with tanks and infantry clashing in vast numbers. This skirmish, however, is portrayed in a much more frantic way: the shots are short, fleeting glimpses of faces and muzzles of weapons; the angles used are mostly closeups of the same, with the occasional short wider shot of a tank or explosion; the editing is more frenetic, jumping between shots quickly to emphasise the paranoia and difficulty of night

fighting. This intense style also presents an uncertainty: there is no guarantee of victory here, and, as is later revealed, the battle ends in Germany's favour. This second battle is more in line with battle sequences in war films after 1970. After PATTON, filmmakers began to take risks with the choice of shots and their progression. A desire to reflect the frantic nature of warfare necessitated a change in cinematography and editing. This was mostly prevalent in films of the era, i.e. films about Vietnam, e.g. APOCALYPSE NOW (1979) and THE DEER HUNTER (1978)¹⁸. But in the 1970s, filmmakers retained certain stylistic elements of the films of the first and second World Wars. There was a focus on national glory (over individual sensibilities), camaraderie and teamwork, strong leadership, and sacrifice in the name of victory – as depicted in, for example, TORA! TORA! TORA! (1970) and A BRIDGE TOO FAR (1977). With the television images being sent back from Vietnam, filmmakers could no longer get away with idealising or glamorising warfare. Combat had become 'real' in the minds of average audiences at home. On balance, and despite its interest in the personal, in its use of protracted takes and a sluggish, contemplative editing style, PATTON harks back to the cutting of those earlier films about the World Wars, where the 'grand narrative' was front and centre.

Thus, PATTON occupies an important space in the history of war cinema. Audiences had become accustomed to the visual style of films such as APOCALYPSE NOW, which were character-driven, intellectual pieces reflecting on the futility of war and the machinations of the soldier's thought process. But in the same period of time, there were films like THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN (1969), which hearkened back to the glory days of the cinema of the early twentieth century – the days of HELL'S ANGELS and TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH (1949). PATTON steers toward a middle ground: a fictionalised retelling of the most interesting and exciting episodes of the general's command, framed within a 'standard' war narrative as outlined by Basinger. I argue this despite Basinger's insistence that biographical films fall outside the parameters of the World War II combat film:

'Although many true combat films are based on the exploits and experiences of real-life war heroes ... the biographical war film about events from World War II tends not to be about combat, but about a personal sacrifice, a religious fervor, or a human crisis of some sort ... Combat is thus used as

¹⁸ See Chapter 4 for more on this era of cinema.

a remembered event (a nightmare) or is presented as the basis of the problem, one section of a larger, noncombat story.' (Basinger, 1986, p. 13-14)

Basinger even references PATTON directly in this dismissal. However, I would argue that PATTON is as much a film of the World Wars as it is a film about Patton himself. The colour palette, the plot progression, the choice of shots, and the representation and alignment of characters all tend towards a much more traditional depiction of war than films shot in the same era. Although the battles are a small part of the film overall, 'one section of a larger, noncombat story,' Patton is such a war-loving character, that he and the phenomenon he loves are inseparable. After witnessing the devastation following the aforementioned night battle, Patton himself says:

'I love it. God help me, I do love it so.'

War follows Patton, and Patton war, and in this way, any film about Patton deserves to be in the same category as a film full of combat scenes.

Where, then, does ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT fit? I would suggest that where PATTON is situated at the nexus of two distinct eras in war cinema – i.e. between the glorified, grand epics of the World Wars and the introspective narratives of the latter Cold War and Vietnam – Milestone's film sits at the beginning of, and set the standard for, the former. It is true that ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT has more focus on the central platoon – and, within it, the figure of Bäumer – but its story is about the equalising nature of war: that all men are the same when thrown in to battle. The sentiment is echoed even in contemporary films. Recall Weber's (2006) discussion of the three main characters in PEARL HARBOR: their personal concerns are dwarfed by the larger political and military struggle. The techniques used to portray this collective engagement with conflict, in terms of narrative, cinematography, and editing, have changed very little. In this way, despite ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT being an anti-war film, due to its consideration of high concepts, military tactics and the consequences of total war, it still sits within the war film genre.

I argue that ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT and PATTON are two revolutionary pieces of cinema. Milestone's film is critical because it establishes a narrative centred on a

platoon, through which the viewer experiences war. It also created a visual style based on the wide-angle lens and the grand vista, and a protracted editing style, which has become part of the language of war film. *PATTON* is equally important, because it falls on a turning point where war cinema became much less about the glory of the nation-state, the fatherland, or the power of policy and military might, and much more about the individual: the lone soldier wading through the trench, jungle, or desert, searching of course for the enemy, but also – more often than not – for himself. Due to the General's turning himself into a vessel of the viewer's experience, *PATTON* remains part of the cinema of the World Wars. *PATTON* championed all of the critical 'big picture' conventions germane to the genre: a central group of accessible, engaging characters; a grand view of the battlefield through the utilisation of long shots and wide angle lens technologies; and longer takes. Both films say something about the history of warfare. In tracking the history of conflict, it can be seen that there were great advances made in strategy, tactics, weaponry, and training in the twenty or so years between the First and Second World Wars. The First World War is predominantly accepted as a misaligning of modern technology with archaic strategy. The capacity was there for nations to attack each other not only from all fronts but also with great strength from sea and air as well as land; the issue was that most of those in command were familiar with successful tactics from older wars. War was changing¹⁹. In *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, Paul and his comrades must overcome their fear of a faceless, nameless enemy, and engage him in a series of land-based skirmishes. Patton leads his forces across Sicily and through France; but his 'weapon' of choice is the tank. Also, Patton's enemy is certainly not faceless. Erwin Rommel is shown as Patton's counterpart in almost every way: equally tenacious, ambitious, and just as proficient in the tactics of tank warfare. Between the First and Second World War there was an evolution in the identity of the enemy. The glory of battle, the honour of defending one's nation against a faceless evil, was replaced with a grim determination to meet the enemy face-to-face, to engage him – certainly no less mercilessly – as a fellow human being. The propaganda, both print and video, of World War II, refers constantly to the 'German' or the 'Nazi' as fundamentally 'other', but no matter whether being compared to a wolf, or a crow, or a rat, always as human, and with

¹⁹ It is interesting to note, here, that while the Allies pioneered the principle of 'lightning war,' only the Germans were willing to put the principle into practice. This, of course, changes by the era of the Vietnam conflict.

human weaknesses. From World War II onwards, there was a proliferation of war films that told many sides of the story, and introduced characters from not just the 'winning' or 'good' side, but from all angles. These almost 'portmanteau' films included MIDWAY (1976), the aforementioned A BRIDGE TOO FAR (1977) and, in part, THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (1957). This phenomenon is shown in a very focused way in PATTON, and this is what separates it quite clearly from ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT. The latter sets the benchmark for the 'platoon' film which, ironically, became quite popular in pro-war films made during and shortly after World War II. The difference with later films, including BATAAN and THE LOST PATROL (1934), though, is that the group is drawn from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Basinger writes of the group in BATAAN:

'These men obviously represent the American melting pot, but the representation is not a simple-minded one... We are a mongrel nation – ragtail, unprepared, disorganised, quarrelsome amongst ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good, and from these separate needs and backgrounds we bring a feisty determination.' (Basinger, 1986, p. 31)

It is these sentiments that last through to films of the 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, the spate of World War II-based films that followed SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, including FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS (2006), WINDTALKERS (2002), THE GREAT RAID (2005), and KOKODA (2006) were mostly centred on an ethnically diverse group of soldiers, brought together in extraordinary circumstances, who must overcome their differences before bringing their newfound solidarity to bear against the enemy. One might say that film producers return to this 'tried and true' format when there is a desire – unconscious or non-sponsored though it may be – to present the military, its members, and the nation-state, as all-powerful, able to stand against any opposition. What separates films of or about the World Wars from those about other conflicts is the consciousness of this notion of glory – whether portrayed positively or negatively. The absence of all glory is what delineates another significant conflict of the Twentieth Century: Vietnam.

Chapter 4 -

Fear, Frustration, Paranoia: Vietnam

*We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw.*

T. S. Eliot (1922), *The Waste Land*

*'It was the same familiar violence, only moved over to another medium;
some kind of jungle play with giant helicopters and fantastic special effects,
actors lying out there in canvas body bags waiting for the scene to end so
they could get up and walk it off. But that was some scene (you found out),
there was no cutting.'*

Michael Herr (1977), *Dispatches*

It is important to preface anything written about the Vietnam War by saying that this conflict was borne of fear, confusion and frustration, was propelled and propagated by fear, confusion and frustration, and is generally remembered in terms of fear, confusion and frustration. To this day, traces of this underlying sense of paranoia and uncertainty persist and may be found even in the labeling of the conflict: for America and her allies the conflict is known as the Vietnam War or Vietnam conflict; for the Vietnamese, it is

either 'The Vietnam War' or 'Resistance War against America,' often translated as 'the American War.' As this chapter predominantly uses American films in its discussion, I will use the monikers 'the Vietnam War' and 'the Vietnam conflict' and variations of same; these refer directly to the engagement of American troops in Vietnam between 1955 and 1975. Whichever its name, the conflict began with North Vietnam attempting to annex the South under its Communist rule. Amongst global superpowers, there grew a fear that what started with South Vietnam could result in the spread of communism across the globe. In a 1954 press conference, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave that fear a name and a model: 'domino theory.'

'You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.' (Eisenhower, in Gravel, Chomsky, et. al., 1971, p. 597)

The domino allusion gave Eisenhower's words with a sense of immediacy and inevitability that only served to increase the unease and tension pervading American and, indeed, international society at the time. In response to this perceived threat, the US government sent ships to ferry refugees from the north of the country to the non-Communist south. Note that this was never conceived as an act of war; the US Congress instead saw it as a 'police action.' (Le, 2012). Later, in an attempt to aid the South Vietnamese to escape incursion from and annexation under the Communist North, US presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, escalated American involvement – the latter sending hundreds of thousands of troops into Vietnam, not to mention engineers and experts on infrastructure. In totality, the Vietnam War claimed between two and four million lives. No one is entirely certain of the exact number. The US withdrew early in 1975, and despite a lengthy – but uneasy – ceasefire between North and South Vietnam, on April 30 of the same year, the Vietnam People's Army eventually overran Saigon and the conflict ceased (PBS, 2005). Underscoring this great and terrible human tragedy is a harsh political reality: the United States of America lost, and lost badly. If strong opposition to the war on the home front was not humiliating enough for the US government, the withdrawal from the conflict, having achieved very few of the

original objectives, was just embarrassing. Tens of thousands of Americans had made the ultimate sacrifice, for no tangible result. Confidence in leadership hit an all-time low, and the shabby events surrounding President Richard Nixon in the early 1970s did nothing to improve perceptions that were almost entirely negative.

The 'Vietnam War' is the umbrella term given to the American intervention into the conflict between French colonists – 'an assortment of army regulars, Foreign Legionnaires, and Vietnamese conscripts' (Lawrence, 2008, p. 33) – and the Viet Minh, the communist independence coalition led by Ho Chi Minh. This French-Viet Minh conflict – the Indochina War – began in December 1946, when Viet Minh forces destroyed a power plant and attacked a French garrison in Hanoi (Addington, 2000, p. 33). Skirmishes and campaigns occurred sporadically until 1954, when the French troops were nearly decimated at Dienbienphu, in northwest Vietnam. In March 1954, French chief of staff, General Paul Ely, asked the American Joint Chiefs of Staff for aid. While some were willing to offer help, General Matthew Ridgway, Korean veteran and UN commander-in-chief, opposed any intervention. It was Ridgway's arguments that convinced the Joint Chiefs and, eventually, President Eisenhower, that American involvement in Vietnam was a poor strategic direction (ibid., p. 41-42). In May 1954, the Battle of Dienbienphu was lost, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declared itself the victor and, ostensibly, chief power in the nation (Lawrence, p. 47). Negotiations between France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, America, and the People's Republic of China, opened in the same month. The result was an uneasy peace, with Vietnam split along the 'seventeenth parallel' into North and South. Eisenhower became determined to work with the South Vietnamese to halt the spread of communism, and his ally in the South, President Ngo Dinh Diem, was eager to assist. Diem used his army and police force to arrest twenty-five thousand suspected communist sympathisers, sending them to detention facilities for torture and, in extreme cases, execution. Those communists that remained pleaded with their North Vietnamese counterparts for aid, but Ho Chi Minh remained determined to keep peace. In 1956, however, the communist party authorised armed self-defence where necessary. These conditions loosened, when communists in the South were encouraged to erect secret facilities and target South Vietnamese officials (ibid., p. 61-63). Hanoi then established supply lines across the seventeenth parallel, allowing troops and materiel to pass southwards.

‘American officials watched with dread,’ Lawrence writes, ‘as the Saigon government faltered in the face of the growing insurgency’ (p. 66). The mission to hold back the tide of communism could barely afford to see the United States remain only a financial supporter of the South. However, it was not until well into the first term of Eisenhower’s successor that American involvement was to escalate. John F. Kennedy’s partnership with Diem began to dissipate in 1962. The United States cut foreign aid, among other ‘selective pressures’ such as suspending shipments of tobacco, rice, and milk (Herring, 2002, p. 123). In November 1963, a group of Army of the Republic of Vietnam officers deposed Diem and his brother and adviser Ngo Dinh Nhu. They were executed the same month. On 22 November, Kennedy himself was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Kennedy’s successor was Lyndon Baines Johnson, who immediately vetoed a withdrawal of troops from Vietnam (Lawrence, p. 85). The USS Maddox was attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin on 2 August 1964, and returned fire. Johnson immediately ordered retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases. Some five days after the Maddox incident, Johnson was granted power to use any and all measures to ‘resist aggression in Vietnam’ (ibid., p. 86). From 1963 to 1968, Johnson increased the amount of American personnel in Vietnam from 16,000 advisers and soldiers to 550,000 combat troops. In purely political and strategic terms, Johnson dealt with clashes between North and South Vietnam decisively and discreetly. That is not to say, however, that casualties were low or insignificant – according to Addington, by the end of 1967 there were 16,021 dead and almost 97,000 wounded (p. 112). On 21 January 1968, however, the Allied garrison at Khe Sanh came under heavy attack by Northern Vietnamese troops. Only ten days after this initial attack, the Tet Offensive was launched by General Vo Nguyen Giap of the People’s Army of Vietnam. Addington describes the offensive:

‘Within the first forty-eight hours [of 31 January 1968], communist forces attacked thirty-six of forty-four provincial capitals, mortared or rocketed every major Allied airfield, and battled Allied soldiers in five of the country’s six autonomous cities, in sixty-four district capitals, and in scores of lesser towns.’ (p. 117)

Though the Tet Offensive was ultimately suppressed by America and its allies, this concerted and orchestrated manoeuvre disturbed Johnson and his counterparts. The

battle for Hue, fought over some eight weeks, would captivate the American people, as television journalists broadcast images direct from the front line into living rooms across the United States (ibid.). Public support for American involvement in the region plummeted, and Johnson was ousted from office in early 1969. Richard Nixon's strategy in Vietnam was one of prolonged withdrawal. The strategy had three parts: first, the constant portrayal of Nixon as willing to go to any lengths to secure victory in Vietnam (what Addington refers to as Nixon's 'madman pose', p. 127); second, a strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, particularly as the latter was improving relations with North Vietnam; and third, a protracted handover to the armed forces of South Vietnam, in order to facilitate American withdrawal (Addington, p. 127). In late January 1973, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho signed the Paris Peace Accords, effectively ending American aggression in Vietnam (ibid., p. 149). In February and March of the same year, all US troops were withdrawn, and 591 prisoners of war were returned (ibid., p. 150). North Vietnamese flags flew atop the presidential palace in Saigon on 30 April 1975. As Lawrence writes, 'The American war was over' (p. 167-8). According to Addington, the total American casualties – military and civilian – for the conflict in Vietnam total 371,825, though this is hugely contested, as are the figures for all military and civilian losses on both sides (Addington, p. 152).

Alongside the tumultuous events in South-East Asia, the 1960s and 1970s was a heady time for the Western world. The civil rights and women's liberation movements were coming into their own, and the proliferation of hallucinogenic drugs – combined with acute social awareness – led to the Flower Power movement and some of the most renowned anti-establishment, anti-war music of the twentieth century, including that of Bob Dylan, Donovan, Joan Baez, Simon & Garfunkel, The Doors, and The Beatles. One might think that the resultant cinema of such times would be a daring, extroverted, outlandish one, particularly with the decline of New Hollywood (*BONNIE & CLYDE*, 1967; *CHINATOWN*, 1974; *TAXI DRIVER*, 1976) and the rise of the blockbuster (*JAWS* (1975); *STAR WARS*, 1977; *ALIEN*, 1979). However, despite a society glued to international events, enmeshed in debate and protest, and united in sexual, civil, cultural, and pharmacological revolution, the cinema of Vietnam is (characteristically) a lonely, quiet, introspective one (see Kolker, 2000; Rapaport, 1984). It is a cinema, moreover, imbued with the same sense of unease, confusion, and frustration that permeated society

of the 1960s and 1970s. Where cinema of the World Wars focuses on a group of characters, films about the Vietnam War usually portray the mission or experience of a central figure. This figure is almost always a tragic or flawed one; if they are not so at the beginning of the film, they are irrevocably altered by the time credits roll. The image of the 'lone warrior' is most traditionally associated with the Western genre, painted art, or even poetry. It is an image etched into history, used almost gratuitously on war memorials around the world (Doss, 2009, p. 14-15). Its use on such memorials supposedly attests to the glory and courage, bravery and sacrifice, of soldiers at war, but in the cinema of Vietnam, the same image evokes alienation and isolation, oftentimes conscious and intentional. This chapter examines *APOCALYPSE NOW* and *FULL METAL JACKET*, two films released after the conflict, that best encapsulate the use of central figures in films about the Vietnam War. These films make use of techniques of estrangement perhaps more than cinema surrounding any other conflict, but this is enmeshed within certain more conventional techniques. Conard's (2007) reading of *FULL METAL JACKET* through the lens of a Nietzschean flux metaphysics is applied to both films and their characters, revealing that the timbre of the time and the war itself is articulated as much through these films' weaving of convention with the negation of same, as through their much more introverted and individual storylines. However, while Private Joker in *FULL METAL JACKET* and Captain Willard in *APOCALYPSE NOW* are central protagonists, only Willard represents the 'lone warrior' trope, as Joker remains part of his platoon until the very end of Kubrick's film. With his constant narration and deliberation over his mission, Willard's character development is more akin to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Joker represents more of a channel through which the audience can experience the horrors of war; while he is a writer with aspirations, he has also been whittled down by the military machine into a heartless and indiscriminate killer. These films – indeed, most films set during the conflict in Vietnam – embody defamiliarisation. They do so by fusing new techniques with old; low-angle handheld camera shots, and slow-motion footage, are inserted as counter-points to much more conventional filmmaking. At once, films about Vietnam take the war film out of the Hollywood studio era, and look forward to the concatenated, media-influenced vision of films about conflict in the Middle East. However, the cinema of Vietnam represents a break from the 'grand narrative.' They speak to no nationalist imperative, herald no universal

triumphalism, and certainly do not sing the praises of combat. They are films out of time (and films apart from any other war cinema) for a war that felt much the same.

In APOCALYPSE NOW, we meet Captain Benjamin L. Willard – played by Martin Sheen – a former special operations soldier embodying every hallmark of the tortured veteran²⁰. Having tried life back in the States and succeeding only in alienating himself from his family and friends, Willard has returned to Saigon: the adopted refuge of the disaffected. He has locked himself in his hotel room, sweltering in the humidity, discouraging stress by encouraging euphoria and hallucination with the use of manifold mind-altering substances. In one memorable sequence, a highly intoxicated Willard openly weeps on the floor, moaning in agony and despair; the shot then changes to the same drunken Willard performing tai chi, before plunging a hand into his own reflection in the mirror: an action pre-empting his self-destruction. He is soon summoned by military superiors to journey high into the jungle, up a long, treacherous river, through enemy territory, to kill Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), a formerly decorated and respected commander who has gone rogue, murdered all those sent to find him, and established a large cult amongst the local population. The end of the film – in which Willard brutally hacks Kurtz to death with a machete – is of course the climax of the piece, but the journey up the river is a far greater part of the film, establishes Willard's character and those in his periphery, and symbolises the Vietnam War as a whole:

'Part of me was afraid of what I would find and what I would do when I got there. I knew the risks, or imagined I knew. But the thing I felt most, much stronger than fear, was the desire to confront him.'

The character of Willard is the lone soldier sailing up the river to defeat a faceless and mysterious enemy. The profound weirdness of the journey makes some attempt to capture the disjointed mental state of those returned from Vietnam; a consciousness distorted by drugs, sex, and murder (Herr, 1977; Rapaport, 1984). '[T]he river journey drawn from *Heart of Darkness*, takes the detective and viewer, not through Vietnam as a separate culture,' writes Hellmann (1982), 'but through Vietnam as the resisting object

²⁰ For purposes of research and analysis, I used the 2002 DVD release of the 2000 remastering of the film, known as *Apocalypse Now: Redux*. This is considered to be the definitive version of the film, certainly by Francis Ford Coppola. It includes several previously omitted sequences and a remastering of the original print.

of a hallucinatory self-projection of the American culture' (p. 431). These are all the aforementioned revolutions – pharmacological, sexual, social – transplanted and distorted from the relative safety and progressivity of the United States into a hellish war zone. It is prudent to mention here that in the midst of this socio-cultural upheaval, cinema, in response, was changing. It began, arguably, with *EASY RIDER* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper. Disillusioned with 'traditional' modes of production and storytelling, Hopper and his friend Peter Fonda wanted to make a road movie with no ostensible storyline. The first attempt was, unsurprisingly, a shambles. Terry Southern was called in to add some story elements, and *EASY RIDER* was born (Biskind, 1998, p. 68-9). The film played with form in such a way as to create a new language of cinema – a cinema with unconventional cutting techniques, including jump cuts and flickering transitions; a lingering camera that moved to the beat of the music and the lay of the land as opposed to who was speaking or the action on screen; and a sparse storyline that took place outside, on the road or over a campfire, and could not be further from the studios or backlots of the classical era. *EASY RIDER*, *FIVE EASY PIECES* (1970), *AMERICAN GRAFFITI* (1973), *THE CONVERSATION* (1974), *ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN* (1976), and *TAXI DRIVER* (1976) are but six films from a cinematic trend that lasted, according to scholars like Isaacs (2013), from the late 1960s until approximately 1980. This era is often called 'New Hollywood,' or 'post-classical Hollywood,' and is seen to articulate the restlessness, uncertainty, and impotence felt by many during the era. 'American cinema, which had once conformed to the rigid aesthetic imperatives of a classical Hollywood, now exemplified a restless spirit,' writes Isaacs. 'This was furthermore the decade in which Hollywood reflected the insurgence of alternative ideologies and cultures and, in its most radical incarnation, the image of a new American subjectivity' (Isaacs, p. 121). *APOCALYPSE NOW* sits at the end of this era, just as the blockbuster was beginning its meteoric rise: *JAWS* had been released four years earlier, in 1975, and *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK* would be in cinemas a year later. *APOCALYPSE NOW* channeled this form-play and disillusionment into a new kind of war film, but this was a formula not unknown to Coppola, who had struggled to carve his own path in Hollywood since his days in film school. *THE CONVERSATION*, another of his films, follows Harry Caul (played by Gene Hackman) in his surveillance business. He is highly respected in his profession, but a socially awkward loner in his private life. On one job, Caul has been

solicited to record a conversation between a man and a woman in a park. Though the meaning of the words remains unclear for much of the film, Caul is deeply troubled by the possible extrapolations of the conversation. Shot with long takes, edited sparsely, and preferring to leave meanings and interpretations to the individual viewer rather than spoon-feed the story to them, *THE CONVERSATION* is demonstrative of Coppola's signature cinematic *modus operandi*. The story, too, is never clear-cut, never delineated, and not particularly easy to follow. Its confusion, its disjointed, chaotic structure, its various strata of possible meaning, are completely intended, and perfectly reflect not only New Hollywood, but also the disillusionment of the 1960's and 1970's – *THE CONVERSATION* was released in the midst of the Watergate scandal. Francis Ford Coppola would refine his storytelling methodology, and his filmic practice, for *APOCALYPSE NOW*.

This began with the funding. The changing nature of Hollywood forced Coppola to adapt accordingly, and he presold the distribution rights to *APOCALYPSE NOW* – overseas and to United Artists in the US – to fund its production. He had the creative control he sought – owning the production rights – but he alone was financially responsible for its completion and subsequent commercial performance (Coppola, 1995, p. 17). It was new funding models such as this that allowed intellectual filmmakers like Coppola and Michael Cimino (who made 1978's *THE DEER HUNTER*) to engage with the politics and people of the Vietnam War on a much deeper level than other directors had with World War II. It is this change that affected war cinema in the most profound way – in effect, diverting it away from propaganda and towards a more cynical view of war. Arguably, *APOCALYPSE NOW* is the quintessential Vietnam War film, and could certainly be considered Francis Ford Coppola's perspective on the conflict. Portrayed and enshrined in the scenes that comprise the film are the very paranoia and uncertainty that the American public felt during the conflict in Vietnam; the public was seeing reports of atrocities on both sides, commanders acting on intelligence that was sketchy at best, downright fallacy at worst. The infamous helicopter sequence contains heinous violence and an unjust engagement of innocence; there is doubt as to who is the enemy and there is doubt in leadership. This is also true of the sequence where Willard runs off with the surfboard, in direct defiance of Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore; this sequence also portrays a small amount of fleeting camaraderie between Willard and his men, as they laugh about

what they have just done²¹. What Coppola did with the helicopter attack sequence, though, was condense his whole perspective on the conflict at large into a seventeen minute aside from the film's main storyline – that of Willard's journey to confront Kurtz – which conveniently leads directly into that plot. It is also a funneling – a concentration – of some sixty years of war film. The helicopter attack is the conventional war combat audiences had known since Griffith – a clash of powers, bullets flying, wide angled shots taking in the entirety of the battlefield, and by extension, the horror of 'Man's inhumanity to man' (Burns, in *Burns Country*, 2013). Once the river voyage begins, however, the landscape, the scope of the film, diminishes to the calm water flowing ever towards the 'dark heart' of the mind, of humanity; similarly, the camera angles move in, privileging mid-shots and close-ups. *APOCALYPSE NOW*, then, portrays the combat elements of the cinema of the World Wars, but eschews the group dynamic (and accompanying channeling of viewer perspective through that ensemble) in favour of the introspective lone soldier. This achieves two things: firstly, it narrows the focus of the film from a wide group of people, each with their own background, aspirations, hopes, and fears, to a single character; secondly, it changes the film's construction and presentation.

The cynical and bitter view of war taken by filmmakers like Coppola and Kubrick emerges in the key themes of death, chaos, morality, and sexuality. Conard (2007) explores *FULL METAL JACKET* in terms of a Nietzschean flux metaphysics; in a world consistently in motion, ever-changing, the imposition of order is futile. Individuality, he writes, is just one element of the chaos of the natural world: no two people are the same. So in the first half of the film, Hartman's attempts to strip the recruits of their personalities are useless. Although he gives each man a nickname that could be used to apply to a range of people, he called Leonard 'Gomer Pyle,' 'unknowingly and ironically labelling the different *as* different, the unique *as* unique, and thereby not only failing in his mission to make them all the same but also illustrating the impossibility of that mission' (Conard, p. 40). Further, Conard outlines Nietzsche's concerns with morality: namely that there are two kinds. The first is the Judeo-Christian fundamental idea of

²¹ Note that the surfboard theft sequence exists only in the *Redux* version of the film. In the theatrical release, the surfboard is visible on the boat in the subsequent sequence, with no explanation of how it got there.

morality, designed to suppress animal instincts. Nietzsche, and, by extension, Conard, argue that this type of morality is 'life-denying' and 'unnatural' (ibid., p. 41). The second type of morality is healthy, and is generally self-imposed, without any kind of belief or indoctrinated motivation. This morality is exercised by the position of values.

'... we evaluate things in the world around us as beneficial or harmful to the discharge and expression of our power, things that help or hinder us in achieving our goals ... [T]he rules contained in a [healthy] morality or system of evaluation aid us in reining in our various chaotic drives and instincts, allowing us to give a certain coherence and structure to our lives and thus allowing us to flourish.' (ibid., p. 43-4)

Conard writes that Kubrick sees morality as a problem in *FULL METAL JACKET*, in the blurred line between combatants and non-combatants, in the ignorance of moral perspective in glorifying those combatants who have performed well as 'killing machines', and in the role of death in the film. In earlier conflicts, despite some collateral damage (and the atrocities of the Holocaust notwithstanding), battles were fought between armies on both sides, not civilians. Conard recalls Jefferson and the American Declaration of Independence when he writes that combatants have given up the right to life – and its associated liberties – in order to be granted the right to take the lives of others, without repercussion or punishment, in the name of one's country (p. 38). In Vietnam, however, the line between combatant and non-combatant became very blurred: the Vietcong would disguise themselves as civilians to raid South Vietnamese towns or US military installations, and would recruit women and children to sabotage helicopters and other vehicles (as seen in *APOCALYPSE NOW*). Before the recruits in *FULL METAL JACKET* begin weapons training, Hartman recounts the performance of Charles Whitman and Lee Harvey Oswald – Whitman having killed a number of students from a tower at the University of Austin in 1966, Oswald having shot Kennedy from a great distance in 1963. Hartman then asks if anyone knows where they learned to shoot; Joker replies that they were trained in the Marines. 'In the marines!' Hartman exclaims, 'Outstanding! Those individuals showed what one motivated marine and his rifle can do!' (ibid., p. 44). There is a lack of any kind of moral judgement here; regardless of them having killed innocent civilians and a president, Whitman and Oswald were stellar marksmen. Death

serves as an ending to both parts of the film: the deaths of Hartman and Pyle, and then the death of the young sniper. Conard writes that where the first death is absurd, meaningless and malicious, the second is 'humane, compassionate; it is the only thing that makes sense in an insane world' (ibid., p. 45). The first death is the result of attempting to impose rules and discipline; trying to order the chaos. The second is a merciful, human reaction to that same chaos. Joker himself adds a philosophical element to the film, when he is challenged by a superior officer to explain why he wears a peace symbol badge and has written 'Born to kill' on his helmet.

COLONEL: Now answer my question or you'll be standing tall before the man!

JOKER: I think I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man, sir!

COLONEL: The what?

JOKER: The duality of man. The Jungian thing, sir!

Duality permeates the film in the ways outlined above, but also in its play with masculinity and femininity. There are a number of scenes involving prostitutes, to which the men display machismo and domination. There is also Hartman's insistence that the recruits treat their rifles as women, 'Because it is the only pussy you are going to get!' But in both *FULL METAL JACKET* and *APOCALYPSE NOW*, it is the way men attempt to mask their very human, very real, fear, with their machismo and manliness. Men will lie, cheat, steal and kill, but when asked about the realities of war by the press crew in *FULL METAL JACKET*, their eyes glaze over and, in the case of Joker, he puts on an air of fake bravado and humour:

'I wanted to see exotic Vietnam, the jewel of South East Asia. I wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture and... kill them. I wanted to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill.'

This masking of fear is not only about the men, but also about American attitudes to the war itself. The results of the Vietnam War speak for themselves. It was what amounted to an unwinnable war against a determined, experienced and vastly underestimated enemy.

It was a loss: a dark stain on the otherwise glorious and victorious military history of the 'Western' Allied forces.

'Perhaps blinded by a sense of their own capability, the Americans failed to appreciate both the depth of the nationalist sentiment which motivated their enemy and the unwillingness of their South Vietnamese allies to adapt to American imperatives.' (Taylor, 2003, p. 7)

The hiding of fear behind fakery is echoed in Robert Altman's MASH (1970), another New Hollywood film. MASH was set in Korea, but is very obviously an allegory of the Vietnam conflict. In Altman's film, army surgeons use humour and absurdity to mask the horrors they face every day in a frontline operating room. Similar notions of masculinity and femininity permeate life at the MASH 4077 as they do in Joker's platoon: the men objectify the women, and see them as potential conquests. However, the doctors would be nothing without their nurses: they often realise and are forced to admit this, somewhat emasculating themselves in the process. Korea was not a victory for America. Filmic representations of such murky conflicts and disturbed historical periods face harsh criticisms. Dittmar and Michaud write critically of almost any film made representing or set within the Vietnam War. They state that nearly every Vietnam War film skirts the potential to portray events with any kind of authenticity, or with any kind of historical or political specificity, choosing instead to focus on the men involved, and on their coming to terms with combat in general, rather than the political machinations behind the futility of that combat:

'[T]hese films differ from films of other wars in the ways they put forth an essentialist notion of combat and, in doing so, preclude discussion of causes and goals, context and consequences, ideals and practices.' (Dittmar & Michaud, p. 8)

APOCALYPSE NOW – in its portrayal of a fictional mission, not only to take out a fictional rogue general, but also through the various stereotypes associated with a macho, over-hyped, Hollywoodised, fairytale version of Vietnam – falls into this category. Coppola's Vietnam could be almost any twentieth-century conflict; certainly there were small, low profile intelligence and insurgence missions into Nazi-occupied Europe in the early

1940s, into Kuwait in 1990-91, and Afghanistan and Iraq from 2003 onwards. One of the most interesting surfaced from my own perusal of the Internet. A Dutch spy snuck into a party attended by German troops at a popular resort near The Hague, and extracted two of his countrymen to be reunited with the government-in-exile in Great Britain. The means of his incursion inspired the opening of the 1965 James Bond film *GOLDFINGER*, where Bond unzips a wet-suit to reveal a pristine evening suit beneath: the Dutch spy used the exact same method, even pouring gin over himself to get past the sentries. Even amongst members of a single group or nation, plots emerge, such as the now infamous and ultimately unsuccessful Operation Valkyrie, a scheme amongst high-ranking German officials to assassinate Adolf Hitler²². Coppola likely chose Vietnam because it was in recent memory, its setting was exotic and cinematic, and the murky politics underscoring the conflict suited the story. I suggest that he also chose Vietnam because its hazy politics and exoticism brings human nature into a sharp relief: the perverse, animalistic instincts that underlie man's calm, polite, civilised exterior fit well in such a wild setting.

While on the topic of men in a wild setting, it is pertinent to discuss the influence of the source text on Coppola's film. *APOCALYPSE NOW* is based on Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, first published as a three-part serial in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899 (Knowles, in Conrad, 2007, p. xxviii). The story itself was based on Conrad's own experiences as the captain of a steamer that went up the Congo River to retrieve the agent of a Belgian trading company. That agent died on the return voyage. Conrad, too, became ill, but recovered, and wrote *Heart of Darkness* some eight years later. The novella takes the form of a 'framed story' and *roman à clef*, wherein the main action of the story is relayed to a small audience on board a boat moored in the River Thames. The teller of the story is Charles Marlow, who tells how he became captain of a riverboat for an ivory trading company in Africa. The story echoes that of Conrad himself, but Marlow goes into great detail concerning the psychological effects of the journey up river. The jungle, he says, broods all form of reflection, contemplation; the darkness of the river's waters and the trees and mangroves on either side seems to envelop the soul.

²² This story has been adapted for film many times, most notably in a 2009 version directed by Bryan Singer and starring Tom Cruise.

'There were moments when one's past came back to one... but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.' (Conrad, 2007, p. 41).

On finding Kurtz – the agent of the trading company – Marlow discovers a once vital man reduced to an incomprehensible lunatic. Though there are flashes of lucidity, the jungle seems to have claimed Kurtz's soul.

'Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear – concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear... But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad.' (ibid., p. 83).

Kurtz is also very ill, and Marlow resolves to bring him back for proper medical care. However, Kurtz dies on the return journey. His dying words are: 'The horror! The horror!' (ibid., p. 86). The novella gained notoriety for its apparent racism (Achebe, 1988). Throughout, the natives are referred to as 'savages', 'cannibals', 'niggers', and 'animals.' However, scholars such as Firchow (2000) and Watts (1983) refute this, arguing firstly that these critics fail to distinguish between the views of the author and those of the character he created; secondly, the picture of imperial invasion of Africa created by Conrad is actually remarkably accurate. In the literary deconstructions of those critics who have deemed Conrad 'racist,' we can observe characteristics of cinema set during the Vietnam conflict. Watts, for instance, states that 'the tale probes the very assumptions [critics say] it endorses' (Watts, p. 203). This probing is done in the novella's structure, which is a deliberately constructed maze of meaning and metaphor. 'It is an organizational [sic] principle of *Heart of Darkness*,' Watts writes, 'that reassuring clichés are evoked and then subverted, just as salutary affirmations are sought, briefly established, and then undermined' (ibid., p. 198). Conrad's work, then, criticises imperial incursion into occupied territory, by presenting one such journey as a confused, uncertain tale. Indeed, in reading the novella again, I was struck by the muddling of words, the way the language seems to trip over itself in getting to the point. In one

memorable section of prose, Conrad (via Marlow's narration) describes first seeing the gruesome additions to Kurtz's outpost: severed heads on poles.

'Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen – and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids – a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.' (Conrad, p. 72).

The language shares the rhythm and disjointedness of the spoken word – and this in itself is a technique of estrangement. The reader is used to carefully structured prose that gives some sense of the action, the characters, and the setting. Conrad's voice in *Heart of Darkness*, however, is one of a single character, and is therefore highly subjective. The reader is placed in the mind of the protagonist, flawed and muddled such as it is. This exact technique of subjectivity, and the resultant feeling of uncertainty, is central to the portrayal of Captain Willard in APOCALYPSE NOW.

At the time of APOCALYPSE NOW's release, in 1979, the war had only ended four years earlier. The people, stories, experiences, of Vietnam were still very fresh in peoples' minds. It is hard to know exactly what they thought of Coppola's psychedelic odyssey; only original reviews are easily accessible, and if they are anything by which to judge popular reaction, then it was at best highly polarised. Vincent Canby of the New York Times was dissatisfied, saying that despite the film 'disclosing not only the various faces of war but also the contradictions between excitement and boredom, terror and pity, brutality and beauty', it ends up 'an adventure yarn with delusions of grandeur' stuck in a 'profoundly anticlimactic intellectual muddle' (Canby, 1979). Likewise, Richard Roud criticised Coppola's story and direction, calling the whole film 'cultural overkill' (Roud, 1979). On the other hand, Roger Ebert (1999) sings both the film's and director's praises, calling APOCALYPSE NOW 'a good and important film – a masterpiece, I believe.' Ebert also made a prediction about the film's legacy:

'Years and years from now, when Coppola's budget and his problems have long been forgotten, "Apocalypse" will still stand, I think, as a grand and grave and insanely inspired gesture of filmmaking – of moments that are operatic in their style and scope, and of other moments so silent we can almost hear the director thinking to himself.' (Ebert, 1999)

The notion of the director 'thinking to himself' aligns directly with the characterisation of Vietnam War films as intellectual, introspective forays into the mind, and into the darkness of humanity. The element of darkness explored in *FULL METAL JACKET* is the excision of humanity by an institution: in this case, the United States Marine Corps. *FULL METAL JACKET* was Stanley Kubrick's second last film, before 1999's controversial sexual odyssey, *EYES WIDE SHUT*. In a way, each of Kubrick's films are a journey: to humankind's carnal inner self (*LOLITA*, 1962, and *EYES WIDE SHUT*); to the absurdity of the Cold War (*DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB*, 1963); to the stars (*2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*, 1968); into the past (*SPARTACUS*, 1960, and *BARRY LYNDON*, 1975) to a dystopic and violent future (*A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, 1971); and finally, in *FULL METAL JACKET*, through the hellish training regime of the Marine Corps, and into the hell of warfare. *FULL METAL JACKET* also encapsulates the protagonist's transformation from a sensitive, naïve youth into a cold, hardened, ruthless and lethal killing machine.

FULL METAL JACKET begins with shots of a number of young recruits having their heads shaved at Parris Island Training Facility. The young men are then given their opening address by Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, who is loud, crass, and an extreme disciplinarian: at many times throughout training he verbally and physically abuses his trainees. The recruits must endure harsh endurance training, obstacle course runs, drill manoeuvres, weapons training and basic domestic duties. Throughout these episodes, the central characters emerge. The main character is Private Joker, who later becomes a Corporal, then a Sergeant. Joker is a thoughtful but disciplined man who tries to remain true to himself despite the dehumanising effects of basic training. After graduating from Parris Island, he becomes a combat reporter for *Stars and Stripes*, constantly clashing with editors who wish him to gloss over the truth for the sake of morale. Amongst Joker's comrades at Parris Island are Private Cowboy, a quiet, introspective figure; and Private

Gomer Pyle, a lazy, disobedient, overweight slob, who Hartman targets for relentless abuse due to his weight, and consistent inability to perform. The men also berate and humiliate Pyle, particularly when Hartman begins punishing the entire unit whenever Pyle makes a mistake. Hartman gives every recruit a nickname in place of their birth names, further stripping them of their humanity and accelerating their subsumation into the military machine. The first act ends with the recruits' graduation, and subsequent dismissal into their various roles and platoons: infantry, demolitions, engineering, and so on. Joker is made a combat reporter, and is ribbed by Hartman because of it. Hartman gives Pyle one conciliatory remark when he announces his placement in the infantry: 'You made it.' The joy of graduation is short-lived, however: on their final night on Parris Island, Pyle takes his gun into the lavatory. He is confronted by Joker, who tries to pacify him, but something has obviously snapped. Pyle begins performing solo drill, barking orders, which brings Hartman into the lavatory. Pyle then kills Hartman before – mechanically, and perhaps abjectly – turning the gun on himself.

Act two begins with Joker and his press colleagues being propositioned by a Vietnamese prostitute; Joker's photographer, Rafter Man, has his camera stolen by a pair of Vietnamese teenagers. This sequence leads to a discussion on why the Americans bother helping the Vietnamese when it is clear their presence is resented. Joker and Rafterman are briefed by their editor, and superior, Lieutenant Lockhart, who sends them to Phu Bai, where Joker is reunited with Cowboy; from there they make their way to Huế. The Battle of Huế was a protracted skirmish that lasted almost five weeks, resulting in a tactical victory for the US and South Vietnamese forces, but a strong propaganda and political victory for the North Vietnamese and Vietcong (Warr, 1997, p. xi). In *FULL METAL JACKET*, the battle takes up a reasonably short period of time, but allows an insight into US military urban warfare tactics – rake the target building with machine gun fire, wait for retaliation; if retaliation occurs make use of grenade launchers to clear the building, then move in and finish off any stragglers. After the battle, a television crew interviews the men involved. Machismo and fear are on show in equal measure as, one by one – and Joker and Cowboy included – they recount their personal feelings of war, or tell crass jokes to mask deeper emotions. The men then receive orders to move further out of town, to an industrial estate full of abandoned warehouses. Their commanding officer is killed in short order by a sniper, who then terrorises the remaining men until

they finally decide to move in. Led by Animal Mother and Joker, the team surround the sniper's building and rake it with machine gun and artillery fire until the sniping stops. The group move into the building, where Joker finds the sniper wounded and writhing on the ground; he also discovers it is a young girl. The other men urge Joker to finish her off; even the girl herself ceases praying and pleads, 'Shoot me.' After much hesitation, Joker pulls the trigger, then looks off into the distance with the 'thousand-yard stare.' The film ends with the men marching through a Huế in flames, singing the Mickey Mouse Club Song. This ending is absurd – and echoes scenes throughout the cinema of Vietnam that feel entirely out of place, such as the Playboy bunnies sequence in *APOCALYPSE NOW*. These scenes are completely intentional, as they reify the notion of chaos inherent in films of this era, and the era itself.

FULL METAL JACKET has stronger ties to the ensemble element of World Wars cinema; there is a group of main characters through which we gain an insight into the training of a marine, and also into the hell of serving in Vietnam. But Stanley Kubrick is the master of unsettling audiences, as proven in his earlier works, and *FULL METAL JACKET* is no exception. The ensemble cast is where the similarities with the cinema of the World Wars end²³. From the beginning we are taken on a ride that begins with the stripping of humanity from young recruits, and ends with a harrowing depiction of ruthless combat, and the vindication of military training and protocol despite the absurdity of the situation. According to Shklovsky, the artist 'transfer[s] the usual perception of an object into the sphere of new perception'; in the case of *FULL METAL JACKET*, the objects are the military and the notion of war, as it was perceived during the era of the Vietnam conflict.

In its approach to narrative, *FULL METAL JACKET* is typical of the Vietnam War film. As opposed to the grand narratives of the World Wars – which channel politics, love, death, social and national interest and channel them through the actions and experience of a group of central characters – the stories of Vietnam tend to be closed-minded, introspective accounts of individual experience; that or the story itself is intrinsically linked to one character, and through them we experience (almost first-hand) what the conflict is like. An example of this is Joker's narration; although it is sporadic – occurring

²³ Though Kubrick subverts even the 'diverse ensemble' trope: Joker and Cowboy look very much alike.

three or four times in the entire film – it centres the audience, reorienting their thoughts with Joker's own perspective (Mainar, 1999, p. 197). Narration is prevalent in both APOCALYPSE NOW and FULL METAL JACKET, as another technique for directing audience attention inwards, into the heart and mind of the soldier, as opposed to tactics, the machinations of war or governance; the ethics of the soldier, the choices he has to make everyday, on his own, without orders or direction, are at the core of what Vietnam War films are about, and every cinematic element is included or utilised to that end (re-work). It surprised me that consistent narration by a central character is almost exclusive to the Vietnam film. Films of other conflicts often make use of an omniscient, unseen narrator to introduce the time and place, or use title cards or crawls to the same end; but rarely does the audience hear the subjective point of view of an individual character. The narration in APOCALYPSE NOW was written by Michael Herr, whose book DISPATCHES was an inspiration for both that film and FULL METAL JACKET; Michael Herr was credited as a screenwriter for Kubrick's film.

After reading Herr's book, it is not difficult to see how it influenced both Coppola and Kubrick, and their films. Almost a stream of consciousness novel, it echoes Hunter S. Thompson and Jack Kerouac in its random alignment of humour and horror, poetry and profanity; Thompson himself said of the book:

'We have all spent ten years trying to explain what happened to our heads and our lives in the decade we finally survived – but Michael Herr's Dispatches puts all the rest of us in the shade.' (cited on rear cover of Herr, 1977).

Herr was a correspondent in Vietnam for Esquire magazine from 1967 to 1969. His experiences ranged from unimaginable boredom to sheer, cutting terror. He articulated these experiences for the readers of Esquire in their own language; not that of a sanitised news reporter or military mouthpiece towing the line.

'Some of us moved around the war like crazy people until we couldn't see which way the run was even taking us any more, only the war all over its surface with occasional, unexpected penetration. As long as we could have choppers like taxis it took real exhaustion or depression, near shock or a

dozen pipes of opium to keep us even apparently quiet, we'd still be running around inside our skins like something was after us, ha ha, La Vida Loca.' (Herr, p. 9)

Much like the disjointed, confused society opposing the war, and its terrified, bored, exhausted, confused participants, Herr's story is more episodic – a post-modern series of vignettes linked not by plot, progression, escalation, only by setting. The only bookends to these vignettes are chapters entitled 'Breathing In' and 'Breathing Out.' Appraisals of FULL METAL JACKET – and indeed some academic theses around the work – discuss its disjointed narrative, the sheer shellshock and dislocation that viewers feel once the action moves from Parris Island to Vietnam itself (Krohn, 1992; Kuberski, 2012, p. 83-4). I contend that this sudden and jolting change of scene is particularly exemplary of a Vietnam War film. How many young lives were uprooted and changed forever when they were drafted? There were also young people back home, with no interest whatsoever in art or politics, that suddenly took up paintbrush, camera, typewriter and megaphone when the injustice, corruption and social disorder took root between the 1950s and 1970s. There was also an incredible difference and distance between what a soldier encountered daily during basic training to what he saw and experienced on the field of battle; the fatigue felt in the barracks at the end of the day would be nothing compared to exhausted sleeplessness in a muddy foxhole in the jungle.

Kubrick, however, jars the audience with his narrative manipulation. Naremore (2007) reflects on the clearly defined two-part structure, suggesting that it was Kubrick's intention to defy audience expectations and to play with the possibilities of a more observational tone.

'... the unexpected elimination of Hartman and Pyle, who were the only characters capable of sustaining a story, condemns us for a time to "wander into regions bordering dangerously on nonsense." Kubrick told interviewers that he wanted to "explode the narrative structure" and, in the aftermath, he gives us not only fragmentation and aimlessness but also a mixture of styles or modes.' (Naremore, p. 211).

In the documentary *A LIFE IN PICTURES*, Herr, who co-wrote the screenplay for *FULL METAL JACKET* with Kubrick, says that he sees it more as a pure war film, in the sense that it neither glorifies nor critiques conflict, merely presents it as it is; he also comments on Kubrick's ability to find beauty where others might have difficulty doing so.

'[T]he detachment of the view is like a God's-eye view of combat ... [the story] seems to be so still and removed: the cleanliness of it, and the power of it, and the beauty of it, because it was also beautifully filmed. And he understood that it was accepted that it was quite okay to acknowledge that among all the things that war is, it's also very beautiful.' (Herr, in Harlan, 2001).

FULL METAL JACKET, therefore, is not a war film in the traditional sense, but it is a film about war, and every element thereof that affects the soldiers represented. In this way, it both typifies and re-settles the Vietnam War film sub-genre, in terms of narrative. This deliberate deconstruction of narrative allows Kubrick to present a sympathetic view to those like Herr, who see war as an eerily beautiful phenomenon; it also allows both Kubrick and Coppola to present disturbing aspects of war in a unique, confronting, and entirely new way.

With earlier Vietnam films, such as the few made during the event itself, there was a tendency to de-contextualise the conflict: to make it less about Vietnam and more about conflict and its participants. The resulting films, including *A YANK IN VIET-NAM* (1964), *TO THE SHORES OF HELL* (1966) and *THE GREEN BERETS* (1968), are instead a group of relocated, reconstituted World War II films. Westwell also acknowledges the contribution of satire to the Vietnam sub-genre, particularly the contributions of *THE DIRTY DOZEN* (1967, see Chapter 3) and *KELLY'S HEROES* (1970), 'in which the World War II patrol movie is brought into contact with the cynical sensibilities of the late 1960s' (Westwell, p. 61). This reluctance to address the Vietnam war head on was based partially on its politics: the war was fought in a limited manner, at first without a full deployment of American troops, and was only ever a peripheral conflict in US foreign policy (Taylor, p. 5-8). The war was entered into without any gauge of public support, and the fear of Communism was at its zenith, as was the fear of thermonuclear war (Westwell, p. 59). Hollywood was also in decline, in terms of its studio system, which

was giving ground to more gritty, realistic films and filmmakers intent on telling more intense stories: this movement became known as 'New Hollywood,' and its exponents included Robert Altman, Woody Allen, and Martin Scorsese. The Vietnam War was also in everyone's faces, in the sense that it was much more widely covered by television news crews and print media journalism; the role of coverage and public information, up until that point, had been filled by cinema, in the form of newsreels that preceded feature films much like the trailers or previews of today (ibid., p.60). Due to the war's unpopularity, the government was also much less willing to cooperate than might normally have been the case. Filmmakers were forced into positions of making pro-American melodramas that were closer to the grand narratives of World War II. It was not until the war ended that the themes of paranoia, uncertainty and lack of faith in leadership could be explored – in films such as *THE DEER HUNTER*, *COMING HOME* and *FIRST BLOOD* – but, according to Klein (1990), this did not accurately reflect the period or the conflict itself.

These films' narratives generally advance from the war experience to criticize American society of the 1970s from alternative cultural perspectives. Their subject is not so much the war or combat experience – very few war scenes are presented – but the effect of the war on American veterans and the implications of the failure of the post-Vietnam United States to fully implement the countervision of the sixties at home or abroad.' (Klein, p. 22)

This manifests itself clearly in films like *COMING HOME* and *BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY* (see 'On the returned veteran film', at the end of this chapter), but this sense of unease about accurate portrayal is also apparent in *APOCALYPSE NOW* and *FULL METAL JACKET*. While at times harrowing, the fighting in *APOCALYPSE NOW* is against a largely unknown enemy, almost against the jungle itself. We see Willard traversing a world on which he has no direct impact: he is merely moving through. The set-pieces of *APOCALYPSE NOW*, therefore become settings; backdrops only – with Coppola's use of colour they are almost canvases, artworks against which Willard and his men are but a blur. Willard is the *other* in these scenarios, until his arrival at Kurtz's compound where he becomes the focus of great activity. Kurtz appears to have been expecting him, and has made preparations for his arrival. Kurtz knows his fate, as does Willard. With the

appearance of Marlon Brando as Kurtz, there is, suddenly, an enemy: a great, powerful, esoteric figure, and the perfect foil for Willard. Kurtz embodies the frustration of the Vietnam era: the public were concerned that those in charge were letting events get away from them. The American military had become involved in a conflict against an enemy who were better-equipped and far more experienced in this type of warfare. Kurtz's course of action, then, was to defect, and become one with the jungle and its people. While possessed of a powerful intellect and a readily-apparent charisma – the hundreds of people blindly following him are testament to this²⁴ – Kurtz's actions are disturbing to the audience. In the film, as in Conrad's novella, Kurtz's dwelling is decorated with severed heads: this is a naturally distressing image. In Kurtz's dialogue, too, there is a bitter and twisted aspect to the character. Most of the dialogue was improvised by Marlon Brando himself, after discussions with Coppola; the rushes ran for some hours, and Coppola and editor Walter Murch had to cut a great deal of good footage (Sellers, 2009).

'I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. That's my dream; that's my nightmare. Crawling, slithering, along the edge of a straight razor... and surviving.'

The above line was improvised by Brando, but perfectly encapsulates the tentative, paranoid nature of both the story and its political context: Willard and, by extension, America, journeyed far to impose order on what they perceived to be chaos. In their very imposition of order, the chaos overtook them. The US was forced to withdraw; Willard, in APOCALYPSE NOW's bizarre conclusion, assumes the role of leader within Kurtz's tribe, having slain the camp's originator. Willard succeeded in his mission, but is himself an entirely changed man. Morality, so Nietzsche claims, is the ultimate imposition of order by humanity on the chaos of existence. But those who impose order are vulnerable: the characters of the jungle – for it does play the role of a character in APOCALYPSE NOW – and the abandoned buildings of Hué and surrounds in FULL METAL JACKET – always get their revenge. The settings – continuous, monotonous, like Impressionist paintings – reinforce the sense of frustration, inertia, helplessness; Conrad, before these films, created

²⁴ The casting of Marlon Brando adds to the character's intrigue – he is an immediately recognisable figure, but his character is twisted and insane.

the same effect in a literary sense. The 'faceless enemy' seems to embody the universe resisting the imposition of order – but unlike the entirely faceless enemy of films about Middle Eastern conflicts, the opposition eventually reveals itself. In *APOCALYPSE NOW*, the emergence of Kurtz gives a visage to the enemy combatant, as does the teenage girl sniper that Joker must kill in *FULL METAL JACKET*.

Whether visible or not, the presence of an enemy in a film necessitates scenes of confrontation. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, films about World War I and II prefer a wide view – encompassing the entire battlefield and observing troop movements from an almost strategic perspective. In this chapter, it is observed that American films about the Vietnam conflict move in closer, depicting combat from the soldier's point of view. This individual, visceral, experience of war is disjointed, concatenated, reflecting Rapaport's observations of the landscape and the battles in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (Rapaport, 1984). The visceral nature of the combat encourages filmmakers to make use of techniques of estrangement. These techniques draw the viewer in, giving them some sense of what is being experienced by the individual soldiers. In the combat depicted in Kubrick's film, for instance, we see only muzzle flashes from distant buildings, while Douglas Milsome's camera remains firmly behind and amongst Joker and his companions. The major combat of the film is the patrol of Huế that ends with the sniper sequence throughout which the camera remains low, almost at hip- or knee-height, as the men move in towards their target. There are long, calm tracking shots, such as when squadron leader Crazy Earl is moving through the ruined buildings. The camera runs laterally to Earl's movements, and the soundscape is unobtrusive but ominous; the distant rumbling of vehicles and dull thud of far-off artillery fire an audial backdrop to Earl's footsteps. The key moment in this tracking shot is when Earl exits a building and stops to inspect a child's toy, a bunny, left seemingly abandoned in the rubble; it is a booby trap, which explodes, killing Earl and leaving Cowboy in charge of the squadron. These tracking shots recur throughout not only *FULL METAL JACKET* but also all of Kubrick's films, and they reinforce well the calm, detached, contemplative mood of Vietnam War cinema. The sniper sequence is perhaps the most drawn-out in the film – even apart from the relentless barrage of abuse from Gunnery Sergeant Hartman. It begins just after Earl's death: the patrol veers off course, then move up to what seem like abandoned buildings. Crouching behind low cover to check their position, Cowboy then

orders Eight Ball to secure the area. He advances, before being shot in the leg by the sniper, such that his cries will draw in the others. The delineation of space in the beginning of this sequence is simple. From a group shot that echoes those seen in *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* (Figure 4.1), the film cuts to a shot behind the group, as Eight Ball hurdles the barrier and moves towards the buildings (Figure 4.2). As he slowly advances, there is a cut back to one of the squad, nervously watching events unfold (Figure 4.3). The cut back to Eight Ball's advance is conventional for such a scene – it prolongs the action while maintaining the established space. The next shot, however, shifts to a new point of view (Figure 4.4). A rising frame, that almost imitates someone standing up, is penetrated at its zenith by the barrel of a sniper rifle. The same frame then zooms in on Eight Ball as he signals the all clear: the gun then fires. On this action, there is a cut to slow-motion vision of Eight Ball's leg exploding with blood (Figure 4.5), then to a shot of the Marine squad opening fire on the buildings (Figure 4.6). A series of shots from the front shows the faces of the Marines as they fire machine guns, grenades, and mortars into the buildings (e.g., Figure 4.7) – these shots are cross cut with vision of the results: the side of a building exploding outwards, for example (Figure 4.8). There is also a sweeping pan across the front of the buildings as bullets explode into the concrete and shatter the wooden doors. On a return to the initial closed form group shot (from Figure 4.1), Cowboy then calls a ceasefire.



Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.2.



Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.6.



Figure 4.7.



Figure 4.8.

The pacing for this combat sequence is slow, deliberate, even when the firing is intense. The swooping pans of the buildings as they are fired upon are nothing like the frenzied editing of later war films (such as *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, or even the more conventional action cutting of *RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II*), and reflect a desire in this instance to present the effects of combat, rather than the individual perspective of the combatants. There is no particular focus on any individual soldier, which mirrors the increasingly anonymous treatment of the men in the first half of the film: the Marines are faceless, but a cohesive unit. The enemy is unseen, and the cohesive unit works against that enemy. The shots are not massively wide – although beyond the Marines you can see the building, you only see the men from the waist up, or crouched behind cover. Even during Eight Ball's slow-motion fall, he is framed from the shins up. This more intimate framing shifts the audience's perspective from the wider considerations of the battlefield as a whole, to the much closer quarters of a small urban skirmish. While no individual is focused on for any great length of time, the close-ups on the soldiers' faces suggest a more human involvement with combat. The slow-motion shot of Eight Ball falling – echoed later when he is shot twice more, and then again when another Marine rushes to his aid – feels apart from the action, yet is crucial to the sequence. This alignment of real-time with slow-motion also occurred in Sam Peckinpah's *THE WILD BUNCH*, about which Sean Cubitt (2004) wrote:

'Peckinpah's is an antitechnological universe: the six-gun and the movie camera are the only true, the only authentic machines... Only cinema and the code of the shoot-out have the smack of truth, the phenomenology of visceral presence. And both are caught at the moment of their fading.'
(Cubitt, p. 191).

Rather than try to recapture the shoot-out of the dying (or by the late 1980s, Cubitt would say, the well and truly dead) Western, Kubrick transfigured it into a new iteration, suited to the urban setting and faceless enemies of Vietnamese city warfare. This new interpretation and treatment of combat, and the accompanying visual syntax, have been added to the lexicon of the conventional war film, particularly in films about conflict in the Middle East (see Chapter 5).

To recap, both APOCALYPSE NOW and FULL METAL JACKET make use of mid-shots and close-ups, both in the traditional role of focusing attention, but also as part of a dialect of visual language absent from films about other conflicts. First World War films favour a wider angle, taking in the central characters amongst their battalion or, going even wider, the battalion racing across the battlefield, weapons at the ready, towards the enemy; where Second World War films went wider still, acknowledging the landscapes, the grand vistas upon which battles were fought. This latter focus is perfectly realised in films about D-Day – the 6 June 1944 landings at Normandy – which usually include one lateral tracking shot, following the Allied troops landing on their boats, racing up the beach and, often, being mown down by Axis machine gun fire in the process; this shot can be seen in THE LONGEST DAY, THE BIG RED ONE (1980) and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, among others. The films of the 1970s and 1980s that addressed the Vietnam War eschewed the extra wide angle in favour of a mid-shot or close-up, choosing to focus on the individuals involved. Indeed, FULL METAL JACKET opens with lengthy shots of each of the Marine recruits having their heads shaved, to a background of the Johnnie Wright song 'Hello Vietnam.' This serves as the perfect introduction both to the characters and to the dehumanisation – and transformation into precision killing instruments – that is to follow. It is also a sequence characteristic of Kubrick's cinema, juxtaposing images with music in a very jarring way; having one's head shaved is often seen as a harrowing ordeal, stripping one of individuality, personality. This is combined with a jaunty

country tune to create an odd audio-visual dissonance. Throughout the seemingly unending training and complementary abuse from Hartman, the cinematography also serves to merge the individual Marines into a single, faceless platoon. They are treated by the camera much more equally, and one notable shot removes their faces altogether, placing them as black silhouettes before the setting sun (Figure 4.9). There is little sense of this dehumanisation in *APOCALYPSE NOW*. None of the characters speak of their training, nor do they speak much about the military as a concept or institution; they rarely even question the war. In and of themselves, each member of the 'PBR Street Gang' is a truly unique character: the hard-but-fair 'Chief' (Albert Hall), surfer Lance (Sam Bottoms), 'Chef' (Frederic Forrest), and the very young, gung-ho, but naïve and inexperienced 'Mr Clean' (Laurence Fishburne). Collectively, though, they serve as eccentric peripheral points of interest, another part of the backdrop through which Willard travels. In the case of *APOCALYPSE NOW*, it is the conflict itself that serves as the dehumanising force: in a panic, upon stopping a villager's boat, the crew open fire, killing the innocent crew. A puppy survives, and is immediately adopted by Lance. From that moment on, though, smiles do not last long on the faces of Willard's comrades; the war is no longer fun; the war, like the river, seems never-ending. This notion of dehumanisation is common to almost all war cinema, but the *emphasis* placed on it by films about Vietnam separates this era from those before and after it.



Figure 4.9: Faceless Marines in *FULL METAL JACKET*.

With the fragmented nature of the content and structure of most Vietnam films, one might expect the editing to be equally disjointed. In fact, the films examined in this chapter draw out the action or exposition, making the audience much more aware of the content of the frame: the characters, setting, set dressing, dialogue, the entire *mise en scène*. The process of editing APOCALYPSE NOW is cinematic legend. According to editor Walter Murch, by the time shooting was complete there was over a million feet of film to sift through (Aubry, 2006). Murch likened the editing of the film to cutting a swathe through the Amazon with a machete (Murch, 2001). What resulted, however, fits perfectly into the reflective mold of Vietnam cinema. The films of the Vietnam War are not about combat, at least not in the way the cinema of the World Wars is. These films are much more about what combat does to people and environments; and in the case of APOCALYPSE NOW, it is about a mission within a mission. The film is about Willard's journey up the river to meet his nemesis, his doppelganger: his alter ego, his fate. The most important, famous, action-packed combat sequence in the entire film takes place before Willard's journey has even begun, and ends with its beginning; it is also, arguably, the best-known scene of the film, and one of the most iconic sequences in cinematic history. After boarding attack helicopters, a platoon of soldiers flies over a small coastal Vietnamese village, ruthlessly firing on innocent civilians, making small work of what little resistance there is, and finally firebombing the entire area with napalm. What makes this part of the film so iconic and memorable is that the whole scene plays out to Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries,' which is blasted from loudspeakers mounted on the helicopters; according to Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore, 'My boys love it. Scares the hell out of the slopes.' The entire sequence lasts almost eighteen minutes – by any standard, a long time in which to portray a single combat engagement, and, notably, only surpassed by the depiction of the Normandy landings in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. It begins with a lengthy tracking shot (around the twenty second mark), following Kilgore leading Willard and his men towards the choppers. This is a very busy shot, and a tour de force for a single take. Smoke, dust and fumes swirl through the air; in the background the choppers are being loaded, men are climbing aboard and the rotors are beginning to turn over. In the foreground (and out of focus), men run to and fro, though we only see from their chest to just below the waist as they rush past camera. On arriving at Kilgore's chopper, the camera switches to a mid-shot as Kilgore yells at one of his men, then

commands a bugler to signal their departure. The camera then jumps on board with the troops. We cut between the faces of the men (in close-up shots), then return to the ground as the helicopters take off past the bugler. There are shots from the air too, taken from one chopper, looking at the others silhouetted against the sunrise. Music begins here: a mid-range synthesised pad that wavers between a few distinct notes; a close-up of Willard's profile is layered over the first shot of the choppers, and then a second chopper shot is layered over Willard's face. The synth pad continues as the scene cuts to Kilgore and Lance B. Johnson discussing their preferences for surfboards: the dialogue and action consistently returns to surfing during the entire sequence, as an appropriately absurd aside to the reality of attacking the village: another layer of absurdity in an already chaotic perception of combat. After this moment, Kilgore gives the order to initiate 'psy war op,' which means turning on the Wagner, and turning it up to maximum volume. The editing from this point is done to the rhythms of the classical music, cutting between the faces of the men, zooms in on machine guns ready to fire, the speakers blasting the music and the surfboard Kilgore brought along on the attack run; these consistent cuts between shots of about two to three seconds in length serve to build up anticipation, much like the music itself does with its smaller, recognisable thematic motifs.

This rhythm is broken, though, when there is a cut to the sleepy, silent, Vietnamese village, where some women are sorting vegetables, and a group of singing schoolchildren leaves the hall and walk out into the town square. The cut is deliberate, and very jarring. Coppola's intent is clear: to show the effects of the absurdity soon to be arriving in the helicopters we just saw. The shots here are extremely steady, slow, deliberate tracking movements, reinforcing both the calmness and serenity of the setting, but also contrasting greatly with the loud, bombastic shots that preceded them: in their slowness, they de-automatise the viewer's perception, defamiliarising the quite peaceful scene, infusing it with a sense of foreboding. Soon, we hear the distant 'whumps' of the helicopters. The townspeople realise what is coming, and begin leaving the town square, taking the children with them. There is then a shot, ostensibly from the coastline, of the many choppers flying in low over the waves; it is at this point that the music swells, as we cut to a rear shot of the choppers as one of them swoops around in a dramatic movement. The score reaches a climax as the orchestra plays the key motif from the 'Ride of the Valkyries,' and the helicopters open fire. The next few minutes play out against the

remainder of the music by Wagner, cutting between shots of the men in the helicopters, shots of the choppers themselves, people on the ground either running away or returning fire, and the results of the heavy assault, with water sprayed high into the air, primitive huts, watchtowers and bridges splintering into a thousand fibres, and hundreds of Vietnamese being mown down, enemy or not. This is shown in contrast to the two or three choppers that are shot down on the American side. It is worth noting that in comparison to later films about World War II, or those about the Gulf Wars and other Middle Eastern conflicts, *APOCALYPSE NOW* has next to no shots filmed using a handheld camera. The immediacy of the sequence is imparted by shooting from within the choppers with the troops, or through long tracking shots (either from a dolly track or using a steadicam) that show the enormity of the damage wreaked by the Americans. The later half of the combat sequence shows a helicopter swooping in to land in the same town square shown earlier, in order to evacuate a wounded soldier. The operation is sabotaged, however, when a young Vietnamese woman runs in – supposedly to attempt to evacuate herself – and plants a grenade in the chopper, which then explodes, killing all on board. Kilgore then swoops in and kills the woman and her companions; ‘Fucking savages,’ he spits, without any hint of irony. The remaining helicopters then land on the coast, with some of the ground troops still picking off the limited Vietnamese resistance. Despite Kilgore’s calmness as he strolls along the beach – in a mirror of the tracking shot that opened the sequence – shells are exploding all around, and soldiers are still cowering in foxholes. The surfing theme is reprised, as Kilgore orders two of his men to go out on the water, despite the area still being fired upon: ‘You either surf or fight!’ As the napalm strike is ordered in to finish off whoever is left in the village, the young men surf amongst exploding geysers of water. After the firebombing, Kilgore kneels down and converses with Willard, and finishes with one of the most quoted lines of the film: ‘I love the smell of napalm in the morning ... smells like victory’ (contracted). As Kilgore walks off to watch the men surfing, Willard hands Lance his gear, and the two make a run for the boat that will take them to Colonel Kurtz. On the way, Willard steals one of the remaining surfboards from one of the choppers; the subsequent chase and escape is perhaps the only time the audience sees Willard genuinely happy in the entire film, as he laughs and collapses on the deck in relief²⁵. With the escape, though, the journey is

²⁵ Even more poignant, then, that the surfboard theft sequence and subsequent escape should be cut for

begun, its only possible end being a confrontation with Kurtz. The horror of the helicopter attack is thus replaced with another horror: the unspeakable perversion of Kurtz, and the sense that his assailant is equally corrupt.

The 'Ride of the Valkyries' attack scene is memorable for its synthesis of audio and vision to create a terrifying, nightmarish image of war being rained down from above²⁶. This is seen from the points of view of the US military, in Kilgore and his men – and Willard and his comrades – as they unleash a relentless barrage of fire on the quiet Vietnamese village. The audience is also transplanted into the shoes of the villagers – both those who attempt to repel the attack, and those who are innocent witnesses – as they prepare for the onslaught with very little warning. The cross-cutting between the thunderous interior of the helicopters and the near-silence of the village further accentuate the difference in experience, and the necessity Coppola sees in showing his audience both attacker and defender. The sequence privileges the perspectives of the Americans, in that it must show the glee of Kilgore and his men, but also the cautious acceptance of Willard and his platoon that this is a just cause of action. Willard laughs at the use of Wagner, but sets his jaw for the remainder of the sequence: he is reluctant to share the elation of Kilgore's platoon at their wanton destruction. This goes some way to explaining Willard's chosen profession: the assassin strikes in a surgical, precise manner, with little or no collateral damage. He feels ambivalent towards such a wanton, callous and *imprecise* act of warfare. In the previously recounted scene when the PBR Street Gang open fire on unarmed civilians in a boat, Willard, again, remains largely unaffected. When 'Mr. Clean' and 'Chief' are killed, it is the remainder of the Street Gang that react, not Willard. He remains apart from the action, retreating further into himself and poring even deeper over his notes on Kurtz, and the orders he must carry out. Despite the gravity of the events surrounding him, Willard remains introspective; his own individual perspective – his crosshairs – are fixed on Kurtz from the moment he is given his mission. If anything, the large-scale machinations of war serve to distance him even further. Throughout APOCALYPSE NOW, Willard is filmed largely in close-up or mid-shot – though there may be others in the frame (Figure 4.10), it is always Willard who is lit such that the audience

theatrical release. This section was restored to the 2001 REDUX version.

²⁶ The same sequence can be seen in 2005's JARHEAD. The Marines watch the film while awaiting their deployment, and the music and action whip them up into a killing frenzy.

can see him. This reflects a focus on the individual – unlike cinema of the World Wars, the other members of the central group are unimportant.



Figure 4.10: Mid-shot of Willard in APOCALYPSE NOW.



Figure 4.11: Close-up of Willard in APOCALYPSE NOW.

Depth of field is the term used to describe the ‘depth’ of a shot in terms of focus, or, ‘the range of distances in front of the lens that will appear satisfactorily in focus’ (Monaco, p. 85). If the subject of the frame is in sharp focus, and the background is not in focus, a shot is said to have a shallow depth of field. If foreground, mid-ground and background are all equally in focus, a shot has a long depth of field. The shallow depth of field used by Coppola contrasts with the long depth of field used by Kubrick, but the effects are similar in terms of texturing the Vietnam conflict. Monaco writes that cinematographers are ‘interested not in scientific reality but in psychological reality’ (ibid.). To this end the

filmmaker and cinematographer must work together to figure reality not only in terms of what they want the audience to see, but also what they want hidden, and what they want to be implied. In Figure 4.11, Willard is sharp while the river in the background is fuzzy. Willard is deep in thought, looking through the notes on Kurtz provided by his superiors. The depth of field reflects his contemplativeness, but the constant presence of the river, even in this shot, suggests that the journey is constantly weighing on his mind, and is never far from his thoughts. The great depth of field employed by Kubrick gives his images a flatness. Far from being less accomplished²⁷, the longer depth of field serves the function of having all three planes (fore-, mid-, and background) in focus. In Figure 4.2, for instance, the Marines are in focus, as is the building they are firing on: the audience watches the machines of war *and* the havoc they wreak in real time. The layering of psychological considerations alongside the effects of war is a technique of estrangement that characterises films about the Vietnam conflict, and reveals yet more of the essence of the era.

The role of the media was not explored in any great depth until films about the Gulf and Iraq Wars. Similarly, the influence of the changed visual syntax that accompanied thoroughly embedded journalism did not become mainstream until the mid-late 1990's; in a strange way, it could be said that this new vision of war began with *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, though a 'mediated' vision of war was supplanted into earlier feature films about the Gulf War including Shimon Dotan's *THE FINEST HOUR* (1992) and Paul Greengrass's *THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY* (1996). However, the germ of the examination of the impact of the media on war – and perceptions of same at home and on the battlefield – can be found in both *APOCALYPSE NOW* and *FULL METAL JACKET*. The news crew in *APOCALYPSE NOW* is fronted by Coppola himself; as the men land on the beach following the helicopter attack sequence, the news crew moves past laterally, filming a low tracking shot. Coppola, as the director, yells, 'Don't look at the camera, keep on fighting!' The presence of the director within the frame is itself an estranging technique. The audience is jarred from their steady acceptance of the *mise en scène*, and everything they have seen so far is called into question. Rather than seeming inauthentic, however, Coppola's presence seems justified, in that as the director of *APOCALYPSE NOW*

²⁷ A great depth of field is much harder – and more expensive – to achieve than a shallow depth of field.

is presenting his own view on Vietnam, the way a television director would were they present in Vietnam during the conflict. The essence of Vietnam, the chaos of the conflict in political *and* representational terms, is present in this few seconds of Coppola's film. In FULL METAL JACKET, though, the role of the media is laid beneath the middle section of the film, as Joker plies his trade for *Stars and Stripes*, the official US military magazine. Throughout the film, the troops struggle to put their training into practice: to be the killing machines that Marines ought to be. They tread the fine ethical line between killing without thought, or choosing not to kill and be spared any resultant guilt. Joker, as a writer for an official military publication, must walk another ethical tightrope: he desires to produce objective journalism that reports what the military is doing (or not doing) in Vietnam, but is constantly brought to heel by his superiors. The resident editor of the magazine, Lieutenant Lockhart, tows the party line, blindly scrapping honest, realistic depictions of the conflict in favour of stories that praise troops for mercilessly killing enemy troops or even civilians. Joker has proposed a story about a firefight in the jungle, about which Lockhart asks 'Where's the weenie?':

JOKER: Sir?

LOCKHART: The *kill*, Joker. The *kill*. All that fire, the grunts must have hit *something*.

JOKER: Didn't see 'em, sir.

LOCKHART: Joker, I've told you we run two basic stories here. Grunts who give half their pay to buy gooks toothbrushes and deodorants - *Winning Of Hearts and Minds*. And combat action which result in a kill - *Winning the War*. I don't ask much of you people but I do expect you to adhere to my editorial policy. You must have seen blood trails, drag marks?

JOKER: It was raining, sir.

LOCKHART: Well that's why God passed the law of probability. Re-write it and give it a happy ending. One killed. Make it a sapper. Or an officer.

Though a small exchange in the film – the treatment of the war by the press is not Kubrick's first priority in *FULL METAL JACKET* – it presents an interesting portrayal of media reportage. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1994) wrote that the biggest problem about news coverage of Vietnam was that what *should* have been said, i.e. that the war was 'fundamentally wrong and immoral' (Herman & Chomsky, p. 252), was simply not reported. That is not to say that the press did not take up a view contrary to the establishment. Indeed, in keeping with the spirit of the 1960s, the reportage savagely attacked those in charge, but not for the merciless slaughter of innocents or for the abuse of power exerted upon the Vietnamese by soldiers, but for mismanagement of political resources (ibid., p. 172-3), not least the *materiel* of war that was deployed in Vietnam and across Indochina at the time. The media are largely absent in cinema of the World Wars, though photographers and cinematographers were deployed to cover the conflicts (among them were Robert Capa and Frank Capra). The appearance of news crews in films about Vietnam is not treated objectively: it shares the view of Herman and Chomsky that the media treated the Vietnam conflict within a model of propaganda. The arrogant re-writing of history by the editor of Stars and Stripes within *FULL METAL JACKET* was deliberate on Kubrick's part. In addition to the direction given to the troops by Coppola himself in *APOCALYPSE NOW*, the embellishing of actual events by Lieutenant Lockhart presents a crucial criticism of America's involvement in Vietnam. This treatment also very blatantly tells the audience not to believe everything they see, both in terms of reporting on war, and within all representation, including the film itself. In presenting the construction of a version of events – in the form of a camera crew or the war correspondents' office of a magazine – both Coppola and Kubrick are reminding the audience that their own films are nothing more than the same. This consciously dislocates the audience, forcing them apart from the events on screen, questioning notions of truth and verisimilitude. All films about the Vietnam conflict are concerned with these questions on some level, but the construction of *APOCALYPSE NOW* and *FULL METAL JACKET* – their wide angle shots, their long shot durations, and their protracted editing – allows the viewer to consider these themes while watching the film, not only in

retrospect. This is cinematic immersion on a different level, based largely – and somewhat ironically – on techniques of defamiliarisation: a rounded philosophical presentation, both in terms of the director ‘thinking to himself’ and in terms of Frampton’s notions of the film-mind working in parallel with the mind of the viewer. The essence of humanity, morality, and reality are all put under the microscope, and the viewer is drawn along by the vision and the audio as the director takes them through an examination of each key theme. Nietzsche (2003) – in his scathing attack on his contemporaries – claimed the major problem with philosophers was their obsession with ‘that which is’ (Nietzsche, p. 45). He says that his contemporaries were obsessed with dehistoricising a given concept in order to ‘make a mummy of it’ (ibid.) On truths being withheld from their understanding, Nietzsche imagines them exclaiming, ‘It must be an illusion, a deception which prevents us from perceiving that which is; where is the deceiver to be found?’ (ibid.) Bazin’s comment, mentioned in the Introduction, on art as being a representation based on a ‘preservation of life’ is crucial to an understanding of cinema serving as both the mummy and illusion – cinema bridges this gap between ‘that which is’ and, I suppose, ‘that which is not,’ by dehistoricising, by preserving, and by representing. In terms of Vietnam, no other conflict has been more heavily critiqued, or reflected upon as much on the level of personal experience.

‘The stifling heat, the crushing permanence of tropical conditions, and the probability that nothing will happen ... simply draws out whatever one feels to points of boredom beyond conscious definition, to a meditation on death whose double is the uncertainty of knowing whether one hears anymore or not, whether the eyes can see, whether the mind processes, or the self is still reacting.’ (Rapaport, p. 138).

The cinema of the First and Second World Wars is very obviously of its time: the conflict’s necessity is rarely questioned, the objectives small and reasonable, the men often reluctant but inevitably willing to get the job done. Apart from the omnipresence of the jungle, however, it might be hard to determine that APOCALYPSE NOW was about Vietnam – even with that environment, it could be set in any jungle conflict of the second half of the twentieth century. FULL METAL JACKET situates itself historically by depicting the beginning of the Tet Offensive, but the agony of training, the experience of

a soldier in wartime, and the grappling with taking another life, are all universal themes that could be applied to any conflict. In dehistoricising the Vietnam conflict in this way, filmmakers like Coppola and Kubrick can more easily examine its component parts, and present a depiction of the conflict as a failure on many levels: from the presidents and generals all the way down to the grunts on the battlefield.

APOCALYPSE NOW was released in 1979, only a few years after Spielberg's JAWS and Lucas' STAR WARS, the same year as the James Bond film MOONRAKER and mere moments before the beginning of the decade that gave the world Indiana Jones, Marty McFly and E.T. The blockbuster was on the rise, and its prevalence remains to this day. Early on, according to King (2000), a 'blockbuster' was merely a film that had been successful at the box office: by this definition, GONE WITH THE WIND, CASABLANCA and PSYCHO were blockbusters (King, p. 2-3). Later, according to writers including Rosenbaum (2000) and Shone (2004), the term came to incorporate films that made use of special effects, large set-pieces and action-packed, sometimes fantastic, storylines, i.e. those were large on production value and in terms of narrative. The need for commercial success tended to outweigh the basic need for a coherent – or even believable, or comprehensible – plot, believable characters, or any kind of emotional or intellectual depth. The film merchandising industry – exponentially expanded by the *Star Wars* franchise – began to affect the production of the films themselves, with characters being invented or introduced that producers thought would sell a great number of action figures; with plots being left open, to be filled in later by a video game or accompanying graphic novel. APOCALYPSE NOW sits on the cusp of this change in mainstream film production: it was a mainstream movie, in the sense that it was distributed at first by a respectable company in United Artists, then later in its REDUX edition by Miramax, and conceived and directed by a prolific and successful filmmaker in Francis Ford Coppola, whose GODFATHER series had garnered significant critical acclaim²⁸. The role of spectacle in the blockbuster has been explored by King, and he suggests that despite changes, or refinements, in the economic factors that drive movie production, the notion of there being a 'pure' or 'classic' cinema that preceded the modern era is misguided. There are government bodies devoted to rating films for particular age groups; the home media

²⁸ In 1979 only the first two parts had been released, in 1972 and 1974. The third and final film in the series was released in 1990.

rental industry requires arbitration of films into categories or genres, for ease of storage and display; advertising and distribution are both now high-income, high-activity sectors that influence how, what, and when people see films or their attached advertising or merchandise. But even pre-*Jaws*, the concept of going to the cinema to escape reality was far from foreign. Early horror and adventure films attracted great audiences, and constitute great 'blips' in the 'pure cinema' concept, as King states. Coppola made a film that bridged the gap between spectacle and narrative; despite the massiveness of the jungle, and the enormous set pieces against which Willard's journey is played out, this is still one man's journey, one man's mission.

FULL METAL JACKET, in contrast, flies almost directly in the face of the cinema of spectacle, certainly with regard to the war film. With Kubrick's long, slow takes, and his knee-height tracking shots that seem to last forever, he seems to be dredging Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation from the early days of the twentieth century and supplanting it in the middle of South-East Asia. The deliberateness of Kubrick's direction and cinematography combine to truly unsettle an audience by then – 1987 – used to seeing examples of a set war film canon. Like APOCALYPSE NOW, FULL METAL JACKET makes use of large, expensive, authentic-looking set-pieces, and a great deal of special effects in its limited depiction of combat; and its portrayal of combat's aftermath, in the scenes in Huế where the men are interviewed by the news crew, and where Joker encounters the mass grave along the road to Phu Bai. But more importantly, the set-pieces are endowed with very authentic *mise en scène*: on the road to Phu Bai, Joker is passed by a seemingly endless line of jeeps and troop transports, and there are hundreds of extras wandering about; likewise, in Huế, there are many extras filling up the frame with movement, and the towering plumes of smoke from artillery strikes create a striking backdrop against which Kubrick's dissertation on war and humanity can play.

The contemplativeness, retrospectivity, and deep intellectual engagement of Vietnam cinema evolved and grew alongside the budgets of Hollywood blockbusters. Arguably, the progression of notable Vietnam cinema of this style ended with 1987's FULL METAL JACKET, PLATOON and GOOD MORNING, VIETNAM. The blockbuster budgets, however, kept rising. The emergence of a startling new conflict in the Middle East around this time forced filmmakers to balance budgets with storytelling and emotional impetus, in an

attempt to attract a new audience to war films; later, the events of September 11, 2001, would give rise to new expressions of fear, confusion, and frustration, that would permeate the war cinema of the early twenty-first century.

* * * * *

On the 'Returned Veteran' film -

John Milius wrote the first incarnations of APOCALYPSE NOW. Milius was told by Coppola to put into the script every sequence he ever wanted to see in a war film; the resulting ten drafts added up to over a thousand pages (Cowie, 2001, p. 7). At various points, Coppola himself rewrote parts of the script, occasionally producing entirely original drafts based on Milius' work. One of Coppola's scripts – pencil scribbles and coffee stains and all – resides in the British Film Institute, and is dated 3 November 1975. This version is bookended by a framing device not unlike that of Conrad's original novel. After Vietnam, Willard works as a bodyguard for a rich businessman. His ward has a party on a yacht, at which Willard is harassed into telling his story (Coppola, 1975). The intervening story is much the same as Coppola's finished film, but this framing device would have introduced the element of the returned veteran, unable to adjust to life without war.

Of course, a sub-genre of film about the Vietnam conflict is the returned veteran film; stories of veterans attempting to resettle into their lives back home, struggling with what would later become known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, drugs, alcoholism and social or marital difficulties. TAXI DRIVER's (1976) Travis Bickle copes with PTSD by buying a gun and going on a killing spree. In 1978, COMING HOME starred Jon Voight as a veteran returned from Vietnam, who falls in love with his carer. BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY (1989) was directed by Oliver Stone, who himself did a tour of duty in Vietnam. Stone's film was adapted from the memoirs of Ron Kovic, who returned from the conflict, confined to a wheelchair. While going about rebuilding his life back home, Kovic (played in the film by Tom Cruise) becomes a vehement anti-war activist. These

films are worth mentioning – if only in passing – as they often say more about the lasting impact of the conflict on the veterans and the greater American consciousness, than the combat films themselves. The sense of inertia, frustration, and confusion that permeated society during the conflict, was transplanted into the experience of the returned veterans who, often injured physically or psychologically, themselves felt inert, frustrated, and confused. The combat portrayed in *APOCALYPSE NOW*, *FULL METAL JACKET* and *THE DEER HUNTER*, for example, is absent; it is replaced by mans' struggle with himself, a struggle that manifests itself in psychotic episodes, sexual dysfunction, and battles with drugs and alcohol.

Chapter 5 -

Live from the Front Line: Conflict in the Middle East

The introspection and deep intellectualism of Vietnam-era cinema dissolved into a hyper-mediated early '80s cinema characterised by the soundbyte and the fleeting image. While the war cinema of the late 1980s onwards is typified by a return to the group ensemble and the intimate framing of subjects reminiscent of Vietnam war film, it is also typified by a disjointed, concatenated, 'machine-gun'-style syntax inspired by news footage and videogames. The films chosen for this section – *THE HURT LOCKER* (2008) and *THREE KINGS* (1999), with a supplementary discussion of *JARHEAD* (2005), *SYRIANA* (2005), and *VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: IRAQ* (2006) – have been selected as the 'quintessential' films of this era. This is due to the films' inclusion of the media within the narrative, alongside considerations of the complex social and political structures underlying any Middle Eastern conflict. While the technology producing the narratives has changed, and the presentation of those narratives is very different, this thesis contends that the stories themselves have returned to the nationalistic, high-concept ideals of the World Wars. These films take a wider perspective, appropriating techniques of news reportage and documentary footage in presenting an essentialist view of these new global conflicts: handheld cameras, a constantly-moving frame, and disjointed editing shake the audience into an awareness of the implications of these far-away wars. War cinema during the 1990s saw a revival of films about World War II. This was due in no small part to the 50th anniversaries of two key events: the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944. Cinema about conflict in the Middle East

in the 1990's was confined to a few small character-driven films, including *COURAGE UNDER FIRE* (1996) and, later, *THREE KINGS*. In fact, the majority of films produced about these conflicts were documentaries (Westwell, 2006). It was not until after the September 11 terrorist attacks that post-Vietnam dramatic cinema matured into a style of its own, integrating – rather than resisting – imagery inspired by (or, indeed, drawn directly from) news reports and documentaries into their *mise en scène*. The theories underscoring this chapter are those drawn from Slavoj Žižek, Paul Virilio, and Jean Baudrillard, with supplementary perspectives from James Der Derian, Noam Chomsky, and others. Historical perspectives are gleaned primarily from the work of Robert Fisk.

It is much more difficult to define the 'conflict' of this chapter, than it was to outline the political background and chronology of the World Wars, and Vietnam. The sudden explosion of 24-hour news reporting, syndicated information channels including AAP and Reuters and, later, the propagation and growth of Internet, led to world becoming smaller, at least with regard to communication and access to news and information. National boundaries became blurred: free trade was suddenly the political paragon of the era, and the activity – or inactivity – of 'regimes of interest' such as those established in parts of Asia and the Middle East, became a focal point for the foreign policies of many nations. If the naming of the conflict in Vietnam from 1955 to 1975 is considered a political minefield, the labeling of any of the conflicts that occurred in the Middle East between 1985 and 2010 is almost certainly ideological suicide. In this chapter I refer to two conflicts. The first is known in the West as 'the Gulf War,' or the 'Persian Gulf War.' In America, the main conflict is known by its military designation, 'Operation Desert Storm,' and took place from 2 August 1990 to 28 February 1991. For clarity and consistency, I will call it the 'Gulf War.' The second conflict is the US-led invasion of Iraq, which began on 20 March 2003, and which ended with the withdrawal of American troops in the latter half of 2011. The 'enemy,' if it can be called such, was the regime led by Saddam Hussein, though attempts to address similarly corrupt and oppressive regimes in neighbouring countries, including Lebanon, Iran and Afghanistan, were often drawn under the banners, respectively, of Operation Desert Storm (1990-91) and Operation Enduring Freedom (2003-2011). The 'enemy,' in some cases, may also include insurgent forces operating in US-occupied areas. This second conflict is referred to in this thesis as either the 'Iraq War' or 'US-led invasion of Iraq.' Both operations,

within a context of conflict occurring across the Middle East, are referred to collectively as ‘conflict in the Middle East’ or variations of same.

In his 1961 farewell address, President Dwight D. Eisenhower coined the phrase ‘military-industrial complex’ to refer to the financial and political inter-dependence of the legislative branch of the government, the armed forces, and the ‘defense technology and industrial base’ that supports them. Eisenhower’s farewell came in the midst of a time of prosperity and relative peace in America; his granddaughter, in 2011, called the speech ‘a solemn moment in an unsolemn time’ (Eisenhower, 2011). ‘Ike’ warned that the power of the military-industrial system was open to abuse and exploitation:

Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.
(Eisenhower, in Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008)

The American war machine had attempted to overthrow a Communist regime in Vietnam, and had failed. This was in the wake of another catastrophic conflict: Korea. Cold War paranoia reached its zenith with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, and the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in 1975 was a concern to the foreign policy advisors of many nations. However, American foreign policy advisors had watched the many continuing conflicts in the Middle East with great interest. In Afghanistan, for instance, a communist government seized power in 1978, which led to uprisings from rebel groups. In response, the Soviet Union sent troops to aid the communist leaders; neighbouring Pakistan established covert training centres for the rebel groups. If ‘[t]here is no war without representation’ (Virilio, 1984, p. 7) then there was certainly a war in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989, as the whole conflict depended on public opinion. Robert Fisk was one of the few journalists who made it into Afghanistan at the time, reporting for *The Times* in the UK. Of the shock at finding that the Soviet embassies worldwide were issuing visas to journalists, he writes:

‘This was astonishing. The Russians wanted us there. Their fraternal support’ for the new Karmal government – and the supposedly hideous

nature of his predecessor's regime – was to be publicised. The Russians were coming to liberate Afghanistan. This was obviously the story the Kremlin was concocting.' (Fisk, 2005, p. 50)

The notion of a 'concocted story' strikes to the heart of what contemporary combat has become, and it had begun as early as 1979 (incidentally, the year APOCALYPSE NOW was released theatrically). Before, during, and after the Gulf War of 1990-91, it became clear that journalists could be utilised to deliver messages tailored to garner support for the conflict. These messages would be encoded in the dialect of independent, impartial journalism. Fisk writes of the somewhat terrifying JIB – Joint Information Bureau – established by the US military for disseminating information about US involvement in the Gulf.

'All the promises of military potential, the inescapable firepower, the expressions of confidence, the superiority of technique and equipment, took on a subliminal quality. For while you might learn all you wished about the squash lead of a 155-mm shell or the properties of a cluster bomb, you were not permitted to dwell upon the results of its use... For this was war without risks, war made acceptable. It was clean war – not war as hell, but war without responsibility, in which the tide of information stopped abruptly at the moment of impact.' (ibid., p. 737)

With the development of telecommunications networks, news and information services (including the 24-hour news cycle), the Internet, and videogames – the enmeshing of 'the huge industrial and military machinery of defense' with the tendrils of the media was almost inevitable. James Der Derian (2000) details this amalgamation: from technologies that changed the nature of battle, to the role of the media in shaping public perception of conflict, Der Derian suggests that this combination of the machines of war with the channels and distributors of information (or misinformation) and entertainment, will lead to something akin to automatism.

'If you have these virtual environments based on worst case scenarios, which indicate how we're going to represent the enemy, their threats to us, and how we respond quickly, because speed is of the essence, then all of the

human attributes – deliberation, empathy, and experience – become secondary to a machine-like response.’ (Dialogic, 2008).

Der Derian writes that it is not only news that becomes subsumed into this sphere of influence, but also cinema, the Internet, and video games. Society is bombarded by stories of conflicts in far-flung parts of the world, and when we try to escape it, by going to the movies or playing a game, the same messages are drilled into us, albeit coded somewhat differently. This ‘automatism’ Der Derian warns against is a product of what he calls ‘virtuous war,’ where a given conflict is sanitised for a television-viewing audience, offering ‘a vision of bloodless, humanitarian, hygienic wars’ (Der Derian, 2000, p. 772). The role of technology must not be downplayed: from warfare’s execution, to its representation, and eventual reception, the machines involved dictate terms of engagement and of perception. Particularly in modern warfare, where battle is often orchestrated from a great distance away from the action, problems of image and perception are very much at play. With satellites and surveillance drones hovering overhead, and reconnaissance patrols making use of helmet-mounted cameras, the perception of war is dependent on those viewing devices presenting information correctly; deception is reasonably simple: like cinema, war is ‘a trade in dematerialization, a ... market which no longer produces matter but light’ (Virilio, p. 41). In a similar repositioning of control, a motorcar puts its driver at once at the helm, but also apart from the mechanical goings-on beneath the bonnet. Further, the length of the bonnet distances the driver from the extremities of the vehicle, which has a particular impact if the car hits a pedestrian, for instance. Myrtle’s death, in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, exemplifies this tyranny of distance. Daisy is at the wheel when a manic Myrtle jumps on to the road in front of the car. Daisy is obviously shaken at the sudden impact and death; Gatsby takes the wheel and the pair drive off. While Gatsby’s repossession of the car could seem more a reflection of his character than of the detachment allowed by the automobile, Fitzgerald’s treatment of the accident certainly imparts a level of ambivalence, as he tells it from an eyewitness’s point of view:

‘A moment later she rushed out into the dusk, waving her hands and shouting – before he could move from his door the business was over.’
(Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 112)

This ambivalence connotes a level of distance or detachment: from the driver's and the witness's points of view. The motorcar, then, acts as an instrument of defamiliarisation, perfectly embodying Heidegger's (1977) notions of man being subsumed into automatic, mechanical processes (p. 18). The driver, like the machine gunner, or the remote drone operator, are all integral to the operation of their respective devices. They are also, to varying degrees, apart from the action: the perpetrator is distanced from the act. Technology is a mediator: in the case of the motorcar it separates the driver from the road, and from others who might be on the road; in terms of warfare, the growing distance between trigger and target necessitates different relationships and interactions between man and technology. The indication of success or failure is often nothing more than a read-out or image on a screen. Virilio goes on to draw stronger links between warfare as presented on-screen to commanders, and the cinema:

'As in cinema, what happens is governed not by a single space-time principle but by its relative and contingent distortion, the capacity for repressive response depending on the power of anticipation.' (Virilio, p. 76).

The link between media representation and war – and its inherent tension – was made most clear-cut with the advent of twenty-four hour television news. This coincided with the introduction of television networks wholly dedicated to the presentation of news and current affairs – forever changing the role of the media in everyday life, the way news and information is disseminated, and its very construction. Suddenly, there was no relief from the realities of the world: footage of bodies, coffins, overlaid with statistics, body counts, collateral damage, 'attack breakdowns,' would be entirely foreign during coverage of the conflicts in Korea or Vietnam. But come the embedded journalist with a skeleton camera crew, there was renewed pressure on networks to find stories to fill the twenty-four hours. There was also increased concern from older forms of news dissemination – mainly print – that they were becoming irrelevant. This was made difficult by a twenty-four hour news cycle dedicated to presenting exciting vision, crossing to correspondents in far-flung corners of the earth, reporting on natural disasters, bloody political coups and harrowing civil and international conflicts. These dedicated news networks are often privately funded – owned by media conglomerates with interests in media both old and new – and

as such put forward the biases and interests of their advertisers, owners and stakeholders. In order to hold advertisers news networks became more and more competitive, searching for the bigger story, the better shots, and the greater spectacle: '[T]he press has moved toward sensationalism, entertainment, and opinion' (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 226).

The notion of the 'spectacle,' the hunger for ratings, and the almost fetishistic consumption of 24-hour news, was foremost in the minds of those who sent several young men into the air on the morning of September 11th, 2001. On the morning of September 11, nineteen members of the Islamic terrorist network al-Qaeda hijacked four passenger jets. Two of these were deliberately crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York City; another was piloted into the Pentagon in Washington D.C.; the fourth – believed to be headed towards the Capitol Building – was reclaimed from the terrorists by its passengers, and crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. The final death toll from the attacks was 2996 people. Unquestionably, it was the most shocking, destructive, and lethal terrorist attack in the history of the Western world. The political aftermath, however, led to one of the most intriguing periods in the foreign policies of several major Western powers. George W. Bush first emerged after the attacks to declare war on 'terror,' an unprecedented conceptual political manoeuvre. Needing justification beyond an obscure, generic, and faceless enemy, the Bush administration believed that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (or WMDs) as late as 2003. Despite United Nations weapons inspector Hans Blix finding no evidence of WMDs, Bush contravened UN resolutions and launched an invasion of Iraq (Pike, 2011). Enormous swings in public consciousness – first mobilised behind George W. Bush and the Global War on Terror, then very strongly against it – influenced popular media, including videogames and graphic novels (see Chapter 6), but most notably cinema. A cynical manipulation of public opinion was suddenly unmasked, and the resulting backlash found its way into a plethora of representations.

Notable writers and academics, including Noam Chomsky, Andrew Hill, and Slavoj Žižek, were amongst the first to speak out against what they saw to be the heavy-handedness of American foreign policy in the wake of September 11. Paul Virilio, too, in conversation with Bertrand Richard, said that the Iraq invasion of 2003 'revealed the grotesque face of a response that was literally a misstep, one war late and one terror

removed' (Virilio, 2012, p. 29). Chomsky used the Bush administration's response to the attacks – and the resultant conservative media coverage – to fuel the perspectives most notably posited in *Manufacturing Consent*, which he co-authored with Edward S. Herman. Herman and Chomsky outlined a model of propaganda, and applied it to news coverage of many different conflicts and humanitarian crises. Their conclusion was that the media is inherently biased towards those stories which will resonate on an emotional level with audiences (increasing empathy and a desire to tune back in later), alongside those items which will best suit target audiences for advertisers, while reducing 'flak' from stakeholders in commanding governmental or industrial positions.

'... a propaganda model suggests that the "societal purpose" of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state. The media serve this purpose in many ways: through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises.' (Herman and Chomsky, p. 298)

This propagandist agenda was in full flight during the coverage of the attacks in New York. Žižek, writing not even a year after the planes hit the Twin Towers, deconstructed the attacks as a radical adjustment in the deployment and manipulation of images and media to catastrophic effect. The constant replays of the second plane hitting the tower led to a desensitisation, a separation, a detachment (Žižek, 2002, p. 12). The image was no longer indexical of actuality; instead it was a symbol of mediatisation. This mediatisation was, in part, exploitative and obscene, but also testament to the sheer power of images to entice, to deceive, to hypnotise.

'... it has become increasingly clear that the intention of the attacks was to act as a lure or bait to draw the United States into the type of conflict of global proportions the War on Terror has developed into, with the intention that this would increase the hyperpower's vulnerability and provide Al Qaeda with a better chance of achieving victory.' (Hill, 2009, p. 12)

What is different about these conflicts, and their intrinsic link with the media-industrial complex, is that many different voices can be heard. This is the cinema of geopolitics – a cinema as much of political ‘space’ as to purely filmic space – and nowhere in the history of war film has it operated, informed opinion, offered perspective, on so many levels. Politics, the media, culture and warfare collide in a heady and intense mixture of the style of reporting or documentary, and of cinematic modes and technologies both traditional and avant-garde. A fragmented political landscape manifests itself culturally in a disorienting, unnatural, unconventional visual frame, in a jarring editing style, and in narrative structures occasionally tending to the post-modern, but with content taken straight from the ‘grand narratives’ of the World Wars. This is a cinematic aesthetic informed by digital technologies, media coverage, and modern weaponry. There are significant changes in the way the story is told, but very few to the story itself.

THREE KINGS is a story of what can happen in the wake of a war that was never really won or lost – such is the hazy politics of almost any conflict in the Middle East. As far as Privates Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), Chief Elgin (Ice Cube), and Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze) are aware, though, the Gulf War is over. They spend the final days of their tours of duty playing football, drinking, and embarking on small and largely uneventful patrols. However, when they discover a map hidden in the anus of a captive Iraqi, they immediately surmise it details the location of many millions of dollars in gold bullion, stolen from Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. Archie Gates (George Clooney) is two weeks from retirement when he hears of the discovery, and decides to cash in before he leaves the army for good. The vault containing the gold is in a village inhabited by a community of Iraqis oppressed by the members of Hussein’s Republican Guard. On witnessing the horrors perpetrated by Hussein’s men, Gates and his men decide to try to help the villagers escape across the border to Iran.

Directed by then-unknown filmmaker David O. Russell (later nominated for multiple Academy Awards for 2010’s *THE FIGHTER* and 2012’s *SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK*), *THREE KINGS* is a stylised war fairytale, where the main characters try to screw the army they seemingly serve, but inevitably get swept up in a righteous quest to save the local population. The conflict is apparently over, but the men still witness atrocity. In one very memorable moment a woman wails as her husband and child are taken away; to stop her

wailing the guardsman shoots her in the head. Many, if not most, of Basinger's tropes are revisited in the context of this new region and conflict. The central group of the film is diverse: Barlow is cocky, self-confident, and arrogant; Vig – according to the film itself – wants to be Barlow, but remains inexperienced, anxious, and afraid; Elgin is the almost tokenistic African-American character, however remains 'one of the guys'; and Gates – mere weeks from retirement – is the only soldier who has experienced combat, and therefore assumes a leadership role. There is death: at the end of the film the group, including a battle-shocked Barlow, must come to terms with the loss of Vig. The men also discuss the war itself, trying to figure out why it took place, if it ever did, and if it is even over. From a tactical point of view, the men are on their own, having devised their own mission with their own objectives – they do this with no support from their superiors or soldiers outside the group. Cinematically, too, the group operates *outside* or *apart from* the conflict, able to engage with it, dissect it, observe it, from a relatively objective point of view: this narrative defamiliarisation operates on the viewer too, who is drawn into the conspiracy.

The presence of the media in this film is constant, but what is different between this and other representations of press (film crews in *APOCALYPSE NOW* and *FULL METAL JACKET*, reporters in *PATTON*) is the level to which they are involved. Nora Dunn plays television news reporter Adriana Cruz, who relentlessly tails Archie Gates in her search for a story. At one point Gates sends her off with slightly thick Specialist Walter Wogaman, purely to get rid of her, and distract her from their plans to steal the Kuwaiti gold. Cruz's set-up on the American base is indicative of the level of press involvement in conflict: she has an air-conditioned trailer filled with banks of televisions, editing equipment, and communication tools.

Russell's approach is unconventional. This is a dramedy film set in the immediate wake of the Persian Gulf War. Set following the conflict as it is, confusion and frustration pervade the whole film – from individual characters through to the nations and peoples it depicts – as to whether the conflict is actually over, and whether its objectives were achieved. Confusion and frustration manifest themselves in dialogue and characterisation set within a concise story structure that aligns itself with the sharpness of documentary

and news reporting. This is offset by an offbeat cinematographic approach that confounded and baited Warner Bros., who funded and distributed the film.

The central characters of *THREE KINGS* are three disgruntled soldiers. Unhappy with their lot and tired of their deployment, they seek their own way out of their situation. Though there are fewer characters than early war films, the banter between these men is reminiscent of the group dynamic of films such as *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. These older films, according to Basinger, sought to present a cross-section of America, with the intention of imparting a 'we're in this together' mentality (Basinger, p. 34). There are no single characters on which to focus, and while they all seem self-centred at first, they soon have their eyes opened as to the larger environment and the machinations of the conflict and region: in this way they become the device through which the audience can experience the conflict, as in films about the World Wars.

THE HURT LOCKER was released in 2008 and directed by Kathryn Bigelow. The film won six Oscars, including Best Picture, and Best Director for Bigelow (IMDb, 2012b). It tells the story of a bomb disposal team working during the Iraq War, and focuses on central character Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner), the unpredictable, enigmatic leader of the team. The film begins with James' introduction to the team, after their last Sergeant (played by Guy Pearce) was killed in an explosion.

With its focus on three main characters, *THE HURT LOCKER* is very similar in narrative structure to *THREE KINGS*. There is one slightly more central character in Jeremy Renner's Sergeant First Class William James, but he is made so only through the observations of the other two soldiers – Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty): a technique that evenly divides the dialogue and screen-time between the three men. Sergeant James, though, is an anomaly. While he works as part of a team, he is often aside from them, often operating alone. Later in the film, Specialist Eldridge must be rescued from the enemy and while James does not hesitate to moving in to rescue his comrade, there is a sense that he does so only because 'orders' and a code of military 'acceptability' dictate that he must. In this sense Sergeant James is a reluctant hero that harks back to Basinger's topology. He is a platoon leader who will follow orders without question, but is a man lacking in interpersonal skills – James does not work well with others.

Khatib (2006) writes that the desert is almost a character in and of itself; it is certainly treated that way by the camera. The landscape plays a pivotal role in the narrative in that it isolates and diminishes; it also reinforces ideological constructs that underlie that narrative, most often the foreign policy of the United States (Khatib, p. 22). Further, the division and ownership of the desert has been but one of the catalysts for conflict in the Middle East. In *THREE KINGS*, the desert provides a backdrop to the events of the film, but also provides a barrier to the team's objective: the group must cross the desert with the gold and 'conquer' the mountains and the landscape as a whole before they reach the Iranian border. As Khatib points out:

Mountains are traditionally viewed as the most inaccessible parts of landscape (Short, 1991), and so conquering them infuses the American soldiers with power over the Other landscape and consequently over the people who inhabit it. (ibid., p. 27).

THE HURT LOCKER juxtaposes the desert with a war-torn urban landscape, most notably in the bomb disposal scenes themselves. In the opening of the film, urban sounds congeal seamlessly into a thematic hub-bub; this fused with the dizziness of the film's visuals, and the integration of the disposal robot's point of view into the cinematography. This 'digital aesthetic' informs the film's narrative and ideology as much as its technical construction: this is a global, technological conflict, constructed as much around its technology as around its geography and political machinations. It estranges the audience, and prohibits them from finding anything relatable in the landscape, the people, or their depiction. Virilio (1984) has more to say about representation, technology, and warfare. He traces the changes in the shape and dimensionality of warfare, as it evolved from the two-dimensional battlegrounds of the American Civil War and earlier, to the three dimensions of World War I, and on to the global, orbital, planetary conflicts of the Gulf War²⁹; 'the history of battle,' he writes, 'is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception' (p. 10). The larger the conflict, though, the harder it is for commanders and troops to trace the standard chronology of conflict; this is presented in *Three Kings*, as not all of the soldiers are aware who won, or even if the conflict is over at

²⁹ It could be argued that the global battleground of the Gulf War was itself an evolution of the international power-plays of the Cold War.

all. It is not only battlefield commanders that must contend with this change in strategy and the nature of the wars being waged. This technological advancement necessitates a shift in representation for society at large. Virilio writes: 'the concept of reality is always the first victim of war' (p. 43). This shift is predicated on an indexical relationship between the 'real' and the representation – be it on a screen in a command centre, or a cinematic rendering of the battle after the fact. In war, so Baudrillard (1994) says, '[s]imulation is the real master, and we have only a right to the retro, to the phantom, parodic rehabilitation of all lost referentials' (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 39). Carrying this onward to the filmic depiction, Virilio suggests that the representation affects the nature of the battle itself, even in retrospect. There is a necessary split between the real and the represented – 'cinematic derealization [sic]' (Virilio, p. 99):

'... sequential perception, like optical phenomena resulting from retinal persistence, is both origin and end of the apprehension of reality, since the seeing of movement is but a statistical process connected with the nature of the segmentation of images and the speed of observation characteristic of humans.' (ibid.)

The changing nature of conflict, then, will *necessarily* – by its very nature – confuse, unsettle, and estrange a moviegoing audience. The creators of dramatic cinema, then, must determine ways to make their stories accessible, while still considering the complex political undercurrents of the Middle East. In the two key films of this chapter – *THREE KINGS* and *THE HURT LOCKER* – this is done firstly by anchoring the stories on a central ensemble of characters, and then by reorienting the story from a single character's perspective to a multi-layered, omniscient story structure. A central group of characters, and a wide-reaching, all-encompassing narrative, are both storytelling techniques that hark back to the cinema of World Wars I and II: I argue here that this is not a mistake, but rather an observable trend. In *THE HURT LOCKER*, there is a continuous rotation of troops through a war zone where the conflict is without a foreseeable end. This is shown via a text overlay, which clearly states how long the team has left before they can go home. This anchors the story within a military protocol accessible to an audience and also gives the film a clear timeframe. Politics is notably omitted from *THE HURT LOCKER*: the characters do not question why they have been posted, nor the motives of

their superiors. This omission speaks to a world-view where this conflict is a necessary one. The same view of combat as essential is posited in many World War I and II films. The necessity of combat is never questioned; those who order it to be carried out are portrayed as above the criticism of lower order men. Consider PATTON, for example. While the general is a central character – an eccentric, larger-than-life one at that – he is still one of the men, and is still part of the military machine. In this ‘classic’ philosophy of war film, we see a genuflection to authority figures. The conflict in THE HURT LOCKER occurs among the team – among James, Sanborn, and Eldridge – as shifts in power and perspective, doubts and delusions, rise and fall. This banter and power play occurs in any kind of team, but lends itself well to a platoon of soldiers, where a wrong decision could end in severe injury or death. Banter and dramatic conflict also lends itself to a scripted feature film – as with a theatrical play – where an audience relies on the characters to provide a relatable experience. In THREE KINGS, the three men generally accept Archie as their superior without concern, but there are still significant differences between the capabilities of each of the men—which lead to squabbles. Archie seems to be the elder of the group, to whom we are offered a counter-point, Troy, representing youth, vitality, and virility. As the almost ‘token’ African American character, Elgin represents machismo and toughness; there is a sense that none could stop him. Conrad, by comparison, is weak, weedy, and not especially bright. All the characters fall into their respective places in the unofficial chain of command (or pecking order), until Conrad’s death. Death is the equaliser: it brings all the men to the same level in the realisation that none are superior to any of the others if the enemy’s bullet finds its target. THREE KINGS, like THE HURT LOCKER, eschews a wider view of the command and control structures of the military, but consistently questions the role of the media and the purpose of the war. It does so in quieter moments, such as when reporter Adriana Cruz opens up to Walter Wogaman at the beginning of the film’s third act:

ADRIANA: *The war is over and I don’t fuckin’ know what it was about. What was this war about? I was managed by the military.*

Both films anchor a deep discussion about war and its consequences in the interaction and conflict of the central groups of characters and in the individual characters

themselves. This approach is not dissimilar from that of Milestone in *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*. Milestone grounds his exploration of the reasoning for World War I in an informal discussion between the men while they share a meal (see Chapter 3). These scenes are isolated, separated from the rest of the film, like a vignette. The audience can look through a particular window and consider the justification or ramification of warfare without sacrificing narrative consistency or propulsion: a key consideration for filmmakers exploring the World Wars *and* conflict in the Middle East.

Arguably, *THE HURT LOCKER* is a quintessential war film: it takes key war film tropes and combines them all into a story that consists of the suspense of disarming explosive devices, the tension of long-range sniper battles, the excitement of a rescue mission under heavy fire, and the quiet moments between these episodes where the men talk and reflect on their experiences. Each of the film's 'episodes' can be linked to the changing technology of warfare: the large-scale explosive detonations, the high-powered sniper rifle, the dynamics of urban warfare. The changing face of warfare necessitates a story structure that deconstructs a complex, large-scale conflict into small sections: skirmishes easy to present on film, and that characterise modern conflict.

Comparisons can be drawn between the cinema of the Gulf Wars and the classical Western. Both genres treat narrative and groups of characters in a way not dissimilar from the combat films of the World Wars. The Western also established a close relationship between character, narrative, and landscape. Often characters travelled in groups, traversing vast tracts of land to reach their chosen destination. In many Westerns, including *THE SEARCHERS* and *HIGH NOON*, there is a reluctant hero, even an anti-hero, who walks a fine line between virtue and corruption. The central character is often a maverick, who will put himself or others in danger to achieve his own ends, before resolving that he must change his ways to restore order. Morals are ambiguous in the Western, and this is not owing to any particular predication on the part of the characters; it is often simply a result of a harsh existence. With most Westerns, order was key. If the central character was, by his nature, a bad man, then by the end of the film he had to die, even if he had redeemed himself: this restored order or equilibrium and was, in a somewhat morbid way, a 'happy' ending. *THE WILD BUNCH* is a crucial example. Pike and his posse are far from moral paragons, but by the end of the film they have realised

that they must make an attempt to overthrow the ‘enemy’ – in this case, a corrupt Mexican warlord – and rescue their former comrade. By the battle’s end, nearly everyone involved has been killed, including Pike, his gang, and the warlord. In this way, all corruption has been swept away: order has been restored. In terms of the Nietzschean flux metaphysics explored in the context of *FULL METAL JACKET*, the stories of the Western genre are perhaps the least ‘realistic.’

Stories of the Middle East are politically complex, but their cinematic representations draw on similar narrative themes to the Western. They are also equally rich in ideological subtext. Corruption is rife, and not just on the side of the insurgents or the Taliban, but on the part of the so-called ‘Coalition of the Willing’ as well. The Abu Ghraib scandal and the Hood incident – the latter of which is central to the plot of *VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: IRAQ*, examined in this chapter – are but two incidences of hideous maltreatment of prisoners: egregious breaches of trust on the part of US and Coalition forces. Further, trust in the US presidency, strong as it was after the September 11 attacks, was severely weakened when grand strategies for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan dissolved into vagaries, misnomers, and untruths. Despite these complexities, narratives of the Gulf Wars often adhere to the conventions of the Western. In *THE HURT LOCKER*, for example, we recognise in Sergeant James the reluctant hero who sets aside his personal feelings and priorities to rescue his teammate. This is after James has been established as almost a rogue element: a man who loves his job solely for the thrill of cheating death, even when he places other people at risk. The convention of the posse operating on the wrong side of the law is evident in *THREE KINGS*, where Gates, Barlow, Elgin and Vig actively work to undermine their own side. Part of the conflict – or at least a significant propeller of the narrative – is the character’s journey through a treacherous landscape, often made even more dangerous by its inhabitants. In *THREE KINGS* this journey is used for comic effect: the characters purchase old American cars to traverse the desert. Later in the film, though, the landscape reasserts its power, when the soldiers aid the refugees across the mountainous border into Iran; there is the constant feeling of being watched, and the mountains themselves seem to crowd the situation. Earlier in the film, however, traditional treatments of character and dialogue are used. If we take a standard scene from *THREE KINGS* – defining ‘standard’ as a conversation scene featuring a group of characters – we see that this film takes a much

more conventional approach to editing; this is in spite of a predominantly hand-held cinematographic style (the implications of hand-held camera are discussed shortly). After Gates hears about the discovery of the map to the gold, he meets Elgin, Vig, and Barlow to take control and formulate a plan. The scene begins with a medium close-up shot, with the three junior soldiers standing at attention, and Gates moving between them (Figure 5.1). When Gates finds the map there is a close-up of the object of his search, followed by an extreme close-up of Barlow's face (Figure 5.2), which shows Barlow's uncertainty about this new figure. There is then a cut to Gates after he moves around in front of Barlow (Figure 5.3), and there is a tense exchange between the two men. When Barlow realises that Gates wants to help, the camera moves back, and the editing becomes more relaxed, shifting between the men as they speak (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). Though the camera is hand-held, the framing of the subjects and the cutting between them is functional, and adheres to the classic Hollywood format observed in *PATTON* (see p. 93-4). Furthermore, this reinforces the group dynamic of earlier films about war and conflict.



Figure 5.1: ‘This the proctology tent?’



Figure 5.2: 'You're on the path to truth when you smell shit.'



Figure 5.3: 'Don't get grabby, Sergeant.'



Figure 5.4.

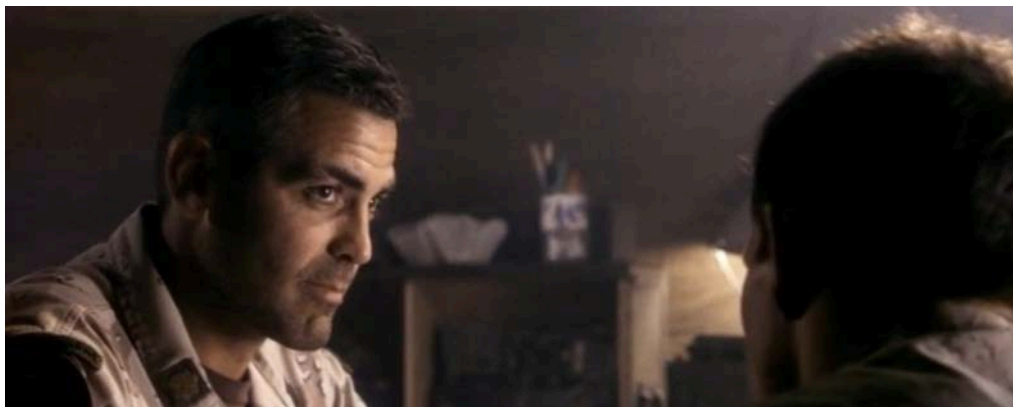


Figure 5.5.

The soldier's experience in the Gulf (in either conflict discussed in this thesis) is very different to that of earlier conflicts. The soldier him (or her) self is also a different model: where previously soldiers may have been drawn via conscription, for the most part the modern soldier is there because he or she wants to be. The paradigm now is one of a career in military service. The desire to serve ones' country is strong—as is the desire to see action: to put the many years of training and preparation into use. James Meek (2005) writes:

'[Y]our average marine is much more likely to be the kind of guy who is in uniform because he yearns to feel what it is like to be afraid of violent injury, and what it is like to frighten others.' (Meek, 2005).

The slow, steady build-up of troops in the Gulf in 1990 was a deliberate action by the United States and intense media coverage ensured Iraq was aware of their presence (Michalski & Gow, 2007). This strategy was effective, but meant that there were over 500,000 men on the ground in the Middle East with very little to do but patrol and train. This lack of any real action led to boredom and frustration, and few films capture this sense of inertia as profoundly as Sam Mendes' JARHEAD (2005).

The narrative centres on Anthony Swofford (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) as he moves through training in the United States before being deployed to the Gulf. The training scenes establish the characters and are very reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's FULL METAL JACKET³⁰. The training scenes also reinforce the meaning of the title: 'jarhead' is the

³⁰ Some sequences, including the opening, are shot-for-shot replicas of Kubrick's film.

Marines' own slang for themselves; their heads are empty vessels that get filled with orders. On deployment, Swofford – a crack shot – is teamed with spotter Alan Troy (Peter Sarsgaard). Swofford, Troy, and their comrades try to stave off boredom by messing with the press, drinking, watching movies, and generally mucking about. The only action in the film comes some eighty minutes in, when the platoon is moved out and towards the border between Iraq and Kuwait.

Swofford, Troy, and their team, led by Staff Sergeant Sykes (Jamie Foxx), form the ensemble typical of World War II narratives³¹. Within their unit they discuss the reasons they find themselves in the Gulf, and in the Marines. They also must come to terms with the horrors of war, most notably on the Highway of Death, the six-lane highway between Kuwait and Iraq, where, retreating Iraqis – military and civilian – were attacked by American ground forces on 26-7 January 1991 (Giordono, 2003). This scene is amongst the most morbid; Swofford leaves the platoon to go to the toilet, and comes across a group of corpses, seated where they were vaporized, frozen in time. The later part of the film sees Swofford and the team enter the surreal darkness of the oil clouds³², where it rains oil and the men find breathing very difficult. Parts of this section of the film echo APOCALYPSE NOW and, by proxy, sections of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

'We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand, because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories.' (Conrad, 2007, p. 43-4)

The men struggle with these conditions, complaining and suffering, but the counterpoint to this is the character of Sykes, who remains stoic and patriotic through even the hardest moments. In one sequence Swofford is working under the oil cloud, when Sykes comes to sit with him: (Figure 5.6).

³¹ One of the Marines in Swofford's unit, Fergus O'Donnell, is played by Brian Geraghty, who also appears in *The Hurt Locker*.

³² When the Iraqis knew Coalition forces were approaching the Kuwaiti border, they damaged, sabotaged, and set alight hundreds of oil wells in a 'scorched earth' policy (Hirschmann, 2005, p. ix). For a detailed examination of this and its effects, see Hirschmann, 2005.



Figure 5.6: 'I mean, who else gets the chance to see shit like this?'

SYKES: *I could be working with my brother right now ... All indoor work, too, lots of A/C ... I'd run his crews, too, probably increase productivity 40-50 per cent; make 100k a year. Do you know why I don't? Because I love this job. I thank God for every fucking day he gives me in the Corps. Oo-rah. I mean, who else gets the chance to see shit like this?*

In being an accessible, relatable, character, Sykes snaps the other figures out of their delusions of home. He acts as an anchor: supporting where he can, disciplining where necessary, and ensuring that all of his team remains on objective. Sykes is what James (of *THE HURT LOCKER*) could be if he was not so self-absorbed, so addicted to the drug of war. Sykes also ensures that *JARHEAD* remains a comment on the soldier's experience of war, not a commentary on the conflict itself. This reflects an adherence to a much more traditional concept of the soldier's role, i.e. as a mere pawn in a much larger game, rather than a conscientious and active participant in political upheaval. It also gives the viewer a rare glimpse into the politics of the unit – another very clear link with cinema of the World Wars. In *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT*, for instance, the pecking order is clear: Katczinsky is the anchor of the group; Bäumer and the others fall in behind him. Likewise, in *PATTON*, while the General remains central to the narrative, he is clearly a part of a larger military hierarchy. This wider narrative view – a more open cinematic comprehension of war and military protocol – is emblematic of films about both the World Wars, and the Gulf and Iraq conflicts. In terms of visual syntax, however, films about Vietnam had changed cinematography and editing, with both elements of

filmmaking orienting themselves around the individual soldier. In the 1960s and 1970s, though, television news crews became more mobile, and journalists and photographers began putting themselves on the line to cover events with greater accuracy and in much greater depth. The result was a number of changes in the tone and aesthetic of the vision and perception of war, and one such change was the cameraman's new ability to hold the camera in his hands.

Seeking a synergy with the realism, grittiness, and immediacy of news reportage and documentary, filmmakers telling the stories of the American incursion into Iraq (and the surrounding conflicts and operations) often eschew tripods in favour of a shaky, unstable, and baseless image. The cinematography of Gulf War cinema is ever-moving, constantly being knocked around, and often hiding the main characters behind props and the miscellanea of the *mise en scène*. The audience, then, must work around obstacles to discern the action of the sequence, as it is presented in a disjointed, unexpected way. Used to being given the story on a palatable platter, the audience must think for themselves, to determine what is most important. This unusual visual style works in parallel with a concatenated editing structure, as examined later, but the language of this kind of cinema is synchronous with asynchrony – cinematographic chaos – designed to estrange at every opportunity. Shklovsky writes of authorship in literature:

'...we find everywhere the artistic trademark - that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism or perception; the author's purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomatized [sic] perception.' (Shklovsky, p. 21-2)

Despite its origins in news reportage and documentary, the handheld camera remains a very definitive authorial statement. Paul Greengrass has made the handheld camera his stylistic signature, and nowhere is this tool more actively used than in his film *GREEN ZONE* (2010). There is no 'combat' in *GREEN ZONE*, at least not in the sense discussed throughout the rest of this thesis: armed engagement between two sizeable opposing forces on a battlefield. The action in Greengrass's film is small, surgical, precise – for instance, some 59 minutes into the film, a group of two or three men burst into a house where bombs are being made. The invaders move quickly, eliminating all but one of the house's occupants. They grill him for information, but when he refuses, they execute

him. This scene is frenetic and shot entirely on an unstable handheld camera. The camera would experience bumps and shakes were it in the hands of an amateur, or someone trying to film action while staying reasonably safe: this is a 'realistic' approach to filming combat, and is heavily inspired by news reporting, particularly live crosses to combat zones. *THE HURT LOCKER*, too, adopts this realist bent. With an image washed of all colour, the film itself is visually bland, bleak, and dull. Cinematographer Barry Ackroyd prefers close-up and mid-shots that follow the characters and their actions. However, these shots are inter-cut with wide establishing shots that show the expanse of the Middle Eastern landscape; these personal shots are also interspersed with cutaways that emphasise the 'otherness' of the Iraqi townships. A sense of scale is created by the use of multiple cameras in the one space: this also offers the effect of many eyes watching the action unfold. At approximately twenty minutes into the film, there is a scene in which Sergeant James approaches a buried explosive device. This sequence is particularly demonstrative of this unconventional cinematographic approach. Suspense is built as James approaches the device, by shooting the character from a number of different angles (Figures 5.7, 5.8). These character shots are inter-cut with people watching James – in his cumbersome protective suit – approaching the object of interest (Figures 5.9, 5.10).



Figure 5.7.



Figure 5.8.



Figure 5.9.



Figure 5.10.

The frame is shaky, constantly moving, and zooms in and out for no apparent reason. A camera constantly in motion achieves two effects. Firstly, it re-works the visual syntax of news reports and documentary filmmaking into a narrative framework. Secondly, it re-orientates the perspective of Vietnam cinema – a highly subjective, introspective point of view – from one central character to a protagonist *plus* a series of observers. Thirdly, it infuses the sequence with a sense of paranoia and menace. This uncertainty is reinforced in the editing of the scene, as it jumps between these various perspectives, these multiple cameras, with no apparent continuity. The visual syntax is one that imparts a feeling of being watched, and also of doing the watching. The notion of surveillance, of eyes everywhere, is a key part of modern warfare: these are battles where perception is everything. Virilio offers the following:

'The offensive arsenal has equipped itself with new devices for a conflict in which optical and motor illusion have fused in the cinematic delirium of lightning-war.' (Virilio, 1984, p. 95).

The precise, targeted strikes, and small, contained skirmishes that comprise modern warfare are based on devices that shape perception. From smartphones, to briefing screens, situation rooms, to targeting computers, drone vision, and helmet-mounted cameras, the re-mediation of the battlefield impacts on narrative in a number of ways. Garrett Stewart suggests that this constant picture-in-picture distracts the audience from a wider perspective:

'Where we expect an encompassing narrative overview, the proverbial big picture, we get only robot scans, objective, uneditorialized [sic]. Where we expect the raw drama of combat and its private tolls, we get violence, suffering, and its counterassaults, buffered everywhere by autofocus viewfinders.' (Stewart, p. 47).

Stewart goes on to suggest that this reliance on screens – on a shot/reverse-shot editing system not between characters, but between visualiser (targeting computer; smartphone; digital briefing room map) and visualised (target; leader's speech or horrific event; actual

real-world location or landscape) – leaves no room for deeper analysis in terms of thematic concerns or a teasing out of meaning.

‘... the continuous video traces of such violence within plot leave next to no space for the visual rhetoric of exposé. In analytic as well as digital terms, there’s no exposure time, no lag for ironic or polemical reframing. There’s only the electronic tracking of terror moment by moment.’ (ibid., p. 48)

Stewart examines films that engage directly with the concept of terrorism, the so-called ‘War on Terror’ and the impact of both on American soldiers and their families. These films, including *THE KINGDOM* (2007), *REDACTED* (2007), and *VANTAGE POINT* (2008), eschew a larger political context in favour of a perspective that focuses on smaller objectives and themes. *THE KINGDOM*, for example, follows a crack team as they attempt to track down a serial killer within the context of America’s military and industrial interests in Saudi Arabia. The nature of mobile media and multiple perspectives is again traced in *VANTAGE POINT*, where an assassination attempt is recounted from many different observers’ points of view. While these films explore themes of terrorism – in part linked to the American military involvement in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq – they revolve, mostly, around small, isolated events. Films such as *THREE KINGS* and *THE HURT LOCKER* trace longer periods of time. While moments of action – often shown via screens or from multiple points of view – are necessary to the narrative, they also contribute greatly to character development and, through the characters, an exploration of thematic concerns. This process complies with three of Basinger’s tropes: the presence of a commentator, the juxtaposition of action and repose, and the effects of various modal devices.

‘[The] group contains an observer or commentator.’ (Basinger, 1986, p. 74)

In *THREE KINGS*, this role is partly played by Archie Gates. At one point, Gates succinctly summarises the situation: ‘Bush told the people to rise up against Saddam. They thought they’d have our support. They don’t. Now they’re getting slaughtered.’ *THE HURT LOCKER*’s commentator is much less objective. Sergeant James is addicted to the thrill of combat. While aware of the importance of military protocol and procedure,

and of his family waiting at home, his perspectives on war are much less global and a great deal more personal. On a rare visit home, he is talking to his infant son as the boy plays with his toys:

JAMES: 'As you get older, some of the things you love might not seem so special anymore. Like your jack-in-a-box. Maybe you'll realise it's just a piece of tin and a stuffed animal. And the older you get, the fewer things you really love. And by the time you get to my age, maybe it's only one or two things. With me, I think it's one.'

'A series of episodes occur which alternate in uneven patterns the contrasting forces of night and day, action and repose, safety and danger, combat and noncombat, comedy and tragedy, dialogue and action.' (ibid.)

The 'action,' in terms of traditional screen combat, in both *THREE KINGS* and *THE HURT LOCKER*, is sparse. While the third act of *THREE KINGS* involves an incursion into a bunker to retrieve an American prisoner, the other combat in the film is limited to a brief skirmish outside Saddam Hussein's bunkers after Gates and his men steal the Kuwaiti gold. This is also the case in *THE HURT LOCKER*, although the combat-oriented episodes of the film are built largely around suspense (see below). The sequences of 'repose' allow the characters to postulate on the reasons for their being involved in the war, or on justifications of the conflict itself. *JARHEAD* contains no violence whatsoever, and self-consciously comments on this when, at the end of the conflict, Swofford and his teammates fire their weapons into the air. While doing this, they discuss the irony of this being the first rounds fired during the war. By structuring the films according to sequences of combat and non-combat, the filmmaker allows the audience time to recover from the more harrowing scenes. In *THE HURT LOCKER*, though, the build-up of suspense lessens the relief of these periods of recovery.

'The tools of cinema are employed for tension (cutting), release (camera movement), intimacy and alienation [sic] (composition), and the look of combat (lighting) and authenticity (documentary footage).' (ibid., p. 75).

In the scene from *THE HURT LOCKER* deconstructed earlier in the chapter – wherein James discovers and defuses the multiple buried explosives – the unfolding of the action

as seen from different perspectives could be interpreted as a comment on competing opinions or viewpoints about the Iraq War. However, the desire for ‘authenticity’ when portraying the ‘look of combat’ necessitates a mixture of ‘intimacy and alienation.’ The ‘tension’ and ‘release’ noted above are used in all war films to keep the audience on the edge of their seat, putting forward notions about how war happens, what sacrifices must be made, and why the end supposedly justifies the means. If we consider war as an object, and these films as images of that object, then Shklovsky offers the following:

‘An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object – it creates a “vision” of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.’
(Shklovsky, p. 18)

On the basis of the theory of Barthes and Sontag, I would concur that an image on its own is not, as Shklovsky suggests, the ideal index for what it depicts, but it can be argued that the *alignment* of images can impart a great deal of meaning. Bazin (1967), for instance, suggests that narrative and meaning are maintained by the arrangement of images by an editor. ‘It is montage,’ he writes, ‘that abstract creator of meaning, which preserves the state of unreality demanded by the spectacle’ (p. 45). In allowing the alignment of images to create meaning in the mind, the viewer is subsumed into the industrial, machinic process of cinematic meaning-making, as per Heidegger’s notions of automatisisation. But the automatisisation – the unstoppable flow and duration – of the moving image led Deleuze (2003) to deduce the ‘artistic essence’ of that image: ‘producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly’ (p. 156). Deleuze neatly sums up defamiliarisation in recognising that the ‘shock’ of the unstoppable moving image forces a viewer into thought, into an immediate process of decoding and deconstructing. The balance between tension and release – encoded in the editing of a given sequence or in the structure of an entire film – shocks the viewer into considering the implications of the action or tension (the combat) and the themes raised during periods of inaction or release (the repose).

Alongside this action/inaction structure, *THE HURT LOCKER* uses the changing technology of warfare to segment its story, fusing individual episodes or scenes to the technology of war: one scene is centred around a sniper battle; another concerns a rescue mission under heavy bombardment; and, given the occupation of the central characters, several episodes concern the suspense surrounding the disarmament of suspected explosive devices. As noted earlier, the editing of the film is haphazard, seemingly random, and apparently unstructured: this is done to draw the viewer's attention to the amount of eyes on any given scene – be it the eyes of innocent witnesses, the planters of the explosives the group attempts to defuse, or the soldiers themselves on the enemy or on one of their own. Even a relatively simple sequence takes this approach. At one point James returns from planting explosives at a detonation site, only to realise he left his gloves near the device. He returns to the explosive in the jeep and leaves Sanborn and Eldridge, who – while James is absent – debate the morality of detonating the device, killing their reckless superior in the process.

The sequence lasts less than two minutes, yet contains thirty discrete shots, i.e. twenty-nine cuts between them. A wide shot establishes the space of the scene: a barren desert landscape. A Humvee sits on a hill overlooking a crater-like valley, and three soldiers are arrayed around the vehicle (Figure 5.11). After Sanborn yells 'Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!' Eldridge remotely detonates the explosive, shaking the camera. Planning a second detonation, Sanborn shouts the same warning, before Sergeant James interrupts. This sequence of events is covered by alternating mid-shots, which move around the characters with no apparent logic (e.g., Figures 5.12 and 5.13). When James enters the Humvee to drive to the detonation site, there is a cut to shot of James through the window of the vehicle (Figure 5.14). After James leaves the vicinity of Sanborn and Eldridge, they are framed together (Figure 5.15), before a cut to a long, shaky shot of the Humvee making its way to the explosion site (Figure 5.16). This long, subjective, progressive vision of James retrieving his gloves is inter-cut with shots of Sanborn and Eldridge as they conspire, in a fairly conventional shot/reverse shot system (Figures 5.17 and 5.18).

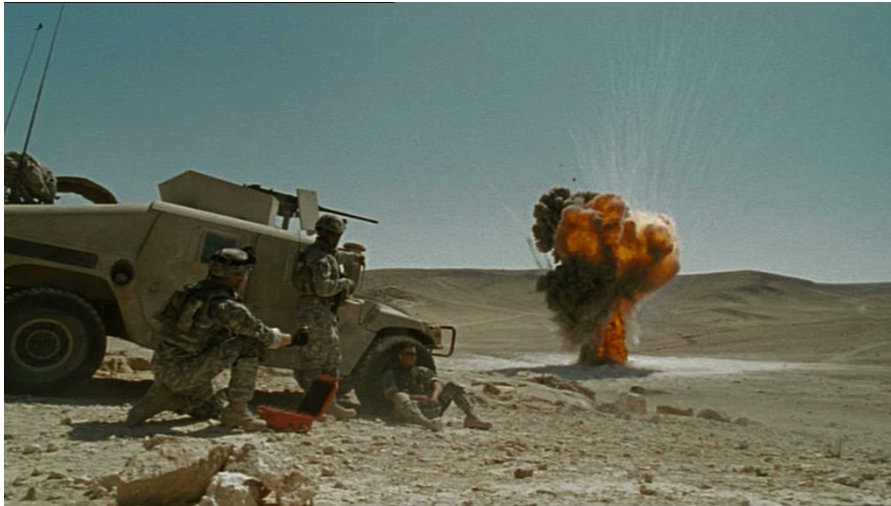


Figure 5.11.



Figure 5.12..



Figure 5.13.



Figure 5.14.



Figure 5.15.



Figure 5.16.



Figure 5.17.



Figure 5.18.

This coverage of what seems to be a simple conversation scene is far from conventional, and nor is its editing: some shots are left at a lengthy ten seconds in duration, whereas others last barely a second. The effect here is to make the audience aware of the coverage, and aware of the mechanics of editing, in order to increase the suspense of the scene. What if Sanborn and Eldridge killed James? What would be the moral implications? How would the film end if the central character were to be suddenly murdered? These are the questions raised by the startling cinematography and unnerving editing of this otherwise short and apparently inconsequential scene. The scene ends, however, with nothing happening. James retrieves his gloves, and we see him from Sanborn and Eldridge's position, in the distance, waving. The final shot of the sequence is a close-up of Eldridge as he slowly exhales, disturbed. The scene has no closure, be it explosive or conciliatory. It sits, clumsily, some forty-eight minutes into the film, after the team has successfully completed two missions, and before they move out on patrol into the more combat-oriented scenes of the film. Its strange orientation within the film makes it feel like a vignette, or an aside. The scene, then, is disruptive, and shocks the viewer into rapt attention. This would be the same effect as being addressed directly by the protagonist of a Shakespearean drama, and creates a layered story structure that is far from linear. This layering of narrative, combined with shaky camera and disjointed editing, are filmmaking manoeuvres that draws attention to the form. The viewer is not allowed to relax: a constantly moving camera forces the viewer to follow the action within the frame. The seemingly random shot durations do not conform to any established editing logic. Further, this vignette within the larger narrative draws the audience away from the earlier tension/release structure of the film; it thoroughly unnerves the audience, perhaps in some way preparing them for the tense action to come. These estranging techniques, this layering of story – and the concatenated cinematography and editing within – is taken much further in *SYRIANA*.

SYRIANA is an intense and multi-layered film – incorporating multiple diverse story threads – that attempts to depict the struggles around oil in the Middle East. In doing so, it tells the story of an American family (led by Matt Damon) caught up in international politics; a young, progressive, Saudi prince (Alexander Siddig), who will stop at nothing

to bring the Middle East out of the dark ages; a poor Pakistani man (Mazhar Munir) eager to give meaning to his existence; and an ageing CIA operative (George Clooney), desperate to maintain relevance in a time when his skills are severely outmoded. The film has been described as an almost dissertative statement – ‘baffling, never wholly lucid but always compelling our total attention’ (French, 2006) – about the incredible influence of oil on politics, international relations, and the lives of millions of people worldwide:

‘... the film [sees] the world in three colors: black, for the oil that brings out man's cunning and killer instinct; gray, for the shades of honor and self-interest by which the main players try to define themselves; and red, for the blood spilled in Allah's and oil's names ...’ (Corliss, 2005).

The film presents an international perspective indicative of changing attitudes towards conflict: attitudes recognising that warfare, diplomacy, and struggles for power are as much dependent on perception and image as they are on deterrence or military superiority. The film jumps between Iran, the United States, Switzerland, Spain, and Lebanon, and is shot predominantly in a hand-held style, but it is the frenetic editing that breaks the film up even more than its convoluted narrative. Inspired, yet again, by the conventions of modern news reportage, the film flicks between a CNN cross on a television monitor, to some apparently unimportant activity at a desk in the background, to Matt Damon's character, Bryan Woodman, flicking through a newspaper in the foreground. In this film there is a determination to capture all the action within a scene, much as a news cameraman would film as much as possible, to give context to a story. Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, writes that narratives are losing their singularity and, in part, their strength, in fragmentation:

‘The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on.’ (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxiv)

Lyotard argues that the great narratives – metanarratives – of old are worthless in the face of a computerised, digitised, society. However, these metanarratives are comprised of elements that give them form (and formula): both Lyotard and Foucault call these

individual elements ‘statements.’ In terms of legitimating knowledge, Lyotard writes that ‘[t]rue knowledge... is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy’ (ibid., p. 35). These ‘statements’ can be conceived of, in terms of this research, as story elements or filmmaking techniques that give form to a given genre. How, then, does *Syriana* fit in this context – described as a postmodern narrative, yet clearly dependent on many traditional story elements in order to get its point across? The answer may lie in Booker’s description of a postmodern cinema, which draws on the work of Benjamin, Baudrillard, and Jameson. The ‘hyperlink narrative’ was originally posited by film critic Alissa Quart (2005) in her review of Don Roos’s film *HAPPY ENDINGS* (2005), which interweaves many parallel storylines: this ‘genre’ has become popular in the 2000’s (consider *CRASH*, 2004, or *BABEL*, 2006), though its origins lie in the New Hollywood era, and Booker suggests the structure’s ‘founding father’ is Robert Altman. Quart suggests that in these fragmented narratives, the cognitive relationship we have with story elements is similar to the connections we make with information on the internet. Scattered and disjointed such as it is, we click between browser tabs, applications, and screens, taking small grabs of information as we go (Quart, 2005). In terms of film, however, this disjointed hyperlinking narrative usually coalesces into a cohesive ending, as it does in *SYRIANA*. Booker takes Quart’s thinking further in suggesting that this fragmented story structure could be seen as examples of ‘what Jameson calls “cognitive mapping,” or the process of making sense of one’s world and one’s place in it, a process that Jameson sees as being particularly difficult in the complex and fragmented reality of the postmodern world’ (Booker, 2007, p. 19). In this ‘process of making sense,’ however, a filmmaker cannot simply re-write the rulebook, particularly with genres as established as the war film or political thriller. The ‘shock factor’ of avant-garde techniques, new alignments of images, the introduction of new modes of viewing, must be tempered with recognisable story tropes or conventions. However, Frampton re-frames this, noting that an open-minded viewer might conceive of a film as re-thinking the world for him or her in real-time.

‘The concept of the filmind makes the filmgoer aware that the film-world can be re-thought – that film-thinking may dig into the film-world to undo or subvert this basic creation. If a filmgoer has the concept of the

film-world-creating filmind in their mind as they watch a film, then they will be ready for whatever manipulation the contemporary film throws at them.' (Frampton, p. 79).

This is particularly true of a film such as SYRIANA, which is exemplary of hyperlinked narrative, as it moves – with the speed of a mouse-click – between continents and competing points of view. The film presents these multiple perspectives in an overlapping structure, creating in the mind of the viewer a much wider understanding of the interrelation of the various characters and their actions. The multiple, overlapping storylines, and different perspectives, comprise a defamiliarising structure, designed to unsettle the viewer. In the process, the truly multi-faceted nature of international politics and global warfare is made startlingly clear.

VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: IRAQ is an interesting case, and presents a Hollywood-style narrative from the 'other' side. The Turkish film, directed by Serdar Akar, turns the tables on conventional – even contemporary – Hollywood representations of the Middle East. The film depicts a Turkish special operations team sent to Iraq to hunt the American commander responsible for the unnecessary detention and interrogation of Turkish soldiers in July 2003 (known as the 'Hood event'; Howard and Goldenberg, 2003). One of the most expensive Turkish films ever made, it was popular at the box office and very well received by the Turkish (and wider Eurasian) film community (Rainsford, 2006; Wall Street Journal, 2006; Arsu, 2006). Diverging from the frenetic, immediate aesthetic pervading Hollywood representations of the Iraq invasion, VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: IRAQ presents a clean, smooth approach to cinematography, with a pacing more akin to that of New Hollywood than of new media. The torture sequences in Abu Ghraib, where detainees are sprayed with strong industrial hoses, are shot with a Steadicam, and even the action scenes maintain a crispness and smoothness in their portrayal of combat. The opening sequence is shot with a dolly, and is lit in a traditional cinematic style: there is a key light (the primary light source) and a fill light. Often less intense, the fill light provides a rounder glow that gives depth to that beyond the subject (Bordwell and Thompson, p. 193). The very next scene contrasts this earlier, more conventional, lighting arrangement, with another that is more realistic. The Turkish commander looks out across the forecourt, where the American troops are arrayed before

the compound. The room is dark – the lights are turned off so as not to draw attention – and the sunlight filters through the Venetian blinds, creating streaks of light across the commander's face. This is reminiscent of *film noir*, a style of film that was most popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Often highly stylised gangster stories, *films noir* revolved around anti-heroes, gangs, hard-boiled detectives, and *femmes fatale*. These films eschewed floodlit, studio-style lighting and preferred few – or even single – light sources in order to amplify shadows and recesses. Cameras were still, or slowly moving, creating a sense of menace within the frame (Ray, 1985, p. 159-161). Hence, the lighting and choice of shots in VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: IRAQ creates a mood of more traditional cinematic storytelling and, indeed, the narrative of this film is much more linear and traditional than many American movies about conflict in the Middle East.

To extrapolate a single discursive thread from the multitude of competing narratives around Middle Eastern conflicts is nigh futile. With oil companies fighting for control, governments fighting for ties with those oil companies, insurgencies rising to quell rebellion, and ancient civilisations struggling for relevance in a rapidly changing modern world, there are just too many interests to portray – though it has been demonstrated above that SYRIANA comes closest to covering almost all of them³³. If the rejection of metanarratives is a symptom of postmodernity, then perhaps the cinema of the Middle Eastern conflicts is the most postmodern. The construction of many of these films is jarring, disorienting, and very much designed to estrange; to make viewers think about the issues and characters and interests being portrayed. The construction, though, is also very apparent to the viewer – with cinematography, editing, and *mise en scène* influenced directly by television news reportage and documentary. Making the mechanisms of construction apparent to the viewer is a characteristic of modernism; the result of that construction is defamiliarisation. In this case, then, it could be argued that cinema about conflict in the Middle East sits at the nexus of modernity and postmodernity, or has entered a kind of post-postmodernity. I, however, argue that this tension is the result of the clash of old and new: a return to the narratives of old – to the grand, nationalistic

³³ Though SYRIANA engages with fundamentalist Islam from the perspective of grooming potential martyrs, it is often left to Middle Eastern films to portray the subtleties of Islam, and the often tender relationship between religion and daily life. Marriage and the role of women are also explored in detail in the cinema of the Middle East, particularly Iran. See KANDAHAR (Iran, 2001), A SEPARATION (Iran, 2011), and OSAMA (Afghanistan, 2003).

ideas that pervaded the cinema of the World Wars, combined with highly-advanced filmmaking techniques, and the shifts in cinematography and visual syntax that accompany this. Though the technology and techniques of cinematic storytelling have changed – along with the machines and weapons of war – when discussing global conflict, the stories remain the same.

What does this mean for cinema? Are there no new stories, no new modes of representation? Simply put, there were never any new stories to begin with. The majority of drama, even contemporary cinematic drama, is drawn from basic premises and story structures that have existed since the era of Aristotle. Booker (2004), for instance, argues there are only seven discrete plots; and a deep analysis of Campbell's *Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1993) might even narrow that down to a single mythic paragon of narrative. Basinger's list of tropes, too, provides a very clear-cut list of requirements specific to the war film: she even outlines a rough imaginary narrative of her own that ticks all the boxes (Basinger, 1986, p. 75-76). It is therefore up to individual filmmakers to try and find a story – or set of stories – that can be told with the filmmaking techniques germane to the contemporary era. *THREE KINGS* contributes to the discourse from a position of some distance – some eight years from the end of the Persian Gulf War – and with the benefit of hindsight. Russell had the opportunity to critique or satirise the motives and strategy of the George H.W. Bush administration, but instead chose to present the story of three disgruntled young soldiers, ready to cut their ties with the military and start a new life – somewhat richer than they were on enlistment. Marilyn B. Young's (2003) revisiting of four war films all released around the year 2000 trace the representation of combat across multiple eras around a single historical moment. This moment was the end of the Clinton administration and the entry of George W. Bush to the global political scene, the September 11 attacks and the resultant 'War on Terror,' and the apogee of the 24-hour system of news. Young suggests that rather than move past the Vietnam era of murky politics and disillusioned soldiers, the modern war film is repressing the current similarly confused global political climate, preferring the clearer character of films of the World Wars. Modern films about older conflicts, she writes, 'abstract war from its context, leaving it standing on its own, self-justifying, impervious to doubt, a fact of nature' (Young, p. 256). Films concerning modern combat are right in amongst the action, however, eschewing a wider view that need consider political

justification or ramification; layering vision upon vision, screen upon screen, in what amounts to what Doherty calls ‘moral rearmament.’ The message of *Three Kings*, then, is one that is fully aware of the mediatisation of war, the machinations of conflict, and the personal impact of war trauma. Framed as a ‘dramedy,’ or drama-comedy, the film is high drama punctuated with moments of comic relief – in the beginning of the film, the men are amused when Walter Wogaman plays with night-vision goggles in broad daylight; the neatest counterpoint to this is Troy Barlow’s moving (if somewhat shell-shocked) reaction to Conrad Vig’s death. That is not to say that the film is entirely uncritical of the war, nor is Russell himself. ‘A strange warfare with an ambiguous ending,’ is how the director characterises the conflict (Anderson, 1999). As outlined above, the aesthetic of news reportage heavily influenced the film’s cinematography; but the role of the media is enmeshed in the narrative, and is embodied by in the character of Adriana Cruz. Some two years after the US premiere of *THREE KINGS* on 27 September 1999 (IMDb, 2012a), the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon proved that the military-industrial-entertainment complex was just as effective at amplifying terror as it was informing the public about that same terror.

The cinematic treatment of the September 11 terrorist attacks could comprise an entire book (and already has – several, in fact) so will not be examined here, but the same treatment is emblematic of the evolution of the same military-industrial-entertainment first mentioned by Eisenhower, and then expanded upon by Der Derian and Virilio. Michalski and Gow (2007) in their meditations on war, the media, and notions of ‘veracity,’ contend that ‘the present analysis of image is not necessarily connected with intent’ (p. 3); this in their introductory discussions about propaganda and media effects. There was a resurgence of what could be called ‘propagandistic’ narratives in fictional cinema, though, in Hollywood reconstructions of the September 11 attacks (Markert, Žižek, Hill). Basinger’s tropes were incredibly useful at this time: the group dynamic, national over individual interest and the cinema of high concepts – a wider perspective – are readily apparent in *WORLD TRADE CENTER* (2006) and *UNITED 93* (2006). The former, directed by Oliver Stone, portrays a group of New York policemen and firemen working together to rescue those trapped in the rubble of the Twin Towers; the latter, another Paul Greengrass feature, depicts the story of the passengers of United Flight 93,

who overpowered the hijackers and averted further tragedy³⁴. SYRIANA and THE HURT LOCKER could be seen as a critical eye on US foreign policy, reactionary to this upsurge in patriotism and use of tales of heroism in a bid to rally against political uncertainty. However, while the tone of the work of Gaghan and Bigelow may be critical (or, at the very least, partaking of a wider consciousness than that of conservative US media outlets), the narrative framework housing that commentary is remarkably similar to that of World War II combat films. In each film the characters must overcome the traits or characteristics that set them apart, to work together in achieving the larger goal, overcoming all obstacles in their path.

Earlier in this chapter, the link between cinema about conflict in the Middle East and the Western was outlined. Very generally, with regard to North America, the 'frontier' was the name given to any unsettled, unpopulated area beyond those claimed by European colonists³⁵. The Western film genre (as with 'Wild West' literature – often pulp fiction – that preceded it) made much of the frontier: the wild, untamed land inhabited by animalistic tribes; the untamed lands from which few returned if they ever dared venture forth. Heroes were made or broken on the courage to cross the frontier, as John Wayne must do in THE SEARCHERS, as Charles Bronson does in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, as Pike and his gang do in THE WILD BUNCH. Sobchack (2003) writes that it is deviations from standards set over many years – and many films – that define genre (p. 104). The war film canon is full of captains and their men defying the odds to achieve their objective. Indeed, Basinger's list of World War II combat film conventions clearly states that an objective is one key ingredient of these films. Similarly, combat and death counter-cut with scenes of inaction and reflection feature prominently in World War II films. But the most important convention is talk of home, and talk of 'why we fight.'

'The attitudes that an audience should take to the war are taught through events, conversations and actions.' (Basinger, 1986, p. 62)

This is true of all films: every filmmaker has an opinion to offer. In Vietnam this was often critical, as the objectives, motivations, and chronology of the conflict were all

³⁴ Interestingly, Oliver Stone, director of *World Trade Center*, made *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Platoon*, two films notable for presenting a critical view of America's involvement in Vietnam.

³⁵ Unpopulated, at least, by other European colonists. Settled areas were often taken by force from indigenous populations.

unclear. Arguably, the objectives, motivations, and chronology of the conflicts in the Gulf are equally hazy, but a greater degree of co-operation between the media and the military leads to a sense of obligation to tell stories that glorify the sacrifices made by the men on the ground. This is not to say those sacrifices are not worthy of coverage, special treatment, or admiration, just that this forms a key element of the nationalistic ideal portrayed in many films about both the Gulf War and the later conflict in Iraq. In portraying that nationalistic ideal, the narrative conventions of the World War II combat film have been revived: ensemble dynamic (Gates, Elgin, Barlow, Vig; James, Sanborn, Eldridge), group as ethnic mix (Elgin in *THREE KINGS*; Sanborn in *THE HURT LOCKER*), talk of home (or, in the case of *THE HURT LOCKER*, going home, only to return; in *THREE KINGS*, Barlow speaks to his wife on the phone, and she tells his superiors about his capture), death (Vig in *THREE KINGS*; Staff Sergeant Thompson, played by Guy Pearce, in *THE HURT LOCKER*), and a hero – often reluctant – who is part of the group (Gates' age makes him the natural selection; James is distant but is still in charge of the ordnance disposal team). These recognisable narrative tropes help to shore up the complexities of the conflict itself. They give the filmmakers a platform from which to tell their particular story, and ease audiences into the horrors of war.

A war zone is typically conceived of as a man's world; there is very little place for women. Indeed, women were not allowed even near the front lines until 1994 (Westwell, p. 86). The gendered narrative rarely enters into discussions of 'traditional' war film. The role of women is largely ignored beyond helping on the home front, or wishing their men well as they go off to battle (Basinger, 1986, p. 62). This changed somewhat in the 1990s, where a small group of films not only gave women central roles, but empowered them by making those roles tough and independent: these included *G.I. JANE* and *COURAGE UNDER FIRE*. But typically women remain in minor or background roles, often spoken of (missed, pined for, lusted after) but rarely seen. The notable exception to this rule is the strong female character of Adriana Cruz in *THREE KINGS*. Despite being strong and independent, though, she is exploited by the military, manipulated into telling the stories the military wants to tell. The notion of the 'frontier' returns here – from the Western genre. The frontier was a place for men; women, straying too far from their homes, were kidnapped by bandits or Indians — triggering what Slotkin (1998) calls a 'captivity narrative.' The woman is the damsel in distress, and the men must saddle up to find her.

This overlapping of narrative, and the inter-play of reader expectations that results, indicated by Barthes (1974) in *S/Z*. He calls narrative a 'contract,' in the same sense that I have called genre a contract between filmmaker and viewer. The contract, as defined by Barthes when discussing literature, must have its value determined. The individual elements of a given narrative also have a value.

'At the origin of Narrative, desire. To produce narrative, however, desire must vary, must enter into a system of equivalents and metonymies; or: in order to be produced, narrative must be susceptible of change, must subject itself to an economic system.' (Barthes, 1974, p. 88)

This system also includes the canon – the established body of work within a specific genre or narrative type. Each text buys into the canon, and trades in the individual elements of the accepted story structure, the techniques most prevalent in exemplary texts.

As previously discussed, elements of the Western genre recur within stories about war and conflict. Schubart (2009) raises the former narrative type in her discussion of the case of Jessica Lynch, a then-nineteen year old Private First Class in the US Army, who was injured and captured in an ambush on her vehicle in Iraq. She was rescued some twelve days later by Special Operations forces: the first successful rescue of an American prisoner-of-war since the Second World War, and the first of a female. The operation received significant media coverage, later proven to be false. The military engineered the story to present Lynch as a brave warrior, a survivor, a battler, and her Iraqi captors as evildoers hell-bent on murder and destruction. However, Lynch testified to Congress in 2007 that she never once fired her weapon, was knocked unconscious in the car crash, and was treated very well by her captors, receiving high-quality medical attention for her injuries (Schubart, p. 65). This flies in the face of the traditional narrative, such as in Westerns including *The Searchers*, where the woman is mistreated, abused, or tortured. In an effort to garner further sympathy, some reports even stated, falsely, that Lynch was raped. In Schubart's discussion of the case – which in itself is testament to Der Derian's military-media 'amalgam of brass, silicon, and silicone' (2009, p. 153), and Chomsky's notion of news networks framing stories to suit industrial and governmental interests – she refers to the Western genre, to modern mythology, to the characterisation of Lynch

in the media, and uses words like *mise en scène* in describing the portrayal of events precedent and subsequent to the 'action'. In the framing of news 'events,' networks rely on cinematic tropes to 'sell' a story, to lend it immediacy, and to imbue it with credibility. There is an irony inherent in the fact that the creators of feature film utilise the techniques characteristic of the news media to achieve much the same end.

These later conflicts echoed Vietnam in that very few people – even troops on the ground – knew precisely why they were being fought. The documentary *RESTREPO* is very revealing about the thoughts of the men who encounter the enemy on a day-to-day basis. The alleged strategy is to win hearts and minds, as it was in Vietnam; to try and turn the enemy to a 'Western', American, and supposedly, superior, world-view. Specialist Kyle Steiner, though, says:

'This hearts and minds thing is not working; for one we are not well trained in hearts and minds... hearts and minds is not the window when you see the guy shooting at you and then he puts his wife and kids in front of him, knowing full well that we won't shoot back, you know, fuck his heart and his mind.' (Kyle Steiner, in Junger & Hetherington, 2010).

The conflicts of the Middle East are complex systems of political negotiation, encompassing many different nations and battlegrounds that are often undefined. Conflict often springs up with little or no warning, based on sudden attacks or unexpected engagements. Many nations have vested interests in the areas concerned, and the September 11 attacks intensified international scrutiny on the origins and home regions of the attackers. These far-reaching, complex, and truly international conflicts necessitate a wider perspective. This perspective is presented in the films of contemporary filmmakers – such as David O. Russell and Kathryn Bigelow – by returning to wider views of the landscape, amplifying its role in the conflicts, and by telling stories about groups of soldiers working together to achieve objectives and do good, rather than focusing on the issues of reserved, disturbed, solitary protagonists. The role of the media in modern warfare has prompted a multi-faceted, multi-mediated image – or series of images, or stories – that is often moving, and greatly inspired by footage shown in news reports or documentaries, shot live in the combat zone. The alignment of these images presents a postmodern, disjointed cinema that presents a view of combat as essential –

while *THREE KINGS* could be said to criticise or satirise the Gulf War, the men still band together to do right by the Kuwaiti people. A return to the philosophy – or filmosophy, to borrow Frampton's term – of World War I and II cinema if ever there was one.

For commanders, for men on the ground, for men in the air and on the sea, conflict in the Gulf makes little to no sense. But as it flashes across news reports daily, filmmakers feel compelled to try and distil the conflicts into some kind of digestible story for cinemagoers. It is this motivation that has inspired some of the films discussed in this chapter. Similarly, other cultural artefacts have influenced these films' presentations, and these films, too, speak across platforms to new media. The next chapter presents a brief discussion of some of these media, and cinema's relationship to them.

Chapter 6 –

Expanded Cinema, Extended Discourse: War in Videogames & Comic Books

On Videogames

'Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself – that comes too late – a crop of inextinguishable regrets.' (Conrad, p. 87)

While modern cinema experiments with narrative, and makes use of a consistent set of tools in order to relay that narrative, it remains an artform with a set, linear duration. In this section, I look at how the tropes of cinema, and the tools used by filmmakers, are extended across platforms to create new appreciations and new understandings of combat. Here, I examine the influence of cinema on two video games: CALL OF DUTY 2 and SPEC OPS: THE LINE. How do game developers reduce the enormity and complexity of established history to a 'lived' and 'livable' experience in CALL OF DUTY 2? It is important for the player to feel at once as though they are experiencing the past, but also as though they can exert some sort of control over it. SPEC OPS: THE LINE takes place in a speculative near-future, but makes use of tropes adapted from cinema (and earlier military shooter video games) to estrange *and* immerse the viewer; this section also examines how the player's notions of representation, war, and the military are changed in

this way. Above all, I suggest that the concept of the grand narrative is translated over to these new platforms and representations.

Video games are a hotly contested and controversial area of research and emerging theory. There are two sides to the debate: one examines video games as ‘game-stories,’ a hybrid of interactive mechanics and narrative conventions; the other side looks at the ‘seemingly conflicting definitions of games and (in particular) narratives’ (Aarseth, 2012, p. 130). I will not position myself as either a ‘narratologist’ or ‘ludologist.’ Instead, I take an approach that chooses elements of both arguments – incorporating them in the theoretical framework established throughout the thesis – to interrogate the discourse between cinema and video games³⁶. To this end, I will examine the games in broad terms – story, character, setting, mechanics, and development – before examining the links between, in the first instance, CALL OF DUTY 2 and World War II combat films, and between SPEC OPS: THE LINE and the cinema of Vietnam and the Gulf Wars. In this way, video games can come to be understood as cultural artefacts, and also as an extension of filmic discourses about war and conflict.

It is around Chapter 10 or 11 of Yager Development’s SPEC OPS: THE LINE that things really start to fall apart for the protagonist, Captain Martin Walker. His target, decorated leader-turned-rogue Colonel John Konrad, has shut off the water supplies to an already sand-ridden, utterly destroyed alternate version of Dubai. It is around this time, too, that one of his squadmates, Sergeant John Lugo, is abducted and lynched by the angry mob that inhabit the otherwise deserted city: a mob consisting of refugees from the sandstorm and the American soldiers first sent in to aid them. Already suffering bizarre hallucinations, high levels of stress, and severe paranoia, Walker moves ahead, into a confrontation with his old commander from which he may not return alive – or sane. SPEC OPS: THE LINE was conceived as a dismantling of the military shooter genre as defined by successful franchises CALL OF DUTY and MEDAL OF HONOR. Taking the conventions of these long-running game series and turning them on their heads, what results is an eerie, introspective, highly subjective game that has left many critics and gamers puzzled and intrigued. The game polarised the gaming community, critics

³⁶ Personally, I can see how narratologists and ludologists could come to blows. However, I tend to see more benefit in examining *why* the two perspectives are not natural complements, if this is true at all (see Binns, 2013b).

praising the complex storyline and high-concept themes of the piece, gamers wondering what the point of the exercise was, if there was any to begin with (Gallaway, 2012; Lindsey, 2012; Sadd, 2012). To understand the impact of this recent game on the military shooter genre, I will discuss SPEC OPS: THE LINE from a narrative and aesthetic point of view, alongside one of the games it subverts, CALL OF DUTY 2.

CALL OF DUTY 2 was developed by Infinity Ward and released in October 2005. In the single-player mode, 'Campaign,' the player takes on the role of Private Vasili Koslov, a member of the division defending Moscow from the German forces. As the game progresses, the player steps into the shoes of two other characters: Sergeant John Davis of the British 7th Armoured Division in North Africa, and Corporal Bill Taylor of the American 2nd Ranger Battalion. Over the course of the game, the player engages the enemy with a range of weapons, vehicles, and tactics, all designed to be as era-accurate as possible. The game is divided into missions that range from ten minutes in length up to around half an hour, with objectives of varying complexity and difficulty. Two missions will be examined here: the first takes place very early in the game, and involves the destruction of a German-occupied building by Koslov and his comrades; the second draws heavily on cinematic representation, as it is the arrival of Corporal Taylor at Pointe du Hoc, as part of the D-Day landings.



Figure 6.1: Approaching the Soviet stronghold, CALL OF DUTY 2.

In the first mission, the German forces have taken up positions within a solid, imposing six-storey building, and are launching waves of infantry at the approaching Soviet troops. The Soviets make their way across open ground, taking cover where they can in foxholes or behind pieces of debris, tree trunks and so on. The player must then enter the building at ground level, taking out as many enemy soldiers as possible, before planting explosives at key structural points. The player then retreats to a safe distance before the explosives detonate, and the building collapses. This mission immediately follows a training sequence, where the player learns basic gameplay mechanics: how to crouch, jump, and sprint, and how to pick up, change, reload, aim, and fire weapons. Practice of these techniques is interrupted by a German attack, however, and the player must utilise all the skills they have learned to push back the assault and take down the German stronghold.

The game is divided into missions, and each mission is divided into a set of objectives. These objectives give the mission – and, by extension, the game – form, by breaking it down into discrete segments. This formalism echoes the episodic nature of early war cinema – from beginnings at home, through enlistment, to deployment and the experiences of warfare, perhaps up to the moment of death. The objectives for this early mission in *CALL OF DUTY 2* are simple and linear:

- Rendezvous with the necessary assignment
- Fend off the German attack
- Counterattack
- Plant the explosives

The game attempts to mix up the monotony of the mission by including a section where you must peer through binoculars at the approaching enemy, or use a sniper rifle to pick off enemy soldiers from afar, but for the most part this is a simple ‘attack run’ mission.

The first-person perspective affords a sense of immersion, and a direct level of engagement with the mechanics of the game, and with the narrative. McMahan’s (2003) qualitative aesthetic analysis of the computer game *MYST III: EXILE* pivoted around three key areas: immersion, engagement, and presence. Immersion, according to McMahan, is dependent on three requirements:

‘(1) the user’s expectations of the game or environment must match the environment’s conventions fairly closely; (2) the user’s actions must have a non-trivial impact on the environment; and (3) the conventions of the world must be consistent, even if they don’t match those of “meatspace.”’
(McMahan, p. 68-9)

Secondly, engagement can be measured according to whether ‘deep play’ is possible, or whether a player can ‘be so engaged with a game that [he or she] reaches a level of near-obsessiveness’ (ibid., p. 69). Thirdly, presence can occur based on all or some of the following:

‘... quality of social interaction, realism in the environment (graphics, sound, etc.), from the effect of “transportation,” from the degree of immersiveness generated by the interface, from the user’s ability to accomplish significant actions within the environment and the social impact of what occurs in the environment, and from users responding to the computer itself as an intelligent, social agent.’ (ibid., p. 72-3)

Manovich (2001) writes that it is also the physical environment of the activity that dictates the level of engagement. Frescoes and mosaics, he writes, ‘are inseparable from architecture. In other words, they cannot be moved anywhere. In contrast, the modern painting ... is essentially mobile’ (p. 112). With frescoes and mosaics, the spectator can move around – the media does not proscribe a set viewing position. However with a painting, though one may move closer or further away, the lateral position is inscribed in the media itself. Manovich contends that modern society suffers for its image-based development, in an almost Newtonian manner: ‘It is as though the imprisonment of the spectator is the price for the new mobility of the image’ (ibid.). The same is true of film and video game consumption – whether in a cinema or a home theatre, the media dictates that it is not proper to move around while consuming³⁷. Engagement with a video game is predicated on the player being stationary, but it is rarely a similar

³⁷ That said, the recent trend towards active gaming has seen gamers stand up and move around, in response to direct feedback on screen. This can be observed with the Nintendo Wii system, and the Xbox Kinect and PlayStation 3 Move accessories (Oxford, 2010). Thomsen (2010) and Ireson (2011), however, outline some of the problems facing the integration of motion control into action and shooter games, categories to which war-oriented videogames overwhelmingly belong.

experience to a cinema, where all other sense of surroundings is cut off. Certainly, my own engagement with CALL OF DUTY 2 involved sitting at my desk, as the game was played on my laptop computer; and with SPEC OPS: THE LINE, I was in my lounge room, playing it on a PlayStation 3 console. Manovich also notes that this new environment of artistic consumption – and agency over the representation itself – splits the subject.

‘... in the representational tradition, the spectator has a double identity. She simultaneously exists in physical space and in the space of representation. The split of the subject is the tradeoff for the new mobility of the image as well as for the newly available possibility to represent any arbitrary space, rather than having to simulate the physical space where an image is located.’ (ibid., p. 113)

True enough, Manovich is writing of virtual reality, but his principles are replicated in interaction with video games. When playing a game, the user exists simultaneously in two environments: first, their own physical situation in reality, such as on an armchair in a lounge room or sitting at a desk or workstation; secondly, the player exists as the character within the game-world. These two existences are not mutually exclusive – the game character cannot move without the player’s action – but Manovich’s dichotomy presents a dilemma in terms of narrative analysis of video games. When analysing a linear narrative – such as a film or novel – one picks apart that single thread of story looking for and critiquing key moments.

‘A traditional narration works ... because it is a continuous line that plays with a reader’s (or viewer’s) expectations and orchestrates their emotional trip from beginning to end, controlling the important points such as the point of no return and the climax.’ (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et. al., 2008, p. 182).

Designed in this way, a video game would not function – at least it certainly would not present much of a challenge for a player, and would unfold much like any other visual entertainment, such as a film. Interactivity necessitates that the player be presented with choices. Hence, video game narrative is often mapped as chapters containing puzzles to

be solved, enemies to be defeated. Between each chapter there is a 'boss fight' or challenge, where the player must defeat a particularly tough enemy or solve a less penetrable puzzle. Depending on the actions within each chapter, and the player's overall performance, one of a number of endings is possible (ibid., p. 182). Egenfeldt-Nielsen et. al. acknowledge that this type of 'progression' game is often quite dull.

'The key to a successful mechanics is to make players feel that they are contributing to creating a plot; the most successful narrative experiences happen in games where our actions have noticeable plot consequences.'
(ibid., p. 183).

Sarah Wanenchak (2012) writes on the links between games and cinema: 'interaction with them is mediated by a monitor, and they almost always feature a narrative of some kind that drives the action on the screen' (Wanenchak, 2012). Crucially, Wanenchak notes that where games might be seen as active engagement with discourses of war, movies and television are certainly not passive: 'viewing those forms of media in fact often involves complex patterns of interpretation and meaning-making' (ibid.). She notes, though, that the difference between visual narratives (movies and television) and interactive narratives is crucial in understanding shifting perceptions of war and conflict. The first Gulf War was the first conflict that was 'packaged for mass consumption, more immediate and more real' – the first true example, arguably, of 'war-as-spectacle' (ibid.). The line between documentation (in a primary, news reporting sense) and representation (in a secondary, narrative or stylistic sense) is blurred, Wanenchak argues, in that both are highly subjective, '[making] certain kinds of interpretation possible while precluding others' (ibid.). The recent prevalence of targeting imagery, and the incorporation of military technology into conflict reportage, lends further credibility to any kind of documentation or representation. Wanenchak notes that this, too, was a large part of the first Gulf War, where America sought to position itself as the most advanced military in a given conflict, but particularly in contrast to the apparently primitive and conservative Iraqi forces attempting to annex Kuwait. The integration of imagery with technology, and the constant stream of representation in place of actuality, led Jean Baudrillard to posit that – essentially – the Gulf War was one huge representation, that it 'did not take place.' The role of computer simulation plays a large part in modern warfare, particularly

in training, where pilots will often use simulators before manning real aircraft, and infantry will make use of video games to develop camaraderie, rapport, and tactical awareness (ibid.; Bogost, 2007, p. 77). Wanenchak writes:

‘... simulations have power – power to shape meaning, our perceptions of ourselves and others, and our understandings of our own behaviours, as well as what behaviours are appropriate and reasonable in specific contexts.’ (Wanenchak, 2012)

In her dissection of CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE and its sequel, CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2, Wanenchak refers to the concept of ‘new war,’ in which traditional notions of state, agent, player, soldier, civilian, participant, are broken down into a much more complex state. The representation of this idea in film has led to innovative stories including SYRIANA, THE BOURNE IDENTITY and SPY GAME; in video games, however, the concept was mostly left alone in the military shooter genre until MODERN WARFARE and its sequels³⁸. Further to this ideological blurring is the now-familiar narrative trend of soldiers being exploited or betrayed by their commanders, either overtly or subtly. Rather than perpetuate the ‘grand narrative’ of nationhood, honor and sacrifice, these stories suggest that in spite of all heroism, all forfeit of life and freedoms, war is essentially senseless, and it is those in command who should be held to a higher level of scrutiny (ibid.). While this uncertainty is readily apparent in SPEC OPS: THE LINE, some of the confusion and botched command decisions of World War II were integrated into the level design of CALL OF DUTY 2, such as in the Pointe du Hoc mission, explored in depth later in this chapter.

Crucially, though, if a player has a sense of agency, then it is possible for them to attain a higher level of engagement. Such agency is critical for historical narratives, where the chronology is seemingly set in stone. This sense of agency, in games set during the Second World War, echoes the powerful immersive effects of films like Spielberg’s SAVING PRIVATE RYAN or THE LONGEST DAY. In these films, the audience is situated on the beach as the men run towards the German defences. The viewer is given a privileged view of what the soldiers experienced. Through the manipulation of space and

³⁸ Similar concepts were explored, but usually within the framework of action-espionage games such as the SPLINTER CELL and METAL GEAR SOLID series.

perspective, however, the audience is also given a grander, wider, perspective. In *THE LONGEST DAY* this takes the form of what Binns and Ryder (2013) call ‘the D-Day shot,’ a slow lateral movement perpendicular to the direction of the charge, and in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, the audience is flown over the aftermath of the Normandy landings, removed temporally and spatially from the action. These cinematic techniques allow the audience to grasp the individual and collective experience of battle, giving them a sense of interpretive agency around the grand narrative. In videogames like *CALL OF DUTY 2*, this agency is made much more literal, as the player becomes an actor within that overarching story.

CALL OF DUTY 2, then, was always designed to put the player right among some of the most significant battles of the Second World War. Indeed, the President of Infinity Ward, Grant Collier, boasted that the company was ‘committed to thrusting gamers into the heat of battle like no other, taking players on a thrill-ride of adrenaline that leaves everyone gasping for air’ (McNamara, 2005a). But the issue with this game – indeed, this style of game – is that it is so firmly grounded in history, in a defined, chronological series of events. The concern for developers is that they must balance this with allowing the player to feel some sense of control over the events that are unfolding; this is achieved by imposing a structure of objectives on a set historical event. The Battle of Moscow, for example, took place between October 1941 and January 1942. The German forces planned a simultaneous ‘pincer’ attack on the Soviet capital from the north and the south (Poroskov, 2001, p. 49). However, through the bravery and determination of the Soviet troops under the command of Stalin – and the citizen militia – who set up anti-tank ditches and barricades, Moscow became an almost-impenetrable fortress. Despite heavy losses, the Russian troops stationed in the capital held off the German forces until two reserve armies and several hundred tanks arrived to support them (ibid., p. 53). In December the tide of battle turned, and the Russians launched an immediate counter-offensive, despite being outnumbered by the Germans (ibid., p. 54). The counter-offensive put the Germans in a definitive retreat, and the Russians set about repairing their damaged capital – an easy task with hearts and minds soaring on the euphoria of victory.

Within this definitive chronology of events, the developers of CALL OF DUTY 2 created a story within a small section of the larger historical chronology. The player must find a unit of men stationed not far from a key strategic position, maintain that initial position, then launch a counter-attack and destroy the stronghold. This chapter of the game contains a microcosmic version of the Battle of Moscow itself; turning almost certain defeat into a glorious and patriotic victory. The player is crucial to the mission unfolding; a certain number of enemies must be taken out before the unit moves forward; the player must enter the German compound before any of their squadmates; and it is the player who must plant the explosives to bring the building down. The agency afforded to the player serves to distract them from the game's flaws, which I would argue have to do with McMahan's definitions of immersion. The chapter is linear, with set beginning and ending points. The player must move through the level in a pre-determined path – the only real open choices afforded to the player in the chapter are which piece of scenery to use as cover, and in which order to place the explosives on the building's foundations. These are closed 'options' rather than open 'choices,' as they do not affect the outcome of the chapter. The behavior of the environment is limited by the technology – the engine and software that underlie the graphical user interface. This means that most scenery objects in the game are fixed and indestructible. After the first level the player accepts this as part of the 'game-world' or the 'game-reality,' but it remains a barrier to immersion, and thus must be accepted in the first place.

In the single-player campaign, social interaction is limited to whether other persons are in the room watching the player move through the game. In-game, however, the player is ordered around by NPCs (non-player characters) as they would be by a superior in the military. Similarly, the character's fellow soldiers react to narrative events and enemy attacks in a realistic way, swearing, screaming, or yelling to help the player evade incoming fire. Beyond the interactive physical characteristics of the scenery detailed above, the textures and colours used in the game design are detailed and realistic – this aids their 'invisibility' and, hence, the player's immersion in the mission and engagement with the game. The player's actions are significant and non-trivial in that the game cannot progress if they are not achieved. Through the above I would argue that 'deep play' is certainly possible. However, I would qualify this by saying that CALL OF DUTY 2 is foremost an interactive representation of a set chronology of historical events. The

game itself reminds the player of this between missions, when edited newsreel footage from the era itself introduces the context of the upcoming chapters. It is this enforced detachment that would prevent 'deep play' in the majority of players. Engagement with CALL OF DUTY 2 as a text is predicated on the player's understanding that despite 'options' within the objectives, those objectives remain fixed: the game will not progress if they are not completed.

Tanine Allison (2010b) contends that film and video game representations of World War II hold at bay traditional notions of warfare merely by including combat sequences, which, she writes, 'delight in images of destruction and violence on a mass scale.' (p. 182).

'They engage spectators bodily in the thrills and excitements of combat, enacting a roller coaster of sensations and corporeal responses. These sequences come as close as the films come to showing the dark underside of the conventional story of the war: that, while it may have been justified by the need to fight fascism, the war resulted in a fixation on the spectacle of annihilation and the ecstatic pleasures (and pains) of fighting beyond all else. In this alternative story embedded within the combat sequences, what characterized the war is violence and destruction more than honor and sacrifice.' (ibid.)

In a game such as CALL OF DUTY 2, there is indeed an argument to be made for the sensationalisation and fetishisation of combat. There is little time to rest between waves of enemy troops; the completion of objectives – often including the mowing down of several enemies with a variety of weapons – brings with it a level of satisfaction; it is difficult to not be drawn into the excitement and thrill of combat, particularly when one is in no actual danger. But with CALL OF DUTY 2, the intention is to place the player within history – to this end one is constantly reminded of that history. The loading screens for the individual missions contain a written journal entry by the player's character, on a table piled with black and white photographs. Before each section, an edited video plays, compiled of various newsreel clips and with an era-appropriate voiceover. These 'strategies of authentication,' as Allison calls them, situate the player

within a lived history, and empowers them with the illusion of having some control over that history.

Considering older games such as MEDAL OF HONOR (1999) and the original CALL OF DUTY (2003), Allison continues:

'These games celebrate killing, demonstrating both the spectacular thrill of combat as well as the unrelenting violence and cruelty of the war.'

(Allison, 2010b, p. 183)

She writes that these games make more of the spectacle of combat, the thrill of the kill, than of the individual sacrifice, the distance from home, 'the finality of death, the sensation of pain, and the ubiquity of great blunders and small mistakes' (ibid.). This is certainly true of CALL OF DUTY 2 where – despite improvements on its predecessor in terms of graphics, enemy intelligence, and smoothness and fluidity of gameplay – the player simply moves between objectives, literally ticking the boxes, thinking little beyond those parameters. Allison, then, sees historical games like CALL OF DUTY 2 as diverging from the grand narrative – they do less to make sense of combat than poetry, or painting, or literature. Further, all first-person shooter games 'exist to recreate the activity of shooting weapons' (p. 210). Allison supports this by suggesting that despite the historical setting of World War II games, the meticulous attention to detail in designing weapons and uniforms, the aesthetic and geographical accuracy of the environments, these visual elements are merely a framework, a 'window dressing,' for the basic dynamic of simulated combat (p. 212). Following this logic, all first-person shooter games, whether set in a 1942 combat zone, a haunted mansion, a moonlit jungle, or a derelict spacecraft, are all fundamentally the same. But it is exactly these visual cues, these aesthetic frameworks, these 'window dressings,' along with the game's over-arching narrative, that encourages relative comparisons be drawn between, for example, CALL OF DUTY 2 and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. Beyond this, the use of these semiotic devices in breaking down barriers between audience and story make war videogames the natural discursive extension of war cinema.

The colour palette of the opening sequence of SAVING PRIVATE RYAN is beige and khaki, against which the red of blood is all the more pronounced. These colours are washed out,

removed of their contrast, by the manipulation of the glass of the lenses (Probst, 1998). The shakiness of the camera, and the seemingly random cinematography, lends an air of immediacy and immersion that few film sequences representing D-Day can claim. The sequence begins in the landing boats, with the camera following Captain Miller (played by Tom Hanks) as he awaits the inevitable. The other men on the boat are praying, thinking, vomiting. On landing, half the men on the boat are immediately cut down by enemy fire, and Miller leaps over the side into the water. He then makes his way, slowly, up the beach, as men are mown down in their hundreds. The main characters are assembled from this chaos: a (conveniently) broad cross-section of America that perfectly embodies Basinger's requirement for a 'melting pot' of macrocosmic cultures in the microcosm of the military platoon. Once at the top of the beach, the men – led by Miller – work together to overcome a machine gun nest, then make their way inland.

With the cinema screen, the darkened cinema environment, the advent of modern surround sound technology, films aim to immerse. The opening sequence of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* is many things: epic, definitely; breathtaking, certainly; self-indulgent, possibly; accurate, I suppose very few are left alive today who can judge. But in terms of immersion, it is perhaps the closest cinema has come to approximating the all-encompassing experience of being lost in a game world. This is not to cheapen the experience of war, but rather to suggest that games can perhaps approximate the essence of conflict in a way that few other media can hope to.

Pointe du Hoc was a critical objective for the American forces, as it was heavily fortified, and the Allies believed the Germans had mounted enormous 155mm guns along the cliff top. Closer to D-Day, it became known that the Germans had moved the guns about a mile inland; commanders chose to withhold this information from the men, as Pointe du Hoc remained an important stronghold to be gained (Black, 2006, p. 78). The mission involved landing the boats on the beach under the cliffs, firing ropes and raising ladders to the cliff top, and climbing the sheer rock face to the top – all under a barrage of enemy fire. The US 2nd Ranger Battalion was tasked with this incredible set of objectives; to their credit, very early on 6 June 1944 they succeeded, overrunning the German positions with only 135 casualties. They then moved inland to disable the 155mm guns at their new location (Beevor, 2009, p. 102).

This first part of D-Day – landing, scaling the cliffs, securing positions along the clifftop in preparation for German counter-attacks) took around two to three hours for the Rangers to complete³⁹ (ibid., p. 103). The continuing challenge for CALL OF DUTY 2 game designers was to maintain a level of historical authenticity while affording the player a sense of agency over events as they unfold. The game firmly places the player well within the almost-mythic setting of 6 June 1944 by opening with President Dwight D. Eisenhower's address to the troops. This audio is played over newsreel footage of preparations for Operation Overlord, other battles, and the aftermath of German attacks. The level proper begins with the player's character – Corporal Bill Taylor of the 2nd Ranger Battalion – in the landing boat with his squadmates, as they head towards the beach. The player cannot move, but can look around by moving the mouse⁴⁰. On looking around, the player can observe other landing boats to either side, or the cliff looming ahead.



Figure 6.2: Side view from the Normandy landing boat, CALL OF DUTY 2.

³⁹ The more dangerous and costly part of the battle came after the clifftop, when the Rangers had to hold their position against enemy counter-attacks until the 116th Infantry Regiment broke through the German lines from Omaha Beach a day later (Beevor, 2009, p. 103).

⁴⁰ I played the Mac version of CALL OF DUTY 2.



Figure 6.3: Looking forwards in the Normandy landing boat, CALL OF DUTY 2.

When the player gains movement control on hitting the beach, the German barrage is intense, even on Easy difficulty. On the landing ramp, Taylor is thrown into the air by an enemy grenade – the sound is reduced to an eerie whine to simulate shellshock, and movement is again restricted, until a squadmate lifts Taylor to his feet. The player must then climb a rope to the clifftop and assist his squad in assaulting and taking over the German positions. It becomes clear at this point that the 155mm guns are not where they are meant to be: Taylor and his squadmates are ordered to move inland and set up a roadblock to dissuade German counter-attacks, as other men search for the guns. Advancement along the battlefield at the top of the cliffs is slow; bullets whizz overhead; mortars and grenades explode all around. There is an on-screen indicator that shows from which direction the player is being fired upon: in this section the indicator shows red from all directions. From the roadblock Taylor and his squad move into the surrounding countryside, taking buildings as they go, all under very heavy gunfire. The guns are then located, and it is up to Taylor himself to plant the explosives to destroy them. From building to building, bunker to bunker, then, the squad continues, until they regroup with the battalion on the beach. Air support moves in, and the commander calls in reinforcements: the mission ends.

The influence of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* on this mission is clear from its opening moments. The beach at the base of the cliffs is much narrower than, say, Omaha, but

under heavy enemy fire, with grenades and mortar shells exploding all around the player, it may as well be a mile wide. No sooner has Taylor stepped off the landing boat than a grenade explodes, and he is shell-shocked, like Captain Miller in the opening sequence of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*. The sound and visual design of this section of the game draws heavily on the aesthetic created by Janusz Kaminski: washed-out lenses, blurred and ghosted vision, all accompanied by an eerie whine to emulate the temporary deafness accompanied by such a nearby explosion. Also, the story arc of this brief chapter has been simplified for players. By all accounts the Pointe du Hoc landing – though ultimately successful – was incredibly tough, brutal, and harrowing (ibid., p. 153). Players of games, though, cannot do several things at once under withering fire that will kill them – or at least mortally wound them – if they are hit. So the designers of *CALL OF DUTY 2* included a regenerating health system: the player can take several hits before the screen clouds red, and the player must find cover to recover from their wounds. Likewise the entirety of the Point du Hoc assault has been reduced to simple, progressive objectives:

- Climb the rope and find the artillery guns
- Destroy the artillery guns
- Backtrack to the beach, clearing the three German bunkers on the way

The outcome of the mission does not change based on the actions of the player one way or the other, provided the player is not killed, and takes out a few Germans along the way. However, the mission makes the player feel as though they are playing a part in history, whether that is due simply to the atmosphere that is created, or to what little agency the player is afforded. The feeling of immersion is aided by the sheer chaos of the scene – precisely the effect that Steven Spielberg wanted for the opening of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*.

This opening sequence is a nightmare. Today's audiences are shocked into silence while watching. No one talks, and no one munches popcorn or rattles candy wrappers (Basinger, 1998).

SPEC OPS: THE LINE achieves a similar kind of immersion, but rather than place the player in a set day in history, this newer game seeks to situate the player within the – perhaps deranged – mind of a special operative sent to destroy his former commander.



Figure 6.4: Taking a hit, CALL OF DUTY 2.



Figure 6.5: Third-person squad perspective in SPEC OPS: THE LINE.

In SPEC OPS: THE LINE, the first and, arguably, the most obvious divergence from CALL OF DUTY 2 is the perspective of the player. SPEC OPS is presented from a third-person perspective, with the player's character always visible within the frame from, at closest view, the lower back up. The heads-up display (HUD) is simple and uncluttered, giving only basic details of which weapon is currently in use, how much ammunition it has remaining, and the distance to the next objective. This simple design ensures the player is less worried about functional information and more concerned with the mise en scène and the narrative. The narrative, in SPEC OPS: THE LINE, is not based on history, but

rather inspired by literature. Yager Development explicitly state that the game was inspired by Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* – this has led many critics, by proxy, to compare the game to Francis Ford Coppola's APOCALYPSE NOW.

In short, SPEC OPS: THE LINE follows Walker, Lugo, and Adams as they enter a post-disaster Dubai to recover any Marines and refugees left alive. The disaster in question is a sandstorm that ravaged the city, destroying buildings and killing hundreds of thousands of people. What remains forms an eerie backdrop against which the game unfolds. Continuing the literary theme, I would liken the game's environment to the world evoked in T.S. Eliot's (1922) poem *The Waste Land* – a world where nothing is as it seems, where the familiar is now strange, and where there is little hope.

'He who was living is now dead,
We who were living are now dying.' (Eliot, 1922)

SPEC OPS: THE LINE challenges the player by subverting many of the tropes of military shooters (Holkins & Krahulik, 2012). The enemy is not well-defined, from an ideological, national, or visual point of view. Often, Walker and his comrades are firing on American soldiers. The environment is helpful at times, but often the crate or fence the player uses as cover will disintegrate under the sheer magnitude of enemy fire being directed at that location; cover is also of little use when the enemy tosses a live grenade over or around it. There is also a sense of pointlessness when the player has been battling wave after wave of enemies for an extended period, and suddenly Lugo or Adams realises the squad can shoot out a window and bury the whole enemy platoon with sand. The mechanics of the game are similar to many military shooters, but it is even this similarity is intended to make the player consider how removed from reality these games are (ibid.). Holkins & Krahulik reviewed the game in two parts: the first without spoilers, which examined the game in broad conceptual terms and its relationship to other military shooter games; and a second which examined gameplay, plot points and the game's themes in great depth. Overall, their understanding is that the game did not have the budget to create highly immersive, realistic gameplay, and their perspective is that the developers used this to foster a sense of unreality. In their words, 'The banal gameplay is meant to give you a sense of the uncanny' (ibid.).

This sense of the bizarre is heightened by the almost-deserted city. The recognisable Dubai landmarks of the Burj al Arab or the Burj Khalifa are nowhere to be seen at first (the former makes an appearance in later chapters); the skyline has fallen and crumbled, leaving half-standing buildings emerging from enormous sand dunes – ‘Ozymandias’ hubris writ city-sized’ (Meer, 2012). The environment, the mechanics, and the characters have set the player up to be wary and doubtful long before the plot really begins to unfold. Critics agree – to varying degrees – that the greatest achievement of the game is that it makes the player aware of what they are doing: actively engaging in a simulation of murder. That the murder is within the context of a military engagement is of small consequence.

‘It is a game about playing a US soldier marauding through a desert setting and shooting almost anything that moves, but it genuinely made me feel awful about doing that. Importantly, this was deliberate on the game’s part.’ (ibid.).

Heart of Darkness informs the game’s narrative in subtle ways. Walker’s journey into Dubai echoes Marlow’s journey up the river; as such, Marlow’s feelings about his surroundings are manifested in dialogue and scenarios in SPEC OPS: THE LINE.

‘In and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened with slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularised impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.’
(Conrad, p. 16-17)

Just as Marlow rarely stops in his journey up river, Walker and his squadmates continuously move through the bizarre environments of the swallowed Dubai. This infuses the game with a dream-like sense of being constantly on the move, not unlike being on a boat, sailing slowly up a river. The sand is also used in interesting ways. It at once acts as a metaphor for Walker’s doubt – there is no solid footing, and the earth

could give way beneath him at any time – but also as a possible aid, as when the player can shoot out windows, letting the sand in to swallow enemies.

‘Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams...’
(ibid., p. 32-33)

This quote almost describes the game mechanics that create doubt in the mind of the player. The game chapters are linked by cut-scenes: when the cut-scene depicts a ‘real’ event, the scene fades to black; when what is depicted is one of Walker’s hallucinations, the scene fades to white. When Conrad asks ‘Do you see him?’, one thinks of Walker’s attempts to describe his former superior to his squadmates.

‘Was John Konrad the greatest man I ever served with? Well, I dunno. There was this one time in Kabul when he dragged my bleeding carcass half a mile to the evac chopper, so maybe I’m biased. But the facts don’t lie. The man’s a fuckin’ hero.’ (Williams & Pearsey, 2012).

Walker in this sense is an odd choice for a central character – though not within the game’s logic of uncertainty. Often the player controls a nondescript, impartial character, an Everyman, as in CALL OF DUTY 2, where the only descriptor we have for the character we control is their name. But Walker clearly has his own perspectives and opinions on Konrad, which imbues the game with an odd sense of purpose: the player is curious to know more about the relationship between the protagonist and antagonist. This, in turn, alienates Walker’s squadmates, so that the player feels increasingly as though they are alone in this quest. This alienation combined with the game’s self-awareness and constant questioning of the player makes the game itself a metaphor of confusion and uncertainty. The game is not fun. The game makes the player question his or her decisions. The game gives no moral anchor to guide the player’s actions. Add to this the hallucinations suffered by Walker towards the end of the game and SPEC OPS: THE LINE, in a very credible and visceral way, addresses real-world combat, and the very real issue of post-

traumatic stress disorder. This reduction of focus, onto the individual experience of the soldier, also forces the player to think of the sheer numbers of men affected in this way and, in so doing, subverts this individual focus into a wider, more aware perspective on conflict and its effects – the manifold rhizome-like offshoots of the grand narrative.

As the player enters the game's third act, things are never as they seem. The interactions between Walker and his squadmates become stunted, almost standoffish. Where Walker, in the first few chapters, would shout orders at Lugo and Adams in a professional manner, towards the end of the game his orders are short and angry, barked at his squadmates in an almost animalistic manner. The environment shifts, almost imperceptibly: an object's appearance will change when you pass it – most notably a tree, in full bloom on first view, will be completely bare and lifeless if you turn around to look at it again. Also, at the very start of the game, Lieutenant Colonel Konrad's face appears on a billboard, but it changes during a sequence of action.

'As first-time players we don't recognize the face, and Walker doesn't mention it. Regardless of anyone's reaction, the images are there, looming at the back of Walker's mind while staring him straight in the face.'
(Dyer, 2012)

This manifestation is particularly telling of a revised attitude towards war: this wider awareness that takes into account a blurred line between right and wrong; between experience and reflection; and between the stories of heroism and sacrifice on the field of battle, and the often life-long pain and suffering of those who return.



Figure 6.6: THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW promotional poster.

SPEC OPS: THE LINE subverts the military shooter genre by appearing to be an exponent of the very same. The game leaves red herrings that the audience will recognise as conventions of traditional military shooter games, particularly in the opening chapters. Penny Arcade's review notes that these first few scenes are likely to sort the deeper gamers from those out for the experience of violence akin to CALL OF DUTY or MEDAL OF HONOR. The game relies heavily on cinematic cutscenes that bridge the sequences of action, though the later chapters are highly dramatic even while the player has control of Walker. The game is epic in scale, and is designed to be highly cinematic. The unsettling image of the Dubai skyline sunken in the sand is reminiscent of marketing artwork for the release of THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (2004). The largesse of the storyline – and the micro-apocalyptic nature of its setting – hides larger themes. As discussed, there are the observations made about post-traumatic stress disorder, but there are also moral questions about military actions. In a memorable – and much-discussed episode – Walker is called upon to make a choice. On approaching a checkpoint, it seems clear that it has become overrun with enemies. A mortar sits on a privileged position overlooking the army, who is unaware of the small squad's presence above them. Walker orders Lugo

and Adams to start preparing the mortar, at which point Lugo notices that the ammunition is white phosphorous. This heinous weapon burns white hot, incinerating metal, concrete, plant life and flesh without discrimination, and is still used by the United States in conflicts to this day. Lugo tells Walker what the ammunition is, and Walker gives the order to continue. The player is given a choice, but in the end the game seizes control, and states quite bluntly that this horrible thing must be done in order to continue. Brendan Keogh (2012) describes the experience of being reminded that the game is in control, not the player.

'Walker ... is right that sometimes there is no choice and you just have to kindly do what you are told. ... Walker is choosing to be in a situation where he has no choice, and so am I. The Line doesn't really want players to stop playing at this point. It simply wants us to accept responsibility for the situations we allow ourselves to be in.' (Keogh, 2012, p. 79).

The concept of choice within video game narratives is controversial. Some believe that interactivity offers possibilities that advance storytelling to its next stage of evolution (Aarseth, 1997, p. 18; Ryan, 2002, p. 604-5); others believe there is no more choice proffered in video games than there is in a novel (Aarseth, 2001, p. 230). Much debate around SPEC OPS: THE LINE centres around this very question, i.e. whether Yager Development have offered the player more or less scope to exert choice within the narrative of the game. There are scenes within SPEC OPS: THE LINE that seem to offer the player a reasonable scope of free choice, such as the particularly dark moment where the player is presented with two figures, bound, blindfolded, and hanging from a crossbar. The player must decide who to kill: a civilian who stole water for his family, or the soldier who murdered the civilian's family. The scene has been orchestrated by Walker's nemesis and the game's antagonist, Lieutenant Colonel Konrad, who explains the situation through Walker's earpiece; one of Konrad's snipers also has the area covered, such that any attempt to avoid the situation will result in both prisoners being killed. The player is faced with three choices: shoot the civilian, shoot the soldier, or take out Konrad's sniper. The results of this dilemma notwithstanding, this is a key sequence in that it puts choice in video game narrative into sharp relief alongside standard linear storytelling. On the one hand this is a dramatic, almost cinematic sequence, where the

protagonist sees first-hand his enemy's guile and cruelty. On the other it is a fully realised, constructed, and planned sequence, as are any others within the game, and the player has as little choice as they do at any other point in the proceedings. Regardless, this is Nietzsche's morality dilemma at its most explicit – there is no order, and any attempt to impose such results in further chaos.

Later, while isolated from his squadmates, Walker has a particularly disturbing episode where his vision comes in and goes out, creating a strobe effect. This is even more confronting given this occurs while a heavy weapons soldier is firing at Walker from a closing distance. Every time Walker takes out an enemy, they turn into a white mannequin, and then another enemy appears in another part of the room.

'What this scene seems to suggest is what I find really terrifying is the possibility that I'm not killing people. Do you actually kill when you kill in a videogame? It seems like I want to feel like I am actually killing people, so off-putting do I find the non- human mannequins, and that is terrifying' (Keogh, p. 110).

This is clearly a hallucination, but what is interesting is that in creating the hallucination – and therefore contributing to the conceit of the entire game – the game designers have taken control away from the player. This is part of the game's mechanics, and the aforementioned conceit, but it aligns this part of the game more with cinema in presenting a character and setting, rather than situating a player within a world through which they can freely move. This sequence is neither cut-scene nor gameplay segment – the player has control but the game has dictated that success will be difficult, given limited vision and constantly reappearing enemies. Manovich alludes to this effect in describing older video games as shifts between representation and interaction.

'... the designers of interactive media, such as games, DVD titles, interactive cinema, and interactive television programs, often consciously attempt to structure the subject's temporal experience as a series of periodic shifts. The subject is forced to oscillate between the roles of viewer and user, shifting between perceiving and acting, between following the story and actively participating in it' (Manovich, p. 207).

The designers of SPEC OPS: THE LINE have made this division between spectating and acting much less arbitrary. Indeed, all the actual, video cut-scenes in the game are almost seamlessly integrated into gameplay, with almost no loading time at all⁴¹. Be it cut-scene integration, or a gameplay sequence that feels more like a cut-scene, the designers of SPEC OPS: THE LINE have created an engaging story that feels darker and more real than any other – simply because it poses questions to the player that many other military shooter games choose to ignore. In the same way that APOCALYPSE NOW channeled the Watergate era and Vietnam opposition into a heady mélange of misplaced masculinity, untrustworthy authority, and unanswered questions, SPEC OPS: THE LINE makes players look at themselves, and whether the simulation of murder should be treated as psychologically different from the actual act of murder itself. Whether it succeeds in that aim is up to each individual player, but this simulation aspect also communicates the nature of conflict in a different way than any other medium: by taking a controller in your hands, are you, by extension, picking up a weapon? The experience is made visceral by the camera being situated as the character's point of view, and by the collusion of sound and vision to create meaning, or to mislead. Video games immerse because they make use of the same tools as cinema, resulting in very similar effects. Interaction with a video game, while predicated on a system of player control, hardware, and software, essentially consists of the viewer sitting in front of a screen. The same cues that define the quality of the cinematic experience – cinematography, editing, pacing, script, and character development – are the same that define the enjoyment of a gameplay session⁴². Engagement with a video game hinges on whether a level of 'deep play' is possible, i.e. whether the player's interaction with the game environment – however fantastic or surreal – is credible or accessible. I contend here that CALL OF DUTY 2 succeeds in appropriating a set chronology of historical events into a linear mission that the player can make their way through, and appreciate in that particular historical context. SPEC OPS: THE LINE is self-consciously darker, and is not meant to be an enjoyable experience. Both games, however, immerse the viewer not just in a representation of war, but in one subjective experience of war. Neither game is meant to be *enjoyable*, in a euphoric sense,

⁴¹ This is partially due to the game's underlying design: the cut-scenes were created using the same 'engine' as the gameplay itself, therefore transitions between gameplay and cut-scenes are much simpler to achieve.

⁴² Indeed, often unconsciously, game critics use these very cinematic devices to judge the quality of video games.

but both impart an *essence* of warfare, which goes some way towards achieving a complete understanding of the horrors faced by the men on the ground, and situating that individual experience within a grand narrative of conflict.

* * * * *

On Comics & Captain America

'Look at me. I believe in an idea, an idea that a single individual who has the right heart and the right mind that is consumed with a single purpose, that one man can win a war.'

- Captain America (Bendis, Hickman, et. al., 2008)

Few fictional characters have caught the timbre of so many eras as Captain America. Since his first appearance in 1941, the character has undergone many transformations, held many opinions, and struggled with his role as beacon of hope, font of endless strength, and all-American hero. Captain America – 'Cap' – created in the midst of the Second World War, was seen as the tonic for a nation who had been drawn into an international conflict. He was one man – but a man that embodied an idea. That idea was that he was every man – he was America, and together, that country could overthrow the evil that threatened it. In the beginning, Captain America embodied the 'grand narrative.' There was no individual interest in Captain America: he was not selfish, nor cocky. He never claimed to be anything other than he was: a man. A genetically-altered man, sure, but a man nevertheless, with the same hopes, fears, dreams, and doubts, as all other men. He never sought out violence, but knew it was sometimes necessary for the greater good. Throughout the printed comic series, and in the 2011 film adaptation, violence occurs throughout. It never detracts from Cap's morals or his 'goodness,' it is simply there. Through Cap's actions, and those of the team or army behind him, the world is returned to an equilibrium: peace is restored. Captain America is always called

on to fight – but it is the good fight he fights. Violence is an imperative in any war – so it follows that any representation of war must also contain or imply scenes of combat. It is through this representation that creators may communicate the essence of war and conflict – and through the interpretation of that communication that viewers may come close to appreciating the heat, thrill, and terror of war.

Comic books operate somewhat differently from both cinema and videogames, in that they present a story visually with no movement. The logic of the frame is omnipotent, in that it is up to the artist to imbue that frame with movement, and for the viewer to decode that movement while reading. Jason Dittmer (2010) calls this logic a ‘geography,’ a mode of mapping time and space without duration or movement of any kind: this logic or geography allows the reader to decode not only the images, but the narrative, and is further based on the reader’s prior awareness of the form.

‘[I]t is the audience’s assumption that there is a coherent narrative in front of them that leads them to construct one from the montage of images and absences provided by artists and writers. This leap of faith requires comic book producers to anticipate the practices of reading in order to provide the cultural resources they need to construct narrative.’ (Dittmer, 2010, p. 225)

Comic books are not unlike film storyboards in their efforts to capture movement and narrative within a sequence of static frames. Different artists present action and transitions in different ways, but generally the form treats often-epic storylines as dynamic, colourful scenes with larger-than-life characters. Superhero stories are drawn to the platform for this reason: the opportunity to depict a spectacle in a unique way. Furthermore, there is a cinematic logic to how the static images are linked. Lines depicting motion blur or action are decoded by the reader according to an understanding of movement defined by cinematic representation. Furthermore, the narrative progression of the comic is dependent on cinema, as it can be traced according to Deleuze’s (2005) conception of montage:

‘Between the beginning and the end of a film something changes, something has changed. But this whole which changes, this time or

duration, only seems to be capable of being apprehended indirectly, in relation to the movement-images which express it. Montage is the operation which bears on the movement-images to release the whole from them, that is, the image of time. It is a necessarily indirect image, since it is deduced from movement-images and their relationships.' (Deleuze, 2005, p. 30)

If we comprehend comics in a mode dependent on cinematic communication, we necessarily comprehend the spectacle of the comic as per the cinematic spectacle. War is, undoubtedly, a spectacle. Virilio treats the battlefield as a stage, referring to the 'scenario' and 'the power of anticipation' as tools of war. In Virilio's 'lightning-war,' perception and the manipulation of same are so critical that even the men on the ground are almost superfluous. It is images that matter, whether actual or created – and it the creation and perception of images that will turn the tide of battle. In a post-September 11 world, Captain America, too, relied very heavily on public perception. Under pressure to register for government service – in a scheme championed by Iron Man – Cap instead chose to go rogue, believing that superheroes were better equipped to handle the evil in society out of the public eye. A civil war ensued, between Iron Man's forces and Cap's 'Secret Avengers.' In the climactic battle, Cap saw ordinary civilians – firefighters, policemen – fighting with Iron Man, and suddenly felt that he had let the people down. He turned himself in, and outside the courthouse, was apparently killed by a sniper. This whole sequence is framed by a live news report, and intermediary cells are filled with a journalist's face as she summarises the action as it happens, and speculates on what it could mean (Webb, 2011, p. 207). The enframement of this section within a news report attests not only to Cap's new reliance on images and public awareness, but also to the dependence of that public on those images. Released across 2006 and 2007, this story arc, called 'Civil War,' spanned several characters and intersecting storylines. Most importantly, though, it shifts the character of Captain America well and truly out of the stagnant waters of World War II – poor Cap had been fighting that fight since 1941 – and into the media-laden, image-dependent world of the 21st Century.

Continuing the post-war examination of the comic series, there are issues of, and episodes in, Captain America that firmly support the work of this thesis – as aforementioned, it seems Captain America threads the weave of the grand narrative in

much the same way as war cinema. The Marvel Ultimate series presents an alternate history for the hero, in which he is part of the team The Ultimates (not the Avengers as in the original storyline, and the 2012 film; Whedon, 2012). In one particularly memorable mission, he is sent to deal with an alternate version of himself (Aaron & Garney, 2011). In the 1960s, while the real Cap was frozen in ice, the government tried to create another Captain America. But without the original serum, government scientists were forced to recreate the effects using steroids and stimulants. Initially, the results looked promising: Frank Simpson, the test subject, took to his new form instantly, and took out many enemies in the jungles of Vietnam. But in addition to his new physical stresses, Simpson's brain, too, was warping, and one day he disappeared. He re-emerged when he learned of the original Cap's return. Simpson finds Steve Rogers and beats him almost to death; Rogers wakes up and is ordered by his superiors to track down and eliminate Simpson. It is revealed that Simpson has returned to Vietnam, and has brainwashed some locals, and injected them with his own blood – creating a small army of twisted, manic super-soldiers. Cap infiltrates the commune, but is captured – he is physically and psychologically tortured, in an attempt by Simpson to convert Rogers to his deviant ways. Realising this will fail, Simpson enters the prison cell to execute Rogers, but the latter spits snake venom into Simpson's eyes. A very lengthy hand-to-hand fight ensues, and the two enemies wax lyrical about morality, before Rogers emerges victorious into the sunlight.

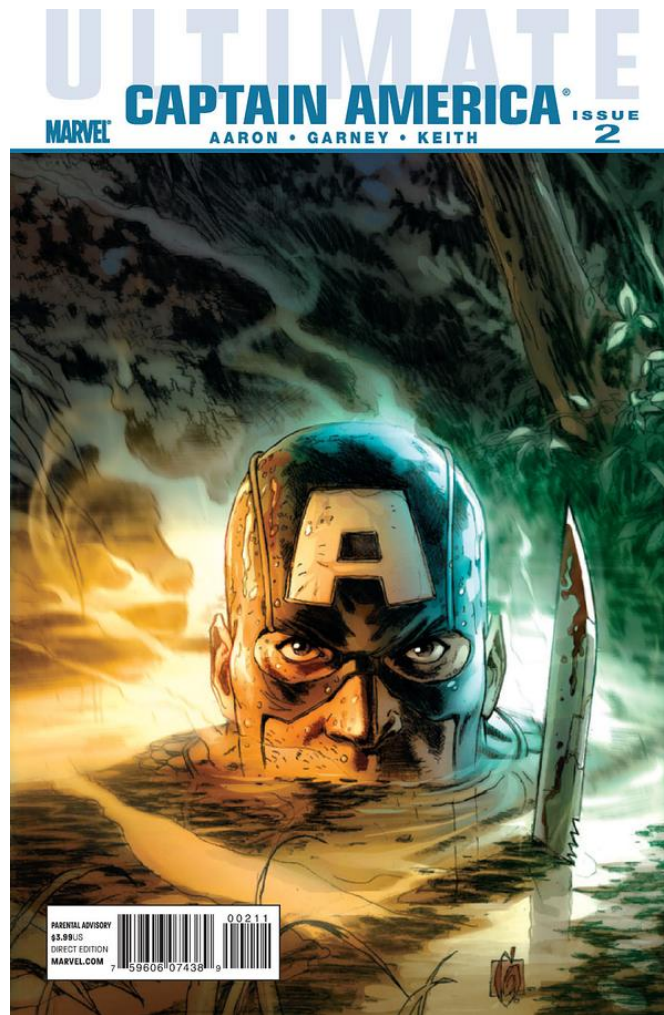


Figure 6.7: Ultimate Captain America, Issue #2.

The similarities between this Captain America storyline and APOCALYPSE NOW are manifold, and are never ignored by its creators. The cover of Issue #2 steals shamelessly from the scene where Willard emerges from the water to infiltrate Kurtz's lair (Figure 6.7). The framing of the storyline, too, eerily echoes that of the film: an assassin is approached by his superiors to embark on a secret mission to remove an 'aberration' from the system. Cap is actually never explicitly told that he will be operating independently: he assumes this, knocks his superior unconscious and steals away, deliberately going AWOL to cover his tracks. Like Willard in APOCALYPSE NOW, Rogers must make his way through the jungles of Vietnam, picking up hints and clues as he goes, but also discovering similarities between himself and Simpson. The construction of Simpson is similar to Coppola's treatment of Marlon Brando as Kurtz. In the beginning he is framed only in shadow, certain features only visible in part. The most notable – and disturbing –

feature of Simpson's Cap is the American flag tattooed from his forehead down over his eyes and the bridge of his nose. This self-mutilation – with such a prominent symbol of American patriotism – is a hideous subversion of the strength of Cap's iconography. Steve Rogers' mission to Vietnam perfectly encapsulates not only the disillusionment of that particular episode in American history, but also the similar feelings that accompanied America's incursion into the Middle East. This series was released in 2011, while American troops were still stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Cap has always been an icon of hope, freedom, and the American dream, but in this series we find a Cap who must face his darker side. This contemplative, introspective tone mirrors that we encounter in Cap's missions following the September 11 attacks in New York City.

Released in June 2002, less than a year after the planes hit the World Trade Center, Captain America Vol. 4 #1 – part of a series entitled *The New Deal* – sees the Sentinel of Liberty helping New York policemen and firemen pull bodies from the wreckage, and aid those who made it out before the buildings came down (Rieber & Cassaday, 2010). While doing this good work, he reflects on why the attacks took place; what could possibly drive anyone to carry out such a malicious act? He is approached by Nick Fury – his superior – to embark on a mission to Afghanistan, but Cap refuses, stating unequivocally that the world he is doing at Ground Zero is far more important. But months hence, a plane drops bombs on a small town, killing many and causing a great amount of destruction. It is discovered that al-Tariq, an Islamic terrorist is responsible, and Captain America is sent to deal with the threat. Over the course of the next few issues, Cap faces off with al-Tariq on several occasions and in many different locations, each time discovering something new. It seems al-Tariq's extremism stems from a love for his own people, and his family⁴³. It cannot be denied that al-Tariq is twisted and malicious, and must be destroyed, but what humanity the man possesses gives Captain America pause. In post-September 11 cinema, American triumphalism is king, and evil is often faceless, certainly anonymous, and must be destroyed at all costs. Rather than mirror this, the creators of this series chose to ask questions. This approach is almost ironic for the solitary defender of American liberty, and was heavily criticised at the time

⁴³ This series was widely criticised at the time of its release for seeming anti-American (Medved, 2003).

of its release. Michael Medved (2003) writes that this new Cap ‘seems disillusioned, embittered, and surprisingly sympathetic to terrorists.’

Captain America’s post-9/11 understanding of the destruction of Dresden suggests a moral equivalence between the Allied forces in World War II (in the midst of a bloody, all-out global war) and the al Qaeda terrorists who randomly attacked unsuspecting office workers. Especially in a comic book aimed largely at children and teenagers (and rated PG) the comparison (in the hero’s own voice) is both illogical and obscene. It seems naïve to suggest that it was ever the intention of Rieber and Cassaday to defend the actions of the terrorists in September 2001. It seems much more likely that in the reactionary wave of patriotism following the attacks, the creators of this series saw echoes of the same fundamentalism that drove the terrorists into action. Rather than condemn their countrymen for this, as they were accused by Medved and others of doing – and it is an understandable reaction – they chose to frame their story in a very methodical and contemplative way. Cap asks many questions in this series: of his superiors, of the American government, of the terrorists, and of himself. And he invites readers to do the same. In questioning, in this constant revision of opinion and widening of perspective, Cap comes closer not to the truth of the conflict, but to a greater and clearer awareness of the sheer complexity of the world he now inhabits.

In the eyes of Captain America, the ‘national interest’ – in terms of that dictated by those in power – diverges from the ‘greater good.’ In this way, Cap himself seizes hold of the grand narrative, and changes it. Captain America was among the first to realise that hasty action, rather than a calm and measured response, was foolish, and exactly what the enemy wanted. Cap reminded everyone that life had to go on in spite of what had happened; but every day to remember those that had been lost, and learn from what happened in the wake of the attacks. Captain America realised that the grand narrative had now shifted from the story of great powers colliding to the story of the people, and this is reflected in contemporary war cinema. In *THE HURT LOCKER* we see a small ensemble of men working as part of a larger operation: their individual hopes, dreams, and fears are not hidden, homogenous, nor are they collective or representative – a treatment of the ensemble dynamic in earlier films. *THREE KINGS* sees a small team take matters into their own hands, first for their own greedy ends, and then for the good of

the people that were left behind in the excitement of the conflict – ironically the people America thought they were defending.

Captain America remains the quintessential American hero. Like I argued of General George S. Patton in Chapter 3, Cap seems to embody the grand narrative, but he also embodies its failings. The grand narrative cannot jump between nations or political ideologies as ‘hyperlink’ narratives can do; Cap can only do so between individual issues, certainly not within a single story. In the comic book format, like storyboards for a film, there remains a clear progression of narrative impetus. The videogame develops this progression by involving the player directly, allowing them to choose – to varying degrees – how the story evolves. Both modes – the comic book and the videogame – are dependent on cinema, however, in order to present their own ‘truths’ about war. Furthermore, both comic book and videogame representations make use of the ‘grand narrative,’ and the tropes of the war film genre, in order to do just that.

Chapter 7 -

Conclusion: Cycles of Violence, Repeat Performances

The war film has persisted through some one hundred years of cinematic history, and despite the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011 – and a similar extraction from Afghanistan planned for Spring 2013 (Gordon & Landler, 2013) – contemporary international conflicts exist that will pique the creative interest of filmmakers for many years to come. This thesis has shown that the history of dramatic feature films about war and conflict can be traced as divergences from, or returns to, a nationalistic narrative that takes a ‘big picture’ view of war and conflict: a ‘grand narrative.’ Most films about warfare and conflict make use of techniques of defamiliarisation, among other semiotic devices: I proposed that these techniques comprise a cinematic methodology by which filmmakers seek to approximate the ‘essence’ of combat.

As noted in Chapter 2, Bazin (1967) writes that it is an attempt at preserving of life that is central to representation. ‘[T]he making of images ... is no longer a question of survival after death,’ he writes, ‘but of a larger concept, the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny’ (p. 10). The grand narrative has persisted for thousands of years as a regulatory structure, an ‘ideal world’ – a means of telling stories that resists change. Some twenty years after cinema’s inception, and not long after its popularisation, the outbreak of the First World War prompted filmic reactions to conflict and destruction, fear, honour and sacrifice. With countless battles since – alongside a steady advance in filmmaking technology – almost every human conflict has been represented on film.

The World Wars are continually revisited on film, and there are several reasons for this. Firstly, it was a tidy war, with reasonably clear battlefields and areas of engagement. These clearly defined elements led to memorable individual battles, such as the Battle of the Bulge, Bastogne, Operation Market Garden, and, of course, the assault on Normandy. There were two sides, the Allies and the Axis: one that was ostensibly ‘good’, the other apparently evil. Further, the victory for the Allies was absolute in a strategic sense. This is arguably the most important point – the ‘good guys’ won. America, in particular, uses World War II as a shining beacon of American triumphalism. The notion of manifest destiny – a collective, shared positive outcome of war – is central to any national ideology. Through the films analysed, it has been shown that this ideology – this grand narrative – that was established in early cinema, wavered in Vietnam, and has since been threatened in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have argued that the adherence to, or divergence from, this ideology is represented in cinema in terms of recognisable war film tropes. As explored in Chapter 3, *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* contains many of these tropes, namely: a dedication/prologue; a diverse group of men; a series of missions the group must successfully accomplish for the narrative to proceed; the narrative alternates between action and inaction/repose; members of the group die; a climactic battle occurs; and ‘[t]he audience is ennobled for having shared their combat experience, as they are ennobled for having undergone it’ (Basinger, 1986, p. 73-75). Further, the cinematic style of the film reflects a wider view. The shots used are predominantly wide shots, taking in the battlefield in its entirety, or showing the men as a cohesive unit within the frame. What close-ups are used reflect quiet moments of contemplation, but the viewer is soon once again presented with a ‘big picture’ view of warfare and combat. While *PATTON* refigures this framework slightly – focusing in on the individual character of the General – it still maintains a wide perspective. The General himself, in his position as a symbol of military authority, discipline, and servitude, is a projector, a vehicle, for the grand narrative in this later film. The battle scenes of *PATTON*, in particular, show a General with a broad understanding of the history of warfare, in complete command of the resources at his disposal, and with a far-reaching line of sight across the battlefield that translates into panoramic cinematography. Schaffner’s film is exemplary of the broader view, eschewing individual

concerns in favour of collective glory: a wider cinematographic lens, in addition to a protracted editing style, supports this interpretation of the grand narrative.

Through the cinematic lens, the World Wars are transfigured into periods in history where America and its allies were unassailable, near-invincible paragons of power and righteousness. Combat is seen as essential to regain peace, purge the world of evil, and restore national pride. The group dynamic reinforces the attitude of “we’re all in this together,” and it is treated as inevitable that no matter how close the group gets, or how much they work together to achieve their objective and protect each other, sacrifices will have to be made. Death is inevitable in films of the World Wars: whether seen from a distance or terrifyingly close to the camera. In the end, though, these films are about those that have gone before. They represent a period of history long past, beyond reach, almost in the realm of mythology.

‘Left only with memory traces cleansed of real fear and anxiety to work with, the reconstruction is affectively effective because the real experience of slaughter, lying beyond what cinematic language can hope to capture on screen, can successfully be recoded.’ (Bronfen, p. 111)

Modern depictions of World Wars I and II are heavily influenced by news reportage and documentary – as are films about the Gulf and Iraq Wars. A frame that is constantly on the move barely registers the central characters, let alone a wider view. Yet even these later films – SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (1998), ENEMY AT THE GATES (2001), MIRACLE AT ST. ANNA (2008), to name three – in their staunch adherence to ‘big picture’ narratives of camaraderie, sacrifice, and collective glory, reify the grand narrative, and revive it before a new audience.

The era surrounding America’s involvement in Vietnam was typified by disillusionment, frustration, and fear. The conflict could not have gone worse for the United States. American commanders had expected to swoop in and liberate the South Vietnamese from their northern counterparts, emerging as saviour and stopping the spread of communism across the globe. What resulted was a catastrophic bungle of foreign policy that cost America some 90,000 soldiers’ lives and countless millions of dollars (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). America’s forced withdrawal was embarrassing,

and those soldiers that came home were not afforded the 'hero' label that men serving in the World Wars received. These men – who had seen the horrors of war just as much or more than their predecessors – were not seen as liberators, but rather as being complicit in this tremendous failure of foreign interventionism. Naturally, these feelings were infused in the films made during and after the period. Rather than being a chessboard for grand strategy or a backdrop to glory, the landscape of Vietnam became a claustrophobic character in itself; an entropic, chaotic, unpredictable beast that sent forth flame, water, bullets, arrows, and natives to kill those who tried to impose any kind of order on it. The enemy, thus, was largely faceless, subsumed into the darkness and the murkiness of the jungle, the river, the hollow, burnt-out buildings. When the enemy did emerge, however, their face was markedly similar to the protagonists' perception of themselves: Kurtz was an American soldier, like Willard; the teenage sniper, in *FULL METAL JACKET*, was young and naïve, like Joker. In *APOCALYPSE NOW*, the story moves up the river, through the jungle, with Willard and the PBR Street Gang. The journey is punctuated by moments of action, confusion, frustration, tension, and release, but while the other men get caught up in these feelings, Willard turns inward. The constant narration, poring over notes, ignorance of his squadmates and their surroundings makes Willard the embodiment of this era's ambivalence. His obsession, though, proves his undoing, and in facing Kurtz he must free himself of his obligations, his mission, his opinions, his philosophy, and embrace the madness to which Kurtz has succumbed. In *FULL METAL JACKET*, we begin in the clinical, functional environment of Parris Island, where the Marines must train before they will be deployed to Vietnam. The training is horrific, violent, and harsh. The men are stripped of their names, identities, their humanity, and are released from Parris Island as a cohesive unit of killing machines. The clean, ordered surroundings of the base give way – marked by the deaths of two key characters in Hartman and Pyle – dissolving, visibly, to the tents and demountable shacks of Da Nang, and then further to the hollow, empty, bombed buildings of Huế. The cinema of Vietnam zooms in, preferring mid-shots and close-ups to the wider perspective of earlier films. These shots privilege the protagonist at the expense of the landscape and those around him. In the case of *APOCALYPSE NOW*, while the river is a constant presence, the film is centred – visually *and* in terms of narrative – on Willard and his mission. Joker, the protagonist of *FULL METAL JACKET*, while being stripped of his name and background during training,

remains an anchor for the narrative. It is with Joker that the story begins and ends, so the camera remains with him, from the waist up, for much of the film. The editing in Vietnam cinema, though, retains the protracted style of some films about the World Wars. Rather than encouraging an appreciation of the *mise en scène*, the battlefield, the landscape, however, these longer shots, lethargic cuts, impart a more introspective, contemplative tone. These techniques are commensurate with an inward-looking cinema, on a re-presentation of the past that is still trying to understand exactly what happened.

These films are slow journeys – through training, to deployment, and then into combat, and from inertia, to embarking on a mission, then slowly up river – that grate at the soul. In the cinema of the World Wars, the reasons for and parties to the conflict were absolute and beyond question. But in these later films, the notion of absolutism is scrutinised, problematised, and critiqued. In their episodes of absurdity, these films make an audience cringe and laugh simultaneously. This is because while watching, the viewer is aware – with the benefit of hindsight – that the conflict never had the successful closure of earlier conflicts, and many are still unsure of what was actually achieved (if anything). These films explore the feelings, concerns, and problems of the conflict in question. They do this by reconsidering the environments, the battles, the style of warfare, the people, and the soldiers involved. The era, then, is considered from a point of detachment: these filmmakers are working through the problems of the era as much as they are trying to depict the same era with a degree of realism. The films of Vietnam cast the conflict in a state of flux: a conflict that many would rather forget, but one that was critical to defining an era of America's history. This is a context into which the grand narrative does not fit: the findings of this thesis concerning this era reflect this perspective.

The Gulf War was a short conflict, lasting some six or seven months, and was, ostensibly, a victory for American troops. Both sides signed a ceasefire agreement, though a broadcast on a CIA-run radio station called for the people of Iraq to rise up against Saddam Hussein. America and her allies would later deny complicity in this encouragement, despite George H. W. Bush himself making some of the comments (Fisk, pp. 793-796, 847). The Gulf War was linked intrinsically with media presentation, and the key moments in the conflict played out as though planned by a television news

director. This mediatisation of warfare had reached its zenith by the time of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC on September 11, 2001. The subsequent declaration of war on terrorists by George W. Bush was done via a live telecast from the White House, and the media coverage of the war on terror merged with that of the recovery from the attacks in a chaotic 24-hour cacophony of vision and sound. In 2003, troops from America and three of her allies (the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland) invaded Iraq, beginning an eight-year occupation that encompassed a protracted struggle for power, and the fall of dictator Saddam Hussein. The withdrawal of troops from Iraq ended on December 18, 2011, though fighting has not ceased between the groups the Coalition left behind. Ten years after the initial invasion, the Iraq War was labelled a catastrophe akin to Vietnam.

'The sectarian virus incubated in the occupation has now spread beyond Iraq's borders and threatens the future of states across the eastern Arab world. But the war hasn't only been a disaster for Iraq and the region. By demonstrating the limits of US power and its inability to impose its will on peoples prepared to fight back, Iraq proved a strategic defeat for the US and its closest allies.' (Milne, 2013).

The statistics show a much greater number of casualties inflicted by America than on it. A victory, then? Perhaps not. According to Boettcher and Cobb (2006), the presentation of statistics can be difficult in non-traditional warfare settings, such as those with no clear geographical boundaries or specific areas of engagement (p. 832). Further, there is a need to contextualise American casualties within the larger loss to the opposition, 'in the hopes that high ratios of Iraqi deaths to US deaths will reduce the negative impact of American losses' (ibid., p. 833). The media re-frames the metrics of war in order to promote American triumph – a twenty-first century version of the grand narrative. Conflicts so dependent on representation engender narrative feature films that are equally subservient to processes of encoding and decoding. These films also heavily feature the media, in the form of cameras, journalists, banks of computers and editing equipment. The influence of journalism on the films about the Gulf and Iraq Wars is clear – handheld cameras imitate those of live reporting, and disjointed cutting presents a functional mode inherent in documentary filmmaking. The narrative is structured by characterisation,

performance, and script, rather than by the form, which jolts the viewer from a conventional visual syntax into a constantly moving camera and many different perspectives on single scenes. These estranging formal techniques belie a heavy reliance on the traditional story elements of films of the World Wars. The most significant contention of this thesis is that rather than diverge further from any nationalistic or propagandistic tendencies – in the wake of Vietnam – the cinema of the Gulf and Iraq Wars returns to themes of assumed, vested interest over individualism. Further, rather than advance storytelling and thematic consideration to a progressive level of critique and commentary – given now that filmmaking techniques have reached an almost perfect alignment of mobility and economy – filmmakers seem more preoccupied with a return to a perspective of conflict as a necessity. *THE HURT LOCKER*, for example, presents war as an addictive experience. *JARHEAD* posits that ‘normal life’ is unlivable – or at least certainly not ‘normal’ – after living through a tour of duty. It falls to filmmakers to present these odd perspectives as both plausible and realistic to viewers who may never experience the horrors of combat first-hand, and this thesis has argued that it is through techniques of estrangement that this is achieved. This contemporary cinema presents a new logic of the image dependent on mediatisation that thoroughly unsettles the viewer. In so doing, it retextures the eras concerned as a myriad of competing perspectives, not just journalistic, but historical, ideological, and cultural. These are complex political struggles, and the origins of them, for some of those involved, extend back thousands of years. The multi-faceted, multi-perspectival approach taken by many filmmakers, including Stephen Gaghan (*SYRIANA*) and Phil Alden Robinson (*THE SUM OF ALL FEARS*, 2002), is a way of attempting to not omit some of those perspectives, as older films may have done. However, while these films are often critical of administrations, politicians, and the military, the might of America and the need to protect her people remains paramount – the era is textured by all of these films as one in which America was threatened from many sides.

One of the methodologies chosen for this thesis was to organise cinematic adherence to the grand narrative according to Michel Foucault’s model of discursive formation – flagship films were chosen due to their central representational role within these formations. Between those ideological, mythological formations, a case was made around the essence of conflict, and how that essence might be captured, discursively, on screen.

The concept of a grand narrative – a nationalistic, idealistic, mythic war film structure – aligns itself alongside Jeanine Basinger’s comprehensive dismantling and examination of the World War II combat film. Basinger describes the formation of the genre, and posits that the films made and released during the conflict itself perfectly encapsulate that very formula. Throughout this research I have drawn links between Basinger’s rubric and films made outside the conflict – not only looking back on World War II, but also pre-dating that conflict, and into films of the recent past. The major deviation from the grand narrative of World War I and II was the Vietnam War – this was explored using a model of Nietzschean flux metaphysics, drawn from Conrad’s writing on Stanley Kubrick’s *FULL METAL JACKET*. The adherence of films to the grand narrative was judged based on a multimodal analysis of the communication of meaning through various scenes: the work of Iedema, O’Halloran, and Bateman & Schmidt was crucial for this deeper analysis. Iedema’s system of analysis breaks a visual representation into its constituent parts – it then frames each part as a step in an argument. The argument is not necessarily persuasive, rather it argues to be received by the viewer in a given way, from which point the viewer can make up their own mind. While eschewing timing and pacing, shot selection, and audio mixing, in favour of a simple vision/audio comparison, Iedema’s method laid the groundwork for a deeper form of multimodal filmic analysis. Iedema suggests that a moving image works almost as a paratext – in dismantling it into its individual components, one might ascertain how it speaks to the viewer, to other texts, and how the viewer might ‘talk back’ to the text itself (Iedema, 2001, p. 187). Rather than treat a filmic text as operating in and of itself, O’Halloran looks at the choices made by the filmmaker, and how the film operates on a sensory level to bring about both an awareness of the film-world and a revised appreciation of our own surroundings. O’Halloran revises traditional linguistic theory – often used when analysing film – to incorporate elements of social semiotics. This approach treats filmic construction not as a set of language devices, but as a more rounded audiovisual expression. O’Halloran also takes into account the temporal nature of cinema and how it speaks to the society of its era of production – this extends the traditional semiotic (or reducing even further, the ancient linguistic) approach to film, preferring instead to treat it as a phenomenon that sustains a communication over a given period of time. Each second is important, and may contain new information. Bateman & Schmidt (2012),

combine these approaches, among many others, into rounded multimodal film analysis model. The consideration and combined use of these multimodal approaches extends the reach of Basinger's work on the war film genre, demonstrating a dynamic model for scrutinising an evolving body of work.

In considering the major films – and discussing the many others referenced in the research – it has become clear that film, much like war itself, is predominantly about perception. This is regardless of the era in which the film emerges, or the conflict it depicts. In combat, as noted throughout the thesis, commanders must make tactical or strategic decisions based largely on what they can see, or on reports of what has been observed by others. This intelligence is dependent on the viewer's position, or the position of the technology on which they are relying. It is also dependent on the capabilities of the technology that might be used. Film operates in a similar way. The unpacking of meaning within a film is dependent on revealing its construction and on demonstrating the viewer's awareness of that construction. Various constructions align themselves with certain genres, of which war film is but one. In terms of packages of meaning, war film relies on a conservative system of outcomes. The audience must come away realising that war is a bad, but often essential thing. Viewers must realise that the sacrifices made by those that have come before were necessary in order to enjoy modern freedoms. Combat is consistently presented as a tough, harrowing, and unrelenting phenomenon. Those involved often dread the inevitable moment when they will engage the enemy directly. The viewer, then, is drawn into this moral imperative, where individual concerns must be pushed away in order to do the right thing for one's nation. In later films, this individual concern is attenuated by the media, who act on the individual's behalf to get to the 'truth' of a given story or conflict. Conflict is portrayed, constantly, as an inevitable, almost continuous phenomenon, and the perception of that conflict through various media, including cinema, re-textures those conflicts and eras in the way this research has done.

Barthes, in his seminal essay 'The Photographic Message,' posits:

'... on the one hand, the press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic, or ideological norms which are so many factors of

connotation; while on the other, this same photograph is not only perceived, received, it is read, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs.' (Barthes, 1982, p. 198)

Cameras, and their product, the photograph, radically changed the way people perceived the world. Suddenly, a snapshot of reality could be captured: moments frozen in time, and memories that could be kept and relived for a lifetime. The moving picture camera, which took series of still photographs to give the illusion of movement, was equally revolutionary. Moving on from snapshots of time, it was now possible to lift scenes of some duration from life, and relive them in real time. Reality must have felt like a blank canvas: a world waiting to be recorded, manipulated, removed and reused.

This re-shaping and re-presenting of reality, however, necessitated a certain distance. The photograph, as noted by Barthes, above, and also by Sontag, is far from an objective capturing of the real world. The photograph is laden with as many structures and layers of meaning as any Renaissance painting: these layers also require just as much work to deconstruct and decode. In encoding, re-coding, reality, though, a photographer – or a cinematographer – is rendering a new version of that reality. They are presenting a certain 'truth' about the scene they have captured that forces the viewer to accept a new perception of that scene. The acts of photographing and filming, then, are by their very nature, acts of defamiliarisation. In filming a scene between two actors, the director and cinematographer work together to render that scene such that it carries the intended narrative and emotional impetus. This involves a manipulation of light, position, performance, and framing. Likewise, in capturing a firefight between rebel insurgents and American forces, the news cameraman must frame the action in order to give some sense of the goings-on, to transmit the essence of the event. These transmissions of narrative, emotion, essence, can only ever approximate reality. But the decoding of these transmissions by viewers influences perception and, thus, all future decodings. It is clear, then, to see how an era might be re-textured by its representations – by deconstructing films throughout this thesis, I posit a means of seeing these eras anew.

Through the foregoing analysis, and the surrounding discussion of techniques of defamiliarisation, a new way of looking at film has emerged. War cinema moves viewers

beyond a naïve, realist understanding of the world. In recognising the tropes of war films almost immediately, we are able to deduce when they are being used to promote a grand narrative, or to subvert it. Film has always been an alignment of a number of modes of communication – sound and vision being the most basic and arbitrary modal division – but in presenting a more rounded view of filmic transmission, I have been able to identify those techniques that draw the viewer apart from the action, and from traditional modes of reception. These techniques force the viewer to see the contents of the frame in a new way, and to understand something of the essence of war and conflict. Further, in characterising eras according to their cinematic representations, rather than the inverse, a unique shift occurs: it is possible to observe history unfolding through films, rather than simply looking back on, contemplating history through its filmic footprints. The speed with which films are released – following the historical events they depict – further supports this as a viable analytical method. Films that depict events at some distance have the opportunity to re-texture a former era according to the political perspectives or dominant ideologies of the era in which they are produced. *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, for example, presented an heroic, if harrowing, portrayal of American triumphalism – a high point in the American story – at a time when faith in leadership was low, and certain stories were in dire need of happier endings. The more recent *ARGO* (2012) and *ZERO DARK THIRTY* (2012), however, tell similarly heroic stories about America when attitudes towards the Middle East have tended to the ambivalent, particularly as there is no longer direct involvement in Iraq.

Future research might consider how sign systems, and sets of techniques (such as those of defamiliarisation), operate within a wider cinematic context. Does halting the automatised perception open new possibilities for filmmakers, or creators of new and interactive media? Further, it might be prudent to consider how history could be redefined by artistic representation. While this research has proffered a new way of seeing war film, there are other contexts, histories, genres, and media that might be scrutinised. The analytical methodology that lies beneath the contextual discussions – adapted from the work of Iedema and O'Halloran – could be applied across a range of different visual media, not only cinema but television, advertising, animation, and videogames. This would result in new ways of texturing media and genre, and the ideologies they communicate, by deconstructing their modal and semiotic systems of encoding meaning.

Transmedia scholarship would benefit from comparisons of multimodal analyses across different mediums, and how this might influence the production and reception of multifaceted narratives. This research, too, has focused on Hollywood feature films about large-scale, well-known conflicts that involved the United States of America. Further research might investigate the far reaches of the genre – and the role of semiotics within it – as well as within documentary, or transmedia projects. Moreover, the films of different nations and alternate conflicts might be considered as geographical boundaries become less defined, and the technology of warfare continues to advance.

* * * * *

War is not going away any time soon. General Patton's cosmic view of war as a continuous struggle seems more apposite as conflicts become less defined, less absolute, and more difficult to understand or represent. The individual soldier might just as well be a faceless warrior, a single, continuous presence in the mythic struggle against evil and oppression. The battles he fights may well be continuous skirmishes in an endless war. When he dies, he pops up elsewhere on another battlefield, an endless cycle of reincarnation, like re-spawning in a videogame. The notion of the eternal warrior is not native to Patton, though his fancying himself as one was interesting in the context of that film. Patton needs history, he relies on that imperative, that constancy, and feels his own role within that chronology. In doing so, he is part of the mythologising process: indeed he is, and was, a mythic figure of his own era.

Man will always be a part of an endless chronology of events, and underlying that chronology – like an unformulated discourse – are the grand narratives that we constantly return to for guidance, reassurance, and guaranteed entertainment. Cinema has its own imperative – the revealing of plot, of its story, at a constant 24 frames per second. War film was born with cinema. Its presence has guided, reassured, and guaranteed entertainment for, many generations, and its hundred-year-long history seems destined never to end – as long as war maintains its fascination. We are currently in an era of confusion, and concern, where wars are fought with nebulous concepts, or with

ideologies in far off lands. Thus, filmmakers have decided that we need big stories, idealistic tales of heroism and sacrifice, more than ever before. The grand narrative has recurred time and again throughout history, and it is in dismantling that big story – revealing how a clash of nations, of ideologies, might be encoded cinematically – that we can start to grasp the essence of war.

*'Through the travail of ages,
midst the pomp and toils of war,
have I fought and strove and perished,
countless times among the stars.
As if through a glass and darkly,
the age old strife I see,
when I fought in many guises and many names,
but always me.'*

(PATTON, 1970)

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Appendix – Sample of Film Analysis Methodology: *The Hurt Locker*

Analysis Sheet

Film: The Hurt Locker
 Director: Kathryn Bigelow
 Date/s Viewed: 27-Jun-11

Scene Duration:

1:57

Time	Shot Type	Visual	Dialogue	Audio	Music
0:00	Wide	Three men in front of a truck on a ridge overlooking desert valley Text: 'Days left in Bravo Company's Rotation: 23'	"Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole..."	Dialogue only	None
0:04		Same shot; bomb explodes		Explosion	
0:11	MCU	Looking down at character holding detonator	"Ready for second det?"	Dialogue only	None
0:12	MCU	Character responds	"Ready."	Dialogue only	None
0:14	Wide	Character yells	"Fire in the hole!"	Dialogue only	None
0:15	Wide	Slightly different angle; character repeats	"Fire in the hole!"	Dialogue only	None
0:18	MCU	Camera whips from high to Sgt James yelling	"Whoa whoa whoa wait wait..."		
0:20	Wide	Sgt James stands up	"Think I forgot my gloves down there."		
0:23	Mid	Sgt James walks towards truck	"Think I forgot my gloves. Hang on."		
0:25	CU>Mid	From James' face to other two soldiers' reactions		Truck door shuts	
0:26	CU	Through window, Sgt James in truck		Truck starts	

0:32	Long	Two soldiers in foreground, truck drives towards bomb site				Truck engine	
0:36	MCU	Eldridge kneeling, twirling dog tags, stands, cam follows				Engine receding	
0:42	Long	Truck recedes into distance				Engine recedes still	
0:45	Mid	Sanborn & Eldridge stew over James' antics					
0:48	>CU	Sanborn picks up the detonator				Foley of detonator	
0:49	>Mid	Sanborn and Eldridge standing next to each other				Sanborn clears throat	
0:56	Long	Truck drives towards bomb site				Distant engine	
0:58						"You know these detonators misfire all the time."	
1:01	MCU	Looking past Sanborn at Eldridge, looking at detonator				"What're you doin'?"	
1:02	"	"					
1:03	MCU	Reverse, looking past Eldridge at Sanborn				"I'm just sayin', shit happens, they misfire."	
1:04	"	"					

1:08	MCU	Looking past Sanborn at Eldridge, looking at detonator	"He'd be obliterated to nothing."		
1:09	"	"	"		
1:10	Tracking wide	The truck drives across the desert floor			
1:12	"	"	"His helmet'd be left, you could have that."		
1:15	MCU	Looking past Eldridge at Sanborn	"Little specks o' hair, charred on the inside."		
1:18	Long	Long shot of truck parked, James moving outside it	"Yeah there'd be half a helmet somewhere."		
1:25	MCU	Looking past Eldridge at Sanborn	"...change in technique and protocol, make sure..."		
1:30	Mid	Looking past Eldridge and Sanborn from behind			
1:33	MCU	Looking past Eldridge at Sanborn	"...report."		
1:36	MCU	Looking past Sanborn at Eldridge	"Are you serious?"		
1:38	MCU	Looking past Eldridge at Sanborn	"I can't write."		
1:42	MCU	Looking past Sanborn at Eldridge	"... are you serious about killing him?"		
1:44	MCU	Looking past Eldridge at Sanborn			

1:48	Long	Truck in distance, James bends behind a barrel, picks up gloves				
1:54	MCU	Looking past Sanborn at Eldridge	Eldridge sighs			