

Film Style and the World War II Combat Genre

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.



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Abstract

This dissertation examines the style of films from the World War 2 combat genre, addressing films made during WW2 and in the following half century and focuses on major Hollywood productions. Using a theoretical framework derived from the work of David Bordwell and Ian Hunter, I show that existing film criticism has concentrated on the narratives of these texts, often using analytic practice as a stimulus for critical self-analysis. For this reason, academic cinema studies has a limited understanding of the stylistic attributes of these films and in some instances the knowledge that has been produced is demonstrably false.

I analyze in detail the style of four films made during the 1942-1945 period, as well as four films produced in the 2000s. These primary texts are supplemented with analysis of a number of other films in order to identify the stylistic norms of cinematography, sound, editing, and performance of death in the WW2 infantry combat film.

The thesis argues for an understanding of Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) based upon Kristin Thompson's approach of neoformalism. I use this approach to argue that *Ryan's* hand-held cinematography, staging techniques, and sound design can best be understood as creating the effect of defamiliarization for viewers accustomed to existing cinematic representations of combat. Additionally, I argue that contemporary approaches to performance and *mise-en-scene* suggest that the genre's approach to realism has evolved to favor a significant increase in detail. Using cognitivist research into the imagination and mental simulations, I further argue that the increased audio-visual details enable the viewer's imagination to more vividly render the scenario presented by the fiction. While these particular details may or may not have close(r) correlation to the real world, they produce an effect which I call "reported realism." My conclusion shows that similar developments are apparent in first-person combat shooter video games.

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