Film Style and the World War II Combat Genre

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2012
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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1. Introduction

OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces the aims and topic of the research and justifies, in general terms, the theoretical approach I take throughout the dissertation. Firstly, I indicate the reasoning behind my focus on WW2 combat films and define the historical evolution of the genre according to Jeanine Basinger’s description of “waves,” from her book *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre.* I show that my dissertation will focus on infantry combat films made by Hollywood during the war and in the post-*Saving Private Ryan* 2000s. Secondly, I indicate some of the problems with existing film criticism of WW2 films, suggesting that the predominant critical work on this genre analyzes the narratives and ideological systems of the films at the expense of film *style.* Thirdly, I briefly summarize the usefulness of a number of theoretical positions for my own study. Primarily, the thesis draws upon Ian Hunter’s theorization of interpretative practices, and the film analysis methodology of David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Barry Salt. Finally, I define the specific research questions which guide the thesis. These questions attempt to understand the lack of critical attention to the style of WW2 combat films, as well as to refocus analytic attention onto this aspect of the films’ construction.

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1.1 General introduction

This research project began as an attempt to analyze two World War II combat films directed by Clint Eastwood: *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters From Iwo Jima* (2006). At the beginning of my research, these two films seemed to provide an interesting problem for film analysis in that they represent a single director telling the story of a single battle from the sides of both combatants. *Flags* depicts the perspective of the U.S. Marines attacking Iwo Jima, whereas *Letters* focuses on the Japanese defenders of the island.\(^2\) One of the key attributes of the genre since *Bataan* (Tay Garnett, 1943) is what Jeanine Basinger refers to as the “faceless enemy,” which are presented “as an impersonal […] mindless group, as opposed to [the lead characters who are a] collection of strongly delineated individuals.”\(^3\) Eastwood’s approach is therefore unusual in that *Letters* is a Hollywood film presenting the American soldiers as the faceless enemy. Additionally, there is of course the further problem of *Letters From Iwo Jima* being a Hollywood film about Japanese soldiers, speaking Japanese with English subtitles. As such it seems almost tailor-made for an analysis informed by “the Other” of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.\(^4\) Said’s problematization of stereotyped cultural representations of “the inscrutable Oriental” immediately raises the question of how could a film, purportedly about the “sacrifice and survival” of Japanese characters, be valid if it is made by an American director?\(^5\)

\(^2\) Both films also present “back home” scenes. *Flags* detailing the events that occur when some of the lead characters return home as heroes, and *Letters* offers flashbacks of various Japanese soldiers as they remember life in their hometowns, prior to being sent to defend Iwo Jima. In this dissertation I focus on the combat sequences.

\(^3\) Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 55. Basinger’s study does focus on mainstream Hollywood films, as does my own in this dissertation. I explain the reasons for this below.


Surprisingly, as I began to review the relevant literature on combat films, as well as reviewing a selection of films for study, my interest in this kind of Cultural Studies analysis of representations faded significantly. While an analysis of Eastwood’s films from the perspective of a post-colonialist theory would add important contribution to film studies’ understanding of combat films, there emerged in the literature an enormous gap in the academic understanding of the style of these films as a genre. As I show in Chapter 2, the existing critical works on WW2 combat films attend very specifically to the narratives and ideological components of these narratives. In doing so, scholars have largely ignored the stylistic properties of these texts: the specifics of the films’ cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound. What follows here then, addresses this lack of academic knowledge of a genre, which has strong significance in the second half of 20th century cinema.

In changing the direction of my original approach, I have widened the analysis to include much more extended discussions of other WW2 films. Eastwood’s films no longer hold the same significance to this study. In fact, the focus has shifted significantly towards Steven Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan (1998), however I consider films made during the war as well as a selection of mainstream movies made in the post-Ryan 2000s. This research has strong precedents in the poetics of David Bordwell, the neoformalist approach advanced by Kristin Thompson, 6


7 Basinger acknowledges the significance of Spielberg’s film, suggesting that “The main reason for the genre’s reemergence in its old hats and uniforms […] really has to be the success of Saving Private Ryan. This powerful drama dared to reactivate World War II.” However, since Basinger’s 2003 version of her book is an update of the original 1986 publication, she makes only brief mentions of Ryan throughout. See Basinger, The World War II Combat Film: xiii.
and statistical measurements of film style by Barry Salt. Through an extended encounter with the work of these scholars, my dissertation reframes critical discussions of WW2 combat films onto their stylistic systems.

### 1.2 The WW2 Combat Film as Genre and Critical Object

While Basinger’s pioneering study of the genre undertakes a sustained analysis of the various configurations of films depicting WW2 actions of the Army, Navy, Airforce, and Marines, for my purposes I will define the object of study much more narrowly. In this dissertation I am concerned with films portraying armed infantry forces—the Army and/or the Marine Corps—and I concentrate on sequences of combat action. Basinger’s approach is extremely useful for the scholarly understanding of combat films; however, it is of course a study of the genre conventions, rather than a focused analysis of the stylistic norms associated with these films. My research contributes to the academic understanding of the genre by extending Basinger’s study into terrain which is well outside the scope of her study. Regardless, it is useful to take note of her key points in relation to the genre’s evolution.

In *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, Basinger divides the corpus of texts into five historical categories, or “waves,” which comprise successive stages of the genre’s evolution. The “First Wave” encompasses films made and released between America’s entry into the war until December 1943, in

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9 See Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*: 1 – 75.
which “the basic definition of the World War II combat film is formed.” Here, Basinger is describing films such as *Wake Island* (John Farrow, 1942) and *Bataan*. In this first wave of combat films, the narratives generally “depict the first disastrous losing battles of America’s entry into the war.” *Wake Island*, while featuring fictional characters, is based on the real-life Japanese attack on that island which took place on December 8, 1941. This assault on the small atoll, one day after the Pearl Harbor attack, ended in the defeat of the US garrison by December 23. *Bataan* also creates a fictional squad and places them in the narrative context of the combat which took place on that island in the Philippines during the early months of 1942. The film ends with virtually all of the major characters killed by the Japanese attackers, promoting what Basinger regards as a relevant United States’ propaganda message of the time by invoking the “anger, determination, and passion for the fight.” In these early films, the basic genre elements are established. For instance, “internal conflict on our side,” the “last stand” combat sequence which has been borrowed from Westerns, and themes of sacrifice, such as the pilot in *Wake Island* whose wife has been killed at Pearl Harbor, and who “takes his plane up to bomb the Japanese warship successfully.”

The “Second Wave” of combat films is the group of films released between the First Wave and immediately after the end of the war itself. In this phase of the

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10 Ibid., 110. Emphasis in original. By “beginning of the war,” Basinger is really referring to United States’ involvement in the conflict.
11 Ibid., 111.
15 Ibid., 26 – 27.
genre, Basinger suggests that these films—such as *Objective, Burma!* (Raoul Walsh, 1945)—are “subtly different” to the early films. Her reasoning is that these films “have an awareness” of the genre conventions and iconography of the earlier films and newsreels that had been released early in the war. For instance, *Objective, Burma!* seems to assume “the audience already knew and understood such concepts as the group of mixed ethnic types” in a combat film and does not explain these conventions through dialogue. Whereas the down-beat endings of *Bataan* or *Wake Island* may have seethed with an angry propaganda encouraging Americans to support the war, these films often had delicately positive conclusions. While the second wave films acknowledge the hardship of battle, they simultaneously suggest that victory is imminent. For instance, Captain Nelson’s unit does survive the combat and marches back to the command post in the conclusion of *Objective, Burma!*, however, he immediately empties a sack of dog-tags into the Colonel’s hand and states: “This is what it cost.” A key characterizing feature of these second wave films is that they typically—with the exception of *The Story of G.I. Joe* (William A. Wellman, 1945)—tell fictional narratives.

For Basinger, the “Third Wave” of WW2 combat films, which includes films released in the decade between late 1949 and late 1959, is marked by thematic complexity as filmmakers (and presumably, audiences) reconsider and re-

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16 Ibid., 111.
17 Ibid., 112.
18 Ibid.
19 Ian Jarvie notes that *Objective, Burma!* was controversial in England because it serves the purpose of “aggrandization of the American role in the war,” by crediting American troops “apparently spearhead the liberation of Burma, when in truth few Americans were involved in that [primarily British] combat.” See Ian Jarvie, “The Politics of the War Film” [unpublished introduction to a book], http://www.yorku.ca/jarvie/online_publications/Burma1.pdf (accessed March 18, 2012).
20 *The Story of G.I. Joe* is an exception in this regard because it is based on Ernie Pyle’s newspaper reports filed from the combat zones.
understand the Allied victory at the end of the conflict. Through these films, Basinger argues, Hollywood “could resolve the war, finish it off once and for all” as well as speak to issues of the post-war society. For instance, Battleground (William A. Wellman, 1949) depicts the Battle of the Bulge while simultaneously commenting on tension with Russia during the late 1940s. For Basinger, Sands of Iwo Jima (Allan Dwan, 1949) shows a marked difference in what constitutes combat heroics. John Wayne’s character of Sergeant Stryker is killed at the end of the film, but the killing is a “random death” and is presented as “accidental […], not one which is heroic and wins battles.” While Robert Taylor and Robert Mitchum died at the end of Bataan and The Story of G.I. Joe, neither of them possessed the same star status at the time as Wayne. Therefore, his death at the end of Sands of Iwo Jima can be read as indicative of the newer attitude of the third wave combat films toward the war: “By killing him, we [Americans] rid ourselves of the war and of wartime attitudes […] we can go on, more mature and ready for peacetime.” The third wave is also “marked by the interruption of the Korean War.” Not only did the era produce Korean War combat films that borrowed and reworked the conventions of the established genre, but the Korean conflict also influenced the thematic material of WW2 films which became more cynical. Attack! (Robert Aldrich, 1956) “begins the demolition of the

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21 Basinger, The World War II Combat Film, 110, 140.
22 Ibid., 140.
23 Ibid., 146. Basinger produces this interpretation by drawing attention to a line of dialogue from the unit’s chaplain and arguing that the line associates Josef Stalin with Adolf Hitler: “As the years go by, a lot of people are going to forget, but you won’t. Don’t let anybody tell you you were a sucker to fight in a war against Fascism.” Emphasis in original.
24 Ibid., 153.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 150.
29 Ibid., 161 – 163. For example, Sam Fuller’s Steel Helmet (1951) has the conventional group of heroes; however, while “They may not be the Irishman/Brooklynite/scholar we know from the past [WW2 films] they are an American collection of tough misfits.”
wholesomeness of the tradition” of justified fighting by showing the hero run over by a tank, for instance.\(^\text{30}\)

For Basinger, the “Fourth Wave” of films, released in the decade between 1960 and 1970, typically present WW2 in significantly different terms:

This period of epic re-creation, with its attention to minute detail as to timing and place, may be seen as the final evolutionary stage: the true war has been removed, and in its place is its filmed replica.\(^\text{31}\)

By this, Basinger does not mean that Darryl Zanuck’s *The Longest Day* (1962) or *Battle of the Bulge* (Ken Annakin, 1965) are necessarily realistic or authentic “replicas” – only that the films attempt to portray a broad overview of the Second World War, rather than the more localized battles which typify the earlier waves of combat films.\(^\text{32}\) The author also notes that these fourth wave films include color film-stock as well as wide screen CinemaScope productions. She regards the use of color as creating a sense of “distance” between the film characters and the audiences, as well as to “add unreality, making a subconscious link to the entertainment films of the same period.”\(^\text{33}\) Additionally, she argues that CinemaScope was “perfect” for this wave of films in that it “provided […] a larger canvas” for the filmmakers to present these epic films.\(^\text{34}\)

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 170.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 178. Basinger clarifies this point with recourse to the closing title card of *Battle of the Bulge*, which reads: “This picture is dedicated to the one million men who fought in this great battle of World War II. To encompass the whole of the heroic contributions of all the participants, names, places, and characters have been generalized and action has been synthesized in order to convey the spirit and essence of the battles.”

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 178 – 179.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 179. I discuss the use of color and widescreen aspect ratios in detail in Chapter 4 although, as I indicate later, my focus is on 1940s films and 2000s.
The last of Basinger’s categories, the “Fifth Wave” films released during the period 1965 – 1975, are characterized by a tendency to use satire to present an “inverted” and “opposite reality” to the films prior to this wave.\(^{35}\) She links this “subversive” movement to “the counterculture at work against the mainstream during the same time period” and in particular the popular beliefs about the Vietnam conflict.\(^{36}\) For instance, while *Gung Ho!* (Ray Enright, 1943) is arguably the first “dirty group” movie in the WW2 genre, its group is significantly less corrupted than the men led by Lee Marvin’s character in the fifth wave film *The Dirty Dozen* (Robert Aldrich, 1967). *Gung Ho!*’s group includes men who admit (with neither pride nor shame) that they have killed before, two brothers who were born to different fathers, and Robert Mitchum’s character who is a boxing champion and “has been in the brig four times.”\(^{37}\) *The Dirty Dozen*, by contrast, features a group assembled by court martialed soldiers about to be executed for crimes such as murder and rape.\(^{38}\) Although *The Dirty Dozen* follows the generic narrative formula, the group’s mission is no longer to attack a “useful military target, but […] a whorehouse, a fancy ‘Rest and Recreation’ for German officers.”\(^{39}\) Basinger finds a similar generic subversion at work in the narratives of *Play Dirty* (André De Toth, 1969), *The Devil’s Brigade* (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1968) and *Kelly’s Heroes* (Brian G. Hutton, 1970).\(^{40}\)

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 181.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 182.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 184.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 186.
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 185.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 181 – 191. *Castle Keep* (Sidney Pollack, 1969) should be added to this list of fifth wave films. Arguably, *The Devil’s Brigade* is a much more light-hearted film with stronger ties to the fourth wave than the fifth wave than the other dirty group movies identified by Basinger. After all, William Holden’s character of Lt. Col. Frederick is clearly much more of a father-figure—though certainly one who practices tough love—than Lee Marvin’s brutal anti-hero who threatens to one of the men in *The Dirty Dozen*: “Look, you little bastard, either you march or I’ll beat your brains
Because *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* was first published in 1986, Basinger’s research did not include the new wave of combat films released beginning from the end of the 1990s. The second edition addresses this, including a chapter called “Combat Redux” which focuses on *Ryan* and asserts that the film’s narrative “does not really break with the established genre format.”

Basinger’s conclusion is that aspects of the film, such as the gory representations of violence and the soldiers’ questioning of their mission, were not innovative simply because of their inclusion in the film. Rather, according to Basinger, the film has “a truly new purpose” by comparison to earlier entries into the genre in that Spielberg “challenged audiences to think about the violence they accept in modern movies (and in daily life), and its utterly gratuitous purpose.”

Basinger’s work provides an excellent beginning coordinate for my current project. However, since 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. This is evident in her analysis of *Ryan*, which simply indicates that:

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41 Ibid., 258.
42 Ibid., 261.
43 Ibid. I extend this discussion in great detail in Chapters 3 and 4, where I draw upon Kristin Thompson’s neoformalism to argue that aspects of *Ryan*’s style can best be understood as functioning to create the effect of defamiliarization. See Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).
Spielberg’s mastery of sound, editing, camera movement, visual storytelling, narrative flow, performance, and color combine to assault the viewer, to place each and every member of the audience directly into the combat experience.\textsuperscript{44}

Basinger’s quick gesture towards \textit{Ryan}’s style is both reasonable and understandable, but simultaneously it is also unfortunate. It is reasonable and understandable because her analysis is dedicated entirely to defining the genre conventions of narrative, theme, and character in these films. However, it is unfortunate because it is indicative of a wider problem in the dominant critical methodology that has been used to interpret WW2 combat films. Although Basinger’s statement is valid, it is also extremely vague. For instance, it leaves undefined what type of editing is used by Spielberg, as well as how it “assault[s] the viewer.” Even when a critic does get more specific about a film’s stylistic aspects, the statements are often presented as assumptions that ignore qualification or detail. For instance, Albert Auster writes of \textit{Ryan}:

\begin{quote}
Despite the originality of the ground-level shots, drained colors, camera lenses spotted with water and blood, and the hellish scenes of GIs screaming or searching for severed limbs, the images still rely for their inspiration on those old, grainy combat photos and newsreels that have been the iconic symbol of the D-Day invasion since the end of the war.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Certainly this is more specific than Basinger’s commentary, but Auster provides no details as to how Spielberg’s imagery resembles “old, grainy combat photos and newsreels.” Arguably, Robert Capa’s photographs of D-Day are the most

\textsuperscript{44} Basinger, \textit{The World War II Combat Film}, 254.
\textsuperscript{45} Albert Auster, “\textit{Saving Private Ryan} and American Triumphalism,” \textit{Journal of Popular Film and Television} 30, no. 2 (Summer 2002), 101.
“iconic” images of the event; however, Ryan’s cinematography is much clearer and with a greater range of contrast than Capa’s blurred, stark photographs. Additionally, Capa only made it to the waterline and did not take photographs further up on the beach where most of Ryan’s opening scene takes place.46 Auster’s claims are further diminished by Toby Haggith’s research into D-Day combat footage. According to Haggith, “most of the film shot of the [American troops involved in the Normandy] landings was lost when the ship carrying the footage back to Britain was sunk.”47

However, there are more significant problems when a critic’s focus on the narrative or ideological components of a combat film lead them to make assumptions about the style which are untenable. Later, I show a number of these in relation to Ryan and other WW2 combat films, however, it can also be seen in criticism of other combat genres. For instance, consider the following statement about Oliver Stone’s Vietnam War film Platoon (1986):

> The documentary feel of the combat sequences—marked by shaky, hand-held camerawork—offer audiences a sense of immediacy, claustrophobia, and realism [and] more importantly, the subjective point of view of the grunts. Platoon suggests that “the true story of war” can only be told from the perspective of the grunt soldier […] This documentary style of filmmaking modified with character close-ups for emotional impact presented audiences with narrative grounded in

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46 According to Capa’s autobiography, “Exhausted from the water and the fear, we lay flat on a small strip of wet sand between the sea and the barbed wire.” After shooting some more stills from this position, Capa was picked up by an LCI boat and returned to the U.S.S. Chase. None of his pictures on the beach shows explosions or gunfire. See Robert Capa, Slightly Out of Focus (New York: Random House, 1947/2001), 141.

fiction, but also presented with an unprecedented degree of realism. The new Hollywood war film [such as Ryan] is more than conscious of this tradition.\textsuperscript{48}

Certainly these statements sound compelling and provide a useful background for the author’s critique of what they see as the “myths of heroism” embedded in contemporary combat films.\textsuperscript{49} However, none of that description of Platoon’s camerawork is actually true. It is simply erroneous to describe Platoon’s combat sequences as “marked by shaky, hand-held camerawork,” given that a five-minute viewing of any combat sequence of the film shows that Stone’s dominant technique is to mount cameras on tripods or smoothly track them sidewards on a dolly platform.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that academic film studies’ preference is to analyze the narratives and ideological position of these films at the expense of the genre’s stylistic system. As a result, there is simply no body of knowledge regarding the aesthetic construction of this significant genre. In the following section I show why I believe this to be the case, as well as identify how my own research addresses this considerable gap in cinema studies’ understanding of the WW2 combat genre.

Additionally, quite a lot of the material under discussion here bears a relationship to the concept of realism, and there are significant difficulties with this topic within the field of film studies. One such complication is that the term is used in so many different ways by critics that it does not seem to have any consistent

\textsuperscript{48} Philippa Gates, “‘Fighting the Good Fight:’ The Real and the Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film,” Quarterly Review of Film and Video 22, no. 4 (2005), 300.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 308.
meaning beyond being “a mode of representation that, at the formal level, aims at verisimilitude (or mimesis).”  

This is a general definition and gives no indication of what aspects of cinema might constitute this mimetic style; indeed part of my project is to undertake such a task of identification. In order to do so, I will assume a definition of film realism as a set of conventions which may or may not bear any resemblance to reality but which are frequently considered mimetic by filmmakers and viewers. This is, of course, a different approach to the existing literature on film realism, in which theorists usually address the notion of realism in order to understand it as a philosophical concept or phenomenon. Like interpretive positions such as psychoanalysis and post colonialism, I consider these philosophical discussions of film realism to be interesting and important, but I also consider them to be concerned with different issues to those with which I am concerned here. By making the above assumption, I will be able to undertake a clear analysis of film style in Chapters 3 and 4. Such an approach also enables me in Chapter 5 to draw concluding remarks on this topic: in that chapter I propose the theoretical concept of “reported realism” to describe the phenomena of film realism with more accuracy than existing models.

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51 An exception which goes some way toward suggesting how filmmakers attempt to produce realist films is Williams, *Realism and the Cinema*. With excerpts from written accounts by early filmmakers who claimed a commitment to realism, Williams’ traces some idealistic approaches to the concept of realism. However, some of the salient techniques changed since the publication of Williams’ book. Additionally, Williams’ text does not give the level of specific technical insight into production techniques which I am attempting here.

52 David Surman indicates some of the problems of these approaches in his analysis of computer generated animation films. See David Surman, “CGI Animation: Pseudorealism, Perception and Possible Worlds,” (MA diss., University of Warwick, 2003), http://www.gamasutra.com/education/theses/20040928DavidSurmanThesis.pdf (accessed 10 January, 2012). These issues are dealt with at length in Andrew Kania, “Realism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, eds Paisley Livingstone and Carl Plantinga (New York: Routledge, 2009), 237 – 248. For this reason, I will not re-count them here, other than to draw upon particular aspects from the cognitivist perspective when I discuss which stylistic attributes of films seem to encourage spectators to describe particular films as realistic. A useful overview of some of the political debates around the concept of realism is found in Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Culture*: ix – xvi.
1.3 Background to the study

This project, which constitutes a work of film history, has its roots in what is perhaps an unlikely place—my M.Ed dissertation written during my prior career as a secondary school English teacher. In that research, I investigated the teaching of viewing practices associated with documentary films in the secondary school English context. Through an analysis of interviews with classroom teachers, state curriculum documents, and the contents of classroom textbooks, I argued that English teachers exhibit a tendency to lead students through a very specific viewing practice which privileges their ethical engagement with the texts. The dominant pedagogy in classrooms typically trains students to use a visual text—whether a documentary film or a fiction feature film—as a stimulus to motivate discussion of their own beliefs and attitudes. This personalist-ethical paradigm treats the narrative elements of the text as a surface on which students’ moral selves can be displayed for the corrective gaze of the teacher. While this is certainly a core objective of English curriculum documents (in Western Australia, at least), the evidence shows that students develop their capacities in performing this kind of interpretation at the expense of other textual skills which are equally central to the curriculum. The other two curriculum aims for English can be described as rhetorical training in textual conventions and aesthetic appreciation of texts. Markers for the state examinations (the Tertiary Entrance Examination) in Western Australia perennially comment on students’ inability to demonstrate

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53 Stuart Bender, “Learning the Documentary Lesson: Theory and Practice in English” (M.Ed diss., Edith Cowan University, 2007)
54 Ibid., 64 – 76.
understandings of rhetorical techniques or aesthetic properties when producing responses to interpretative tasks.\textsuperscript{56}

That study was guided strongly by the work of Ian Hunter, whose own research into English teaching had identified the same practice in the teaching of literary texts.\textsuperscript{57} Hunter, informed by Michel Foucault’s studies of governmentality, shows that this approach to English teaching functions to train students to use literature as a means of continually questioning their own beliefs and behaviors.\textsuperscript{58} Hunter describes this process as ethical self-problematization.\textsuperscript{59} For instance, students are unlikely to be presented with a range of existing interpretations of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1834) in order to develop an appreciation of the poem’s ability to support a range of possible meanings.\textsuperscript{60} Rather, teachers are likely to ask students to speculate on how the poem speaks to their concerns about the environment. In this context, \textit{polysemy} seems to describe each student’s particular belief to count as a different “interpretation” or meaning. However, each student is of course performing the same interpretative practice.\textsuperscript{61}

As I show in Chapter 2, Hunter has also shown that very similar pedagogical

\textsuperscript{56} My M.Ed research drew upon TEE Examiner’s reports for the years 2002 – 2005; however, the reports since my study continue to show the same concerns by markers. For instance, the 2010 examiners commented that “Candidates are still often describing [visual texts] rather than analysing, or spending unproductive time on plot retell in relation to their studied text/s; understandings of visual language were too often limited.” See Government of Western Australia Curriculum Council, \textit{Stage 3 English WACE Examiner’s Report 2010}, http://johnwatsonsite.com/Share-Eng/SIC?Stage_3_English_Examiners_Report_2010.html (accessed March 20, 2012).


\textsuperscript{59} See Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson.”


\textsuperscript{61} For more on this teaching of multiple reading practices, as well as detailed discussion of possible poetry pedagogy, see Stuart Bender, “Post-Response: Setting Limits to the Poetry Lesson,” \textit{Interpretations}, no. 40 (2008): 30 – 41.
routines occur in the academic humanities, including film studies. In this current research project, I engage more strongly with Hunter’s critique of the humanities, showing how academic cinema criticism has habitually ignored the stylistic attributes of WW2 combat films.

While working with the theoretical material of Hunter and Foucault for the M.Ed study, I eventually turned to the type of film analysis practiced by David Bordwell. Since my argument was that English teachers do not address the stylistic construction of the documentary films they teach, I wanted to offer an alternative pedagogy which would resolve the problem. Bordwell’s historical poetics pointed the way towards an alternative pedagogy which would enable students to understand the stylistic features of film texts. Additionally, I found that Bordwell’s discussion of film criticism in *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* echoed in many key respects some of the arguments of Hunter that I drew upon throughout my M.Ed research. In large measure, Hunter’s argument hinges on a productive model of interpretation. The most straightforward account of such a viewpoint is to say that the process of interpretation is one in which a viewer (or reader) produces meaning by using

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63 See David Bordwell, On the History of Film Style (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It; and Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema.


particular rules to apply meaning to relevant components of a text. A different interpretation is simply the result of different rules being applied, rather than a difference of intellect, personality, values, or sensitivity. This should not be regarded as identical to Bordwell’s argument in Making Meaning; however, there are clear (and useful) similarities. As Noel King demonstrates, Bordwell’s definition of criticism is “an ‘occasional’ activity in the sense of being a site-specific activation or application of various heuristic devices, schemata and semantic fields.” In Chapter 2, I provide greater detail about the overlap between the work of these two theorists.

As a result of this encounter with Hunter and Bordwell, when I began planning for the current research I revised my original consideration of Eastwood’s two WW2 combat films about the battle at Iwo Jima. It became obvious that an attempt to examine the apparent subject-positions occupied by Eastwood, the Japanese characters, and the audience would not explore what I now regard to be most significant about these films. Whereas academic film studies has virtually no understanding of the style of WW2 combat films—including Eastwood’s—there is already a solid body of knowledge of these films’ narratives, genre, and ideological components, as well as a significant amount of interpretation of these elements. Rather, in this dissertation I have chosen to refocus the discussion of WW2 combat films onto their stylistic attributes.

The importance of my research here is that the existing literature on combat films—whether WW2 or related to other conflicts—generally offers only

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interpretations on the genre. The dominant critical methodologies used to interpret combat films can be considered iterations of the process which Hunter regards as an act of ethical self-problematization. For instance, when Antony Easthope’s analysis of Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978) describes its narrative structure as “legitimating the male [homo-social] bond,” this is an instance of the critic using the text as an occasion for critical reflection of their own society. In Easthope’s reading, the ethical interrogation is informed by theories of masculinity, but it could just as easily have used Marxism, post-colonialism or any other doctrinal paradigm as a way of identifying formal aspects of the film to stimulate the ethical reflection. While these kinds of interpretations are valid and interesting, they constitute a very particular form of interpretation which does not produce information or knowledge about the text’s compositional properties. As Hunter argues:

This practice requires the initiate to divorce ideas, arguments and desires from their “mundane” spheres of determination and contexts of judgement by attaching them to the formal organisation of the work of art; and, conversely, it requires that the formal organisation of the work be subordinated to the ideas, arguments and desires allegedly expressed through it.

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68 Even the two clear exceptions that I have found still exhibit this tendency at points in their exposition. Basinger, of course, offers opinions on various films’ themes, as does Lawrence Suid in *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, which accounts for the interaction between Hollywood and the Pentagon. The important distinction here is that these scholars spend less of their analysis on ethical hermeneutics than they do on genre conventions (in Basinger’s case) or on historical-technical influences on the construction of particular films (in Suid’s book). See Lawrence Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).


70 Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson,” 74.
I should point out that neither I, nor Hunter, regard the reading/viewing practice of self-problematization in negative terms. There are societal advantages to this educational practice which enables students (whether in high school or at university) to use aesthetic objects, such as films, in order to perform work on their ethical and moral interiority. For Hunter, it is an essential task of government which some educational settings have been called upon to perform.\(^\text{71}\) Indeed, Hunter compares this “practical mastery of specific aesthetico-ethical techniques” to another human endeavour which requires practice and training: “Like the athlete’s body the aesthete’s personality is something that must be worked on.”\(^\text{72}\) However, he would remind contemporary readers that in the early years of mass education the practice was more honestly regarded as a specific practice of person-forming.\(^\text{73}\) For instance, one of the early bureaucrats involved in the assembly of mass education, Matthew Arnold, describes the relevance of Literature to day-to-day life in the following terms:

> More and more he who examines himself will find the difference it makes to him [...], whether or not he has pursued his avocations throughout it [the day] without reading at all.\(^\text{74}\)

In Hunter’s view, this type of education is less concerned with understanding the textual objects apparently under study—for instance, films in a “film” course, or poetry in a “literature” course—than it is with “forming” subjects who are able to use the texts as occasions to turn inward and critically evaluate their own beliefs.


\(^{72}\) Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson,” 73.

\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1869), 6.
and conduct. Importantly, Hunter’s research shows that this practice is the result of a series of social and historical contingencies and therefore should not be regarded as an essential attribute of human development (in general) or textual study (in particular).

My argument extends Hunter’s by examining the critical response to the WW2 combat genre. I show that not only is there virtually no engagement with formal properties of these films in the literature, but that the dominance of the self-problematizing method has led to some serious misunderstandings of the genre’s aesthetic construction. In Chapters 3 and 4, I attend to these gaps in film studies’ understandings of the genre’s style by examining in detail the techniques of cinematography, sound, editing and mise-en-scene of combat death. This aspect of my research is strongly modelled on the poetics of Bordwell, the neoformalism of Thompson, and Salt’s taxonomic approach to analysing film style.

In a series of books, Bordwell has shown that an analysis of film from the perspective of poetics is capable of yielding extremely nuanced descriptions of how films create particular artistic effects on their audiences. For instance,

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75 Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson,” 78.
76 Ibid.
77 There are two significant exceptions, which show the scholarly value of a non-hermeneutic approach. The first is Jarvie’s “The Politics of the War Film,” which tracks the script development process of Objective, Burma! Although Jarvie does address the politics involved in such decisions as altering the “group” objective, and director Raoul Walsh’s tendency to simplify scenes during shooting, his paper does so through a serious engagement with the technical processes of script writing, producer involvement, studio concerns and so on. The second exception is William Friedman Fagelson’s “Fighting Films: The Everyday Tactics of World War II Soldiers,” Cinema Journal 40, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 94 – 112. Fagelson uses published anecdotes in the U.S. Army’s WW2 publication Yank as well as newspaper reports of the time to reconstruct the responses of some specific military audiences when they viewed combat films in front-line recreation theatres. Certainly, there are instances of ethical problematization in Fagelson’s analysis, such as his speculation of how the “real” soldier audiences “coped” with what they perceived as unrealistic representations of their own actions by “recourse to sarcasm, cynicism, and parody.” As in Jarvie’s paper, Fagelson’s piece employs this ethical hermeneutics within an overall framework of analysis which addresses specific—rather than hypothetical—practices of production and reception. See Fagelson, “Fighting Films,” 103 – 106.
of Cinema demonstrates that even such apparently mundane cinema techniques, such as editing out an actor’s blinking, has powerful effects on the audience’s interpretation of the character.\(^7\) In *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, Bordwell describes in detail the tendency in contemporary Hollywood films—from the 1970s onwards—to predominantly employ a style of editing and cinematography that he calls “intensified continuity.”\(^7\) My research adopts this kind of narrow focus on film style, with the intention of defining specific attributes of how the techniques used by WW2 combat films constitute particular “norms” in different filmmaking eras.\(^8\)

Thompson’s neoformalism is related to Bordwell’s poetics, however, its distinct methods of analysis allow my study to account for many aspects of WW2 combat films that have hitherto been inadequately theorized. In *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis*, Thompson illustrates the usefulness of this approach for identifying how the presence of particular cinematic devices are motivated in very specific ways.\(^8\) In Chapter 4, I draw upon this mode of analysis to examine what I consider to be one of the most misunderstood aspects of combat films: the use of hand-held cinematography.\(^8\) As neoformalism is derived from the Russian Formalism of the early 1900s, Thompson has updated and adapted many of the concepts to suit cinema studies. A key term in the


\(^{8}\) Norms are the dominant groups of techniques that seem to be available to filmmakers in a particular era. However, that does not mean that all films (or filmmakers) use all of them. This approach enables the analyst to define the “creative options” available, as well as pointing to stylistic tendencies and identifying lesser known techniques. Ibid., 1 – 18.

\(^{8}\) Thompson, *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible*.

\(^{8}\) I also use neoformalism at other points in the thesis. For instance, in Chapter 3 I discuss the appropriate motivations of particular types of sound design in combat sequences.
formalist/neoformalist tradition is *defamiliarization*, which is an effect created by particular texts to challenge the viewer’s perception of events, narratives, characters, and ideas that have become routine and habitual. Since WW2 combat films have now been produced for over 50 years, the concept of defamiliarization provides a valuable critical tool through which to analyze some of the stylistic changes present in these films.

Barry Salt’s pioneering studies in film style have also provided me with excellent tools for identifying and describing the cinematic devices used by this genre. In Chapter 3 I use a number of techniques adopted from Salt’s studies, for instance the technique of counting Average Shot Lengths for particular films to measure the norms of editing in particular eras of filmmaking. These methods of analysis also have links to the work of a number of other scholars, centering on the website www.cinemetrics.lv, where statistical measures of film style have been refined through discussion, critique, and sharing of data.

The combined work of these scholars supplies an excellent approach to examine aspects of style which have hitherto been ignored by film studies. In Chapter 2 I discuss the relevant influence of their work in much more detail. Additionally, this thesis is informed by my own practical experience of filmmaking. The particular set of skills I have developed directing and designing visual effects for short action films enables me to understand some of the practical issues involved in creating scenes of violence on screen. For this reason, I am in a suitable position to analyze the textual content of these films with a highly sophisticated

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83 See Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*: 10 – 11.
84 See Salt, *Film Style and Technology*; and Salt, *Moving Into Pictures*.
85 For an overview of this work, see the collected articles on “Cinemetrics Studies” at http://www.cinemetrics.lv/articles.php (accessed March 24, 2012).
degree of detail. Of course, not only have my practical skills assisted in my scholarly analysis, but the opposite is also true. Through this extended engagement with the minutiae of combat style, I have advanced my own filmmaking praxis immensely.

1.4 Aims and limitations of the thesis

There are two major contributions of my project to the field of academic film studies. First is my application of Hunter and Bordwell’s arguments to the corpus of criticism on the WW2 combat genre. Second, and more importantly, is my very detailed and specific account of the stylistic systems of this genre of filmmaking. In order to perform this task, this dissertation focuses on two sets of mainstream WW2 combat films. As it is my intention to make concrete comparisons between films and eras, I focus exclusively on infantry combat films. Additionally, I narrow the analysis to the combat sequences and unless otherwise indicated, my statements should be regarded as relevant to the major battles in the films.

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86 For examples of my work, see the blog I maintain at http://stuartbender.wordpress.com.
87 I comment on these throughout the thesis, but by way of indicating the importance of this point I will suggest from the outside that I found a huge increase in the impact of the violence in shootout scenes when I adapted what Stephen Prince refers to as “substitutional emblematics.” This technique involves presenting damage to the scenery in order to “stand-in” for violence on the human body. Although Prince’s poetics is meant to be descriptive of the norms of screen violence, this kind of analysis holds strong interest for filmmakers who wish to draw upon these norms. See Stephen Prince, Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003): 207 – 208.
89 Basinger does include aerial and naval combat films in her study, as does Suid. From my viewing of these films it is apparent that the stylistic techniques involved in depicting air and sea combat are considerably different to infantry combat. As such, these films are outside the range of this thesis; however, in many cases they are relevant to Basinger’s genre study as well as Suid’s historical account of the Pentagon’s interaction with Hollywood. This includes first wave films such as Air Force (Howard Hawks, 1943), Twelve O’Clock High (Henry King, 1949), Destroyer (William A. Seiter, 1943).
My focus on mainstream Hollywood productions is at once scholarly, as well as practical. This focus is scholarly in that the dominant academic critique of the genre has also focused on Hollywood productions. It is practical in the sense that all of the films were available in good quality DVD or Blu-Ray formats, which I consider essential for my comments on stylistic attributes to be meaningful. The first five films of the sample were made during the war: *Wake Island* (1942), *Bataan* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diary* (Lewis Seiler, 1943), *Gung Ho!* (1943), and *Objective, Burma!* (1945). The other five are contemporary productions: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998), *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001) and *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). With the exception of *Enemy at the Gates* these are Hollywood productions and I have selected them because as two distinct groups they will enable me to identify clear norms of style in wartime productions as well as within the contemporary milieu. At various points in the analysis I do consider other films made in these two eras, as well as films made during what Basinger would describe as the third and fourth waves.

As indicated above, a central theme of this dissertation is that existing film criticism has focused exclusively on the narratives of these texts and for this reason academic cinema studies has a limited understanding of the practical means by which these films have been produced. The two primary research questions which guide this project have been designed to address this problem:
1. What are the specific norms of style (e.g., cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound) used by the 1940s, and post-Ryan 2000s infantry combat films?

2. Why has existing film criticism ignored the stylistic analysis of these films?

Using the answers to these two questions, I also explore a third question in Chapter 5 (Conclusion):

3. How relevant is the notion of realism to an analysis of style in the World War II combat film genre?

This final question hovers over many discussions of the genre in both scholarly criticism and popular reviews. For this reason, although I cite examples of critical attitudes towards combat realism throughout the discussion, in general I defer my engagement with the topic until the conclusion. As I show throughout Chapter 3 and 4, realism in relation to film style is a particularly complex issue; however, the data and analysis in those chapters enables me to offer a definition in Chapter 5 of what I call “reported realism.”

There are some clear limitations on this study and these, in fact, point towards important future research. For instance, my very brief viewing of some recent non-English speaking combat films suggests that there are complex influences of
the Hollywood style on those films. Occasionally I make references to non-WW2 combat films, such as films about the Vietnam War or the Gulf War. However, a full analysis of those films is, of course, beyond the scope of this thesis. As such, my comments here are intended to illustrate a specific aspect of WW2 films and should be regarded as preliminary statements regarding Vietnam or Gulf War cinema.

1.5 Chapter summary

This chapter functioned to define the World War II combat film genre, as well as point towards the theoretical approach taken throughout the dissertation. Initially, I drew upon Jeanine Basinger’s research into the generic conventions associated with these films and used this to indicate the focus of my research, which is the sub-genre of infantry combat films set during that conflict. I showed that this dissertation primarily discusses two sets of films made from two distinct eras of production: first, a group of films produced during the war itself and second, a group made in the post-Ryan 2000s. The chapter then outlined some of the major problems with existing film criticism of WW2 films, arguing that the dominant critical methodology applied to these films takes a narrative or ideological-analysis approach. While these approaches arguably yield useful and relevant research, they do so at the expense of a thorough understanding of the genre’s stylistic techniques. In response to this, the chapter briefly summarized the usefulness of a number of theoretical positions which will be drawn upon during

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90 For instance, the Chinese Civil War film *Assembly* (Xiaogang Feng, 2007) seems to borrow a number of aspects of the Hollywood aesthetic and a number of internet reviewers have suggested similarities to the style of Ryan’s battle sequences. However, as I show in Chapters 3 and 4, there are a number of complex problems in regarding Ryan’s style as typical of Hollywood and, in fact, many of the stylistic devices attributed to Ryan are based on mistaken assumptions. See “Reviews & Ratings for *Assembly,*” http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0881200/reviews (accessed March 25, 2012).
the following chapters. Finally, the chapter specified the three research questions which guide the thesis. These questions are designed to explain the lack of attention to the style of WW2 combat films by existing film criticism, as well as to refocus analytic attention onto this aspect of the films’ construction.
OVERVIEW

This chapter reviews the theoretical background for the current research project. I begin by arguing that film interpretation is a productive practice in which the critic applies specific rules to make meaning from appropriate textual cues. I derive this approach primarily from the work of David Bordwell and Ian Hunter. While these two scholars offer separate viewpoints on the critical process, the first section of this chapter shows that there are clear overlaps between them. Bordwell’s notion of criticism as a rhetorical activity involving heuristics has strong similarities to Hunter’s account of reading/viewing as bound by specific rules in which critics are trained. For Hunter, the dominant critical practice in the Humanities is one that is grounded in pedagogy, in that most interpretative methods involve the critic using the text as a stimulus for an interrogation of their own—or their society’s—ethics. Hunter, following Michel Foucault, suggests that this practice serves the function of governmentality by training subjects in a process by which they can undertake maintenance and management of their own conduct.

I then problematize six interpretations of one WW2 combat film, Steven Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan, highlighting the ways in which the dominant critical apparatus favors an introspective hermeneutics of the self. While this practice yields arguably fascinating and engaging interpretations of Ryan’s narrative and ideology, it does so at the expense of an understanding of the stylistic system employed by the film. I indicate that this is typical of other critical
work on WW2 combat films, exposing a significant gap in academic film studies’ knowledge of the genre. The third section offers a brief overview of an alternative critical approach, derived from poetics and stylistic analysis, which I develop in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.1 Criticism as productive practice

Despite the existence of poststructuralist theories in contemporary critical thought, there persists a predominant view of texts as that which Michel de Certeau has labelled a “strongbox of meaning,” at least in the literature on WW2 combat films.\(^91\) For instance, Brian Locke’s recent criticism of *Bataan* contains the bald statement that the film “depicts the Japanese ‘yellow peril’ enemy not only as hostile to both white and black Americans, but as even more racist to blacks than white Americans, *displacing the history of white racism towards blacks onto the Asian enemy*.”\(^92\) Although no character in the film explicitly states the opinion that the Japanese possess greater racist attitudes towards the black American characters than the white characters, the author argues that *Bataan* holds this implicit meaning within the presentation of its narrative. The intention of this kind of criticism seems to be to reveal meanings about the text—including its context and its society—which can apparently be uncovered by a suitably sophisticated mind or theoretical position.

In what follows, I will offer a significantly different approach to understanding criticism and interpretation. Unlike the kind of hermeneutics indicated above, my

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approach will assume that textual criticism, such as the scholarly interpretation of films, is a *productive practice*. This assumption holds that meaning is something that can only be “produced,” rather than something to be “recovered” from the text, the author or filmmaker’s biography, a set of values or from the viewer themselves.\(^93\) Richard Rorty’s pragmatism has a strong influence on this view of interpretation: “We may describe a given set of marks as words of the English language, as very hard to read, as a Joyce manuscript, as worth a million dollars, as an early version of *Ulysses*, and so on.”\(^94\) Rorty’s argument is that whatever description (that is, the interpretation or meaning) ultimately settled upon is dependent upon what happens to have been said, discursively, about that particular set of marks.\(^95\) Noel King points out that this position is derived from the works of Michel Foucault and Ludwig Wittgenstein.\(^96\) Taking this approach in line with other research into the productive model of reading, there are three major implications for the criticism of cinema.\(^97\) First, it follows that there is nothing inherent about a film, or its author, that triggers a particular interpretation. For instance, the presence of black American characters in *Bataan* does not, by itself, prompt a reading focused on racist attitudes in American society. Second, when two (or more) critics interpret the same text differently this is a result of their application of different rules for interpretation, rather than them simply

\(^{93}\) See Bronwyn Mellor, “English and Reading Practices,” (PhD. diss., University of Western Australia, 1992) and Bennett, “Texts, Readers, Reading Formations.”
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 98.
\(^{97}\) For more on productive models of reading/viewing, see Bennett, “Texts, Readers, Reading Formations”; Greenfield, “On Readers, Readerships and Reading Practices”; and King, “Text/Reading/Context.”
having “different points of view.” Third, from this position, meaning is not found in a text, but is activated by following certain historically determined rules which involve the viewing performing very specific routines.

An analogy from a combat film can stand to illustrate this concept of interpretation as a rule-bound practice. Consider the opening scene in the Gulf War film *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999), in which a US soldier spots an Iraqi on a sandy crest and calls out to his unit, “Are we shooting?” Their attempt to read the situation is as follows:

Soldier #1: Are we shooting?

Soldier #2: [Off-screen] What?

Soldier #1: Are we shooting people or what?

Soldier #2: Are we shooting?

Soldier #1: That’s what I’m asking you!

Soldier #2: What’s the answer?

Soldier #1: I don’t know the answer. That’s what I’m trying to find out!

[On-screen: The Iraqi has a weapon and is waving a white flag.]

Soldier #1: I think this guy has a weapon! Yeah he does!

[He shoots and kills the Iraqi.]

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100 In offering this analogy I will make what Noel King calls a “critical alibi.” Specifically, I am appropriating the *Three Kings* dialogue in order to illustrate a theoretical concept; however, I do not contend that the film itself makes an appeal to this concept. In my interpretation here, I may make the excerpt of film’ dialogue mean something appropriate to my argument, although that is not to suggest that in any other context the *Three Kings* scene would hold the same meaning. For more on critical alibis, see Noel King, “Critical Alibis and Thin Description,” *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 6, no. 2 (1991) http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au /ReadingRoom/6.2/King.html (accessed November 7, 2011).
On a battlefield, the “meaning” of a person standing on a hill could be one of at least three options. They could be interpreted as: i) a hostile enemy soldier, ii) a surrendering enemy soldier, or iii) a civilian. It is not up to the infantry soldier to decide on which meaning to attach to the person. Rather, the meaning is fixed according to the “rules of engagement” issued by the appropriate authority. These may be written on cards carried by soldiers, as well as passed on to individual soldiers by their unit commanders. They are specific, such as this recorded order from a Marine Lieutenant prior to an attack in the Euphrates:

Change in the ROE [Rules of Engagement]: anyone with a weapon is declared hostile. If it’s a woman walking away from you with a weapon on her back, shoot her. If there is an armed Iraqi out there, shoot him. I don’t care if you hit him with a forty-millimeter grenade in the chest.

The military rules of engagement are variable (within a certain range of options) depending upon the context of combat; however, once fixed they precisely determine the “meaning” of every human on the battlefield. Although a scholar like Locke producing an interpretation of representations of race is obviously not dealing with the sort of high stakes involved in a soldier’s encounter with the Republican Guard, this comparison is a reminder of something easily forgotten in the game of interpretation. Firstly, soldiers are only in a position

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102 Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick, quoted in Evan Wright, Generation Kill: Living Dangerously on the Road to Baghdad With the Ultraviolent Marines of Bravo Company (London: Bantam Press, 2004), 84.
103 I am not using the term “game” here in a trivial sense. Rather, I am using the Wittgensteinian meaning which, as Brian Moon indicates, describes a rule-bound activity in which competent performance is the “product” of “local and specific trainings” in those rules. Battlefield rules of engagement constitute a “game” in this regard, as do particular interpretative practices. See Brian Moon, “Reading and Gender: From Discourse and Subject to Regimes of Practice” (PhD diss.,
(geographically as well as ethically) where they are required to “read” people on a battlefield because of a multitude of circumstances that are entirely external to them. Likewise, a scholar is only in the position to interpret a film like Bataan because of external contingencies, such as the need to publish as a tenure requirement, or because they are teaching a unit which deals with the WW2 combat genre. Secondly, the satire of the Three Kings scene is that the soldier is unable to accurately read the meaning of the Iraqi—in fact, he misreads the situation and kills a surrendering soldier—because nobody seems to know the rules of engagement. His confusion leads him to ignore the Iraqi’s white flag and focus on the AK47 assault rifle. The scholar attempting to analyze race representations in Bataan is only going to produce a valid reading if they actually know which textual cues “count” in this type of interpretation. For example, if they argue that Sgt. Dane’s psychosexual development is echoed in the closing shot of him firing the unit’s machine-gun, then they have not performed a “correct” interpretation of representations of race at all.

Thus, the context of viewing is not simply something which influences an interpretation. It, in fact, functions to produce the meaning. In order to more fully articulate the problem of interpretation I will draw upon the work of two researchers who offer independent, but complementary, accounts of the interpretive process. David Bordwell’s research into film criticism suggests that critics produce their interpretations according to a set of practices of inference and


There are obviously a multitude of factors involved in enlisting in the military, including a certain amount of personal decision-making, but also social influences such as “military institutional presence” in a particular neighbourhood. See Meredith A. Kleykamp, “College, Jobs, or the Military? Enlistment During a Time of War,” Social Science Quarterly 87, no. 2 (June 2006): 272 – 290.

Though obviously this sort of thing might be valid in a Freudian reading.
rhetoric. In short, Bordwell’s account details the strategies mobilized by critics when they interpret cinematic texts. His key argument is that by examining the “actual procedures of thinking and writing” used by critics, it is possible to understand the “institution” of academic film criticism as “nothing but a body of conventions.”

Ian Hunter, over a course of publications, has also argued that the different interpretive positions in the humanities can be read as practices with conventionalized rules and discrete procedures. However, Hunter’s work emphasizes the primarily pedagogical purpose served by these practices. From this perspective, the analysis of texts in the humanities is used as a hermeneutic “occasion” in which the student, scholar, or teacher can engage in a process of ethical self-problematization. The intersection of the works by both Bordwell and Hunter enables an examination of the existing research into WW2 combat films, so I will begin here with a review of the relevant literature by these two researchers.

2.1.1 David Bordwell: Interpretation as Rhetoric

In his *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Bordwell suggests that there are four types of meanings which critics can construct for a film. These are a “referential” meaning, an “explicit” meaning, a “symbolic” (or “implicit”) meaning, and finally a “symptomatic” meaning. These differing meanings can be regarded as becoming increasingly abstract, as well as comprising two distinct processes. The first two types of meaning—referential and explicit—constitute *comprehension* of the film. A referential

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107 Ibid., xi.
meaning is formed when the spectator constructs a “world” from information provided by the text and treats the film as referencing this real or fictitious world. The viewer comprehends the events depicted in the film and mentally assembles (reconstructs) a coherent world—and a coherent *fabula*, or story—from the information presented in the text.\(^1\) In producing an explicit meaning, however, the spectator “assign[s] a conceptual meaning or ‘point’ to the fabula and diegesis” and identifies “explicit cues” within the text which suggest “the film ‘intentionally’ indicates how it is to be taken.”\(^2\) The hackneyed claim that a given WW2 combat film suggests that “war is hell” is a clear example of such a meaning.

By contrast to the methods of *comprehension* involved in these two meaning making processes, the second two types of meaning—implicit and symptomatic—should be regarded as *interpretation*. Bordwell suggests that when a spectator constructs an implicit meaning, “the film is now assumed to ‘speak indirectly’.”\(^3\) Roger Ebert attributes such a meaning to *Ryan* when he argues that Spielberg and screenwriter Robert Rodat have “made a philosophical film about war.”\(^4\) Ebert regards the actor Jeremy Davies (who plays Cpl. Upham) as “the key performance in the movie” because his “survival depends on his doing the very best he can […] but even more on chance.”\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Bordwell has dealt with this comprehension process extensively in an earlier book. See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985).

\(^2\) Ibid., 8.

\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Ibid.
Symptomatic meanings, however, differ from the first three types of meaning in that those meaning-making processes assume “that the film ‘knows’ more or less what it is doing.”115 On the other hand, a symptomatic meaning, which Bordwell also labels a repressed meaning, construct meanings “that the work divulges ‘involuntarily’.”116 This is clearly the interpretive process at work when Locke argues that Bataan “presents the Asian as the true culprit of bigotry, displacing the stigma of American racism from white onto yellow.”117

Bordwell does not regard these types of meaning-making as forming a hierarchy, or that spectators necessarily move from the referential to the symptomatic in a sequence. His book does, however, focus on the third and fourth types of meaning-making identified above because they dominate critical practice. The process of constructing implicit meanings, according to Bordwell, has become institutionalized in the academic context due to a number of contingent factors. For instance, certain films released after WW2 seemed to encourage the sort of meaning-making practices that had already become dominant in studies of literature and visual arts. According to Bordwell:

Italian Neorealism raised questions of realism, characterization, and narrative construction, while the 1950s work of Kurosawa, Rossellini, Bergman, Fellini, and others presented ambiguities that invited interpretation. American experimentalists, such as Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger, Gregory Markopoulos, and Stan Brakhage, made films that sought to be construed on the models of poetry and myth.118

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115 Bordwell, Making Meaning, 9.
116 Ibid.
118 Bordwell, Making Meaning, 44.
Additionally, Bordwell suggests that the “growing power of the idea of individual authorship” [the auteur] after the 1950s encouraged critics to attribute implicit meanings to films.\footnote{Ibid., 43 – 50.} Locating the initial surge of this kind of criticism in France, Bordwell argues that American academics gradually adopted this search for “interior meaning” throughout the 1960s and 1970s.\footnote{Ibid., 49 – 53. On page 49, Bordwell attributes the phrase “interior meaning” to Andrew Sarris, who was an early-adopter of auteurist critical practice in America. See Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” Film Culture 27 (Winter 1962-63), 7.} For instance, “Philosophy departments used films by Godard and Antonioni to illustrate existentialism; teachers of literature studied Throne of Blood as an adaptation of Macbeth.”\footnote{Ibid., 53.} The key assumption guiding the construction of an implicit meaning appears to be that by looking under the referential and explicit meanings of the film it is possible to find “significant themes, issues, or problems” which should be explicated in critical discussion.\footnote{Ibid., 64.}

The film critic attempting to construct a symptomatic meaning, however, tends to “show how repressed material [in the film] has social sources and consequences […] secreting something significant about the culture which produces or consumes it.”\footnote{Ibid., 73. Emphasis mine.} Locke’s reading of Bataan as displacing white American racism onto the Japanese is a clear example of this practice, particularly in that this symptomatic interpretation is at odds with both the explicit and implicit meanings of the film. It is this notion of the “contradictory text, predicated on repressed meanings that disrupt explicit or implicit ones” which Bordwell regards as being central to the dominance of symptomatic interpretations in post-1960s film
studies. In using this concept, readings with political motivations (for instance, readings based upon Marxist, poststructuralist, Feminist, or postcolonialist positions) are able to accommodate repressed meanings in films regardless of whether the critic takes these meanings to be positive or negative:

The critic may unmask ideology by pointing out all the patent distortions in the film, but go on to “save” the film by showing how it either contains progressive elements or embodies in its very incompatibilities some instructive indications of how fiercely ideology must struggle in order to maintain its authority.

While this description clearly fits the politically inclined interpretive positions indicated above, Bordwell dedicates the final pages of his chapter on “Symptomatic Interpretation” to showing how these modern critical approaches fit snugly with older traditions of criticism. On the one hand, what he labels the “culture-based critiques of the 1940s and 1950s” followed similar conceptual premises, in that “these studies assume films to be contradictory texts harbouring repressed meanings.” On the other hand, the “routines” and “craft” involved in producing a Marxist or poststructuralist interpretation, for instance, remain similar to earlier symptomatic critical practices.

124 Ibid., 88.
125 Ibid., 88 – 89.
126 Ibid., 98. Bordwell is referring to work such as Siegfried Kracauer’s From Caligari to Hitler (1947) and a 1950 paper by Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites on Joseph Mankiewicz’s No Way Out (1950). For Bordwell, Kracauer’s study concludes that German cinema exhibits “a collective German disposition to submit to tyranny”. He also indicates that Wolfenstein and Leites argue that No Way Out contains scenes which exhibit symptoms of racism, despite the authors’ acknowledgement that the conscious intentions of the filmmakers seem to have been to produce a progressively liberal representation of a black doctor. See Bordwell, Making Meaning, 73 – 75; Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947); and for the original essay, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, “Two Social Scientists View No Way Out: The Unconscious vs. the ‘Message’ in an Anti-Bias Film,” Commentary 10 (1950): 388-389.
127 Ibid., 104.
The key contribution of *Making Meaning*’s account of the interpretive process is that it regards critical practice as constituting a “constructive activity.” According to Bordwell:

The critic does not burrow into the text, probe it, get behind its façade, dig to reveal its hidden meanings; the surface/depth metaphor does not capture the inferential process of interpretation. On the constructivist account, the critic starts with aspects of the film (“cues”) to which certain meanings are ascribed.

A film’s “cues” can be any textual unit and in order to “ascribe” meaning to a particular film’s cues, the critic draws upon what Bordwell refers to as “semantic fields.” A semantic field is a “set of relations of meaning” between particular textual cues and which the critic can use to impose particular meanings upon the film:

Thus *city/country* can be said to constitute a semantic field, unified by a relation of opposite meaning. *City/town/village/hamlet* also constitutes a semantic field, organized by diminution in size. *City/state/region/country* constitutes a semantic field defined by incusion. When one asks the meaning of *city* or *country*, one is partly asking into what semantic fields it can be inserted.

In this account, semantic fields are different to “themes” in that the semantic field mobilized by the critic “organizes potential meanings in relation to one another,” whereas a theme is an abstract idea. For instance, it might be possible to argue

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128 Ibid., 13.
129 Ibid.
130 For a full discussion of semantic fields, see Bordwell, *Making Meaning*: 105 – 128.
131 Ibid., 106.
132 Ibid., 106.
that a particular combat film deals with the theme of “war” or even “masculinity,” but a critic may need to draw upon the semantic field of “war/peace” or “masculinity/femininity” in order to interpret a particular line of dialogue. In order to construct meaning from the film’s cues, the critic “maps” the semantic fields onto the cues: “mapping” is Bordwell’s metaphor which suggests a process of “selective projection.” For instance, a critic could conceivably map the “war/peace” semantic field onto specific characters in Malick’s *The Thin Red Line* (1998). This process would perhaps focus interpretive attention on Cpt. Staros’ as he weeps during down-time in combat at Guadalcanal and the film cuts to brief flashbacks of moments with his wife. A more complex example is found in Dana Polan’s interpretation of *The Thin Red Line*, in which he maps a clustered semantic field relating to “the auteur” onto the opening shot:

> How when an auteur has not made a film for twenty years, is it possible to read just the nature in the new film’s opening shot (an alligator that immerses itself in murky swamp water up to its eyes) and not also read for authorial voice, visual talent, this director’s take on the war movie?\(^{133}\)

Bordwell would argue that by choosing this particular semantic field (and then mapping it onto an appropriately receptive cue from the film), Polan is employing the interpretive heuristic of “making films personal.”\(^ {134}\) For Bordwell, who invokes the concepts of heuristics and schemata from cognitive psychology,


\(^{134}\) For more detail on this heuristic, see Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 151.
critics follow conventional routines that have become effective throughout the history of film interpretation.\textsuperscript{135}

Central to Bordwell’s argument in \textit{Making Meaning} is the rhetorical nature of interpretation and criticism. Specifically, rhetoric is “a matter of \textit{inventio} (the devising of arguments), \textit{dispositio} (their arrangement), and \textit{elocutio} (their stylistic articulation)” and all interpretations are rhetorical acts.\textsuperscript{136} However, the rhetorical performance is mediated and conditioned by the institutional context of the critical act:

From the rhetorical standpoint, the interpreter’s basic task—building a novel and plausible interpretation of one or more appropriate films—becomes a matter of negotiating with the audience’s institutionally grounded assumptions. There is a trade-off. Risk a more novel interpretation, and you may produce an exemplar; fail, and you will seem merely odd. Stick closely to the limits of plausibility, and you will pass muster, but you may seem routine. In general, the best preparation is to study exemplars. This teaches the critic what will go down with an audience and what degrees of originality are encouraged by particular institutional circumstances.\textsuperscript{137}

Bordwell stresses the importance of the institution of criticism, suggesting that interpretation is “thriving” in the academy: “books, journals, and graduate


\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 205.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 206.
programs in interpretive theory proliferate." He also suggests that this industry has narrowed the focus of its domain in such a way as to be limited (and limiting). According to Bordwell, the specific problem for current criticism is that it:

- tends to be conservative and coarse-grained. It tends to play down film form and style. It leans to an unacknowledged degree upon received aesthetic categories without producing new ones. It is largely uncontentious and unreflective about its theories and practices.

At the conclusion of *Making Meaning*, Bordwell sets out his ideas of a direction for film studies which has its basis in *poetics*: “the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects.” I will address this in greater detail in Section 2.3, where I outline the theoretical and critical practices which are relevant to my own study of WW2 combat films. At this stage, in order to complement Bordwell’s account of the interpretive process, I will enlist the research of Ian Hunter. Where Bordwell regards different types of criticism—for instance, Marxist, Feminist, Freudian—to be operating according to identical assumptions about symptomatic meanings and routine heuristics, Hunter takes a pragmatic perspective to interpretation, but also approaches the problem of hermeneutics in terms of a peculiarly *pedagogical* practice.

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138 Ibid., 254.
139 Ibid., 254 – 262.
140 Ibid., 261.
141 Ibid., 266.
2.1.2 Ian Hunter: Interpretation, Pedagogy, and Governmentality

Models of interpretation which take meaning-making to be a productive practice—and I consider Bordwell’s account of criticism to be an example of such a position—argue that the particular interpretation produced by any spectator is not necessarily encouraged by the text itself. As Jonathan Culler suggests:

“Once upon a time there were three little pigs” demands that we ask “So what happened?” and not “Why three?” or “What is the concrete historical context?”, for instance.  

Indeed, the act of asking any of these questions is a social practice, determined by external contingent conditions (such as an English Literature exam, a scout campfire, a publication for an early edition of Scrutiny and so on). Therefore, this model of reading as productive practice suggests that different interpretations are merely the application of different rules and practices of making meaning. Hunter suggests that these rules and practices are not in themselves “expressive of what we as individual subjects see or experience,” and that a reader who fails to reproduce such rules, “has neither missed something in the text nor failed to exercise some innate capacity for literary or aesthetic recognition.”

Accordingly, it is not a short-coming for a viewer to have never interpreted Bataan according to Locke’s symptomatic reading. He illustrates this with reference to a poem by e e cummings:

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Hunter argues that although the poem may initially seem meaningless, two different meanings can be rendered from it by applying two discretely different...
practices. First, it could be regarded as “the dutifully mimicked speech of a drunken bigot,” which the reader would produce by applying the rule of treating “the disruption of syntax and spelling as, simply, phonetic mimicry—as, for example, when the word ‘Australian’ is written and pronounced ‘strine’ to give the effect of ocker speech.”145 Alternatively, in very specific discursive contexts, it can be rendered “literary” by applying a different rule along the lines of: “Read the jumbling of spelling and syntax as a sign of the breaking of rules that allows a direct experience of reality.”146 By applying this rule the reader experiences, at least fleetingly, the feeling of being a drunk bigot.147 This is not merely theoretical conjecture by Hunter. He, in fact, finds a critic—Barry Marks—who has read Cummings in precisely this way: “Cummings has forced the reader to feel his language […] he has done everything possible to bypass the intellect, for thus only could he get us to enter experientially into the meaning of his poem.”148 There are clear parallels between Hunter’s view of interpretation as rule-bound praxis and Bordwell’s account of semantic fields and heuristics. Both approaches may also be taken to privilege the reader’s authority in the interpretation process; however, following Roger Chartier, it is important to remember that this “independence” from the author’s “meaning” is:

not an arbitrary license. It is confined by the codes and conventions that govern the practices of a community. It is also confined by the discursive and material forms of the texts read.149

145 Ibid., 83.
146 Ibid., 86. Emphasis mine.
147 Ibid., 83 – 84.
148 Barry Marks, quoted in Hunter, “The Concept of Context and the Problem of Reading,” 84. Hunter also shows two critics’ applying the same reading practice to another cummings’ poem, “The Grasshopper.”
Research into the productive model of interpretation suggests that the meaning-making process cannot be explained only (or even mostly) in terms of a reader’s ideological values about “race” or “gender,” for instance. Instead, as King argues, it just means that a reader from a community in which anti-racist reading practices are valued, for example, may have a “practical familiarity” with the rules for producing an anti-racist reading if they have been educated in these rules.\footnote{Noel King, “Text/reading/context,” 126 – 127.} Thus, the productive model of interpretation would explain aspects of Locke’s interpretation of *Bataan* in precisely these terms.

Such an approach to the problem of interpretation brings into focus the historical and socio-institutional deployment of particular reading practices. In a series of writings during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hunter investigates the specific reading practices deployed for pedagogical purposes in the popular school English context.\footnote{See Hunter, *Culture and Government*; and Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson.”} Although this early work focuses on the reading of literature in the secondary school English context (an analysis which I have also extended to the teaching of documentary texts in this same context), his later research applies the same governmental model to academic criticism within the university context.\footnote{Hunter has also argued that the specific tasks of contemporary academic humanities faculties emerged from the late 1800s development of the government school education. See Ian Hunter, “Personality as a Vocation: The Political Rationality of the Humanities,” *Economy and Society* 19, no. 4 (1990): 391 – 430; Hunter, “Literary Theory in Civil Life”; and Ian Hunter, “The History of Theory” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006): 78 – 112. For an application of the governmental model to the secondary English classroom teaching of poetry, and of viewing texts, see Bender, “Learning the Documentary Lesson”; Bender, “Post-Response”; and Stuart Bender, “A Persistent Practice: The Problem of the Documentary Lesson,” *English in Australia* 43, no. 2 (2008): 27 – 37.} As I indicated in Chapter 1, Hunter’s work has been extremely influential on this
present study. In this section I will explain how Hunter’s account of interpretative pedagogy in the secondary school context provides a useful background for the discussion of academic criticism of WW2 combat films.

For Hunter, the English lesson (or more specifically, the literature lesson) operates according to a specific pedagogical routine which trains the individual student in specific competences of moral self-regulation. Literary texts are deployed in this context as the device which focuses these competences so that students can undertake work upon their own subjectivity. Such a practice is among the strategies which Foucault would describe as “technologies of the self,” which permit “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” From this perspective, the dominant reading practice taught in secondary school English classrooms has a governmental objective, where government in the Foucauldian sense encompasses more than just the state political system and focuses on the “way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” by structuring “the possible field of action” of human subjects. Hunter regards subject English as a field in which literary texts are deployed for the purpose of training students

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153 As indicated earlier, my encounter with Hunter’s genealogy of secondary school English not only informed the approach taken in my M.Ed research, but also pointed directly toward the current project.
156 See Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221, emphasis mine. For more detail, see Foucault, “Governmentality.”
to self-govern in the decisions they make in their personal lives. Significantly, this does not happen through explicit instruction of morals. Rather, it occurs through a set of subtly coercive classroom routines which have as their end result the production of students who can use “text[s] as a device for moral inspection” of themselves. Instead of examining Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1963) as a generic example of politically infused historical-fiction, for instance, students are likely to be encouraged to consider a question such as: “What do you think it would be like to be forced to work for an authoritarian government without being paid or without receiving adequate food or shelter?”

Hunter’s governmental account of subject English—as well as his later account of academic criticism—has its roots in Foucault’s studies of power which examine the historical shift from power as a means of “punishing the body” to one which

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157 Hunter, Culture and Government, 42. Throughout Culture and Government, as well as the neoFoucauldian educational research which follows Hunter’s pioneering analysis, “subject English” is used to refer to the discipline of English within secondary schools. The term is also, in many respects, descriptive of academic literary studies within the tertiary system.

158 Brian Moon, “Rethinking Resistance: English and Critical Consciousness,” Interpretations 27, no. 3 (1994), 59. Elsewhere, I describe this tendency as a “persistent practice” of English teachers in that students are often taken through similar pedagogical activities whether teachers claim to be teaching them to appreciate great literature (and cinema) or whether they claim to be inoculating students against dangerous messages encoded in stereotypical portrayals of women in Hollywood films. See Bender, “Learning the Documentary Lesson,” and “A Persistent Practice.” The former pedagogy would fit within a “Culturalist” tradition, informed by such thinkers as Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, whereas the latter would be derived from the “Cultural Studies” tradition which privileges ideological critique. For the heritage of the Culturalist English model, see Arnold, Culture and Anarchy; F.R. Leavis, Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture. (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930). For examples of the theoretical material which influences Cultural Studies English, see Louis Althusser, Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation,” in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971): 127 – 186; and Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

has as its goal the “governing of the soul.” According to Foucault, this shift took place in order to match the values and desires of human subjects to particular governmental objectives through a complex network of power relationships in society. The specific form of power which relates to Hunter’s work on criticism is the notion of “pastoral power,” which Foucault links to “a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself.”

Foucault’s portrayal of traditional Christian pastoral power characterises its form in four specific ways: it ensures salvation, it sacrifices as well as commands, is attendant to the individual and develops knowledge of its subject’s souls/minds. The key function of this power is to operate directly on the interior of the individual, in order to correct moral aberrations and, significantly, to result in a developed form of conscience in its subjects, in the gradual use and understanding of a series of techniques of self-examination, by which they come to know themselves better and implement upon themselves the lessons of the pastor. Through a redistribution of this power in (approximately) the 1700s, the concentration of pastoral power began to spread into other aspects of the social apparatus and, importantly, shifted to promise salvation in this world. In the educational apparatus, functioning as part of the “network of practices of

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161 Ibid. See also Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth,” Political Theory 21, no. 2 (May 1993), 204.
162 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 214.
163 Ibid.
government,” pastoral power became practiced through “the teacher or tutor in relation to the child or the pupil.”  

This raises questions of how and why education, in particular English education, describes itself as having a liberating project, or a “social mission.”  Hunter’s work critiques the assumption that subject English functions to free students’ minds from social constraints. For Hunter, governmental power swelled into the early development of English education, creating a discipline which is in fact “an instituted means of forming a particular type of person.” This aesthetico-ethical subject is produced through very specific pedagogical routines constructed around the teacher/student coupling. This form of “bio-power” was also enabled via the architectural arrangement of the cellular classroom, comparable to Jeremy Bentham’s panaopticon, which permitted the supervising (correctional) gaze of the teacher who would “incite, observe and guide” students in learning situations. Nick Peim describes the end point of bio-power as “the production of self-disciplining, self-regulating citizenry.” In classroom practice individual students are expected to initially misread the text under study because of their “moral and psychological immaturity.” Following this, students offer “endlessly significant responses” (i.e., they are offered the freedom to respond in

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168 Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson,” 73.
171 Ibid., 72 – 73.
any way that seems personally relevant) to the text without judgment by the teacher, in order to reveal their interiority which is then problematized through systematic questioning by the pastoral figure (the teacher).\textsuperscript{172}

In his later work, Hunter argues that the academic humanities serve the same governmental function of producing subjects capable of ethical self-problematization.\textsuperscript{173} On the one hand, the academic English seminar can be regarded as having a similar structure to the secondary school literature lesson in that the teacher-critic operates in a pastoral role, guiding students to problematize their own incomplete responses to texts.\textsuperscript{174} Certain Cultural Studies textbooks actually promote this kind of critical task, for instance Media & Society, which suggests that students use the acronym “SEARCH” which “foregrounds social issues and social differences,” such as Sex (and gender), Environment, Age, Race and Religion, Class, and Handicap.\textsuperscript{175} The authors encourage students to use it to guide their analysis of media texts:

1. Consider how you are placed in relation to these six categories. How does it feel to be in these positions, and how well represented are you in the media?

2. How do the media represent the world in relation to these six categories?\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} See Hunter, “Literary Theory in Civil Life”; and for a much earlier gesture towards the humanities context, “The Occasion of Criticism.”
\textsuperscript{174} Hunter provides two specific examples to support this. The first is I. A. Richards’ classic lesson in which he reportedly invited students to interpret un-named poems and then criticized their “stock responses.” The second example is Stanley Fish’s “experiment” in which he asked students to interpret what he told them was a “seventeenth century devotional poem” but was in fact a simple list of words. Hunter’s argument is that these instances illustrate that literary theory is “pedagogical at its intellectual core, being a discipline whose access to its object occurs only through the ethical grooming of the individuals so disciplined.” See Hunter, “Literary Theory in Civil Life,” 1124.
\textsuperscript{175} See Michael O’Shaughnessy and Jane Studlar, Media & Society, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Victoria: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38. This has been used as a key textbook in an undergraduate Cultural Studies course I have tutored in previous years.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 39.
Although the specific content of these questions is contemporary, its form of focusing the critic’s attention inward has a long historical lineage. According to Hunter, from the German Romantic critics onward, criticism adopted the “task of problematising the reading of literature in order to achieve the ethical problematisation of the reader.” For Hunter, virtually all modern forms of criticism can be regarded in these terms, irrespective of the particular theoretical doctrine adhered to. Locke’s symptomatic interpretation of Bataan and Ebert’s comments on Ryan both take differing theoretical approaches to the texts at hand; however, they are each a clear instance of the critic using the text as a “surface” upon which to open up their own—and/or their society’s—values for problematization and inspection. These interpretive practices construct the critic as someone who initially “only half understands” the text because they are contending with something which is:

“difficult” in a very special way. Not hard to read like a bad fax but hard to read like a sign from God.

In this way, criticism is able to redeploy literary (and cinematic) texts as polysemic, but only within specific contexts and between certain boundaries. Rather than being an effect of “postmodern nihilism,” the notion of meaning as

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178 For instance, even my own neoformalist analysis of aspects of Saving Private Ryan in Chapter 4 can be regarded in this way. That is that the analysis has some aspects of self-interrogation, particular in the way that I justify the discussion among prior readings and interpretations of Ryan. However, my analysis also has significant differences to the primarily self-problematizing critical activities Hunter is targeting here.
179 For more on this notion of the text as “surface” for displaying the ethical interiority of the reader, see Hunter, “Learning the Literature Lesson.”
180 Hunter, “The Occasion of Criticism,” 162 – 165. The quote “not hard to read like a bad fax” is from Ian Hunter’s unpublished manuscript, “Notes on Wittgenstein and Film Criticism,” originally quoted in Noel King, “Critical Alibis and Thin Description.”
not “in” the text, but as constructed during the reading/interpretation process, is in fact a key component of traditional approaches to reading.\textsuperscript{181} Consider Saint John Cassian’s (c. 415) instructions for a hermeneutic practice of self-problematization by which a monk would use the Scriptures “to turn inward, deciphering and transforming himself by discriminating the inner meaning of the holy books from the false impressions left in the corrupted medium of their human understanding.”\textsuperscript{182} In the late 1700s, Immanuel Kant (particularly in \textit{The Conflict of the Faculties}) redeploys this practice of Scriptural interpretation for a wider (but still religious) reading community, suggesting that the preacher:

\begin{quote}
must treat the text \textit{only} (or at least \textit{primarily}) as an occasion for anything morally improving that can be made from it, without venturing to search what the sacred authors themselves might have meant by it.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

At the same time, Friedrich Schiller’s \textit{On the Aesthetic Education of Man} aimed to redistribute these practices for the general reading of literary texts in order to cultivate an “aesthetic inwardness.”\textsuperscript{184} It is in Schiller that Hunter locates the origin of criticism’s adherence to the pedagogical process of ethical self-inquiry which constructs the typical reader as one “who only half-understands the work.”\textsuperscript{185} Arguably, Schiller seems to anticipate interpretive positions as divergent as New Criticism and Vivian Sobchak’s phenomenology when he suggests that if a text appears to be “formless” and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{181} Hunter, “Literary Theory in Civil Life,” 1114.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 1110.
\textsuperscript{184} Hunter, “Literary Theory in Civil Life.” 1116 – 1119.
\textsuperscript{185} Hunter, “The Occasion of Criticism,” 162 – 165.
\end{footnotesize}
makes its effect solely through its content; it can just as often be evidence of a lack of form in the observer. If he is either too tense or too languid, if he is accustomed to read either with his intellect alone or with his sense alone, he will get no further than the matter even with the most beautiful form.\textsuperscript{186}

Clearly, similar assumptions guide the New Criticism, particularly in its connection to Leavis, who argued that the “first concern” of the critic is:

\begin{quote}

to enter into possession of the given poem (let us say) in its concrete fullness, and his constant concern is never to lose his completeness of possession … In making value-judgements (and judgements as to significance), implicitly or explicitly, he does so out of that completeness of possession and with that fullness of response.\textsuperscript{187}
\end{quote}

However, it is also evident in Sobchak’s argument against contemporary film theory’s privileging of the spectator’s intellect at the apparent expense of the sensorial aspects of cinema:

\begin{quote}

At worst, then, contemporary film theory has not taken bodily being at the movies very seriously—and, at best, it has generally not known how to respond to and describe how it is that movies “move” and “touch” us bodily, how they provoke in us “carnal thoughts” before they provoke us to conscious analysis.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
Hunter would argue that while these two approaches might yield different readings at the level of content, they are structured according to the same self-problematizing form. Additionally, they have the same target of analysis which is not the text, but is, in fact, the subjectivity of the critic. This has implications for this dissertation’s approach to film interpretation and analysis. Later, I demonstrate that the dominance of this approach has meant that film studies has a limited understanding of several important aspects of WW2 combat films. However, first I will more finely draw the linkage between Hunter’s approach and that of Bordwell.

2.1.3 Bordwell and Hunter: Heuristics and Pedagogy

The conclusions of Bordwell and Hunter complement each other in ways which are useful for this dissertation’s understanding of film criticism. Consider one of Bordwell’s “justifications” for film studies to be a distinct academic discipline which focuses specifically on the history of cinema style:

If studying film is centrally concerned with “reading” movies in the manner of literary texts, any humanities scholar armed with a battery of familiar interpretive strategies could probably do as well as anyone trained in film analysis. This is especially true as hermeneutic practices across the humanities have come to converge on the same interpretive schema and heuristics.189

It is here that the angle of attack by Hunter’s position differs from Bordwell’s, although arguably they arrive at a similar territory. For Bordwell, there is a significant institutional component to criticism in that the conventions of

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189 Bordwell, On the History of Film Style, 8.
particularly interpretive processes are established through academic publications, course documents and critical traditions. Hunter, however, considers these to be institutional “occasions” and emphasizes the *pedagogical* aspect of criticism as deployed throughout them. From this perspective, criticism—and the academic apparatus which supports it—has as its objective the production not simply of interpretations (as in Bordwell’s formulation), but instead is productive of a particular kind of reader-critic. As Hunter writes:

> The civil disposition of literary theory is thus manifested not in the objects of its occasional political interpretations but in the comportment of the theorist for whom a political situation occasions an interpretative exercise. Literary criticism is connected to the sphere of government through pedagogical deployment rather than political knowledge. Moreover, it is not just because it is now taught in educational institutions that literary theory and criticism is pedagogical, for it is pedagogical at its intellectual core, being a discipline whose access to its object occurs only through the ethical grooming of the individuals so disciplined.

As an example of how these two perspectives on interpretation would explain critical responses, Noel King offers an account of a question posed (by Patricia Mellencamp) at a conference presentation by Lesley Stern in which she presented an analysis of Martin Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* (1980):

> Mellencamp [invoking a viewing practice that draws upon Freud] said that Stern had “missed” the central point of La Motta’s speech about having “small hands ...
little girl’s hands.” Mellencamp *insisted* that this meant La Motta, or the film, was saying he had a little dick.\(^{192}\)

King goes on to point out that a viewer who “knew the boxing truism that even the greatest of light-heavy-weights (say, Jose Torres) could be knocked out by the most pedestrian of heavyweights (say, Jerry Quarry)”, might argue that La Motta was referring to the upcoming fight with a “legendary heavyweight.”\(^{193}\) King does not consider Mellencamp’s comment to simply be admitting polysemy. Rather, he suggests that Mellencamp “was insisting ‘what is signified here is the penis, how could you not see that’.”\(^{194}\) In other words, Mellencamp “wasn’t simply saying ‘an interesting interpretation will result if you take La Motta’s hands to be his penis’.”\(^{195}\) This is followed with a very clear explanation of the Bordwell and Hunter approaches to interpretation:

Bordwell would say that this indicates the presence of a different heuristic, resulting in a clash of “optics” and Stern probably would say that she was aware of the interpretative move mentioned by Mellencamp but was not interested in making it. Hunter would side-step the possibility of this being seen to be a clash of epistemological viewpoints by saying that one doesn’t miss something that is in the text so much as one does something else with it, although this “doing of something else” would also constitute a “knowing,” would constitute a production of knowledge for good or ill.\(^{196}\)

\(^{192}\) King, “Critical Occasions.” Emphasis mine.  
\(^{193}\) Ibid., ¶14.  
\(^{194}\) Ibid.  
\(^{195}\) Ibid., ¶15.  
\(^{196}\) Ibid.
This concept of a “production of knowledge” is central to Hunter’s argument that interpretation is a productive practice. Rather than revealing something about the true nature of the film, rather than revealing what characters are really thinking, rather than revealing what a director really intended, particular interpretive behaviors are brought to bear against the text in such a way as to produce a particular subjectivity for the viewer to occupy. As such, Mellencamp’s reading of La Motta’s “little hands/little dick” can be read as an act of self-interrogation in which the critic uses the text to elicit a discussion of the issue of sexual inferiority. By bringing the issue into discourse, various ethical positions on the issue can be confessed (for example, verbally at a conference dinner) and then participants may be able to work on their own beliefs.

The problem with the prevalence of these kinds of analyzes for film studies is that it does not allow a poetics of film style. As Bordwell puts it, writing of the way critics treat film style:

The concentric-circle model, whereby aspects of setting or camerawork amplify or comment on characters’ interaction, is a comparably crude way to understand film style […] The “classical” system of continuity staging, shooting, and editing can either be treated as a neutral ground for the truly significant meanings arising from dialogue and deportment, or it can be exploited for its symbolic potential (for example, eyeline-matching as creating power-infused looks).197

Combining the perspectives of Bordwell and Hunter then, it seems that very often the details of a film’s style are cast aside while the critic carries out a process of

ethical inquiry and debate regarding their (and/or their society’s) attitudes toward an issue that can be mapped onto some simplified textual cues. As I show below, the academic criticism of war films often performs these routines in their interpretive practices. While there has been significant knowledge “produced” about critics as a result of their work into WW2 combat films, there is very little knowledge of the style of these films. Spielberg may frequently use hand-held cameras in *Saving Private Ryan*, for instance, but critics simply do not know in what ways this camera style is similar to, and different from, the hand-held filming by members of the US Army Signal Corps during WW2.

### 2.2 The governmental trend in existing criticism of WW2 films

As indicated by the theorists above, film criticism rarely attends to the stylistic attributes of the texts being interpreted. Instead, criticism generally functions to problematize the narrative aspects of the films. The dominant critical practice of film studies is “the deployment of a post-Romantic cultural apparatus which results in the enigma of the text becoming the enigma of the one who reads it” and through this process the critic engages in an activity of “self-scrutiny, self-shaping, self-problematization.” 198 I should point out here that there is nothing inherently wrong with such an approach—indeed, as I show in this section, these interpretive practices have yielded some interesting, admirable readings of WW2 combat films. However, the dominance of this hermeneutic method also means that there are significant gaps in film studies’ knowledge of these particular films. 199 In this section, I use the model of critical practice as advanced by Bordwell and Hunter to account for the hermeneutic trend in criticism of WW2 films.

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199 Arguably this is also true for other genres.
combat films. I have chosen six interpretations of *Ryan* as my primary sources for analysis because I believe these will serve to illustrate the tendencies of contemporary criticism. Additionally, *Ryan* will occupy a central position in much of the stylistic analysis I undertake in later chapters.

The first analysis I will deal with is Geoff King’s piece titled “Seriously Spectacular: ‘Authenticity’ and ‘Art’ in the War Epic.”

King argues that *Saving Private Ryan* is a specific instance of a “Hollywood spectacle” which represents an attempt at “authenticity.” After describing the Normandy beach landing sequence in detail, King poses a series of questions:

> Does the unrelenting nature of the spectacle make it genuinely uncomfortable, or just allow the viewer to enjoy the dizzying hyperreal spectacle freed from any feelings of guilt? It is not easy to answer such questions with any certainty, although the issues might be clarified by examining the location of the beach landing spectacle within the broader narrative structure of the film.

The practice of self-problematization is evident in the questions themselves in that they provoke a great deal of information about the critic (or their society) and little about the film. In this case, the critic seems to suggest that it would be amoral for the film to “allow the viewer to enjoy” the violence without “feelings of guilt.”

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201 He also suggests that *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) is an example of Hollywood spectacle which makes an attempt at “art,” in that it “gives little indication of ever having been intended” to represent war in an authentic manner, instead functioning as a “creative interpretation of reality.” See King, “Seriously Spectacular,” 293-294.

202 Ibid., 290.
Like many such interpretations, King’s manages to sidestep issues of the audiovisual construction of the film text and use the narrative itself as a surface upon which to do this moral interrogative work. Although quantitatively King’s chapter gives more lengthy attention to the audiovisual composition of the film’s battle sequences than do some other critiques of *Ryan*, once he has established the moral dilemma to be dealt with, this is discarded in favour of further questioning of the narrative. For instance:

A questioning of the sentimentality of heartstring-tugging devices [of conventional war film narratives] focused on individuals seems also to be implied in the scene where one member of the patrol dies after ignoring Miller’s order not to take a child handed down by anxious parents from the ruins of one of the towns through which they pass. The soldier takes a risk in order to do what he defines as “the decent thing,” to help get a child to safety for the sake of its parents: in some respects an echo of the plot of *Saving Private Ryan*.203

In this commentary, King has performed an interesting and novel interpretation of some of the film’s narrative events, using them metonymically as a surface upon which to carry out some moral interrogation. Later in the chapter, King returns to *Ryan* in order to argue that the narrative works to reconcile problems of domestic life (eg: Cpt. Miller’s “life back home”) and life in battle (eg: the “Last Stand” motif used in the closing combat sequence). Again, this is a very well performed analysis that builds to an exemplary instance of the moral interrogation undertaken by this interpretive method—King’s final statement in this piece is:

203 Ibid., 291.
204 Alternatively, of course, this event from the film could be interpreted as an instance of the attempted “authenticity” of *Ryan*; after all, it is true that in a warzone soldiers are killed, while it may or may not be true that a letter from Lincoln is obvious grounds for risking the lives of a patrol. I thank Mick Broderick for posing this particular question.
The location of the domestic hearth at the absent core of a film like *Saving Private Ryan* might also be reassuring to any viewer facing a similar contradiction between the espousal of “civilized” humanitarian values in everyday life and the enjoyment of spectacles of bloody devastation.\(^{205}\)

It appears to me that as much as the “authenticity” of the film seems to be the driving detail throughout this piece, it is merely an interpretive device by which the critic can seize the film while they go to work performing a very standard form of analysis. It is reminiscent of Northrop Frye’s conception of the public critic, who acts like Hamlet with the grave-digger, “ignoring everything he throws out except an odd skull which he can pick up and moralise about.”\(^{206}\) King does point directly to an aspect of *Ryan*’s style that I will discuss in detail in Chapters 3 and 4: the *moving* hand-held camera, which films the action in relatively long takes. However, what is significant is that once King has used one paragraph to indicate that the film does this, he simply moves on to an analysis of the narrative and film apparatus, as if Spielberg’s long-take can be taken for granted. As I show later in the dissertation, the long-takes of *Ryan* are remarkably unique, functioning in very specific ways to create the combat sequences.

While the problem of “authenticity” appears throughout much of the criticism of *Ryan*, many critics also have another target in their sights: the semantic field of “memory” and the cultural concept of WW2 as “the good war.” This is evident in an article by Philippa Gates, titled: “‘Fighting the Good Fight:’ The Real and the

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\(^{205}\) Ibid., 300.

Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film.” Gates argues that the “New Hollywood” combat films, such as *Ryan*, *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace, 2002) and *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001), explore different themes to the Vietnam-based films of the 1970s and 1980s. Specifically, she argues that the films present soldiers “fighting the good fight” in that the films conclude with “clear-cut heroes and moral—if not military—victories.” Performing what Bordwell would class as a symptomatic interpretation, Gates argues that:

The wound that Vietnam inflicted on American society seems still not to have healed. Rather than exploring America’s failure in Vietnam like the war films of the 1980s—whether tales of the returning vet like *Coming Home* [Hal Ashby, 1978], or the revenge film like *Rambo* [*First Blood*, Ted Kotcheff, 1982], or the realist combat film like *Hamburger Hill* [John Irvin, 1987]—the new Hollywood war film chooses a fight it can win as its focus.

Throughout the article, Gates suggests that although the contemporary war film looks “realistic” (by which she appears to mean brutal, ugly, and personal) it merely uses these tactics to disguise a moralising stance. This moralizing stance is exemplified, for instance, in the scene in *Ryan* where Cpt. Miller’s small unit stays to help Ryan’s unit defend their post because they consider it to be “the decent thing.” While this differs in moral content from the 1980s Vietnam films, in which the heroic characters “symbolically re-fought […] the war in Vietnam and, in doing so, regenerated American conceptions of masculinity,”

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207 Gates, “Fighting the Good Fight.”
208 Ibid., 307.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid., 302.
Gates argues that characters like those in *Ryan* are merely offering a recast kind of moral benchmark.\(^{211}\) Gates closes with the point that modern war films present “myths of heroism and war as fictional—and spectacular—as those of the revenge film of the early 1980s like *Rambo*—with idealistic heroes who are just trying to fight what they see as ‘the good fight’.”\(^{212}\)

While this symptomatic interpretation is executed well from a rhetorical standpoint, it is also significant as an example of how critics can shoehorn almost any textual device into this kind of hermeneutics. For instance, Gates asserts that “Digital cinematography and CGI effects offer a graphic vision of the horrors of war”, but she cites very little evidence—and no textual description of her own—to justify this claim.\(^{213}\) There is no indication of which particular aspects of digital cinematography, as opposed to film cinematography, or what aspects of CG effects, as opposed to practical effects, make the current films any more brutal.\(^{214}\) Ultimately, her interpretation is based entirely on the films’ narratives and dialogue, ignoring the distinctly *cinematic* aspects of the text, such as cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing, and sound.\(^{215}\)

Marilyn Young’s “In the Combat Zone,” originally published in 2003, comments on a string of combat films released around about the turn of the 21st century, including *Ryan* and Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbour* (2001).\(^{216}\) Like Gates, she

\(^{211}\) Ibid. 
\(^{212}\) Ibid., 308. 
\(^{213}\) Ibid. 
\(^{214}\) Significantly, none of the films she mentions were shot using digital acquisition and her only example of visual effects is that one film, *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 2003) uses CG to visualize a bullet impact. Ibid., 299 – 300. 
\(^{215}\) The difference I am gesturing to here is that cinematic texts have a specific stylistic system of cinematography, sound, editing and *mise-en-scene*. 
attempts to position these films into a post-Vietnam War political context. Specifically, Young concludes that “Hollywood, and the government, would seem to have ‘kicked the Vietnam syndrome’.” With this statement, the author is referring to the tendency for these films to represent American soldiers who “sacrifice their lives only for one another” instead of for nothing, or for the greater good of mankind. Young comments that these films represent the WW2 soldiers as the “greatest” generation and then cites a Guardian newspaper reviewer, who says of Pearl Harbour:

It is as though we should feel nostalgic for times when dying for the nation was called for. We are supposed to believe that people at war were better human beings, and we should be more like them.

In the process of using conjecture to cement the “probable” motivations of the filmmakers, Young actually manages to articulate two possible types of moral interrogation of the self that become possible with the film. The first is an explicit reading of the film (“We should be more like them”), which the critic presents as the preferred meaning of the filmmakers. The second is the symptomatic reading—in this case, a resistant reading—in which the critic challenges the preferred meaning in a public display of self-problematization. I consider this to be an extreme instance of the self-problematizing practice in that the critic here

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218 Young, “In the Combat Zone,” 321.

actually opens up two subjectivities for the reader to occupy and the process of choosing either one over the other also involves the process of self-interrogation.

Young also makes a statement about Ryan which is interesting in terms of the generic conventions of the infantry combat film. Once again interpreting textual devices symptomatically, she argues that, “Ground combat proves much more satisfying” than air combat films. Interestingly, Jeanine Basinger has argued the opposite, asserting that airforce films are “inevitably more exciting and glorious” than infantry films. These opposing comments point to the elasticity of this kind of interpretive process. Consider the conclusion Young offers in terms of the semiotics of an infantry combat film:

The camera always faces out against the enemy, or inward at the grievous wounds enemy fire causes. The individual soldier fighting for his life becomes the victim of war; those he kills, since they are so evidently bent on his destruction, the perpetrators of violence. His innocence is ours. Spielberg’s achievement went beyond nostalgia. By enabling identification with the individual combat soldier, his World War II epic extended a pardon to soldiers everywhere.

This is a significant statement because there are interpretations of Ryan, including the one by Peter Ehrenhause which I address later, which regard neither the viewer nor the soldiers as innocent. Here again is the critic as Hamlet, picking up

220 Young, “In the Combat Zone,” 316. By this I do not mean that I think Young personally finds ground combat satisfying, but that she believes audiences find it satisfying and that she intends to interrogate the reasons behind this fascination.
221 Specifically, Basinger is writing about WW1 movies at that point and suggests that: “the air movies celebrate the individual, and concern themselves with the burdens of elite leadership. The infantry films are more involved with death, futility and the waste of youth in war.” See Basinger, The World War II Combat Film, 82.
222 Young, “In the Combat Zone,” 316.
the occasional skull to moralize about—in this case, the camera facing out against
the enemy at some point in the film.

John Bodnar also invokes the process of ethical interrogation from the very
opening sentence of his article, titled “Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory
in America.” He begins with: “The release in 1998 of Saving Private Ryan by
Hollywood director Steven Spielberg has revived again the debate over war and
remembering.” The author then goes on to argue that although the film
succeeds in “disclosing the real terror of combat,” its characterization
“remembers” (and therefore upholds) a very specific idea of the American
General Infantryman that “the common American soldier was fundamentally a
good man who loved his country and his family.” For Bodnar, the film uses the
characters of Cpt. Miller and his men in order to prove by the film’s conclusion
that “the nation and its warriors are moral and honourable.”

The author refers only to highly generalized textual cues as evidence of the film’s
representation of the “terror of combat.” Specifically, he indicates that the film is
able to “reproduce the frightening sound of German gunfire and the brutal reality
of exploding body parts.” Although he asserts that “modern technology” allows
filmmakers to depict these things, he does not indicate any aspects of film
technology that might do so, nor does he cite specific examples of the film’s
deployment of cinema technology in its depiction of combat. Bodnar’s

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223 John Bodnar, “Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America,” The American
224 Ibid., 805.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid., 806.
227 Ibid., 805.
228 Ibid.
interpretation of the film’s “moral message” hinges upon three specific textual cues. First, he describes the character of Miller as an ordinary American man, willing (but not enjoying) to fight out of a sense of duty.229 Second, he argues that the book-end scenes located at a present day military cemetery enable Ryan to “look back over his life and the graves of the heroic dead and express the hope that he lived a life that merited the sacrifice his comrades made for him.”230 Third, according to Bodnar there is a contradictory thematic structure to the film in that the Omaha Beach sequence “confronts the horror” of war, whereas “in later scenes, when GIs go off on an adventure to save one individual, it often lapses into play acting and a desire to fight the war over again.”231

Additionally, the author justifies his interpretation of these aspects of the film’s narrative by calling upon two contextual cues from the domain of history. The first of these is a contextual contrast he makes between the concept of “democracy” in the 1940s with the 2000s, suggesting that Spielberg instils the film’s moral with 2000s attitudes towards individualism and democracy.232 Bodnar’s second contextual cue is what he regards as a historical shift (in America) from a 1940s celebration of heroes to a modern cultural space which includes the expression of victims (e.g., those who suffered as a result of WW2).233

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229 Ibid., 805 – 806.  
230 Ibid., 806.  
231 Ibid., 811.  
232 Ibid., 807.  
233 Ibid., 807 – 808. Bodnar’s key example of this tendency, expressed as a symptomatic interpretation, is the difference between the “images of old public history” in the Washington Mall with the newer monuments to the Vietnam veterans.
From the perspective of Bordwell, Bodnar’s interpretation of *Ryan* fits the rhetorical task of “creating a novel and plausible interpretation” and, in this case, the author achieves it by establishing his knowledge of historical and cultural context. However, despite the amount of detail offered in regard to these contextual issues, there is virtually no identification of—let alone discussion of—film technique or style. This privileging of context over textual detail makes sense from a Hunterian point of view. By drawing upon some limited textual cues, and extended detail of contextual cues, Bodnar is able to use *Ryan* as an occasion for an ethical engagement with “brutality” in the American culture. For instance, the author states that: “Once war exposed how savage men could be, it did not take much of a cultural leap to see that everyone was threatened by warlike behavior wherever it was manifested.” That *Ryan* is being used as merely a stimulus for ethical reflection is perhaps apparent in the sheer quantity of attention Bodnar gives to everything *but* the film text. Instead, he draws upon aspects of the film’s narrative to raise issues for discussion that are actually about history or society.

However, it should also be acknowledged that Bodnar is writing from the field of history and therefore it also makes sense that his interest in *Ryan* is unlikely to involve specialized textual analysis of the film techniques. However, I believe it is significant that Bodnar’s analysis would find a welcome home in a film studies discussion of *Ryan*. Furthermore, there are striking similarities between Bodnar’s use of the film and the way that Peter Ehrenhaus—a Communications and Media scholar—analyzes the film.

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235 Ibid., 810.
236 From a Hunterian point of view, it also makes sense that Bodnar’s analysis would feature the same ethical practice of the self as the other *Ryan* critics here, because history departments are also part of the humanities. See Hunter, “Personality as a Vocation.”
The ethical imperative is indicated from the title of Ehrenhaus’ article, “Why We Fought: Holocaust Memory in Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan.” In this very well-articulated interpretation, Ehrenhaus begins by outlining some prior readings of Spielberg’s film, in the process bringing moral issues to the forefront of his discussion of Ryan. The author suggests that the film has been criticized as either attempting to resurrect notions of the “good war,” on the one hand, or because it does not justify the war in what some critics regard as morally accurate terms, on the other. For instance, he points to Howard Zinn, an historian and WW2 veteran, who criticizes Ryan on the grounds that its narrative functions to “rescue […] the good name of war.” On the second point, Ehrenhaus refers to critic Thomas Doherty who has argued that the violence in Ryan offers such a spectacle that it reveals a “guilty secret” that war is “exhilarating.” In these opening strokes, Ehrenhaus is foregrounding the “novelty” of his reading by mapping the terrain of previous interpretation and criticism, in order to offer his interpretation as new, more nuanced and subtle.

238 Ibid., 321.
241 For more on the importance of “novelty” in producing an interpretation, see Bordwell, Making Meaning, 41. Clearly, my own meta-critical account in this dissertation attempts a similar context-setting novelty. Bordwell argues that the rhetorical effect of these kinds of reviews of recent work is to suggest, “I [the critic] hereby put the top card on the pile; no work is more recent, hence more potentially significant, than what you’re reading now.” See Bordwell, Making Meaning, 213.
Ehrenhaus’ argument is that *Ryan* refers to the Holocaust. Since there are no explicit references to the Holocaust in the film—as opposed to a film like *The Big Red One* (Sam Fuller, 1981) which has its main characters liberate a death camp—Ehrenhaus must find textual cues onto which he can map this semantic field implicitly or symptomatically. Two characters from Cpt. Miller’s unit serve this function for his interpretation: Private Mellish and Corporal Upham. Mellish, as the only Jewish member of the unit, “is the vehicle through which viewers can engage the Holocaust and participate in construction of its memory as an *American* phenomenon.”  

The author acknowledges that the Holocaust is not present at the denotative or explicit levels of the film text:

> But embedded within the film’s narrative structure, scenic composition and character development we find the Holocaust. We may be directed toward the “quite private morality” of the film’s characters, but the Holocaust is the “grand moral landscape,” the ground upon which these characters search for Private Ryan.

Upham is one of these characters; he is also the cowardly American that Spielberg has reportedly empathized with, according to the film’s publicity material. For Ehrenhaus’ interpretation, Upham symbolizes modern American guilt in response to standing by while the Holocaust happened. To justify this interpretation, the author addresses a scene during the film’s climax in which Upham hides inside a

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243 Ibid., 324. Ehrenhaus is appropriating the quotations here from Bruce Edwards, “Saving Private Ryan Fails to Explain Why Men Willingly Went Off to War,” *Human Events* 54, no. 30 (August 7, 1998), 22. Interestingly, Ehrenhause does not comment on the two prominently displayed Star of David gravestones in the Normandy cemetery sequence that begins and closes Spielberg’s film.
245 Ehrenhause, “Why We Fought,” 328.
staircase while Mellish fights to his death in hand-to-hand combat with a German soldier nearby. From the standpoint of criticism as a performance of rhetorical practice, the interpretive manoeuvres conducted by Ehrenhaus, when he deals with his primary textual evidence, are exemplary.

Having already argued that characters are to be read as symbols (for instance, Mellish as the “thoroughly assimilated American Jew”), Ehrenhaus moves into a detailed account of the narrative events that take place in the scene. Briefly, amidst a large battle sequence, Upham is carrying ammunition into a bombed-out building, where he hides after seeing a number of German soldiers head up the stairs. Mellish is trapped inside the building and fires at the Germans until he runs out of ammunition and fights the one remaining German with his fists. Throughout the sequence, Mellish waits unmoving in the stairway and listens to the fight in the next room. Spielberg uses parallel cutting to edit between Mellish and Upham, until Mellish is finally stabbed fatally by the German.

As the German leaves and walks out of the building he stares at Upham briefly and continues walking. Ehrenhaus’ scene description is dotted with careful reference to the textual cues out of which he later builds his symptomatic interpretation of Upham as America’s failure to act upon the Holocaust. For instance:

Another parallel cut returns us to Upham, in an extreme low angle shot, focusing upon his gaiters and boots, and the steps that he cannot master; the screams from the room further debilitate Upham, as a medium close up of his face pans down to

\(^{246}\) Ibid., 326 – 328.

\(^{247}\) Ibid., 326.
fingers *fumbling the rifle’s safety release*, and then pans back to the terror in Upham’s face.\(^{248}\)

Finally, Ehrenhaus deploys his key textual cues, taken from the closing shots of the sequence:

> In this brief shot [as the German leaves the building], we can glimpse in passing the military designation on his collar; Mellish’s slayer is a member of the SS, the *Schutzstaffel*, the elite corps of the Nazi party that ran the extermination camps and coordinated the Final Solution. In the last shot of this four minute scene, the camera pans back up the stairs. It dollies in on Upham, who sinks behind the bars of the staircase railing, curls up into a fetal position and heaves with sobs.\(^{249}\)

Ehrenhaus states that these aspects of the *mise-en-scène* are “woven” into the film to represent America’s “guilt for not having acted, for not having acted sooner, for not having done enough” during the time of the Holocaust.\(^{250}\) While I consider this to be certainly an interesting and well-argued interpretation, I am most concerned with the ways in which it functions as a pure example of the practice of ethical introspection. The author’s detailed analysis of the sequence problematizes the film to recast it as something that has not been fully understood by previous viewers. His analysis then uses the film as a surface upon which to display a collective ethical posture, in the process making a public display of his own mastery of these ethical techniques of the self.

\(^{248}\) Ibid., 327. Emphasis mine.

\(^{249}\) Ibid., 328.

\(^{250}\) Ibid.
The important point here is not that I think Ehrenhaus’ interpretation is invalid—in fact, I think his skilful performance of the interpretive practice is remarkable. The problem with the proliferation of these kinds of interpretations is that, as I show below, the end result is a vast production of knowledge of the critics themselves and their social context but minimal knowledge of the actual films and their stylistic construction.

This tendency is pushed further in Marouf Hasian’s article, “Nostalgic Longings, Memories of the ‘Good War,’ and Cinematic Representations in *Saving Private Ryan*” which offers an overview of several interpretations of *Ryan.* The novelty of Hasian’s approach is to link it to the field of “critical memory studies” which allows the author to treat the film as a “historical remembrance.” Hasian regards *Ryan,* and other historical remembrances such as museums, as objects which allow users (viewers or visitors) to “bring together their prior preconceptions of the past (experienced directly or vicariously) and tie them to the symbolic meanings that are evoked by the presence of various rhetorical artifacts.”

In some ways this reads as an interesting echo (and expansion) of de Certeau’s comment that a “text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control.” However, although Hasian is arguing that these “sites of memory” are polysemic, the various meanings he posits are in fact iterations of the same

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252 Ibid., 340.
practice of ethical problematization. For instance, Hasian’s critical memory theory seems to predict variations in the interpretive process such as the following, which are clearly activities of self-questioning hermeneutics:

Generations who were either too young to remember the conflict, or who were not even alive in the 1940s, can now choose up sides and vicariously engage in surreal debates over the depictions and meanings of bygone events.

For many members of the generations who did not fight the war, the moral calculus that places a high value on the saving of a single life may seem out of place, the measuring stick employed by earlier generations. One gets the feeling that perhaps there are those viewers who left the theater wondering if the sacrifice of Miller—and hundreds of thousands like him—was really “worth it.”

Hasian also catalogues a number of non-academic viewers of the film, who have all used the film as an occasion for ethical self-questioning. He summarizes critical responses (academic and non-academic) to the film in the following terms:

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255 Ibid., 343. It is unclear whether or not Hasian thinks this is a positive or neutral activity. However, I think the use of the word “surreal” is interesting. As an example of these kinds of surreal debates, I have worked with secondary school English teachers who use John Hersey’s nonfiction narrative book *Hiroshima* (New York: Knopf, 1946/1985) as an occasion for 16 year old students in Western Australia to write essays on whether or not it was justifiable to use the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945. These sorts of activities have precedent in the work of educationalists like John Dixon who has written about the way his reading experience of a poem by Robert Frost has been negatively colored by the events of the Gulf War. Hunter critiques such interpretations—and Dixon’s in particular—as typical of an approach by the English profession which sees itself capable of discussing world issues despite having no qualifications in, say Middle Eastern history or international relations. See John Dixon, *A Schooling in “English”: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 197; and Ian Hunter, “After English: Toward a less critical literacy,” in *Constructing Critical Literacies: Teaching and Learning and Textual Practice*, eds. Sandy Muspratt, Allan Luke, and Peter Freebody (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997): 332 – 333.
Leftists can congratulate the creators of the film for recognizing the existence of Uphams [the “cowardly” soldier, as opposed to supposedly traditional overblown “heroics”], the graphic depiction of the carnage of the war, and the unanswered questions that haunt the grave scenes. Moderates can identify with Miller’s humanism, his willingness to acknowledge the need for occasional reforms in wartime bureaucracies, and his candid belief that this “PR” mission is temporarily keeping him from coming home. For conservatives, the movie shows that the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood that developed during World War II have not been forgotten and that Americans have worked through their “Vietnam Syndrome.” The nation may now be ready to once again recognize the eternal importance of character, virtue, honor, and sacrifice.257

By raising these possible interpretations, Hasian is, in fact, enabling criticism’s job by openly problematizing the text and inviting readers to take Ryan as a stimulus to “begin the endless task of dialectical self-shaping.”258 This self-shaping allows viewers to examine their own beliefs—for instance, their beliefs with respect to war, WW2, Vietnam, American brutality—and reflect on their own daily conduct. Consider one of two quotes Hasian extracts from a compilation book of posts to an America Online message board dedicated to the film:

[The viewer tried] to put myself in Dad’s boots. I really found myself there, and I think now I understand better why he had such a hard time talking about Omaha Beach.259

258 Hunter, “The Occasion of Criticism,” 164.
It is here that it becomes obvious how integral the process of ethical problematization is to the film viewing experience, not only for film critics but for casual audiences as well. I suspect that this is largely a result of the practice’s dominance in contemporary mass schooling, but is also an effect of public critics’ adopting the practice and therefore acting as public exemplars of the process. Film viewing—and engagement with discursive practices related to the occasions of viewing—have therefore become significant aspects of the governmental apparatus managing citizens’ self-conduct.

David Slocum has suggested, following Norbert Elias’ notion of the “civilizing process,” that the portrayals of violence in the combat films of the 1940s functioned to transform human violent “drives” into representations which permitted “imaginary identification.” While I think this argument, and the theoretical position behind it, can be usefully recruited to justify certain types of film representations of violence, there are important distinctions between an Eliasian approach to these films and the Foucauldian-Hunter position I am taking. For instance, Elias argues that the external “constraints” on an individual’s conduct are gradually internalized through maturity from childhood to adulthood—and the viewing of screen violence is arguably one means by which this psychological process would take place. Hunter, following Foucault, however emphasizes the social practices which act to produce certain behavior and thoughts rather than to constrain them. This is, of course, linked to Foucault’s...
critique of the “repression hypothesis” in terms of sexuality. Rather than there being a general social constraint or repression of sexuality starting in the seventeenth century, Foucault argues that there was a “veritable discursive explosion.”\textsuperscript{262} By this he means an “incitement to discourse” in which individuals were impelled to \textit{confess} the most minute sexual thoughts and desires instead of simply the physical act of sex itself.\textsuperscript{263}

This dissertation focuses attention on what can be regarded as confessional practices associated with viewing the film—whether they be the production of scholarly interpretations, newspaper criticism, casual conversations between viewers or blogging. These practices are confessional in that they converge on an act of self-examination. In explaining the historical origins of this particular technique of self-improvement, Foucault suggests that:

\begin{quote}
To declare aloud and intelligibly the truth about oneself – I mean, to confess – has in the Western world been considered for a long time either as a condition for redemption for one’s sins or as an essential item in the condemnation of the guilty.\textsuperscript{264}
\end{quote}

And in terms of how this actually emerges in Christian praxis:

\begin{quote}
Everyone, every Christian, has the duty to know who he is, what is happening in him. He has to know the faults he may have committed: he has to know the temptations to which he is exposed. And, moreover, everyone in Christianity is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{262} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, 19.

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 17 – 19. I suspect that it would be possible to chart a similar “incitement to discourse” in violence—i.e., as society claims greater desensitization toward violence in the media, we find the media continually talking about it.

\textsuperscript{264} Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self,” 201.
obliged to say these things to other people, to tell these things to other people, and hence, to bear witness against himself.\textsuperscript{265}

As Hunter has argued, other institutions have adopted the Christian practice in order to fulfil the task of governmentality.\textsuperscript{266} For Alois Hahn the “exposure of the self” to which Foucault refers occurs in other social practices and produces behaviors of self-constraint:

The more one knows oneself the better one can control oneself; the more others express their real selves, reveal their emotions, confess their true nature, the more they can be controlled.\textsuperscript{267}

We see the direct expression of this practice of managing one’s own conduct in a newspaper review of Ryan cited by Hasian. The reviewer notes that Ryan and The Thin Red Line are “subtly influencing the way I and most other Americans think about the crisis in the Balkans.”\textsuperscript{268} The reviewer continues with a series of questions:

Do these representations of the war in the 40’s make us more eager to fight in the late 90’s, or more reluctant? They do sober us to the physical reality of war, but they are nonetheless deeply nostalgic. They recall combat in Europe and the Pacific

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{266} Clearly this is also a task taken up by self-help books in recent decades. Arguably, talk-back radio fulfills a similar task. I thank Mick Broderick and Brian Moon, respectively, for these points.
as the proving ground of manhood, an ultimate test of character, our last national bonding experience.\textsuperscript{269}

It is apparent, therefore, that the practice of self-questioning has been mobilized in the majority of criticism—both popular and academic—written about WW2 combat films. Even when critics disagree on the particular questions, or the various ways of answering them, it seems that the interpretive apparatus functions primarily to use the films as occasions for ethical reflection.\textsuperscript{270}

However, I do not mean to suggest that these scholars and critics have not offered interesting, informative, and well thought-out interpretations. As I have indicated with respect to Ehrenhaus, these interpretations are often effective performances of the critical act, but it is significant that this exclusive focus on ethical questioning of the society that has produced and consumed these texts has resulted in limited knowledge of how combat films are constructed.\textsuperscript{271}

Significantly, the problem is not simply that film scholars do not have a solid understanding about the style of these films. The problem is that what critics generally think they know about the style of these films is demonstrably false and the terminology is used so loosely as to be of no descriptive value. Worse, these inaccurate understandings are sometimes used to justify the sorts of interpretations I have overviewed above. Two examples from the criticism will demonstrate the problem. First, consider the following statement from Ehrenhaus,\textsuperscript{269}

\begin{quotation}
Ibid.
\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{270} For instance, consider Thomas A. Bruscino, Jr., who offers praise for an aspect of Ryan’s structure which is often criticized: the framing device of Ryan’s older self at a cemetery. For Bruscino, this device is used to “reflect” the memory of the veterans: “In the process, by rewriting history, it has, for the most part, at last got it right.” See Thomas A. Bruscino, “Remaking Memory or Getting it Right? Saving Private Ryan and the World War II Generation,” http://www.michiganwarstudiesreview.com/2010/20100302.asp (accessed November 15, 2011).
\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{271} In this instance, I am confident that the statement applies to not just WW2 films, as my examples from criticism of \textit{Platoon} below indicate.
\end{quotation}
concerning the cinematography of a specific moment after Ryan’s opening battle has closed:

The moment is defined by a long shot [long take] with continuous fluid action. It begins with a 3/4 shot of two American soldiers squatting in a German trench rifling the remains of a dead German. One of the soldiers stands up and calls out to Mellish, “Hey, Fish. Look at this. A Hitler Youth knife.” He hands the knife up to Mellish, who is foregrounded in the shot.272

Ehrenhaus’ use of the phrase “defined” in this context is simply wrong, in that I take his comment to suggest that the style is unique to this particular moment of the film. As I show in Chapters 3 and 4, one of the distinct characteristics of Spielberg’s film is his use of long takes with fluidly moving action throughout the combat sequences. Ehrenhaus is attempting to imbue a single moment with stylistic significance because it is also a moment which has a textual detail—the Hitler Youth knife—that works with his interpretation of Holocaust memory.

Consider too, Gates’ description of the “realistic” style of Platoon:

The documentary feel of the combat sequences—marked by shaky, hand-held camerawork—offer audiences a sense of immediacy, claustrophobia, and realism—but, more importantly, the subjective point of view of the grunts.273

While I acknowledge that it is a convenient and useful critical shorthand to suggest that “shaky, hand-held” cinematography suggests a documentary

272 Ehrenhaus, “Why We Fought,” 325.
verisimilitude, in the case of *Platoon* it simply does not make sense. Stone’s combat sequences here are characterized by stable tripod-mounted filming with long-focus lenses. In fact, Stone often smoothly tracks the camera horizontally with men running through the bush.

These kinds of mistaken descriptions appear throughout the literature and criticism on WW2 combat films, as I show in Chapters 3 and 4. In the following section I offer an account of some theoretical approaches to film style which enable the scholar to examine the stylistic construction of WW2 combat films in a degree of detail which existing criticism has hitherto ignored.

### 2.3 An alternative approach: The poetics of film style

In this dissertation I will take a different approach to those critics above, in that I will examine the stylistic trends of the WW2 combat film genre in the 1940s and the post-*Ryan* 2000s. This entails asking different questions of the texts than the hermeneutic methods of implicit or symptomatic criticism. Rather than speculating on whether or not *Ryan*’s tribute to “the greatest generation” is a valid cultural gesture, for instance, my analysis will ask how the films use particular stylistic devices to tell their stories and create meaning. For instance, I am concerned with the specific ways in which the contemporary films employ the use of hand-held cinematography and what might be the normative trends in the sound design of battle sequences. My approach is derived largely from Bordwell’s practice of poetics, which he summarizes in an interview with Chuck Stephens from *Cinema Scope*:

274 I use the term “meaning” here primarily to describe what Bordwell would call denotative and explicit meanings.
One way to frame this more broadly is to say that most film scholars aren’t interested in film as a creative art. I know it sounds odd to say that, but I think it’s true. Most scholars are interested in film as an expression of cultural trends, interests, processes, etc. or of political moods, tendencies, etc. More specifically, those who are interested in film as an art seldom try to find out the craft traditions—the work processes, the technologies, etc.—that give artists the menus they work with. The approach I try to develop is commonplace in art history and the history of music, but not very developed in film studies.²⁷⁵

Hunter would describe the former kinds of scholarly inquiry indicated by Bordwell as operating within the aesthetico-ethical interpretive routine of governmentality. For a critic working within the framework of those approaches, of course, it is simply not relevant to consider the stylistic presentation of combat because the critic’s primary concern is with particular narrative events that can be used as stimulus for ethical introspection. As a result of this dominant critical approach there is much that film studies does not know about the poetics of WW2 screen combat. Significantly, there is much that remains unknown about how WW2 films, in Bordwell’s terms, are “made in order to elicit certain effects”.²⁷⁶

As I indicated in Chapter 1, there are significant precedents to this kind of study. Since I synthesize these with my own data and research throughout the extended discussion of combat film style in Chapters 3 and 4, here I will simply sketch out the broad framework of the theoretical material relevant to my later analyzes. The

²⁷⁶ Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema, 54.
key source for this study is Bordwell’s *Poetics of Cinema*, which develops in detail the kind of research project proposed in his earlier book, *Making Meaning*. For Bordwell, a study of cinema derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*—which focused on drama and literature—fits with more recent poetics such as Russian formalism and studies of architecture and music. The key value of such a study is significantly different to the hermeneutic traditions addressed earlier:

> The poetics of any artistic medium studies the finished work as the result of a process of construction—a process that includes a craft component (such as rules of thumb), the more general principles according to which the work is composed, and its functions, effects, and uses. Any inquiry into the fundamental principles by which artifacts in any representational medium are constructed, and the effects that flow from those principles, can fall within the domain of poetics.

In *Poetics of Cinema*, Bordwell addresses a diverse range of film devices. His intention in each case is to explain how these devices have particular effects on the viewer. The methods of analysis and explanation taken vary from cognitive psychology—which he uses to explain shot/reverse shot editing, as well as the incidents of blinking in actors’ performance—to meticulous image parsing of scenes from films made in the 1910s in order to discern the norms of staging. In other publications, Bordwell has used similar analytic methods to explain how

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specific aspects of films function. For instance, his earlier book *Narration in the Cinema* uses poetics to explain how audiences make sense of narrative events and *On the History of Film Style* proposes that many stylistic aspects of films are the result of practical solutions to problems faced by filmmakers.²⁷⁹

Bordwell’s research program is radically different to that taken by traditional film theory and criticism, a point argued in depth and illustrated by the contributors to *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*.²⁸⁰ One example from *Poetics of Cinema* will illustrate the significance of such an approach to my own discussion of WW2 combat film style. In a chapter titled “Aesthetics in Action: Kung-Fu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expression,” Bordwell conducts a stylistic analysis of how particular action sequences are assembled by Hong Kong filmmakers. The aim of such a poetics is to identify “some artistic strategies of Hong Kong cinema that largely go undiscussed.”²⁸¹ In order to clearly discern the artistic choices made in foot chases, fist fights and shoot outs, Bordwell contrasts the way these narrative events are handled between two different production contexts. Specifically, he compares the techniques used by a Hollywood film—such as the foot-chase in Richard Donner’s *Lethal Weapon* (1986)—with a Hong Kong film, for instance *Hearty Response* (Law Man, 1986). In this analysis, he finds that the Hollywood style is predicated on “continual activity” which offers only an “impression” of the “idea” of the action taking place, whereas the Hong Kong films “maximize the action’s legibility” through the staging, shooting and editing

²⁷⁹ See Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*; and Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*.
of the stunts.\textsuperscript{282} Having identified these tendencies, Bordwell labels them as stylistic norms and sets about identifying the strategies used by Hong Kong filmmakers to present action with this level of clarity.

This is a strategy of analysis of which I will make frequent use in this dissertation because it allows for clear identification of the specific techniques used in particular production traditions. Holding examples of films from two different production contexts against each other reveals obvious differences in technological devices, but more importantly it throws into sharp relief the different filmmaking techniques that constitute the norms of the respective eras. In my case I compare the Hollywood combat films made during the 1940s with those made in the 2000s, identifying some significant continuities of style as well as significant departures in the stylistic norms of each context.

Stephen Prince has also adopted poetics as one of the perspectives from which his work approaches screen violence, particularly in his \textit{Classical Film Violence: Designing and Regulating Brutality in Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1968}.\textsuperscript{283} Although not primarily concerned with combat films, his text does offer a poetics of violence and makes reference to a number of WW2 films which I also consider in my discussion. In true Aristotlian manner, Prince classifies five devices for the screen representation of violence and explicates each with examples that include war films. These devices are \textit{spatial displacement}, \textit{metonymic displacement}, \textit{indexical pointing}, \textit{substitutional emblematics}, and \textit{emotional bracketing}.\textsuperscript{284} As Prince’s discussion is thorough-going, it is not my intention to use his list of

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 396 – 402. In an earlier work, he refers to the Hollywood style as “intensified continuity.” See Bordwell, \textit{The Way Hollywood Tells It}.
\textsuperscript{283} Prince, \textit{Classical Film Violence}.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 207 – 208.
devices to simply work through the films in my study and identify further
instances of their use. Rather, my interest in Prince’s poetics is primarily the form
of analysis he takes which is similar to Bordwell’s. By that I mean his method is
to identify normative practices of particular cinematic depictions. Similarly to the
way Bordwell uses a problem/solution paradigm to account for the emergence of
particular stylistic norms, Prince considers how the historically specific pressures
of cinema censorship shape the stylistic solutions taken by filmmakers depicting
violence.\footnote{The problem/solution paradigm approaches stylistic developments as responses to practical
problems faced by the artist: for instance, the problem of how to direct the viewer’s attention to an
important character in a scene. For more on this type of analysis, see Bordwell, On the History of
Film Style: 149 – 157.} In Objective, Burma! for instance, spatial displacement is used to
conceal a US soldier’s mutilated corpse from viewers. The camera is set up
perpendicular to the door-frame through which the corpse lies and since only the
corpse’s legs are visible, the “explicit masking created by the doorframe
emphasizes the off-limits character of the atrocity—off-limits to pictorial
representation.”\footnote{Prince, Classical Film Violence, 211.}

Prince’s historical poetics enables close attention to the cinematic portrayal of
violence. He discovers that cinematic violence does not develop in a continuous
or progressive fashion and the analysis reveals some interesting insights into the
impact of censorship on films. For instance, Bataan uses the occasional squib-
explosive to show bullet hits on a soldier’s body, but this does not become
common until 1967 after films such as Arthur Penn’s Bonnie and Clyde (1967).\footnote{Ibid., 238.}
Prince’s research suggests that the combat films made during WW2 “often pushed
the limits of the acceptable” while the contemporaneous films of other genres did

\footnote{Ibid., 238.}
not.\textsuperscript{288} For instance, \textit{Pride of the Marines} (Delmer Daves, 1945) features a head-shot, as well as squib hits on actors, complete with careful framing and lighting to direct viewers’ attention to the impacts.\textsuperscript{289} Prince suggests that during WW2 the Production Code Administration was more “flexible” on battlefield violence “because it provided for greater realism and authenticity”, but would be less flexible in a gangster film where the same kind of violence “would be seen as exploitative and in bad taste.”\textsuperscript{290} Censorship was, of course, still a factor. \textit{Bataan}, which was passed by the PCA despite its lengthy fight scenes, subsequently had some scenes edited by regional and overseas censors.\textsuperscript{291}

Prince also uses poetics as one analytic tool, among others, in his earlier study of films by director Sam Peckinpah.\textsuperscript{292} Specifically, Prince examines Peckinpah’s montage style by describing his use of multi-camera (and variable speed) filming and tracing it back to Akira Kurosawa’s similar “exploration[s] of slow motion within scenes of violent death.”\textsuperscript{293} Additionally, Prince locates four major influences of Kurosawa on Peckinpah—the use of slow-motion for the shots of deaths, the use of multiple cameras with variable lens focal lengths, and the disjunctive use of diegetic sound (for instance, in \textit{Seven Samurai} (1954), Kurosawa amplifies an off-screen scream during a slow-motion shot).\textsuperscript{294} My discussion of WW2 combat film style extends the poetics of screen violence

\begin{footnotes}
\item[288] Ibid.
\item[289] Ibid, 155 – 158.
\item[290] Ibid, 163 – 164. Such decisions are of course informed by specific implicit meanings ascribed to the genre by the PCA. Prince speculates that the PCA may have considered that “a high threshold for battlefield violence might be acceptable if the real circumstances depicted by a film—such as the fighting on the Pacific islands—were unquestionably horrific.”
\item[291] Ibid, 162.
\item[293] Ibid., 52; 53. Significantly, Prince suggests that Peckinpah “always cited [Akira Kurosawa’s \textit{Rashomon} (1950)] as a favorite film.”
\item[294] Ibid., 54.
\end{footnotes}
begun by Prince. For instance, in Chapter 3 I identify the stylistic options for filming a gun-shot killing and in Chapter 4 I broaden that analysis within the very specific kind of filming used by Spielberg in *Ryan*.

My study also derives from the work of Barry Salt who has conducted statistical analysis of the style of a large number of films. In *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* and *Moving Into Pictures*, Salt establishes a taxonomic approach to film analysis which allows for a cataloguing of film style, with a particular focus on the historical development of cinema technology.\(^{295}\) His approach does seem to differ from the poetics of Bordwell and Prince above, whose approaches are chiefly concerned with how a film’s stylistic system is designed to elicit particular effects from the audience. Salt’s approach sometimes accounts for the effects of film style and sometimes his focus is much more narrow. In his studies, he is interested in the types of film lighting that result from the availability and standard uses of lighting technology in the 1910s, as well as the pace of editing in films in different periods. This later notion, which he labels the “average shot length” (ASL), has been adopted and adapted by Bordwell and other scholars of film style because of its usefulness in determining a key characteristic of film construction.\(^{296}\) In my later analysis of WW2 combat films I have found the identification of ASLs to be an effective entry point into describing the aesthetics of these films, as well as the statistical classification of shot sizes and camera movements.

\(^{295}\) Salt, *Film Style and Technology*; and Salt, *Moving Into Pictures*.

This thesis is also directly informed by the work of Kristin Thompson and the theoretical approach she calls neoformalism.\textsuperscript{297} Derived from the Russian Formalism of the early 1900s, Thompson’s neoformalism adapts the critical methodologies of that movement in order to critically analyze films as particular kinds of art objects. This approach assumes that art objects function primarily to defamiliarize perception. According to Viktor Shklovski the process of defamiliarization is important because:

> If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic…. Such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed […]

Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war…. And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. 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.\textsuperscript{298}

This does not mean that neoformalism is only interested in difficult, challenging films. On the contrary, Thompson’s \textit{Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis} shows how the process of defamiliarization can be found in

\textsuperscript{297} For the primary text, see Kristin Thompson, \textit{Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible.}

“ordinary” films, as well as that the neoformalist methods yield informative analyzes of these films. 299 As Katherine Thomson-Jones argues:

Film scholars have tended to spend most of their time figuring out what films mean. For the neoformalist, however, this is just part of a much broader task of figuring out how films work. Films work according to their formal structure, or how they are put together, but they also work differently in different contexts. 300

A neoformalist position is concerned with the formal devices deployed in a text, which includes the motivations behind their usage. As a technique of analysis which draws close attention to the stylistic composition of films, I will draw upon the terminology of neoformalism throughout the discussion of WW2 combat films.

While the products of analysis from the perspective of poetics and neoformalism are of clear value for historians of film style, they also hold significance for filmmakers. For instance, my own filmmaking practice has benefited from this on-going engagement with Bordwell’s poetics of depth staging, Prince’s poetics of screen violence, and Thompson’s perspective of defamiliarization. 301 My encounter with these theorists and these critical approaches has encouraged me to develop a film style I had only pursued simplistically in earlier short films. For example, where I staged in depth for purely pictorial reasons in Asphalt and Lace (2009, Fig. 2.1), I refined this compositional strategy in Double Cross (2011) for

299 Thompson, Breaking the Glass Armor.
301 For the poetics of depth staging, see Bordwell, On the History of Film Style; and David Bordwell, Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
greater pictorial interest and developed it into sequences, rather than one-off shots (Figs. 2.2 – 2.10). Additionally, where I had always presented screen killings directly in previous films, Prince’s account of filmmakers techniques of substitution led me to present the climactic shootout in *Double Cross* obliquely (Figs. 2.11 – 2.12). Finally, *Double Cross* also contains a sequence in which the sound design during a shootout has been influenced by the defamiliarizing effect created by the muted sound in certain sequences of *Ryan*.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has served three functions. First, it reviews the relevant literature that forms the corpus of existing academic criticism of WW2 combat films. I showed that there are some excellent and informative studies of the genre, for instance Jeanine Basinger’s text, as well as a number of critical accounts of the narratives and ideological positions of the films. Second, the chapter reviewed the theoretical arguments of David Bordwell and Ian Hunter, who offer differing (though complementary) viewpoints on the practice of interpretation. Bordwell, in his book *Making Meaning*, argues that critical practice involves the employment of heuristics to perform the rhetorical act of interpreting a film. Hunter argues that critics perform a particular routine—which is a learned set of rules—to make meaning of the text, and the dominant critical practice in the Humanities treats texts as an “occasion” to reflect on either the critic’s self, or the beliefs of the critic’s society. I used this framework to examine six interpretations of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*, which demonstrated the limitations of such a hermeneutics. While the interpretations are arguably interesting, they disregard important stylistic components of the films being analyzed. The third function of this chapter was to overview the alternative critical methodology, derived from
Bordwell’s poetics, Stephen Prince’s poetics, Barry Salt’s stylistic taxonomical approach, and Kristin Thompson’s neoformalism. I showed how these modes of analysis will enable me to concentrate on the stylistic system of films in the remainder of the dissertation—their cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, and sound.
3. Discussion: The Stylistic System of 1940s and 2000s WW2 Combat Films

OVERVIEW

This chapter comprises a discussion of style between two eras of filmmaking: the 1940s and the post-Saving Private Ryan 2000s. My approach here is to use Stolz der Nation—the film-within-the-film of Quentin Tarantino’s Inglourious Basterds (2009)—as an individual test case to point towards relevant aspects of WW2 combat film style: the cinematography, editing, mise-en-scène, and the specific techniques of representing death. Due to the novelty of this approach—specifically, the level of attention to the stylistic details of combat films—I sometimes address the same scenes a number of times. For instance, a gunshot killing may be examined in terms of its cinematography and then in a subsequent section, its editing or sound design may also be analyzed. The chapter begins by addressing the position of Stolz der Nation within the narrative of Basterd, drawing primarily upon Gerard Genette’s poetics of narrative to argue that the fake combat film is the key structural component of Tarantino’s multiple-protagonist network narrative. Following this narrative analysis, I describe in detail the stylistic system of Stolz der Nation and use this terminology and conceptual framework to examine the same aspects of style in a selection of combat films from two different eras of production.

First, I identify and discuss the norms of cinematography in the 1940s WW2 films and those made in the post-Ryan 2000s. I present some straightforward

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302 See Genette, Narrative Discourse.
differences such as the transition to wide-screen, color photography as well as the modern tendency towards hand-held filming. Significantly, I demonstrate that some of the key assumptions of critical accounts about the cinematography of post-

*Ryan* combat films are fundamentally flawed. Second, I use statistical counting methods to examine the editing styles of the 1940s WW2 films and those made in the 2000s, indicating that the combat sequences of these films have only marginally increased during the 50-60 years since WW2. In this analysis, *Ryan* emerges as a significant outlier with the longest shot durations of any of the WW2 films studied (from either era). Additionally, I identify the different strategies of editing gunshot killings on film, arguing that there are only three different methods for representing this type of violence. I discuss the different uses of these methods, noting the consistency between the 1940s films and those made during the 2000s.

Third, I discuss the techniques of sound design and mixing that are employed in the 1940s and 2000s combat films. I argue that the changes in sound recording/mixing technologies have catered for very specific types of creative approaches to audio design in these two eras. The 1940s films adopt what Michel Chion calls a “vococentric” approach to sound which emphasizes the human voice during the combat sequences. By contrast, the 2000s combat films primarily adopt a unique mixture of naturalistic and non-naturalistic strategies in their design. For instance, whereas modern technology allows filmmakers to obscure the human voice within layers of battlefield atmosphere, there are other non-naturalistic techniques which attempt to provide a subjective experience of

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combat. To explain these strategies I enlist the neoformalist concept of defamiliarization, as developed by Kristin Thompson, and argue that the contemporary films use subjective sound techniques which defamiliarize their representations of combat violence.\textsuperscript{304} Thus, the contemporary films can be read as using this aspect of their stylistic system as a response to criticisms of hyper-violent cinema.

Fourth, I account for the broad differences in the evolution of screen violence in WW2 combat films from the 1940s to the 2000s. Drawing upon Stephen Prince’s poetics of screen violence, I extend his research by focusing specifically on combat violence and examine the evolution of what he calls the “clutch-and-fall” aesthetic of the 1940s films.\textsuperscript{305} I argue that although there has been a move towards greater detail and brutality in the depictions of screen violence in the films over this period, this evolution has not been consistent. For instance, although a 1960s film such as \textit{The Dirty Dozen} may portray kinds of violent acts which would be unthinkable in the earlier Production Code era, the physical performance of the deaths in this film are still depicted using a 1940s aesthetic. Contemporary films, however, borrow from the classical style of violence but augment it in various ways to present the effects of gunshot killings on the body in much greater detail.

\textsuperscript{304} For more on defamiliarization, see Thompson, \textit{Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible}; and Thompson, \textit{Breaking the Glass Armor}.

\textsuperscript{305} See Prince, \textit{Classical Film Violence}.  

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3.1 *Inglourious Basterds* and *Stolz der Nation*: The Problem of a 1940s Film Nested Within a 2000s Film

At the climax of Quentin Tarantino’s World War II/espionage film, *Inglourious Basterds* [sic] (2009), the Basterds attack a cinema in occupied Paris in which the premiere screening of Joseph Goebbels’ new propaganda film is taking place. Present in the audience are Goebbels, Adolf Hitler and a number of other Nazi officials. The reason for the presence of such high-profile Nazi figures is that the screening is the premiere of a film titled *Stolz der Nation*.  

In the diegesis of *Basterds*, Goebbels has apparently produced what he regards as his finest film; the dramatized account of the exploits of a soldier, Fredrick Zoller. *Stolz der Nation* portrays Zoller as a kind of German version of Audie Murphy. Alone in a bell tower he shoots and kills 250 of the 300 US soldiers in the surrounding city, until they retreat after four days. During the climax of *Basterds*, Tarantino includes short segments of *Stolz der Nation* projected on a screen when the Basterds are in the theater itself. The extracts present in *Basterds*’ diegesis are essentially a string of sniper killings with minimal context. The first shot presented is from the middle of the shootings (with no explanation of how Zoller ended up alone in the tower) and the final shot ends well before the US troops retreat.

In this chapter I am concerned with some unique problems *Stolz der Nation* poses for scholarship regarding both the presentation of a “film-within-a-film,” as well

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306 The actual film of *Stolz der Nation* was directed by Eli Roth during the making of *Basterds* with the intention to be included in this sequence of *Basterds*. It is, of course, entirely fictional. The six minute piece is viewable in its entirety on the DVD release of *Inglourious Basterds*, Director. Quentin Tarantino, 2009).

307 There is, of course, considerable humour in the design of the film, in that Goebbels’ is unlikely to have even considered producing a film like *Stolz der Nation*. As Rainer Rother notes, Goebbels was opposed to the explicit encoding of Nazi ideology within propaganda films. Arguably, the close-up of Zoller carving a Swastika into the floorboard of his sniping tower is probably too “explicit” for Goebbels’ taste. See Rainer Rother, “What is a National Socialist Film?”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 4, no. 27, (2007): 456.
as the style of WW2 combat films. As this film-within-\textit{Basterds} is the centerpiece of the narrative proper, it is worth considering how the audience’s access to \textit{Stolz der Nation} is mediated by the diegesis. In what follows I perform two different, but related, sets of analysis. First, I examine the formal position of \textit{Stolz der Nation} as the “film within the film” of \textit{Basterds}, to explain how it is central to understanding the narrative structure of Tarantino’s film. Second, the film provides a unique means of pointing towards relevant terms to describe the technical devices used in the stylistic system of WW2 combat films made in the 1940s (\textit{Stolz der Nation}’s purported production context) as well as the 2000s (its actual production context). Therefore, in the majority of this chapter I consider the piece’s stylistic properties in relation to a selection of WW2 combat films from the 1940s and the 2000s. Both of these analyzes will demonstrate the usefulness of a critical approach to narrative and technical details of style that is grounded not in ethical scrutiny, but in terms of poetics and neoformalism.\footnote{However, such an approach is susceptible to some of the same criticisms as the interpretations of films I addressed in Chapter 2. After all, my overall process of rejecting those interpretive approaches and finding another in the works of Bordwell, Thompson, Salt, and Price is arguably one in which I have used existing critical texts as occasions to reflect on my own approach to film analysis. The difference is that I am aware of this and have flagged this up-front. My overall analysis is intended primarily to fill the gaps in knowledge that exist because of the dominance of the existing critical methodologies.}

The specific research questions for this chapter’s examination of \textit{Stolz der Nation} and its relationship (legitimate or otherwise) to 1940s and 2000s WW2 combat films are as follows:\footnote{These are a subset of the first overarching research question identified in Chapter 1.}

\begin{enumerate}
\item What is the function of \textit{Stolz der Nation} within the overall narrative framework of \textit{Inglourious Basterds}?
\end{enumerate}
2. In what ways is the stylistic system of *Stolz der Nation*—its cinematography, editing, *mise-en-scene*, and sound—characteristic, and not characteristic, of combat films made in Hollywood in the 1940s and the post-*Ryan* 2000s?

3. What are the norms of film style in the 1940s combat films and the post-*Ryan* 2000s?

### 3.1.1 The place of *Stolz der Nation* within the narrative of *Inglourious Basterds*

Before examining the visual construction of *Stolz der Nation*, it will prove useful to determine how this piece functions within the overall narrative of *Basterds*. Strictly speaking, it is a “film within a film” and the following brief account of how *Stolz der Nation* functions within *Basterds* is derived largely from Gerard Genette’s theory of narrative, the Formalists’ distinction between story and plot, and Bordwell’s account of cognition and comprehension. Additionally, I use the term “primary audience” here to refer to the audience watching Tarantino’s film, *Basterds* and to distinguish it from the characters who are presented as viewing *Stolz der Nation* within the diegetic world of *Basterds*.

To begin with, I will first reconstruct the story (or *fabula*) of *Basterds* by identifying its levels of narrative. For the purpose of this paper I will assume that the “first narrative”—in Genette’s terms—pertains to the Jewish character Shosanna. My reasoning here is that the overall structure of the film centers on

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The opening scene presents her surviving the execution of her family at the behest of Colonel Hans Landa and the secondary narratives (including everything that happens to the Basterds, Zoller’s romantic infatuation and the mission of Lieutenant Archie Hicox) all develop so that the characters close in on Shosanna’s theater for the film’s climax. The interwoven nature of these narrative parts allows these characters to function as multiple protagonists (and antagonists) who are sometimes following similar goals (Hicox and Lieutenant Aldo Raine), sometimes opposing each other (Landa and virtually everybody) and who cross paths at various points in the narrative.\footnote{For an extended description of multiple protagonist narratives, see Kristin Thompson, \textit{Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique} (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999): 47 – 49.} Most significant for the current analysis is Zoller’s narrative, which provides the means by which the multiple protagonists/antagonists converge. His first appearance in the plot occurs at the same time that the audience observes Shosanna “hiding out” in Paris and his attempt to pursue her romantically leads her to re-encounter Landa, who has been placed in charge of security at the premiere of \textit{Stolz der Nation}. Additionally, of course, Goebbels’ film production of Zoller’s battlefield exploits—which occurred sometime before the narrative point at which \textit{Basterds} opens—are the reason for his presence in Paris as well as the reason for the other major characters to congregate in Paris.

Zoller’s sniper experience took place in an earlier part of the narrative (it is “analeptic”, in Genette’s terms) and it is important to distinguish how Tarantino’s plot allows viewers to reconstruct the story information.\footnote{See Genette, \textit{Narrative Discourse}, 115 – 116.} Firstly, the events (and Goebbels’ film version of them) are referred to in conversation between Zoller and Shosanna when he is initially attempting to win her affections in a cafe.
Although he does not tell her about the film or his combat experience, she becomes curious as to why he receives so much attention from other German soldiers in the cafe. These events simultaneously encourage the audience to form the tacit question: What happened to Zoller before he arrived in Paris? This questioning is also encouraged through Tarantino’s refusal to offer English subtitles for the German interchanges between Zoller and the excited soldiers. The analeptic material (Zoller’s sniper experience) is actually narrated twice—with quite different effects each time. In this cafe scene with Shosanna, the analepsis occurs during Zoller’s reluctant recount—for her, and for Basterds primary audience—of the sniping incident in Italy:

Zoller: I was alone in a bell tower in a walled city. It was myself and a thousand rounds of ammo, in a bird’s nest, against three hundred enemy soldiers.

Shosanna: What’s a bird’s nest?

Zoller: A bird’s nest is what a sniper would call a bell tower. It’s a high structure, offering a three hundred and sixty degree view. Very advantageous for a marksman.

Shosanna: How many did you kill?

Zoller: Sixty eight. The first day. A hundred and fifty... the second day. Thirty-two the third day. On the fourth day they exited the city. Naturally, my war story received a lot of attention in Germany. That’s why they all recognise me. They call me the German Sergeant York.

Shosanna: Maybe they’ll make a film of your exploits.

Zoller: Well, that’s just what Joseph Goebbels thought. So he did and called it “Nation’s Pride [Stolz der Nation].” And they wanted me to play
myself. So I did. Joseph thinks this movie will be proven to be his masterpiece. And I will be the German Van Johnson.

Through this dialogue the characters reveal analeptic information to the primary audience as well as offering the additional proleptic information about the premiere of the film *Stolz der Nation.* Tarantino refuses to cut to a flashback of the incident in Italy, which results in a peculiar narrative effect. On the one hand the dialogue reveals the “past tense” information necessary for the primary audience to reconstruct the overall story of Zoller, while simultaneously the scene shows the “present tense” attitude of Zoller and Shosanna to the sniper incident. This allows the actor’s performance to show that although Zoller begins with false modesty, when he begins to talk of the outstanding body count he seems to drop the pretence and proudly say each number after a brief pause for effect. Shosanna, having originally asking him to leave her alone, appears to develop admiration and interest in Zoller as he talks of his sniper experience. However, at the end of his recount, she abruptly leaves. This invites the audience to speculate about whether her brief interest in him was legitimate or not. In some ways this makes Tarantino’s film unusual by contemporary filmmaking standards, which according to Bordwell would usually deal with this kind of scene by offering glimpses of the analeptic material.

The second time this analeptic material is repeated is during the climax of the film when it is presented as *Stolz der Nation* projected in Shosanna’s theater. As this is a visual representation of the analeptic material of Zoller’s combat experience

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313 Ibid., 40.
which other characters also “watch,” the *Basterds*’ primary audience is again presented with two moments of time simultaneously. While the screened film shows a “performance” by Zoller re-enacting the sniping events depicted in *Stolz der Nation*, overall Tarantino’s film *Basterds* also presents his response to the way they are depicted and to the cheering reactions of the German audience. Shot/reverse-shot editing is also used to show Goebbels smiling and nodding satisfactorily, Hitler laughing, and Zoller turning his eyes away from the screened combat. The combination of editing and performance thus allows the primary audience to infer that Hitler thoroughly approves of *Stolz der Nation*, Goebbels is proud of it, and Zoller is feeling shame and/or regret at his “real-life” actions being presented as heroic.\(^{315}\)

In narrative terms, this film-within-a-film actually functions as a kind of “complete analepsis,” in that it is the means by which all the “antecedents” of each part of the narrative are joined together.\(^{316}\) The projected images in Shosanna’s theater of Zoller “re-enacting” events from much earlier in the story connect everything in the narrative. Specifically, the Basterds are in the theater because they were meant to provide sabotage support for Lt. Hicox, who was planning to be there because the Nazi High Command would be present for the film premiere. At the same time, the Nazi High officials themselves are there because their presence is meant to instil pride in the German military. Col. Landa

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is present because he is in charge of security (necessitated by the presence of the High Command). And finally, Shosanna’s decision to use the premiere as a chance to burn down the theater and kill the Nazis present is motivated by her desire to get revenge on Col. Landa.

As such, *Stolz der Nation* serves what Genette calls the “explanatory function” of a second narrative. As a means of tying together the multiple protagonist narrative threads of *Basterds*, the analeptic material presented in *Stolz der Nation* has a relationship of “direct causality” to the overall narrative. From this brief narrative analysis we can see that the context of *Stolz der Nation* is one of, if not the, key elements of Tarantino’s film.

**3.1.2 The redundancy of a film-within-the-film**

In this section I am interested in the technical means by which Tarantino mediates the primary audience’s access to *Stolz der Nation*. For instance, how are specific methods of editing and *mise-en-scene* used to actually present the film-within-the-film, since this is not achieved by simply cutting to the film and letting it play out for its entirety? I will be drawing upon Bordwell’s work on redundancy cues, Noel Carroll’s theory of erotetic narration and cognivist accounts of the deictic gaze in point-of-view editing.  

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318 I am using redundancy in the sense found in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*: 56 – 57. See also Susan R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 149 – 197. See the account of micro-questioning and answering in Carroll, *Mystifying Movies*: 170 – 181. Although Carroll’s account of the intelligibility of erotetic narration would consider micro-questions to be something like, “Will von Hammersmark get out of this interrogation with Landa?” I believe the concept can be usefully extended to explain the way editing works in permitting audience access to a film-within-the-film, for instance the shot of Shosanna “looking” to the right of screen encourages the question “What is she looking at?” which is immediately answered by a shot of the projected screen. Carroll’s account is compelling theoretically, but it also seems filmmakers themselves are fully aware of this process. One textbook, written by a Hollywood visual effects artist but aimed at the DV
The sequence begins with Shosanna walking into the theater lobby. Once inside, she stands at the top of the lobby balcony and looks down at the Nazi guests below. In Genette’s terms, she is the initial focalizer for this sequence, although as a multiple-protagonist network narrative, of course, Basterds uses variable focalization throughout. After a series of shot/reverse-shots which imply she is looking at the crowd, Shosanna begins to walk down the stairs. A continuous take has the camera track with her movement down the stairs and then pull back slightly as she is met by Zoller and Goebbels, who introduce her to the people with whom they are already in conversation. At this point a waitress walks past the camera, which motivates the camera to both pan and track rightward with her movement and crane upwards to rest on Landa who is waiting at the top of the stairs and looking down at the crowd below. The take continues as Landa’s gaze finally rests on someone in the ground and he walks down the stairs. The camera again follows him by craning downwards and tracking across to reveal Lt. Raine, Pfc. Ulmer and Sgt. Donowitz (the Basterds in disguise as Italian cameramen so as to gain entry to the premiere). They are in conversation with Bridget von Hammersmark, who is their double-agent contact. At this point Tarantino finally cuts to a reverse of Hammersmark and the Basterds as Landa approaches them. From the opening scenes, the film has been moving towards the convergence of these characters at Shosanna’s theater, and thus this connection between the characters is rendered by the camera movement and staging of a single take.


Genette, Narrative Discourse, 189 – 190. For multiple protagonist network narratives, see Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It: 99 – 101. For Bordwell, these types of narratives sometimes use a “converging-fates strategy [to] make the plot cohere,” which is exactly what occurs in Shosanna’s theater.
The dialogue that takes place at this point between Landa and von Hammersmark is the means by which the film motivates the movement of specific characters into the theater auditorium in which Stolz der Nation will screen. Spatially, this is important later in the sequence when multiple narrative events take place simultaneously. This spatial relationship is established quite elegantly through a simple narrative requirement. Landa’s objective is to get von Hammersmark alone in order to interrogate her. In order to do this he must get rid of the Basterds without arousing their attention to this subterfuge. Landa already suspects that von Hammersmark is a traitor and has brought the Basterds into the theater. Prior to the theater sequence, Landa found evidence of a woman’s shoe and a napkin with von Hammersmark’s autograph on it, at the location of a shootout between the Basterds and a Gestapo officer. Both of these items obviously suggest her involvement in the Basterds’ sabotage schemes. In order to get her alone—so that he can test the “Cinderella slipper” on her foot—Landa tells her “Italian cameramen” where their seats are and hints that they should go there.  

While Landa continues his playful banter with von Hammersmark, Tarantino’s camera follows Donowitz and Ulmer as they walk toward the auditorium entrance and then cranes the camera up as Shosanna walks into the projection booth. The redundancy of showing the characters doing exactly what Landa had said they were going to do—walk into the auditorium—functions to establish the spatial location of key parts for the multiple-character action sequence which follows.

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320 Of course, there is an element of tongue-in-cheek humour in the way the Basterds play their Italian cover roles. The most obvious is Lt. Rain’s strong Tennessean accent as he pronounces “Barn-schorrr-no.” There is also humour inherent in the dramatic irony of the primary audience’s awareness that Landa knows the Italian cameramen are actually the Basterds. From such a perspective, it is enjoyable to watch Christopher Waltz’s performance as Landa, playing with the Basterds who do not know if he recognizes them or not.
After establishing where the projection booth, the auditorium entrance, and the lobby are in relation to each other, the film then cuts to Donowitz and Ulmer attempting to find their seats. As they walk and look around the auditorium, shot/reverse-shot editing establishes firstly the balcony where Goebbels is waiting for the film to start and secondly, the balcony where Martin Bormann (indicated by a non-diegetic arrow and title superimposed on the screen) is taking a seat. These shots delineate the geography of the theater—later when Donowitz and Ulmer attack Hitler and Goebbels, the primary audience is able to understand how the characters know where to find the Nazis. The shots also function to provide narrative redundancy which indicates how significant this event is, by showing the members of the Nazi High Command who are present.

The Basterds have a similar objective to Shosanna: they intend to kill the Nazi officials. However, Shosanna and the Basterds are completely unaware of each other’s plans. The Basterds aim to blow up the theater with dynamite that is strapped to their legs, while Shosanna intends to burn the theater down by setting fire to her stockpile of nitrate films. Tarantino reveals the Basterds’ plans by craning the camera down to Donowitz and Ulmer’s legs and superimposing a circular insert shot which reveals the dynamite under their legs. Shosanna’s scheme is more complex. She and her projectionist Marcel have filmed a close up of her speaking directly into the camera (and therefore the Nazi audience), in which she says the following:

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321 This is non-diegetic of course, just like the arrow indicating Bormann’s presence earlier in the scene.
Shosanna: I have a message for Germany. That you are all going to die. And I want you to look deep into the face of the Jew who’s going to do it!

Marcel, burn it down.

They have spliced this footage into Stolz der Nation so that it appears during a change-of-reels after Zoller’s sniper scene. Once this screens, they plan to set fire to the theater. Since there is so much taking place at this point of the narrative, Tarantino uses tactics of redundancy to reinforce this significant sequence of events so that contemporary viewers—who are unlikely to have much knowledge of how films are projected—can comprehend how Shosanna’s plan will unfold. The dialogue between Shosanna and Marcel quickly reminds the primary audience of their plans—which have been explained in a previous scene, which included a short metadiegetic interruption of voice-over and stock-footage to explicitly describe the flammability of nitrate film-stock. Later in the climax, Marcel and Shosanna re-articulate their plans step-by-step, indicating the projector and its reels of film. The reels are labeled with numbers to aid the spectator’s comprehension here and reel number four—containing their intervention into the Stolz der Nation film—is prominent in the shot in which it is mentioned. The reel itself is highlighted with hard lighting from above as well as being indicated with a large red X which the other film reels do not. Arguably, this might be something that Marcel would do in order to indicate the significant reel so that their plan runs flawlessly. However, it certainly functions to telegraph to the primary audience that this particular reel is important.

Tarantino avoids showing the first three reels of Stolz der Nation by simply having an usher announce that the screening is about to start and then cutting
away from the theater entirely to present two lengthy scenes involving Landa.\footnote{Although the theatrical release of \textit{Basterds} elides the opening of \textit{Stolz der Nation} and only returns during the sniper scene, the DVD release of the film contains an “extended/alternate scene” in which the characters watch the opening of \textit{Stolz der Nation}. The alternate scene appears to have gone through much of the post-production process of the actual film; its sound design is of a similar quality as the theatrical film itself and there are none of the usual markers of “deleted scenes” that have been removed well before the post-production stage such as poor telecine quality, on-location sound, or time-code displays. The absence of these markers suggests that Tarantino may have only decided to remove this scene very late in the post-production process.} Landa first takes von Hammersmark into an office to interrogate and kill her and then has Raine and Utivich dragged to a private bar nearby to negotiate his own conditional surrender to the Americans. After these sequences, Tarantino cuts to a close-up of Shosanna in the projection booth. From the off-screen sound of gunfire, it is clear that the combat sequence of \textit{Stolz der Nation} is playing. Significantly, this is the first time \textit{Basterds’} primary audience has been presented with anything of \textit{Stolz der Nation}. The narrative of what is shown of \textit{Stolz der Nation} itself is extraordinarily simple. It is almost exactly the sequence of events that Zoller retold Shosanna in the cafe and this is useful for a number of reasons. From a practical standpoint it contains and limits the kind of footage that needed to be shot as part of the film-within-the-film.\footnote{Roth and his brother apparently directed the shots needed for \textit{Stolz der Nation} in three days of filming. See Michelle Kung, “\textit{Inglourious Basterds}, Eli Roth on Quentin Tarantino, Awards Season and Shooting DVD Extras,” http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2009/12/15/inglourious-basterds-eli-roth-on-quentin-tarantino-awards-season-and-shooting-dvd-extras/tab/article/ (accessed 1 March, 2010).} It also allows for (and works within) the constraints of narrative redundancy that facilitate comprehension of the multiple-character climax of \textit{Inglourious Basterds} because each time Tarantino cuts to a shot of the projected film, it is easy for viewers to place the projected black and white images within the already tightly outlined narrative of \textit{Stolz der Nation}.

This simple narrative caters for a key creative strategy which seems to inform the access the primary audience is granted to moments from the projected film of...
Stolz der Nation. Chiefly, there are such brief glimpses of the screen that in order to infer what is being shown the spectator must rely on the reactions of the characters who are watching, as well as the soundtrack. As a result of this there is an impression of the violence of Stolz der Nation, even though the images actually shown from it might ordinarily be described as brutal killings. The means by which this is achieved, as well as some possible effects of such a strategy, will become evident by considering the first time images from the projected film are presented in the Basterds sequence.

This sequence has 10 shots and occupies just over 30 seconds of screen-time. It begins with Shosanna in profile close-up, looking off-screen to the right, and with the cinema projector in the background (Fig. 3.1). This shot is accompanied by the sound of the projector as well as the theater speakers playing the combat sequence of Stolz der Nation. Tarantino repeats this profile framing a number of times throughout the sequence when cutting to different characters. After the three second shot of Shosanna, the next is a two second mid-shot of Marcel, also looking to frame-right as he looks past the projector. He moves his head to adjust his angle of view slightly. These two glancing shots are followed by a two second wide-shot from in front of the cinema audience with the light from the projector in the background. Throughout these three shots the soundtrack has featured repeated gunfire, spent shells being ejected from a rifle and the sounds of yelling. But it is not until the fourth shot that the projected image of Stolz der Nation is presented (Fig. 3.2). Even then, it is highly mediated through the Basterds diegesis in that the primary audience watches over the heads of characters in Shosanna’s theater.
This fourth shot occupies seven seconds of screen time and is a wide-shot from eye-level in the theater audience, showing rows of heads that all stare toward the projection of *Stolz der Nation*. Within this one wide shot, the projected image of *Stolz der Nation* in fact contains five individual shots.\(^{324}\) The first is a four second mid-shot of Zoller looking down from the bell-tower and saying something in German (not subtitled) and then firing his rifle. Immediately after the rifle-shot, *Stolz der Nation* cuts to a half-second shot of two US troops running (Fig. 3.3). One of the US soldiers falls over as a yell is heard on the soundtrack and, significantly, the camera work is shaky, hand-held and moving quickly in “run-and-gun” style. This and the next moment of *Stolz der Nation* exhibit some of the prime characteristics of what Bordwell has called “intensified continuity.”\(^{325}\)

Following this half second run-and-gun shot, the projected film cuts to an over-the-shoulder of Zoller as he fires at the US troops in the street below him (Fig. 3.4). This over-the-shoulder angle uses jump-cuts which edit out the process of ejecting the spent shell from the rifle. The first “shot” in this sequence take one half of a second, showing Zoller fire once and in the background a soldier falls to the ground. The victim is tiny, because of the perspective and height of the camera. The film jump-cuts to another half second shot, of the same position and framing, as Zoller fires again and another soldier falls to the ground in the background. The third shot is very short (only several frames) as Zoller fires once more but Tarantino cuts away from the projected image before the victim in the background visibly reacts to the gunshot.

\(^{324}\) Although, as I show below, technically the final three shots are jump-cuts of what looks like the same “shot,” over the shoulder of Zoller.

\(^{325}\) “Intensified continuity” refers to the stylistic trend of post-1960s filmmaking to favour rapid cutting and close framings, among other techniques. Its presence in the purportedly 1940s production of *Stolz der Nation* is obviously significant. See Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*: 121 – 138.
The next shot runs two seconds and presents Goebbels and Hitler in profile mid-shot, sitting together in one of the theater balconies, looking to frame-right. Hitler’s jaw is tense and his gaze fixed firmly on what I presume to be the theater screen (Fig. 3.4). Goebbels takes a deep breath as his gaze is also focused on (presumably) the theater screen; I infer from this that Goebbels is concerned about Hitler’s response to the film and Hitler is paying careful attention to the portrayal of Zoller on-screen. Tarantino then returns to the original framing of Shosanna for almost three seconds as she stares to frame-right (presumably through the projection booth viewing window). This is followed by a classic shot/reverse-shot pattern of three shots which suggest Zoller’s reaction to the projected events. The first runs one and a half seconds and is another profile close-up as Zoller looks to frame-right (Fig. 3.6). He flinches slightly—in time with the sound of gunfire and death-yells on the soundtrack—and wipes his mouth with his hand. The reverse angle of this presents a three second wide-shot of the projected screen as Stolz der Nation shows three individual shots which are significant because they are a deviation from the shaky, hand-held style of the previous projected sequence. First, a dollied tracking shot with three US soldiers running as one of them is hit and violently falls over (approximately one and half seconds) (Fig. 3.7). Second, a smooth dolly mid-shot sliding past Zoller’s bell-tower as he takes aim and fires (one second). And third, a low-angle wide-shot as a US soldier falls down some stairs (just over a second). Tarantino then returns to three seconds of the profile close-up of Zoller in the audience as he shakes his head more forcefully than earlier and wipes his brow. I infer from this shot/reverse-shot setup that Zoller is feeling regret for his battlefield actions that have been filmed for the purpose of
**Stolz der Nation.** This inference is confirmed in dialogue, of course, in a later scene when he leaves the cinema and visits Shosanna in the projection booth.\(^{326}\)

The final shot of this sequence is a three and a half second tracking mid-shot of Donowitz as he leaves the theater. The camera dollies smoothly backwards as he walks toward it and in the background on the projected screen *Stolz der Nation* presents two US soldiers in mid-shot discussing whether or not to destroy the bell-tower that Zoller is using as a sniping platform. This moment completes the 30 second sequence, which features 14 seconds of *Stolz der Nation* footage and 16 seconds of audience “viewing” shots.

Although initially we are presented with sustained shots of the projected image of *Stolz der Nation*, this strategy modifies throughout the rest of the sequence. Occasionally Tarantino provides shots of the projected screen in full, for example repeating the profile framing and shot/reverse-shot tactic as Zoller views his “screen self” kill six soldiers before he decides to leave the theater. Generally, however, the remainder of the sequence uses strategies of sound and *mise-en-scene* to severely limit the primary audience’s access to the image in interesting ways. For instance, during the brief part of the sequence in which Donowitz leaves the theater and comes back to get Ulmer so they can attack Hitler face-to-face, there are *no* shots of the projected image at all, but there is the sound of constant gunfire over the top of various shots of Ulmer getting up, crossing the row of viewers, and leaving with Donowitz. Because all of the visuals shown

\(^{326}\) Arguably, Zoller is simply using this as a pretext to seduce Shosanna. However, his facial reactions in the cinema suggest that there is at least some genuine regret, or brief “survivors’ guilt” involved in his response to the images. For more on survivors’ guilt, see Roy E. Opp, and Anne Y. Samson, “Taxonomy of Guilt For Combat Veterans,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 20, no. 3 (Jun 1989): 159 – 165.
prior to this have Zoller shooting and killing, the overall impression created by the sound here is that Zoller is killing continuously. A further instance of the use of sound to provide an impression of the combat violence occurs in the projection booth when Marcel tells Shosanna they must begin their plan. The camera is in the projection booth in a sustained two-shot (33 seconds) while the sound of Stolz der Nation’s gunfire continues in the background. The mise-en-scène also offers similar impressionistic views of the projected image. For example, during a view of the theater from Marcel’s point of view as he opens the door and locks it, there is a glimpse of the screen. There are also oblique framings from behind the projection screen when Marcel walks behind it to set fire to the pile of nitrate film. In the first of these, for instance, the screen behind Marcel is just beyond the field of focus of the lens and, as the camera moves to reveal the scale of the film pile, only the bottom of the projected screen is visible in the shot. Despite this occlusion, it is still possible to discern that the projected screen is showing soldiers shot, as well as images of Zoller repeatedly aiming his rifle and firing.

The effect of these strategies is twofold. Firstly, by merely suggesting the on-screen violence it creates the impression that there is more of it. Something similar occurs in the closing battle of Peckinpah’s Cross of Iron (1978)—although it feels as though there is a lot of on-screen death, Peckinpah, in fact, shows less than a handful of mid-shots of soldiers being hit and instead relies upon practical smoke effects, repeated images of guns firing, explosions, and messy camera framing to create this impression. The second effect of this strategy in Basterds is that the continual sound of gunfire and obscure framings of the screen, may also

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327 For another example of how oblique film techniques can create an “impression” of an event, see Bordwell’s account of a foot-chase scene in Lethal Weapon (Richard Donner, 1987) which I referred to in Chapter 2. See also Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema: 396 – 399.

328 I illustrate the editing of Peckinpah’s chaotic montage in this sequence in a later section.
act in a masochistic fashion to tease the audience with the violence that we do not see. I am reminded here of Bordwell’s brief remark that *Stolz der Nation* “provides the sort of film that *Basterds* refuses to be: We never see our squad in the sort of *Merrill’s Marauders* [Sam Fuller, 1962] skirmishes we probably expected going in.”329 Not only does the typical combat in *Basterds* itself “refuse” to be the sort of carnage we find in *Stolz der Nation*, *Basterds* refuses to show us the carnage of *Stolz der Nation* for any significant length of screen time. In this regard, the screen on which *Stolz der Nation* is projected could be read as the “dream screen” *par excellence* of masochistic film theory: in this case it “offers only partial gratification” to the level of violence viewers may expect in a Quentin Tarantino film (or a WW2 film, for that matter).330 It is of course significant that once the “screening” of *Stolz der Nation* is interrupted by Shosannah’s act of setting fire to the theater, the *Basterds* do, in fact, engage in their most prolonged moment of on-screen violence. As Ulmer and Donowitz take position at Hitler’s balcony and fire their machine pistols continuously as the burning Nazis below them in the theater, Tarantino makes a double-barrelled intertextual reference. Firstly, the physical position of Ulmer and Donowitz above their targets parallels

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330 See Gaylyn Studlar, “Masochism and The Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema,” in Bill Nichols, ed. *Movies and Methods: An Anthology Volume II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 602 – 621; and Jean-Louis Baudry, “The Apparatus,” trans. Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 2, (Winter, 1974-75): 39-47. This masochistic interpretation works well to illustrate where my overall theoretical orientation (outlined in the beginning of this paper) departs from that of Bordwell and Carroll who would suggest, I believe, that theories of masochism do not help our understanding of cinema. From my Hunterian philosophical framework, it is certainly unacceptable to claim a masochistic nature of cinema *in toto*. However, a critic might invoke it in a situation like the projected screen *Stolz der Nation* as a means of producing an interesting reading as they perform the role of the “critical intellectual.” The problem occurs when critics forget that they are *performing* this activity and protract its significance across such a broad field that mundane, localized issues of cinematic techniques are forgotten (as, for instance, in the interpretations of *Saving Private Ryan* indicated earlier in this piece). I thank Brian Moon for this point about post-Hunter interpretive activity.
that of Zoller in *Stolz der Nation*. The second intertextual reference of this scene is that the setup of a US squad brutally massacring Nazi men and women also parallels the climax of Aldrich’s *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), in which the men pour gasoline and drop hand-grenades down the ventilation shafts of a bomb shelter in which the Nazis (including women) are hiding. Since it seems that the “original” *Inglorious Bastards* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1978) is most probably an exploitation knockoff of *The Dirty Dozen*, Tarantino’s staging of this scene neatly closes the intertextual circle here.

3.2 The Poetics of Screen Combat: The Style of *Stolz der Nation*

One of the interesting features of *Stolz der Nation* is that the characters in the diegesis of *Basterds* respond to its stylistic system as if the film looks and sounds the way that combat films made in the 1940s would. For instance, although some of the extracts projected in Shosanna’s theater exhibit hand-held camerawork that is not typical of Hollywood combat films of the 1940s, or the German films of the same period, none of the characters watching the film seem to notice this. The hand-held camera, as I show below, has come to be almost *de rigueur* in contemporary combat sequences, but is not at all a normative feature of the 1940s combat films. This is also true of the display of bullet impacts on victims’ bodies, as well as the crisp, high-fidelity digital sounds of the gunfire. However, there are stylistic aspects of *Stolz der Nation* which suit the purported time-period. The most obvious is the black-and-white film stock, but also the prevalence of shot/reverse-shot editing to depict the gunshot killings. As a result of these

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stylistic continuities and mismatches, the piece can act as a kind of “known quantity” against which I intend to test a sample of films actually made in the 1940s to point towards the salient aspects of cinema style involved in combat sequences. At the same time, given the fact that Stolz der Nation was actually made after Ryan, this testing process will also point towards an account of some of the stylistic norms of the WW2 combat films made in the post-Ryan 2000s. It seems apparent that Ryan has been incredibly influential on this genre: not only did the number of produced combat films increase significantly after its release, but the film is often invoked as a reference in popular reviews of other war films.

3.2.1 Cinematography

The two most noticeable characteristics of Stolz der Nation’s cinematography to a contemporary audience are likely to be its use of the black and white image (which may or may not be a digital process) and the presence of a hand-held camera for some of the shots. Of these two attributes, the use of black and white is most probably an attempt to match viewer expectations that a film shot in the 1940s would be filmed on monochromatic stock. However, the hand-held camera

332 My study is focused primarily on Hollywood combat films for two reasons. Firstly, the closest instance of a ‘combat’ film I could find from Nazi Germany is Veit Harlan’s historical film Kolberg (1945). Certainly this is Goebbels’ major propaganda effort. However, its combat scenes do not significantly resemble the staging of Zoller’s shoot-out, nor does it style resemble Stolz der Nation in any way that would make comparison meaningful. (Kolberg is even shot using Agfacolor stock.) Secondly, Stolz der Nation is of course a Hollywood film. Outside of the two eras under study here (the 1940s and the 2000s) there are combat films from Germany such as Stalingrad (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993) and films from Australia such as Kokoda (Alister Grierson, 2006). These are prime areas for future research to examine.

is so out of place that it is surprising internet critics have not commented on this. For instance, while there are internet fan pages dedicated to identifying and cataloguing the “movie references” throughout Basterds, Stolz der Nation has apparently gone uncriticized and been accepted as a legitimate imitation of Nazi propaganda films.\(^\text{334}\) It is as if the film belongs within the Basterds’ mise-en-scène just as the Swastika flags or the single oak leaf on Landa’s collar which signifies his rank of Colonel (Standartenführer).

The film is projected in Shosannah’s theater in an aspect ratio of roughly 1.18:1 which, although not standard for Hollywood films of the 1940s, according to Ranjit Sandhu was certainly still being used by some German films during the time period.\(^\text{335}\) Shot compositions are variable, with no apparent guiding rules to dictate which setups are hand-held or tripod-mounted. For instance, while there may be carefully composed central framings of Zoller in mid-shot, the film also places a slightly unstable camera over-the-shoulder of Zoller taking aim and firing at the men on the streets below his tower.\(^\text{336}\) Similarly there are stable tripod-mounted mid-shots of US soldiers taking a bullet to the chest, while other deaths are sometimes filmed with a jerky, unstable camera movement that barely manage to catch the men within the lens’ field of view. Occasionally the camera also dollies smoothly past a string of US soldiers as they’re hit, and even dollies


\(^\text{336}\) Incidentally, the occasional hand-held shot is one of the aspects of the style of Stolz der Nation which allow it to contrast with the overall style of Basterds: Bordwell has commented on Tarantino’s “classical approach” to locking-off a single camera or moving it on a dolly or crane. See Bordwell, “(50) Days of Summer (Movies), Part 2.”
around Zoller’s tower while he takes aim and fires. Despite this variation in camera style, the film predominantly favours mid-telephoto or telephoto lenses; the telephoto lenses, in particular, are regularly used to single out individual soldiers in mid-shot as they are hit.

3.2.2 Editing

The fast-paced editing of *Stolz der Nation* (its Average Shot Length is 2 seconds) contrasts strongly with the more restrained cutting of its parent film *Basterds*, which has an ASL of 6.4 seconds.\(^3\) However, the sequences which Tarantino presents in Shosanna’s theater are actually cut with a much faster ASL of 1.2 seconds. This disparity is because the DVD-released special features version of *Stolz der Nation* is a self-contained short film and has some major differences to the clips extracted during the *Basterds* sequence. The impact of these differences is quite significant, in that there are three shots which are extreme outliers that influence the higher ASL count of 2 seconds. The first and second of these (nearly 15 seconds and 10.5 seconds respectively) feature the main dialogue between two US officers, as one of the officers forcefully states that he will not destroy the tower from which Zoller is sniping at them. Some of this footage appears in Shosanna’s theater in *Basterds*. The third outlier (nearly 46 seconds) is a mid-shot of Zoller sitting in the tower as sporadic bullet impacts into the tower blast dust and wooden splinters down upon him. He gazes off-screen and, given the spatial information provided by the film, it must be assumed that there is nothing specific in the tower that he is looking at. Since he is a German soldier, fighting against US troops which significantly outnumber him, I interpret this behavior here to

\(^3\) I should point out that I obtained this count using the online counter at www.cinemetrics.lv and counted the shots in the “entire” *Stolz der Nation* found on the DVD special features. The entirety of *Stolz der Nation* on DVD has 144 shots in 4 minutes and 49 seconds.
mean that he is thinking about his loyalty to Germany and whether or not he is willing to die for his nation. He is staring with a “far away” expression in his eyes and this encourages us to try to read “thought” in his gesture of gazing off-screen, but not at any fixed object.³³⁸ Significantly, this particular shot is included only briefly in Basterds itself: it appears after Shosannah has shot Zoller in the projection booth and peers out into the auditorium to check if anybody in the audience has heard her gunshots (and, of course, they haven’t noticed them because of the number of gunshots on the soundtrack of the film they’re watching). Because these three shots from Stolz der Nation are not included at length in Basterds, the impression created of the film-within-the-film is that it is ultraviolent.

Stolz der Nation uses a variety of editing strategies to present Zoller’s killings. The first device is the use of shot/reverse-shot editing to show Zoller firing a single shot from his rifle and then a cut to the victim who is hit and killed. Indeed, the very first time Tarantino shows a glimpse of the projected screen it presents one of these shot/reverse-shot moments. In the first shot, Zoller takes aim at something just below the camera (this is a mid-shot, with the camera positioned at a low-angle just underneath the window of Zoller’s bell-tower) and fires once (Fig. 3.2). In the reverse-shot (a run-and-gun hand-held wide-shot chasing two US soldiers down the street) one of the soldiers throws his gun and falls backwards (Fig. 3.3). Although this reverse-shot does not represent Zoller’s literal gaze, the constructive editing of these two shots encourages the inference that Zoller’s single bullet hit this particular soldier. This pattern (occasionally using a close-up

³³⁸ I borrow notions of “mental attribution” here from Persson in assuming this is a dominant reading of Zoller’s body language. For more on the interpretation of character states according to attribution processes in everyday life, see Persson, Understanding Cinema: 159 – 168.
of Zoller instead of the mid-shot) is repeated five times throughout the segments of the film that Tarantino includes in Basterds. A different strategy, used only in a three-shot jump-cut sequence which immediately follows the first shot/reverse-shot pattern, is an over-the-shoulder angle showing Zoller’s gun in the foreground aimed at men on the ground below the tower. In each of these jump-cut shots, Zoller fires and apparently hits a soldier on the ground who topples over (Fig. 3.4). At other times, the film simply edits together a string of shots of US soldiers being hit by bullets. The overall effect of this editing is that it Zoller seems to be killing the troops with consummate ease. At no point does he seem to be in any real danger and each of his bullets seem to reach its intended target—unlike, for instance, some of the sniper scenes in Ryan in which Pvt. Daniel Jackson is shown missing the occasional moving target.

### 3.2.3 Sound

This impression of ultra violence is emphasized by the soundtrack, which feels as though there is nearly constant gun-fire. Whether Tarantino’s camera is showing visual glimpses of the projected film or not there seems to be constant gunfire from the theater speakers. Of course, there are a few moments where the gunfire ceases, however the overall impression is one of Zoller firing continuously. In diegetic terms, the sound design of Basterds orients the sequence spatially so that when the camera is with Shosanna in the projection booth the sound of Stolz der Nation appears to be coming from the theater next door and when the camera is with Zoller inside the theater it seems to be coming from those theater speakers.\(^{339}\)

On the other hand, the sound design of Stolz der Nation itself does not address...

\(^{339}\) This is achieved primarily by mixing and frequency adjustment rather than through stereo panning.
spatial orientation in the same way. In considering the sound design here I am appropriating Arnt Maasø’s notion of “spatial listening” to examine three aspects of the film’s gunshots: the “volume or level of the sound, frequency characteristic[s], and the relationship of direct to reflected sound.” With this in mind, the gunshots in *Stolz der Nation* are mostly at the same volume, regardless of whether the camera is close to Zoller or if he is not even in the frame. The only time this volume changes slightly is when the US officers are talking about whether or not to destroy Zoller’s tower: Zoller’s gunshots continue in the background, but at a lower volume. As well as being reproduced with a crisp digital quality, Zoller’s gunshots maintain the same frequency whether right next to the camera or off-screen and, presumably, some distance away from the US soldiers who occupy the frame. The gunshots also exhibit a significant amount of reflection, which makes sense given the surrounding buildings that would reflect the sound in the diegesis. The effect of these sound design characteristics is to intensify the gunshots in such a way that they contribute to the mythic status attributed to Zoller by the editing patterns mentioned above.

### 3.2.4 The Performance of Death

Film violence is, of course, a recurring object for scholarly inquiries, quite possibly because it has, as Prince points out, “attracted audiences so deeply and incessantly that one might argue with much justification that depictions of violence constitute one of cinema’s essential pleasures and appeals for

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340 Arnt Maasø, “The Proxemics of the Mediated Voice,” in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*, eds Jay Beck & Tony Grajeda (Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 2008): 37 – 38. Maasø is of course talking specifically about the voice. However, the concepts can be usefully applied to the sound of gunfire in WW2 combat films.
More particularly, Jason Jacobs regards gun violence as having a close relationship with cinema from its early days. For instance, they share terminology (“the shot, the magazine”) and the same cause-effect structure of narrative itself (“he bleeds because I shot him”) as well as being related through contingent developments such as the invention of “the [first] fully automatic Maxim gun (mounted on a tripod) coincided with the first showing the Lumieres’ films.”

Paul Virilio also argues that many cinematic advancements are driven by the demands of warfare on military imaging technologies.

Predictably, critics find endless opportunity in film violence to undertake some form of ethical scrutiny. I will perform a different analysis, similar to the poetics of Prince’s *Classical Film Violence* with the difference that where Prince primarily examines the codes of “substitutional” representations of violence I am interested in graphic depictions of combat violence: bullet impacts and the effects of gunfire on flesh. There are two issues to consider in terms of combat violence in WW2 films. Firstly, that of the quantity of death presented and secondly, that of quality (which Prince calls the “stylistic amplitude” of violence). The quantity of death in the brief excerpts Tarantino presents of *Stolz der Nation* is a significantly high number of 21 kills in approximately one minute of screen-time. *(Bataan*’s violent climax, by way of quick comparison, has approximately 20 confirmed gun-shot deaths, 13 deaths from explosions and 11

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345 Ibid, 35.
346 This number only includes the deaths which are presented visually; considering that Zoller seems to score a kill shot with almost every round fired the “apparent” death is much greater because the soundtrack continues to present gunshots even when we cannot see the screen.
bayonet-deaths in nearly six minutes.) The quality of the deaths is a separate issue, taking into account representational variables such as camera distance, framing, special effect squib-hits and the physical body movement of men being killed. From this perspective, *Stolz der Nation* is highly graphic in its depiction of death. Wide-shots are used to portray 11 of the deaths, mid-shots to portray seven deaths and one death occurs in close-up. Four of the mid-shots involve squib-hits on the actor and the close-up also involves a squib-hit. The squibs typically send up a bright gray puff exploding from the actor’s clothing (usually chest, but occasionally their leg) (Fig. 3.8). The bodily reaction to the bullets, whether squibbed or not, is primarily visualized with either a violent jerking motion backwards (possibly enhanced with stunt wire-work) or by the soldier throwing his weapon and falling over with minimal bodily convulsions.

### 3.3 A Comparison of 1940s and 2000s WW2 Combat Films

It is clear that these interrelated properties of *Stolz der Nation*’s combat aesthetic—the cinematography, editing, sound and performance characteristics—work to offer a highly graphic, though stylized and exaggerated portrayal of its violent acts. This aesthetic may appear to be at odds with what is expected from a 1940s film, so I am now interested in describing the norms of cinematic representation of combat in WW2 films made in the 1940s as well as in the 2000s. In this section I will consider the stylistic system of ten WW2 combat films. The first five of these were made during the war: *Wake Island* (1942), *Bataan* (1943), *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), *Gung Ho!* (1943), and *Objective, Burma!* (1945). The other five are contemporary productions: *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) and *Windtalkers* (2002), and *Flags of*
Our Fathers (2006). Except for Enemy at the Gates these are all Hollywood productions and have been chosen because as two distinct groups they will demonstrate the norms of representation of wartime productions as well as the contemporary aesthetic. Future research could include films made during what Jeanine Basinger terms the “third,” “fourth,” and “fifth” wave of WW2 combat films (those made between 1949 – 1970) as well as a range of international productions. The intention here is not to illustrate a teleological development from the 1940s until present-day combat films: rather, the purpose of the analysis is to identify stylistic norms in two eras of WW2 combat film production. My approach is guided by the principles outlined in Bordwell’s Figures Traced in Light, promoting a study which aims to “chart the variety of stylistic manifestations at particular periods and in specific production contexts, always remaining alert for both normalized practice and transformations of those norms.” It is reasonable to expect that some components of the WW2 film aesthetic will remain common throughout all eras of production. For instance, the iconography of particular weapons, uniforms and theaters of combat. There are also likely to be some obvious differences, such as the use of color photography. However, at the same time, I believe it is important to remain open to surprising continuities and changes between particular production contexts. For example, it turns out that the editing of the 2000s films show a greater resemblance to the wartime productions than they do to Spielberg’s apparent “benchmark” film. Through an analysis of style it is possible to identify these kinds of aesthetic trends. I will thus attempt to outline the stylistic options available to these two

347 For purposes of clarification of particular stylistic devices, I also refer to films outside this primary sample. These ten texts should be regarded as a manageable sample which can be examined in close detail.
349 Bordwell, Figures Traced in Light, 241.
groups of filmmakers wishing to portray combat violence within the narrative of WW2 infantry combat.

3.3.1 Editing or mise-en-scene

Statistical research suggests that the cutting rate of films has accelerated from a rough average of “8-11 seconds before 1960 and towards a range of 4-6 seconds in recent years” while action scenes tend to be edited somewhat faster than the mean average of the overall film. In order to arrive at a meaningful comparison of the editing of WW2 combat films during the two periods under discussion here, I have focused on particular combat sequences from the films. These sequences have been selected because they are all extended battles (i.e., longer than 30 seconds) and involve infantry fighting between groups of men. An analysis of sequences showing small-scale skirmishes may produce different results. Peckinpah’s Cross of Iron (1977) is included not as any kind of representative “mid-point” between the 1940s and 2000s, but simply because that film illustrates an extremity of cutting only surpassed by the extracts of Stolz der Nation that are included in Basterds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country of Production</th>
<th>Battle scene chosen</th>
<th>ASL during battle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wake Island</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>4.6 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal Diary</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>2.9 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gung Ho!</em></td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax (first attack)</td>
<td>2.4 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>4.3 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective, Burma!</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>3.8 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross of Iron</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>UK / Germany</td>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>1.7 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Omaha Beach</td>
<td>6.3 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Climax (“The Alamo”)</td>
<td>5.8 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thin Red Line</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>“Taking the bunker”</td>
<td>3.4 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy at the Gates</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>UK / USA / Germany</td>
<td>Opening battle</td>
<td>2.0 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windtalkers</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Central battle</td>
<td>2.2 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flags of Our Fathers</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Beach landing sequence</td>
<td>2.9 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolz der Nation</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Sniper sequence</td>
<td>1.1 sec*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Here I am using the ASL as derived from the shots included in the *Basterds* sequence.

Fig 3.9 Average Shot Lengths of selected combat sequences from the films under discussion

Given that it is often assumed that “movies are being cut faster now” some of these results might be predictable.\(^{351}\) For instance, it may have been expected that the battle sequences of *Windtalkers* and *Enemy at the Gates* would be cut faster than *Bataan*. However, there are two surprises in these results. *Gung Ho!* seems to be cut almost as fast as a contemporary film, while *Ryan* emerges as an substantial outlier: its battle scenes are cut significantly slower than either the 1940s films or those of the 2000s. This is noteworthy, given that some commentators on the film have made such quite clearly mistaken assertions about *Ryan*’s style such as the following:

Long, sweeping aerial views of the invasion [which the reviewer apparently regards as typical features of WW2 films] are replaced by tight shots and *quick*

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\(^{351}\) Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 121. Although I am focusing exclusively on the combat sequences here, there is also a trend toward these sequences being edited with a significantly faster ASL than the overall films from which they have been extracted. For instance, *Wake Island* is 6.8 seconds (vs. an ASL of 4.6 sec in the combat sequence), and *Objective, Burma!* is 5.1 sec (vs. 3.8 sec). The same tendency is exhibited by the contemporary films: for example, *Ryan*’s overall ASL is 9.3 sec (vs. 6.3 sec and 5.8 sec), *The Thin Red Line* is 8.3 sec (vs. 3.4 sec) and *Enemy at the Gates* is 4.1 sec (vs. 2 sec).
cuts as Spielberg and director of photography Janusz Kaminski seek to personalize the battle and represent the perspective of the infantry.\footnote{Dave Depickere, “Fact or Myth? Saving Private Ryan,” http://web.me.com/davedepickere/World_War_II_analyzed!/Saving_Private_Ryan.html (accessed 20 May, 2010). Emphasis mine.}

It seems likely that because of Ryan’s jittery camerawork and the quantity of violence in the Omaha beach sequence, the film feels as though it has a faster pace. However, later I will address in detail the complexity of Spielberg’s framing, camera movement, and actor staging techniques which contribute to this effect. The other films show a difference in their cutting range of 2.9 – 4.3 seconds for the 1940s films, to 2.0 – 3.4 seconds for the post-Ryan battle sequences, which is certainly an accelerated cutting rate, but is not as dramatic as might be expected.\footnote{It is also worth noting that the battle scenes of Ryan occasionally feature a short string of shots cut together much faster than the overall sequence. For instance, the very first deaths during the beach landing as the ramp of the Higgins boat opens up achieve a striking emotional impact from a combination of their violence (multiple men are suddenly killed without our seeing the shooters) and the sudden contrast of a comparatively short ASL of 2.9 seconds.}

Since the infantry combat film inevitably shows soldiers shooting each other, it is worth considering the editing strategies available to filmmakers depicting this kind of killing. The three techniques employed by Stolz der Nation seem to comprise the broad normative strategies which filmmakers employ and although a combat sequence might favour one or another of them, filmmakers typically employ all three at various points as well as elaborating upon each basic strategy.\footnote{There is a possible fourth strategy for depicting gunshot violence. Frequently, WW2 films show men firing their guns but even though they do not include the victim in the frame, or edit to a shot of the victim, the narrative events allow the viewer to form the logical inference that the shooter must be shooting at someone. Peckinpah, for instance, edits parts of the climactic battle in Cross of Iron this way, and in my viewing of the film I regard this as offering the impression of a much greater amount of death than the earlier part of the scene. This occurs often in very recent}

Initially, I will sketch how these three techniques are representative of
the norms of combat film editing, and later—after doing the same with techniques of cinematography, sound and the performance of death—I will use this material to describe the filmmaking practices of WW2 combat sequences.

**Shot/reverse-shot killing:**

By far the most common strategy, used extensively by all of the films studied here is shot/reverse-shot editing which isolates both the shooter(s) and the victim(s) in their own framing. The initial shot normally presents an individual soldier firing his weapon, followed by an immediate cut to the victim apparently being hit by the bullet (see Figs. 3.10 – 3.11). Examples of this are found in the extracts of *Stolz der Nation* that Tarantino includes in Shosanna’s theater in *Basterds*, which typically use shot/reverse-shot patterns with a 2-frame delay between Zoller’s muzzle-flash and the cut to the shot of the apparent impact on the victim. In this way, the excerpts show a strong respect for the spatial relationship between Zoller and his victims while also demonstrating his prowess with the rifle. This kind of editing allows viewers to make logical inferences about the diegetic space of the film. (Or, in erotetic terms: Who did he shoot? He shot that soldier.) As an example of a more complex level of inference-building, a film may sometimes return to the initial shot of the shooter (Figs. 3.12 – 3.14), encouraging, or at least allowing for, the viewer to infer the character’s reaction to their act of killing (for instance, satisfaction or regret).

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355 Ryan is the exception. Very few of the gun-shot kills in the opening sequence and “The Alamo” sequence use shot/reverse-shot editing, instead preferring the second type of gunshot setup identified below. This also occurs in his *Munich* (2005).

356 In these cases, I believe the process of mental attribution outlined by Persson is an appropriate explanation. See Persson, *Understanding Cinema*, 159.
In most cases this kind of editing follows continuity rules similar to those of eye-line matching that dominate the presentation of dialogue scenes in classical Hollywood filmmaking. That is, the screen direction of the aimed weapon in the first shot matches the direction of the victim in the reverse-shot. There is at least one exception to the rule in *The Thin Red Line*, which contains a shot/reverse-shot killing where the screen direction of the shooter’s aim does not match that of the victim’s reverse-shot (Figs. 3.15 – 3.16). In this case there are at least two levels of coherence at work. On the one hand, the overall combat sequence of *The Thin Red Line* clearly establishes the geography of the battlefield and, as such, the change in screen direction is not enough to disrupt the spatial continuity. On the other hand, it is possible that the action of firing a gun at another character has a strong level of coherence all by itself. Yet it does seem that screen direction is still significant: an argument could be made that part of the chaotic impression of Peckinpah’s *Cross of Iron* derives from the montage of different camera setups—often of different victims—which disrupt the continuity of screen-direction between shooter(s) and victim(s).  

Regardless of these exceptions, the basic continuity rules of screen-direction appear to be the norm in the two periods of WW2 combat films under study here.  

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358 Eric Lichtenfeld finds a similar normative style in action films such as *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), *Air Force One* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1997) (including the wide-shots used for *Air Force One*’s aerial dogfights which obediently follow screen-direction continuity rules). Lichtenfeld also identifies an alternative norm in films like *Con Air* (Simon West, 1997) and *The Rock* (Michael Bay, 1996) which use such rapid editing that the geography of their locations is broken down to the point that the audience cannot comprehend the spatial relationship between parts of the scenery. See his *Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004): 163 – 195.
Shooter-within-the-same-shot killing:

Alternatively, the filmmaker may use shooter-within-the-same-shot framing to present the shooter and victim on screen simultaneously. In this strategy, the filmmaker stages the action so that the action of killing occurs in apparent “real-time” of each gunshot (Fig. 3.17). The impact of this technique, found at some point in all of the films in this study, can largely be attributed to aspects of *mise-en-scene*. Typically, these shots are staged in depth and the norm is to place the camera over-the-shoulder of the shooter(s). Spielberg frequently stages his combat violence this way, which is one of key the reasons *Ryan* has a higher ASL than the other films. For instance, in *Ryan*’s opening battle we see over-the-shoulder angles from the perspective of the German machine-gunners as they kill US troops attempting to get onto the beach, as well as over-the-shoulder angles of the US troops shooting Germans once they have made it up to the machine-gun nest (Fig. 3.18). *Guadalcanal Diary* achieves an increased impression of violence by staging the victim in the foreground: the shooter’s gun-smoke is framed to act as a substitute for the victim’s blood spray (Fig. 3.19). By staging a gunshot killing in depth, I believe the dramatic impact of the event can sometimes be increased by making the composition more directionally dynamic (Fig. 3.20). These framings, certainly used more often by *Ryan* than any of the other films, are also present in isolated instances in *Gung Ho!* and *Wake Island*.

Although it would be technically possible to stage the same action parallel to the camera, this does not occur in the films studied here, except for one death in

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359 The effect is similar to, though not nearly as intense as, the dramatic first killing of a gangster in *The Public Enemy* (William A. Wellman, 1931) which Prince regards as high in stylistic amplitude because of its strong backlighting which allows the gun-smoke behind the victim to “erupt” like a “geyser” of blood. See Prince, *Classical Film Violence*: 94 – 95.
Windtalkers. Even this shot is given a greater sense of dynamic movement by a whip-pan between the shooter and the victim (Figs. 3.21 – 3.22). I suspect that one of the reasons there is almost never a horizontal framing of a shooter-with-the-shot killing is that it presents a difficult image for the eye to follow. Consider the unusual staging of a gunshot in a production that exhibits virtually all of the characteristics of intensified continuity, Band of Brothers (DreamWorks SKG, 2001) (Fig. 3.23). In this shot, the two figures are pushed to the opposite edges of the frame, creating an unusual tension which makes perception difficult and creates an unsettling effect.

This is a significant scholarly point, since the shooter-with-the-same-shot technique is easily identifiable in even the earliest WW2 combat film, Wake Island. As Prince points out, one of the “enduring myths” of film studies is that “gun violence in the [1940s] Hollywood period, as enforced by the PCA, required that shooter and victim appear in separate shots, with an edit point placed between them.” Prince argues that the Production Code simply did not enforce such a strategy and while his study shows that there are some examples of shooter-within-the-same-shot framings in gangster films, my data shows that the WW2 combat films of the era do sometimes stage battlefield gun violence this way. According to Prince, the “righteousness” of the violence in the wartime combat film which resulted from the “moral cause of fighting the Germans and Japanese” allowed filmmakers to stage gun killings that in other genres might be deemed objectionable by the PCA. From an artistic and technical level, it is worth pointing out that the shooter-within-the-shot style allows for a degree of flexibility

360 Ibid, 105.
361 Ibid, 33.
in its amplitude of the violence portrayed. For instance, a director can alternatively reveal or diminish the bodily reaction of the victims either by bringing them closer to the foreground shooter or pushing them further into the background. At the same time, I believe that emphasizing a single shooter in the foreground may bring the viewer into intimate contact with the act of killing. On the other hand, staging a group of shooters in the foreground may create the effect of a cold-blooded massacre by alienating the viewer from the action.\footnote{In Chapter 4 I undertake a full analysis of Spielberg’s distinctive use of this technique in \textit{Ryan}.}

**An implied off-screen shooter:**

The third option in staging a battlefield bullet death is to imply an off-screen shooter by choosing not to edit to an image of the shooter, and instead to remain on the victim in order to show the effects of the bullet(s) on their body. Of the films studied here this strategy is used in all of the 2000s films, but not at all used in the scenes studied from the 1940s.\footnote{I am not including bullet-hits on scenery where the identity of the shooter is not presented, because this does not constitute a kill I am not including it as part of the current discussion.} It seems that the dominant usage of this strategy is to suggest that a bullet can come from anywhere, as in \textit{Ryan} when the men are wading from the Higgins Boat to the shore and are completely vulnerable to the German machine-gunners above them who are concealed even from viewers or in the sudden death of a soldier during a close-quarters skirmish in \textit{The Thin Red Line}. In these cases, the \textit{mise-en-scene} and cinematography usually directs the audience’s attention to the individual victim. For instance, at one point \textit{Ryan}’s camera framing drifts to a mid-shot shot of a particular soldier in the water just before he is shot in the chest (Fig 3.24). The victim of an off-screen shooter in \textit{The Thin Red Line} is placed in the foreground and his sudden bodily reaction to the bullet impact is a fast, dynamic movement horizontally across the frame which
focuses the viewer’s attention to him (Fig 3.25). Alternatively, the filmmaker may not draw our attention to the victim and instead place them within the background mise-en-scene of the battlefield. The effect is still to convey that death can happen suddenly and the bullet could come from anywhere; however, in these cases it functions to form a backdrop of battlefield violence.

When significant characters such as stars, or major characters, are shot in this fashion the films generally attempt to draw our attention to the event of their shooting. The prime example would be John Wayne’s death at the climax of Sands of Iwo Jima (1949). The shooting of non-significant soldiers, however, is more variable. Sometimes they may also receive the same level of attention or they might simply be killed in the background. For instance, during the opening battle of Enemy at the Gates a soldier is shot by an off-screen machine-gun the first time the film shows the character. By cutting to him at the point of impact, his death is given a specific kind of importance. Rather than being significant at the narrative level of character (after all, he is nameless), this death is presented such that it can be read as a metonym for the battlefield events (Fig. 3.26). A different effect is created by the death of a similarly non-significant soldier in Ryan which occurs without the viewer necessarily paying close attention to it (Fig. 3.27). Spielberg’s frame here is cluttered with distracting movement. Five soldiers scramble in a row, heading out of the left side of the frame, before the sixth is shot and tumbles over. This takes place while three other soldiers are lying prone in the foreground firing their rifles. The soldiers are further obscured by the muted color palette and desaturated film processing which brings down the green of their battle tunics to match the scenery. In a static shot it might be easier to see the sixth soldier as he is hit, but Spielberg’s hand-held camera bounces up and
down, sometimes edging to the right and then quickly reframing to the left again. It is a “blink and you miss it” moment and once the soldier is hit and begins to fall, Spielberg chooses not to cut. Instead, the take continues as two more soldiers run past and then whip-pan to the left to reveal two German soldiers in a trench. Of course it is possible that one of them shot the soldier, but it is not clear to the viewer because, in my reading, it simply does not matter. By this I do not mean that we consider the death to be unimportant, but that the *mise-en-scène* and cinematography present the soldier’s death as simply one of many on this battlefield.

Since *Stolz der Nation* employs the three broad strategies of editing a gun-shot death in a WW2 battle sequence, this is actually one way in which the film deviates from the norms of actual 1940s productions. The technique of implying an off-screen-shooter was not part of the stylistic system available to 1940s filmmakers; however, contemporary filmmakers frequently make use of it as a means of increasing the suddenness and/or incidental nature of death in combat. I think there is also a practical reason behind the technique’s absence in the 1940s films since, much more than the other two strategies, the effectiveness of the off-screen shooter hinges strongly on showing the effect of the bullet hits on the victim’s body. The 1940s filmmakers were unable to easily show this; aside from the already noted exceptions in *Bataan* and *Pride of the Marines*, the 1940s films do not feature squib-hits on the actors.\(^{364}\) Faced with the problem of depicting gunshot death on screen, the other two techniques are much more feasible

\(^{364}\) *Objective, Burma!* features a significant amount of squibbed scenery, but none on actors. As Prince notes, “most Hollywood films [of the 1940s period] presented the human body as being generally inviolate and immune to destruction or disfigurement as the result of violence […] Squibs, of course, could visualize bullet hits, but these were rarely as flamboyantly obvious as the knife or arrow that impales the back of a movie cowboy and remains visibly protruding after the character has pitched to the ground.” See Prince, *Classical Film Violence*, 148.
solutions. For instance, shot/reverse-shot editing allows filmmakers to occlude the moment of impact by editing to the victim after the bullet has apparently hit them and they have already begun to fall. Interestingly, this method is used rarely by either the 1940s films or the 2000s films. While I find this method to be effective (and apparently so does Eli Roth for he uses it a number of times in *Stolz der Nation*), it seems the 1940s filmmakers were prepared to cut to the reverse-shot a few frames before the bodily reaction to the bullet-hit and let audiences simply infer that the bullet fired in the previous shot has now impacted the victim and caused the reaction. Another tactic used frequently by the 1940s films is to combine shot/reverse-shot with the technique of substitution. Consider a two-shot sequence in *Objective, Burma!* which begins with the shot (Fig. 3.28) and then cuts to the reverse-shot which is composed to allow the bullet hits on the bamboo fence to stand-in for the violence on the bodies of the Japanese victims behind the fence (Fig. 3.29). The 2000s films, by contrast, tend to use more squib-hits and so the no-shooter technique becomes a viable option, while at the same time shooter-within-the-same-shot killings can be staged with the victim much closer to the shooter.

Although these three strategies form the basis of editing gunshot deaths in a WW2 battle sequence, filmmakers do not necessarily deploy them in any predictable fashion. A director may choose to favour a particular death-by-gunfire strategy at given moments. For instance, while *Ryan*’s opening battle primarily shows death by means of the off-screen-shooter strategy during the beach landing, the

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365 *84 Charlie Mopic* (Patrick Sheane Duncan, 1989), a Vietnam War film rather than a WW2 film, dramatically flaunts the off-screen shooter strategy as a formal device within its structure of apparently being constructed from film footage shot by a military motion picture crew. In one scene the men hide behind cover while one of their squad lays out in the open and is shot a number of times by an off-screen sniper. The soldier is shot and hit repeatedly for almost two minutes of screen time before the Sergeant decides to give him a mercy killing.
sequence switches to primarily shooter-within-the-shot framings once the men have made it to the top of the machine-gun nest. At the beginning of *Bataan’s* climactic battle, director Tay Garnett improvises upon the shot/reverse-shot pattern by first cutting from a wide-shot of five US soldiers firing machine-guns to a mid-shot of one of them, then to a mid-shot of another gunner, before finally cutting to the reverse-shot of a group of Japanese apparently gunned down by the group’s bullets. *Objective, Burma!* can cut from a shooter-within-the-shot framing to a clarifying closer shot to depict the final moment of the victim’s death (Figs. 3.30 – 3.31).

### 3.3.2 Cinematography

The following two statements—the first by Spielberg and the second an interpretation of Spielberg’s camerawork by film reviewer Roger Ebert—both gesture towards the significance of cinematography in the WW2 combat genre. Unlike cutting rates, for example, filmmakers and untutored audiences do sometimes comment upon this aspect of the stylistic system:

> I felt however on *Saving Private Ryan* that I wanted the action to inspire me as to where to put the camera – the same way being shot at inspired the veterans to survive and prevail.\(^{366}\)

> Spielberg’s camera makes no sense of the action [at Omaha Beach]. That is the purpose of his style.\(^{367}\)

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\(^{367}\) Ebert, *Saving Private Ryan* Review.
As I showed in Chapter 2, critical statements about the cinematography of these films are very often misguided or false. There is a danger in making broad statements about the purpose of camera techniques in WW2 combat films because such assertions risk over-simplifying this aspect of style. Without any empirical data of the cinematography techniques used by WW2 combat films it is easy and tempting for a critic to claim that: “Documentary style filming combined with desaturated color and [a] deafening soundtrack has become the standard for today’s war films.” For this to be a meaningful claim, films like *Windtalkers*, *Enemy at the Gates* and *Ryan* would have to be demonstrably similar in their stylistic construction (and as I will show below, they are in fact significantly different). Additionally, there would also have to be some sort of agreement as to what constitutes a “documentary” style of filming. In this section I examine the cinematography of the battle sequences of the films studied. However, for the time being I will only make provisional comments about the concept of the apparently documentary style of contemporary war films. This is because I believe this area has been inadequately theorized in film studies and I undertake a full analysis of this in Chapter 4, Section 4.1. In order to frame this general discussion of cinematography in the current section, I want to draw attention to how easily a theorist such as Thomas Schatz can make claims about the style of combat films:

In terms of cinematic technique, the combat film brought a new level of realism to the Hollywood feature film. With Hollywood’s wartime features more focused than ever before on real-world events, the lines between factual and fictional films steadily blurred. This was most pronounced in combat films, which often included

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It is true that the 1940s productions predominantly focus on battles that had actually taken place (Wake Island, Guadalcanal, Bataan) and it is likely that this achieves a higher narrative verisimilitude than Ryan’s last-stand battle at the invented city of “Ramelle.”370 However, I think that Schatz is overstating the case in his suggestion about the significance of documentary footage in the wartime productions. He does not qualify this statement by identifying exactly how the documentary footage is used by these films, or by specifying whether he means land, sea or air combat. As it turns out, the infantry combat films made during the war simply do not use documentary footage of combat action on land, opting instead to stage all of the combat presented. They do occasionally use documentary footage of the military as a means of establishing a sense of veracity for the narrative, as in Objective, Burma! which opens with what appears to be documentary footage of military officers looking at maps etc, as well as some shots of gliders landing in the climax, and Gung Ho! which seems to use documentary footage of soldiers training and submarines submerging.371 The closest examples I can find of 1940s infantry films drawing upon documentary footage to enhance the authenticity of its combat sequences occur in Guadalcanal Diary and Lewis Milestone’s A Walk in the Sun (1945). During its climactic battle

370 It is also probable that these films have greater narrative verisimilitude than the action/adventure set-pieces that occur in Guns of Navarone (J. Lee Thompson, 1961) or Where Eagles Dare (1968), for instance.
371 I say “seems to” because it is entirely possible that these shots may have been staged for the production. However, the image quality of those scenes does not match that of the rest of the film on my DVD copy. Regardless of whether or not these scenes are documentary footage, the point is that the land combat sequences in the films do not use real-life combat footage, which limits the validity of Schatz’s claim.
sequence, *Guadalcanal Diary* includes two shots of Japanese artillery gunners taking aim and firing—the footage’s graininess suggests that it is authentic newsreel or documentary footage. However, this footage is presented as merely part of the sequence. A brief moment during *A Walk in the Sun* also attempts this kind of “seamless” inclusion of documentary footage within a battle. In this instance, the soldiers on the ground (played by actors) observe an aerial dogfight above them: the sequence is presented through shot/reverse-shot editing which intercuts the footage of the actors with documentary footage of a dogfight between two planes, concluding with the enemy plane plummeting into the ocean. *Wake Island* also seems to use authentic combat footage of fighter planes in the beginning of its climactic battle just prior to the Japanese troops landing ashore. However, these examples contrast with the more typical usage of such footage in the wartime productions. For instance, *Objective, Burma!* opens with informational shots of Burma, training camps, and so on, which are clearly meant to be taken as newsreel footage rather than production footage.  

I have found one example of a 1940s combat film which incorporates documentary footage of actual infantry combat into its action sequences. *Sands of Iwo Jima*, made in 1949, quite liberally cuts from studio shots of the actors to footage from various documentaries during its combat sequences, most notably *With the Marines at Tarawa* (US Marine Corps, 1944). For instance, as John Wayne’s troops approach the beach in the Higgins craft, the film shows us documentary footage of explosions in the distance. Additionally, the film re-stages a scene from *With the Marines at Tarawa* in which troops attack a beach.

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372 In this case, they are accompanied by a voice-over which identifies the location as Burma and explains the importance of the mission.
373 According to Suid, this footage was provided to the filmmakers as part of the cooperation deal with the Marines. See Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 124.
fortification and cuts between production scenes and the documentary footage. However, the significant point is that none of the films I have studied that were made during the war use this device.

Thus, criticism which makes statements about the authenticity or realistic appearance of the wartime combat films takes a short-sighted approach of the problem of film realism. Content to make bold statements about “the influence of newsreels” on combat scenes in the 1940s, such criticism fails to account for the actual aesthetic of these films, which simply do not show any evidence of adopting the style of cinematography from the adjacent genre of combat documentaries. By contrast, the professional discourse around the post-Ryan films often includes the stated intention to use cinematography to represent the war “realistically.” Often, filmmakers expressly indicate the significance of WW2 combat photography in their stylistic decisions. Tom Stern, cinematographer of Flags of Our Fathers, cites a collection of books of combat photographs published during WW2, and Kaminsky specifically claims that he and Spielberg used Robert Capa’s blurry images of the Normandy landing as one of their “guiding references.” Even Michael Bay’s Pearl Harbour, not renowned for realism, apparently draws some influence from combat footage and attempts to recreate the effect of a cameraman “accidentally” losing shutter synchronisation during the action of combat. We have then, a rich area for stylistic analysis that

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374 Sam Fuller’s Verboten (1959) also does this to a certain extent. For instance, showing production footage of a German officer giving artillery instructions and then cutting to stock footage of battlefield guns firing and tanks exploding.
376 On the other hand, this could simply be the filmmakers taking inspiration from the effectiveness of Saving Private Ryan’s stylistic “accidents.” The cinematographer of Pearl Harbour, John Schwarzman, does in fact refer to the shutter being thrown out of synchronisation
has not yet been explored in any systematic or detailed fashion. In what follows I undertake the beginning of such an analysis of the cinematography of the combat films of the 1940s and the post-Ryan 2000s.

To begin with, the fact that Stolz der Nation is presented in black and white is in keeping with the actual 1940s WW2 films in this study. Historically, it makes sense for films like Bataan and Guadalcanal Diary to be shot in black and white as, according to Susan Hayward, Hollywood in the 1940s “decreed that colour should be reserved for certain genres that in themselves were not particular realistic—stylized and spectacle genres (musical, fantasy, epics).” Indeed, just as the modern WW2 films often exist within a discourse of realism, the wartime combat films sometimes made quite explicit appeals to “realism,” as evident in the on-screen text which opens Wake Island claiming that: “In this picture the action at Wake Island has been recorded as accurately and factually as possible.” In order to portray combat realistically it seems filmmakers were content to use black and white film. At the same time, however, I suspect that the black and white film-stock reduced some aspects of visual realism, most particularly that of bloody wounds. Consider one moment in Wake Island where a Japanese grenade explodes near a dugout and, as the smoke clears, one of the two soldiers inside begins shoving his friend who has slumped over next to him (Fig. 3.32). As the soldier pulls his hand away from the static body of his friend he looks at it for a moment, suggesting that his hand is covered in blood. Close inspection of the shot

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as being “similar to what Janusz [Kaminski, ASC] and Steven Spielberg did on Saving Private Ryan” but does not name any of the actual WW2 combat footage that he and director Michael Bay apparently studied. See Christopher Probst, “One Nation, Under Siege,” American Cinematographer (May 2001): 43–44.

377 Susan Hayward, Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, 3rd ed (New York: Routledge, 2006): 88. It is interesting that some of the combat documentaries were shot in colour. For instance, John Huston’s Battle of Midway (1943).
shows that his fingers certainly appear darker, which most likely suggest blood—it cannot be merely a shadow, judging by the direction of the light. However, the staging of the shot, and the actor’s performance with his hand, occludes close attention to whether or not there is blood there. Moreover, the black and white film-stock reduces the visual significance of the blood. As I will show later, in discussing the performance of death, there is a case for the argument that the 1940s audience, whether in fact or simply from the filmmakers’ point of view, did not want to see a high degree of realistic evidence of US servicemen being killed.\textsuperscript{378}

The style of color cinematography used by contemporary WW2 films seems to fall into two distinct categories: those which attempt to desaturate the image and those which use a relatively unmanipulated colour image. For \textit{Ryan}, the filmmakers reportedly considered shooting in black and white, however the decision was made instead to shoot in colour, but use a variety of techniques to achieve a muted look. Kaminsky claims that shooting another WW2 film (after Spielberg’s \textit{Schindler’s List} (1993)) in black and white would be “pretentious” and Spielberg was interested in what he perceived as the “desaturated look” evident in some 16mm colour footage of WW2 combat he had reviewed in preparation for \textit{Ryan}\.\textsuperscript{379} By modifying modern lenses to achieve softer contrast and then processing the film-print to retain additional density (a Technicolor laboratory process known as “ENR”), the filmmakers achieved a desaturated look which also had to be taken into account by the makeup department when creating

\textsuperscript{378} I thank Mick Broderick for this point.
blood. Unlike *Wake Island*, it seems, death in *Ryan* would be rendered much more explicit through cinematography that emphasized the red of blood on green tunics. *Flags of Our Fathers*, displaying Eastwood’s usual taste in dark imagery and taking advantage of newer technological advancements in post-production, goes even further than *Ryan* by using digital colour manipulation to exaggerate the contrast and monochromatic effect of the ENR process while still retaining the red of the blood. According to cinematographer John Toll, the print of *The Thin Red Line* was originally planned to be treated with the ENR process for purely aesthetic reasons—“to get the richest blacks possible”—but eventually the filmmakers decided they did not want the colors to be desaturated. Rather, the cinematographer was interested in “maintain[ing] the richness and variety of all the natural color we photographed in our tropical environments” and had all film-stock processed normally.

Likewise, *Windtalkers* does not use ENR or other processing techniques to affect the image saturation or contrast but this was primarily for practical reasons. According to the cinematographer, there were up to 15 cameras running during some of the battle sequences and for this reason it

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383 Ibid.
would be difficult to control the similarity of the footage if the laboratory used ENR, flashing or other manipulations in processing.³⁸⁴

The use of color, black-and-white, or desaturated colors in post-Ryan films is a complex issue. While those contemporary WW2 films motivated by a notion of realism (or at least, what might be called a “serious” attitude to combat) may often employ the almost monochromatic aesthetic of Ryan and Flags of Our Fathers, I believe that Stolz der Nation (essentially a “period” film) uses black and white as a simultaneous nostalgia for, and pastiche of, the 1940s films to which it is attempting to pay homage. This differs, for instance, to a film like The Man Who Wasn’t There (Joel Coen, 2001) which is also a period film, shot in black and white, but uses monochrome’s storytelling capabilities of light and shadow in a way that Stolz der Nation simply does not.³⁸⁵ In my opinion, The Thin Red Line is more concerned with a poetic impression of combat and Windtalkers is essentially a mainstream 1990s “action” film repackaged with WW2 combat iconography and scenario. Films such as Ryan and Flags of Our Fathers may have the intention of employing their near-monochromatic aesthetic as an index of realism, but I believe the primary reason the ENR process is effective in these films is that the high-contrast produced by the practice creates an overbearing mood of despair. For instance, Stern explains that for Flags of Our Fathers: “We tried to create a monochromatic world, a kind of über hell on earth.”³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Jeffrey Kimball, cited in David Wiener, “Speaking in Tongues,” American Cinematographer (December 2002): 70 – 72. As a side-note, Ryan sometimes had four cameras running during the battle sequences, although Kaminsky’s interview in American Cinematographer suggests that there were only two cameras on the Omaha Beach sequence.


³⁸⁶ The extent of this mood is revealingly joked about by Flags of Our Fathers cinematographer Tom Stern, who describes pre-production conversations on Million Dollar Baby in which Eastwood would say: “Do you remember how dark Bird was? [...] Do you think we can make this
contrast that is effected by the ENR process certainly creates a harshness that is visually appropriate to such an intention. Indeed, the first use of the bleach-bypass process for an entire feature film is Michael Radford’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1984): a film obviously characterized by its mood of chronic pessimism.  

In order to understand the positioning and operation of the camera in these films, I derive method from Barry Salt’s model of stylistic analysis and I will apply a similar analysis to the combat sequences of the set of films so far under analysis. The results of this analysis are tabulated in Fig. 3.33 and they, of course, require some explanation and discussion. Firstly, the analysis represents broad trends in the combat sequences under discussion and is not a micro-analysis of each film in its entirety. My method in this particular analysis was to take extracts of a chosen battle from each film (or two battles, in the case of *Ryan*) and classify each shot according to its shot scale, its movement and then speculate on the motivations for its camera movement (if any). The extracts of each sequence were chosen by taking a “phase” from the overall battle which includes a clear depiction of both sides of fighting troops in the midst of combat. For instance, in
Ryan’s Omaha Beach sequence, the first phase involves the men landing on the beach in the Higgins crafts, the second phase is their movement up onto the beach, and the third phase (chosen for this analysis) is their successful taking of the German machine-gun nest. For this reason, the results should be regarded as specifically representative of only that part of the combat sequence, but taken together the results are suggestive of some broad trends in camera style between the two production eras being considered here, as I will show shortly.

In defining the various shot scales I have used the descriptions offered by Salt:

- Big Close Up shows head only
- Close Up shows head and shoulders
- Medium Close Up includes body from the waist up
- Medium Shot includes from just below the hip to above the head of upright actors
- Medium Long Shot shows the body from the knee upwards
- Long Shot shows the full height of the body
- Very Long Shot shows the actor small in the frame.  

To offer at least minimal grounds for comparison I have converted the count of each shot-scale into a percentage for that sequence. For instance, 50% of Wake Island’s 18 shot battle are composed in Very Long Shot compared to 5% of Stolz der Nation’s 57 shots. However, interpretation of these statistical results requires some moderation via qualitative viewing of the extracts, as evidenced by the misleading Shot Scales data for Ryan’s “Alamo” sequence. This sequence is problematic because the data is, of course, generated only from the number of shots in the sequence and in the “Alamo” there are a higher number of Very Long Shots and Long Shots with quite short durations. At the same time, there are

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389 Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 171.
relatively fewer Mid Shots although they have a significantly longer *screen duration* than any of the wider framings (one of the Mid shots is a 42 second travelling shot). This means that although the data is statistically accurate as a pure count of shots, it does not reflect the fact that the majority of that sequence is really composed in Mid Shot.\(^\text{390}\) Significantly, it draws attention to the very specific style of Spielberg’s approach to these scenes.

As well as indicating if the camera is either “mounted” (fixed on a tripod or dolly mount) or hand-held, there are two aspects of camera movement that I have considered in this table. Firstly, it is important to describe whether the camera movements are of the pan/tilt variety, or if it is a physical move such as a dolly forwards or a tracking shot alongside a moving character. Secondly, I have attempted to speculate on the motivation for the camera movement. In terms of panning/tilting movements, like Salt, I have ignored simple reframing movements if a character moves only slightly in the shot. For instance, a standing character who shifts their weight from their left to right foot might move very slightly in the shot and the camera must pan (also very slightly) to maintain the framing. Salt suggests that this practice had become an “automatic action by camera operators from the end of the ‘twenties onwards.”\(^\text{391}\) I would suggest that these very slight movements (reframings) are simple to deal with analytically when the camera is mounted. However, the issue is more complex when the camera is hand-held (as it often is in all of the 2000s films, with the striking exception of *Stolz der Nation*). On the one hand, the camera may physically move for the purpose of reframing a character who has made a slight body movement. There are some example of this

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\(^\text{390}\) When I discuss the shot scales data later, I consider the “Alamo” sequence an outlier. For instance, Fig. 3.35 excludes this sequence from the averaging calculation performed on the 2000s films.

\(^\text{391}\) *Salt, Film Style and Technology*, 250.
in *Ryan* where a soldier may stand up from a crouching position and the camera operator seems to stand up just enough to maintain a similar framing with their movement. On the other hand, simple/slight physical camera movement may result from the contemporary practice of the camera operator simply swaying their body slightly from side to side. Some may regard this technique as a means of either injecting “energy” to a shot or giving an “observational” impression, although these are problematic and clichéd justifications which I deal with in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.1, or giving an “observational” impression.\(^{392}\) This aesthetic is found in the majority of shots in the battle sequence of *The Thin Red Line*. For the statistical record of these film sequences I have ignored both types of slight camera movements so as to draw attention to the camera moves that I think are the result of more obvious directorial interventions; however, because these are such common aspects of camera style I will also comment on them later.

In regards to the motivation for camera movement, I suggest that there are three distinct motivations for camera movement in the films studied, each of which arises from the diegesis. The camera may move to follow *character movement*, to reveal scene *geography* or to act as a *dramatic intensifier*.\(^{393}\) In the first category I place attention-directing moves such as the camera panning with the movement of a *character* as they run behind some cover, or tracking behind them as they move on the battlefield. The second category includes any movement that is required to show (or reveal to) the viewer the *geography* of the scene. For instance Spielberg

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\(^{392}\) Although I have ignored this type of movement in the current analysis, I deal with it in the later section on *Ryan*’s hand-held camera. Bordwell has made some general descriptions of this kind of camera technique, concluding that by the 1960s “Filmmakers were coming to believe that virtually any scene could benefit from the hand-held shot’s immediacy, urgency and (the inevitable word) energy”. See Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*: 144 – 145.

pans and tilts from Pvt. Jackson in his sniping tower down to Cpt. Miller in a dug-out and this clarifies the geographical position of the characters. Both of these motivations for movement are denotative, providing comprehension and intelligibility (as in the geographical motivation for a pan between shooter and victim). However, the third motivation of dramatic intensification is fundamentally expressive, emphasizing something specific about the scene. For instance, there is no denotative need for Spielberg to track in to a closer shot of a particular soldier calling out: “Don’t shoot! Let ‘em burn!” as German soldiers jump from their flaming pill-box. Rather, the camera move intensifies the drama of the situation, emphasizing the character’s emotional outburst.

Shot scales

There are both significant similarities and differences between the shot scales used during the combat sequences of these films and for illustrative purposes I have compiled histograms of the tabulated data (Fig. 3.34) as well as an averaged comparison between the 1940s and 2000s films (Fig. 3.35).

The first point to make here is the unsurprising tendency towards closer framings in the 2000s films and this is shown clearly in the averaged data of Fig 3.35, which indicates the most remarkable differences in shot scales between the periods are in the significant reduction in VLS and the increases in CUs and

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394 For an overview of the denotative and expressive functions of style, see Bordwell, _Figures Traced in Light_, 33 – 34.
395 In order to compare only one battle sequence from each film, the statistical data for shot scales in _Ryan’s_ “Alamo” sequence has not been included in the averaging process in Fig. 3.35.
At the same time there is an almost perennial use of the LS for 20-30% of the shots used in the combat sequences. Only *Wake Island* and *Stolz der Nation* use fewer LS, the former using the most to present the action in the even wider VLS and the latter using by far the most evenly distributed range of shot scales out of any of the films studied. For the rest of the films, I would suggest it makes sense to show enough of the action in LS because they fulfil the audience’s need for clear geographical orientation of where one army is in relation to the other. While VLS are often used to show both groups of soldiers, the LS is generally used either to show the movement of one group of soldiers from one area of cover to another, or as in much of *The Thin Red Line*, to show the positions of both armies during close quarters skirmishes. The 1940s films virtually never use LS to show both sides of combatants in the one frame. I count *Ryan’s* over-the-German-machine-gunner-shoulder framings as LS which function for redundancy. They elaborate the geographical space of the battle that has already been articulated by character dialogue in the Higgins craft prior to landing (i.e., that the US soldiers’ objective is to move up the beach towards the German gun emplacements). The film’s commitment to articulating the space of the action is described by one of *Ryan’s* camera operators, Mitch Dubin accordingly: “So many films are shot in close-ups today that you never really get a sense of the geography or where you are. Steven [Spielberg] is very specific about saving his close-up for when they really mean something.”

While Roger Ebert might argue that *Ryan’s* camera does not make “sense” of the action, this is just one example that the filmmakers certainly took comprehension into account while designing the cinematography of the piece. Indeed, Spielberg has explicitly stated that he “used wider lenses for

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397 Dubin, cited in Probst, “The Last Great War.”
geography and tighter lenses for the compression of action. With modern films often showing US soldiers and the enemy in the one shot, comprehension and geography become paramount.

A related component of the cinematography of the films is the particular aspect ratio used, as it both enables and prevents particular kinds of framings. The aspect ratios for the films studied here is summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of production</th>
<th>Aspect Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wake Island</td>
<td>1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal Diary</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gung Ho!</td>
<td>1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective, Burma!</td>
<td>1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin Red Line</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy at the Gates</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windtalkers</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flags of Our Fathers</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolz der Nation</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.36 Aspect ratios of the films. Significant deviations are in bold.

Obviously, various aspect ratios affect the framing of shots. For instance, Objective, Burma!’s 1.37:1 ratio means that MCUs show very little of the background (Fig 3.37), whereas the 1.85:1 of Ryan allows Spielberg to frame battlefield action behind Capt. Miller even in MCU (Fig 3.38). In the even wider 2.35:1 format of Flags of Our Fathers, Eastwood can include an expanse of battlefield action in the background of a MCU of a machine-gunner (Fig 3.39).

Stolz der Nation’s almost square 1.18:1 frame cramps Zoller tightly into his tower even in MCU (Fig 3.40). Wake Island’s 1.37:1 frame makes VLS of invasions and beach-landings awkward to frame dynamically (Fig 3.41), while on the other hand, the 2.35:1 ratio is well-suited to epic war films such as The Thin Red Line (Fig 3.42) and Flags of Our Fathers (Fig 3.43). Conversely, careful staging and “aperture framing” of VLS in 2.35:1 can effectively direct viewer attention to the figures in deep field (Figs 3.44 and 3.45). Ryan’s 1.85:1 frame suits close-quarters combat on the streets by emphasizing the claustrophobic surroundings even in LS and VLS (Fig 3.46).

Hand-held “documentary style” versus mounted/fixed cameras

Ryan and the 2000s films virtually all use hand-held camerawork exclusively or as their predominant style during the combat sequences. Ryan’s camera is by far the most extreme in terms of this “hand-held” aesthetic, sometimes being shunted aggressively from the side and very often shaking for no apparent reason. But regardless of the assumptions and statements by some of the critics I discussed in Chapter 2, this is not at all characteristic of the hand-held approach used by the other 2000s films. Even Flags of Our Fathers’ fuzzy insert shots that I take to be the subjective point of view of a soldier running up the beach are unlike Ryan’s, for these images are so short and blurred that they only hint at what is being shown (Fig. 3.47), whereas Ryan’s distinct shaky camerawork is far less blurry and lingers on the scene much longer (due to the longer ASL) and thus the

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399 As indicated earlier, it seems that Stolz der Nation is imitating an aspect ratio that was still being used in Germany in the 1940s. In this shot, of course, the Basterds’ 2.35:1 frame enables Tarantino to include a large number of audience heads watching Stolz der Nation.

400 Spielberg claims the 1.85:1 ratio is more “life-like,” as opposed to widescreen processes which he describes as “an artificial aspect ratio.” See Spielberg, quoted in Pizello, “Five Star General.”

401 As I showed in Chapter 2, it is common for critics to make direct statements that Ryan’s filming style is typical of contemporary combat films.
viewer can comprehend the on-screen events much more readily. *The Thin Red Line*’s camera once quickly moves behind a rock for cover as the men scramble to do the same; however, for the most part the camera weaves through the action with only a small amount of instability. At times, *Enemy at the Gates* even uses a Steadicam to track smoothly in front of the protagonist running through the battlefield. *Windtalkers*, amidst the hand-held shots of general battlefield action (some of which was filmed by a Marine Corps Reserves combat camera operator, and none of which resembles *Ryan*’s camerawork) edits not only to Steadicam push-ins on Nicolas Cage as his character apparently loses control, but also a downward swooping crane-shot as he continues his rampage through enemy lines.\(^{402}\) *Stolz der Nation*, for all its apparently furious and frenetic violence, places the camera firmly on a tripod for the majority of its shots. This last part is important. Prior to the careful analysis of this present study, I had, in fact, mistakenly assumed that *Stolz der Nation* uses an intensified continuity approach with what might be terms a “shaky” hand-held aesthetic.

The 1940s films, by contrast, all use a stable, mounted camera and generally keep it in a fixed position. The films do pan or tilt the camera slightly in order to maintain consistent framing when characters move slightly (although Raoul Walsh stages *Objective, Burma!* in such a way that even these slight movements are almost never necessary) and in two of the films (*Bataan* and *Objective, Burma!* ) there are no physical camera movements at all in the combat sequences. It is not until *The Sands of Iwo Jima* in 1949 that hand-held shots begin to appear during the infantry combat sequences, but in that film the hand-held shots are, in

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fact, insertions from the documentary *With The Marines at Tarawa* (1944).

These are interesting inclusions, because the documentary footage does not depict events that the filmmakers were not able to reproduce themselves in the remainder of the sequence. There is also no stylistic attempt to merge the production footage, which is all shot using stable, mounted cameras and in some battlefield close-ups of John Wayne, studio lighting. I think there are important issues to consider in regards to filmmaker intentions and the audience response to the use of hand-held filming in battle scenes. It seems likely to me that the *Sands of Iwo Jima* audience is meant to be aware that they are watching real combat footage at these points. Given the Academy Award winning success of the recent *With The Marines at Tarawa* it is possible that audience members would even recognize the particular footage. Of course, this is not the same as the audience of *Ryan* (or *Flags of Our Fathers*, for instance) believing that what they are seeing in that film is “like” real combat footage.

The filmmakers’ own discourse on *Ryan*’s use of the hand-held camera oscillates between two very different positions. Spielberg states that the “special techniques,” which include the hand-held camera and the use of an external image shaking device, “were intended to make you feel as if you were right in the middle of combat, as opposed to watching it like an armchair civilian.”

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403 As indicated earlier, some wartime films cut in documentary footage of troops training, or of aerial dogfights. However, I have found no wartime productions that insert infantry combat footage.

404 As I show in detail in Chapter 4, this is exactly the way a number of critics and reviewers regard the Omaha beach sequence.

405 Spielberg, cited in Pizello, “Five Star General.”
were several combat cameramen landing with the troops at Normandy.” 406 Although both explanations suggest an intention of authenticity and realism derived from the camera lens somehow “being there” in the battle, Spielberg’s statement privileges a kind of subjective experience whereas Kaminski’s justification allows for a mediating lens between the diegetic events and the viewer’s extra-diegetic experience of the film.

For Toby Haggith, an archivist at the Imperial War Museum, Ryan’s camera has a particularly complex relationship with actual combat footage from WW2. In comparing the Omaha beach sequence with actual D-Day footage shot by American and British cameramen (with his primary source being the Normandy footage from the British Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU)), Haggith finds significant contrasts between the two types of camerawork. 407 Firstly, Haggith suggests that the low camera angles sometimes used in Ryan’s battle are appropriate imitations of the way the AFPU cameramen often shot, commenting on Sergeant Ernest Walter’s first-hand account of the practicalities of filming on a battlefield where he “always liked to be next to a wall or a tank because he felt safer.” 408 However, Spielberg’s camera is not always in such a position and sometimes it “alternates between ‘ducking’ behind cover with the US Rangers, to filming in no-man’s land; at one point taking up a position directly in the line of fire of some riflemen, and in another filming at the end of a trench along which some German soldiers are rushing to escape a machine gun.” 409 Practically, these shots do not represent the kind of view combat cameramen would achieve on D-Day, although I think this only diminishes Kaminski’s claim, not necessarily

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408 Ibid, 340.
In any case, I do not think Ryan’s filmmakers are speaking literally when they claim the cinematography is “like” being there: in contemporary film marketing, “realism” in various guises seems to be a common means of attracting attention to a film. Cinema criticism, however, needs to attend to a film’s construction more seriously.

Haggith points out that the actual D-Day footage does not feature the kind of shakiness so characteristic of Ryan’s sequence. One reason is that the AFPU cameramen “had their own professional aspirations: at the least they could hope that their film might be incorporated in a newsreel and at best be used in a prestigious official production such as Desert Victory.” Additionally, the cameramen were trained “to hold the camera steady when filming and would brace themselves where possible against a firm object,” so that there are very few shaky moments even during tank sequences or during explosions. It is worth noting that Ryan actually appears to take a deliberately casual approach to framing and camera steadiness during the battle sequences. For instance, at one point it simply tips to the side as if by accident (Figs. 3.48 – 3.49). This kind of contrived mistake, which I will later call “controlled spontaneity” (although clearly an attempt by fiction filmmakers to mimic the unpredictable nature of war footage), is something that actual WW2 camera operators took great pains to avoid. Indeed, some men modified the stocks of rifles to make a supporting mount for the

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410 As I show in Chapter 5, there is something to be said for a specific kind of immersion and “reported realism” Spielberg seems to be hinting at in his discourse.

411 As just one instance, Jason Statham, star of the completely absurd film Crank (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2006) claims in an interview just prior to the film’s theatrical release that “I have always seen it [green screen stunt work] and you can always tell that it is a fake attempt”. See Fred Topel, “Statham talks Crank stunts,” http://www.canmag.com/news/4/3/4937 (accessed 20 September, 2010).


413 Ibid, 341.
camera or found other improvised means of stabilising hand-held shots (Fig. 3.50).\textsuperscript{414}

My research adds to Haggith’s analysis in finding that the hand-held combat footage of the other 2000s films is also unlike that of the actual WW2 combat cameramen—although it should also be noted that these other films do not necessarily make the same claims of realism about their cinematography. Spielberg’s style was apparently influenced by John Huston’s WW2 documentary \textit{Battle of San Pietro} (1945), which does feature some moments of extreme camera shakiness either during moments of gunfire (to the point that they obscure the event depicted) or when an explosion occurs close to the camera (Figs. 3.51 – 3.52).\textsuperscript{415} However, as Haggith reminds us, the authenticity of Huston’s combat sequences is dubious in light of recent examination of notebooks from the time.\textsuperscript{416} Additionally, a combat cameraman from the Army’s 163\textsuperscript{rd} Signal Corps Company has pointed out that \textit{Battle of San Pietro} was assembled by intercutting some of their Signal Corps footage with restaged events filmed by Huston with two battalions on leave from the front. The cameraman, Ed Montagne, suggests that one of Huston’s techniques was to hit the camera with his hand to give the effect of the camera being affected by explosions. Although Montagne regarded the footage as “great,” he “resented” the critiques from headquarters that “Major Huston’s men are able to do this [kind of explicit battle footage]. Why can’t yours?”\textsuperscript{417} The shakiness of \textit{Ryan}’s camera actually does resemble Huston’s explosion-imitations in many respects (and therefore, it is unlike legitimate

\textsuperscript{415} Ibid, 335.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid, 336. See also, Maslowski, \textit{Armed With Cameras}: 87 – 94.
combat footage). However, Spielberg and Kaminski employed more complicated technology than simply hitting the camera. Using the Image Shaker device from Clairmont Camera—an appliance added to the camera which shakes the image by a controllable amount—the filmmakers initially intended to use it so that the camera would “feel the impact of the explosions,” however “after seeing dailies, we just dialled it in and out as Mitch [the camera operator] ran with the camera.” As a result, the shaking occurs frequently throughout the Omaha Beach sequence and is not always motivated by an explosion.

Haggith concludes his analysis by stating that Spielberg’s camera takes on more than one role:

[F]irstly, it is the “point of view” (the US Rangers and the defenders); secondly, it is the “all seeing eye”; thirdly, it views the beach scenes through the eyes of Captain Miller (Tom Hanks); and lastly through those of an anonymous Ranger, who runs up the beach after Miller, audibly panting and groaning.

Haggith finds this “perplexing,” since it simply does not represent actual WW2 combat footage. Furthermore, “is also inconsistent with the assumptions of conventional cinema: logically if the lens is the audience’s omnipresent eye, it should be unaffected by the battle and certainly not become smeared with ‘blood’ and water.” Therefore, according to Haggith, Spielberg “has done no more than borrow some stylistic elements characteristic of combat filming to enhance the

420 Ibid, 348.
dramatic power of the scenes.”

Of course, it is not only Haggith who has criticized the hand-held style of Ryan: although some public critics and reviewers have argued that the style is effective, there are others who disagree. For instance, one internet reviewer comments that:

Kaminski, so challenged by the opening scenes, gets to take a couple of breathers as the film goes on, and sometimes his camera is jittery and hand-held for no reason than to call attention to itself: a frequent annoyance in indie cinema because, as in this film (and I extend the argument partially to the battle scenes), there is nothing more “real” or “artless” about a hand-held camera moving between obvious Points A and B than a clean tracking shot or a simple cut.

As indicated earlier, Ryan’s hand-held camera also does not bear a resemblance to the camerawork of the other 2000s combat films (or necessarily to that of whatever an “indie” film’s cinematography might be). They do not shake the camera as much or in the same manner as Ryan, they have a more precise approach to framing and they do not physically move the camera to anything like the same extent as in Spielberg’s combat sequences. For instance, The Thin Red Line’s camera tends to favour positions behind the US troops or behind the Japanese troops, although these positions certainly cannot be taken to be combat camera positions as they would place the operator in extreme danger of being shot.

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421 Ibid, 348.

422 Nick Davis, “Saving Private Ryan” [review] http://www.nicksflickpicks.com/savpvt.html (accessed 18 September, 2010). There are, of course, a number of assumptions in Davis’ statement about hand-held cinematography and “indie” cinema which are outside the scope of this present discussion. I take his statement to refer to the sort of hand-held cinematography that might be found in an independent film like Larry Clark’s Kids (1995) or perhaps Roger Dodger (Dylan Kidd, 2002). From such a perspective, the key mistaken assumption in Davis’ remark is that there is anything similar between one type of hand-held shot and another. For instance, as if the way Roger Dodger handles a dialogue scene in a café is in any way similar to the way a camera might be following Tom Hanks as his unit attacks a pill-box. I address this specific issue in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.
There are only three obviously hand-held shots in *Stolz der Nation*, for instance the hand-held “run and gun” shot which follows two US soldiers running along the street at the point they are shot dead, an over-the-shoulder framing of Zoller that shows him shooting at the soldiers below, and a low angle shot of a soldier falling down some stairs which has the camera rotate slightly to keep him framed during the tumble. The first shot uses the hand-held camera’s instability and shakiness in a way that is very common to modern films, adding “energy” to the shot while the second and third shots are, in fact, so stable that the hand-held effect is barely noticeable.

Of course, while there are a number of different cinematic uses of hand-held cameras it seems that the technique’s deployment in WW2 films is usually motivated by one of two primary reasons. Firstly, it may be taken as a means of injecting that clichéd feeling of “energy” or secondly, to imply that the events unfolding are occurring too quickly to be captured with the polish of “artificial” Hollywood film scenes. The first motivation could be said to be one of viewer immersion while the second is an attempt at suggesting veracity. While a film may depend upon only one of these strategies, they may also be incorporated in tandem—as, for instance, is evident in the filmmakers’ discourse on *Ryan*’s style. Despite the already discussed unrealistic (or inaccurate) nature of the way the hand-held camera performs in *Ryan*, the persuasiveness of its claim to realism indicates that the strategy was established as a long-standing convention well before Spielberg staged his own Normandy invasion. One of the sources for the development of this convention is likely to be the original footage shot by military cameramen—which, in their shaky moments, *do* faintly resemble the slight wobble of a film like *The Thin Red Line*. But I suspect there are other sources that
have contributed to the modern viewing public’s acceptance of the convention, such as that the device has a long history in cinema, as outlined by Bordwell in *The Way Hollywood Tells It*. Bordwell argues that while there are examples of hand-held shots in silent cinema (specifically, *Battleship Potempkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) and *Napoleon* (Abel Gance, 1927)) and that the technique was used “occasionally” in post-war films, it became “more acceptable in mainstream American movies” after the “triple influence” of direct cinema documentaries, French New Wave films and British derivations of the New Wave style.\(^423\) Additionally, the “demand for frequent camera movement” in the modern style of intensified continuity, suggests Bordwell, has “probably helped popularize handheld shooting.”\(^424\) The 1960s direct cinema practitioners, of course, had a particular ideological purpose to “transparently observe the world” by using the newer light-weight, portable means of recording their subjects without the elaborate setup of the larger cameras and synchronised-sound recording equipment of previous years.\(^425\) I believe films like *The Thin Red Line*, *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Enemy at the Gates* (and even *Windtalkers* in its hand-held moments) are adopting the aesthetic of direct cinema’s often hand-held camerawork and in doing so they secure what has come to be regarded as a realistic “edge” that the stable-camera films of the 1940s do not offer modern viewers.


\(^424\) Ibid.

\(^425\) Carl Plantinga, *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 136 – 137. I should also indicate here that I recognise the problems of direct cinema’s claims to “truthfulness,” however these problems do not reduce the significance of fiction filmmakers’ adoption of the visual strategies as a means of creating the impression of an “unplanned realism.”
An interesting film in this regard is *84 Charlie Mopic* from the adjacent genre of the Vietnam War film which, although fictional, is presented entirely as if it is unedited footage shot by a combat cameraman attached to a patrol from the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The film has been regarded by some combat veterans as among the most realistic, if not the most realistic, of the Vietnam War films. Its camera is held relatively stable during the to-camera interviews with the soldiers, but then bobs with the operator’s footsteps as they follow the soldiers through the bush. Other non-cinematography based tactics of verisimilitude in this film are in fact familiar to the WW2 genre. Aside from the apparent realism of the raw, unpolished camerawork, the film attempts to gain authenticity by beginning with a title card dedication to actual fighting units (as in the 1940s WW2 films). It also boasts a Vietnam veteran, Patrick Duncan, as its writer/director which offers the sort of credibility associated with Sam Fuller’s *The Big Red One* (1980). For Keith Beattie, *84 Charlie Mopic* fits within a set of films, including *Platoon* (1988), which represent a “movement toward capturing the ‘real truth’ of the experience of the war in Vietnam” and seem to “have ‘more to say,’” that is they are supposedly capable of teaching us more, than documentary texts that present ‘straight’ historical accounts.”

Clearly, Beattie’s analysis is the type of ethical interpretation I have criticized earlier in this dissertation (i.e., he is questioning whether or not these films “teach us more” about Vietnam than other types of cinematic treatments of the conflict). However, neither Bettie nor the critics of WW2 films appear to be operating from an adequate theoretical position of the hand-held camera, which is an objective of my Chapter 4, Section 4.1.

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**Controlled spontaneity**

A significant characteristic of the battle scenes in two of the films studied here is that they use a strategy of choreographing both staging and hand-held camera movement in order to create an effect that I call “controlled spontaneity.” This technique is at work in both *Ryan* and to a limited extent in *The Thin Red Line*. Toward the end of the “Taking the hill” battle sequence of *The Thin Red Line* the fighting takes place at close quarters: the small unit of US soldiers is firing from behind the cover of rocks at the top of the hill and the some Japanese soldiers are firing machine guns from inside the bunker while others are charging towards the US troops. At one point in this scene—which has an ASL of 3.8 seconds—Malick presents a 13 second hand-held shot which pans back and forth between a single US soldier and two other US soldiers who are all caught up in the middle of the fighting. Shooting with a wide-angle lens, the camera does not move physically during the shot other than the slight tell-tale wobble of hand-held instability. The first part of the shot is a shooter-within-the-same-shot framing of one soldier firing at the Japanese staged in deep field (Fig. 3.54). In the middle of his gunfire, the camera suddenly whip-pans to the right to frame two other US soldiers taking cover behind a rock (Fig. 3.55). At the exact moment the camera comes to rest on them, an explosion occurs at the entrance to the bunker in the background and Japanese soldiers begin to emerge from the bunker. Some of the Japanese are shot by off-screen shooters, but at least one of them appears to be shot by the soldier in the right-hand side of the foreground. While these two soldiers continue to shoot (at Japanese soldiers who are now off-screen), the camera whip-pans back to the left to return to the first soldier. At the exact moment the camera points at him the soldier lunges forward to (apparently) throw a grenade (Fig. 3.56). The camera remains on him for almost one second after he has thrown the grenade, during
which time the blurry figure of a Japanese approaching over the hill in the background is visible. At that point the camera quickly pans to the right again just as the other two soldiers have begun firing at the approaching Japanese in the background (Fig. 3.57). On the very edge of frame-left, the viewer can see the first and second Japanese fall and then the third is also apparently shot by one of the foreground US soldiers, again in shooter-with-the-same-shot framing.

What is being described here is not simply a matter of having a large amount of action going on in the frame. Instead, the effect of spontaneity is created by a careful co-ordination of character movement, the timing of events such as explosions and bullet-hits, and the hand-held camera’s mobile frame in such a way that the camera seems to be able to “catch” the significant events at the right time, almost as if by accident. A non-example would be any shot in Ryan in which the camera simply follows Cpt. Miller as he runs up the beach amid explosions and other men. Although these shots certainly involve careful choreography (for example, the placement and timing of squib-hits, the movement of people for safety, the movement of the camera itself) they do not exhibit controlled spontaneity because the camera does not appear to accidentally catch significant actions by moving to them at the precise moment they occur. A clear example in the Omaha beach sequence, however, occurs when the camera follows a small group of men running toward the machine-gun nests with Bangalore torpedoes. The camera bounces as it moves forward and does not maintain any kind of consistent framing, which could be interpreted as a combat camera operator chasing them (Fig 3.58).\footnote{However, it does not have to be regarded in this way. As Haggith shows in his work on the AFPU camera men, a combat camera operator would, in reality, be very unlikely to run directly up to the front line like this.} Suddenly, the camera whip-pan}s to the right (Fig.
3.59) and then stops on a well-framed Close Up of a wounded soldier (Fig. 3.60). The camera continues to physically move forward, but also continually reframes to maintain this Close Up of the soldier on the ground. It then whip-pans back to the men running toward the machine-gun nests (Fig. 3.61). This particular shot indicates one of the complexities of orchestrating controlled spontaneity: the camera must pull-focus at precise moments and these focus positions must be well planned beforehand.\(^\text{429}\) As with the shot in *The Thin Red Line*, I believe the overall effect of this 23 second shot is to draw the audience’s attention to particular aspects of battlefield violence while simultaneously positioning that violence as merely a small part of a much larger context of battlefield action.

The technique of controlled spontaneity may also be used to add a frenetic pace to battlefield events, as Spielberg does in a 42 second shot during “the Alamo” sequence (Figs. 3.62 – 3.75). In this part of the scene, Cpt. Miller’s unit is under attack in the town of Ramelle and is being flanked. Three of them (Pvt. Mellish, another soldier and Cpl. Upham) run up the stairs of a building across the street to mount a .30 caliber machine gun to repel the attacking Germans. Spielberg presents this entire series of actions in one wobbly, hand-held moving shot which primarily follows Upham. His physical movements throughout the scene are frantic, in comparison with the other two soldiers who move with efficiency. At the start of the shot, Upham is hiding behind cover while in the middle distance, Mellish and the other soldier are running from a building that has been shot at by a tank in deep-field (Fig. 3.62). Logically, the camera cannot be a combat

\(^{429}\) Standard filmmaking practice for accurate focusing is that the Focus Puller measures the distance from the lens’ image plane to the subject or subjects (e.g., Tom Hanks, the Flak gunners) and indicates the distance(s) on the lens barrel or follow-focus ring. Of course, if the moving subject happens to be at a slightly different position during the take, experienced focus pullers are likely to be able to compensate for this.
cameraman because the camera height here would put them dangerously in the line of fire, but the pace of action and the apparent spontaneity of the rest of this shot mean that the audience is unaware of this. As the other two soldiers run across the road and out of the frame at screen-right, the dust cloud from the exploded building wall engulfs Upham in the foreground and the camera tilts down to him (Fig. 3.63). Upham gets to his feet, scrambles across the road and is followed by the camera, but the camera seems to move faster than he does (Fig. 3.64) and picks up Mellish as he runs into the building across the street (Fig. 3.65). Upham then runs into the frame and the camera follows him up the staircase – Mellish and the other soldier are ahead of him up the stairs and enter a room (Fig. 3.66). Upham pauses, catching his breath and the camera waits with him, observing his panic (Fig. 3.67). As Upham moves into the room, he crosses the camera in the middle of its own movement forward towards the other two soldiers who have made it to the window (Fig 3.68). But it seems the camera is too late, because the two men instantly turn away from that window (apparently the Germans are not flanking from that direction) and run off to screen-left (Fig 3.69). The camera moves toward them as they mount the machine-gun at a hole in the wall (Fig 3.70). It so happens that both they and the camera are there just in time for the Germans to come past that hole: the men fire their machine-gun and kill the Germans in shooter-within-the-same-shot framing (Fig 3.71). The camera moves backward from the window while the men continue firing (Fig 3.72) and at this exact moment Upham has decided to run across the room (Fig 3.73) to the window on the other side. The camera moves through the wall (Fig 3.74) and

430 I believe this could also be interpreted as him pausing to relax because he cannot believe he made it through what had just taken place on the street. Unlike the other two soldiers in this shot, Upham has not been through combat prior to the events depicted in the film.
comes outside the building to frame Upham in the foreground and the continuing combat action in the background (Fig 3.75).\footnote{If the camera is to be interpreted as that of a combat camera operator, then here it must have moved through an unseen door onto a balcony to frame the conclusion of the shot. On the other hand, if there is no door (or window) and no balcony then the camera is, of course, not meant to be present in the diegesis. Controlled spontaneity does not need to be from the perspective of a cameraman apparently in the diegesis, as the shot from \textit{The Thin Red Line} shows.}

The shot is a breathless depiction of action and the controlled spontaneity is achieved in such a seamless way that viewers are caught up in the action, ignoring that the events have occurred conveniently in time with the camera’s apparently unplanned movements. I suspect the same shot performed using a Steadicam would draw attention to itself, as in the long-take shootout/chase sequence at the end of Brian de Palma’s \textit{Carlito’s Way} (1993). An interesting contrast to Spielberg’s approach would be a shootout in the Hughes Brothers’ apocalyptic \textit{The Book of Eli} (2010) in which characters inside a house shoot it out with their enemy outside. The camera moves inside the house and then outside again a number of times during an apparently extended take. There is an element of apparent spontaneity to it, in that the camera “happens” to be framing the outside attackers at the moments they are preparing a rocket launcher, or preparing a Gatling gun, for instance. At times the camera is shaky as though shot by a news camera operator running around the scene and then suddenly the camera moves smoothly as though on a Steadicam. The “shot” was accomplished with multiple cameras and significant computer manipulation with the intention of looking like it is one take.\footnote{See the behind the scenes documentary on the DVD release of \textit{The Book of Eli} (Albert Hughes and Allen Hughes, 2010).} However, the supposedly invisible transitions between shots occur during obvious CG dust, smoke and debris that obscures particular moments. The effect is interesting and novel, essentially drawing attention to the
technical prowess of the filmmakers, as one internet reviewer has noted: “the movie deserves a nod for creating a shoot-out that is technically unique, with the camera doing an unbroken, virtual figure-8 camera loop-around.” I would suggest that nobody has praised the WW2 combat shots by Spielberg or Malick because they are subtle.

The technique of controlled spontaneity may also be used to add a frenetic pace to battlefield events, as Spielberg does during one part of “the Alamo” sequence in which the men have been flanked by Germans with a .20mm Flak gun. In a 4 second shot, the camera begins on some US troops attacking a Tiger tank (Fig. 3.76) and then whip-pans to the right at the moment some Germans have begun wheeling their flak gun into position (Fix 3.77). The camera slightly over-shoots the framing on the Germans and attempts to correct, but then suddenly whip-pans again to the right to pick up Cpt. Miller in Close Up as he begins giving orders to attack the flak gunners (Fig. 3.78). Additionally, the camera operator’s timing must be exact: if the camera arrived a moment earlier on Cpt. Miller giving orders, or a moment later, the effect of spontaneity would be lost. Of course, the most commonly used option available to filmmakers who want the camera to frame particular objects and characters at exactly the right time is to simply cut to it as necessary. Through editing the camera can be anywhere it needs to be at any time it needs to be there and by using various tactics of continuity editing, the

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434 Not that Spielberg is unwilling to do such overt moves using technology. In fact, he out-does the Hughes Brothers in his War of the Worlds (2005) when Tom Cruise’s character drives down a freeway in a van. The shot uses CG, blue-screen compositing and camera-tracking to create an extended shot where the camera moves up to the car to catch specific moments of dialogue while also swooping around to reveal the carnage covering the landscape.
435 There is also a much more elaborate example from the same sequence, in which a 42 second take involves the camera moving from outside a building, up a set of stairs, and out onto a balcony. I discuss that example in greater detail in Chapter 4.
filmmaker can create the impression of continuous action.\textsuperscript{436} However, this process simply does not create the impression of spontaneity. But as with the other aspects of the hand-held camera in the war films, there is nothing particularly realistic about controlled spontaneity. We should recall that the AFPU cameramen claim that battlefield action “happened too quickly to catch on film” and could not be anticipated, and the practical issue of only carrying 10 minutes of film at D-Day meant they could not simply run the camera freely and hope to catch explosions or killings.\textsuperscript{437}

The practical considerations of planning for a shot are useful reminders that controlled spontaneity is highly controlled by the filmmaker, yet the point of all the planning is ultimately to emphasize the attributes of the hand-held camera that make it seem somehow closer to what audiences are prepared to consider “realistic.” Bordwell has noted how the fight scenes in Sylvester Stallone’s \textit{The Expendables} (2010) were filmed by five camera operators who were, in Stallone’s own words, “on their own” in terms of filming what they could.\textsuperscript{438} The resulting fight scenes are barely comprehensible and incoherently visualized and Bordwell suggests that in this case, as in many other instances, “realism” is:

\begin{quote}

simply a fig leaf for doing what you want. Virtually any technique can be justified as realistic according to some conception of what’s important in the scene. If you shoot the action cogently, with all the moves evident, that’s realistic because it shows you what’s “really” happening. If you shoot it awkwardly, that presentation
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{436} For a filmmaker’s perspective, see Walter Murch, \textit{In the Blink of An Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (California: Silman-James Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{437} Haggith, “D-Day Filming – For Real,” 341.
is “realistically” reflecting what a participant perceives or feels. If you shoot it as “chaos” [...] well, action feels chaotic when you’re in it, right?\footnote{Ibid.}

Controlled spontaneity is obviously much more than simply setting up a battlefield and leaving the camera operators “on their own” to deal with the action. For instance, the staging must be thought-out, actor movement rehearsed, the locations of squib-hits and other pyrotechnics must be identified for safety purposes and so on. This does not make them any more realistic; however, it does arguably make them more visually compelling. As I showed in Chapter 2, at least some audiences do regard \textit{Ryan}’s combat scenes as realistic, so a scholarly explanation of this phenomenon is essential here. For contemporary audiences at least, one criteria of realism seems to be the degree to which the presentation of an event seems to unplanned, unrehearsed and imprecise. Spielberg’s coordination of camera and actor movement in \textit{Ryan} shows that he knows this. Consider the way he has described the film’s cinematography:

\begin{quote}
The whole movie has a different style than anything I’ve done before. It’s very hard and rough, and in the best sense, I think it’s extraordinarily sloppy. But reality is sloppy it’s not the perfect dolly shot or crane move.\footnote{Spielberg, cited in Pizello, “Five Star General.”}
\end{quote}

Here, an aesthetic of imprecision and spontaneity in the cinematography are taken to be markers of the camera “being there” and are therefore assumed to signify
realism, regardless of whether or not they could indeed be considered “realistic” in any mimetic sense.\textsuperscript{441}

Directors in other genres have occasionally attempted something similar to this approach of controlled spontaneity. For instance, Alfonso Cuaron’s dystopian science fiction film \textit{Children of Men} (2006) constructs a number of crucial sequences in what are apparently one-takes. Although some of these sequences were achieved by digitally blending a number of separate shots, the appearance in each case is of a single shot. The careful choreography of these shots took up to 12 days to prepare; however, the point of doing these kinds of elaborate continuous shots, according to Cuaron, is:

To try to create a moment of truthfulness, in which the camera just happens to be there to just register that moment. So what becomes important, then, is not the camera, but the moment.\textsuperscript{442}

By “moment of truthfulness” Cuaron seems to mean the feeling of spontaneity, since in another interview he has suggested that although he can “choreography to the inch every single moment […] things are going to go wrong and it’s how he [the actor] reacts with things going wrong that create a moment of truthfulness.”\textsuperscript{443}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{441} I discuss the concepts of “reality,” “realism,” and “authenticity” from a theoretical perspective in Chapter 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Visual distortions: Manipulations of time and blood on the lens

One of the striking ironies associated with some of the most non-realistic camera techniques in the WW2 combat scenes I have been dealing with is that these have generally been employed as a means of enhancing the impression of “combat reality.” As indicated, Huston’s practice of hitting the camera with his hand to simulate or augment a nearby explosion in a staged battle seemed more like battle footage to military commanders than the more stabilized footage shot by the AFPU or Signal Corps cameramen in actual battle conditions. More recently, Malick and Spielberg’s scenes manage to create a sense of immersion amid the unexpected chaos of a battlefield while obviously being very precisely staged and choreographed in what I have called controlled spontaneity. These, and the visual distortions I will deal with in this section, seem to suggest that clean, precisely crafted battlefield cinematography has been cast aside by modern directors in favour of a “flawed” image.\textsuperscript{444} Audiences too, seem to regard the modern films as closer depictions to what a battlefield is “like” and, as I will suggest later, the affective impact of the modern films is enhanced strongly by these manipulations of the cinematography. The apparent paradox is explainable to a certain extent by existing film theory. Consider, for instance, the following philosophical stance on realism and mimesis by André Bazin:

\begin{quote}
The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{444} In fact, the only modern film studied here that uses obvious “Hollywood” cinematographic techniques in its battle is Woo’s \textit{Windtalkers} and that film’s crane shots stand out starkly against the shaky hand-held footage that brings the audience closer to the action.
the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model.\(^{445}\)

Indeed, the discourse of public reviewers’ commentary on *Ryan* carries a distinctly Bazanian flavour. After all, the common response which has been summarized by Basinger as “Hollywood finally tells the truth” is clearly informed by teleological assumptions that filmmaking practice has developed toward a realistic representation of infantry combat violence.\(^{446}\) But as Prince points out:

> Conventions for depicting violence change over time, as do assessments by audiences about what counts as real and convincing. *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* [both 1931] were excessive films in their day, just as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *Hostel* (2005) have been in more recent periods.\(^{447}\)

For Prince, *Ryan’s* battles have a strong impact because the graphic violence is treated stylistically in a way that was unfamiliar to the 1998 audience: in particular, means of distorting the image. He draws brief attention to the softening effect of stripped lenses and the desaturating ENR process I have already addressed earlier in this section, but he also points to Spielberg and Kaminski’s “radical experimentation with the speed and angle of the camera’s shutter.”\(^{448}\) The shutter angle is one camera control that determines the amount of light transmitted to the film by limiting the amount of time a frame of film is exposed to light.\(^{449}\) A

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\(^{446}\) Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 253.


\(^{448}\) Ibid, 285.

\(^{449}\) The lens aperture (the iris, or *f*-stop) also controls the amount of light reaching the film emulsion, but does so by literally increasing or decreasing the quantity of light. As such, it does not have the same effect on object movement as does a manipulation of the shutter angle.
long shutter speed (created by a wide shutter angle) exposes the frame for long enough that movement in the object might blur slightly on the film, whereas a short shutter speed (a narrow shutter angle) will register moving objects as a much crisper image. Standard cinema practice is to shoot with a 180-degree shutter when filming at 24 frames per second (the frame rate for synchronized sound). The resulting footage appears effectively as smooth motion to the human eye. For Ryan’s battle sequences, the filmmakers occasionally used a 90-degree or 45-degree shutter which creates a staccato-like effect on object movement. This is most evident during explosions: “When the sand is blasted into the air, you can see every particle, almost every grain, coming down,” which Kaminski regards as creating “a definite sense of reality and urgency.”\(^{450}\) Although Prince does not justify the significance of this technique, I want to draw specific attention to the non-realistic aesthetic involved here. Salt’s critique of the technique is that it “has nothing to do with a sense of reality, since all the cameras used to film the World War II all had shutters fixed at 180 degrees (or nearby), so the effect does not occur in footage form the Normandy landings or anywhere else.”\(^{451}\) Clearly, this distortion of the image from what would count as “normal” (i.e., the smooth motion of the vast majority of Hollywood films) achieves its impact by literally unsettling the audience’s visual expectations.\(^{452}\)

Of course, Spielberg is not the only filmmaker attempting to manipulate the presentation of time in a WW2 combat sequence. Although the 1940s films studied do not make any obvious manipulations in this area, all of the 2000s films

\(^{450}\) Kaminski, cited in Probst, “The Last Great War.”
\(^{451}\) Salt, Moving Into Pictures, 311.
\(^{452}\) As I show in Chapter 4, it seems that the neoformalist concept of defamiliarization explains many aspects of Ryan’s cinematography. This defamiliarization is affected not only by the visual distortions, but also by the particular type of hand-held cinematography used by Spielberg during the battle sequences.
(except *Flags of Our Fathers*) use some sort of temporal adjustment. There are some obvious uses of slow motion. *Windtalkers* uses it the most frequently. For example, there are a number of slow-motion Close Up shots of Sgt. Enders during his frenzied killing spree, as well as very slow-motion shots of men on fire tumbling away from an explosion. Woo also uses it to significantly increase the stylistic amplitude of deaths which involve a lot of scenery destruction, letting the slow-motion and fast shutter-speed suspend the particles of dirt and pieces of blown-off clothing in the air as the victims’ bodies fall to the ground. *The Thin Red Line* slows a single shot of a soldier jumping to his feet and running up the hill as bullets from a machine-gun kick up dirt around his feet: again the slow motion underscores the character’s dramatic moment. The protagonist of *Enemy at the Gates* is not given a rifle before the battle and makes a desperate grasp for one that has been dropped by a fallen comrade—slow motion footage of his reaching hand both ensures that the audience comprehends that another soldier picks it up before he could, while also increasing the suspense. Later in the scene the retreating soldiers are shot by their own officers and brief slow-motion shots of men being hit and/or falling to the ground are inserted amongst normal speed footage shot with a narrow shutter angle.

One of the obvious cinematic sources of these kinds of temporal distortions is Sam Peckinpah. His style of editing together shots of violence filmed at varying frame rates is usually linked to his *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and his significance to the WW2 combat film is articulated clearly with *Cross of Iron*, his 1977 film about German troops fighting on the Russian front. Although Peckinpah is often regarded as having been the first Hollywood director to put realistic violence directly in the audience’s line of vision, Prince argues that in fact Peckinpah’s
representations of violence have little to do with realism at all. For Prince, violence in Peckinpah’s films is both poetic and subjective and is primarily a result of the very particular way his films use slow-motion montage in scenes of death. Rather than simply filming a gunshot victim in slow-motion, Peckinpah’s strategy is to shoot the gunshot(s) with multiple cameras running at different frame rates and placed at angles that do not follow standard continuity cutting rules.

The resulting sequences achieve a dynamic effect through their spatial and temporal distortion and although Prince’s primary sources come from The Wild Bunch, I find that the technique is clearly articulated in a battlefield killing during Cross of Iron. In this sequence, Sergeant Steiner’s men have returned to their German camp and are fired upon by their own troops. This brief 12.5 second sequence contains 12 shots, but only five of them are in slow-motion. First, Peckinpah provides a three second LS of the soldier being fired upon by machine-gunners in the foreground, during which the camera zooms in to a slightly closer shot of the victim as he begins to react to the gunshots (Fig. 3.79). Next, a one second shot of one of the soldier’s comrades reacting to the shooting—he screams out “No!” (Fig. 3.80). This is the first time a separate event interrupts the primary action of the man being gunned down and the effect is to extend the duration of the killing. Peckinpah then switches to slow-motion filming for a 21 frame BCU of the machine-gun’s barrel firing (Fig. 3.81). In the next shot, also in slow-motion, the victim is hit and spins around as blood squirts from the wound (Fig. 3.82). Notably, this camera position is discontinuous with the previous setups: there is no kind of eye-line match between the gun firing in the previous shot and

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this angle. This striking effect is enhanced by the return to the gun firing for another slow-motion shot (Fig. 3.83), this time only 14 frames in duration. Peckinpah switches back to normal speed for three shots. The first is 15 frames of the soldier as he begins to fall (Fig. 3.84) and this action is interrupted by the second shot of the soldier’s commanding officer reaction, which lasts 19 frames (Fig. 3.85). The next shot returns to the soldier falling to the ground (Fig. 3.86), the duration of the collapsing movement having been extended by the interruption of the cutaway to Steiner. Now that the soldier has collapsed, the machine-gun stops firing and Peckinpah returns to the 19 frame slow-motion of its smoking barrel (Fig. 3.87). The slow-motion continues in the next shot which shows the victim’s body settling on the ground as its legs and arms flop downwards—this shot is 1.5 seconds which makes it the second longest in the sequence (Fig. 3.88). Peckinpah returns to normal speed filming for a one second shot of the machine-gunners (Fig. 3.89) before switching back to slow-motion for the final collapsing movement of the victim (Fig. 3.90). Once again, the cut-away serves to extend the duration of the victim’s final collapse.

The spatial and temporal distortions in the *Cross of Iron* sequence create a non-realistic (or at least, non-naturalistic) representation of the combat violence, turning it into what Prince has called a “hyperkinetic spectacle.”⁴⁵⁴ In this sequence, there is a progression from a great amount of movement in the frame in the beginning shots, to much less movement once the victim has hit the ground. The first seven shots of the sequence are full of movement, regardless of the film

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⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 72. It should be noted that Prince is using this term in order to problematize Peckinpah’s violence and to argue that Peckinpah’s style is complicit in producing viewer enjoyment of the violence depicted. For my analysis, I think it is more relevant that Peckinpah’s style is simply not taken up by the 2000s WW2 combat films except in a simplified form in *Enemy at the Gates* as I show below.
frame rate—the muzzle flashes of the gun firing, the sharp recoil of the victim as he is hit and the sharp reactions of the victim’s comrades as they see the killing. The final five shots exhibit a sudden reduction in the amount of movement in the frame, again irrespective of the frame rate. The victim’s body on the ground shows only the slight downward movement of his limbs settling into the dirt, the machine-gun does not fire in close up and only the coils of smoke move slowly around the muzzle—even the machine-gunners are static (Fig. 3.89). Thus, the tension between character movement and stasis, normal and slow-motion filming emphasizes the dramatic impact of the gunshot.

The sequence highlights the peculiarities of Peckinpah’s slow-motion aesthetic. According to Prince:

> Slow-motion images are not of themselves dynamic. Their tendency is toward inertia.\textsuperscript{455}

Therefore, the dynamism of a sequence such as this comes from the particular shots which have been selected for slow-motion treatment. Peckinpah keeps the beginning of the victim’s fall in normal speed (Fig. 3.84 and 3.86), but switches to slow-motion when the body has hit the ground. For Prince, the “poetic force” of the slow-motion of these scenes comes from:

> the metaphysical paradox of the body’s continued animate reactions during a moment of diminished or extinguished consciousness. Slow motion intensifies this paradox by prolonging it. It is not just the moment of violent death which is

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid, 65.
extended, but the mysteries inherent in that twilit zone between consciousness and autonomic impulse, that awful moment when a personality ceases to inhabit a body that is still in motion.\footnote{Ibid, 60.}

This same strategy is adopted to a lesser degree by *Enemy at the Gates* as the Russian soldiers are gunned down while retreating. The film briefly switches to slow-motion for a number of shots of their bodies hitting the ground. My close viewing of this film in light of *Cross of Iron* suggests that there is another stylistic element at work in producing the intense effect of these montage sequences. This is the extremely rapid cutting of the shots. For instance, the majority of the shots in the *Cross of Iron* sequence identified above are under one second and the *Enemy at the Gates* massacre replicates this in its quick cutting between the guns firing and bodies falling to the ground. However, the latter film does not use Peckinpah’s montage strategy of cutting between a number of different angles—in the *Enemy at the Gates* sequence, once the soldier has hit the ground that is the last time the film shows him. *Windtalkers* also frequently uses brief slow-motion inserts of victims’ bodies hitting the ground; however, unlike *Enemy at the Gates* these are occasionally edited using a similar montage style to Peckinpah; John Woo, true to his Hong Kong heritage, sometimes repeats a number of different angles of a particular action (such as a group of soldiers being shot up by machine-gun fire as they try to pull a comrade out of barbed wire fence) and these are usually in slow-motion.\footnote{Bordwell has written about this typical Hong Kong action strategy of repeating certain actions to enhance their legibility on screen. See Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*: 408 – 409.} This differs from Peckinpah’s technique in that the different angles do not radically distort the spatial relationship of the scene, nor
are they constructed in such elaborate cross-cutting patterns and thus the action remains highly intelligible at a logical level.

Prince locates the antecedents for this style in both Akira Kurasawa and Arthur Penn, who experimented with slow-motion inserts for scenes of violence before Peckinpah. Although Peckinpah apparently claimed he had not seen *Bonnie and Clyde* before shooting *The Wild Bunch*, Prince suggests that a copy of the film had been presented to Peckinpah.\(^458\) During a detailed comparison of Penn’s slow motion deaths with Peckinpah’s, Prince points out that Penn experimented without success with slow motion in *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958) and then more effectively in *Bonnie and Clyde*. His conclusion is that: “By alternating between slow and apparently accelerated tempos (the apparent acceleration produced at normal film speed by virtue of the Texas Rangers’ fast rate of fire), Penn successfully brings out the balletic and spastic qualities of the scene.”\(^459\)

Peckinpah, however, variously cited two very different sources of where this idea came from, even though “As we can now see, ample precedent existed in the films of Kurosawa and Penn.” Peckinpah apparently:

got into the habit of telling interviewers that during his military service in China in 1945 he realized how slow motion might apply to such scenes after seeing a Chinese passenger shot while riding on a train. Peckinpah called it one of the longest split seconds of his life. On other occasions when he told the story of learning about slow motion, it was he who had been shot: “I was shot once and I remembered falling down and it was so long … I noticed that time slowed down

\(^{458}\) Ibid, 57 – 59.  
\(^{459}\) Ibid, 59.
and so I started making pictures where I slowed down time, because that’s the way it is.”

Prince is not convinced by either of Peckinpah’s claims for the source of his slow motion deaths. However, he does suggest that Peckinpah is attempting to really imply to his critics that he is “no exploiter and glorifier of screen violence but merely an observer of the psychological reality of living through a violent experience.” The author suggests that it is much more likely that Peckinpah was impressed with Kurosawa and Penn’s stylistic treatments of death, “began trying them himself, and subsequently projected his World War II memory onto the results.” While I am convinced by Prince’s reasoning here, I think there is more to be said about participants’ memories of combat violence. Consider a WW2 veteran’s verbal description of a combat incident in an interview with historian Stephen E. Ambrose. The interviewee, Major Richard Winters, had come upon a unit of German troops without being seen and then began firing at them. In the interview, conducted nearly 50 years after the event took place, Winters’ description reads like a justification for the realism of slow-motion violence in cinema:

The movements of the Germans seemed to be unreal to me. When they rose up, it seemed to be so slow, when they turned to look over their shoulders at me, it was in slow motion, when they started to raise their rifles to fire at me, it was in slow, slow motion. I emptied the first clip [eight rounds] and, still standing in the middle

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460 Ibid., 61.
461 Ibid.
462 Ibid.
of the road, put in a second clip and, still shooting from the hip, emptied that clip into the mass.\textsuperscript{463}

Winters has quite possibly adopted the phrase “slow motion” from popular discourse; however, that does not change the fact that this is the\textit{language} he has used to describe a particular event from his combat experience. Recent research in the area of cognitive science suggests that, rather than events being\textit{perceived} in slow-motion as they take place it is more likely that certain events (in particular, stressful or traumatic experiences) are\textit{remembered} as occurring over a longer duration than was really the case.\textsuperscript{464} Central to this hypothesis are experiments indicating that the part of the human brain called the amygdala may influence the memory of experiences and events “according to their emotional importance.”\textsuperscript{465} The combat experience described by Maj. Winters is no doubt a highly emotional experience, as indeed is Peckinpah’s anecdote of witnessing the Chinese killing. Whatever their experience was at the time, their described memories are characterized by a slowed down perception of time. This could be explained by cognitive science research, which suggests that “the involvement of the amygdala in emotional memory may lead to dilated duration judgments retrospectively, due to a richer, and perhaps secondary encoding of the memories.”\textsuperscript{466} As such, it

\textsuperscript{463} Richard Winters, cited in Stephen E. Ambrose, \textit{Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne From Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest} (USA: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 148. Interestingly, when the filmmakers of \textit{Band of Brothers} recreate this event, they do not use slow-motion. However, there is a similar feeling created by a striking contrast in editing pace. Specifically, the sequence is primarily composed of BCU and CU shots leading up to Winters’ character discovering the Germans and these shots are edited very rapidly. At the moment where Winters discovers the Germans, the editing slows down and the shots are primarily LS.


\textsuperscript{466} Stetson \textit{et al}, “Does Time Really Slow Down During a Frightening Event?”, 3.
might not be realistic in a literal sense to use slow-motion for a killing in a film but it may, in fact, be a more accurate means of depicting (or expressing) the normal human cognitive perception of such an event.

Another kind of visual distortion sometimes employed by the 2000s films is for a blood-spray to hit the lens and remain there. In *Ryan* the effect only happens three times in the Omaha beach sequence. The first time it occurs, two tiny droplets of blood hit the lens when a group of soldiers are shot in front of the camera in their Higgins craft. In this instance, the blood is difficult to notice because the droplets are tiny. Soon after that, a CU of Miller ushering the men out of the Higgins craft has small droplets of blood already on the lens (Fig. 3.91). The most extreme blood on the lens occurs later in the sequence, in a MS of a group of medics attempting to tend to a wounded soldier—much larger rivulets of blood have flowed down the overall surface of the lens (Fig. 3.92). *Enemy at the Gates* does this once in its opening battle, suddenly cutting to a shot which has a large red smear in the bottom left corner as well as fine droplets of blood across the overall picture area.\(^{467}\) The device occurs twice in *Windtalkers* and both instances are run-and-gun shots as the camera moves along a Japanese trench the US forces are attacking. In one of them, a Japanese is shot right in front of the camera and a single drop of the blood burst from the squib hits the camera lens at the left side and stays there as an out of focus red spot while the camera continues forward. A few shots later, the camera has a drop of blood on the right hand side before the film even cuts to this angle.

\(^{467}\) Interestingly, two shots later, the camera has a few spots of what seems to be dirt on the lens and then the following shot has much larger spots of dirt.
Like *Ryan*, in these cases the camera has been positioned very close to the combat. On the one hand, this means the effect can be regarded as a logical occurrence, since the camera is in the midst of the action and therefore close enough to get splattered. But on the other hand, it is also practicable. By this I mean that this kind of shot has to be filmed with a wide-angle lens because a telephoto lens would render the blood so out of focus that they would simply be smears that create slightly fuzzy spots on the lens, rather than the effect of visible blood droplets. I think there are two stylistic factors at work here. First, these moments count as an attempt to add a visceral realism to the shot. The diegesis appears to interfere with the recording apparatus, just as John Huston’s technique of hitting the camera to enhance and simulate near-by explosions. In effect, the destructive impact of the bullet on the victim’s body does not disappear after the body has left the frame: it remains on the camera lens. And second, it should be remembered that the directors of all of these films were in a position to reshoot the individual shots if blood accidentally hit the lens. Therefore, in these cases the blood on the lens is either deliberately orchestrated (as an instance of controlled spontaneity), or the “accidental” effect was deemed to be desirable after the fact. Therefore, it seems that audiences are meant to read these “mistakes” as an index of realism—as if the camera was really in the middle of a fierce battle for which the camera operator was not quite prepared. As indicated earlier, Spielberg himself refers to this method of filming as “sloppy” and claims that it is *unlike* the kind of artificial Hollywood filmmaking that might be found in his earlier films—by which I think he is referring to his pure entertainment films such as the *Indiana Jones* films or *Jurassic Park*. For *Ryan*, he says:
If the lens got splattered with sand and blood, I didn’t say, “Oh my God, the shot’s ruined, we have to do it over again” we just used it in the picture. Our camera was affected in the same way that a combat cameraman’s would be when an explosion or bullet hit happened nearby.468

*Children of Men*, though not a war film, also has blood striking the lens when a character is shot close to the camera. The director of photography, Emmanuel Lubeszki, reveals that the general approach was that the filmmakers wanted “the viewer to feel as though the action is happening for real.”469 The long takes during dialogue scenes and action sequences, a rough approach to lighting, and especially the blood hitting the lens, all seem to provide this effect of immersion. Interestingly, the director claims that the blood on the lens was accidental:

I yelled cut, but there was an explosion, so nobody heard me. And then I realized if they had heard me, and they have cut [sic], I was not going to be able to shoot the scene. So I just let it go. […] It was about embracing those accidents, embracing those things that I could have never designed originally.470

This is, of course, similar to Spielberg’s attitude that “If the lens got splattered with sand and blood […] we just used it in the picture.” While this is obviously much less “controlled” than the created impression of spontaneity (such as apparently accidental framings) found in the intricate coordination of camera and character movement already discussed, these filmmakers are no doubt aware that blood or dirt *could* hit the lens. What is significant here is Spielberg’s statement

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468 Spielberg, cited in Pizello, “Five Star General.”
470 Alfonso Cuarón, interviewed in Norris, “Cuarón Faced New Challenges in ‘Children of Men’.”
that the blood on the lens was not necessarily planned, but it was acceptable if it
spontaneously took place because of the type of film being made. Presumably, it
would be unacceptable for this to happen when Indiana Jones shoots a group of
Nazis—because of that film’s overall humorous tone and entertaining purpose—
but it is appropriate if it happens to occur in the shooting of a film with a strong
allegiance to notions of realism. Part of this approach to realism appears to be the
assumption that by finding ways to give the impression that the camera is “really”
there in the diegesis, the audience will feel “like” they are also there. This is
reflected in Spielberg’s statement justifying the sheer number of squib-hits he
wanted in the film’s battles:

When you go to war, even though the combatants are far off and often invisible to
the eye, what they are pouring down upon you has physical manifestations, and I
think that’s very symbolic of chaos […] and I tried my best to fill up every square
foot of Omaha Beach, as well as the town of Ramelle, with the manifestations of
war.471

Controlled spontaneity then, may sometimes be a result of very specific planning
and execution—as I show in a virtuoso long-take that occurs in the climax of
Ryan—or it may also be the result of accidents that come about by orchestrating
and environment in which they are likely to occur.

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471 Steven Spielberg, interviewed in Ron Magid, “Blood on the Beach,”
Camera movement and its stylistic function

Since all of the films studied have camera movement to a greater or lesser degree (*Objective, Burma!* is the notable outlier with its minimalist approach to camera movement), I will now consider this aspect of style in the combat sequences.

Consider this simplified table of the camera movement data from the sequences studied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of camera movement</th>
<th>Motivation for camera movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Character Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(% of total shots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wake Island</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal Diary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective Burma!</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gung Ho!</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.93  Simplified table of the camera movements in the film extracts of Fig 3.33.

It is obvious from these results that panning movements are the most frequent types used in these sequences and the most common motivation for movement (including physical moves such as dollying or a hand-held tracking shot) is the movement of character(s) within the shot. While there is a very slight tendency
towards more camera movement in the 2000s films, what is striking is the significant lack of shots motivated by scene geography or dramatic intensification in the 1940s films. Here I will draw upon Bordwell’s description of four functions of style, as outlined in his *Figures Traced in Light*. Although Bordwell’s analysis is primarily about staging the categories of analysis can be very usefully extended to the camera movement found in WW2 combat scenes.

Briefly, Bordwell suggests that any particular aspect of a film’s style will serve one or more of four functions. The first is simply to “denote a fictional or nonfictional realm of actions, agents, an circumstances,” and this is the most basic function of a stylistic aspect, such as a particular camera movement.\(^472\) Secondly, an aspect of film style may “display expressive qualities” in either its attempt to present an emotion or in an effort to cause an emotional response in the viewer.\(^473\) In this case Bordwell is not referring to the response of sadness to a “tear-jerker” narratives, or Ehrenhaus’ hypothesized viewer feeling regret in response to Holocaust subtext of Ryan’s narrative. Rather, an example of a shot’s expressive capacity would be Woo’s dramatic downward swooping crane-shot as Sgt. Enders gets caught up in the exhilaration of battle. The movement of the camera emphasizes his behavior and marks as significant in a way different to the shots surrounding it. Thirdly, film style might “yield more abstract, conceptual meanings as well” by suggesting *symbolic* associations.\(^474\) Finally, aspects of film style may be purely *decorative* and employ patterns of elements which function as “ornamentation” to be appreciated for their own aesthetic sake.\(^475\) Bordwell speculates that some camera movements in Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia*

\(^{472}\) Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*: 33 – 34.
\(^{473}\) Ibid. 34.
\(^{474}\) Ibid, I suspect that symbolic meanings for camera movements are rare.
\(^{475}\) Ibid.
could be regarded as serving this function: “For instance, we have two characters talking to one another and the camera is moving in time to the music […] the camera is moving slowly in on one character and then it moves slowly in on the other character.”\textsuperscript{476} While such a pattern of camera movement may become evident, it may be difficult to pin-point “exactly what it is expressing [because] it’s a little more than you’d need [to denotatively show character expressions].”\textsuperscript{477}

From this perspective, the dominance of camera movement motivated by character movement makes sense. This is a purely denotative function of style which allows the viewer to focus attention on the main characters. When a GI moves across a battlefield, the camera can either pan or track to maintain the view on him. Movement motivated by aspects of the scene geography is less common, but is also denotative. Spielberg’s pan movements in “The Alamo,” for instance, are mostly used in order to show how one soldier’s position is related to another (for instance, Miller’s location relative to the Germans with their flak gun in Figs. 3.76 – 3.78). A pan can denote the geographical position of a suddenly introduced character. For instance, in \textit{Gung Ho!} a soldier turns to glance at something off-screen and fires his rifle, then the camera immediately whip-pans to the left and stops on a Japanese as his body falls over in a doorway.

As well as these denotative functions, there may also be \textit{expressive} purpose for a particular camera movement, although obvious examples of these shots are rare in the sample of films here, and they are restricted to physical camera moves which intensify the drama of a specific battlefield event. \textit{Windtalkers} uses significantly

\textsuperscript{476} Bordwell, cited in Nielson, “Bordwell on Bordwell: Part IV – Levels of Engagement.”

\textsuperscript{477} Ibid.
more of these than the other films; for instance, the crane shot already mentioned. Each of these function as what Bordwell has called a “denotative-expressive intensifier,” which serve to intensify a dramatic moment for the character while simultaneously drawing attention to the character at that point in time.\textsuperscript{478}

Decorative camera movements are rare in the films studied; however, there is a notable exception in another 1940s film, Lewis Milestone’s \textit{A Walk in the Sun}. During a scene in which men throw grenades and fire at a German tank driving past, the camera dollies horizontally past the row of men firing directly at the camera. This camera movement is repeated a number of times, serving a number of stylistic functions simultaneously. In shots from behind the men, the camera tracks with the movement of the tank—thus serving the denotative function of showing the geographical position of the men in relation to the tank, while also showing the movement of the tank itself. In shots from in front of the men, tracking sideways this has the denotative function of showing the number of men moving into position, but does not focus on any particular soldier as once the camera has moved past them, they are no longer visible. However, the combination of these shots conveys a feeling of excitement, thus fulfilling an expressive function. But what is most significant about this sequence is that the fast-paced horizontally dolly shots can be appreciated as a reiteration of Milestone’s famous dolly shots past the trenches in his WW1 combat film \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front} (1929).

Finally, it should be remembered that a particular aspect of style might serve a combination of functions. For instance, the controlled spontaneity of both Ryan

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid. Arguably, musical emphases would also serve similar functions.
and *The Thin Red Line* serve obvious denotative purposes of revealing geography and carefully controlling the viewer’s attention to particular character’s actions at very specific points. However, they also serve the expressive purpose of conveying the frenetic pace and unpredictable nature of combat. At the same time, however, there is arguably a decorative component to these elaborate shots. For instance, Spielberg’s careful staging and choreography can be admired for their skillful execution. In Malick’s sequence, the controlled spontaneity above establishes a rhythm of panning back and forward: this rhythm is used in many other shots in the sequence except they are often a pan in one direction, then edit to another shot which contains a rapid pan in the opposite direction and so on. It is a decorative flourish for some viewers to discover.

### 3.3.3 Sound

The significance of the soundtrack of combat in film representations of war is easily apparent when considering the way that one modern writer, Andrew Kelly, recalls *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Kelly regards the film as one that “retains its power” for contemporary audiences through its realism and, although writing about the film in general, his language when describing the apparent “realism” of the film betrays the importance of the sound of battle in his account of this film:

> The hissing of the bullets, the rattle of the machine-gun, the barrage, the howling and screaming of the injured and the frightened, were all too horribly apparent to the audience.\(^{480}\)

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\(^{479}\) Andrew Kelly, “*All Quiet on the Western Front*”*: The Story of a Film*, (London: I.B. Tauris. 2001).  
\(^{480}\) Ibid., 158; 84.
With this in mind, there are some important differences in the use of sound between the two eras of WW2 films being studied here. In short, the contemporary films exhibit a much greater use of their soundtracks to create a greater range of effects on the audience. Of course, the first WW2 combat films were made during the first two decades of film sound. However, while the development of sound technology is certainly one of the key factors responsible for this difference, another important issue is that the production context of the modern films is arguably one in which a film soundtrack is regarded in professional circles as something to be designed. Indeed, “sound design” and the modern war film are bound up together very tightly. Walter Murch devised the term to describe his work on the Francis Ford Coppola’s Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), where he used the term sound designer to describe someone who “takes responsibility for the sound of a film the way a director of photography takes responsibility for the image.”  

There appears to be a direct impact on modern filmmaking by the collaboration between Murch and Francis Ford Coppola (on *Apocalypse Now* and other films), as well as the collaborations between sound professionals and other members of what Gianluca Sergi regards “the sound-conscious generation” of 1970s directors such as George Lucas, Spielberg and Martin Scorsese. From this perspective, the “innovative” soundtracks of many modern films have largely been the result of the “privileged

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481 Walter Murch, “Sound Design: The Dancing Shadow,” in John Boorman, Tom Luddy, David Thomson and Walter Donohue, eds. *Projections 4: Film-makers on Film-making* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1995), 246. Interestingly, Coppola suggests that the term “sound designer” was in fact created to give a credit for Murch’s work on Coppola’s earlier film *The Rain People* (1969). Murch mixed *The Rain People*, but was not a member of the union which meant he could not be credited. However, since the term “sound designer” did not exist Murch could be freely credited as such. See Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (New York: Random House, 2002), 53.

position” the sound department now occupies in Hollywood. They are often allowed greater time to work on their aspect of the production, often benefit from a closer relationship with the director and are given much earlier involvement than was previously the case.\textsuperscript{483} The impact of this production and post-production context is most obvious in what I consider to be the two major changes in the sound of the 2000s combat films versus the 1940s films. Specifically, the 2000s films normally feature: i) a dense layering of battlefield sounds, including a much greater range of sound effects, and ii) short moments where there is an attempt to alter the dramatic concentration of the scene by using sound manipulation.

The quantity of sounds layered in the soundtrack of battle sequences in the modern films becomes apparent from even a brief comparison of a 1940s film and a 2000s film. \textit{Guadalcanal Diary} is typical of the 1940s films in that what could be called the “atmosphere” soundtrack of the battlefield is characterized by constant gunfire and artillery explosions. By atmosphere I am referring to non-synchronous sound effects which relate to off-screen sources, as well as sounds which have synchronous on-screen sources. In creating the atmospheric sound of the 1940s films, oftentimes identical sound effects are repeated without significant variation. Significantly, although the atmosphere is constant during the battle scenes, the layering of the sounds is quite sparse. For example, there is often a burst of machine-gun fire, followed by an explosion, followed by another burst of the same machine-gun fire, followed by a few rifle cracks and so on.\textsuperscript{484} Often the gunfire is made up of the same sound effect regardless of the type of weapon.

\textsuperscript{483} Ibid, 118.
\textsuperscript{484} Jungle sounds would also fall into this category.
used.\textsuperscript{485} In this sense then, \textit{Stolz der Nation}’s choice of sound effects is relatively in keeping with the 1940s films. However, the extent to which \textit{Stolz der Nation} uses sonic reflection to create a sense of space as well as the overall clarity of the soundtrack of course make it generally unlike the 1940s films that actually exist.\textsuperscript{486}

By contrast, the 2000s films studied here typically feature a range of different gunfire sounds as well as a sound mix which densely layers these effects together. These films also use mixing to address the spatial properties of their battlefield sound effects. Whereas the off-screen gunfire in the 1940s films might occasionally drop in volume it is typically presented at the same constant level throughout the combat. The 2000s films achieve a greater dynamic range by raising and lowering the various layers of sound effects according to the camera’s relative position to the source of these sounds. As a result of these devices, while the normative style of contemporary combat sequence soundtrack \textit{does} feature constant battlefield atmosphere, it cannot be described as repetitive. While there is likely to be an attempt at verisimilitude in such techniques, the mixing levels of the constant gunfire serve denotative functions. As Randy Thom points out, alluding to his sound design for the Vietnam battle sequences in \textit{Forrest Gump} (Robert Zemeckis, 1994):

\begin{quote}
Certain kinds of sequences – battles, night scenes, jungles – [are] in danger of the audience having no idea where they are from moment to moment. You see a character at a given time, but you have no idea where he or she is in relation to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{485} A standout exception here is \textit{Objective, Burma!} which goes to greater effort than the other 1940s films in using several different sounds for each weapon.

\textsuperscript{486} This clarity is likely because of the range of frequencies available in the Dolby Digital format.
anything else because you just see this person surrounded by a bunch of leaves, and
those leaves look like every other set of leaves you see everywhere else. So if you
establish where the centre of the battle is acoustically, then you can at least tell the
audience how far away from that they are at any given moment. And so you’re
describing geography with sound in that case.487

The sound of bullet impacts in the 1940s films are typically represented by a very
limited range of “ping” ricochet sounds (in fact, Bataan uses the same sound for
an impact into a helmet, rock, dirt or a tree). The contemporary films, on the other
hand, employ a much greater variety of bullet impact sounds, mixed at various
levels to suggest their spatial positions. They typically also contain a very high
number of sounds of bullet pass-bys.488 Arguably, this could be taken as an
attempt at immersion. After all, in an analysis of the atmospheric soundtrack of
Ryan, Ian Palmer cites a veteran of WW2 who claims that: “When a rifle is fired
at you, you never [hear] the shot fired. All you hear is the bullet [whooshing
past].”489 Debra White-Stanley, invoking Michel Chion’s concept of the
acousmachine, suggests that the German machine-gunfire in Ryan poses a threat
which “cannot be located in the visual field.”490 Gary Rydstrom, Ryan’s sound
designer, was apparently instructed by Spielberg not to use existing sound effects
libraries for the weaponry and bullet hits and, as such, the sound department

487 Randy Thom, “Designing a Movie For Sound,” in Larry Sider, Diane Freeman and Jerry Sider,
128.
488 In these contemporary films, a bullet impact on the soundtrack usually accompanies a visual
bullet impact on screen, but not always. A bullet pass-by, on the other hand, may accompany a
tracer round visible on screen, but mostly it does not have a visual component.
489 Gerald Jerram, cited in Ian Palmer, “How Realistic is the Sound Design in the D-Day Landing
Sequence in Saving Private Ryan?” MA Diss. (2002.)
http://www.gamasutra.com/education/theses/20030804/palmer_01.shtml (accessed 30 October,
2010).
490 Chion 1999, cited in Debra White-Stanley, “‘Sound sacrifices’: The Postmodern Melodramas
of World War II.” in J. Beck and T. Grajeda (Eds), Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film
Sound (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 221. See also Chion, The Voice in Cinema.
recorded fresh sounds of authentic weapons firing bullets directly past microphones at close range.491

In terms of the impact of modern technology on the process of mixing together a large quantity of sound effects, it is not simply that the modern sound designer has more tracks to mix than the sound engineers of the 1940s. There is now also a much greater facility for mixing and controlling the frequencies of the sounds, as well as the apparent spatial location of the sound within the surround sound format. Rydstrom, speaking of his approach to mixing, suggests that:

> It’s about how frequencies work together. There’s a trick to making a gunshot big using multiple layers of elements. You take the high snap of a pistol and add to it the low boom of a cannon and the midrange of a canyon echo. You orchestrate it. On an über scale then, we do that to the whole soundtrack, making sounds work together.492

One significant layer within the mix of a battlefield soundtrack is that of the human voice. The obvious instances in WW2 combat films are of officers giving orders, men grunting and screaming as they are shot and their cries of agony as they bleed to death. In this regard there are some very clear differences between the way the 1940s films treat the human voice and the way this is handled by the soundtrack of the 2000s films. In the 1940s films the human voice is heard clearly whenever a character speaks. For instance, when an officer in *Gung Ho!* calmly


issues the order to draw back from a skirmish, his voice is crisp and clear. In fact his voice is exactly (and incongruously) as loud as the M1 Garand rifle he fires immediately after speaking. Additionally, the battlefield sound around him ceases while he speaks. Of course, this is a classical cinematic practice. Chion refers to the audience’s “vococentrism,” in arguing that as far as “real spectators” are concerned, “there are voices, and then everything else.”493 For Chion, this “hierarchy of perception” in the classical cinema, instated by the presence of the human voice, would explain why the 1940s war films “artificially” raise the volume of voices above the battlefield atmosphere.494 This kind of sound mixing has been criticized by Peter Maslowski, who invokes Sam Fuller and describes the sound of early combat films as “deceptive,” stating that on a real WW2 battlefield the “thunderous cacophony” of combat was “deafening […] and the noise did not conveniently stop or fade into the background so that soldiers could hear themselves and one another talk.”495 Black Hawk Down even points to the problem of human voice and hearing in combat by presenting a soldier deafened by the sound of a machine-gun fired close to his ears.

The difference between such a vococentric practice and the soundtracks of the contemporary WW2 films is striking. Soldiers’ speaking voices are often (though not always) drowned out by the dense battlefield atmosphere of gunfire and explosions. For instance, when Cpt. Miller and his men are caught in the surf of Omaha Beach, Miller and Sgt. Horvath yell at each other and at the men to order them out of the water and up onto the beach, yet most of their words are barely audible to the audience because of the thick soundtrack of the battle going on

494 Ibid, 5.
495 Maslowski, Armed With Cameras, 73.
around them.\footnote{Of course, it could be argued that this is a case of the sound design being congruent with the diegesis in that their voices seem to barely be audible to the other characters (based on the looks of confusion on their faces).} In general, the soldiers of Ryan, Flags of Our Fathers and Windtalkers are often yelling or talking to each other throughout the battles. For instance, phrases such as: “Watch out!” or “Get that son of a bitch!” are heard from off-screen sources throughout the scenes. Although these are not usually loud enough to be clearly understood by the audience they do provide a constant atmosphere of voices.\footnote{These off-screen call-outs, as I take them, are not meant to act denotatively for the audience since they are not usually followed up by an on-screen event that has been anticipated by the line. For instance, “Watch Out!” is not necessarily followed by an enemy actually attacking the main characters. By contrast, when the films cut to a shot of a soldier yelling something like “Watch out!” this is generally followed by an enemy soldier (or some other threat) appearing on-screen also.} As I show in Chapter 5, the overwhelming quantity of these sounds contributes to a specific type of verisimilitude, which I call “reported realism.” This mixing style is quite unlike any of the 1940s films where, unless they are speaking dialogue crucial to the narrative, the soldiers’ voices are rarely heard at all. Such a tendency of the contemporary films also points to an interesting paradox about the sound design of these films. While the yelling voices are sometimes drowned out by explosions or gunfire in the 2000s films, the breathing of the soldiers is often audible when individual soldiers are in MS or CU. Even the vococentric films of the 1940s do not do this, yet it is a persistent feature of the 2000s films. It seems to me that this breathing is meant to act expressively (to suggest fear, for instance) rather than to be “noticed” or attended to by the audience.

Although there are numerous instances of GI’s voices being drowned out by the battlefield atmosphere, significant moments of the speech by major characters in the 2000s films are audible and intelligible. This is aided in part by the way these films typically stage significant dialogue moments far enough away from the
enemy gunfire that there is at least a logical reason behind the gunfire being lower in volume. However, the moments of unclear dialogue need to be accounted for since such a strategy goes directly against the dominant mixing practice of contemporary films which keep dialogue clear and comprehensible. Walter Murch argues that this vococentric practice is a necessary means of maintaining the audience’s attention:

Since human beings are what we are – the talking animal – dialogue has a pre-eminence in film that it shares with opera and theater – if you don’t understand what’s being said, you are taken out of the moment. The bottom line is: make the dialogue intelligible. So I would first mix the dialogue as a sub-unit all by itself.498

By referring to the audience being “taken out of the moment,” I think Murch is referring to audience members losing their attentive focus on reassembling the narrative (fabula), as well as becoming aware of the cinema apparatus and/or production process. In terms of unclear dialogue, this might mean that an audience member turns and asks a fellow spectator for clarification along the lines of: “What did he just say?” or “Why aren’t they moving onto the beach?” This is certainly a legitimate narrative problem. For instance in the example from Gung Ho! above, it is essential for the audience to clearly hear the officer give the order to retreat in order to comprehend why the men turn away from a gunfight that they seem to be winning. By fading down the battlefield atmosphere and limiting the number of effects competing for what Murch has called the “audio oxygen,” the filmmakers draw the audience’s attention to the officer’s voice explaining that he wants to lure the Japanese back towards an ambush: “Tell the boys to move

back, here’s where we spring the trap.” ⁴⁹⁹ But how important is it, when watching
Ryan, that the audience knows exactly what words Miller and Horvath are saying
when trying to get their men to move up onto the beach? Arguably, this scene
presents a disorienting chaos of the battlefield so it might make sense at the level
of realistic motivation that the audience does not process everything that is said.
Indeed, the sequence is hardly incoherent at all in terms of its geography or
character goal(s), so the temporarily unintelligible sound of Miller and Horvath’s
voices can also be regarded as serving the denotative-expressive function of
implying a chaotic scene without necessarily creating a comprehension problem
for the audience.⁵⁰⁰ By this I mean that although the dialogue does not
denotatively inform the audience of Miller’s order for the men to move onto the
beach, the actors’ performance (Tom Hanks yelling, Tom Sizemore yelling back)
denotatively indicates that the men are finding it difficult to hear each other. In
turn, this expresses the chaotic feeling of the scene. Compare this to some
dialogue later in the scene, in which soldiers’ voices are clearly heard yelling
things such as: “[We’re] right where we’re supposed to be, but no-one else is!”
This is another way of informing the audience of the soldiers’ disorientation amid
the chaos in battle, although in these kinds of cases there is obviously a higher
degree of denotation at the level of narrative events.

Sound design in general (and sound mixing in particular) does not mean
combining every sound that would logically occur in the diegesis. As Sergi has
argued, filmmakers consider the “focus” of sound design to be important.⁵⁰¹ Focus

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 87.
⁵⁰⁰ As I have shown in the section on cinematography, Spielberg’s camerawork functions quite
extensively to establish and maintain clear geography throughout the combat sequences. I develop
this line of inquiry further in Chapter 4.
involves the selection of particular sounds, the exclusion of other sounds, as well as the clarity and density of the mix of a particular sequence. Thom describes mixing as “getting rid of things – at least for a time.”502 In this way, the contemporary WW2 films typically use varying amounts of sound manipulation to create short moments of lowered density and clarity which function to shift the focus from the battlefield in general to some specific actions of violence and/or to one specific soldier’s experience of the battlefield. This is most extreme in Ryan, where Miller has brief moments of shell-shock. As Rydstrom explains:

The natural sounds of the battle would drop away. We were left with what I tried to make into a sort of listening to a sea-shell kind of roar, all the realistic sounds drifted away, dropped away, and it gave another point of view on battle. So now we are seeing images without having the realistic sounds go with them and that becomes a different take on it. We can see a man carrying his arm but we are not hearing the reality of it, and we take that in very differently than we were earlier on.503

Thus, this moment of the battle is an attempt to suggest what Cpt. Miller sees (and apparently, hears) while he is temporarily disorientated. Visually this sequence uses shot/reverse-shot editing and depth-staging (see Fig. 3.38) to impressionistically imply that Miller is looking at various instances of awful battlefield carnage. In this moment, Spielberg cuts to some remarkably gruesome visuals. For instance, a flame-thrower on a soldier’s back explodes and the flames engulf two men near him, a soldier picks up his dismembered arm and continues moving up the beach and burning men run from a flaming Higgins boat. During

502 Thom, “Designing a Movie For Sound.” 129.
503 Rydstrom, interviewed in Sergi, The Dolby Era, 178.
these shots, the battlefield sound is initially stripped back to only a select few effects (such as bullet hits and an occasional explosion), but these are also softly buried within an overall soundtrack that has been suddenly reduced in clarity (the “sea-shell” effect Rydstrom has mentioned). Unlike the rest of the sequence, where the overwhelming quantity of sound effects of the battlefield diminish the significance of each individual death in order to present a generalized accumulation of carnage, these moments focus the viewer’s attention to very specific victims. The sound effects are gradually removed entirely until by the time Miller picks up his helmet from the surf, itself filled with bloodied water, the only sound is the “sea-shell” roar. Abruptly, a soldier then yells directly into the lens (which is meant to stand in for Miller’s eyes here): “What now, Sir?”, but in this shot his voice is completely absent. A single whistling sound rising in pitch begins to emerge above the low frequency of the sea-shell drone, indicating an approaching artillery shell. Suddenly, the overall soundtrack is suddenly restored to its normal clarity (and density) with an explosion marking this transition. The soldier’s voice is finally audible as he shouts again at Miller: “I said, what the hell do we do now, Sir?” This extreme contrast of sound level and clarity then, which is a favourite technique of Rydstrom, serves the denotative-expressive function of emphasising how overwhelmed Miller is by the battlefield.  

I believe this technique also has an artistic purpose beyond the attempt to emphasize or represent a soldier’s state of mind. It can be read as a defamiliarizing device which challenges existing conventions of representing combat violence. It is also important to note that Ryan is not the only 2000s film that uses this kind of sound design although it is certainly the most extreme.

See Kenny, “Gary Rydstrom.”
Arguably, there is a surreal quality to the shot of the soldier picking up his arm since dismembered body parts (disturbing in themselves) are usually presented as objects of shock. For instance, they float in the surf of the Pacific Ocean in Cornell Wilde’s *Beach Red* (1967) and lay on the black sand of Iwo Jima in *Flags of Our Fathers*. What is most significant is that Ryan’s moment of aural distortion serves to defamiliarize the contemporary conventions of sound associated with screen violence, which in turn allows the images to shock the viewer in a more immediate way than the violence in the rest of the scene. After all, since the overall Omaha Beach scene is so bloody and graphic, it runs the risk of desensitizing viewers to its own impact by simply being excessive. Some viewers may even enjoy the “spectacle” of such violence, as film reviewer Thomas Doherty suggests:

> The guilty secret here is that far from being horrifying and repulsive, the stunning spectacle of sight and sound is a joy to behold and hearken to from a theater seat, pure cinema at its most hypnotic and intense. [Jean-Luc] Godard is right: war on screen is always exhilarating.505

With this in mind, all of the 2000s films studied here use this defamiliarizing device at some point during their combat sequences. *The Thin Red Line* uses this audio strategy to defamiliarize an example of “heroic” combat behavior: a single soldier rushing a machine-gun nest alone. In a 13 second close-up of one soldier hiding behind a rock and looking around at the other men pinned down by machine-gunfire, the volume level of the battlefield atmosphere is gradually

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505 Thomas Doherty, film review cited in Ehrenhause, “Why We Fought,” 323.
lowered. First, the volume of the off-screen gunfire and bullet hits lowers to a barely audible level and then the discomforting low-end drone of a “cosmic beam” instrument begins to dominate. The soldier looks around and breathes heavily. His eyes widen and suddenly he jumps up, apparently having made the decision to rush the machine-gun nest alone. On the next cut to a wider shot of him running up the hill the battlefield atmosphere returns to the normal volume as bullets impact into the dirt at his feet and he charges toward the machine-gun nest and throws a grenade at it. The soldier’s grenade falls well-short of the machine-gun nest and he retreats to his original position. The manipulation of the sound emphasizes the defamiliarization also created by the futility of the event itself.

*Windtalkers* also has a similar moment of aural distortion in which three soldiers simply stare (in shot/reverse/shot) as Sgt. Enders is caught up in the excitement of his killing spree. At this point the orchestration of the music changes from being triumphant and fast paced, to something much more sparse: a sustained high note from the string section, a simple military snare drum and a solitary horn. The battlefield atmosphere sound fades down significantly, allowing Enders’ sub-machine gun to dominate, even to the point that the sound of a single shell ejecting from the gun is flamboyantly amplified as it passes the camera in slow-motion. While this sequence is certainly closer to the sort of gleeful portrayal of violence Thomas Doherty seems to be suggesting is inevitable in a war film (and guilt-inducing for what he regards as the complicit viewer), the effect of the sound manipulation in each of these sequences suggests that something more complex is

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506 The length of this shot also makes it stand out starkly in a sequence with an ASL of 3.8 seconds.

507 The “cosmic beam” is “essentially a large wooden horizontal beam strung with piano wire and played with a metal bar” that has enormous volume and a huge, droning low-end frequency. See Tom Kenny, “The Delicacy of War,” http://mixonline.com/mag/audio_delicacy_war/index.html (accessed 30 October, 2010).
at work. Consider these sound techniques from the point of view of poetics. The
sea-shell effect in Ryan, the muted sound of Windtalkers and The Thin Red Line,
and the stark soundtrack to the opening scene of Flags of Our Fathers all show a
desire on the part of the filmmakers to make these particular moments stand
out.508 They contrast sharply with some other stylized sound techniques of violent
films. For instance, this technique is quite different to the amplified sound of
blood trickling down the wall at the climax of Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver
(1976) or the sound of a guard’s neck snapping as he hits the ground in the
prologue of Bay’s The Rock (1996).509 Whereas I think Scorsese and Bay have set
up the soundtrack of these violent scenes for the audience’s aesthetic appreciation
of a kind of stylistic virtuosity, these WW2 films are using their impressionistic
moments of distorted sound in a defamiliarizing manner. On the one hand, the
temporary hollowing-out of the film’s soundtrack as it focuses on one soldier
defamiliarizes the conventions of WW2-based adventure films such as Where
Eagles Dare which do not attempt to present subjective experiences at all. On the
other hand, the same technique defamiliarizes the convention used by films such
as Beach Red, which do attempt to present a soldier’s subjective experience, but
do it through voiceover.

In the case of the films which present overtly subjective moments (for instance,
Miller’s shell-shock or The Thin Red Line’s long-take CU) it seems to me that
viewers are supposed to develop allegiance with the character as they watch the

508 Enemy at the Gates also uses the same technique to focus on the deaths of retreating Russian
soldiers shot by their own officers. The opening sequence in Flags of Our Fathers could either be
a dream sequence or a flash-back.
509 Or even, for that matter, the digitally mixed gunshots described by Rydstrom that occur in the
rest of the Ryan’s battles.
battlefield tableau before them, sharing their horror and/or bewilderment.\(^{510}\) Enemy at the Gates also has a similar moment of distortion in the battlefield; however, in that film there is no character bearing a shot/reverse-shot relationship with the violence. In these cases I believe the film is manipulating the sound in order to distance the viewer from the spectacle of the battlefield killings. Both techniques encourage the audience to consider those particular violent events with a higher degree emotional gravity than the overwhelming bloodshed occurring in the rest of the battle scenes. Perhaps this is what Thom has in mind when he suggests that in order for a modern battle sequence to “mean something,” the filmmakers must mix the scene so that only particular bullet pass-bys or mortar blasts, for example, dominate the soundtrack when they are dramatically significant, not just when the source is presented visually.\(^{511}\) In effect, Thom is arguing for a defamiliarizing approach to the soundtrack of a contemporary war film by mixing the soundtrack in non-naturalistic ways which contrast sharply with the combat visuals to create unsettling effects.\(^{512}\)

One final aspect of film sound remains to be discussed: the use (or not) of music during the battle scenes.\(^{513}\) In this regard, Ryan again emerges as a significant deviation from the norms of cinematic battles, along with Flags of our Fathers.

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\(^{511}\) Thom, “Designing a Movie For Sound,” 129.

\(^{512}\) Of course, these moments can also furnish multiple interpretations. While I have suggested that they act as defamiliarizing devices to suggest combat horrors in a fresh way for modern audiences, the presence of these devices could also be read by an appropriately motivated critic as symptomatic of a culture which is fascinated by violence or, alternatively, as critical commentary by the filmmaker on that same culture (much as Peckinpanh’s insert shots of children burning a scorpion in The Wild Bunch can be read as the director’s comment on sadistic violence as an inherent human trait).

and Bataan. The following table summarizes the use of non-diegetic music in the battle sequences being discussed. I have indicated whether or not there is music leading up to the battle ("pre-battle"), during the combat as well as immediately after the combat ceases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Pre-battle</th>
<th>During-battle</th>
<th>Post-battle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wake Island</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (film ends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal Diary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Scene ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective, Burma!</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gung Ho!</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Private Ryan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin Red Line</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes (atmospheric)</td>
<td>Yes (atmospheric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy at the Gates</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windtalkers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flags of Our Fathers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Scene ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolz der Nation</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 3.94 Table of the use of music during the battle scenes discussed

It is clear that in both eras of these war films, filmmakers use music before the battles in just as many instances as they do not. For example, Flags of Our Fathers uses a snare drum and a sustained horn passage to create suspense prior to the battle, whereas Bataan’s soundtrack achieves its before-battle suspense not through music, but with the audible voice of an officer counting down “Three… Two… Okay… [Fire]” as the Japanese approach slowly through the bush. Almost all of the films studied use music at the conclusion of the battle scenes while the surviving soldiers survey the post-combat battlefield. Guadalcanal Diary and Flags of Our Fathers are the exceptions because they cut to a different scene.
before the gunshots cease. *Wake Island* does in fact include music at the conclusion of the battle; however, the film itself ends at this point as an artillery barrage appears to explode on top of the men’s position and smoke fills the frame. With Jeff Smith’s criteria of film music in mind, it seems to me that this use of music acts partially to mark the conclusion of the combat while also “accenting” this moment at which the battlefield violence has stopped.\(^5\)\(^1\)\(^4\) In doing so, the music also influences the mood of the scene and I would suggest that this encourages the audience to regard the battle with a particular emotion. In the case of *Guadalcanal Diary* and *Windtalkers* this might be a feeling of triumph and, in the case of *Ryan* or *Enemy at the Gates*, it might be an attitude of poignant contemplation.\(^5\)\(^1\)\(^5\)

In terms of the presence (or absence) of score during the combat sequences themselves it is clear that most of the films feature a score during the battles. The noteworthy exceptions are *Bataan* in the 1940s and *Ryan, Flags* and *Stolz der Nation* in the set of 2000s films. Typically, the films which do have music during these sequences use the score to dramatically enhance the narrative actions. For instance, the music often swells in intensity during those parts of the battle featuring mass movement or actions such as explosions or aircraft flyovers. These scores typically then shift to much quieter and slower music during the moments of battle where men are crouching behind cover and waiting to advance. There are also usually very clear musical “cues” to stress the drama of particular moments. For example, the brass section rises suddenly in the score of *Guadalcanal Diary* as Anthony Quinn’s character is shot in the back unexpectedly, as it also does in

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\(^5\)\(^1\)\(^4\) Ibid, 190.

\(^5\)\(^1\)\(^5\) Michel Chion describes this kind of music as “empathetic” in that it is “in harmony with the [tragic] emotional climate” of the scene. See Michel Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, Columbia University Press: 2009), 477.
*Windtalkers* when Sgt. Enders slits the throat of a Japanese who poses a threat to Pvt. Yahzee. While this kind of musical scoring arguably hints at triumph, victory or excitement, the score of the *Thin Red Line*’s battle is expressive of the drama in a much more subtle and claustrophobic way. As noted by Pawel Stroinski, it is a remarkably non-dramatic score in which the low drone of the “cosmic beam” instrument during the “taking the hill” battle is actually the musical opposite of the wide, expansive orchestral score of the other films.\(^\text{516}\)

Like *Bataan* in the 1940s, which stands out because of the absence of music during its combat, *Ryan* and *Flags of Our Fathers* both deliberately avoid music during their battles. This is sometimes true even of moments that might traditionally receive a score to emphasize their dramatic significant within the narrative. Consider the pivotal gunfight in the middle of *Ryan* where Miller’s squad attack a German half-track and co-incidentally locate Pvt. James Ryan. Given the scene’s significance in the narrative, I find it surprising that the entire scene occurs without music. In a carefully choreographed shot that lasts one minute and 24 seconds, Spielberg shows Miller’s men waiting to ambush the half-track when it suddenly explodes from someone else’s bazooka fire.\(^\text{517}\) The shot continues while the camera follows the men as they rush onto the road, shoot the fleeing German soldiers, and then meet Ryan—bazooka in hand—who stands up from where he was hiding in the field with two comrades. Although at the beginning of the ambush there is a subtle score (some slow-tempo, low-end notes from the brass section with a barely discernible snare-drumroll), this music disappears as soon as the unexpected explosion occurs. Even the moment that the

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\(^{517}\) I discuss the cinematography and staging of this sequence in detail in Chapter 4.
bazooka shooter is identified as Ryan does not receive a musical emphasis. Rather, the filmmakers allow silence and facial expressions to depict this moment in which Miller’s unit find the objective of their mission—Private Ryan. At the same time, this moment creates irony in Ryan’s cheerful response to Miller knowing his name by cutting immediately to Miller explaining to him that his brothers are dead.

The absence of music in this scene, as well as the wide-expansive space in which the skirmish takes place, allows the sound of the gunshots to reverberate loudly. By comparison, the gunshots in films with musical accompaniment do not carry as much reverberation and atmospheric reflection simply because the audio oxygen, to use Murch’s terminology, is used up by the amount of music.518 I think there is arguably an aspect of defamiliarization to this kind of sound design also. In short, the audience expects shootings to be scored dramatically, so when there is this noticeable absence of music they are forced to respond differently than they might have to previous films. Rather than treating the combat as entertaining spectacle, for instance, the audience may be encouraged to reflect on the human carnage or dramatic significance of the particular events. As an extreme example of how the reverberating gunfire can affect the power of a soundtrack, consider how the overall impact of the bank robbery shootout in Michael Mann’s Heat (1995) would be diluted by the addition of a traditional action film score.

This practice also has an obviously realistic motivation. Ben Winters argues, in a highly nuanced reading of the music that does exist in Ryan’s non-combat scenes, that it seems “filmmakers and spectators alike recognize (at one level) that the

presence of music indicates a self-consciously fictional world." I would suggest that for modern filmmakers, the choice to exclude music—as a tactic of “realism”—has some tangential ties to the tradition of direct cinema filmmaking of the 1960s which, as Julie Hubbert points out, “abandoned” non-diegetic background music “because it was the music that violated the practice of observed sound, the mandate for unmediated, live sound.” Of course, some of the early filmmakers of war cinema had occasionally used this technique, as Bataan shows, and it should also be noted that combat scenes without music had even appeared in some adventure oriented WW2 films such as The Guns of Navarone and Raid on Rommel (Henry Hathaway, 1971). This is most striking in a short skirmish that occurs early in The Guns of Navarone when the Greek fishing boat being used by Cpt. Mallory’s team of saboteurs is boarded and searched by a Kriegsmarine patrol. After a tense build-up, the violence occurs very suddenly as the saboteurs quickly kill all of the Germans and destroy their boat with explosives. Neither the build-up, nor the violence, is scored. Although The Guns of Navarone has no pretensions of “realism,” re-viewing this scene in light of the musically dominated battles of Windtalkers and Enemy at the Gates yields an interesting surprise: the starkness of the soundtrack emphasizes the brutality of the extremely quick skirmish.

3.3.4 The performance and representation of death in combat

Battlefield violence and death are, of course, two central elements of the WW2 combat film and it is important when discussing this aspect of the films that careful consideration is paid to distinguishing between the *quantity* of death shown and its *effect*. For instance, one reviewer who had just attended a revival screening of *Cross of Iron* blogged: “Think about those final moments, how bloody and over the top the final fifteen minutes or so are.”\(^521\) Certainly, there are some stark moments of graphic violence in the film, such as Sgt. Steiner’s execution of Lt. Triebeg in Peckinpah’s WW2 film is graphically portrayed with multiple squib-hits and slow-motion filming. However, the climactic battle of *Cross of Iron*, in fact, shows very little death on screen by comparison to the films studied here: 18 deaths in its final 13 minutes of screen-time, compared with 84 in *Ryan*’s Omaha Beach sequence or, for that matter, 37 in *Wake Island*’s climax.\(^522\)

What *Cross of Iron* does have is a disorienting style which increases the impression of violence. Specifically, there is significant repetition of the sound of machine-gunfire, cross-cutting back and forth to different events on the battlefield during the movement of a single soldier falling to the ground and an extremely fast ASL of 1.1 seconds.\(^523\) These stylistic features of the film’s climax are likely to be the primary motivation for the reviewer’s somewhat inaccurate description of the film’s violence: the fast ASL, which often cuts between different explosions and the amount of structural damage shown on screen create what Stephen Prince has called a “substitutional emblematics” in which violence against non-human objects stands in symbolically for violence against the human

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\(^522\) Later in this section, I offer a quantitative account of the deaths in the combat scenes studied here.

\(^523\) The ASL is 1.9 seconds if the dialogue from the middle of the scene is included.
body. I consider the expressive effect of these stylistic aspects of *Cross of Iron* to be a heightened sense of the violence presented. *Stolz der Nation* presents its own paradox. On the one hand the sheer quantity of killings might at first seem to be a humorous exaggeration, in the spirit of the absurd pipe smoked by Hans Landa in the opening scene of *Basterds*. However, on the other hand the number of deaths is not too far from Audie Murphy’s recreation of his real-life exploits with a tank machine-gun in *To Hell and Back* (Jesse Hibbs, 1955). The significant difference between those two films is that while Murphy’s victims die in the classical style that Prince calls “clutch-and-fall,” Zoller’s victims are thrown backwards violently.

It seems to me that one of the major problems with critical accounts of scenes of combat violence in films is simply that the critic is doing a written description of a complex combination of visual strategies. This problem is clearly borne out in some critical accounts of bodily dismemberment in *Bataan* and *Ryan*. Jeanine Basinger, for instance, comments that despite the fact that *Bataan* was shot entirely on sound-stages (in 1943), it may seem surprising to modern audiences that the film was received favourably as “realistic” in its time. She claims that the film is realistic, in terms of “Its anger, determination, and passion for the fight [against the Japanese].” In particular, Basinger gives attention to a sequence toward the end of the film in which a US soldier is killed by a Japanese sword or bayonet (Fig. 3.95). According to Basinger:

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524 Stephen Prince, *Classical Film Violence*: 238 – 244.
525 Ibid., 154 – 155. I suspect these victims are receiving an extra pull of stunt wire-rigging to jerk them backwards forcefully.
526 I am aware that my own account here has the same limitation, which is why this section includes tabulated data, still-frames from the films and extended description, where necessary. It is my intention here to offer not simply a critique, but in fact an extension of the comments already made by Basinger as well as Prince.
528 Ibid, 46.
Although we do not actually see the head fall, or blood spurt out, this is one of the most graphic and violent killings of the pre-sixties period of film history. Involving us as it does in the swift action, the effect, even today, is breathtaking.\footnote{Ibid, 54.}

And in a later comparison with Ryan, this killing in Bataan:

clearly illustrates the differences between violence “then” [the Production Code 1940s] and violence “now” [the 2000s]. (A Japanese soldier runs in swiftly and strikes an American solidly in the back of his neck with what appears to be a samurai sword. The victim’s face contorts in pain and a scream of horror is frozen on his lips. However, the audience is not shown his head falling off and no blood spurts out or is visible.) This Bataan beheading is one of the most graphic combat deaths of the pre-sixties period and certainly one of the most brutal of the era itself. Yet by today’s standards, it is a bloodless kill.\footnote{Ibid, 256.}

Basinger qualifies this by adding that although this might by a “physically” unrealistic death, its effect on the audience is “perhaps” not unrealistic psychologically and emotionally because it is unlikely that Bataan’s contemporary audiences “believed that soldiers died without losing arms and legs or even blood.”\footnote{Ibid.} While I agree with Basinger’s sociocultural explanation of the affective impact of the killing, I also think that she is overstating the graphic depiction of this killing in Bataan. Consider the detail of a dismemberment by grenade that occurs 13 years earlier in All Quiet on the Western Front which I consider to be significantly more graphic in its portrayal of bodily mutilation on a
battlefield (Fig. 3.96).\textsuperscript{532} But the aspect of Basinger’s account that I want to focus attention on here is the written style she uses when describing the scene. Consider her initial account once again:

A Japanese soldier runs in swiftly and strikes an American solidly in the back of his neck with what appears to be a samurai sword. The victim’s face contorts in pain, and a scream of horror is frozen on his lips.\textsuperscript{533}

This illustrates the problem of a written description of visual elements when that description is grounded in primarily narrative terms. On the one hand, I understand why Basinger is writing in this fashion. After all, to write that the soldier’s face “contorts in pain” and that there is “a scream of horror” is far more vivid and rhetorically effective than to describe it in purely objective terms (for example: “His eyes and mouth open wide, his shoulders arch back to tilt his face upwards”). However, unless there are accompanying still-frames of the action described—and in Basinger’s account there are none—there is a risk that the reader may imagine a depiction that is far more denotatively gruesome than what is actually the case in the film. By focusing on the narrative events rather than, for instance, the pace of the editing, I consider Basinger’s description as primarily a report on the critic’s affective response to the violence. In accounts such as this, the specific details of the film’s representational strategies are down-played at best and, at worst, are outright ignored. It is also worth noting that certain local censorship boards did have a problem with Bataan’s beheading/stabbing shot even though, as Prince points out, the PCA itself did not require cutting of this

\textsuperscript{532} For a lengthier description of the scene from \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front}, see Prince, \textit{Classical Film Violence}: 50 – 51.

\textsuperscript{533} Basinger, \textit{The World War II Combat Film}, 256.
particular shot.\textsuperscript{534} Indeed, while only Ireland actually requested the shot be removed, Ontario and Pennsylvania accepted the visual component of the shot, but were more concerned with the scream which accompanied it, requesting that this be “eliminated.”\textsuperscript{535}

In terms of the beheading in \textit{Bataan}, while Basinger already provides a clear account of the staging of the scene, from her account it remains unclear why she believes that “the effect, even today, is breathtaking.”\textsuperscript{536} Her description of the beheading (or stabbing) shot is that: “A second Japanese soldier runs in full speed from frame right, the upper right hand corner, and swings a sword [...] , hitting the black man solidly in the back of the neck.”\textsuperscript{537} What is missing from this account is an explanation of why the shot stands out so sharply in the sequence, rather than simply an implicit assumption that the narrative event of a beheading is by itself “breathtaking” for audiences irrespective of its stylistic presentation. By considering the specific events depicted and the stylistic attributes of the shots, within the overall sequence, the reason for the scene’s effectiveness becomes clear. For instance, the sequence generally comprises shots that concentrate on individual US soldiers as they engage in combat with small groups of Japanese. Sometimes this consists of close-quarters fighting with Japanese who are within the shot (for instance: strangling, punching, sand-throwing, bayoneting and close-range shooting). And sometimes the fighting involves a soldier throwing a grenade, or firing out of the frame at a group of Japanese who are presumably close to him. The majority of the close-quarters fighting in this sequence is

\textsuperscript{534} See Prince, \textit{Classical Film Violence}, 40.
\textsuperscript{535} See the documents from Joseph I. Breen dated July 28, 1943, August 11, 1943 and June 10, 1947, Bataan case file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, California. Accessed February 4, 2011.
\textsuperscript{536} Basinger, \textit{The World War II Combat Film}: 54.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid, 53.
presented with alternating LS and MS. Typically, the LS are used when at least three soldiers are fighting and the MS single out an individual soldier when he is not surrounded by Japanese attackers. Often, each mini-sequence of the close-combat events takes at least 30 seconds of screen-time. These sequences usually develop according to the following pattern. First, a LS of the soldier shows a number of Japanese charge at him and he begins to fights with them. Second, a cut to a MS shows him progressively killing them one by one. Third, either the film cuts back to the LS as he looks around for more of the enemy, or the film alternates between MS of the combatants until the final death takes place. Each of the shots in this pattern is quite long (often 7 seconds or longer, although the MS are sometimes around 3 seconds in length).

The “beheading” sequence, however, breaks this pattern which has been established and repeated throughout the combat. It is composed of only two shots: a WS and a MS. In the first of these, the US soldier charges at a Japanese, knocks him to the ground with his rifle and bayonets him (Fig. 3.97). As he does this, another Japanese enters from the right side of the frame (Fig. 3.98) and swings with his sword/bayonet. This first shot runs for 3.8 seconds before an abrupt cut to the MS of the (apparent) beheading (Fig. 3.99) which lasts only 13 frames. The “swift action,” as Basinger reports it, of this sequence seems to me to be an effect of the performance of the Japanese (who really does rush in quickly and does swing the sword quickly) which is emphasised by the very rapid editing of the “killing” shot. Additionally, the swiftness of the kill is accentuated by the

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538 This describes the length of a sequence of shots depicting one particular event: it is not to be confused with the Average Shot Length of the overall battle sequence, which is 4.3 seconds.
539 Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 54.
contrast of its quick editing with that of the much lengthier shots during the rest of this sequence.

As I indicated in Chapter 2, John Bodnar’s comments on Ryan illustrate the same kind of descriptive problem as Basinger’s account of the beheading/stabbing scene in Bataan. For instance, he argues that: “Modern technology has allowed the filmmaker to reproduce the frightening sound of German gunfire and the brutal reality of exploding body parts.” By only describing the violence in these general terms, Bodnar’s account is suggestively vague: although battlefield dismemberment is indicated, it remains unclear exactly what is on the screen. A poetics of screen violence would qualify Bodnar’s statement by asking how many exploding body parts does it take to suggest a “brutal reality” and, more importantly, how is this violence depicted by the filmmaker? Such questions focus our analysis on the details of violence so as to understand precisely how Ryan differs from earlier productions. Specifically, I count only six instances of on-screen “exploded” body parts in the Omaha Beach sequence of Ryan (a leg, an arm, a stomach, everything from the abdomen down, two other legs). In fact, it is only the legs that are actually shown coming off the bodies. The first leg explosion happens early in the scene (Figs. 3.100 – 3.103) and the camera quickly tracks Miller as he stumbles out of the water as soon as the body falls onto the beach. The two other leg dismemberments happen (to two different characters) in a single shot much later in the sequence. One leg is visible as it emerges from an explosion in the middle-distance (Fig. 3.104) and immediately after this the

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540 Bodnar, “Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America,” 805.
541 Reportedly, the filmmakers used a combination of amputees, amputee stunt-men, and CGI to produce these kinds of effects. See Steve Dahlly, “Behind the scenes: Allied forces,” http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,284501,00.html (accessed 10 May, 2011) and the website for Amputees in Action, the organisation which provided some of the amputees for the film, http://www.amputeesinaction.co.uk/aboutus.html (accessed 10 May, 2011).
camera reframes to another soldier missing a leg in the foreground as a soldier runs into the shot and takes his ammunition belt (Fig. 3.105).

By contrast, the other dismemberments are shown only after the “exploding” itself has already happened. For instance, as the men start to rally in the surf and move onto the beach, Spielberg cuts to a MS of a soldier lying on his back, screaming with his stomach visibly shot open, intestines spilling out. Additionally, judging by casual discussion with viewers of the film, it seems that the dismembered arm is one of the most memorable aspects of Ryan (Fig. 3.106). It is shown as a point-of-view shot during Miller’s disoriented “shell-shock” moment, as a soldier who is missing an arm picks up what is apparently his arm from the beach and carries it with him as he runs out of the shot. The abdomen dismemberment is visually occluded by an explosion and some quick cut-a-ways before the editing returns to Miller dragging the lifeless corpse along the beach. Dismemberment in Ryan is therefore generally not denotatively gruesome at the point of dismemberment, but the aftermath is certainly shown in highly graphic detail. Within the overall milieu of death in the sequence, these particular dismemberments appear exceptionally shocking for two reasons. Firstly, some shots linger on the dismemberment, which emphasises this effect of combat on the body. And secondly, unlike the shooter-within-the-shot framings for the vast majority of killings in the sequence, the dismemberments are treated to much more frontal portrayal and thus stand out as significant in a way that the shootings do not. Certainly, these constitute a much more denotatively gruesome, or perhaps a more mimetic display, of the combat violence than do the earlier films. However, I do not believe there is evidence to suggest that Ryan is normative in this regard.
But while it is certainly tempting to hone in on these kinds of particularly outstanding examples of combat violence in films, I think there is important work to be done in the “mundane” area of men simply being shot dead. The dismembered arm of Ryan and the beheading/neck-slashing of Bataan certainly stand out as stark moments of violence. However, I believe that more standard deaths in battle deserve critical attention because of their frequently repeated occurrence. As Prince reminds us, “Violence on the screen has two components, the depicted behavior and the stylistic means through which it is presented.”

In the infantry combat film, the primary types of dying behavior are instigated by knife/bayonet, bullet wound or explosion (artillery shells, land-mines and hand-grenades). The behaviors involved in these kinds of killings on film have not changed much since All Quiet on the Western Front however the stylistic presentation of them has changed significantly. Prince suggests that “the evolution of screen violence has occurred in terms of a movement toward ever more intense and elaborated depictions.”

Taking Stolz der Nation from this perspective, it is interesting to note that the film actually does not fit with the norms of 1940s or 2000s representations of death in combat. Consider the portrayals of death by bullet in this film, which are always body-shots. In this regard the film does follow the norms of “depicted behaviour” for screen violence in the film’s assumed 1940s context since the primary kill-shots in those films are body-shots. However, the 1940s films typically depict men being shot in the body by multiple rounds from machine-guns, whereas Zoller’s victims are mostly hit by single shots from his rifle. Additionally, the “stylistic means” of presenting the body-shots does not fit with Stolz der Nation’s 1940s counterparts either. For instance,

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543 Ibid, 284.
one soldier is hit in medium shot, evident from a very small puff of gray smoke from his tunic indicating the bullet’s impact, and his body jerks backwards violently (Fig. 3.107). Another soldier is hit in medium shot and a squib hit blasts a puff of light-gray smoke from his tunic (Fig. 3.108). Like the previous example, I presume this puff of smoke is meant to indicate a blood spray since the red colour of blood would be less visible when rendered in black and white. A moment after the puff, the soldier’s head jerks backs rapidly and he falls backwards to the ground. Both soldiers have received bullets to the body and at no point in Stolz der Nation is it clear that any soldier is hit in the head.

Many of the deaths in the closing battle of Bataan are also by bullet to the body, however, only one uses a clear puff of smoke to indicate the bullet hit (Fig. 3.109). Interestingly, the previous image in this shot/reverse-shot killing showed Japanese soldiers rapidly firing a machine-gun, yet when the film cuts to this mid-shot of the victim there are no bullet-hits to the surrounding environment and the three impacts are barely visible on his body. By contrast, when Zoller’s victims receive a rapid-fire death, we see the squib-hit clearly indicate each impact on the soldier’s body. While the Bataan victim’s impacts were not readily apparent on my first viewing of the sequence, close inspection reveals that there are large puffs of gray smoke to represent the impact but they do blend in with the background.\footnote{Potentially these were difficult to see because of the low-contrast between the gray smoke and the soldier’s “gray” tunic.} A close viewing shows thin wisps of smoke of emerging from the holes in the victim’s tunic. The soldier then slumps out of frame in the style typical of 1940s films, which Prince describes as “clutch-and-fall.”\footnote{Prince, Classical Film Violence: 154 – 155} While this victim’s clutch-and-fall is typical of the 1940s films, the squib hits to his body are
not. It should also be noted that the rapid body jerking action of Zoller’s victims in *Stolz der Nation* is a distinctly modern stylistic performance and does not resemble the 1940s screen deaths.

Examples that are highly normative of the 1940s production context are found in the climax of *Objective, Burma!* (Fig. 3.110) and *Guadalcanal Diary* (Fig. 3.111). When soldiers in these films are gunned down by machine-gun fire, they either clutch-and-fall or throw their weapons away before falling to the ground in a similar fashion. This alternate death style could be called “throw-and-fall” because the victims do not usually clutch their bodies as they fall. For Prince, the pervasiveness of this kind of on-screen death in the 1940s is explainable by the mandates of the Production Code. For instance, it is the

    sanctity of the body [which] is the ideological premise of clutch-and-fall, and it is this idea which the style works to visualize and to safeguard. Clutch-and-fall ensured that death, overall, would be sanitized in Hollywood films.

The same holds true, according to Prince, in regard to the significant absence of head shot deaths in these 1940s films. A head shot would likely be “deemed excessively gruesome or brutal” by the PCA since:

    The head contains the brain—the seat of reason and the locus of personality—and the face is the gateway to one’s being and the public token of its uniqueness.

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546 Another exception, identified by Prince, appears in *Pride of the Marines.*
547 Suid suggests that for some of the deaths in *Bataan*, Tay Garnett used a primitive form of wire-rigging to emphasize the deaths by using ropes to jerk the men when they react to bullet hits. However, in my research I have been unable to find examples of deaths in *Bataan* which visually resemble the wire-jerking effect of *Stolz der Nation.* See Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 70.
548 Prince, *Classical Film Violence*, 155.
Violence done to the head or face, therefore, entails a serious violation of the victim’s dignity and integrity of self, especially when that violence carries the stigmata of visible wounding.\textsuperscript{549}

There are indeed some instances of head-shots in the 1940s films, for instance a single sniper-shot that occurs earlier in the narrative of \textit{Bataan}.\textsuperscript{550} Despite these exceptions, the stylistic norms for the depiction of battlefield violence for the era are for body shots and clutch-and-fall deaths, primarily presented in shot/reverse-shot fashion. Certainly, the clutch-and-fall aesthetic remains prevalent through the WW2 combat films made during the 1950s, 1960s and only begins to change in the 1970s. For instance, \textit{The Heroes of Telemark} (Anthony Mann, 1965) uses clutch-and-fall for the killings, without any kind of squib hit or puff of smoke to suggest the bullet hits. \textit{Beach Red} also uses clutch-and-fall as its primary device for representing bullet death (Fig. 3.112). What does differentiate the violence of \textit{Beach Red} from \textit{The Heroes of Telemark} and the 1940s films is that this film places much greater emphasis on corpses. The film develops an approach to incorporating dead bodies into the \textit{mise-en-scene} which is first seen in Samuel Fuller’s \textit{Verboten} (1959), but does not commonly appear in films until \textit{Beach Red}. In both of these films, dead bodies remain on screen during the battles and occasionally a character will even dig in behind a corpse and play out part of a scene (Figs. 3.113, 3.114). Aldrich’s \textit{The Dirty Dozen} (1967) increases the brutality of combat violence at the narrative level, in particular its famous climax in which the Dozen pour gasoline down the air-vents of a shelter in which German officers and women are hiding before dropping hand grenades to ignite the fuel. But the \textit{visualization} of killing in this film remains primarily within a

\textsuperscript{549} Ibid, 156 – 157.
\textsuperscript{550} As well as the headshot Prince identifies in \textit{Pride of the Marines}. Ibid., 238.
1940s aesthetic of clutch-and-fall (Fig. 3.115) or by suggestion through montage. Indeed, the “human torches” are not at all presented visually.\textsuperscript{551} Rather, the actual burning of the German officers and women must be inferred from Aldrich’s montage and the audience’s comprehension of the narrative events. The film depicts the Dozen pouring the gasoline down the air-vents, as well as dropping the hand grenades, but then focuses on their shoot-out with German soldiers outside the shelter as the explosion and flames presumably kill the victims inside. Certainly, the horror of the events is emphasised through subjective shots of gasoline being poured directly down the air-vents (directly into the camera lens) and a shot lasting less than half of a second of some of the victims’ hands, accompanied by the sound of screaming just before the grenades explode (Fig. 3.116). Although Prince discusses the appearance of The Dirty Dozen and Arthur Penn’s Bonnie and Clyde as marking a dramatic, though inevitable, change in screen violence, it is worth remembering that the stylistic depictions of death are significantly different between the two films. Compare the details of body movement and squib-hits in Bonnie’s death (Fig. 3.117) with the 1940s clutch-and-fall deaths of Germans in The Dirty Dozen (Fig. 3.115).

The stylistic amplitude of combat violence after The Dirty Dozen does show a quickly increasing level of graphic detail. Only two years later, Play Dirty (1969) depicts machine-gun bullet wounds with multiple squib hits in mid-shot (Fig. 3.118) and in Too Late the Hero (1970) Aldrich renders the gunshots with blood sprays against the wall from a head-shot (Figs. 3.119 – 3.120) and blood spurting from abdominal wounds registered with squib-hits (Fig. 3.121). While A Bridge Too Far (Richard Attenborough, 1977) tends to not use squib-hits for the majority

\textsuperscript{551} I am borrowing the phrase “human torches” from Prince’s discussion of the film. Ibid, 204.
of the killings, it does feature deaths that are visualized using a more intensified version of the clutch-and-fall approach. Firstly, the victim’s bodies have a more rapid jerkiness to their movements (Fig. 3.122). Secondly, these deaths are typically filmed using long-focus lenses which isolate the individual victim in shots which occlude the absent “wounds” with battlefield smoke (Figs. 3.123 – 3.124). Thirdly, although Attenborough usually employs shot/reverse-shot setups to show the gunshot killings, the reverse-shot of the victim being hit is usually edited quite abruptly which arguably increases the shock of each kill.

But these examples should not be read as indicating that the evolution of screen violence in combat films has been a consistent move away from the 1940s clutch-and-fall deaths which Prince has described as giving the impression that the victim is “suddenly overcome with lassitude and sinks out of the frame.”

Clutch-and-fall reappears in the 1980s as the dominant technique of gunshot death in Fuller’s The Big Red One (Fig. 3.125). These deaths seem surprisingly outdated by comparison to the more rapid recoil of men hit by bullets in A Bridge Too Far and the spurting blood of Play Dirty and Too Late the Hero. Sluggish clutch-and-fall deaths even persist in some of the Vietnam action films of the 1980s such as Uncommon Valor (Ted Kotcheff, 1983) and Missing in Action (Joseph Zito, 1984). These films, although containing bullet impacts which are often registered with a forceful squib-hit that blows a hole in the victims’ clothes, still favor clutch-and-fall for their deaths. On the other hand, Coppola’s Apocalypse Now and Stone’s Platoon (1986) feature deaths which involve

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552 Ibid, 89.
553 Of course, a full discussion of combat violence in Vietnam War films is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The references to these films are included here to indicate the crossover between the 1970s WW2 combat films and the adjacent genre of Vietnam War films that appeared during the 1980s.
convulsive bodily performance (Fig. 3.126). Of the combat films produced between the 1940s and Ryan, Peckinpah’s *Cross of Iron* has the most consistent stylistic amplification of its killings. That film’s use of slow-motion filming and a montage strategy which cross-cuts between radically placed camera angles both serve to emphasise the deaths themselves which are performed with a striking jerkiness of the victim’s bodies not common in war films until Ryan.

Therefore, the visual evidence points to the evolution of screen violence in WW2 combat films being inconsistent, rather than continuous. This is also illustrated in a simple counting of the kinds of kills that occur in the combat scenes studied from the sample of films used in this discussion (Fig. 3.127). On first impression, the figures appear to suggest no pattern at all other than that there is certainly an increased range in the quantities of death presented (the range is 19 – 59 deaths in the scenes studied from the 1940s films and 27 – 88 deaths in the post-Ryan films). Additionally, this number should be considered with respect to the fact that the two films with the highest death tolls also have by far the longest screen duration (nearly 18 minutes for Ryan, and 13 minutes for Windtalkers).\textsuperscript{554} One way to address this is by considering the average deaths per minute of screen-time. Again, the figures show a slightly increased range between the two eras of films (6.08 – 11.57 deaths per minute in the 1940s films and 4.72 – 14.75 in the post-Ryan films). However, in both eras it is actually unusual for a film to be at the high end of this range. Discounting the films with extreme kill-counts (*Bataan*, *Guadalcanal Diary*, *Enemy at the Gates*), the films mostly average out to a rate of six deaths per minute of screen-time. Surprisingly, *Ryan* rates toward

\textsuperscript{554} Although I am not including *Stolz der Nation* in these figures because it is such an outlier, the fact that it is an outlier is relevant to the present discussion as further evidence that it does not actually fit with either its 1940s or 2000s context.
the low end of the range for the 2000s films with 4.72 deaths per minute. *Stolz der Nation* is, in fact, more extreme in its quantities than either the 1940s context or its 2000s production context. What I think is suggested by these figures is that the quantity of violence has not significantly increased in the WW2 combat films from two different production eras studied here. Since the normative quantity of the screen violence in these scenes has not changed by any significant measure, it is the quality of the combat violence (i.e., its stylistic depiction) in the contemporary films which motivates descriptions of contemporary screen violence as more brutal. Prince, for example, argues that “films today are more unsparing of their audiences, are crueler, and are more assaultive,” partially because “viewers seem to regard such cruelty as offering a truer portrait of the world they inhabit.”

The quality of this violence consists of more than just the depiction of bullet hits with squibbed blood sprays. While squib-hits on actors are certainly a normative part of the contemporary aesthetic (starting with some of the 1970s films), this does not mean that they are always used. Indeed, there are some bloodless, non-squibbed killings in *Windtalkers* which I consider to be more violently presented than their equivalent 1940s scene despite the lack of blood. Consider the deaths of three soldiers by machine-gun (Fig. 3.128) with respect to the same kind of event in *Objective, Burma!* (Fig 3.129). In both scenes, men are being shot through a fence and neither film uses blood sprays to register bullet hits. However, in *Windtalkers* John Woo stylizes the kills by blasting chunks of dirt from the ground which fly past the victims as they are shot (presumably these are meant to

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555 He is referring to more than just combat films; however, the statement is preceded by a discussion of *The Wild Bunch* and *Saving Private Ryan*. See Prince, “Violence”, 285. I take up the apparent realism of the combat violence in *Ryan* in Section 5.2
be from stray machine-gun bullets). Technically speaking, the *Objective, Burma!* shot uses the same sort of substitutional emblems by blasting the bamboo fence apart and throwing clouds of smoke into the air. However, there is obviously a stark difference in the stylistic amplitude of the violence in these two images. Primarily, the chunks of dirt in *Windtalkers*, which stand in for the absent blood-hits of the bullets on the victims, are registered clearly by a fast shutter speed on the camera. These clearly defined chunks, as well as their very close physical proximity to the actors, substitute for blood and bodily damage with far more visceral impact than *Objective, Burma!*’s puffs of white smoke and splintering wood that occur at a distance from the victims. Also important is the messy, erratic bodily positions of the victims in *Windtalkers* by comparison with those in *Objective, Burma!* who are performing a slow clutch-and-fall death. The slow-motion filming of the deaths in *Windtalkers* also accentuates the jerky movements of the characters dying.

I take this particular instance to be a clear example of the kind of artistic and stylistic development that occurs in filmmaking practices as outlined by Bordwell in *On the History on Film Style* and *Figures Traced in Light*. According to Bordwell, “we can usefully consider film techniques as solutions to concrete problems of representation and […] filmmakers inherit many solutions from the trial-and-error efforts of their predecessors.” While the 1940s filmmakers strove to find solutions to the PCA’s mandates on screen violence—for instance by using visual stand-ins for bullet-hits on humans—the modern filmmakers have adapted those solutions and extended them. In the case of Woo’s WW2 film the other significant stylistic precedent for its battlefield killings is what Prince has labelled

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the “Penn-Peckinpah” stylistic. 557 This aesthetic is constituted specifically through “Squib-work, multicamera filming, and montage editing utilizing differential rates of slow motion.” 558 Windtalkers and Enemy at the Gates are special cases in the sample of modern films in that they use slow-motion filming at various points during the combat sequences and the other films do not. Notwithstanding these two films, I actually believe that the Penn-Peckinpah aesthetic is more than a matter of employing those techniques of camera work and squib-hits. Rather, this aesthetic is also predicated on the convulsive bodily movements of the victims (in Prince’s terminology, the “autonomic impulse” of the body as the victim loses conscious control). For instance, consider some of the killings in The Wild Bunch (Fig. 3.130) as well as Bonnie’s death in Bonnie and Clyde. 559 Although Prince’s discussion places emphasis on the way that slow-motion “intensifies” this moment by extending its screen duration, my present examination suggests the significance of the specific bodily performance of death within this style. 560 As such, even those contemporary WW2 films which do not use slow-motion for the deaths can still be read as extending and developing the Penn-Peckinpah aesthetic. One of the interesting ways in which this affects the representation of death in these recent films is that even the classic shot/reverse-shot method of presenting a killing is significantly enhanced by the convulsive bodily reaction to the bullet. Although the technical aspects involved in shot/reverse-shot kills has not changed significantly from the 1940s, its contemporary usage often has an increased stylistic amplitude because it involves an edit to the victim at the moment at which they are hit. That is, at the point at which they lose control of their body.

557 See Prince, Screening Violence, 14.
559 Ibid, 60.
560 Certainly Prince identifies the significance of actor performance in depicting violence. However, the present discussion extends this analysis to examine the development of a type of performance. See Prince, Classical Film Violence, 35; 160; and 202.
While this is also true of the 1940s films, the clutch-and-fall style of death in those films does not present the same impression of “that awful moment when a personality ceases to inhabit a body that is still in motion.”

For examples of the contemporary style, see Figs. 3.131 – 3.132 compared with Fig. 3.110.

One final strategy employed by some films as a means of intensifying their representation of a particular death is to literally prolong the killing as a diegetic event. Where the Penn-Peckinpah aesthetic extends the victim’s death through slow-motion, there are examples of films which draw out the death simply by extending the narrative time it takes for the victim to die. This is indeed a template established, according to Prince, as early as Scarface (Howard Hawks, 1932) in the sequence showing Tony Camonte’s death. When these sequences occur in the WW2 combat films, they usually depict a death that takes place immediately after a major battle. Typically, the main characters discover the victim and watch them die. Thus, the films use these scenes to show the human aftermath of the battle, whereas during the combat itself death is shown as occurring quickly. For example, at the end of Gung Ho! two GIs are surprised by a group of surrendering Japanese who draw a machine-gun and kill the first American. After the surviving soldier shoots the Japanese, he crouches by his comrade and stares at him while he dies after reciting the Lord’s Prayer (Fig. 3.133). The effect is to draw out the agony of the man’s death, but I should point out that this does not mean that extending the dying process instantly attributes greater impact to the death than the more instantaneous killings which are typical of the films studied here. For example, the radio operator who is shot in the face in Ryan has as much

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561 Ibid, 60.
563 Even the slow-motion in Cross of Iron does not have the effect of slowing down the feeling of combat since Peckinpah cross-cuts between the death(s) and other battlefield activities.
effect, although in a different way. By the same token, John Wayne’s death at the end of *The Sands of Iwo Jima* draws its shocking impact, at least in part, from the suddenness with which he is shot and the quickness of his death.\(^{564}\)

### 3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified and examined the stylistic norms two distinct eras of WW2 combat films: the 1940s and the post-*Saving Private Ryan* 2000s. The chapter initially described the narrative function of *Stolz der Nation* as a film-within-the-film of Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds*, arguing that *Stolz der Nation* is the key structural component of Tarantino’s multiple-protagonist network narrative. I then identified the key aspects of *Stolz der Nation*’s stylistic system and used this data to investigate the same aspects of style in a selection of combat films from two different eras of production.

This chapter showed that while there are some significant continuities between the norms of cinematography of the 1940s combat films and those made in the decade since *Ryan*, there are some remarkable misunderstandings in the critical literature on these films. *Ryan*’s hand-held cinematography—sometimes regarded as a *de facto* standard for contemporary combat film style—was shown to be uncharacteristic of the 2000s films. Additionally, the editing of the 1940s films bears striking similarities to the style of editing in the contemporary films. Certainly there is a marginal increase in the Average Shot Lengths of the battle sequences of the 2000s films compared to the wartime productions. However, in

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\(^{564}\) Of course, the star-persona of John Wayne also enhances the impact of this death, because it is the Duke being killed, but also there is a level of irony in his final line of dialogue immediately preceding the off-screen gunshot: “As a matter of fact I’ve never felt so good in my life. How ’bout a cigarette?”
this regard Ryan’s editing is also non-normative in that it is cut much slower than films in either era of production. I used this observation to point to salient aspects of Ryan’s visual style—which I describe as an aesthetic of “controlled spontaneity.”

Additionally, the chapter identified the techniques of sound design and mixing that are dominant in the 1940s and 2000s combat films. While the 1940s films tend to treat the sound-mix from a “vococentric” approach which favours the human voice, the 2000s films predominantly attempt to create what is arguably a subjective impression of the battlefield soundtrack. I employed the neoformalist concept of defamiliarization to argue that the modern films use these subjective sound techniques to defamiliarize their representations of combat violence. Finally, this discussed the visible differences in the screen depictions of violence in WW2 combat films from the 1940s to the 2000s. This analysis extended Prince’s poetics of screen violence by tracing the evolution of what he calls the “clutch-and-fall” aesthetic of the 1940s films into the more detailed killings featured in contemporary combat films.
4. Case Studies on the Style of *Saving Private Ryan*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter performs two related analyzes of two specific aspects of the stylistic system of *Saving Private Ryan*. I present these as twin case studies of cinema style which existing film criticism has inadequately addressed. First, I argue that there are significant problems with existing criticism which has regarded Steven Spielberg’s hand-held camerawork in *Ryan* as producing a documentary-like realism. I compare the combat scenes of *Ryan* with actual combat footage and an examination of filmmaking practices, demonstrating that the film’s cinematography is far more unique than previous critics have suggested. Rather than producing a realistic, immersive experience for the viewer by virtue of it being hand-held, *Ryan’s* cinematography in fact defamiliarizes many of the conventions of representing combat violence and it is this defamiliarization which produces the sort of strong engagement usually ascribed to the combat scenes in this film. I argue that the camera movement is orchestrated in tandem with the blocking of the actors in a style which I call controlled spontaneity.

The second case study in this chapter examines the observable aspects of actor performance in combat films, using *Ryan* as an exemplar of the contemporary style and comparing it with *Objective, Burma!* from the 1940s. I argue that there are significant differences in the performance style of actors portraying soldiers from the 1940s films to the 2000s. In general, the 1940s film performances are characterized by rigid, theatrical body postures and gestures whereas the 2000s actors exhibit much more loose, relaxed physicality. There are also significant
differences in vocal performance, in that the actors in the 2000s films typically use a much greater range of voice loudness and register. The chapter argues that these changes can be read as emerging from a clearly identifiable series of historical and technological developments in film production practices. I also link the changing style of acting to the gradual emergence and dominance of the discourse of Method acting. Although the actors in the modern combat films should not necessarily be regarded as Method actors, the discourse of the Method has enabled particular kinds of acting technique and rehearsal strategies to become dominant. The chapter argues that this has created an environment in which civilian technical advisors, such as Dale Dye and his company Warriors Inc., have taken over from the Pentagon appointed military technical advisors traditionally attached to these films. The chapter concludes by arguing that these developments have resulted in contemporary performances being much more detailed and nuanced than the acting styles of the 1940s.

4.0 Introduction to the case studies

In Chapter 3, I outlined the significant aspects of the cinematography of two groups of WW2 films – firstly, those made during the war itself and secondly, those made in the decade after the 1998 release of Saving Private Ryan. Against this background, the cinematography of Ryan emerged as surprisingly unique in terms of the way that its camera movement is used to present the combat scenes. Its distinctive style has proven difficult for academic discussions to accommodate. On the one hand, although the filmmakers themselves claim that their use of cinematography is inspired by documentary footage shot by battlefield cameramen during WW2, the style of filming used by Ryan, in fact, bears little genuine resemblance to actual combat footage from that conflict. On the other
hand, critics writing during the decade after *Ryan*’s release have mistakenly asserted that the film set the standard visual format for subsequent renditions of combat violence. In doing so, these accounts have, in fact, ignored what I consider to be the central aspects of this film’s style during these sequences.

Additionally, Chapter 3’s discussion of the performance of death in the films studied suggested that the contemporary films typically adhere to a greater amount of detail in their on-screen killings. In this Chapter I will extend that analysis to consider the general bodily and vocal performance of actors in the contemporary films. In order to focus the analysis, I primarily consider the performers of *Ryan*, comparing them to *Objective, Burma!* although my analysis also points towards an understanding of performance in other contemporary films.

What follows is an approach that understands two specific elements of *Ryan*’s stylistic system by being particularly sensitive to the filming and performance of its battle sequences. I will continue to draw upon the theoretical positions employed in Chapter 3: neoformalist film analysis, a poetics of cinema and the praxis of filmmaking from my own experience.\(^{565}\) While the primary aim of this analysis is to explore how two specific features of *Ryan*’s stylistic system—the hand-held camera and the style of acting—function, the analysis can also be considered a demonstration of the critical validity of a critical approach which has a deliberately narrow interest in the aesthetic construction of a film text.

\(^{565}\) See Thompson, *Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible*; and *Breaking the Glass Armor*. For an overview and application of a poetics of cinema, see Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* and Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It.*
4.1 “Getting the Shot”: Rethinking the hand-held camera

of Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan

It is easy to identify the legacy of Ryan’s cinematography by examining the persistent discourse that has emerged since the film’s release in which the style is commonly referred to as a kind of benchmark for combat scenes. For example, in an American Cinematographer article about the television show Band of Brothers, the various production members interviewed repeatedly indicate that the visual style was intended to be very similar to that of Ryan. Picking up on the discourse of “documentary realism” that has become attached to hand-held camerawork in the style of Ryan, one of Band of Brothers’ cinematographers also describes their approach to filming the show specifically as: “Like dropping a documentary unit into the past.” Accordingly, one of the program’s directors also describes the intention of the production as: “to reflect the American soldier’s subjective experience,” in order to make it “experiential for the audience as well.” This was to be achieved, apparently, by specifically avoiding those techniques that would be regarded as overtly cinematic such as slow-motion filming, shots from a crane or point of view shots from the German soldiers’ perspective. The same attitude towards this specific set of filming techniques as somehow closer to reality is also evident in at least two internet reviews of Ryan which regard the hand-held aspect of the film’s camerawork as providing a visual experience akin to that which a person would have during combat:

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566 This analysis has been developed and extended from a paper I presented at the 9th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities, January 9 – 12, 2011. The analysis has also benefited greatly from my discussions and viewing of archival combat footage with Pedro Loureiro at the Defense Imagery Management Operations Center.


570 Ibid., 33 – 34.
Filmed in a documentary style—shaky hand-held cameras, with obscured shots often providing the point of view of the soldier in the field—the viewer is placed in the centre of the action.\textsuperscript{571}

The cinematography is brilliant. The use of the hand-held camera by Janusz Kaminski to give audience a better feel for what it is like to be in the midst of action works effectively.\textsuperscript{572}

This idea of the camera work as “subjective” is also attributed to \textit{Ryan} throughout an interpretation of the film by A. Susan Owen, as well as appearing in Geoff King’s analysis of Ridley Scott’s ancient Roman epic \textit{Gladiator}.\textsuperscript{573} King compares the visual style of its battle scenes with those of \textit{Ryan}, arguing that the style of \textit{Gladiator}’s battles is “lifted” from that of \textit{Ryan}, which:

established a new convention for the creation of an impression of “authentic” impact in the depiction of harrowing combat action, dependent partly on the use of camera-shutter effects that make the highly mobile image strobe, as if immersed in and barely able to keep up with the action.\textsuperscript{574}

\textsuperscript{574} For King, \textit{Gladiator} derives an “impact aesthetic” from \textit{Ryan} which he regards as common in modern Hollywood films and which involves “explosive montage editing and rapid, unsteady camera movement”. While King’s analysis of \textit{Gladiator}’s use of framing and montage is superb, his off-hand comments about \textit{Ryan} are misguided. As I will show later, \textit{Ryan}’s battle sequences do not have “explosive montage” and, in fact, have significantly slower editing than comparable scenes in virtually all Hollywood WW2 combat films. See King, \textit{The New Hollywood Cinema}, 242; 245.
These comments are typical of the discourse that has emerged around Ryan’s camerawork, which is a discourse that operates according to a number of closely related assumptions. The first assumption is that the net result of Ryan’s cinematographic approach can be regarded as a realistic look somehow similar to that found in documentaries. It is notable that in this assumption, the concept of “documentary realism” is applied uncritically, as if there is some general agreement among critics of what counts as “realism” even in the context of documentary filmmaking. The second assumption is that the filming techniques are not just realistic, but that they are also immersive and elicit a subjective feeling of “being there” within the battle scene. A third assumption is that this style has been so influential that it is copied, imitated or referenced by the majority of combat films since Ryan. Such an assumption emerges in King’s comparison with Gladiator and even more directly in Richard Godfrey and Simon Lilley’s analysis of Ryan:

Moreover, his [Spielberg’s] use of handheld cameras and 35-millimetre film gives a documentary effect to the imagery, reminiscent of Frank Capra’s original footage of that day, and a technique that has become commonplace in subsequent retellings of World War Two. It seems to me that these authors’ simplified gesture towards Ryan’s film technique is ultimately irrelevant, as their real target is a discussion of the film’s

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575 For the unsettled debates around these ideas, see Christopher Williams, ed., Realism and the Cinema (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
576 Richard Godfrey and Simon Lilley, “Visual Consumption, Collective Memory and the Representation of War”, Consumption Markets & Culture, 12, no. 4 (2009), 278. It should be noted that Frank Capra was not even at D-Day. The authors may be confusing him with Robert Capa, who was there and whose unintentionally blurry still photographs were reputedly one of the inspirations for Spielberg’s approach to shooting the landing sequence. Additionally, it is unclear what aspects of “35-millimetre film” the authors regard as inherently documentary-like.
narrative and ideology. For my study, however, their misleading statements about
the style of Ryan are intriguing. Firstly, Toby Haggith has already demonstrated
that the hand-held camerawork of Ryan simply does not closely resemble footage
shot by cameramen under similar conditions. Secondly, post-Ryan films such as
Windtalkers, Flags of Our Fathers and even television shows such as Band of
Brothers and The Pacific do not use their hand-held cameras in ways similar to
Spielberg’s film. King’s notion that the camera style of Gladiator is “lifted”
from Ryan can be significantly revised in light of my stylistic analysis here.
Certainly, Gladiator also uses a narrow shutter angle to induce a hyper-real
definition to particles of dirt being thrown into the air on the battlefield behind
Russell Crowe and the camera is “highly mobile” in the sense that it is not bound
to a tripod and frequently moves around with the action. However, I believe that
the controlled spontaneity of Ryan’s composition and camera movement are much
more significant than these surface attributes of the film image, and the film’s
specific orchestration of camera movement and character action remains a stylistic
tendency peculiar to Spielberg. I think it is important also to attend to why critics
are making these mistaken claims of Ryan’s camerawork. Therefore, this
investigation will begin by addressing some specific misconceptions regarding
Ryan’s photography, which will also allow me to address some practical
considerations of hand-held cinematography in modern filmmaking more
generally. Finally, I will examine how the hand-held camera of Ryan functions to
create the effect of defamiliarization that I believe is central to understanding the
style of this film.

577 See Haggith, “D-Day Filming – For Real.” Regarding the television programs, I realize, of
course, that they do frequently use hand-held cinematography but that does not mean the resulting
imagery is at all similar to that of Ryan.
4.1.1 Practical considerations of hand-held cinematography

While I have already questioned the misconception held by many professional critics that Ryan’s hand-held camerawork somehow invokes a “documentary verisimilitude,” what of the argument that the camera work functions to offer a subjective account of the battlefield? From such a position, the technique may be regarded as literally or symbolically representing the viewpoint of a soldier. Indeed, there is evidence that some spectators write in exactly these terms, such as an internet review by Rob Blackwelder claims that the camera is the audience’s surrogate:

Spielberg pulls no punches [in the Omaha Beach sequence], thrusting us into the middle of the desperation and panic, the smoke, the ceaseless machine gun fire and artillery bombardment. The beach is littered with bodies. The surf is blood. The camera lens is splattered as the man next to you is shot.578

Of course, the camera does not at all represent what a person would see on the battlefield if they were there. For one thing, as Maslowski argues, the “smoke and dust” on a combat zone prevents a clear view of what is happening.579 With the exception of a few individual shots in the Omaha Beach sequence in which the camera’s vision is obstructed by smoke, the background is usually quite visible during the sequence. Additionally, the low camera angle is really only an approximation of what a soldier might actually see. Dale Dye, senior military technical advisor on Ryan, bluntly refers to a soldier’s perspective while crawling through a battlefield as “asses and elbows” whereas Ryan’s camera certainly has a

579 Maslowski, Armed With Cameras, 73.
much wider angle of view than this. However, it is worth remembering that, as Suid has argued, “filmmakers have always had to portray men in combat closer to each other than they would be on an actual battlefield” for practical framing purposes of filming on a sound stage or to dramatize the “collective experience” of soldiers in battle. I think this is likely to be true of the Omaha Beach sequence of Ryan, which has a much greater proportion of MS than it does any other type of framing. More important for the question of whether or not the hand-held camerawork of Ryan is representative of a soldier’s viewpoint is the simple fact that human vision simply does not shake in the way its camera does, regardless of visual or physical disturbances that might occur. Head movements, even rapid rotations for instance, do not cause blurred or shaky vision because of what is known as the vestibulo-ocular reflex. The function of this aspect of the vestibular system (which perceives the body’s spatial movements) is to move the eyes to counteract movements of the head, “so that the image of the outside world can stand still on the retina for as much time as possible.” An interesting perspective comes from John Crawford, a physician who in a 1952 article entitled “Living Without a Balancing Mechanism,” describes his own

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580 Dale Dye, interview with author, February 8, 2011.
581 Suid, Guts & Glory: 120, 634. I thank Mick Broderick for the point about the soldiers’ collective experience.
582 Interestingly, the Australian Military has released combat footage of Afghanistan operations, recorded from helmet-mounted cameras. I would expect this sort of filming to be the most accurate footage available of what a soldier would “see” on a battlefield. Unsurprisingly, the videos do not exhibit either the shakiness or framing choices that are found in any of the combat films in my study. It could be argued that when the soldiers are running the footage shakes significantly, but Ryan’s camera shakes even when soldiers are relatively stable and hiding behind hedgehog obstacles in the surf. For an example, see “Special Forces Helmet Cam in Afghanistan,” Australian Department of Defence, July 8, 2011, http://defence.viotv.com?mediald=e59fe0d9-ca63-40ae-9689-32b92911bc0a (accessed August 4, 2011).
experience with damage to his vestibular apparatus by comparing it to hand-held filming:

Most of us have experimented with motion pictures at home. This experience can be used to illustrate the sensations of the patient with damage to the vestibular apparatus. Imagine the results of a sequence taken by pointing the camera straight ahead, holding it against the chest and walking at a normal pace down a city street. In a sequence thus taken and viewed on the screen, the street seems to careen crazily in all directions, faces of approaching persons become blurred and unrecognizable and the viewer may even experience a feeling of dizziness or nausea. Our vestibular apparatus normally acts like the tripod and the smoothly moving carriage on which the professional’s motion-picture camera is mounted. Without these steadying influences, the moving picture is joggled and blurred. Similarly, when the vestibular influence is removed from the biologic cinema system, the projection on the visual cortex becomes unsteady.\footnote{See John Crawford, “Living Without a Balancing Mechanism,” \textit{The New England Journal of Medicine} 246, no. 12 (March, 1952), 458. I thank for John Leigh for sending me this article, as well as informally confirming the effectiveness of the vestibular-ocular reflex.}

Certainly, the sort of vestibular damage experienced by Crawford can be caused by repeated exposure to loud noises (for instance gunfire or bomb blasts). Ironically, damage to the vestibular system seems to be a very common injury in contemporary warfare. According to one group of researchers, “many US military service members who have been exposed to blasts and who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan […] complain of vertigo, gaze instability, motion intolerance, and other symptoms consistent with peripheral vestibular
While it could be argued that Ryan’s shaky camerawork is intended to replicate this experience, I find such a position unconvincing because the instability of Ryan’s camera does not closely resemble Crawford’s description. It seems to me that the kind of shakiness of vision described here is more like the kind of point of view shots films occasionally use to show the perspective of either a drunk character or one being knocked unconscious. For example, when Marlowe is punched in the face during the first-person sequence of The Lady in the Lake (Robert Montgomery, 1947).

One persistent feature of contemporary film criticism is that while critics do show a clear readiness to identify hand-held camerawork as a significant aspect of a particular film’s style, they also display a reluctance to even attempt to articulate the textual appearance of the technique in any detail. This reluctance is most apparent in the way the technique is usually described. Godfrey and Lilley’s analysis of Ryan is typical in that, like other critics, they simply state that the film’s hand-held camerawork offers a documentary verisimilitude, but then ignore the concept completely while undertaking an analysis of the film’s narrative events. Of course, I do think it is possible that filmmakers may indeed be using

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586 Or potentially, the general “queasicam” style of camera movement in The Bourne Ultimatum (Paul Greengrass, 2007). As one group of researchers suggest, “Queasicam sequences take a good part of that visual control [by the vestibulo-ocular reflex] away […] It is no surprise that queasicam action heightens emotional response in viewers. It also leads to poorer visual acuity in the viewer and, as noted by Bordwell […] makes fewer demands on acting, content, and camera work.” I disagree that this necessarily makes fewer demands on the filmmakers. While it may be true in some instances, the demands of pulling-focus on a telephoto lens (as well as managing multicamera setups) certainly place camera crews under significant pressure. Quite clearly the hand-held camerawork in Ryan’s Omaha Beach sequence, which could at times be described as queasicam, places enormous demands on the camera operators. See Cutting, DeLong, and Brunick, “Visual Activity in Hollywood Film,” 122; See also David Bordwell, “Unsteadicam chronicles,” http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p_1175 (accessed April 9, 2012).

587 I acknowledge that Edward Branigan has suggested that critics do not use the word “camera” in a literal sense, instead arguing that criticism refers to cameras in many other ways, for instance as
the hand-held camera so that popular audiences will read the imagery as “like the images” that they typically believe documentaries to have. It seems that the intention of this visual shorthand is for audiences to more willingly suspend their disbelief and read the narrative events with a greater degree of realism—which is not to say that audiences believe that Ryan, for instance, is a documentary. Consider the way LA Times critic Kenneth Turan regards the cinematography of Ryan: “Using a trio of superlative operators [...] and relying on the newsreel look of hand-held cameras, Private Ryan gets as close to the unimaginable horror and chaos of battle as fiction film ever has, closer in fact than some audience members may want to experience.” Turan makes no attempt to qualify his claim about the “newsreel look of hand-held cameras.” Of course, for the purposes of a popular review there is no need for him to validate such claims. However, it is one thing for reviewers to make these sorts of statements and it is another thing entirely for academic critics to mistakenly attribute a particular quality to the style of Ryan and then simply move on to perform narrative interpretation and discuss the alleged politics of the film. To produce these kinds of commentary oversimplifies the aesthetic function(s) of hand-held filming and the repetition of such simplified statements has the unfortunate effect of closing-off further stylistic investigations into what constitutes the varying “looks” of this filming strategy. As I will demonstrate later, Ryan is, in fact, not at all the standard for hand-held filming in combat films and its unique style has hitherto been ignored precisely because critics have been unable (or unwilling) to consider the details of the hand-held aesthetic. In order to illustrate the inadequate theorisation of this

an anthropomorphic device. However, in the case of a film like Ryan, it seems to me that critics are indeed describing the camera as a physical object. See Edward Branigan, Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory (New York: Routledge, 2006).

technique, consider the variety of looks among following five contemporary films that are linked only by the fact that they predominantly use a hand-held camera: *Ryan* (1998), *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *Roger Dodger* (Dylan Kidd, 2002), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) and *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008).

The first problem with the currently limited theorization of hand-held cinematography is the failure to take account of the way the camera actually moves. For instance, the slow rocking motion of the telephoto-lens framings of *Roger Dodger* simply does not resemble the pseudo-palmcorder jitter of the video sequences in *Blair Witch Project*. Similarly, the vibration of *Ryan*’s battlefield images at Omaha Beach is not the same kind of motion as the erratic saccades of the panning movements in *The Bourne Ultimatum*. The particular appearance of each film’s hand-held camerawork is a result of a number of technical and practical factors: specifically, the choice of lenses, the overall balance of the weight of the camera, the physical way the operator supports the camera and even the orchestration and staging of the action before the camera. The very narrow angle of view afforded by a telephoto-lens, for example, exaggerates slight panning movements of the camera to a much greater (and more visible) extent than does a wide-angle lens. At the same time, however, the greater physical weight of a telephoto lens smooths out vibrations of the image: the result of camera operator movement is that the frame can be described as “bouncing” (though it may be a fast or a slow bounciness). This goes part of the way to explaining the difference of *Roger Dodger*, primarily a telephone lens film, compared with the quivering images of *The Blair Witch Project*. 
The way the camera operator holds and supports the camera will also result in different kinds of movement of the image. For instance, even though the filmmakers of *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006) claim they were deliberately attempting to imitate the documentary style of shooting they had developed through years of experience actually making documentaries, they found that the 35mm camera used for the feature film was simply too heavy to be operated in the way they were accustomed to operating 16mm cameras on their documentary shoots. Another cinematographer, Roger Deakins, notes that he prefers a relatively heavy camera because “it is comfortable on the shoulder” and its weight allows for “more controlled movement” when hand-holding on scenes that do not involve a great amount of character movement. One way to visualize this is to think of the difference between the “look” of news footage shot with a shoulder-mounted news camera versus the trembling home-video footage sometimes inserted into news broadcasts. The shoulder-mounted camera distributes the weight more evenly as opposed to a small camcorder which concentrates all of the weight onto the operator’s hand. A more extreme example would be the jitter of cellular phone videos or, for that matter, the tiny helmet-cameras of soldiers in the recent combat footage cited earlier. Filmmakers themselves certainly consider this aesthetic difference. *Cloverfield*’s cinematographer, Michael Bonvillain, argues that “The main idea [of *Cloverfield*] was to make the camera feel like it

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589 See John Pavlus, “Revisiting Flight 93,” *American Cinematographer* 87, no. 6 (June 2006), 30. Specifically, one of the operators used a still camera monopod to give additional support to the camera because of the heavy zoom lens attached, while the other operator (moving more quickly, with a wide-angle lens) had the camera mounted from rubber tubing attached to a dolly on the roof of the plane — when the dolly was visible in shots it was digitally removed during post-production.  
591 Interestingly, the difference is made starkly apparent within *The Blair Witch Project* when the film cuts from the black and white 16mm footage to the handicam images.  
592 “Special Forces Helmet Cam in Afghanistan.”
was a little Coke can and not some giant camera on [an operator’s] shoulder.”

In fact, *Cloverfield*’s hand-held “look” is variable because different portions of the film were shot with three different cameras: a palmcorder (Panasonic HVX200) for shots that did not require visual effects, and either a Sony F23 or a Thomson Viper (both digital cameras designed to function as much “like” film cameras as possible and therefore have similar design and handling characteristics).

The production factors detailed so far affect the kind of “shakiness” of the final image if the camera operator is filming from a stationary position, possibly using panning or tilting movements. However, when the camera also moves physically the type of shakiness to the image will vary depending on a number of other influences. For instance, the speed of the operator’s movement has an obvious impact on the amount of shake to the image (faster movements are likely to be shakier than slower movements). Additionally, uneven terrain is likely to make

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594 Thus, the look of the film is determined by the technology available: the primary reason the filmmakers could not simply shoot the entire film on the HVX200 and get a “handycam” feel straight away is that this consumer-level camera did not record images with the resolution and colour-depth required by the visual effects artists. As a result, the scenes shot with the larger cameras do not have the same kind of shakiness as those shot with the HVX200. However, the scene were approached with the attitude that “the action would have to happen and the camera would have to find it, and on top of that, the operator would have to find it the way Hud [the character supposedly filming the events] would find it”. See Bonvillain, cited in Witmer, “Some Kind of Monster”, 38. This is clearly another instance of controlled spontaneity: reportedly, *Cloverfield*’s long-take scenes sometimes went up to 60 takes. Occasionally in modern films, certain shots have pseudo-shakiness added to the image after visual effects compositing has taken place because this helps blend the digital imagery with the live action footage. An overview of this process can be found at http://fxhome.com/support/tutorials/view/26/Artificial+camera+shake (accessed August 10, 2011).
595 I am classifying as physical movements camera shots that involve tracking or craning, both of which can obviously be performed with a hand-held camera. In fact, it is arguably the capacity to perform these movements that create the “fluid” effect often ascribed to hand-held cinematography.
596 Although it is not relevant to the war films studied here, for the sake of comprehensiveness I should point out that rapid movements with certain digital cameras result in an odd visual lag in parts of the frame. This distortion is the result of the “rolling shutter” used with the CMOS sensor in some cameras and cinematographers working with cameras susceptible to this problem typically try to avoid fast camera movements. The RED One, which has been used on a number of recent Hollywood feature films such as *The Book of Eli* and *Fair Game* (Doug Liman, 2010), is one high-end camera that is predisposed to this problem.
the image noticeably shakier, although an operator may also hand-hold the camera while sitting on top of a moving platform to smooth out the shaking. The skill level of the operator is also a factor, in that experienced operators typically know to try to minimise the “bounciness” of their walking movements.

Another significant practical factor that should be taken into account when discussing hand-held cinematography are the varying reasons for shooting hand-held. Consider Roger Deakins’ opinion on the matter, who explains that “Sometimes, I will shoot hand held just to work quickly and ‘get the shot’ but more often than not I wouldn’t be doing something hand held unless I was after the more fluid feeling of an observational documentary or something with an active energy to it.”

Although Deakins is, in a sense, suggesting here that hand-held filming does indeed offer documentary “like” effect, I think his statement needs to be examined closely. Firstly, his claim about what counts as the “feeling of an observational documentary” seems to me to be a quite pre-theoretical attitude about a particular aesthetic look, rather than a carefully justified academic assertion. As such, I do not read it as a clear declaration that Deakins believes his hand-held work on *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005), for instance, counts as direct-cinema filmmaking about military involvement in Iraq. Deakins’ statement seem to me to reveal something interesting about filmmakers’ practical reasons for “going hand held.” Specifically, Deakins is being very honest in his point that hand-held shooting is (often) faster than setting up a tripod or—in the case of a moving shot—dolly tracks or a Steadicam.

Indeed, this may sound similar to

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598 An even more blunt description of this pragmatic approach is made by David Michod, director of *Animal Kingdom* (2010), in the DVD interview where he states that when he was running out of
the approach of *cinema verite* documentarians using a portable hand-held camera to enable filming of subjects (or in physical spaces) which could not accommodate the large camera equipment and crews of earlier productions. However, the reasoning is actually quite different. For feature filmmakers trying to "get the shot," in Deakins’ words, it is a matter of economics and/or other purely practical reasons. The *cinema verite* camera operators, on the other hand, were deliberately attempting to explore the possibilities of the hand-held camera (and in some sense relying on these) simply in order to actually film anything at all because their approach, according to James Lipscomb, was an attempt “to capture what happens, to move with our characters without interfering in what they are doing.”

Deakins’ comment about the “active energy” of a hand-held camera seems to me to fit with contemporary attitudes of intensified continuity where this type of filming is regarded as “involving” the camera in the events of the scene. This contemporary usage of the hand-held camera relies upon the public’s mistaken perception of documentary style that I indicated earlier. As Robert Drew argues, commenting on the apparent impact his documentary *Primary* (1960) had on fiction filmmaking practices:

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599 In 1964, one critic writing from France praised the work of the documentary terms of “The Americans” (the teams of Robert Drew/Richard Leacock and David/Albert Maysles) as capitalizing on the smaller camera equipment to “follow their subjects almost anywhere”. See Peter Graham, “‘Cinéma-Vérite’ in France.” *Film Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1964), 34.

600 There may also be a particular kind of aesthetic intimacy that comes from a hand-held camera filming from a position of very close proximity to an actor.

Within the next eight months, or a year, fiction films begin coming out of France using our techniques, as if it's good to have shaky cameras. We're trying our damndest to make the shaky camera smoother and over there they're making them shaky to look like us! So *Breathless* [Jean-Luc Godard, 1961] appears, and *Tom Jones* [Tony Richardson, 1963], and a whole succession of films that are using our “look” to—I don’t know, to gain authenticity, I guess.\(^{602}\)

While Jeanne Hall has argued that *Primary* can be better understood by analysing its soundtrack from a perspective which “take[s] a step back from the rhetoric of the movement”, I think the same is true of its camera style.\(^{603}\) In this regard, Drew’s comment seems to overstate the similarities between the “handheld look” of the direct cinema documentaries and the narrative fiction films that have adopted the style. In fact, if the hand-held tracking shots of *Primary* are examined for the sort of instability factors I outlined earlier, they are generally far more stable than the average tracking shot in *Breathless* (and certainly not wobbly in the way Jean-Luc Godard’s camera is during the moving shots). So, although fiction filmmakers might have begun to adopt the *cinema verite* technique of handholding the camera, that does not mean that the resulting images were identical. Merely, the “look” is similar enough for audiences (and sometimes filmmakers) to draw associations with such abstract ideas as immediacy and spontaneity that seem to characterise the filming conditions of the *verite* documentaries. Thus, these ideas could be invoked in order to suggest “realism” in fiction films as the wobble of hand-held footage become familiar to viewers through the technique’s increased usage in news gathering camerawork and

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\(^{602}\) Robert Drewe, cited in Hubbert, ““Whatever Happened to Great Movie Music?””, 193.  
Indeed, it is interesting that audiences (and filmmakers) have so readily accepted the use of the hand-held camera as a marker of realism in combat films, considering, as Stella Bruzzi argues, that “the aesthetics of observational/vérité cinema have become the sine qua non of faux documentaries, the way to signal, therefore, the fakery of the documentary pastiche in series such as Tanner ’88, The Office or The Thick of It and films such as This is Spinal Tap, Man Bites Dog and A Mighty Wind.”

### 4.1.2 Neoformalism, realism and spontaneity

In order to understand why a film’s appeal to these ideas of immediacy and spontaneity would suggest realism, it is helpful to enlist some terminology from the analytic approach of neoformalism as developed by Kristin Thompson. This approach examines what constitutes the “motivation” for a particular device in a given film as well as allows for speculation of how the technique may function to create the artistic effect of defamiliarization. The first contribution of neoformalism to the present study is that its tools for justifying the presence of particular techniques in a text according to particular motivations caters for a more nuanced and directed analysis of the work of hand-held cameras. For instance, when a given device appeals to ideas about the real world its presence can be said to have a realistic motivation. However, it should also be remembered that the device does not need to imitate reality in order for its usage to be justified as realistic. This, in itself, perhaps explains why any contemporary film which

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604 What I am discussing here are the reasons for “going handheld” for entire sequences of fiction films while, of course, there are occasional instances throughout cinema history of the hand-held camera being used for particular shots. For more on this, see Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It: 144 – 145.


606 See Thompson, Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible and Breaking the Glass Armor.

607 Thompson, Breaking the Glass Armor, 17.
uses hand-held cinematography is regarded by public and academic critics alike as “like a documentary.” Since documentaries certainly exist in the real world and some of them use hand-held cameras, the dominant “idea” about them is that they use hand-held camerawork and therefore a fiction film which is shot hand-held appeals to this idea. Read against this background, it simply does not matter that the actual look of the hand-held footage in the WW2 films studied does not resemble documentary or newsreel footage, because the cultural idea of what documentaries and newsreels “look like” is that they have wobbly hand-held camerawork. Indeed, Thompson anticipates such an argument when she summarises the way realistic motivation in a film impacts upon the film’s reception:

Motivations are sets of cues within the work [film, novel, etc] that allow us to understand the justification for the presence of any given device. If the cues ask us to appeal to our knowledge of the real world (however mediated that knowledge may be by cultural learning), we can say that the work is using realistic motivation. And if realistic motivation becomes one of the main ways of justifying the work’s overall structures, then we generalize and perceive the work as a whole as realistic.

The neoformalist examination of cues caters for a detailed explanation of the use of hand-held cameras in WW2 films, since the actual look of the cinematography in these films is so variable. For instance, the camera of *Flags of Our Fathers* does not track forward in order to follow soldiers running onto the battlefield in

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608 Interestingly, the technique had begun to become “automatized” in documentary filmmaking (and therefore had begun to lose its defamiliarizing effect) in the 1960s. Brian Winston suggests that it was “an era when cameramen demanded whether you wanted something shot ‘properly’ or in ‘wobblyscope.’” Winston, cited in Hall, “Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite,” 44.

609 Ibid., 198.
the way *Band of Brothers*’ camera sometimes does nor does the *Flags*’ image jitter and vibrate in the way *Band of Brothers*’ camera frequently does. While both of these use their particular hand-held cinematography to appeal to the idea that newsreels and documentaries are often hand-held, I think the appeal to realism in *Brothers*’ specific style is in fact compounded by an interesting use of transtextual motivation made possible by the evolution of the WW2 combat film genre. The jitteriness of the image also appeals to the audience’s recognition of this as a convention of realistic imagery established by *Ryan* a few years earlier. As Thompson explains, “types of transtextual motivation most commonly depend on our knowledge of usage within the same genre.”610 In other words, the jitteriness of the image in this show (sometimes created by an image shaking device) reminds the audience of the usage of this cue as a marker of realism from *Ryan*, which is also invoked by the promotion of Spielberg and Tom Hanks as part of the television program’s key creative team.

The point here is that there is nothing inherently “realistic” about a shaky camera, as Drewe’s relatively stable, though highly mobile, camera in *Primary* attests. However, I believe that it is more often the case that audiences read shaky camerawork as more realistic than the fluid tracking shots of a Steadicam. Neoformalism then can allow us to identify what it is about such arbitrary features as “shakiness” or “wandering framing” that constitute realistic motivation. By and large, these tactics suggest an unpolished, imprecise, non-Hollywood roughness which can be regarded as a binary opposite of the slick, artificial (and therefore “unrealistic”) productions coming out of major studios and designed primarily as entertainment. As Thompson, writing of *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948),

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610 Ibid., 18.
argues: “For some critics, technical crudeness is associated with realism, since it conveys a sense of the film-maker’s lack of control over shooting conditions in documentary modes.” This lack of control is taken to signify the filmmaker’s non-intervention in the events before, during or after filming and therefore regarded as implying a recording of a real event which is as accurate as possible. Writing of the 1963 Abraham Zapruder footage of Kennedy’s assassination, Bruzzi argues that it is the “accidental” nature of the footage that gives it credibility. Specifically, “the film’s ‘value’ is presumed to be that, because of the singular lack of premeditation, intention and authorship, it is able, unproblematically to yield the truth contained within its blurry, hurried images.” It is fruitful to use this as the background against which to read many popular and academic statements about the realism of hand-held cinematography for combat sequences.

So, by using textual cues that suggest an unplanned, uncontrolled shooting environment, contemporary fiction filmmakers photographing combat sequences can appeal to realistic motivation as a means of conveying a sense of authenticity and veracity to their images. Of course, I am not suggesting that big budget Hollywood combat films are shooting their combat in uncontrolled conditions. Rather, in order to create controlled spontaneity, filmmakers may deliberately arrange their filming conditions to create the impression of an unplanned shooting

611 Ibid., 212.
612 Film studies has launched a number of theoretical attacks on the validity of claims of non-intervention. However, for my purposes here I am interested in the dominant, uncritical attitudes towards “documentary” taken by popular movie-goers as these are the attitudes, in fact, invoked by academic critics when they regard Ryan, for instance, as documentary-like in its style. However, for one well-argued theoretical attack on cinema verite’s claims of non-interventionism, see the Cahiers du Cinéma article by Jean-Louis Comolli, cited in Williams, Realism and the Cinema: 225 – 243.
613 See Bruzzi, New Documentary: 17 – 22.
614 Ibid., 19.
environment, and thus appeal to the “magic of immediacy” (or, in Louis Marcarelle’s terms: *la magie du direct*). As I showed in Section 3.3, this appeal is also made in the marketing and promotional discourse surrounding some of the contemporary films—for instance, Spielberg talking of the film being “sloppy” and considering it acceptable if “the lens got splattered with sand and blood.”

David Frankel, a director on the television show *Band of Brothers*, speaks of a similarly apparent lack of control in the following anecdote of the filming of a particular battle scene:

> At one point a soldier got hit and another guy ran out to rescue him. The camera operator was supposed to follow the action, but as he started to move forward he became so alarmed that he hid behind the actors. His instance was, “Oh God, they’re shooting at me.” Needless to say, we had to cut. That was the moment when I felt like what the horror of battle must be like.

How much of this kind of promotional rhetoric is accurate is, of course, questionable, but from the point of view of neoformalism the discourse serves a revealing background against which viewers interpret these filmic depictions of battle. In one way or another, WW2 combat films have virtually always attempted to appeal to realistic motivation for a surprisingly broad range of techniques that are highly variable throughout the history of the genre. While a contemporary

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615 See Comolli, quoted in Williams, *Realism and the Cinema*, 226.
617 In the fact that the director could call cut and shoot a re-take, Frankel’s anecdote reveals exactly how controlled the filming conditions are on the films aiming for the sense of immediacy and spontaneity. David Frankel, cited in Oppenheimer, “Close Combat,” 32. Earlier in Chapter 3, I cited Bordwell’s analysis of similar remarks from Sylvester Stallone about the deliberately uncontrolled shooting conditions for fist fights in *The Expendables*.
618 Although I am writing about cinematography here, the point seems to stand for the appeal to realism at the level of narrative also. I am referring to the opening title card of *Wake Island*, for
film like *Ryan* motivates its apparently “sloppy” camera technique by an appeal to realism, the more obviously “composed” combat films of the 1940s also appealed to realism through other devices. *Bataan* was praised by many critics of its day for its “gritty realism” although it was shot entirely on sound-stages and is unlikely to be regarded as realistic by present-day audiences familiar with the kind location filming that has become standard for WW2 combat films.\(^{619}\)

As I indicated earlier, there is no inherent reason that the hand-held camera should signify unplanned or uncontrolled shooting conditions. For practical purposes, hand-held shooting requires a great degree of control: the lens focus must be adjusted constantly if the distance between camera and subject changes by even a small amount and, as the focal length of the lens increases, the operator must be increasingly precise with their framing and composition. Of course, errors (deliberate or accidental) in these practical components of camera operation can be exploited to appeal to a greater sense of uncontrolled shooting conditions.\(^{620}\) However, in the films studied here (and certainly in *Ryan’s* Omaha Beach sequence, which has the most extreme shakiness of any of the films) the camera is never really subjected to “operator errors” of this sort.\(^{621}\) The closest example I can find is an (apparent) misjudging of compositional framing during some whip-

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\(^{619}\) See Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*: 46.

\(^{620}\) For instance, Roger Deakins regards Peter Watkins’ films *Culloden* (1964) and *The War Game* (1965) as “powerful” specifically because they were shot “handheld and sometimes out of focus, they lacked any sense of artifice”. See “The DI, Luddites and Other Musings,” http://www.deakinsonline.com/articles/di.php (accessed August 1, 2011).

\(^{621}\) Someone might consider *Ryan’s* camera shutter being thrown out of sync with the film-advance mechanism an example of this deliberate appeal to “sloppiness.” However, I do not consider this as obvious to most viewers as the subject suddenly being out of focus or framed so that their face is missing, for instance, and neither of these more explicit “errors” occur in any of the films studied. *United 93* is an example of a modern film which frequently exploits this roughness. For instance, the camera will often reframe to include a new speaking character, but then a few seconds the focus finally adjusts.
pans. This occurs in one of the examples of controlled spontaneity I indicated in Section 3.3. Specifically, in *Ryan’s* battle at Ramelle, the camera whip-pan to a group of Germans wheeling a flak gun into position and the framing edges too far past them before being corrected (Figs. 3.76 – 3.78). It is as though the new subject (the Germans) appears so quickly the camera operator did not have time to plan the transition from one framing to another. Of course, this mistake in the panning movement could be accidental, or deliberately performed in order to look accidental. Either way, the effect suggests a lack of control.

The arbitrariness of the hand-held camera as an appeal to realism is thrown into sharp relief if we remember that the Steadicam was originally marketed as enabling tracking shots which would be more realistic than those achieved with hand-held filming. Ed Digiulio, the corporate chief of the Steadicam manufacturing company Cinema Products, suggested in 1976 that: “The desire for realism, the increasing use of location filming, the need to film practical interiors, and the creative need of both cameraman and director to produce new and imaginative imagery have all conspired to cause an enormous rise in the use of hand held cinematography over the past decade.”622 For Digiulio, the Steadicam enabled shots that were more “realistic” than hand-held filming for the same intuitive reason I indicated earlier: human vision simply does not bounce during motion. In effect, the Steadicam offered what Digiulio saw as the “sense of immediacy” that filmmakers desire from the “handheld camera mode” but without what he considered to be unrealistic shakiness.623 In this context, “immediacy” seems to be a quality attained primarily by filming on location. Digiulio’s

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comments, as Jean-Pierre Geuens explains, are really referring to the work done by *cinema-verite* documentarians and its influence on some independent American feature films at the time.\textsuperscript{624} As far as combat films are concerned hand-held, filming was not a dominant trend during the 1970s. In fact, the dominant trend for combat films during the 1980s, and throughout most of the 1990s, was for stable, predominantly fixed-camera shooting.\textsuperscript{625} It is not until after *Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* in 1998 that the hand-held camera becomes anything like a standard for combat sequences.\textsuperscript{626}

But this does not mean that both *Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* use hand-held cinematography in the same ways as each other, nor does it mean that the specific nature of *Ryan’s* hand-held work became the norm. Rather, I would argue that *The Thin Red Line’s* hand-held technique (with one exception on which I elaborate below) is more definitive of the norm of filming for combat sequences.\textsuperscript{627}

\textsuperscript{624} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{625} I am basing this observation on 1980s Vietnam War films (since WW2 films were virtually non-existent during the 1980s). *Heartbreak Ridge* (Clint Eastwood, 1986), *Platoon* (1986) and *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin, 1987) are all predominantly fixed-camera films, as is *Casualties of War* (Brian De Palma, 1989). Only the low-budget *84 Charlie Mopic* (1989) differs and it is explicitly making the hand-held camera a part of its diegesis. This is the earliest war film prior to *Ryan* which uses hand-held filming to any significant degree. *Navy SEALs* (Lewis Teague, 1990) is something of an exception: it mixes hand-held and fixed-camera shots during its combat sequences in a way that is on the one hand unlike other combat films of the decade, but on the other hand very much in the style of contemporaneous straight out action films such as *Die Hard* (1988). As in the blockbuster action films of the 1990s, the hand-held camera of *Navy SEALs* is typically noticeable in slightly wobbly shots of men taking cover. Certainly, the frenetic movement of 2000s war films is nowhere to be seen in *Navy SEALs* or *Die Hard*. The hand-held shots in *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987) are limited to when the camera is in a vehicle (eg., the “Get-some!” M-60 door-gunner sequence in the helicopter, or following troops running behind a tank as it rolls toward a battle zone). Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1992) though not a combat film, certainly uses the very specific hand-held style which I will argue characterises *Ryan*, albeit without the image-shaker effect.

\textsuperscript{626} By this I mean that films such as *Three Kings*, set in the first Gulf War, *Tigerland* (Joel Schumacher, 2000) set during the Vietnam era and the WW2 films examined in this study use hand-held camerawork in ways that virtually all combat films prior to 1998 simply do not.

\textsuperscript{627} I am basing this commentary on the research data I reported in the discussion. As indicated there, this is generalised data obtained by extracting the significant battle sequence from each of the films studies and subjecting the sequence to analysis for its average shot length (ASL), as well as the percentage of shot scales and various classifications of camera movements.
Consider the following comparison table, which is a summarized form of the camera style data I reported in Chapter 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Shot Length (seconds)</th>
<th>Hand-held or mounted camera</th>
<th>Panning movement</th>
<th>Physical movement</th>
<th>Motivation for camera movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Saving Private Ryan   | 1998 | 6.3                           | Hand-held                  | 50%              | 32%              | • Character movement (33%)  
| (Omaha)               |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (61%)  
|                       |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Dramatic emphasis (6%)                                            |
| Saving Private Ryan   | 1998 | 5.8                           | Hand-held                  | 30%              | 15%              | • Character movement (50%)  
| (Alamo)               |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (50%)                                                   |
| Thin Red Line         | 1998 | 3.4                           | Hand-held                  | 22%              | 22%              | • Character movement (50%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (25%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Dramatic emphasis (25%)                                          |
| Enemy at the Gates    | 2001 | 2.0                           | Both (Predominantly hand-held) | 32%              | 17%              | • Character movement (73%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (15%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Dramatic intensifier (12%)                                       |
| Windtalkers           | 2002 | 2.2                           | Both (Predominantly hand-held) | 12%              | 33%              | • Character movement (53%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (7%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Dramatic emphasis (40%)                                         |
| Flags of Our Fathers  | 2006 | 2.9                           | Both (Predominantly hand-held) | 5%               | 22%              | • Character movement (80%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Geography (10%)  
|                      |      |                               |                            |                  |                  | • Dramatic emphasis (10%)                                         |

As I argued earlier, it is actually possible to consider the hand-held style of *The Thin Red Line* and the other post-2000s WW2 combat films as a fairly homogenous grouping. Interestingly, although the camera in these sequences has the potential to be very mobile, there is a surprisingly low percentage of physical movement. This may be related to two issues. Firstly, the kinds of events taking place and secondly, that the primary motivation for camera movement in these sequences is to keep a particular character in frame. As a result, there just is not much camera movement since although the sequences take place on large battlefields, a lot of the shots are dedicated either to particular officers looking at the battle and giving orders or to particular soldiers taking cover while being shot at. A related point is that in some cases there is also a significantly lower percentage of panning movements. In both *Windtalkers* and *Flags of Our Fathers*.

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628 Not surprisingly, *all* of these sequences are invasion sequences where the camera is essentially “on the side” of the invaders.
most of the shots of men moving horizontally across the battlefield are handled in such wide shots, or in a horizontal tracking shot, that panning is not necessary to follow their movement. Occasionally there are some dramatic push-ins toward particular characters; however, these are most prominent in Windtalkers because they are used to add expressive intensity to shots of men charging forwards. There are also a number of crane-mounted shots which are typically used to emphasise aspects of the over the top “action hero” violence carried out by Nicolas Cage.

In so far as what would count as obvious “handheld-ness,” these films typically exhibit a kind of gentle bobbing or rocking motion to the image and the closer framings (usually achieved with a telephoto-lens) exaggerate this much more than the wider-shots. None of the films in this grouping have any kind of consistent “shakiness” to them: rather, they resemble the sort of hand-held shots that an operator trying to keep the camera stable would look most probably achieve.

Superficially, much of this description seems to apply to Ryan, allowing for the occasional heavy shunting of the camera and the frequent vibration of the image. When I have talked with viewers and academic colleagues about the style of Ryan, these viewers predominantly recall the battle scenes to be fast and aggressive. Prior to this study I was also certain that this was the case, based on a number of casual viewings over the last decade. However, a closer look at the editing of the film shows that in fact the visual style of the combat sequences is markedly different to that which I had expected. The Omaha Beach sequence is

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629 I have not counted small panning movements to reframe characters when they move slightly.
630 Jillian Sandell neatly summarises these kinds of events as typical of the action genre, which are “dominated […] by the display of male bodies and by hyperbolic performances of what it means to be a man”. It is for this reason that I consider Windtalkers primarily an action film set against the backdrop of specific events from WW2, rather than a WW2 combat film per se. See Jillian Sandell, “Reinventing Masculinity: The Spectacle of Male Intimacy in the Films of John Woo,” Film Quarterly 49, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 23.
edited with an astonishingly slow ASL 6.3 seconds and the Alamo sequence is cut with an ASL of 5.8 seconds. By comparison to the other WW2 combat sequences studied here, these sequences are not simply remarkable for being non-normative, they are *radically* non-normative. Even more noteworthy, with respect to the perceptions of my friends and colleagues, is that neither of the sequences *feel* like they have an ASL of this length. The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, Spielberg’s *mise-en-scene* is arranged such that he favors shooter-within-the-shot killings and on the other hand the camera movement is orchestrated with this *mise-en-scene* so that the camera moves to a new position just in time to frame the next killing. For instance, when Miller’s men have made it past the machine-gun nest at the top of Omaha Beach, a single shot follows them for 52 seconds as they begin to clear out the Germans in the trenches: Spielberg uses shooter-within-the-shot framings over the shoulders of the US troops as they shoot Germans composed in deep-field. The gunshots, and their impacts on the victims, are presented in the same shot and as the camera slowly tracks rightwards it moves into position just in time to frame the advancing Germans in the background as the US troops appear in the foreground at the same time. An exemplary instance of this occurs in the climactic battle at The Alamo, in Spielberg’s 47 second shot which follows Cpl. Upham as he runs across the road and up the stairs into a building. As the camera follows him, it just happens to halt in time as German soldiers become visible through a hole in the wall and Upham’s comrades fire at them (Fig. 3.70 – 3.72).
In this way, the camera moves so frequently that it seems as though the view is almost continually changing. Additionally, when the camera framing does change it virtually always moves to lock in (briefly) on another salient piece of action. Another exemplar of this strategy occurs one-third through the Omaha Beach sequence: as the camera follows a group of men running up the beach toward the machine-gun nests it suddenly pans to the right and downward, catching a fallen soldier’s face in MCU as he screams and sprawls on the beach (Fig. 3.58 – 3.60). In the same take, the camera then just as quickly pans back toward the machine-gun nest, pausing briefly on the way to frame another dying soldier in wide-shot as he falls face-down onto the sand (Fig. 3.61). The effect created by this technique is what I have called controlled spontaneity—clearly these framings are not accidental; however, they feel accidental and therefore spontaneous. As indicated earlier, the other WW2 combat films of the 2000s are certainly able to suggest an element of spontaneity simply by using the hand-held camera. It appears that Ryan is doing something much more complex. On the one hand, Spielberg’s orchestration of mise-en-scene, framing and camera movement in Ryan’s battle scenes are clearly contrived, yet the resulting sequences feel accidental and spontaneous. Given the ubiquitous comments from viewers claiming that Ryan has the most realistic combat they have seen, I think this current examination of Spielberg’s combat filming style gets to the heart of why spontaneity is able to feel “more realistic.” In writing about these shots, I am

631 The simple calculation that I used to determine the percentage of shots with camera movement has result in slightly understated values for Ryan because of its much larger ASL. By this I mean that although only 15% of the shots in the Alamo sequence contains physical camera movement, these shots are by far the longest in the sequence (for instance, the 42 second shot above) and so by proportion a greater amount of screen duration is actually covered by moving camera shots.

632 There would have needed to be a focus-pull during the whip-pan from the pill-box to the fallen soldier in order to keep both in focus when they are in the frame: this was likely achieved by taking distance measurements during preparation for the shot, or by an operator skilled enough to anticipate the distance changes involved.
reminded of Maslowski’s remarks on the difference between slick Hollywood battles and what the US Army Signal Corps cameramen faced during WW2:

In Hollywood, with its carefully choreographed scenes and the ability to shoot multiple retakes, almost every scene could have superb lighting and composition. But in battle the cameramen had no control over light conditions or the speed at which events took place, and little ability to affect composition. Foregrounds, backgrounds, the main subject’s placement in the frame, all were difficult to compose in advance because “the one prediction that can be made about operations against the enemy is that they are unpredictable.” The 162nd SPC’s [Signal Photographic Company’s] Jerry Kahn wanted to get some shots of an enemy artillery barrage—but every time he aimed his camera in one direction the shells exploded elsewhere. Artistic or not, action shots often depended on pure chance, though a cameraman had to be at the front in the first place even to give pure chance an occasional lucky break.633

What I think needs to be stressed here is the emphasis on “chance,” or as a member of the Combat Photography Unit put it: “Keep shooting and hope!”634 Of course, Ryan’s various manipulations of the image—a mistimed shutter synchronisation to streak the highlights, the uncoated lenses which diffuse the light and lower the sharpness of the image, and the artificial vibration of the image through the Clairmont Image Shaker attachment—all work to reduce the apparent slickness and polish usually associated with Hollywood entertainment. Thus, the film appeals to notions of realism and authenticity via its roughness.

633 Maslowski, Armed With Cameras, 69. Additionally, of course, the cameramen generally could not get in harm’s way or directly in the frontline. Reportedly, however, there were a few instances of cameramen filming from extremely dangerous positions. See the chapter entitled “Sticking Their Necks Out Doing Their Weird Things,” in Maslowski, Armed With Cameras: 115 – 133.
634 Ibid., 69. The original is in full capitals.
However, I think the more significant impression of realism in the film’s battle scenes comes from this pseudo-random feeling to this technique of the camera “happening to catch” important actions. Obviously the entire set up is controlled by the filmmaker, but it feels spontaneous and therefore realistic.

I do appreciate that there is sometimes a practical advantage to a filmmaker attempting to produce spontaneity during the on-set filming stage. For instance, director Peter Berg has said that his hand-held multiple camera shooting style allows for the actors to be more creatively loose and improvise in ways they would not be able to if locked down to specific staging setups with determined focus and composition markers. A related case, in many ways, is Paul Greengrass’ United 93. The action was shot in takes running up to 40 minutes (which were then edited significantly) and two cameras filmed with “staggered” start times so that while one camera could reload the action could continue with the other camera continuing to film. However, the practice of on-set spontaneity is not the same as the aesthetic of controlled spontaneity involved in the WW2 combat sequences studied here, and certainly it is nothing like the carefully orchestrated camera and mise-en-scene ensemble taking place in Ryan. In some ways it might be argued that the shooting styles of Greengrass and Berg are more legitimately spontaneous than that of Ryan in that the camera operators do not always know exactly what is about to happen. Ryan’s framing, by

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635 The director also notes that he is aware some audiences dislike the instability of the hand-held camerawork and indicates that he tries to edit out all of the “unnecessary” movement. See the director’s commentary on the DVD release of Berg’s terrorist-thriller The Kingdom (2007). This means of producing spontaneity in the performances may be true, but it is also evident that it allows Berg some improvisation as a director: for instance, in the behind the scenes footage of The Kingdom’s car ambush scene, Berg is heard off-camera directing Jennifer Garner with: “Say ‘fuck’ again!” See “Constructing the Freeway Sequence,” Kingdom, 2007 DVD (Universal Pictures).

comparison, is so precise that I suspect the shots are very carefully planned and choreographed.

4.1.3 Spielberg’s moving camera

Although some critics of style have noticed Spielberg’s long-takes, I think he is doing something very specific here that he also uses occasionally in *Munich* (2005). In these films, Spielberg shows a tendency to not use the standard way of staging gunshot killings. As indicated earlier in the discussion, practically speaking there are really only three ways to film this kind of event: i) the filmmaker can just show the victim being hit, ii) the filmmaker can use shot/reverse-shot editing to show the shooter and then cut to the victim at the moment of impact, or iii) the filmmaker can stage the shot so that both shooter and victim are in the same shot. The first two are the most commonly used conventions. The third is rare, but when it is used the shot is typically staged in depth and framed over the shoulder of the shooter. These shootings do occasionally appear in the 1940s combat films (*Wake Island*, *Gung Ho!* and

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637 I think that although the visual strategy is performed in similar practical ways in these two films, it actually achieves very different expressive results. As I argue here, the way the device is used in *Ryan* achieves a defamiliarizing effect which plays down the apparent significance of each killing, whereas in *Munich*, because the quantity of killing is far less than in *Ryan*, the long-takes allow an uninterrupted (i.e., unedited) interaction to develop between the characters involved in the shot before one of them is killed. Thus, in some scenes in *Munich* there is a drawn out anticipation that a killing will take place and Spielberg extends the shot and delays the killing to create a tension that simply does not exist in *Ryan*. I thank Stephen Prince for pointing me in the direction of considering the different expressive functions of the violence in the long-takes in these films. For instances of other scholars commenting on Spielberg’s long-take style, Barry Salt argues that the director “is by far the most commercially successful film-maker of the last two decades, but he is not quite a typical American director. He has nearly always been a little on the longer side of the mean ASL for American films. This corresponds to his evident desire to keep the scene dissection interesting, and in particular in doing interesting camera moves that are relevant to the narrative”. See Salt, “Film Style and Technology in the Nineties,” in *Moving Into Pictures*, 323. See also Bordwell, *On The History of Film Style*: 253 – 255.

638 I am referring to the practical means of staging, filming and editing such an event. These three strategies are independent of any type of censorship. For instance, there are examples of all three strategies being used within films that were made during the era of the Production Code.

639 As I noted earlier, *Band of Brothers* contains a striking variation of this by staging a shooter-within-the-shot scene horizontally.
*Guadalcanal Diary* all contain isolated instances of this) and occasionally they are used by the contemporary filmmakers (for instance, *The Thin Red Line* has a number of them during the taking of the hill sequence). However, Spielberg’s work is significant not just because of the sheer *quantity* of shooter-within-the-same-shot framings, but also because of the *quality* of them. By this I mean the way they are set up is distinctive, but also their effect is unique. These two aspects of the technique are present in most of the battle sequences; however, for my analysis I will single out a sequence which has so far completely escaped critical attention: the moment when Miller’s squad actually meets Private Ryan which occurs just over half-way through the film.

In this sequence, the first seven shots are edited with an ASL of 5.6 seconds; five of these are hand-held medium shots which track with individual men as they walk through an open field (for example, Fig. 4.2). Based on the dramatic narrative events prior to this scene, I take it that these shots are meant to suggest each character is reflecting on their views toward the mission (that is, in the previous scene their Medic was killed in a skirmish, Private Reiban had threatened to mutiny, Sgt. Horvath had threatened to execute him on the spot and Miller had closed an earlier narrative thread by revealing to the men that prior to the war he had been a school teacher). The body language of the actors also encourages such an interpretation because they either look down while they walk

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640 It is worth noting that these shooter-within-the-shot framings virtually never happened in real combat footage during WW2. One of only a few known instances, shot by Norm Hatch and used in *With The Marines at Tarawa* (1944) has attained legendary status, although it is unclear if any of the Japanese (a group of about eight who run across the screen in deep-field while the foreground Marines open fire) are hit. Significantly, this *With The Marines at Tarawa* shot actually contains a jump-cut: it looks as if Hatch was filming two Marines waiting behind cover, then stopped the camera and lowered it when suddenly the Japanese began running past so he started the camera up again. There is a noticeable jolt to the image on the jump-cut as if the camera has been hastily re-framed to “get the shot” in time, and by this point many of the Japanese have already passed from clear view. I suspect this is the kind of “lack of control” from actuality filming that is being invoked (but not imitated) by practitioners of controlled spontaneity.
or gaze into the distance. These hand-held shots have a bounciness to them that suggests they were shot by a shoulder-mounted camera held by an operator walking backwards: each footprint makes the image bounce up and down slightly. In the sixth shot, the sound of a German half-track approaching forces Miller to turn around and gaze off-screen before ordering the men to duck (Fig. 4.3).

After the seventh shot, a horizontal tracking shot of the half-track framed in medium shot as it travels through the clearing, the sequence changes strategies significantly (Fig. 4.4). The next shot lasts 98 seconds and begins with what looks like the camera operator is shooting hand-held while riding a horizontally tracking dolly. The camera is positioned some distance away from the half-track, with what is probably a normal focal length lens (35-50mm), still travelling to keep the half-track in frame while also revealing some of Miller’s men in the foreground sprawled out in the scrub of the field (Fig. 4.5). The men are all shown taking cover when suddenly an explosion occurs close by the half-track and Horvath looks to one of his men and asks “Who’s doing the shooting?” He repeats the question as the camera continues to track to the right and suddenly the half-track itself explodes and the camera tilts up to follow the flame-ball as it shoots up into the sky (Fig. 4.6). The camera then tilts back down and tracks back to the left, behind one of Miller’s men as he waits for the half-track to creep to a stop. The camera is now in position for an over the shoulder shooter-within-the-same-shot framing as the soldier moves into a kneeling position and opens fire on the Germans scrambling out of the half-track (Fig. 4.7). A slight re-framing to the left introduces another of Miller’s men as he continues to fire, although the shot is still wide enough to include the Germans as they are shot (Fig. 4.8). Miller’s voice is heard off-screen, ordering “Get ready to move on the left flank” and the camera
pans across to him just in time to catch him already on his feet and running toward the half-track (Fig. 4.9). The camera begins physically moving, following him in medium-shot as he runs forward, drops to one knee to observe for movement from the Germans, then continues tracking with him as he cautiously moves past the half-track around to the opposite side.

The camera is now in position behind Miller just at the same time as three Germans run out from behind the half-track and he fires at them with his submachine-gun (Fig. 4.10). They fall to the ground and the camera remains in medium-shot behind Miller as he watches the half-track for a moment before gazing out across the open field behind it. The camera moves slightly to his left, positioning him on the far right of frame and framing out the half-track to leave open the entire left side of the frame just as a voice is heard calling out: “101st [Airborne Regiment]. We’re comin’ out” (Fig. 4.11). Miller lowers his gun and three US soldiers stand up in the field (framed in the empty area of the shot that the camera had just opened up). The three soldiers run toward Miller and Miller hand-signals for his own men to come over: while this happens the camera tracks forward slowly, bouncing with each of the operator’s steps, until it is shooting directly over Miller’s shoulder as one of the new soldiers (Corporal Henderson), now presented in medium close-up, introduces himself (Fig. 4.12). The camera pans across the two soldiers with Henderson as they introduce themselves. One of them is Pvt. Ryan. Miller asks him, “Private James Francis Ryan?” and Ryan smiles back, with a look of surprise, and responds “Yes, Sir. How’d you guess that?” (Fig. 4.13). At this point comes the first edit in 98 seconds: a reverse-shot, in medium-closeup, of Miller as he gazes directly back at Ryan (Fig. 4.14). He
glances over his shoulder at his men, motivating the camera to pan over as they too stare back at Ryan (Fig. 4.15).

This entire sequence runs for two minutes and 39 seconds with the overwhelming bulk of the running time taken up by the eighth shot (98 seconds). As with the other combat sequences of the film, the unusual length of this shot only stands out for most viewers (in my experience) once it has been pointed out. I suspect this is because of the camera movement and the tight orchestration of this movement with the movement of the actors within the scene. In other words, the controlled spontaneity of the shot encourages a high level of engagement with the narrative events. The other significant component of this shot is precisely what Spielberg does with the camera, its composition and the movement of characters within the shot. As I indicated earlier, these kinds of long-take combat scenes enable Spielberg to stage his gunshots in depth. However, the shots themselves can be prolonged to this extent precisely because of the shooter-within-the-same-shot framings. Again, there is nothing necessarily unique about this kind of gunshot staging (in fact, *The Thin Red Line* contains a scene that is orchestrated in the same way although it lasts only 13 seconds and the camera movement is limited to fast panning).

These techniques may not be unique to *Ryan*, but there are two aspects to their use that are significant. Firstly, these long-take combat scenes are repeated so frequently throughout the film. Secondly, the device’s usage creates the effect of defamiliarization. The specific function of Spielberg’s camera movement is for

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641 While the shot in *The Thin Red Line* (which I described in detail in the cinematography section of the dissertation’s discussion) is certainly an instance of controlled spontaneity, I do not believe it creates the effect of defamiliarization. I recognise also that there may also be an element of what
the camera to quickly move into position to film virtually all of the killings as shooter-within-the-shot framings, yet at the same time the device does not draw attention to the move. But for the high degree to which Spielberg controls and directs the viewer’s attention with the movement and precise framings, André Bazin might regard the shot as an instance of “true cinema” for the extremely high degree to which it respects the “spatial flow” of the action presented. Significantly, when the Germans are shot, their deaths are staged in the background and occur quickly. They thus become merely incidental within the overall atmosphere and environment of the battlefield. Unlike in the other WW2 films studied, or even most blockbuster action films, *Ryan* does not cut to a closer shot dedicated to the victim. As a result, these killings are remarkably non-dramatic. In the “Finding Private Ryan” scene, as in the Omaha Beach sequence, the majority of deaths occur in the background of the shot. The film does not single them out prior to their death and as they are shot (or immediately after their

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642 Bordwell describes as “collaborative competition” here. Bordwell, developing an idea borrowed from art historian E. H. Gombrich, suggests that “Urges to compete through innovation […] seem to drive some of our filmmakers.” In this way, Spielberg’s skill at constructing and executing these long-takes could be seen as in competition with Martin Scorsese’s steadicam shot following Henry Hill through the Cococobana Club in *Goodfellas* (1990) or Brian De Palma’s train station shootout in *Carlito’s Way* (1993). Bordwell might argue there is a kind of one-upmanship taking place between certain filmmakers, a display of virtuoso for other filmmakers to appreciate, that casual viewers are not necessarily supposed to notice. In fact, De Palma acknowledges this explicitly in an interview in which he describes seeing Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* (1980): “I thought I was pretty good at doing those kinds of [steadicam] shots, but when I saw that I said, ‘Whoa!’ And that’s when I started using very complicated shots with the Steadicam”. While I agree that this could be taking place here, Spielberg’s long-takes in *Ryan* are a slightly special case. It seems to me that the steadicam shots of Scorsese and De Palma are staged in such a way as to draw attention to themselves as displays of skill, whereas the long-take hand-held shots in *Ryan* serve a number of other stylistic functions. See David Bordwell, “Puppetry and Ventriloquism,” http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/08/07/puppetry-and-ventriloquism/ (accessed 12 August, 2011). See also “Emotion Pictures: Quentin Tarantino Talks to Brian De Palma,” in *Brian de Palma Interviews*, ed. Laurence F. Knapp (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003): 135 – 149.


644 I acknowledge that the film contains an occasional shot/reverse-shot killing (particularly during sniper killings), as well as a number of deaths which occur without the audience being shown the shooter. Additionally, I should point out that the shooter-within-the-same-shot staging does not necessarily imply a so-called “first person” point of view shot, although there are indeed a small number of these setups during sniper killings.
body hits the ground) the mobile camera typically moves on to frame another event. This technique is unusual for three reasons, which is why I argue that it functions in *Ryan* to defamiliarize battlefield violence. Firstly, the occasional shooter-within-the-same-shot killings that do exist in the 1940s WW2 films are virtually always treated as individual setups in which the killing is the specific content of the particular shot (see Fig. 3.17 and 3.19). Secondly, these shots occur very rarely in the contemporary WW2 films. And thirdly, *Ryan*’s technique relies entirely on the highly mobile hand-held camera which is precisely planned to be in specific positions at key points of the long-take in order to film the killing. One of the reasons, in my opinion, that *Ryan*’s combat scenes have been regarded as supremely realistic, even by those critics attempting to lambast the film overall, is that the devices I have been foregrounding function to “renew” the “automatized” and “habitual” representations of battlefield violence that had become the norm prior to the film’s release.644

Stephen Prince has already indicated Spielberg’s “novel way” of depicting battlefield violence, comparing it to Peckinpah’s “elaborately violent” shootouts in *The Wild Bunch*.645 For Prince,

*The Wild Bunch* had a terrific impact on audiences because it made them conscious of a new way of looking at, and filming, screen violence. There was nothing comparable to that impact until Steven Spielberg released *Saving Private Ryan*, which hit audiences with the same intensity and revolutionary force as Peckinpah’s

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644 For a clear summary of these concepts, see Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*: 11.
Without explicitly invoking defamiliarization, Prince is, in fact, articulating the effect of these two films in exactly neoformalist terms. The defamiliarizing aspects of Ryan’s combat violence which Prince focuses on are the unique visual distortions of the film image, the “graphic depictions of bullet wounds and bodies blown apart by explosives” and, at the narrative level, that the “death scenes of secondary and major characters” do not necessarily occur “at clear and preordained points in the story.” My argument in this case-study extends Prince’s analysis by focusing on the specific staging strategies used in the combat scenes, as well as the way the hand-held camera is employed to depict the violence. For instance, although I agree with Prince that the sheer quantity of deaths, and their placement in the narrative sequence, suggests that on the battlefield death is not “exceptional and atypical,” it is apparent from this analysis that this effect is also created by the shooter-within-the-shot stagings because they play down the significance of each death.

4.1.4 Rethinking Ryan

Although it has become a commonly held belief that contemporary WW2 combat films use hand-held cinematography to offer the impression of documentary verisimilitude, in this analysis I have problematized this notion by subjecting the stylistic attributes of Ryan’s hand-held camerawork to a (primarily) neoformalist scrutiny. Certainly, it is true that the discourse that has emerged around these

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646 Ibid.
647 Ibid., 285.
films, and *Ryan* in particular, emphasises the apparently documentary like qualities of the camerawork. It is easy enough to find comments from reviewers, academic critics and the filmmakers themselves which attribute realism to the hand-held camerawork. However, a close analysis of the way the hand-held camera is actually used by these films shows two strong counter-claims to this popular discourse. Firstly, the dominant mode of filming simply does not resemble, in any strong sense of the word, actual documentary combat footage. Secondly, it is clear that *Ryan*’s camerawork is also significantly different to that of the other contemporary WW2 films. I regard the hand-held camerawork of Spielberg’s film to be a practice of “controlled spontaneity,” by which I mean that very measured steps have been taken to use the camera in ways which documentary films do not, yet the net effect of these stylistic devices is to cue spectators to read the events as somehow more “immediate” (and therefore more “realistic”) than previous combat films.

Against this background, the camera style of *Ryan* also stands out as peculiar. Certainly, some aspects of its style have been taken up by other filmmakers. Specifically, these are the visual distortions which a number of other critics have commented upon—the bleach-bypass desaturation of the colours, the mistimed shutter which streaks highlights, the extreme shakiness which occasionally obscures the image. Some of these aspects, while not pioneered in Spielberg’s film, have become frequently used techniques in WW2 films since *Ryan*. For instance, *Flags of Our Fathers* uses the bleach-bypass aesthetic and *Windtalkers* features occasional shots with blood on the lens. But the emphasis placed on these surface elements of *Ryan*’s cinematography has closed off discussions of the topic and has led to the oversimplified statements which regard the cinematography as
somehow like a documentary. Rather than establishing a standard for combat filming as some critics suggest, Spielberg’s WW2 combat film relies upon camera movement to a much greater extent than do the other filmmakers in this study and this movement functions in a very specific way.

I also recognise that the narrative of *Ryan* does not challenge stereotyped story structures of WW2 combat film and that the film can be read in highly conservative terms. For instance, Philippa Gates criticises *Ryan*, and other contemporary WW2 films, stating that “while these ‘authentic’ and ‘realistic’ combat sequences that define the new Hollywood war film may further the goal of the realist combat films of the late 1980s, they do not necessarily offer a more accurate portrayal of war and most often merely mask increasingly idealistic moral assertions.” However, I think that such critiques of *Ryan*’s apparent ideological conservativeness miss the point. Given the kind of defamiliarizing effect achieved by the combat sequences, the narrative of *Ryan* needs to be familiar so as to signal the particular representations that are to be defamiliarized. Part of my goal in this study has been to re-defamiliarize the style of *Ryan*; to point out the aspects of its style which have slipped from critical notice. The film is unique for its use of long-takes which, during the combat sequences at least, involve an extremely mobile camera which is continually repositioned for shooter-within-the-same-shot framings. I have also shown how these techniques have a defamiliarizing effect in the way that they represent the battlefield violence, rendering the killings as merely part of the battlefield *mise-en-scene* and

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649 Gates, “‘Fighting the Good Fight’,” 298. I realise that Gates is targeting other films as well as *Ryan* with her comments.
650 For more on the neoformalist goal of re-defamiliarizing texts which have become familiar, see Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 32.
thus forcing the viewer into rethinking their own perception towards combat
deaths. It is precisely this usage of the camera that I take to be the major stylistic
device which creates the impression of spontaneity, and therefore what creates the
impression of realism in this film.

4.2 “I’ll See You On the Beach.” The Details of
Performance in Saving Private Ryan.

Acting rarely figures in critical accounts of film. Certainly there are exceptions,
however, as Pamela Robertson Wojcik suggests there seem to be two major
reasons for the general “neglect of acting” in film studies:

In part, acting has probably been marginalized within film studies precisely
because of its seeming dominance within popular discourse on the movies. […] In
addition, film acting can seem transparent and resistant to description or
analysis. 651

For Wojcik, viewers and critics alike may struggle to articulate their responses to
the work of film actors because of this transparency and this is, of course, the
source of the title for Carole Zucker’s anthology on the topic: Making Visible the
Invisible. 652 Using the terminology and analytic categories of these researchers as
my starting point, I want to closely examine some specific aspects of acting and
performance in Ryan. There have been no critical accounts of the acting in Ryan
although there have been a number of popular accounts of the specific training of
the film’s actors, which I will discuss in detail later. My investigation here aims to
understand how actors aim for realism in their performances.653

Broadly speaking, the style of acting by the film’s main players fits within the
naturalistic tradition. By James Naremore’s account, this tradition can be defined
as a style of acting which attempts to obscure those aspects of performance which
appear deliberate, rehearsed or staged for the camera.654 For instance, actors in
this tradition may “slop down food and talk with their mouths full […]
ocasionally turn away from the camera, speak softly and rapidly, slur or throw
away lines.”655 This style, which is meant to suggest a character’s private/inner
thoughts, is often associated with the influence of the Russian acting theorist
Konstantin Stanislavski.656 In terms of cinema, this should more properly be
attributed to the version of Stanislavskian acting taught at Lee Strasberg’s Actors
Studio in the 1950s. Approaches derived from Stanislavski privilege (in slightly
different ways) preparation and performance that supposedly comes from the
actor’s “life experience” in order to present a more truthful (realistic, natural)
performance.657 However, it should be remembered that there were instances of
naturalistic acting—or in Roberta Pearson’s terms, acting using the verisimilar
code—from the early years of cinema.658 For this reason naturalistic acting should
not be regarded as necessarily synonymous with the Stanislavskian method or its

653 This is not to suggest that the films are realistic, which is a problem I discuss in detail in the
following section.
654 For an overview, see Naremore, Acting in the Cinema: 34 – 45.
655 Ibid., 44.
656 For pure Stanislavskian approaches to acting, see Konstantin Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares,
658 Roberta Pearson, “Histrionic and Verisimilar Codes in the Biograph Films,” in Movie Acting:
various iterations. At the same time, I do not mean to suggest that some of the performances in *The Crowd* (King Vidor, 1928) or *Diary of a Lost Girl* (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1929), both of which are cited by Naremore as instances of early naturalism, should be regarded as physically similar to the Method acting of Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954). As Virginia Wright Wexman argues, the Method is just another acting technique and it should be remembered that “method performances in such popular films from the 1950s as [Elia Kazan’s] *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *Baby Doll* (1956) today seem as artificial as any other historically dated performance technique.” While the Method was not used by actors in the 1940s combat films, naturalism was of course the dominant mode of acting by the time of the early WW2 films such as *Wake Island*.

WW2 combat films have therefore been produced within an overall tradition of naturalistic performance, yet this does not mean that the style and techniques of acting in *Ryan* should be expected to resemble those of *Objective, Burma!* To guide this analysis, I propose two broad research questions—which are really reframed, sub-questions of the overall questions guiding the thesis:

1. What identifiable differences are there between the performances of military characters in the 1940s films and contemporary WW2 films such as *Saving Private Ryan*?

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2. What factors (practical, aesthetic, theoretical) may have influenced the different styles of acting between the 1940s films and *Saving Private Ryan*?

While this examination primarily focuses on combat sequences, I will comment on other non-combat scenes, such as characters discussing the purpose of their mission. The intention of this analysis is to offer a detailed account of the acting in *Ryan*, while recognising some stylistic norms of the genre at particular historical moments.

### 4.1.2 Observable differences in performance style

This analysis draws upon categories of performance as identified by both Richard Dyer and Barry King, who distinguish between four related qualities of performance: “the facial, the gestural, the corporeal (or postural) and the vocal.”⁶⁶¹ Adapting these descriptive classifications, I will begin by undertaking a detailed account of the differences between the way a specific type of scene is handled by actors in *Objective, Burma!* and *Ryan*. After illustrating some of the differences in acting styles, I will broaden the analysis to include a number of other films. Regardless, I am not concerned here with what is expressed or communicated by particular aspects of performance, although at times I will speculate on possible expressive functions. Rather, I am interested in how the actors perform the scenes. The purpose in this first stage is not so much to identify the stylistic norms *per se*, but to identify the aspects of acting style which might

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be examined to ascertain the norms. For this initial identification process, I will focus primarily on a particular type of scene which is common for the genre: an officer on the battlefield giving orders to his men.  

In *Objective, Burma!* the Japanese have begun to assault the village in which Cpt. Nelson (played by Errol Flynn) and his men have established a temporary base camp. After giving the order to conduct a tactical withdrawal, Nelson supervises the movements of his troops out of the village as well as helping the rear-guard unit fight back against the attacking Japanese. I will compare this with a sequence from *Ryan* in which Cpt. Miller (Tom Hanks) gives orders to his unit while approaching Omaha Beach in the Higgins boat and then continues to issue orders while under fire as they make their way up the beach. The acting styles of these two officers, as well as the supporting players in each scene, show some interesting differences.

I will focus on two clearly defined moments during the *Objective, Burma!* scene in which Errol Flynn gives orders to his men. The first occurs as the Japanese initially enter the village and the second occurs under fire, while he is monitoring the withdrawal of the last troops. In the first instance, after being informed that they are outnumbered, Nelson starts to give orders (Figs. 4.16 – 4.18):

Nelson: Alright, go back to the Corporal. Tell him to pull the machine-gun out. He’s gotta cover us until we cross the swamp. Go ahead. [As the officer leaves, he gestures to Sgt. Treacy and gives him some dog-tags collected from dead soldiers] Treace, you better hold on to these. I’m going with him.

Where appropriate, I will also refer to other scenes from the same two films.
Treace: Yeah, but sir—

Nelson: Get going. When you get your men across [the swamp], set your machine-gun up and cover us. Go on.

Flynn’s vocal performance in this interaction is a fast staccato, abruptly punctuating each sentence. His pace slows and the pitch drops slightly, when he says to Treacy, “You better hold on to these. I’m going with him,” which I take to indicate a moment of thoughtful reflection on the slim chance of survival for the men. However, Flynn quickly switches back to his original rapid pace when he interrupts Treace’s objections. Within the narrative context, the characters are presumably being quiet so as to remain hidden from the attacking enemy. However, Flynn’s hushed tone can certainly not be regarded as a whisper. Later in the scene, giving orders under fire, Flynn speaks with a slightly quicker pace and raises the volume of his voice only slightly. The difference is actually quite minor although it is still enough to suggest either frustration or an anxious excitement during the battle. What is significant, however, is that he says much less when they are under direct attack. Specifically, he runs up to the men who are covering the front of the village and after stopping, simply says: “Come on. On the double with that gun” (Fig. 4.19). Most of the men move the machine-gun away, while Flynn waits with the few remaining soldiers and returns fire. As indicated in Section 3.3.3, the 1940s vococentric convention applies here in that the actor’s voice is never in competition with the sounds of battle. When Flynn speaks, nobody shoots. After a large group of Japanese begins to approach their position, Flynn calls out the names of the two soldiers with him and indicates for them to
fall back. In general then, Flynn’s vocal performance is characterised by minimalism and a simplistic directness. 663

Two comparable issuing-orders beats exist for Tom Hanks’ Cpt. Miller character during the Omaha Beach sequence of Ryan. The first occurs at the beginning of the scene in the Higgins boat where he lists a set of clear instructions regarding what to do once they land on the beach. 664 The second takes place much later in the sequence where the troops are dug-in, pinned down by the machine-gun nest, and Miller must coordinate a Bangalore torpedo attack to breach the German lines. In the first instance, as they approach the beach, Hanks speaks rapidly and with a crisp directness. Sgt. Horvath (actor Tom Sizemore) also speaks to the men with a similar straightness and abrupt tone. For both actors in this scene, while their tone is arguably similar to Errol Flynn’s above, they speak much quicker and yell their dialogue. In this scene, Hanks and Sizemore yell just enough for their voices to have a harsh edge and flattened modulation (Figs. 4.20 – 4.21).

Miller: Port side stick, starboard side stick, move fast and clear those murder holes.

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663 This, of course, is the sort of conventional “masculine” performance that has been criticized by Steve Neale, Paul Smith and others. Although I will not do so here, a cultural studies reading position could perform a productive analysis by comparing Flynn’s minimalist vocal performance with Tom Hanks’ much more verbal style which I describe later. See Steve Neale, “Masculinity as Spectacle,” Screen 24, no. 6 (1983): 2 – 16, and Paul Smith, “Action Movie Hysteria, or Eastwood Bound,” in Stars: The Film Reader, eds. Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy (New York, Routledge: 2004): 43 – 56.

664 There is a level of irony here, of course, in that many of the men in his Higgins craft are killed as soon as the ramp is lowered and the next eight minutes of screen time are dedicated to men confusedly attempting to move through the chaos of the beach landing. Although it is not quite a “pre-battle pep talk” of the sort that has become a convention of modern war films, MaryAn Batchellor argues that a scene much later in Ryan does function as such. Specifically, Batchellor suggests that Cpt. Miller’s explanation of “why the mission [to save Ryan] matters” which takes place after Medic Irwin Wade is killed bears strong similarities to William Shakespeare’s “Henry V” pre-battle speech “He that outlives this day, and comes safe home / will stand a tip-toe when the day is named.” See MaryAn Batchellor, “More on Battle Speeches,” Fencing With the Fog, August 20, 2006, http://fencingwiththefog.blogspot.com/2006/08/more-on-battle-speeches.html (accessed August 31, 2011).
Horvath: I want to see plenty of beach between men. Five men is a juicy opportunity.
One man is a waste of ammo.

Miller: [Louder and slower than before] Keep the sand out of your weapons. Keep those actions clear. And I’ll see you on the beach.

Two things stand out in this interaction. Firstly, Miller’s dialogue contains a significant amount of infantry terminology which is detailed to an extent clearly absent from the *Objective, Burma!* example. It seems to me that the content of Flynn’s lines is intended primarily to serve the classical film function which David Bordwell regards as “the character’s transmission of *fabula* information.” The clear sound recording of Flynn’s voice, as well as his delivery and the dialogue itself, cater for the viewer’s unambiguous reconstruction of the narrative. On the other hand, Miller’s dialogue in the Higgins craft seems to serve a different function. This is because it is simply not essential for audiences to process the denotative reference of terms such as “stick” or “murder-holes.” Rather, it is possible for a viewer without specialist military knowledge to infer that Miller is in charge of the men in the boat, Horvath is the next in command, and both of them are trying to focus the men for the coming assault).

It seems likely that there is no necessity in comprehending each word of the dialogue from *Ryan* simply because in order for me to transcribe the words here it was necessary to activate the film’s subtitles. Michel Chion might call this “emanation speech,” which is “the type of dialogue which exists as a sort of

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665 Arguably, this could have a defamiliarizing effect for the audience.
666 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 162.
667 A “stick” is actually a paratrooper term, describing a variable number of troopers (ie., as opposed to a “squad” or “platoon” which refer to very specific numbers of men). The term “murder hole” refers to the opening at the front of the Higgins boat when the ramp is lowered. See “Saving Private Ryan Online Encyclopedia,” http://www.sproe.com (accessed September 1, 2011).
secretion of the characters, an aspect of their way of being.”  

Partially this is a result of Hanks’ abrupt delivery, but is also because of the sound design. As I discussed in Section 3.3, the sound design of contemporary WW2 films often obscures dialogue in the process of burying it within a complicated mix of atmospheric sound effects. Despite this lack of clarity, I have never had any difficulty following the basic narrative material of this scene. In fact, a misreading of Hanks’ first line of dialogue could take a “murder hole” as another term for German foxholes. Although such a reading would be wrong, it would not interfere with the overall meaning of the dialogue, which is that Miller is the ranking officer and he is ordering the men to attack as soon as they hit the beach. The orders delivered by Flynn in the scene from *Objective, Burma!*, however, are not as specific in terms of military content, yet are actually much more specific in terms of constructing a clear *fabula* for the audience. Note the level of redundancy in Nelson’s dialogue, which is mostly a verbal explanation of the physical actions occurring in the shots. This is not surprising, given a comment by the director, Raoul Walsh, on his process of filmic construction: “There is only one way in which to shoot a scene, and that’s the way which shows the audience what’s happening next.”

I do not mean to suggest that *Ryan* is breaking classical norms of narration. Rather, there seems to be a significantly different kind of detail in both the choice of dialogue as well as the amount of it. The same holds true for the second

668 See Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, 476.
669 Of course, this information is redundant in any case. It seems reasonable to me to assume that most viewers who happened to be completely confused by the dialogue at that moment would begin to make accurate inferences of the narrative information once the ramp lowers and the men run onto the beach into enemy gunfire.
670 Raoul Walsh, quoted in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 163. Although Walsh is talking directly about camera framing and composition and to which the frame enlargements chosen certainly attest, the principle clearly applies to much of the dialogue of *Objective, Burma!*
example of Miller’s leadership. Once the men get to the top of the beach, they are pinned down by machine-gun fire and cannot find many soldiers from their own squad. As Miller takes cover, he grabs a communications officer and begins yelling radio signals at him. He then rolls slightly to his other side as the camera pans with his movement, reframing to include a number of other men that have dug in at his position. The following interaction occurs in a single 60 second take, primarily alternating between the same two framings of the two-shot of Miller and the communications officer (Fig. 4.22) and the over-shoulder shot of Miller talking with the other men to his left (Fig. 4.23). Note the level of military terminology and also the sheer quantity of dialogue throughout which contrasts strongly with the scene from *Objective, Burma!*

Miller: Shore party. No armour has made it ashore. We got no DD tanks on the beach. Dog One is not open. [Turning to face the other men.] Who’s in command here?

Soldier #1: You are, sir!

Miller: Sergeant Horvath!

Horvath: Sir!

Miller: You recognise where we are?

Horvath: Right where we’re supposed to be, but no-one else is!

Soldier #2: [Off-screen] Nobody’s where they’re supposed to be!

Miller: [Grabbing the communications officer] Shore party. First wave, ineffective. We do not hold the beach. Say again, we do not hold the beach.

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671 I realise that the scenes are not perfectly comparable in terms of combat: Cpt. Nelson’s men in the scene from *Objective, Burma!* are of course not involved the same scale of battle as Cpt. Miller’s are on Omaha Beach.
Soldier #3: We’re all mixed up, sir. We got the leftovers from Fox Company, Able Company and George Company. Plus we got some Navy demo guys and a beachmaster!

Miller: Shore party. Shore party. [Seeing the communications man’s face has been shot open, he grabs the radio.] CATF, CATF. CA—

Finally Miller realises the radio has also been destroyed and pushes it away (Fig. 4.24). As with the earlier dialogue, it is unlikely that a non-specialist viewer would have more than a passing recognition of military designations such as “Dog One” or “Able Company,” and even less likely that they would recognise that the CTF acronym refers to “Commander, Amphibious Task Force.” However, this does not impede comprehension because the activity of passing on messages by phone is easily inferred and so is the frustration apparent in Miller’s voice tone. Ultimately, this is another instance of emanation speech, which is also the case with Miller’s frequent words of encouragement to his troops during combat. For instance, he repeats “Come on… Come on… Come on…” to the men as they rush over the sand dune and up to the machine-gun next.672 This is certainly a contemporary convention in other genres, such as the action film, where an action hero like John McClane in Die Hard 4 (Len Wiseman, 2007) will repeat “Stay low… Stay low…” to another character running with him during combat. By contrast, Errol Flynn does not speak unless he is in a stationary position. Also significant in this scene is that Hanks’ delivers the lines with a sense of breathlessness. Although there are more extreme instances of this breathlessness in other scenes, and in other films which I will detail later, in this scene Hanks’

672 It is also significant, in terms of characterization as well as narrative clarity, that Miller and Sgt. Horvath are the only characters which are typically heard saying this kind of dialogue.
performance shows a markedly different approach to Flynn’s steady voice throughout the combat sequences of *Objective, Burma!*

The aspects of facial performance by Flynn and Hanks in these scenes do not exhibit such obvious differences as the vocal performance. But close analysis reveals some noteworthy differences, as well as some interesting similarities. In the first example from *Objective, Burma!*, Flynn’s face is often shown in profile, which makes his facial expressions difficult to distinguish. In general, his face appears tense, his eyes narrowed and mostly staring into the distance even as he listens to and responds to his officers (Fig. 4.16). The movement of his head, when looking around, is of a moderate pace: it is neither casual or frantic. He makes a number of small facial gestures such as swallowing while he looks down at the dog-tags in his hand before calling Sgt. Treacy across to take them (Fig 4.25). Later in the scene, under Japanese fire, Flynn also looks around quite slowly. With slow concentration, he takes aim with his carbine and fires back (Fig. 4.26).

Hanks’ performance in *Ryan* exhibits, by comparison, a greater range of facial expressions. Additionally, they are much more apparent to the viewer because during the combat scenes he is framed in close-up or mid-shot much more often than Flynn in *Objective, Burma!* As such, it is possible to read greater nuance in his performance. For instance, in the first shot of Hanks in the Higgins boat he begins by looking down after drinking from his canteen, then slowly looks up and gazes off-screen (Fig. 4.27). After a very brief moment, his eyes wander to his right slowly, then quickly his head turns as well as if noticing something (or someone) and he gives a very small shake of his head before looking away (Fig. 288
4.28). As the camera tracks backwards down the centre of the Higgins boat, showing the other troops, it also reveals that Hanks had directed this small look to Sgt. Horvath standing immediately next to him. In terms of character expression, Hanks’ facial expression could be read as suggesting that Horvath had noticed his hand shaking (the shot in fact begins as a close-up of Hanks’ trembling hand holding his canteen). The small shaking movement of his head and his quick glance away from Horvath serve to set up some narrative threads later in the film: for instance Miller’s battle-weariness, frustration at the war, and perhaps even the later questioning of his tactical choices by Pvt. Reiben.

In the next shot, Hanks is shown giving the order to prepare for the beach landing (Fig. 4.20) and here his face is, in fact, far more static than Flynn’s in either example from *Objective, Burma!* Hanks stares directly ahead, blinking only occasionally. The very slight movement of his head is due to the bobbing movements of the boat. Arguably this can be read either as Miller acting brave for the sake of the troops, or he has summoned his own inner strength for the landing. Later in the scene, when dug in on the beach, Hanks’ eye muscles show the same tension apparent in Flynn’s performance during the combat scenes. When Hanks discovers that the radio has been destroyed at the end of the shot, his face slackens. But it should be noted that Flynn does use a greater range of facial expressions in the rest *Objective, Burma!* For instance, earlier in the village he is being told of the deaths of a number of his men. As he is told that “they’re all cut to pieces,” his face slackens, his mouth trembles slightly as if stopping halfway through forming a word and he then looks down, apparently to something a few
metres away (Figs. 4.29 – 4.30). At this point, his eyes open wider, in what I take

to be a gesture of surprise and disbelief.673

The more general bodily performances of Flynn and Hanks also show some

interesting overlaps as well as significant differences. For instance, Flynn
typically has a rigid body throughout the whole film, only loosening when he
stoops a little and slackens his shoulders upon seeing the dead bodies of his troops
in the village. Hanks is also rigid in the Higgins boat, and in a few other scenes,
but in general his body is much more loose than Flynn’s.674 This kind of stiff
performance also characterizes most of Flynn’s (and the other actors’) movements
as they run into position on the battlefield. Typically, the actors in *Objective,
Burma!* run up precisely to the point they intend to stop and once in position
remain exactly there. In this instance, precision should not be taken to refer to a
highly trained elegance of movement, but rather an overly careful deliberateness.
Hanks, on the other hand, runs in a way which seems “rough” by comparison
(Fig. 4.31). By this I do not mean “sloppy” or “uncoordinated,” but simply that
there is a looseness to his body which is generally absent from Flynn’s
movements.675 “Roughness” of movement, as I use it here, should be taken as the
best possible written description of physical movements that seem natural rather
than pre-planned and artificial. This roughness is also evident in the way that

673 In the next shots he walks limply across to the bodies and another soldier exclaims that, “even
if they were my brothers I still wouldn’t know!” By comparison to Hanks’ eye gestures, this
moment from Flynn seems theatrical or exaggerated by modern standards. In this particular
example, I think the difference might be simply that Flynn’s eyes open so wide that it might seem
slightly unnatural to modern viewers.

674 A significant example is obviously the detail of Hanks’ hand shaking as a result of his
traumatic experience through the war. I mention this in footnote form because it is an exceptional
detail, even in *Ryan*, for it is often presented in dedicated close-ups. In fact, the first shot of Cpt.
Miller begins as a close-up of his hand shaking.

675 But not always. Interestingly, when Flynn runs up to tell the men to fall back (Fig. 4.19) he
begins running much more naturally in the background, but as he gets closer to the camera (and
his “mark”) he slows down and jogs with the deliberate nature I have been describing.

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Hanks digs-in to his positions of cover. While Flynn tends to run up to a precise
spot, slowing down as he approaches and then stop on the mark, Hanks is more
likely to throw his body to the ground and then roll from side to side settling into
position. While under fire (Figs. 4.22 and 4.23) he is constantly bobbing up and
down, scrambling back and forwards.

Also of interest here are the gestures and movements of men who share the screen
with Flynn or Hanks. For instance, while Flynn receives intelligence and gives
orders to set up machine-gun positions, an actor behind him simply gazes off-
screen, occasionally moving his head very slightly as he breathes (Fig. 4.16). By
comparison, while Hanks attempts to understand the situation while dug in on the
beach, the other actors in the middle-ground and background are busy undertaking
small tasks (Fig. 4.23). In the middle-ground, one man digs in the dirt, another
loads an M7 rifle grenade to the front of his weapon. Further in the background,
other men are scrambling into different cover positions, removing their rifles from
plastic waterproof wrapping. Another interesting point is that the enemy in
Objective, Burma! move with an awkward clumsiness that stands out by
comparison to the rigidity of the US soldiers (Fig. 4.32). By contrast, the enemy
in Ryan have the same kind of natural roughness to their movements as the US
troops.

In summary, between the scenes chosen from Objective, Burma! and Saving
Private Ryan there are some significant differences of acting styles. In general, the
difference is one of detail. Firstly, there is an increased range and level of detail in
the vocal performance of Tom Hanks by comparison with Errol Flynn.
Specifically, Hanks delivers much more dialogue during combat, uses more
technical terminology, speaks with a greater range of volume and pace, and has a tendency towards breathlessness which is absent entirely from Flynn’s performance. Secondly, there is a greater range and subtlety of facial performance in the contemporary film. Of course, this could be the result of an individual actor’s training, technique or skill and is not necessarily a stylistic norm.\textsuperscript{676} Thirdly, there is a significant tendency towards roughness in the gestural and postural performance of the actors in \textit{Ryan}. This includes not just the main players, but also the background performances, which are typically more detailed in \textit{Ryan}. Using this description of differences in acting style between these two films, I now consider how these particular changes in performance style are borne out as stylistic norms through the evolution of the WW2 combat film genre. I will focus on the selection of films from the 1940s and 2000s that have been used elsewhere in this dissertation, but for comprehensiveness I will also include examples from those films made during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{677}

In general the evolution of acting styles in the WW2 combat films studied here, from \textit{Wake Island} to \textit{Flags of Our Fathers}, follows the pattern indicated above. There is a definite progression towards a performance style that has a characteristic roughness and imprecision. This is accompanied by an increased level of detail and nuance in the physical aspects of the performance. In terms of voice performance there is a significant change between the 1950s and the late 1960s from the usually conversational volume and pacing of the 1940s films to a

\textsuperscript{676} Although it is also significant that Hanks’ acting in \textit{Forrest Gump} exhibits a very different style of performance to his role as Cpt. Miller.

style which favours slightly louder volume and slightly quicker pacing. For instance, there are only two significant differences between Van Johnson’s rapid speech in *Go For Broke* (Robert Priosh, 1951) and Flynn’s vocal delivery during the combat of *Objective, Burma!* One is that Johnson and the other actors frequently yell at each other while under fire and the second difference is that the background battle sound of off-screen gunshots does not stop during the dialogue. In *Merrill’s Marauders* (1962) and *The Longest Day* (1962) the actors alternate between the yelling style of *Go For Broke* and the subdued conversational volume of *Objective, Burma!* However, they also begin to deliver the combat dialogue with a sense of urgency previously uncommon in the genre. This is further developed in the late 1960s. For instance, although the squad in *The Dirty Dozen* (1968) is attempting to attack the Germans with a measure of stealth, Lee Marvin’s orders in the climactic combat are frequently delivered with a gruff shout, which often has a harsh edge to it as if straining his vocal chords. This, combined with his aggressive postures and gesturing, communicates a desperate kind of stress and emphasis to his dialogue which is unlike the delivery in the earlier films (Fig. 4.33).

The roughness of vocal delivery increases in the late 1970s as combat speech begins to be broken up by breathing and irregular emphasis. For instance, Robert Redford as Major Cook repeatedly mutters to himself while leading his men across the river in *A Bridge Too Far* (1977). Over and over, he repeats: “Hail Mary… Full of grace… Hail Mary… Full of grace…” The sense of desperation increases as his troops get closer to the Germans and come under increasing fire.

678 Although the sound mixing lowers the volume of the background sound enough to raise the apparent loudness (and therefore clarity) of the performers’ speech.
and artillery bombardment: Redford’s breathing becomes quicker, louder and the words themselves become less intelligible. Later in the sequence, Redford orders his men onto the bridge: “Sergeant! Take four across. Draw fire. Harry and I’ll go up the side!” During this line an explosion is heard off-screen as he yells “side!” much louder than the rest of the dialogue. He then returns to a softer volume for the rest of the line, “You cover.” Although there are no significant WW2 combat films between A Bridge Too Far and Ryan, it is important to note that this roughened style of acting is developed further in some of the Vietnam War films of the late 1970s and mid-1980s. Robert Duvall’s harsh shouting in Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) is sometimes drowned out by the sound of helicopter rotors close-by and in Platoon (Oliver Stone, 1986) characters occasionally speak with a cigar in their mouth which muddies or obscures their speech.679 Platoon also shows a significant increase in the amount of breaks for breath during dialogue, amplified even in mid-shots whereas earlier films (for instance, Redford’s river crossing in A Bridge Too Far) typically only increase the sound of breaths during medium close-ups or close-ups.

A much more extreme roughening of vocal performance is evident in some combat sequences of The Thin Red Line. When Capt. John Gaff is leading a small unit to attack a machine-gun nest on a hill, he gasps for breath even during single lines of dialogue (Fig. 4.34). Unlike Redford’s breathing mentioned above, which functions to punctuate sentences, Cusack plays Capt. Gaff in this scene as

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679 Given the claims that around 85% of the dialogue in Apocalypse Now was recorded after filming using Automated Dialogue Recording, it seems most likely that this drowning out of Duvall’s speech is a deliberate gesture by the filmmakers. Dialogue in modern films is often recorded in an ADR session when loud noises such as helicopters or explosions affect the location sound. This enables filmmakers to adjust the volume of dialogue and sound effects in the mix precisely. See Larry Blake, “Apocalypse Now REDUX,” (accessed September 7, 2011) http://mixonline.com/mag/audio_apocalypseredux.
struggling to catch his breath because of physical exertion. He gasps, “Okay… We’re gonna continue on… up the hill to the right… Nobody fire… or throw their grenades… until I give the signal… Okay… Let’s do it!” Although this is a stand-out example, and there are many similar instances in *The Thin Red Line*, the acting style is also used by Hanks at times in *Ryan’s* Omaha Beach sequence.  

By contrast, the 1940s actors never appear to be out of breath even during combat. The contemporary actors tend to wheeze, take an occasional deep breath, grunt, and shout as loud as they can at each other. During the combat of *Black Hawk Down*, set in Somalia in 1993, the US Army Rangers and Delta soldiers yell at each other constantly to the point of having harsh, hoarse voices. Matt Damon and the other actors in Paul Greengrass’ Iraq combat film *Green Zone* (2010) also shout orders and information at each other this way during the combat scenes—even though they are often using head-sets with earpieces and microphones to communicate with each other.  

In the earlier WW2 films, when actors shout on the battlefield they do so with a rapid, short enunciation. The yelling in the contemporary films is typically more protracted: it is closer to a scream, the actors drawing out each line. Compared with such a style, the crisp short shouts of John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan, 1949), for instance, stand out as a completely different kind of delivery.

This roughening of performance also gradually becomes evident in the facial, gestural and postural performances of the films made from the 1950s onward. As

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680 Although not a WW2 film, the same style of acting is used by one of the British contractors in the Iraq War film *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008) while communicating on the radio to report the deaths of three men in his unit.  
681 This film is notable because many of the characters in Matt Damon’s unit are played by real-life soldiers on leave from tours of Afghanistan. I address this kind of casting later.  
682 Arguably, this is an aspect of “The Duke’s” star persona. However, it is also typical of the other actors in the combat scenes of *Sands of Iwo Jima*.
noted, the 1940s actors usually seem to make rigid, deliberate movements. For instance when the men in *Objective, Burma!* run for cover each one quite deliberately runs directly toward a fixed place and stops precisely (Fig. 4.35 – 4.37). By comparison, at one point during the hill attack of *The Thin Red Line*, Cusack runs into frame to take cover against a rock and then scrambles around to reposition himself (Fig. 3.38 – 4.40). It seems then, that in the 1950s the trend towards more detailed movement begins. For instance, consider *To Hell and Back* (1955) in which WW2 veteran Audie Murphy plays a dramatized version of himself in combat. While his movements on the battlefield are certainly nimble, he does not usually move into specific positions in ways that seem deliberate or rehearsed. As he runs over the edge of a ditch, for instance, he scrambles slightly on the uneven terrain. This roughness increases during the 1960s and 1970s. With the stand-out exception of *The Longest Day*, in which men typically move into what look like predetermined positions, the films of the 1960s and 1970s progressively involve more roughened movements of soldiers on the battlefields. As indicated earlier, I do not mean to suggest that the movements of the contemporary actors are uncoordinated or sloppy. Rather, their movements are more detailed. Arguably, the movements of the 1940s actors can usually be read as simply moving directly from one point to another.\(^{683}\) The contemporary actors seem to more convincingly take cover from fire and check their flanks as they move into a new position (Fig. 4.31). In some cases, combat veterans have commented on this aspect of performance as giving a more accurate impression of soldiering.\(^{684}\)

\(^{683}\) Certainly, when filming on studio sets, these actors would be required to hit very specific marks for the purpose of lighting and sound recording.

\(^{684}\) For instance, see the Special Forces veterans’ commentary on *Black Hawk Down*, in which one of veterans of the actual conflict spontaneously comments that the men “look good moving”
Perhaps a clearer understanding of the actors’ physical movements in the contemporary films can be gained by looking at what the actors do when they are not moving. As just one example, when Miller and his squad find Pvt. Ryan and explain him to him the purpose of their mission, Matt Damon and the other actors are standing so as to lean their weight on one foot. Flynn, like most of the actors in the 1940s films studied, typically stands upright with his weight evenly balanced. While someone might argue that this gives the impression that Flynn’s Capt. Nelson character is so squared away that he assumes such a rigid posture even under fire, that is beside the point here, which is that there appears to be two distinctly different styles of postural performance in the two eras of films and from the 1950s onwards there is a progressive change towards actors’ favouring the “roughened” look (see Fig. 4.41). The roughened appearance of this behavior characterizes the way most of the actors conduct their “business” in the 2000s films. For instance, recall the difference between the examples of background business in *Objective, Burma!* and *Ryan* identified earlier (Fig. 4.16 compared with 4.23). However, it is not until Fuller’s *The Big Red One* (1981) that it becomes common for background actors to perform detailed business. Between *Platoon* and *Ryan*, the performances of background actors (for instance, adjusting their weapons, checking equipment, observing the enemy) become gradually more detailed.685

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685 There are, however, some significant exceptions. Anthony Quinn’s loose, relaxed movements, in both *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943) and *Back to Bataan* (Edward Dmytryck, 1945) stand out in stark contrast to the generally more rigid postural actions of the actors in the 1940s combat films.
4.2.2 Practical explanations of performance style

Against this background, I now want to address how the contemporary “roughened” style of acting tallies with some other relevant accounts of acting style. While I agree with one group of researchers that we should not think that “any style of acting is or should be seen as the norm of evaluative standard of screen performance,” it is clear from the descriptions above that some form of roughening is generally employed by the contemporary actors in WW2 combat scenes. What I am calling a roughened style is really my way of describing the tendency of actors in WW2 combat scenes, from about the early 1950s onwards, to break up the clarity of dialogue and to introduce less rigid movements into their physicality. The effect of these trends is for the actors’ performances, in general, to become more detailed and nuanced. I take the effect of these changes to be one of producing a greater naturalism of performance and, as such, it may seem a convincing argument to suggest that the major reason for this is the growing popularity of the Method acting style over this time. For instance, recall Naremore’s description of actors operating according to Method principles:

Actors in “ethnic” films like The Godfather [Francis Ford Coppola, 1972] or in middle-class domestic dramas like Heartburn [Mike Nichols, 1986] tend to slop down food and talk with their mouths full. Likewise, they occasionally turn away from the camera, speak softly and rapidly, repeat words, slur or throw away lines, sometimes as “Huh?” or let dialogue overlap […] Naturalistic actors also cultivate a halting, somewhat groping style of speech: instead of saying “I am very distressed,” the actor will say “I am dis- . . . very distressed.”

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687 Naremore, Acting in the Cinema, 44.
Although Naremore is referring specifically to actors who might be directly associated with Strasberg and the Method, if his account is taken in general terms, it could be read as applying to the sort of roughened performances noted above. An extended list of Naremore’s examples, in terms of war films, might logically include the breathlessness that becomes common in the late 1970s, as well as the scrambling and imprecise movements which begin roughly with Audie Murphy and become increasingly roughened by the time of *Ryan*. However, this would ignore technical factors, such as the limitations of sound recording equipment in the 1940s, as well as practical considerations like changes in specific type of training given to actors for combat roles.

Alternatively, it is useful to re-read the question in terms of the problem/solution paradigm posed by Bordwell in *On the History of Film Style*.\(^688\) This allows for an examination of the historical influences on the way actors have approached the problem of performing as a soldier on screen. I propose that the changes in performance that are evident in the films studied here are the result of two contingent factors:

1. Technical/aesthetic limitations and advancements of the cinema; and
2. The changing discourse of realism in film acting.

**Technical/aesthetic limitations and advancements**

The first of these factors seems to have had a strong influence on opportunities for physical movement by actors during dialogue scenes. An extreme example of how

sound recording technology can affect performance is found in one anecdotal account from the 1930s by actress Louise Closser Hale. In an issue of *Harper’s* magazine, Hale explains her experience filming with sound as follows:

> [h]e was the sound man and he wanted to see how I intended to play the scene. I strode around, speaking the lines, new and old.... “You see” he explained, “you can’t move around like that. The mike—the microphone—won’t take it”.

> “Can’t I rage?”

> “You can rage”—he measured the width of the desk—“about that far”.

> Two and a half feet of raging!689

Although microphone technology had certainly improved by the 1940s combat films studied here, Hale’s example suggests that for at least some actors prior to the 1940s, the rigid, fixed position style of performance during dialogue scenes was a matter of practical necessity. By the time of *Wake Island* or *Objective, Burma!* microphones had become significantly more sensitive and could enable the actor to have a greater range of movement. However, the microphone did, as today, need to be positioned in a close proximity to the actor to reduce interference and noise from other sound sources. Contemporary filmmakers have the opportunity to use radio-microphones which can be positioned on actors, or microphones slung on boom-poles of similar size and weight to a fishing pole. In the 1940s, however, the microphone would be positioned using large, heavy boom equipment. These booms were limited in the amount of movement (if any) possible during takes because of their weight. Consider the following 1944 report

in the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* regarding developments at Warner Bros:

The latest production technique, which requires that motion picture sets simulate the structures that they are to represent with greater realism, has forced the Sound Department to construct a special microphone boom for small sets. The new boom is a little over 6 ft high, which is about half the usual size, and the boom arm may be extended to 14 ft. Its small size and *relatively light weight, which is about 140 lb*, save considerable production time when working in constricted spaces.\(^\text{690}\)

As an example of how this affects performance in the combat films, the obvious restriction against moving a 140 pound (approximately 63.5kg) boom around quickly would mean that even if Errol Flynn had wanted to deliver dialogue while running into position it would be very difficult (though not impossible) to move the microphone to follow him. By contrast, a contemporary actor can quickly turn their head from side to side while speaking and trust that their voice will be recorded clearly. Matt Damon does this in the Alamo battle of *Ryan*, yelling at Tom Hanks while dug in using a bombed out ditch for cover. In cases like these, the contemporary sound recordist can also use a radio-microphone which will stay in roughly the same position relative to the actor’s mouth, although the limitation with this technique is that the actor’s movement might rub their clothing against the microphone. Alternatively, if the camera framing allows for it, the contemporary boom-operator can physically get the microphone close enough and “swing” the boom while the actor moves so as to capture the sound consistently. Finally, the dialogue could also be re-recorded on location as a “wild” sound to

get the microphone in a position that would normally be seen by the camera, or of course re-recorded during post-production in ADR.\footnote{If the shot involves a lot of explosions or squib-hits for instance, the dialogue may need to be recorded as ADR in any case.}

The postproduction technology available for mixing soundtracks also has an impact on the actors’ performances. As I have shown, the 1940s films obey classical cinema’s vococentric practice of maintaining the human voice at the top of the sound hierarchy.\footnote{See Chion, \textit{The Voice in Cinema}.} However, the means of accomplishing this may vary according to the available technology. For instance, in the 1940s films it is common for the battlefield atmosphere to be attenuated or for the density and quantity of background battlefield sounds to be limited in order for the actors’ voices to be heard clearly. With the development of Dolby sound technology in the late 1970s, as well as the gradually increasing range of reproducible sonic frequencies in the decades leading up to Dolby, it became possible to mix soundtracks so that the human voice would be clearly understandable within a dense mix of combat sounds.\footnote{For an account of the wider implications of this increasing range of frequencies, as well as the impact of Dolby, see Chion, \textit{Film, A Sound Art}: 117 – 145.} According to Michel Chion, “The large number of action films (especially Vietnam War films) that came out starting in the mid-1970s accustomed filmgoers to hearing soldiers yelling to each other over the noise of explosions, helicopters, and general panic, all of which highlighted the advantages of Dolby stereo.”\footnote{Ibid., 346.} I would add that it also became possible for actors to be heard clearly over battlefield atmosphere even when not yelling, as shown by Redford’s muttering of “Hail Mary… Full of grace” which is clearly discernible over the artillery bombardment during \textit{A Bridge Too Far}. Significantly, it became possible to make the artistic choice between hearing the

\footnote{691 If the shot involves a lot of explosions or squib-hits for instance, the dialogue may need to be recorded as ADR in any case.
692 See Chion, \textit{The Voice in Cinema}.
693 For an account of the wider implications of this increasing range of frequencies, as well as the impact of Dolby, see Chion, \textit{Film, A Sound Art}: 117 – 145.
694 Ibid., 346.}
actor’s voice over the battlefield sounds, or not hearing it through the process.695

In terms of this technique, one of the beach assault sequences of The Big Red One offers an interesting contrast with the way the same events are handled in Ryan.696

With his unit pinned down by machine-gun fire, Lee Marvin’s character sends each man up the beach with a length of Bangalore torpedo tubing to clear the way for tanks. Unlike Ryan’s sequence, in which actors yell loudly at each other but are frequently not heard, most of the actors in Fuller’s version of these events talk loudly but without shouting. Typically the volume of their voice competes with the battlefield atmosphere although as the battle continues and Marvin begins to send the men with Bangalore, he does begin to shout at them. He calls at them by number, sending them up one by one as each man is shot down by machine-gun fire. The sound mix makes his voice discernible as he calls each man’s number; however, its volume is on the threshold of clarity as it competes with the sound of explosions and gunfire.

Readers of Bordwell’s On the History of Film Style may wonder to what extent widescreen filming such as Cinemascope or Panavision anamorphic processes affected performances in the WW2 films made during the 1960s. As Bordwell has indicated, staging performances in depth proved to be difficult with these processes because of the shallow depth of field inherent in the technology.697

Given this, it is worth considering how the combat performances in films such as The Longest Day, The Guns of Navarone or A Bridge Too Far were affected by the small depth of field in which the actors would have been able to move. There

695 For more on this type of auditory masking, see Ibid., 480.
696 This particular sequence is also set at Omaha Beach and Lee Marvin’s men undertake a similar Bangalore torpedo sequence to the one in Ryan.
697 For more on the limitations of Cinemascope for staging, see Bordwell, On the History of Film Style: 237 – 242.
does seem to be limited evidence that this is the case. Certainly, some of the
movements in *The Longest Day* and *The Guns of Navarone* seem stilted and rigid
by comparison to *Merrill’s Marauders*, made only a few years earlier (Fig. 4.44). Even Anthony Quinn, probably the actor with the most fluid movements in the
1940s combat films, behaves rigidly when filmed in mid-shot during the combat
of *The Guns of Navarone* (Fig. 4.45), but does not seem to have these unnatural
movements when in wide shot.\footnote{Quinn appears in both *Guadalcanal Diary* and *Back to Bataan*.} However, aside from these instances, anamorphic filming processes do not seem to have had a significant impact on the
performances during the combat sequences.\footnote{The non-combat sequences may or may not show differences and that is an interesting issue to be considered in future research.} One reason could be that the combat scenes typically take place outdoors (either in daylight, or in “day for night” filming) and, as such, the camera can be stopped down to apertures small enough to allow an increased depth of field.

The changing discourse of realism in film acting: Naturalism, the Method, and Military Advisors

Of course, the technological advancements in sound recording and mixing can be regarded as *enabling* (or producing) particular kinds of acting technique as well as *revealing* specific aspects of performance that may have always existed, but had not been recorded. The examples of soldiers talking while moving fast is an example of the former and potentially the greater amount of breathing is likely to be an example of the latter. Another, perhaps more obvious, influence on the specific style of acting in these films is simply the changing practices of naturalistic acting since the 1940s. For instance, although the audio technology of 1943 may not have been able to record the sound of Errol Flynn’s breathing, it is...
also unlikely that the category of naturalistic acting of Flynn’s time would have permitted the sort of breathlessness that punctuates John Cusack’s dialogue in the hill assault sequence of *The Thin Red Line*. That is, of course, the source of the ironic humour in the climax of Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* when the aging and forgotten silent-film star Norma Desmond (played by Gloria Swanson) walks down her staircase “performing” for Joe Gillis and Max Von Mayerling. While Desmond’s acting style would be conventional for the silent era, its exaggerated gestures are laughably out of style for Joe Gillis, who takes pity on her.

Although a written account of physical movements has obvious limitations, in some ways it is almost as if the actors in the 1940s films studied here are following Spencer Tracy’s acerbic rule of acting: “Just know your lines and don’t bump into the furniture.” While the contemporary actor in a combat film may crash through some brush, take cover and then scramble in the dirt, the 1940s actors typically land in one precise place as if avoiding contact with the scenery. However, I do not think the distinction is as simple as just treating the earlier actors as performing “badly” and the 2000s actors as somehow better performers.

Director Edward Dmytryk has written of naturalistic acting:

> Acting styles change with the years. Every era has its “in” techniques […]

> Like any fad of the moment it [stylistic acting] doesn’t age well. In clothes, an extreme style from any particular period becomes, in later years, a laughing matter or an object of curiosity. The same is true for stylistic acting.  

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700 Spencer Tracy, quoted in Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 34.
Although Dmytryk is, in fact, targeting the Method actors of the 1950s, which he regards as turning acting into “a display of eye twitching, nose picking, and fanny scratching,” his comments also apply to the observations made of the combat acting in the films studied.702 After all, while Flynn’s acting in *Objective, Burma!* is certainly the performance of a professional, I think that many contemporary viewers may look upon his deliberate movements as unnatural. Such deliberateness may appear as an “unmotivated stiffness or awkwardness of movement” to viewers accustomed to the roughened form of contemporary acting.703

However, although the Method has had a significant impact on the style of acting in the contemporary combat films, this influence is actually quite indirect. Firstly, it will be necessary to show that the differences in style between the 1940s and 2000s films cannot be easily attributed to the 1950s emergence of the Method style of acting in Hollywood. In order to demonstrate this, I will briefly consider the history and theory of the Method.

Wexman suggests that many aspects of the Stanislavskian performance technique, originally conceived for theatre and which rely upon intense concentration, were easily adaptable to the film acting process “where individual scenes are shot separately and there is always ample time to prepare each one.”704 Although Stanislavski’s ideas were adopted by the American Group Theatre in the 1930s, it

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702 Ibid.
703 I have taken this phrase from Naremore’s analysis of some of the “amateur” acting in the background of Martin Scorsese’s *The King of Comedy* (1983). See Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 273. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the actors in the wartime productions were amateurs, but rather that the 1940s style has become so out of date by current standards that this may be an explanation as to why many of my students laugh at the performance in films such as *Objective, Burma!* or *The Sands of Iwo Jima*.
was not until Lee Strasberg began teaching a modified version of the approach at the Actors Studio in New York in the late 1940s and 1950s that the “Method” started to become adopted by Hollywood actors who trained at the Studio. Dyer characterises the difference of this style to earlier approaches to acting by suggesting that, in very generalised terms, theories of acting technique can:

be divided into two broad schools of thought, classically associated with Diderot and Coquelin on the one hand and Stanislavsky on the other. Diderot and Coquelin, with differing emphases, maintained that the performer should never lose him/herself in a role and should base the performance on the observation of others or on traditional skill […] If you want to perform a person unhappy, you either observe unhappy people in the world and base your performance on how they behave, or you draw upon the stock of theatrical conventions for expressing sorrow.

Stanislavsky on the other hand felt that the performer should come to “live” the character s/he plays as fully as possible and should base the performance on how s/he feels inside. If you want to perform a person unhappy, you remember how you felt when you were unhappy.

This process of remembering an emotional moment in the actor’s life is what Stanislavskian actors would refer to as an “affective memory” and which Naremore describes as a technique in which memory “functioned rather like an onion concealed in a handkerchief, producing real rather than artificial tears.” It appears, however, that versions of this same technique had been in use for some

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705 Ibid., 130 – 132. Stanislavski did not refer to his teachings as the “Method.” This title refers to the modified version of Stanislavskian acting techniques taught at the Actors Studio.
time before the Method began to be adopted by American actors in the 1950s. Indeed, Naremore finds that during the 1920s Hollywood film acting had already begun to move towards not only a naturalistic style, but a particular brand of naturalism which placed an “emphasis” on “being instead of mimicking; the gestures of the actor were supposed to grow out of his or her feelings.”

Cynthia Baron explains that the difference between a Method actor developing an affective memory out of their own life experience and the earlier naturalistic style however, is that:

For experienced practitioners of the period [1930s and 1940s], moods that colour actions and lines of dialogue were established by actors making decisions about how a character would feel in a certain circumstance. Those decisions would become “scripted” into a series of mental pictures, which actors would then recall during performance. Because they were “synthetic memories” invented by actors during their study of the script, they could be activated by opening one’s “mental notebook”, and let go of immediately after the scene or take was over.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that the development and preparation of a character is not undertaken with any kind of consistent approach even by Method actors. For instance, founding member of the Actors Studio Eli Wallach, who is often linked to the Method by his close association with director Elia Kazan, has described his own acting process as “imagining-what-it’s-like.” He contrasts this approach with other Method actors “who, if they’re going to play a coal

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708 Ibid., 60. Naremore offers an example from a 1921 book by Mae Marsh called *Screen Acting* in which the author recounts an experience acting in D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) in which she thought of the death of her own father while performing a scene. Emphasis in original.


miner, have to go down a mine and spend 3 months in a mine and get dirty and
know what the life is like.”

Although the Method tradition represents an important development in the history
of film acting, and many of its related phrases and concepts have circulated into
popular culture, it is not the only type of acting employed by film performers.

Indeed, the romantic rhetoric associated with the Method has become dominant in
contemporary discourses of acting. The tradition has ties to the privileged status
of naturalism and spontaneity (however they may be defined) within much
broader discourses of contemporary filmmaking and film reception, which I have
identified in earlier sections of this study. Related to these apparent markers of
authenticity is the premium placed on the actor’s experience and, in fact, one of
the key aspects of performance in today’s combat films is a particular form of
actor rehearsal which emphasises an immersion in the military experience.

The key figure of this practice is Captain Dale Dye, a retired US Marine with
Vietnam experience who in the mid-1980s established the company Warriors, Inc.

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711 Ibid. However, it should be noted that the Method itself was primarily intended to be a set of
training exercises and, according to Naremore, “Players who used the Method continued to work
in their own emotional idiolect, but they learned to manipulate buried sensory recollections and the
Stanislavskian ‘as if,’ thus appearing more natural and spontaneous. Technically, they were not
‘living the part,’ and they were warned against using emotional memories during performances
(advice they did not always follow—hence the slightly abstracted look associated with some
actors.” See Naremore, Acting in the Cinema, 197.
712 Baron, Carson and Tomasulo, “Introduction: More Than The Method, More Than One
Method,” 2.
713 For instance, the website for The New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts offers the
following advice on its “Industry Tips” page for dramatic acting: “A simple strategy for creating
honest drama is through the use of mantras […] For example, if you are playing in a scene that
involves a fight, you may want to try reciting, ‘I hate you,’ in your head during the scene. This
subtext mantra will subconsciously affect your performance, making it seem more natural.” See
Smith, writing for eHow.com suggests that actors should “Collect similar experiences. Although it
may be painful in the case of sad or angry emotional scenes, it is crucial that you be able to
experience the same emotions as your character. The more genuine the feeling, the better your
performance will be.” See “Acting Tips for Emotional Scenes,”
http://www.ehow.com/how_4607884_acting-tips-emotional-scenes.html (accessed March 13,
2012).
in order to offer technical advice to Hollywood films about the military. Beginning with *Platoon*, Warriors Inc. has taken actors prior to filming and trained them in a virtual “boot camp” which attends to particular aspects of their performance.\(^{714}\) The boot camp is an “intense” few days or, at most, a few weeks during which Dye and his colleagues treat a group of actors to a routine of exercises and instruction derived from military boot-camp practices.\(^{715}\) Although most of the employees of Warriors Inc. have a military background, the company operates as a group of civilian advisors and have no ties to the US Military. Warriors Inc. has worked on a significant number of contemporary combat films, including *Ryan*, *Band of Brothers*, and *The Pacific* and their boot-camp is designed to address the physical aspects of soldiering such as weapons handling and body movement, as well as what Dye regards as the psychological and emotional characteristics of “serving in a combat unit.”\(^{716}\) According to Dye, it is this mental dimension of the performance that is crucial to the work of Warriors Inc. He believes it comes from the relationships between the actors that develop due to the particular exercises through which they have been with each other. As Dye argues:

They bring that experience to every thing they do [on the film]. Every little thing they do, from weapons handling, to the way they stand, the way they run, the way they walk, the way they talk. The relationship between the characters now takes on a whole new shading, a whole new level, because they understand each other. They’ve *lived* in a situation where they’ve had to rely on each other. And that changes things. It’s not two actors now trying to up-stage each other. It’s two

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\(^{714}\) For more information see the company website, accessed October 8, 2011  
http://www.warriorsinc.com/  
\(^{715}\) The boot-camp for *Ryan* was five days.  
\(^{716}\) Dale Dye, interview with the author, February 8, 2011. Dye has worked as a technical advisor on almost 50 films.
people really relying on each other, and understanding that relationship. What happens is, you get these magical performances.\footnote{Ibid. The emphasis is Dye’s.}

The correlation between this approach and the value placed on character interiority by the Method discourse is clear, even though Dye does not invoke the Strasbergian terminology. This approach is evident in the way a Warriors Inc. boot camp attempts to immerse the actors in an ongoing simulation of their characters’ environment. For instance, referring to each other by their character names and using context-specific slang.\footnote{This seems to be a highly extended version of a common actor rehearsal practice. Actors in introductory classes are sometimes told to carry on a conversation in a public place “in character,” for instance in a café. See Two-Week Boot Camp Run By Captain Dale Dye, USMC (RET.): Actors Into Soldiers for “Band of Brothers,” http://wesclark.com/jw/dale_dye.html (accessed October 12, 2011).} Edward Burns, who plays Pvt. Reiben in \textit{Ryan}, reports that:

> The one thing I tried to do when we were in boot-camp, was when I was feeling miserable—or when I was just having any experiences that were unfamiliar to me—just trying to hold onto them and remember them so that when I was doing the film I could, you know, go back to that and say: “Alright, that’s where my head was when I was feeling that way.” And try and just sort of muster that emotion back up.\footnote{See “Boot Camp,” \textit{Saving Private Ryan}, 2010, Blu-Ray supplement (Dreamworks SKG).}

Of course, Burns is speaking in pure Method terms and it is the mental experience of the boot-camp which is regarded by the actors as having a major impact on the nature of their film performances. As Hanks puts it, suggesting that their characters in \textit{Ryan} are supposed to be exhausted:
We learned various combat techniques and what-not, but that’s not really as important, I think, as just experiencing this idea of—you’re up at five o’clock in the morning, and you’re carrying something very heavy on your back all day long, and you have a few moments in order to lay down on the grass and maybe go to sleep. But then you have to get up, and your day’s not over until two o’clock in the morning.  

Since acting methods derived from Stanislavsky encourage performers to “live the part,” this boot-camp approach can be read as facilitating actors to “relate” to the material. Dye regards being in actual combat as so vastly different to the experience of regular life that it is difficult for actors to connect to the material in a convincing way and the training is intended to address this. The way the actor relates to the script and their character may vary depending on the conflict being represented. Dye suggests that in training actors for a Vietnam war film versus a WW2 film there are key differences in this regard.

Beyond the obvious disparities in uniforms, weapons, equipment and tactics, the main difference is in putting the performers in the appropriate state of mind for the period involved. The motivation for a combat soldier who enlists as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II, for instance, is vastly different from that of a man drafted for service in Vietnam. Those differences influence performances in

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720 Ibid.
721 I am using Richard Hornby’s use of the term “relate” here, which is a process he regards as the actor responding to stimuli from both real circumstances and imaginary circumstances. Hornby argues, “This is what is meant by Stanislavsky’s famous phrase, “live the part.” It is not that the actor should believe that the events in the play are truly happening or that he is actually the character he is portraying. Such an approach would be insane. Instead, the actor must become involved in the world of the play. See Richard Hornby, “Understanding Acting,” Journal of Aesthetic Education 17, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 28.
major ways. It’s a matter of how a person [as the character] thinks about the risks he’s being asked to take.\textsuperscript{723}

But Ryan’s actors also speak of the significance of the physical aspects of their training with Warriors on their eventual performance in the film. For instance, they comment on the discomfort involved in eating minimal rations, frequent marching, and being yelled at (by Dye) for making mistakes in the training.\textsuperscript{724} The physical skills training in military procedures, tactics and weapons-handling are also significant. By undertaking explicit, direct instruction of how to assemble, carry, and fire weapons, as well as to move in ways appropriate to military situations, the actors develop a comfort and familiarity with their actions and speech. For instance, the first line of dialogue from Hanks as the men in the Higgins Boat approach Omaha Beach is an instance of this. According to Dye, this dialogue was not in Robert Rodat’s screenplay and instead came out of the training the men had undertaken in landing on a beach in a Higgins boat.\textsuperscript{725}

Dye’s company also offers advice and feedback to the scriptwriters of the films they work on, as well as being present during filming to make further recommendations and to correct particular technical aspects of actor performances. Although Warriors Inc. is arguably the most high-profile company, since their establishment in the 1980s other civilian technical advisors have entered the market.\textsuperscript{726} Like Warriors Inc., these tend to comprise ex-military personnel. One of these is Harry Humphries, an ex-Navy SEAL who has acted as

\textsuperscript{723} Dale Dye, email to the author, August 31, 2011.
\textsuperscript{724} \textit{Saving Private Ryan}, Blu-Ray supplement “Boot Camp.”
\textsuperscript{725} Dale Dye, email to the author, August 31, 2011.
\textsuperscript{726} Although Warriors has advised on non-WW2 combat films, they seem to take on a much higher proportion of WW2 themed contracts than do their competitors.
an advisor on *Black Hawk Down*, *The Kingdom* and *Tears of the Sun* (Antoine Fuqua, 2003). On working with the actors for *Black Hawk Down*, Humphries suggests that in his opinion the physical aspect of the training is the most significant component:

I’m a big believer in making sure that before we start shooting an action movie, such as this one, that the weapons skills, and the body motion, the body movement, the body language skills are taught up-front, so we don’t have to coach the actors so intensely on set. It serves no purpose in my mind to simply put these people through a harassing session up-front just so they can say “I went through hell.” What skills have you learned? That’s my question. What do I have to teach you before you take this shot? The answer should be nothing, because we’ve already had it in a skills session prior to shooting.\(^{727}\)

For *Black Hawk Down*, which had official Pentagon support, the actors went through adapted versions of military training at actual military training facilities, by military instructors.\(^{728}\) Although many comments in the behind-the-scenes documentary of *Black Hawk Down* do signal the importance of the psychological aspects of their training, the actors also place a lot of emphasis on the amount of PT (physical training) and weapons-handling sessions. As actor Ian Virgo says: “Basically, we did a lot of stuff on how to ‘look’ like a Ranger.”\(^{729}\) One actor from the science fiction film *Battle: Los Angeles* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2011)

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\(^{727}\) Harry Humphries, in “Crash Course,” *Black Hawk Down*, 2007, Blu-Ray supplement (Sony Pictures).

\(^{728}\) For more on the Pentagon involvement in *Black Hawk Down*, see Suid, *Guts & Glory*: 670.

\(^{729}\) Ian Virgo, in “Crash Course.” In the interview, he emphasises “look like” with visual air-quotes.
echoes Virgo’s statements: “The boot-camp was mainly to make sure that we walked, talked and act and looked like Marines.”

Of course, filmmakers have very often had technical advisors assigned by the Pentagon in the years before civilian advisors like Dye and Humphries. As Lawrence Suid has shown, the institutions of both Hollywood and the US military understood in the early years of cinema that there were advantages to developing a mutual relationship. Hollywood would benefit from access to equipment, personnel and dramatic story ideas that would entertain their audiences, whereas the military services “quickly realized that movies in which they appeared would aid their recruiting campaigns as well as their efforts to inform the public and Congress of their activities and procedures.” By the time it supplied a tank, and demonstrations of its operations, to Columbia Pictures for the Humphrey Bogart film *Sahara* (Zoltan Korda, 1943), the Army had already supplied D.W. Griffith with tactical advice for *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and over 1,000 cavalrymen to stage his Revolutionary War battles for *America* (1924). There were even occasions where the military provided training to actors; for instance, some of the actors in William Wellman’s *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945) trained with the 150 soldiers provided to the filmmakers. Wellman, according to Suid, “insisted that they [the actors] go through regular training with the soldiers and live them. He wanted them to act and smell like soldiers.”

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730 Ne-Yo, in “Bootcamp,” *Battle: Los Angeles*, 2011, BluRay supplement (Sony Pictures). The senior military technical advisor on *Battle: Los Angeles* was James D. Dever, an ex-Marine Sgt. Major who runs the advising company 1 Force, Inc.
731 For the best overview of the mutual association between the Department of Defence and Hollywood, see Suid, *Guts & Glory*.
732 Ibid.
733 Ibid., 12.
734 Ibid., 15 – 16; 71 – 73.
735 Ibid., 95.
For *Sands of Iwo Jima*, not only did the Marine Corps provide men and equipment for battle scenes, but the appointed technical advisor, Cpt. Leonard Fribourg conducted a boot-camp for the actors, noting that “They wanted to wear the uniform right, the emblems, wanted to know what the stripes meant, wanted to know Marine Corps lingo, and put the right words in the right places.” Indeed, in these two films’ wide-shots the physical movements of the men certainly resemble the sort of contemporary performances in *Ryan*. However, in anything filmed in mid-shot or closer, and during lines of dialogue, the performances in both films much more closely resemble the *Objective, Burma!* style addressed earlier. This observation points to the cross-over between the actor training and the technical limitations indicated earlier in this section. The practice of incorporating real-life soldiers (either actively serving or retired) has an obvious heritage in the Italian Neorealists’ ideal of casting non-actors who have experience in the relevant “world” or context of the characters. It has continued in many recent films. For instance, *Ryan* used members of the Irish Army Reserves to stage the Omaha Beach sequence and *Green Zone* used veterans of the Iraq conflict to act alongside Matt Damon. Perhaps the most famous of these is Lee Ermey, who was a military advisor on *The Boys in Company C* (Sidney Furie, 1978) and *Apocalypse Now* and played small roles in each film.

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736 Leonard Fribourg, quoted in Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 120.
738 In *Green Zone* the movements and vocal performances of the characters generally resemble the style of those in *Ryan*. The degree to which an actor interacting with real military men encourages a performance according to the very general principles of Method is apparent in the following remark from Damon about his work in *Green Zone*: “I showed up to the experience feeling like, ‘how am I going to give orders to these guys?’ You know, these guys have actually been in a war. What am I going to say? I’m an actor, what am I going to say to these guys? But because they were so used to operating in a system in which they followed orders from their commanding officer and because they decided, when they saw my rank and when they saw me playing the role, that I was there commanding officer. If I say something, as their commanding officer, if they roll their eyes, well the scene’s over. Right? But they never did.” See “Matt Damon: Ready for Action,” *Green Zone*, 2010, Blu-Ray supplement (Universal).
When Stanley Kubrick hired Ermey as advisor on *Full Metal Jacket* he was later convinced that the Marine should play the role of the Drill Instructor in the film. 739

While the official advisors would offer technical instruction to actors and conduct limited kinds of training, their primary duty was to assist with story and character details in order to satisfy both Hollywood’s dramatic purposes and the military’s purpose of promoting a positive image. 740 Therefore, it seems appropriate to suggest that the attention to performance in these films fits within the broad tradition of naturalism. However, by and large, the contemporary association of the Method with realism has led to a scenario in which actors undertaking military roles in contemporary combat films tend to receive much more extensive training prior to filming. 741 Indeed, some instances of the actors’ training on *Ryan* are in perfect keeping with the Method tradition, in that the training itself is meant to inform the performance beyond the specific skills and actions which have been

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740 As Suid has noted, the primary difference between the military-appointed advisors and civilian advisors such as Dye is that the filmmakers are under no obligation to implement the advice of the civilian contractors. By contrast, if they choose not to follow the official advisors then the film runs the risk of losing official support, which includes any troops, equipment or locations that may have been provided. See Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 689. Dye, in fact, suggests that there were two instances on *Ryan* where the filmmakers went against his advice for apparently cinematic reasons. First, he suggests that there were conflicting views on the “anecdotal evidence” of whether or not officers had their rank insignia painted on their helmets and thought that painting captain’s bars on Miller’s helmet would receive “some sniping [criticism] by veterans and film critics.” However, Spielberg made the decision to include this in the film because it would “allow audiences to identify the lead actor in a sea of helmets and the confusion of the opening sequence.” Second, Dye believes the way in which the German soldiers passes Cpl. Upham without killing him on the staircase in the Alamo sequence—after stabbing Pvt. Mellish—was “a false note.” Spielberg apparently had drama in mind, insisting on “a sort of ‘flag of individual truce’ in the midst of a brutal battle to demonstrate that soldiers maintain some semblance of humanity.” Dye suggests that “audiences seemed to enjoy the moment and I can’t argue much beyond that.” Dale Dye, interview with the author, February 8, 2011.
741 Arguably, the boot-camps offer an excellent opportunity for film promotion and marketing. Aside from the numerous behind-the-scenes type documentaries that are found on the DVD releases of the films, since *Platoon* it is common to read interviews with actors commenting on their boot-camp training. For just one example, see Jay Sharbutt, “The Grunts’ War, Take 1,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1986, http://www.warriorsinc.com/LAT1.html (accessed October 17, 2011).
trained/rehearsed. Dye believes that the result of this kind of training is the actors’ familiarity with their roles to an extent that would not be possible otherwise. He cites two specific instances from *Ryan* to illustrate this. First, early in the film Hanks delivers a report to his commanding officer which comprises a long string of military jargon and, according to Dye, this is spoken with a high degree of naturalism because Hanks “*knew* what he was talking about. He wasn’t parroting lines.”\(^742\) My observation of Hanks’ performance here is that he speaks the technical vocabulary very smoothly, muttering some words and drawing out others while simultaneously gesturing to maps. The second example from *Ryan* is the degree of expertise with which Edward Burns handles his Browning Automatic Rifle throughout the film, which Dye regards comes from the amount of time the actor spent familiarizing himself with what is an “overly complex” weapon.\(^743\)

### 4.2.3 Increasingly detailed and nuanced

It appears that a legacy of Dye’s work is that the virtual boot camp experience has become one of the norms of production for contemporary films featuring any sort of military action. However, it is unlikely that the practice has by itself resulted in the observed changes in combat film performance outlined earlier in this section. Arguably, the dominance of Method acting inspired discourse—within the filmmaking community and within the public sphere of film promotion more generally—has produced a context in which the actor’s immersion in a role is valued as a marker of realism. The production context of contemporary films has also encouraged the take-up of civilian advisors such as Dye. After all, the US

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\(^742\) Dye, interview with the author, February 8, 2011. The emphasis is in the original recording.  
\(^743\) Ibid.
Military in the 2000s has very little (if any) WW2 era equipment to provide filmmakers so there is limited appeal for the producers of these films to seek Pentagon assistance. As a result, the kinds of training offered by Warriors, Inc. and other advisors running boot camps is that the actors tend to have a greater range of behaviors and actions to bring to their performance. Additionally, the technology of filmmaking has evolved to enable (or encourage) particular acting techniques as well as to emphasise aspects that may already have been part of the 1940s style.

The net effect of these practices is that the contemporary acting style in WW2 films is characterized by an increased detail. This style of amplified nuance is evident in obvious aspects of performance style such as the contemporary actors speaking much more and with much more vocal range than before. But it is also evident in their physical movements such as background actors conducting more detailed business, for example reloading weapons, communicating via field-radios, and looking around for the enemy with much more focus and attention than in the earlier films. In general, it seems that the more detailed the performance, the more convincing it will seem to audience. This is hardly a tenet of the Method—consider the advice Dmytryk offers to actors, using the example of the role of a truck driver:

You need not try to be a truck driver (they would probably spot the deception at once); you need only to be accepted by them. You can dress like them, try to use their language or, better yet, just listen. A few visits to truck stop cafes will shatter the stereotype and set you on the way to a more honest characterization.\textsuperscript{744}

\textsuperscript{744} Dmytryk, \textit{On Filmmaking}, 362.
Connected to this concept is the fact that nobody on the Warriors, Inc. team has any WW2 combat experience. While the company does do research, such research is of course from secondary sources. As a result, it cannot be said that Warriors, Inc. (or the majority of other contemporary military advisors) offer authentic training in WW2 soldiering practices. However, Dye would argue that he is actually training actors in the “camaraderie” and “mind” of a soldier and as I show in Chapter 5, these films should be taken as creating the effect of “reported realism” rather than necessarily an accurate, authentic depiction of combat.

4.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has performed two related analyzes of two aspects of Saving Private Ryan’s stylistic system, in order to address particular gaps in film studies’ understanding of the WW2 combat genre. I showed Spielberg’s hand-held camerawork in Ryan does not significantly resemble actual combat footage—as is often assumed by critics and filmgoers alike—arguing instead that Ryan’s cinematography in fact defamiliarizes many of the conventions of representing combat violence. This defamiliarization is the result of the extreme hand-held style, exaggerated by an optical shaking device, as well as the particular staging of action and its orchestration with camera movement. I propose the term controlled spontaneity to describe this style, which is in many ways unique to Ryan.

The chapter then examined the observable aspects of actor performance in combat films, using Ryan as an exemplar of the contemporary style and comparing it with Objective, Burma! from the 1940s. I showed that there are significant differences in the bodily and vocal performance style of actors portraying soldiers from the
1940s films to the 2000s. I suggested that these changes are likely to have resulted from a clearly identifiable set of historical and technological developments in film production practices. This changing style of acting also has obvious connections to Method acting, in that the discourse and practice of the Method has enabled particular kinds of acting technique and rehearsal strategies to become dominant in Hollywood productions. By referring to the work of Dale Dye, a civilian technical advisor who founded the company Warriors Inc., I then argued that the performances of soldiers in contemporary productions are much more detailed and nuanced than the acting styles of the 1940s films.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Realism, Increased Detail, and Cognitive Simulation

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter presents the implications of my research in Chapters 3 and 4 on the field of WW2 combat film study. It shows that there are three major contributions of this study to film studies understandings of the genre. First, I have demonstrated that existing critical methodologies inadequately understand the style of the genre, leaving significant gaps in the field of knowledge. Second, my research methods have been able to address this aspect of the genre. Third, I propose the term “reported realism” as an alternative to existing theories of realism, which I show is useful for the analyst because it treats realism as an effect created by aspects of film style on the audience. From such a viewpoint, even a film which may not be realistic in some specific sense might come to be regarded by some viewers as “realistic.”

The chapter also indicates that the changes have an interesting relationship to the evolution of First Person Shooter (FPS) combat video games. These games, in a very short time-span, have made many similar developments of stylistic presentation as the films discussed in the thesis. Additionally, I indicate that there is significant trans-textual cross-pollination between these two genres. On this basis, I argue for a cognitivist account of film and FPS video game realism based on Gregory Currie’s notion of “the imagination” and Torbin Grodal’s related idea of “simulation.”\textsuperscript{745} The chapter suggests that film realism is best understood as a

viewing practice in which the spectator’s imagination is engaged via their use of the visual and auditory cues from the text. Finally, the chapter indicates some possibilities for future research based upon the methodology of my thesis.

5.1 The Effect of Credibility: Reported Realism, Authenticity, Accuracy

The focus of this research has been World War 2 combat films made in the 1940s and the post-
*Ryan* 2000s. There are significant continuities at the narrative level between these two eras of production and these have been dealt with at length by Jeanine Basinger and many of the critics I addressed in Chapter 2. My research has shown, however, that the stylistic attributes of this genre have hitherto been ignored by critics or—in the few cases where style is discussed—it has been routinely misunderstood. Chapters 3 and 4 identified a number of distinctive features that define the stylistic norms between the 1940s films and contemporary WW2 combat films. I have shown that there are some significant and enduring similarities at the level of style between the two eras of WW2 combat film production. For instance, although there has been a general increase in the rate of editing between the 1940s films and the post-*Ryan* 2000s, the combat sequences in contemporary films continue to be edited at a pace within a similar ASL range to the wartime productions. Additionally, while there are much higher percentages of closer framings in the combat sequences of contemporary films, there still persists a tendency to favour LS and MS as in the 1940s films. And while the dominant aesthetic in the contemporary WW2 genre productions is to film the combat with hand-held cameras—a style that has been routinely misunderstood.

by film studies—the camera movements still tend to be motivated by the motion of on-screen characters, as it was in the 1940s era. There are also, of course, some significant differences in the stylistic presentation of combat, particularly in the sound design. For instance, with the advent of Dolby Digital sound mixing in the 1970s, the soundtracks of the combat sequences have become progressively more densely layered. A further difference between the 1940s and the 2000s films I have demonstrated is the increasingly nuanced verbal and non-verbal performances of the actors playing soldiers.

Throughout this dissertation I have shown that contemporary viewers—academic and non-academic—maintain the viewpoint that the WW2 film genre is becoming more realistic in its presentation of combat. However, some of the significant claims to realism in the style of these films are demonstrably false. In general, throughout this thesis I have treated realism as a convention in order to use this conclusion to undertake an analysis of what practices and techniques are constitutive of particular norms of realism in the combat film genre. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, most critics do not specify in detail the technical (formal) devices used by the films they are analyzing—and in the case of realism and the WW2 combat film, their attempts to identify stylistic features are frequently wrong. Certainly, an interpreter might single out a particular film as realistic or criticize another film for failing to match whatever arbitrary notion of realism they have been using. In either case, the critic’s approach typically services whatever interpretive doctrine to which the rest of their analysis adheres. A clear definition of realism is understandably difficult for critics and

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746 I am referring here to claims either made by filmmakers or by critics.
747 Many of the examples of the hermeneutic methods I addressed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2) invoke various definitions of realism and authenticity throughout their arguments.
theorists to agree upon when applied to genres such as the war film, which can have a very direct connection to events that have actually taken place. The problem becomes more confusing when differences in narrative and style between films are taken into account. After all, no real-world version of Ryan’s closing battle at Ramelle took place during WW2 since the town is fictional. However, as I illustrated in Chapter 4, the physical movements of the performers in that film can be regarded as more true-to-life than the stylized movements of the players in Wake Island. For these reasons, I will advance the term reported realism in this conclusion as a way to understand the filmic devices which create an effect of credibility that is regarded by viewers as realistic. For this position it does not matter if the devices are indeed accurate representations of a real-life referent. Instead, it is only relevant that the film is regarded as realistic by at least some viewers.

5.1.1 Neoformalist and Cognitivist Grounds for Reported Realism

In order to understand the reported realism of contemporary WW2 combat films, I draw upon the neoformalist concept of realistic motivation. This approach focuses analytic attention onto the way particular cinematic devices are employed by a film as “an appeal to ideas about reality.” In this view, it is irrelevant whether or not the film’s narrative or style is a valid “imitation” of reality. According to Thompson:

Our ideas about reality are not direct, natural knowledge of the world, but are culturally determined in various ways. Thus realistic motivation can appeal to two broad areas of our knowledge: on the one hand, our knowledge of everyday life

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748 Thompson, Breaking the Glass Armor, 17.
gained by direct interaction with nature and society; on the other, our awareness of prevailing aesthetic canons of realism in a given period of an art form’s stylistic change.749

This is not to take an abstract view of “realism.” My analysis proposes a stylistic catalogue of cinema techniques used by a particular contemporary genre which seems to result in audiences regarding the films as realistic. For instance, I have already shown in Chapter 4 that the shaky hand-held camerawork of Ryan’s Omaha Beach sequence does not correspond to real human vision or real combat footage.750 However, the technique makes sense when taken in terms of a realistic motivation because the device has become a convention discursively regarded as representing the immediacy of reality. From this perspective, it is possible to identify historically variable techniques used by filmmakers to achieve what they consider to be realism as well as to locate the textual cues used by critics to argue for a particular film’s categorization as realistic.

The concept of realistic motivation is flexible enough to encompass many of the norms of WW2 combat film style I have identified in this dissertation. In this conclusion I want to develop a point identified through the investigation of Section 4.2. There, I showed that there has been an increased level of physical detail in actors’ performance in the contemporary combat films; however, I believe that this observation extends to some other aspects of the stylistic systems of these films. For instance, the mise-en-scene and soundtrack design of the contemporary films also exhibit much more specific details than earlier combat films. The concept of realistic motivation offers a method of understanding these

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749 Ibid.
750 Or, for that matter, other common hand-held styles.
tendencies. This increasing level of detail is bound up with the activities of perception and cognition by which viewers comprehend the narrative events depicted in the films.\textsuperscript{751} Perception and cognition are central to Bordwell’s account of comprehension in *Narration and the Fiction Film* as well as Thompson’s neoformalism.\textsuperscript{752} According to Bordwell, a Constructivist theory of how viewers make sense of a film would argue that: “The artwork is necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and fleshed out by the active participation of the perceiver.”\textsuperscript{753}

This active participation involves an ongoing process of inference-making and further work in cognitivist film studies has developed these arguments. For instance, in *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, Edward Branigan argues that the spectator’s comprehension of a film occurs through a process of “moment by moment regulation of conflicts among competing spatial, temporal, and causal hypotheses.”\textsuperscript{754} Other researchers have enlisted the concept of the imagination as a way to explain viewer engagement with the narrative of the film. This is not to suggest that the spectator imagines the events on screen are really happening, nor is it a prescriptive account of how certain films become more engaging than others. Rather, as Gregory Currie argues, the theory explains how viewers use the on-screen information to imagine a unified, complete *fabula*: “My imagining is not that I [actually] see the characters and the events of the movie; it is simply that [I imagine] there are these characters and that these events *occur* – the same sort

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{751} By “detail” I am not referring to image resolution or sound fidelity but, as I clarify later, the details in the choices of set design, costuming, makeup, sounds in the atmospheric soundtrack and so on.
\textsuperscript{752} See Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*; and Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*: 30 – 47.
\textsuperscript{753} Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 33.
\textsuperscript{754} Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 39.
\end{footnote}
of impersonal imagining I engage in when I read a novel.” However, the theory is easily confused as suggesting that the spectator imagines the diegetic events happening within their presence. To counter such misconceptions, Noël Carroll makes the following clarification: “Instead of seeing imaginarily, I literally see representations of actors on screen, which I use to imagine the fiction.” Currie would argue that in order to fulfil this process of imagining the fiction, spectators run an offline mental simulation of the narrative events.

These concepts have recently been used by cognitivist theorists primarily to understand how viewer identification and empathy functions. The argument presented by Torben Grodal, for instance, parallels Currie’s in some respects, but diverges in others. His position—which derives also from evolutionary psychology and neuroscience—suggests that films are themselves simulations and offers a theory of how the spectator’s mind tags the input from the films according to a particular “reality status.” For Grodal,

The fundamental architecture of the brain was made at a time when incoming data were essentially true, so that reality status evaluation was a secondary process and the later cultural development of visual (and acoustic) simulations [such as cave

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759 See Grodal, Moving Pictures; and Grodal, Embodied Visions.
paintings and stories] made it necessary to contain the impact of such simulations
by higher order cognitive processes.  

For Henry Bacon, the imagination “has tremendous evolutionary advantage” in
that it enables humans to mentally rehearse for potential future situations as well
as predict behaviors of animals during hunting, for example.  From the
cognitivist perspective, many of these capacities that have evolved for various
purposes also happen to enable humans to comprehend cinematic texts.

The argument below extends the work of these theorists by drawing conclusions
based upon the normative data presented in Chapters 3 and 4. As Carl Plantinga
states, summarising the approach by this field of study: “Cognitive theory today is
primarily interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films,
together with the textual structures and techniques that give rise to spectatorial
activity and response.” Sometimes this involves an explanation of how human
perception understands color, sometimes how it follows the overall narrative and
a significant amount of the research is geared towards explaining character
identification and empathy. What I offer here is more narrowly focused than
these accounts, in that I am interested in some specific activities of filmmakers
and the resulting effects of reported realism.

761 Ibid., 185.
762 Henry Bacon, “Blendings of Real, Fictional, and Other Imaginary People,” Projections 3, no. 1
763 For more, see Grodal, Moving Pictures.
764 Carl Plantinga, “Cognitive Film Theory: An Insider’s Appraisal,” Cinémas: Journal of Film
Studies 12, no. 2 (2002), 23.
765 For further examples of the approach of cognitivist film studies other than the texts cited
already in this chapter, see Thompson, Storytelling in the New Hollywood; Noel Carroll,
Theorizing the Moving Image (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Carl Plantinga and
Greg Smith, eds. Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1999); Joseph Anderson, The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to
Cognitive Film Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996); Smith, Engaging
Characters.
5.1.2 Increasingly Detailed Depictions

I believe the increased level of detail that is evident in the contemporary WW2 combat films allows viewers to run an off-line mental simulation of the diegesis with a high degree of vividness.\textsuperscript{766} As a result of this richly detailed and nuanced imagining, the impression of the film’s realism is greatly increased. For instance, I have already suggested that the extremely dense soundtrack of \textit{Ryan’s Omaha Beach} scene contributes to the great sense of immersion reported by many viewers. From this current perspective, it is arguable that this response occurs primarily because there is a substantial amount of sonic information for the spectator’s imagination to use to simulate the diegesis. This position is, in some respects, anticipated by Kendall Walton, who writes:

But even the most fantastic works are obviously capable of extraordinary “realism” of another sort. Tolkien’s \textit{Lord of the Rings} trilogy achieves it. It may seem that the dissimilarities of the world of \textit{The Lord of the Rings} to the real one—many of them anyway—do not even count against its realism. It does not somehow manage to be realistic in spite of these differences, by virtue of similarities which outweigh the differences; rather it presents a very dissimilar, fantastic world in an enormously realistic manner.\textsuperscript{767}

While it is certainly possible to argue whether or not contemporary WW2 combat films are realistic, it is clear that at least some viewers \textit{do} describe the combat

\textsuperscript{766} This may not \textit{only} apply to WW2 combat films. I have reasons to believe it applies to a number of other genres of filmmaking. However, that discussion is outside the scope of this thesis.

Consider some of the minor physical movements in the performance of the German soldiers in Ryan’s Omaha Beach sequence, in contrast with the simplistic and far less detailed movements of the enemies in the 1940s films. For example, as Pvt. Jackson runs to the flank of a machine-gun nest, a cut to a Long Shot presents three Germans in the machine-gun nest just as one of them taps the middle gunner on the top of his helmet. The middle gunner then shifts his aim and continues firing in the direction of Jackson’s movement (Fig 5.1). The spectator’s imagination is able to perform two activities here. Firstly, an attentive viewer might fill in the gap of what is not stated verbally—that is, that the middle gunner recognized the tap as an indication of enemy movement. Secondly, the German’s action adds further detail to the simulation being run by the spectator’s imagination, along with other aspects of the scene such as the sand caked on Miller’s helmet, the background voices of other soldiers on the beach and so on.

Recalling the neoformalist concept of realistic motivation, the details presented need not necessarily correspond to actuality. Rather, the details simply need to appeal to the audience’s expectations of reality. These expectations, of course, are dependent on the viewer’s world experience as well as experience with other

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768 As I have shown in Chapter 2. Consider the begrudging praise of Ryan by Laurence Suid: “However powerful the opening Omaha Beach sequence is and however close it comes to recreating the experiences of men in combat, the truth remains that the film’s high point has feet of clay.” See Suid, Guts & Glory, 630. Emphasis mine. Eleftheria Thanouli argues that in The Thin Red Line “the battle scenes and the images of the dead and the wounded are very realistic.” See Eleftheria Thanouli, “The Thin Red Line an the World War II Hollywood Tradition,” Kinema, kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.phpid=61&feature (accessed January 16, 2012). Additionally, a Google search with the term “realistic” alongside most of the contemporary WW2 films I have studied yields at least some internet reviews describing the combat as realistic.

769 Though arguably, in this case, it is not crucial for the viewer to fill in the gap, because it would not prevent them following the overall narrative of the film. It was not until repeated viewings that I noticed the detail with the helmet.
The norms of on-screen combat deaths, for instance, have clearly changed from the clutch-and-fall style of the 1940s, through the spasmodic reactions of the 1970s to the sudden jerking motions of the 2000s (See Section 3.3). Each successive iteration of these conventions introduces greater detail into the depiction of death. The visual display of the bullet impact and the accompanying flesh-hits and grunt reactions on the soundtrack are constitutive of such increased details. It is likely that the apparent, or reported, realism in these deaths is largely an effect of the viewer’s ability to imagine (and mentally simulate) the death due to the quantity of detail presented. Indeed, Peckinpah’s bullet-hits—produced by squib-hits blasting chunks of raw meat as well as the fake blood fluid—seem all the more grotesque precisely because of the detail in their presentation. Consider Dale Dye’s view regarding on-screen combat killings:

I’d love for filmmakers to re-think the special effects gore and splatter that they all seem to think result from gunshots or shrapnel hits on the human body. It’s really a relatively mundane event; the killed or wounded man usually just crumples and drops like a puppet with strings cut rather than jerking and dancing with the impact of rounds or shrapnel. It’s generally only then that the bleeding starts. Despite that fact, filmmakers have been taught—or decided for the visual impact—to fill the scene with exploding squibs and blood bags.

Although I am not writing about narrative here, the principle would apply to comprehension of the narrative events. For instance, director Peter Berg claims that his film *The Kingdom* (2007) has received criticism from viewers who regarded it as unrealistic that the terrorists’ bullets never hit any of the main characters in a crucial fire-fight scene. However, Berg claims that when he screened the film for Navy SEALs they suggested that this matches their experience with these sorts of terrorists who have the tactical strategy of shooting blindly. See the director’s commentary on *The Kingdom*, 2007, DVD, Dir. Peter Berg (Universal Pictures).

Although, as I indicated in Chapter 3, there is not necessarily a consistent evolution of the conventions of death. The norms change from one production era to the next, but not in a precisely continuous, predictable fashion.


Dale Dye, email to the author, August 31, 2011.
Dye’s perspective is significant in terms of understanding the cognitive perception of realistic screen deaths. His description of a victim’s body which “drops like a puppet with strings cut” matches the visual appearance of the victim in Robert Capa’s famous photograph from the Spanish Civil War entitled “Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death” (1936, Fig. 5.2). But the killings in the WW2 combat films I have studied here do not significantly resemble Capa’s image or Dye’s description. In cases such as 

*Stolz der Nation*, the rapid jerking of the bodily responses to bullet hits are completely different. Victims in contemporary films, even in genres other than WW2 combat films, die in extremely detailed depictions. For instance, bullet hits to the body are presented via huge puffs of blood and dust which blast from their chests in *Ryan*. One of Zoller’s sniper-rifle victims is jerked backwards so as to collide with an apple-cart (*Stolz der Nation*). And in Walter Hill’s action film *Last Man Standing* (1996), Bruce Willis’ Colt .45 pistol shots blast victims through the windows of a whorehouse. Examples such as these develop and extend the style of substitutional emblems identified by Prince in the 1940s films. Rather than using scenery damage or puffs of gunsmoke as stand-ins for the damage to the human body that is not displayed—as in the substitutional emblems of the 1940s films—these contemporary killings show the damage to the body as well as the scenery in a display of details. An extreme example is the detailed CGI of *Three Kings* in which a single bullet is shown entering a human body and, via

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774 There is of course some controversy regarding the authenticity of Capa’s photograph, some researchers suggesting the death is faked. However, there is also compelling evidence to suggest that the image, and the death, is real. For researcher Richard Whelan, most compelling is the analysis by Capt. Robert Franks, a homicide detective, who comments on details of the subject’s hand-position and foot stance. See Richard Whelan, “Robert Capa’s *Falling Soldier*: A Detective Story,” *Aperture Magazine*, no. 166 (Spring 2002): 53 – 54.

775 See Prince, *Classical Film Violence*. 
photorealistic animation, lodging in an internal organ where bile and bacteria begin to spread (Figs. 5.3 – 5.4).

While I do not think that filmmakers are practising cognitive theorists, in some respects they do seem to show an awareness of the value of increasing the details on screen as a way to strengthen the credibility of the film. It is possible to read Warriors Inc.’s boot-camp training of actors (discussed in Section 4.2) as deliberately intended to amplify the details in the actors’ performance in areas other than death. Additionally, Dye adds another interesting point about on-screen death:

I’ve also got a thing about flies […] especially the flies that feed on dead bodies. It’s an image that still haunts me from real life experience but something that’s never seen in films. I suppose it’s hard to train flies but their presence in swarms around dead bodies leaking fluids is a stunning image that I’ve always thought says a lot about the brutality of war and the results of human combat.776

Of course, there is a combination of realistic and artistic motivation in the wording Dye uses to justify this imagery (ie., “a stunning image that […] says a lot about the brutality of war”). However, his statement suggests an implicit understanding of the audience’s ability to simulate narrative events via presence of elaborate details. This also seems to be the case in the creation of film visual effects. As Prince has argued, filmmakers have recently begun to engage the assistance of scientists—and scientific software which accurately renders environments and object movement according to “known laws of physics”—to

776 Dale Dye, email to the author, August 31, 2011. Dye’s comments also bring to mind the smell of battle.
“enhance the credibility” of effects such as digital water.\textsuperscript{777} He suggests that the tidal waves in \textit{Poseidon} (Wolfgang Petersen, 2006) are “far more convincing” than in \textit{The Abyss} (James Cameron 1989), primarily because the digital technology and knowledge of the late 1980s did not enable texturing of the water to include “froth, spray, bubbles.”\textsuperscript{778}

A counter argument to this theory of simulation and imagination may be that it is perhaps more effective for filmmakers to leave gaps for viewers to imagine, or that some directors intend the viewer to be left with a sense of ambiguity.\textsuperscript{779} Such a claim would misunderstand my position here because I am not adopting a prescriptive attitude towards filmmaking practices. Rather, I am offering a descriptive account of what the contemporary films actually look and sound like in contrast to the 1940s combat films, and speculating on a very specific effect which seems to be achieved by the contemporary aesthetic. From this perspective, it is irrelevant whether or not the films would be more effective if viewers were expected to imagine their own details.

\section*{5.2 A Parallel Case: Combat Video Games}

\textsuperscript{778} Ibid., 19 – 20. Of course, there may also be an element of the audience being overawed by the spectacle of particularly detailed effects.
\textsuperscript{779} For instance, Henry Bacon shows how Lars von Trier’s \textit{Antichrist} (2009) deliberately makes it difficult for the viewer to mentally construct the narrative events of the film as an artistic gesture. However, as Bacon also argues, a film like \textit{Antichrist} is a special case. By comparison, all of the films I have identified here are much more mainstream than that. See Henry Bacon, “The Extent of Mental Completion of Films,” \textit{Projections} 5, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 31 – 50. Alternatively, some art films may use realistic motivation in order to justify ambiguity. As Thompson argues, “We do not always understand people; therefore we may not understand their actions. Gaps in the story information provided by the narration suggest incompleteness […] Ambiguity thus becomes one way of cueing us to take the film’s narrative as realistic.” See Thompson, \textit{Breaking the Glass Armor}, 228.
The adjacent medium of first person shooter (FPS) video games exhibits the same transition toward increased visual and auditory detail. Similar stylistic developments, as those observed in the WW2 combat films between the 1940s and 2000s, are paralleled in the FPS genre in a much shorter time frame. Between 1992’s *Wolfenstein 3d* (id Software) and 2011’s *Battlefield 3* (DICE Software) the aesthetic construction of these games parallel many of the changes identified in the films throughout this dissertation (Fig. 5.5 – 5.6). During the 19 years of video game design between these two games there is a clear progression towards increasingly detailed visual and auditory depictions of the virtual world. By way of demonstrating how my approach can be extended to other text types and genres, I will briefly sketch an analysis of how reported realism is created by FPS games.

In terms of graphic presentation, while the *Battlefield 3* screen-shot is clearly not identical to a photographic image from a film, it is much closer to it than the *Wolfenstein 3d* screen image. For instance, the objects in the *Wolfenstein 3d* screen-shot are clearly pixellated, suggesting a computer generated image as opposed to the more smooth high resolution graphics of *Battlefield 3*. There are other contributing factors which classify *Battlefield 3* as having what would be called a photorealistic style: its lighting effects exhibit shading qualities, casting shadows to indicate an off-screen lamp-pole and building. By contrast, the *Wolfenstein 3d* shadows are simplistic and inconsistent. The sound is also much more densely layered in a contemporary FPS: the player experiences a greater

780 Of course, this brief discussion does not cover every aspect of these games. Other researchers are in much better positions than I to offer analysis of such things as narrative, racial and gender representations and so on. My commentary should be regarded as a preliminary investigation into some specific aspects of the style of these games that have relevance to the overall discussion of WW2 combat films.
range as well as quantity of off-screen yells and higher quality gunshot samples, to name two obvious aspects. Of course, increases in computer technology have allowed game-developers to produce these audio-visual representations. But while the technology has certainly been a factor, it will serve as instructive to identify the specific effects of these technological advancements, as well as to identify the ways in which these effects enable a greater level of reported realism for the contemporary FPS games. Additionally, there are some quite subtle areas in which the FPS genre has become more detailed and which show clear connections with the changes observed in the combat film genre above. Before I discuss those, however, I will first clarify the significance of these observations in terms of player engagement, immersion, and reported realism.

Certainly there are clearly some fundamental differences between video games and films. For instance, games are interactive, tend to have less narrative complexity than films, and are experienced in different environments to the cinema. Grodal has made a cognitivist argument for how video games differ from films in that they can cue players’ sympathetic emotions through the ability to control the game. However, a number of commentators have indicated a clear relationship (sometimes called “convergence”) between video games and

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781 For some players engaging in online multiplayer scenarios, there would also be the overlayed sound of players’ verbal communication through their headset-microphones.
782 Of course, there are doubtless other elements of these games which contribute to their reported realism. However, in the present discussion I am concerned with the increased audio-visual details.
783 However, they are, of course, very often played in environments that are similar to television and DVD viewing.
784 He refers to films as “input-driven,” in that they provide input for the viewer to simulate, whereas games are “output-driven” in that they allow the player to interact with the simulation. See Toben Grodal, “Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video Games, Media, and Embodied Experience,” in Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds., The Video Game Theory Reader (New York: Routledge, 2003), 153.
Other research has undertaken significant analysis of the FPS genre, specifically. Sue Morris, for example, has adapted cinema apparatus theory to analyze the playing conditions of FPS games. Additionally, Birgit Richard has shown how the military used early combat games in the mid-1990s for training purposes, such as 1993’s *Doom 1.9* by id Software (modified as *Marine Doom*, without the zombies) and Take-Two Interactive’s *JetFighter III*. The military’s use of games as simulations developed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, culminating in the recruitment tool developed and released by the U.S. Army called *America’s Army* (2002). Of course, it should be remembered that the relative realism of the gameplay *events* in a commercial FPS is likely to be placed secondary to aspects of fun. As *The Onion* ironically suggests in their parody on the genre, the following is unlikely to be considered enjoyable by commercial consumers:

Ultra-Realistic Modern Warfare Game Features Awaiting Orders, Repairing Trucks: Designers say the new game explores the endless paperwork, routine patrolling a modern day soldier endures in photorealistic detail.

For this reason, here I am concerned with a very specific aspect of video game aesthetics: the normative techniques and devices by which contemporary FPS

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may produce the effect of reported realism. Discursively, there is also a tendency for the successive developments to be regarded as becoming increasingly realistic. Consider the Oxcgn.com pre-release review of *Battlefield 3*, in which the writer anecdotally recounts showing some demo gameplay footage to friends:

[They] thought they were watching some sort of First Person-style movie that had been shot about the wars in Afghanistan/Iraq […] Just before the end, I broke the news to them that what they were watching was in fact, actual gameplay from the new Battlefield 3 game due out this Fall […] and they were basically awestruck by the reality of it all.\(^{789}\)

While this comment is certainly revealing in regard to the use of contemporary war films as a means of grounding the game’s “look” in familiar terms, the reported realism here can be accounted for with respect to the argument of realist aesthetics I advanced in the previous section. The changing appearance and sound design of combat games over the last two decades has implications for understanding player immersion and engagement.

A useful starting point is Clive Fencott’s observation in 1999 that the phenomenon people regard as “presence, the feeling of *being there*” when experiencing virtual reality environments (VREs) results partially from particular details of the environment which he labels “sureties.”\(^{790}\) Such sureties are things that a person interacting with the VRE would find predictable based upon their experience of the real world. For instance: “Lampposts, railings […] The sound of


the [door] hinges creaking […] A working calculator on the virtual office desk.”791 Interestingly, for the people in Fencott’s study, the details did not need to correspond photographically to the real-world in order to create the sensation of presence. Fencott describes presence as a “mental state […] the mental constructions that people build from stimuli are more important than the stimuli themselves.”792 Indeed, Grodal suggests from a cognitivist view that even “visually crude video games such as Pac-Man (1980) might provide strong immersion because of their activation of basic visuo-motor links.”793 Such studies prompt the question: Why do increased photo-realistic details, higher resolution graphics, and so on, generally lead to a greater level of reported realism?794

It should be remembered that the early virtual environments Fencott was writing about were not in fact video games as such. His specific example is a 3d model created by his research team modelled from a sea-side resort called “Saltburn by the Sea.” Additionally, the level of detail in the texturing, for instance, in Fencott’s samples is very limited by comparison with even a commercial FPS released around the same time (Fig. 5.7 – 5.8). I would also argue that one of his statements about the function of sureties benefits from some revision:

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791 Clive Fencott, “Presence and the Content of Virtual Environments,” http://web.onyxnet.co.uk/Fencott-onyxnet.co.uk/pres99/pres99.htm (accessed January 20, 2012). Fencott’s paper does not take an explicitly neoformalist position. However, there is a clear overlap between this part of his argument and the neoformalist concept of realistic motivation as an appeal only to audience expectations and beliefs about reality.

792 Fencott, “Content and Creativity in Virtual Environment Design.”


794 As a side-note, it is also significant that increased “realism” does not necessarily equate with increased pleasure, entertainment, or identification. I thank Mick Broderick for this point.
A useful aphorism is that in interacting with the real world we are trying to make sense of too much information, but that in interacting with VEs [Virtual Environments] we are trying to make sense of too little.\footnote{Fencott, “Content and Creativity in Virtual Environment Design.”}

The contemporary FPS do not necessarily have the same quantity of information as the real world; however, with each successive generation of game releases the user is certainly presented with a greater amount of visual and auditory information. As such, Fencott’s research seems to point toward some very basic—and therefore significant—reasons for player engagement and immersion in computer games. After all, one gamer in 2010 reviewed a revival re-release of id Software’s 1994 game \textit{Doom II} (with its original 1990s graphics) as “still one of the most eminently playable FPS titles ever made” (Fig. 5.9).\footnote{James Hall, “Doom II” [review], http://www.gameshard.net/doom-ii.html (accessed January 25, 2012).} As Joseph Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson argue:

A virtual world can apparently be realistic or not; it doesn’t seem to matter. What matters is that a configuration of technology presents information simultaneously in multiple sense modes with the potential for participant interaction, as when the participant turns his head or walks or reaches, and the information changes appropriately.\footnote{Joseph D. Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson, eds., “Introduction,” in \textit{Narration and Spectatorship in Moving Images} (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2007), 11.}

Fencott’s focus on the mental construction created by the person interacting with the VRE is clearly connected with the cognitivist notion of running an offline mental simulation. The sensation of presence seems to be possible by way of even simplistic details, which only need to approximate real-world cues, but also
because the interactive nature of a game enables the human capacity of “play”,
which Grodal suggests has an evolutionary basis.\textsuperscript{798}

\textbf{5.2.1 Detailed Depictions and Enhanced Presence}

Reported realism in video game is at least partially a result of an enhanced sense
of presence—as game details become more nuanced and offer greater
information, the player’s imagination is able to run an increasingly vivid mental
simulation of the game world. Peter Bell, in a comparison of \textit{Doom} and \textit{Quake II}
(id Software, 1997), briefly indicates some aspects of \textit{Quake II}’s style which
make it seem more realistic than the earlier FPS:

\begin{quote}
It is only through a comparative difference that one is more “realistic.” For
example, in \textit{Quake II}, enemies jump out of the way of gunfire, whereas, in \textit{DOOM},
enemies are more or less armed, stationary targets. \textit{Quake II} also uses a more
advanced graphics engine than \textit{DOOM} does. While \textit{DOOM} superimposes two-
dimensional characters (called “sprites”) against a background, \textit{Quake II}’s graphic
ingenie depicts figures in three dimensions through the use of polygon
modelling.\textsuperscript{799}
\end{quote}

These points deserve greater elaboration as they are central to the question of how
video game aesthetics can be responsible for reported realism. Consider the
artificial intelligence of the \textit{Quake II} enemies when they are aware of gunfire.
There is akin to the \textit{effect} of the difference between \textit{Objective, Burma!’s} enemy
which fumble and move awkwardly and the German gunner in \textit{Ryan} who taps a

\textsuperscript{798} Grodal, “Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles,” 140.
\textsuperscript{799} Peter Bell, “Realism and Subjectivity in First-Person Shooter Video Games,” \textit{Gnovis} 3 (2003),
comrade on the helmet. Of course, greater photorealism in a game’s graphics has a clear impact on the viewer’s ability to imagine the world of the game, but there are more subtle details to be taken into account.\footnote{Although it is outside the scope of this dissertation, many of these observations apply to in-game “cut-scenes.” These are brief animated scenes, in recent games usually rendered within the game engine itself, which act as transitional movies between one interactive scenario and the next.} For instance, when a computer controlled enemy moves out of the way of incoming fire in \emph{Quake II}, the actual animation of the character’s movement is simplistic and minimal. By contrast, in the more recent \emph{Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3} (Infinity Ward, 2011) character movement is much more richly detailed. For instance, wounded characters sometimes writhe on the ground after being shot (Fig. 5.10). In \emph{Battlefield 3}, when an explosion occurs in close proximity to a character, they may stagger and flex an arm outwards to brace their body for a fall to the ground. Getting to their feet again, they are animated to the extent of putting one arm to the ground and pushing upwards (Fig. 5.11). When the character takes cover behind an object, his body transitions from upright position through a number of animated stages (Fig. 5.12). Additionally, there is sometimes more than one version of the animation for such moves, increasing the apparent randomness (or spontaneity) of the characters’ actions. The promotional material for \emph{Battlefield 3} credits this level of animation to particular plugin called “ANT” used by their game-engine to run the game:

\begin{quote}
The ANT technology also enables DICE to ditch the ugly gliding soldier animations that plague every multiplayer game on the market. Soldiers […] now move with a degree of realism, turning their heads and guns before their bodies, transitioning aggressively into and out of cover.\footnote{http://planetbattlefield.gamespy.com/fullstory.php?id=164286 (accessed January 25, 2012).}
\end{quote}
Aside from these pre-animated movements, contemporary games also make use of “ragdoll physics” to produce dynamic interactions between characters and their environment.\(^{802}\) This technology enables game designers to set up a bone system with specific constraints within a character’s body, which are driven by algorithms that move the bones in response to collisions with the environment. For instance, a character hit by a bullet in the shoulder may spin one way to the ground, whereas if hit in the head, knee, or shoulder they will react differently. These physics simulations do not necessarily emulate real-world physics.\(^{803}\) As Thomas Jakobsen argues in his description of a physics-engine he created for the game *Hitman: Codename 47* (IO Interactive, 2000):

> The important goals are *believability* (the programmer can cheat as much as he wants if the player still feels immersed) and *speed of execution* (only a certain time per frame will be allocated to the physics engine). In the case of physics simulation, the word believability also covers stability; a method is no good if objects seem to drift through obstacles or vibrate when they should be lying still, or if cloth particles tend to “blow up”.\(^{804}\)

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\(^{803}\) The term “simulation” is used in this context differently to the cognitivist usage through the rest of this dissertation. Graphics artists and physics system developers use the term simulation to refer to a model run by the computer according to particular constraints and algorithms. For instance, a very simple simulation might involve a sphere located some distance above a surface in 3d space (a “plane”). According to specifically set constraints of overall gravity and the mass properties of the sphere and plane, the computer program can simulate the sphere falling to the surface and bouncing. All of the constraints are variable and do not have to correspond to real-world physics. For instance, the sphere might shatter on impact with the surface if its material properties are set to be simulated as “glass” or some sort of “brittle” material.

These goals indicate why early ragdoll physics—including those of *Hitman: Codename 47*’s—seem primitive by comparison to the recent character reactions in *Battlefield 3* or *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*. As computer processing power and dedicated graphics card technology improves, game engines are able to run physics models that encompass greater numbers of constraints, greater rendering requirements and therefore produce more detailed character movements.

There are other details afforded by the increase in technology, such as the resolution in “texture maps.” These are images of surface textures, such as concrete, grass, and wood which are “mapped” (digitally applied) onto a computer generated object. Often texture maps are photographs of real-world textures and therefore the earliest uses of them were restricted by how much resolution could be produced on screen in real-time. More recent developments also include “bump maps,” which are additional textures that produce the impression of bumps, scratches and other three dimensional properties on a texture that are revealed according to the virtual lighting. One of the highly promoted features of the game engine for *Battlefield 3* was its ability to render “radiosity” in real-time. Radiosity refers to light reflected from one object having an effect on another object close-by. For instance, a brown box next to a green wall may appear to have an amount of green reflected from its surface.\(^{805}\)

While the realistic motivation of these textural and lighting details may appeal to players’ direct experience of the real-world, there are other increasingly detailed

aspects of FPS which appeal only to players’ expectations of the real-world. Weapons are a clear example. Whereas in the case of character movements the details do appear to be coming closer to those of real human movement, it is tempting to suggest that this also seems to be true of the gunshot sounds, weapons handling, and bullet impacts. Consider Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 (Ubisoft, 2008). Erik Sofge notes that, “when it comes to the guns, the developers seem to have pushed the Tom Clancy series closer to the battlefield.” However, this turns out to be just an impression produced by the realistic motivation of particular aspects of the gunplay. For instance, the game-makers have incorporated ballistics data into the effect of bullets: each impact has a variable effect depending on the material of a victim’s clothes, the type of body armor, and how many other objects the bullet has passed through before hitting the character. However, as the game’s weapons designer notes, a “shotgun blast [in the game] will punch through walls and armor just fine, even though buckshot is known for its lack of penetration in the real world.” The reason for this unrealistic effect is that game developers believe players “associate shotguns with powerful, close-range weapons.” It is also evident in the attitude of one of the designers of Rainbow Six: Vegas 2, when he explains that he makes an Uzi’s fire-rate faster and less accurate than it would in real-life because audience expectations from 1980s action films identify the gun in these terms.

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806 I will say more about this “photorealistic” motivation later.
808 Ibid.
809 Ibid.
810 Philippe Theiren, quoted in Sofge, “Shooting For Realism.”
Because it is “reported,” this form of realism contributes to an on-going discourse of realism in the games community and the academic literature. Bell argues that “As games become more technologically differentiated and ‘advanced’ and seem more interactive, earlier games such as *DOOM* seem less so and consequently less realistic.”  

For instance, one reviewer reflecting on *Doom* in 2011, 18 years after its release comments that: “The graphics are a tough subject to touch on nowadays, with modern games coming so close to realism.” However, people interacting with Fencott’s VREs—or a FPS from the 1990s—are aware the environment is not real and that they are not really there although they seem to be mentally constructing a sensation of presence from the information they perceive. Developers seem to have discovered techniques for producing a greater level of reported realism and these techniques are predicated on increasing the details presented by the virtual construction.

### 5.2.2 Transtextual Connections to Combat Cinema

There are a number of significant transtextual elements which link the FPS genre with combat films and in this section I will briefly address how these contribute to the sense of reported realism attributed to these games. It is interesting to see just how much combat films have informed the aesthetic style of FPS games. As Will Brooker has noted, game developers had begun by the mid-1990s a process of “emulation” of popular cinema storytelling techniques. He also shows that the process continued in the 2000s, for example games which began incorporating

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811 Bell, “Realism and Subjectivity in First-Person Shooter Video Games,” 13.
wide-screen “letterboxing,” and slow-motion replays. In terms of the combat genre specifically, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (Electronic Arts, 2002) inserts the game player in a number of scenarios directly borrowed from sequences in *Ryan*. For instance, as the characters approach Omaha Beach in a Higgins Boat, a commanding officer’s voice is heard: “I’ll see you on the beach.” For Brooker, many combat FPS games aim to immerse players in a very specifically cinematic experience: “the experience not of being at war, but being in a war film.”

Indeed, the first *Medal of Honor* quite directly links itself to WW2 combat films. Not only do some of the game-play levels mimic *Ryan*, but the game was created by Steven Spielberg, with Dale Dye serving as military advisor and also contributing his voice to the training section of the game.

One of the most clear influences of combat films on FPS games is in the development of their visual presentation. Again, it is the level of detail in this visual display which strongly contributes to the sense of immersion and the reported realism. However, in this case it is by imitation of specific aspects of the cinema aesthetics which have themselves become associated with realism. For instance, *Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad* (Tripwire Interactive, 2011) has an optional mode designated “War Movie,” which has the effect of desaturating the colours to create a look that is clearly intended to be reminiscent of *Ryan*’s bleach bypass aesthetic. Brooker also points out that rather than presenting the player’s view through a human eye, FPS games, in fact, are displayed as if through a camera lens. For instance, many games include lens flares, fish-eye lens

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814 Ibid.  
815 Ibid., 125. Interestingly, for some viewers/players the association may flow in the other direction. As a secondary-school teacher in 2007 I had a senior student explain that they thought the combat scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* were realistic—his stated authority on the topic was that he had played *Call of Duty*.
distortion or rain droplets on the screen’s view. While this observation is certainly true, I think some of Brooker’s conclusions need to be refined. Arguably, the visual distortions add further information for the player to imagine the world of the game in more vivid detail. It should be remembered that “greater details” does not necessarily entail higher resolution and clearer imagery.

More importantly, there is more to be said regarding Brooker’s suggestion that the “smooth, steady view of gaming” is different to Hollywood’s usual attempts at first-person cinema in which the camera “shakes” and “blurs.” His examples of first-person cinema include Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), The Blair Witch Project and Cloverfield and one sequence from the movie-adaptation of Doom (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2005). While his point is generally accurate as it stands, it misses the point by not exhausting the relevant cinematic comparisons. In actual fact, the virtual camera of many contemporary video games quite faithfully recreates some of the key stylistic attributes of hand-held filming techniques used by post-1990s Hollywood in non-first person sequences. Even the first Doom game in the early 1990s had a bounciness to the vision when the player was moving. I presume this was meant to represent the character’s footsteps; however, as I showed in Chapter 4 this is an inaccurate representation as human vision does not bounce in this way. Rather, the actual effect of Doom’s bouncy view is to denote the kind of instability inherent in a camera mounted on the operator’s shoulder as they walk. Indeed, some recent third person shooter games

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816 Ibid., 126. I would add to this list the blood-on-the-lens effect identified in a number of contemporary WW2 combat films. However, in FPS the blood-on-the-lens is meant to be that of the player’s character. To be truly imitative of the cinema version of this effect the blood would need to be from another character and this is almost never the case in these games.

817 Ibid., 128.

818 He also refers to The Lady in the Lake. However, the highly stable first-person camera view in that film does not resemble the hand-held, blurry camerawork of his other examples. This is, of course, a clear iteration of the kind of critical oversight I detailed in Chapter 4.
push this to extremes. The hand-held effect in *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days* (IO Interactive, 2010) has the virtual camera bouncing wildly when the player’s character was running. While some reviewers praised the “stylish” presentation of the game, other players disliked the effect. The *Kane & Lynch 2* developers included the option to turn off the effect, as did the developers of the more recent *L.A. Noire* (Rockstar Games, 2011) in which the hand-held effect is much more tame.

This analysis has focused on some specific aspects of the aesthetic construction of FPS video games. While these techniques can be explained in terms of realistic motivation, there is of course more research to be conducted into the way game construction impacts on reported realism. For instance, do players consider it more or less realistic if they are able to save the game randomly or after long intervals? How are the details presented in the player’s “heads up display” related to their perception of realism?

### 5.3 Thesis overview

This research project was designed to answer three very specific research questions about the WW2 combat film genre:

1. For what reasons has existing film criticism ignored the stylistic analysis of these films?

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2. What are the specific norms of style (cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, editing and sound) used by the 1940s, an post-*Ryan* 2000s infantry combat films?

3. How relevant is the notion of realism to an analysis of *style* in the World War II combat film genre?

I identified some significant gaps in the existing literature on the genre of the World War II combat film. Without doubt, the academic study of these films has resulted in a substantial amount of knowledge of the genre’s themes and narrative conventions, as well as producing a large body of academic interpretations of the texts. My research, however, has shown that the dominant analyzes of WW2 combat films have tended to undertake symptomatic interpretation and governmental reflection. These approaches tend to focus on the social context and/or narratives of the films, at the expense of the textual characteristics which define the stylistic norms of the genre. As a result of this, film studies’ understanding of the style of these films is incomplete.

The clearest way to identify the significance of these issues is to direct them at Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*, which is sometimes assumed to have set a standard for contemporary war productions.\(^{820}\) In many respects it can be regarded as having similar stylistic characteristics to other contemporary combat films; however, in its most obvious techniques it is not stylistically normative at all.\(^{821}\) Although the desaturated colors of that film’s bleach-bypass process have become common in some other WW2 films there are many instances where that

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\(^{820}\) For a thorough overview of this assumption, see Chapter 2.

\(^{821}\) Basinger argues that the film is normative at level of narrative. See Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*: 253 – 262.
style is not used. More importantly, the hand-held style of *Ryan* is very specific. Spielberg’s camera moves frequently, usually following characters through the battlefield, but always moving into positions which frame salient pieces of action. This is not at all imitative of newsreel filming in combat conditions and is executed with a clearly different technique to the other combat films made since 1998. In Chapters 3 and 4, I proposed this style should be called controlled spontaneity, as it is designed to create the impression of a camera simply happening to catch unplanned, but crucial, moments of action during the battle. This impression is facilitated, and enhanced, by Spielberg’s extended shot duration during the combat sequences. Specifically, the average shot length during the two major battles in *Ryan* are 6.3 seconds at Omaha Beach, and 5.8 seconds in the climactic battle at Ramelle.

This camera and editing style is very unlike the combat films made during WW2 and in the post-*Ryan* 2000s. Firstly, the pace of editing of the 1940s and 2000s combat scenes are both much faster than *Ryan*’s battle sequences. The range of ASLs in the 1940s is 2.4 seconds (*Gung Ho!* to 4.6 seconds (*Wake Island*), whereas the range in the 2000s—excluding *Ryan*—is 2.0 seconds (*Enemy at the Gates*) to 3.4 seconds (*The Thin Red Line*). This kind of editing is strongly associated with the style of gunshot presentation in these films, an area in which *Ryan* again exhibits a distinctive approach. Whereas the dominant method of presenting a gunshot killing in both the 1940s and 2000s is to use shot/reverse-shot editing, *Ryan* typically presents the killings in a single frame. Additionally, the camera very often moves physically into a position just prior to the gunshot
which stages the killing in depth.\textsuperscript{822} This highly mobile nature of Ryan’s camera is also unique in comparison to the other combat films. While the dominant motivation for camera panning and physical movements in both eras of production is that of character motion on-screen, Spielberg physically moves his hand-held camera over a much greater distance and more often than do the other filmmakers. When the camera of other 2000s films physically moves to the extent of Ryan’s camera, it is usually achieved with a much more stable Steadicam style, as happens in parts of the combat in Enemy at the Gates and The Thin Red Line.

In Chapter 4 I advanced the argument that Ryan’s specific cinematography and editing techniques function not so much to create realism, but to create the effect of defamiliarization. The style is characterized by repeatedly presenting the shooter and victim in the same frame, continually placing the camera in positions which show particular scenes of violence, and frequently shunting the camera to create an irregular shakiness to the image. The sound-design of some of Ryan’s battles also defamiliarize viewers’ expectations of combat scenes by muting most of the soundtrack at particular moments. This technique, common to all of the 2000s films studied, is pushed to a much more extreme usage in Ryan and in that film it is often accompanied by the film’s most gruesome and graphic depictions of violence. I believe it is this defamiliarization that prompts the claims of realism attributed to Ryan by many popular reviewers and some academic critics.

Where Ryan’s style can be considered normative is in its conventional techniques of acting and performance. In Chapter 4 I showed that while the combat films of

\textsuperscript{822} As I showed in Chapter 3, other films do sometimes use this depth-staging approach for the killings, just as Ryan sometimes uses shot/reverse-shot editing.
the 1940s had significant input from military technical advisors, one of the key roles for military advisors in the contemporary films is to conduct short training sessions for the film’s actors. In these miniature boot-camps—which can last a number of weeks—the actors receive limited training in weapons use, some military tactics and terminology, as well as experience sleeping in a hooch and eating military-style rations. One of the key figures in this practice is Dale Dye—who claims that this process allows the actor to experience, to a very limited extent, some of the specific characteristics of military life which are, in his words, “antithetical” to civilian experience. While he acknowledges the importance of the physical and technical training, he emphasizes the mental experience of the boot-camps as their most important component. This practice is associated with the gradual dominance of the “Method” acting school from the late 1950s onwards, which emphasizes the actor’s life experience in similar emotional situations as the character is intended to enable a more truthful performance. However, my analysis of the observable characteristics of screen acting between the combat films of the 1940s and the 2000s shows that the physical aspects of performance deserve critical attention. I demonstrated in Chapter 4 that the dominant style of acting in the contemporary combat films is one distinguished by minor physical movements and nuanced movements.

This performance convention is also linked with an overall tendency of these films to become increasingly detailed and nuanced by the 2000s. In this conclusion chapter I have attempted to draw together the stylistic observations with cognitivist research on the imagination and mental simulation. While the existing cognitivist literature addresses important issues such as viewer empathy

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823 Dale Dye, interview with the author, February 8, 2011.
and engagement with the fiction, I have established a theory of how audiences (including academic critics) are able to regard the style of contemporary combat films as realistic. From such a cognitivist position, viewer engagement with the narrative fiction can be explained as an off-line mental simulation of those events depicted by the fiction. On the strength of the observations of film style in this thesis, I argue that at least part of the reason contemporary audiences regard recent WW2 combat films as realistic is because of the sheer quantity of visual and auditory detail the films offer. These hyper-detailed depictions may or may not be accurate to reality; however, the spectator’s imagination is able to use the details to simulate the fiction in great vividness. The final stage of my argument offered an analysis of first-person shooter video games, an adjacent genre which exhibits many similar stylistic characteristics to the combat films studied. While other commentators have certainly noted some of the obvious similarities between these two genres, I identified some subtle overlaps in their style. For instance, the increased detail in performance in the recent WW2 combat films is replicated to a great extent in the character animation in the recent video games, which are themselves increasingly regarded by reviewers as more realistic. These observations lend greater evidence to my argument that increased detail enables the imagination of viewer (or player) to run an off-line simulation of the film (or game) world.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has argued that many of the changes observed in the thesis have resulted in spectators regarding modern films as having a more realistic appearance than earlier WW2 combat films. In order to account for this I proposed the term “reported realism” as an alternative to existing theories of
realism. This term, derived from the Russian formalist notion of realistic motivation, describes the phenomenon that even a film which may not be realistic in some specific sense might come to be regarded by some viewers as “realistic.”

The chapter also indicated that the visible stylistic changes have a unique parallel in the development of FPS video games which show many similar developments of stylistic presentation as the films discussed in the dissertation. I then suggested a cognitivist account of reported realism in film and FPS video games based on Currie’s notion of the imagination and Grodal’s related idea of off-line mental simulations. This chapter argued that film realism is best understood as a viewing practice in which the spectator’s imagination is engaged via their use of the visual and auditory cues from the text. The more detailed these cues, the more nuanced the imaginative response and therefore the greater impression of realism, regardless of the relationship between these cues and their real world occurrences.

5.5 Future research

This thesis has undertaken an analysis of the stylistic norms of the WW2 combat film genre to examine how filmmakers in two distinct eras of production have approached the problem of depicting combat. The observations discussed throughout the analysis illustrate the problems of conducting interpretive work on the genre without an adequate understanding of the stylistic elements of cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, and sound. For practical reasons, the focus of this thesis has been limited to a group of mainstream—primarily American—films made during the 1940s and post-Ryan 2000s about WW2 infantry combat. At times, I have been able to comment on stylistic developments in other eras, such as the specific changes in actors performing death scenes in the
1970s. Such comments indicate a wide field for future research to examine the development and evolution of the norms I have identified between these two production contexts. Although the focus throughout has been on WW2 combat films, the analysis also suggests fruitful opportunities for research into adjacent genres such as the Vietnam combat film, Iraq/Afghanistan conflict films, as well as the contemporary action film genre.

The discussion through Chapters 3 and 4 has demonstrated the usefulness of this analytic approach in terms of understanding very specific aspects of film style. In short, this poetics could be described as paying close attention to how the films actually look and sound, rather than simply taking filmmakers at their word. Therefore, the methodology can be used to examine other stylistic problems. For instance, Chapter 3’s analysis of sound in the contemporary combat films, as well as Chapter 4’s discussion of performance styles, points towards similar issues in other film genres. The way that the human voice is treated by Ryan’s soundtrack shows that defamiliarization can create reported realism in ways that may not be expected. The same analysis could be turned toward dialogue in other contemporary films. For example, to what degree do contemporary films respect the vococentric practice Chion attributes to classical cinema? Are there particular genres, films, or filmmakers which do not follow the norms?

While I think it is definitely important that scholars continue to produce work operating within paradigms of narrative and ideological analysis, I hope that my research has strongly demonstrated the value of approaches which privilege close attention to style. Certainly, this research has involved such painstaking attention to the minutiae of the films that at times it has felt that little progress was being
made. However, the end result has produced some fascinating surprises in the material, as well as correcting some very significant issues in film studies’ understanding of the WW2 combat genre.
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Sunset Boulevard (Billy Wilder, 1950)
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Tears of the Sun (Antoine Fuqua, 2003)
Thin Red Line, The (Terrence Malick, 1998)
Three Kings (David O. Russell, 1999)
Throne of Blood (Akira Kurosawa, 1957)
Tigerland (Joel Schumacher, 2000)
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Tom Jones (Tony Richardson, 1963)
Too Late the Hero (Robert Aldrich, 1970)
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