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Repositorium für die Medienwissenschaft

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Philipps Universität Marburg

Migrations of Media Aesthetics: Anachronisms and Reflexivity in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO

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Published: January 28, 2021

Figure 1. ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005)

1. Introduction

The enduring appeal of war films is generally attributed to their potential to make the horror and spectacle of war available to sensuous experience. These films' depictions of war are based on a number of conventions designed to create an impression of credibility and authenticity. One convention that has been especially common since the early 1990s is to use the aesthetics of contemporary news and documentary media — newsreels, TV footage, or,

more recently, online formats — to mark the audiovisually configured world as historical. War films also possess enormous immersive and empathy-arousing potential. As an "illusion machine," cinema produces experiences that make us feel as though "war is being represented 'the way it really is'."[1] But it is not war films' accurate reproduction of reality that makes them so intuitively persuasive for us, but their audiovisual figuration.[2] Roland Barthes's noema of photography, "that-has-been",[3] converges here with the "improbable probability" from Frank Ankersmit's theory of historical experience[4] We know that the fiction film is only simulating the depicted history, and yet we feel differently: "'It can't be so!,' and yet "It must be so'."[5] However, by contrast with Barthes, who admits to having conflated "truth and reality in a unique emotion"[6] under the effect of the punctum of a photograph, the historical experience that we have while watching a war film remains fictional. The false inference that leads us to believe that a photograph's referent really existed is replaced by the presence of the film itself. The war film itself becomes a form of historical experience, in a manner very similar to Béla Balázs's description of the effect of "absolute film":

> *What matters […] is merely the optical impression, not the reality represented. Objects lose their substance here because what the films value is appearance. The image itself is the reality that is experienced.[7]*

This is especially evident in the case of war films, whose audiovisual figurations have assumed a metonymic character in popular conceptions of war.

In order to develop a theoretical account of the role of media aesthetics in strategies to create an impression of

1. Manuel Köppen, *Das Entsetzen des Beobachters: Krieg und Medien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), 356.

2. Cf. Gertrud Koch's argument that it is precisely the constructed, self-contained character of a historical film's "cosmos of signs" that makes it so immersive (Gertrud Koch, "Nachstellungen: Film und historischer Moment," in *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, ed. Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2003), 225). I believe this claim can also be extended to war films.

3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.

4. Frank Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2012), 43.

5. Ibid.

6. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 77.

7. Béla Balázs, "The Spirit of Film," in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, ed. Erica Carter (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 160.

authenticity and sensuous experience, I shall trace the various stages of mediatization in the Argentinian war film ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005). In this film, I shall argue, historical references are combined with an anachronistic media aesthetic. The film's plot follows a familiar schema: When a friend he served with in the Falklands War goes into a coma after an overdose, the main character (a journalist named Esteban) begins to confront his own memories of the war. In a series of extended flashbacks, we see the grueling daily routine of young, completely unprepared Argentinian soldiers deployed on the Falkland Islands. As is typical in postclassical war films, the focus is not on completing a mission but simply on the struggle for survival.[8] The migration of media aesthetics[9] is combined with a hybridization of genres, in which the war film genre is fused with typical elements of film noir such as trauma, memory, guilt, and redemption[10] This essay will therefore consider aspects of Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma (2013). It also draws on Vivian Sobchack's ideas about embodied film experience (1992), Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory (2004), and Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory (2012).

2. War Films and Media Aesthetics

My argument in this essay proceeds from the observation that the audiovisual design of many war films is based on the audiovisual representation of conflicts in news and documentary media. The technical and aesthetic features of emblematic photographs and shots from documentaries migrate into filmic depictions of historical events, thereby also narrativizing their media presence[11] Thomas Elsaesser speaks of the "performativity of certain public images," which are interrogated and reworked

8. see Elsaesser, Thomas. "Saving Private Ryan: Retrospektion, Überlebensschuld und affektives Gedächtnis," in *Mobilisierung der Sinne: Der Hollywood-Kriegsfilm zwischen Genrekino und Historie*, ed. Hermann Kappelhoff, David Gaertner, and Cilli Pogodda (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2013), 70.

9. On the concept of migration in relation to film and history, see also Delia González de Reufels, "Image Migration and History: The End of the Chilean Military Dictatorship in Pablo Larraín's Feature Film NO!," Research in Film and History, no. 1 (November 2018): 1–12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14793.

10. see Elsaesser, "Saving Private Ryan," 72.

11. Ibid., 62.

in fiction films.[12] The resulting new context gives rise to a peculiar ontological status "that transcends the normal distinction between reality and fiction without constituting a special 'truth' (the frequently invoked, oft-denounced notion of photographic indexicality) or new ontology of the real (like Baudrillard's 'copy with no original')"[13] Although this development began with films about the Vietnam War, which sought an aesthetic equivalent to contemporary television experience,[14] it was popularized above all by a film about the Second World War: In SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (1998), Steven Spielberg produced a "traumatic" media memory by recreating photographs taken by war correspondents such as Robert Capa during the Allied landing on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.[15] As well as photos and newsreels from the Second World War, the film's spectator experience also incorporates the "live effect"[16] of TV news coverage of the Vietnam War. We shall return to these sorts of anachronistic constellations from another perspective later on.

Recreations of contemporary media aesthetics like in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN make use, first and foremost, of the referential realism of archive material. ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO likewise establishes the connection to the Falklands War using famous archive footage from contemporary television news and later documentaries, including shots of a British aircraft carrier and political figures like Margaret Thatcher and Leopoldo Galtieri. Jamie Baron describes the "archive effect" evoked by such images, a feeling of the immediate presence of history that arouses the desire to make direct, affective contact with the past[17] The archive effect is fueled by our yearning for the past, and thus inseparably bound up with nostalgia. According to Baron, the audiovisual

12. see Elsaesser, "Saving Private Ryan," 62.

13. Ibid.; Baudrillard himself writes: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal." (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.)

14. see Köppen, *Das Entsetzen des Beobachters*, 362.

15. Elsaesser, "Saving Private Ryan," 74.

16. Köppen, *Das Entsetzen des Beobachters*, 362.

17. Jamie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014), 12–13.

evocation of history causes us to feel a "shudder" of awareness that "is deeply entwined with historical desire, the desire to know and/or 'experience' history, to make present what is by definition absent — the past — when all we have left are its fragments"[18] In popular conceptions of history, actual historical events can be replaced by sensuously experienceable media figurations of the past. As Eelco Runia would put it, they are no longer a metaphor for past events, but a metonym:

> *For Runia, unlike the metaphor (which is concerned with a "transfer of meaning") the metonym is concerned with a "transfer of presence" […]. In other words, the metonym, like the archive effect, produces a sense of disparity.[19]*

If the shift from metaphor to metonym means the transfer of meaning is replaced by a transfer of presence, then the use of archive material makes the paradoxical aspect of history, which is simultaneously present and absent, sensuously available to us.[20]

However, Baron also notes that the archive effect should not be considered in isolation, but rather is dependent on the interaction between film and spectator.[21] The effect can bring us uniquely close to the past, but could equally well be perceived as an artificial insertion or interruption. Koch attributes this heterogeneous effect to the dissonance between the archival material and the film in which it is inserted:

> *The film spectator regards as real above all anything that gives the impression of reality; by contrast, they will not be very impressed by anything that disrupts, rather than conforms to, the medium's illusory character.[22]*

18. Baron, *The Archive Effect*, 123.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 124.

21. Ibid., 174.

22. Gertrud Koch, "Nachstellungen: Film und historischer Moment," in *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, ed. E. Hohenberger and J. Keilbach (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2003), 223.

Through its interaction with the fiction film's immersively lived spatiotemporal structure, the archival material develops a hybrid character. Integrating the material into the film's audiovisual fabric and narrative logic allows it to fuse with the film. But at the same time it remains to some degree a foreign body that can sometimes disrupt the living, immersive encounter with the film. The experience of a difference between the archive material and the mostly coherent world of the fiction film thus also possesses a reflexive potential, something which ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO explores right from the start. On his first appearance, the journalist Esteban is shown in the role of a director. During a demonstration against the Argentinean government's economic policy in the early 2000s, he guides a TV camera through the crowd, in a sequence shot in a "shaky cam" aesthetic. After conducting a few interviews, Esteban turns directly to the TV audience and verbally identifies the setting as Buenos Aires. This scene highlights the artificially constructed nature of media images and archive footage, which are based on individual decisions and so only afford a subjective perspective on events.

The audiovisual strategies of ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO thus go far beyond a mere archive effect; the aesthetic experience connected to the reception of archive material is brought to our awareness, made tangible. By depicting the TV images of the Falklands War as popular forms of memory and emphasizing their mediated character, the film reveals its potential for media reflexivity. When Esteban sees his friend Alberto being wheeled into the emergency room, the film cuts to a first flashback showing the friends during the war. Cross-faded close-ups of soldiers are shown in a visually distorted, TV-style aesthetic: blurred, overexposed, bulging like a

television screen (figure 2). Thus, even the protagonists' fragmented, traumatic memories adopt the aesthetic of popular media depictions of war. The TV images are not just presented as metonyms for the Falklands War, but also emphatically marked out as media products by the pronounced TV screen aesthetic, the manipulated playback speed (the soldiers move in slow motion), and a dramatic score verging on pathos.

Figure 2. Memories in a TV aesthetic: the use of flashbacks in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005). For the video, please see the online version of this artcile.

Media images also serve as a catalyst for memory at a narrative level. Another flashback is introduced by a sequence in which Esteban is shown watching television in bed. This time, the picture quality is crisp and high-resolution. Argentinian soldiers are assembled on an airfield, waiting to be flown to the Falklands. Esteban is desperately trying to telephone his mother, until he is suddenly interrupted by an NCO. This personal recollection is immediately followed by TV footage evoking the popular memory of the Falklands War, starting with flickering, faded, low-resolution clips of a defiant speech by President Galtieri. The film then cuts to Esteban attentively watching the footage, reverting as it does so to a crisp, high-resolution picture quality. The

first flashback, which suggested that TV images had superimposed themselves over his own memories, has apparently prompted Esteban to revisit the past. Together, we and the film's protagonist watch grainy archive footage, some of which has been blown up from the original material: iconic media clips of Argentinian soldiers, Harrier fighter jets, and saluting junta officers. Initially, they are shown as a reflection on Esteban's glasses, before the film cuts to a full-screen montage (figure 3). The next shot, in which we peer directly at the TV screen through one lens of his glasses, helps the audience to identify more closely with Esteban. TV sequences showing Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and, once again, the aircraft carrier are accompanied by a somber score with thunderous percussion and voice-overs analyzing the historical events from Argentinian and British perspectives. At the end of the sequence, we see Esteban sitting with an editor at a video editing desk, emphasizing the constructed, mediated nature of this representation of the Falklands War and the typical documentary conventions it employs.

Figure 3. Iconic TV images and close identification with the protagonist: the representation of media memory in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005). For the video, please see the online version of this artcile.

On my interpretation, the film begins by replicating a few iconic television images of the Falklands War, before proceeding to deconstruct them and reveal them to be

a mediated, second-order perspective. Let us briefly digress and consider Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology of film experience, which is likewise based around a dual structure of seeing and being seen.[23] Sobchack understands film as simultaneously a visible object — a world of film images — and a subject that has its own point of view on the world.[24] As spectators, we simultaneously perceive these film images as a filmic world and as an intentional perspective on this world. The film constructs, as Thomas Morsch puts it, "a visible visual relation between an embodied eye and the sensuous world, and mediates this relation in the form of cinematic expression as an experience for the spectator".[25] According to Sobchack, while film, like photography, objectifies "the subjectivity of the visual into the visible," the cinematic

> *qualitatively transforms the photographic through a materiality that not only claims the world and others as objects for vision (whether moving or static) but also signifies its own materialized agency, intentionality, and subjectivity.[26]*

However, Morsch argues, the intentionality of the film and that of the spectator are not identical; the film's perceptive practice is understood as being like mine but not as mine[27] It is at this fault line that the medium's reflexive potential lies. ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO provides an illustration of this for the historical film genre. By first invoking the metonymic qualities of media representations of the Falklands War and then deconstructing them, the film shows popular memory to be mediated. While initially we accept the flashbacks as part of the filmic world, the emphasis on the specific TV aesthetic prompts us not just to analyze the filmic perspective on this world, but also to question our own perspective, both on the filmic world and on the film's perspective on this world.

23. The term "seeing" should be understood here as synonymous with the film's perception, which also includes hearing.

24. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 21–22.

25. Thomas Morsch, *Medienästhetik des Films: Verkörperte Wahrnehmung und ästhetische Erfahrung im Kino* (Munich: Fink, 2011), 183–184.

26. Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence'," in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, 88–128. Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016. https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/.

27. Morsch, *Medienästhetik des Films*, 178.

The archive effect that originally served as a marker of authenticity is revealed to be a construction. This casts doubt on the reliability of Esteban's flashbacks and memories, as they too appear to be based on media fragments. Another strategy is therefore needed to create the illusion of a faithful depiction of the past. As I shall show, this gap is filled by an even more significant migration of media aesthetics, based on anachronisms of a distinctively filmic kind.

3. Anachronisms and Meta-Migrations

Like many other war films, ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO switches back and forth between multiple periods of time. While the framing narrative is set in the early 2000s, there are extended flashbacks to the Falklands War in the early 1980s. But even before the first shot of the film fades in, the two periods are linked together at the auditory level. The film begins with the sound of gunfire, a clear reference to the war, which then merges into the noise of a demonstration. A first anachronistic connection is thus drawn, between the trauma of the Falklands War and Argentina's bankruptcy in the early 2000s. Anachronisms of this sort are common in historical films. The term "anachronism" refers here not just to cases where a film shows or mentions objects that do not seem to "fit" the depicted period, but also to specific filmic strategies. André Wendler describes anachronisms in this latter sense as the "engine of filmic historiography",[28] which the spectator is able to sensuously experience. Wendler's argument draws in part on Siegfried Kracauer's unfinished *History – the Last Things Before the Last*,[29] in which chronological historical time is replaced by a juxtaposition of asynchronous elements.[30] The resulting disparity prompts the spectator to adopt an analytic

28. André Wendler, *Anachronismen: Historiografie und Kino* (Paderborn: Fink, 2014), 304.

29. Siegfried Kracauer, *History – the Last Things Before the Last* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995).

30. Wendler, *Anachronismen*, 338.

perspective as they watch a film, asking how and why these anachronisms occur and what functions they serve.[31] Anachronisms thus also develop a self-reflexive potential:

> *Anachronistic cinematic objects, like the canvas in the first shot of Caravaggio, which constantly oscillates between painter's ground and cinema screen, between the years 1600 and 1986, between visibility and concealment, are the sites of historiographic knowledge production in the age of cinema.*[32]

Wendler describes how, within the shot, the historical period when the film is set anachronistically overlaps with the time when it was made. Phenomenological approaches to film add a third temporal layer, namely the time when the film is watched by the spectator, for it is only in the moment of screening and reception that the film image is manifested as a performative practice that can be sensuously experienced and interpreted.

The migration of media aesthetics from news and documentary formats to fiction films likewise gives rise to anachronisms, with the overlapping and interlinking of different times sometimes encompassing multiple historical periods. As already noted, the first flashbacks in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO are modeled on the media aesthetic of contemporary TV news, while the subsequent, extended flashbacks use an audiovisual design established by war films like SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. What we have here is a meta-migration: The media aesthetic of the Second World War migrates beyond the bounds of that particular period into the depiction of a completely different war that took place many years later. When he visits his comatose friend Alberto at the hospital, Esteban begins to remember. The

flashback begins with a long, sedate pan. We see Esteban as a young soldier, staring out to sea. The desaturated, green-tinged color palette, the grainy, high-contrast picture quality, the image composition, even the uniform and the helmet, strongly recall Spielberg's D-Day aesthetic (figs. 4–5), and promise an authentic look back at the past. This promise is reinforced at the referential level when the text "Malvinas, Mayo 1982" appears on the screen, situating the action in a specific time and place. There then follow more iconic shots of soldiers crawling out of dugouts, drinking from simple tin cups, and marching in a long file in the background. The composition and imagery are, again, strongly reminiscent of films like SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, and hence also, through a process of meta-migration, of photographs and newsreel footage from the Second World War.

Figures 4–5. Migration of media aesthetics: D-Day and the Falklands War in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005) (top) and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (Steven Spielberg 1998) (above)

Dramaturgically, it is notable that both SAVING PRIVATE RYAN's and ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO's war sequences are flashbacks that are marked as subjective memories right from the outset. The films are thus, strictly speaking, not attempting to authentically visualize the wars themselves, but rather the memories of these wars, onto which the above-described media aesthetic is projected. The sequences in the framing narrative, to which ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO continually cuts back, are clearly differentiated: The colors are more saturated, while the camera acts more like a detached observer. This contrast reinforces the effect of the anachronistic media aesthetic used to depict the war, whose referential link to the Second World War recedes into the background.

Only rarely do we become aware of the anachronism. Surprisingly, in the scene where this happens most forcefully it is not the WWII media aesthetic that seems anachronistic, but the contemporary military equipment. While Esteban, Alberto, and other Argentinian soldiers stationed on the Falklands are lined up for roll call, they are attacked by a British Harrier jet (fig. 6).[33] Although we are aware that the period being depicted here is the Falklands War, which took place in the 1980s, the aesthetic design invites a mode of reception that takes the Second World War as its point of reference. The attack by the third-generation fighter jet thus feels like an unexpected collision with modern war. At the narrative level, this escalation reinforces the technological superiority of the British forces, while the Argentinian soldiers look as if they have come straight out of a film about the Second World War. In the interplay between historical reference and filmic convention, the impression of perceptual authenticity overrides any doubts about historical

33. Although Hawker Siddeley Harrier fighter jets first entered service in 1969, it was only with media coverage of the Falklands War that they gained their iconic status ("A Modern Military Icon," *BBC Magazine*, October 20, 2010, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-11584481.

accuracy. In other words, the epistemically unclear character of the aesthetic and images deployed by the film furnishes them, as Elsaesser puts it, "with a unique power capable of creating a new kind of authenticity in and on behalf of the cinema in which they feature."[34] The associated emotion, a "vague but strong" feeling[35] similar to Barthes's "reality effect",[36] is manifested with particular intensity if we believe we recognize elements of earlier (film) experiences.[37] Films like SAVING PRIVATE RYAN thus function as an archive of hyperreal "histospheres",[38] on which ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO draws.[39] The resulting meta-migrations sometimes involve multiple layers of media aesthetics, not merely reproducing the Second World War aesthetic but also refiguring and updating it. The audiovisual parameters of historical photography and newsreels are combined with the restless, live-action character of late 90s war films. Hectic, handheld shots in extreme close-up, three-dimensional soundscapes, and the use of special effects create an immersive "movie ride aesthetic"[40] that thrusts us into the middle of the action. These specific cinematic conventions for depicting the Second World War also migrate into films like ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO, resulting in complex aesthetic constructs composed of interwoven, interfused levels of filmic and extra-filmic history.

Figure 6. Attack of the Harrier jet in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005). For the video, please see the online version of this artcile.

34. Thomas Elsaesser, "Saving Private Ryan," 62.

35. Christian Metz, cited in Margrit Tröhler and Guido Kirsten (eds.), *Christian Metz and the Codes of Cinema: Film Semiology and Beyond* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 31.

36. Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 148.

37. According to Barthes, the reality effect is produced by signification of "the real" in which "the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism." (Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 148.)

38. Rasmus Greiner, *Histospheres: Zur Theorie und Praxis des Geschichtsfilms* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2020), 91.

39. This idea is based on Baudrillard's thesis that cinema has contributed to the disappearance of history and rise of the archive. (Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 48.)

40. Robin Curtis, Christiane Voss "Fielding und die movie-ride-Ästhetik: Vom Realismus zur Kinesis," *montage AV* 17, no. 2 (2008): 11–15.

At the end of the film, we see faded archive footage of the Argentinian forces' abandoned equipment, destroyed military vehicles, and prisoners of war with dirty uniforms and haggard faces. In a voice-over, Esteban delivers his bitter assessment. The stance taken here reveals an anachronism at the level of political meaning-making too. Analogously to the meta-migration of the media aesthetic, the film adopts the (primarily US American) reading of the Second World War as a "good war".[41] Although ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO depicts the Falklands War in the idiom of an antiwar film — in the battle sequence, for instance, shots of torn-off limbs and the subjective perspective highlight the existential threat of war — Argentina's political claim to the Falklands and attempt to take them by force are never questioned. The meta-migration of the media aesthetic is thus accompanied by political meaning-making that functions in the typical manner of a Hollywood war film: "the mobilization of a feeling, shared by many individuals, of belonging to a political community"[42] If, as Hermann Kappelhoff puts it, this feeling structures "emotional judgments and attitudes regarding moral and political matters",[43] then the cut to Esteban's friend Alberto dying in hospital at the end of ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO not only creates the impression of the referential authenticity of the archive material that is used, but also links it to the fictional story in a way that creates political meaning: a meta-migration that further expands the close relation that already exists between (media) aesthetic and political meaning-making.

4. Referentiality and Prosthetic Memory

Our memories of modern wars are primarily shaped by filmic representations. These memories are then in

41. On the concept of the "good war," and the way the myth of the good war is perpetuated by fictional films, see Sebastian Haak, *The Making of the Good War: Hollywood, das Pentagon und die amerikanische Deutung des Zweiten Weltkriegs 1945–1962* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013) and Studs Terkel, *"Der gute Krieg": Amerika im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Zeitzeugen sprechen* (Munich: Schneekluth, 1989).

42. Hermann Kappelhoff, "Affektmobilisierung und mediale Kriegsinszenierung," in *Sprachen der Emotion: Kultur, Kunst, Gesellschaft*, ed. G. Gebauer and M. Edler, (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014), 248.

43. Ibid.

turn addressed by other films, so that their depictions of war come to feel like our own sensuous (film) experiences. Alison Landsberg devised the concept of "prosthetic memory" to describe this phenomenon.[44] She likens these media-induced memories to artificial limbs.[45] Similar ideas have also been expressed by media theorists. Marshall McLuhan argues that the human body responds to media overstimulation by narcosis or even amputation of the sensory organs, which are then projected onto technical extensions.[46] On this theory, the prosthetic memories induced by films would not just be artificial memories of things the spectator themselves did not experience, but also part of this projection. Sobchack's objection that prosthetics always remain a foreign body that cause the human beings who use them to "disappear into the background"[47] can be countered by thinking of prosthetic memory as analogous to the enervated artificial body parts of a cyborg.[48] As media extensions, they attempt to balance out the deformations generated by a film, while simultaneously constituting just such a deformation themselves.[49] Landsberg notes that the concept has been intimately interwoven with the process of commodification since the early twentieth century, which "enables the transmission of memories to people who have no 'natural' or biological claims to them".[50] Although there are legitimate criticisms to be made about the commodification of popular films, they do allow viewers to develop a ubiquitous historical consciousness based on prosthetic memory.[51] Media depictions of historical worlds make history accessible to wider audiences and enable closer identification by allowing spectators to recall historical events as if they were their own personal, sensuous experiences. Landsberg explains that "the technologies of mass culture" in modern democracies transform memories

44. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

45. Ibid., 20; This also marks a point of connection between Landsberg's work and Marshall McLuhan's media theory, which defines media as extensions of the human body (Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 2010).

46. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

47. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 211.

48. Sobchack criticizes approaches that use the concept of prosthetics for being reductive and simplistic, and largely leaving the people (amputees) who actually use prosthetics out of the picture: "As an effect of the prosthetic's amputation and displacement from its mundane context, the animate and volitional human beings who use prosthetic technology disappear into the background – passive, if not completely invisible – and the prosthetic is seen to have a will and life of its own." (Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 211.)

49. Lars Nowak, *Deformation und Transdifferenz: Freak Show, frühes Kino, Tod Browning* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2011), 43.

50. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 18.

51. Ibid.

into a "portable, fluid, and nonessentialist" good that blurs the boundaries between personal and collective memory.[52]

Landsberg's theory is relevant to the fight scene in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO at a number of levels. The night-time clash with British troops begins with a tracking shot. From a bird's-eye perspective, we see dead and wounded soldiers. Even before the focus shifts to the fighting itself, we can already hear the noise of battle. Esteban crouches down next to the dead and injured, illuminated by the light of exploding shells. In the background, Argentinian soldiers are retreating under heavy fire. The apocalyptic atmosphere is reinforced by the somber score. Dramaturgically, the scene is an inversion of the Omaha Beach scene in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN; in this film, the protagonists are not the liberators, but the occupiers on the losing side of the battle. The anachronism is presented with dynamic shaky cam shots and extreme close-ups that prevent the spectator from getting their bearings, and utilize the same aesthetic strategies as the famous sequence in Spielberg's film. The camera's gaze catches fleeting glimpses of screaming, heavily wounded soldiers with torn-off limbs, while to begin with the only sign of the enemy is the muzzle flashes of their guns. Even later, when the British soldiers overrun the Argentinian position, they remain almost invisible: indistinct forms shot in extreme close-up.

Although SAVING PRIVATE RYAN serves in this scene as as a universally valid expression of war, ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO does also use iconic images from the First World War in certain shots and situations. From the over-the-shoulder perspective

of the machine gunner to the claustrophobic confines of a dugout shaken by artillery bombardments, there are numerous carefully composed callbacks to Lewis Milestone's ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT (1930). These include the only scene where the enemy is given a face: As in Milestone's trench warfare epic, an enemy soldier suddenly runs up to the protagonist. Like his French counterpart in the earlier film, the British soldier looks friendly rather than threatening, but Esteban pulls the trigger and kills him anyway, just like ALL QUIET's Paul Bäumer.

Despite these references to earlier filmic depictions of war, the 90s war film remains the clearest point of reference. By drawing on its multi-immersive aesthetic (which has the status of a prosthetic memory), the war film genre has emancipated itself from the images of war reporting. The experience of battle is made sensuously available. We can already see this tendency in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, which imitates historical newsreel shots "while at the same time cinematically surpassing them".[53] The same thing happens with the archival footage in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO. In our memory, the war film aesthetic displaces the intuitively persuasive referentiality of the archival footage. According to Köppen, "the old medium of cinema has become increasingly responsible for simulating the experiences merely promised by the news broadcasters' electronic media;"[54] it delivers on this promise by addressing the prosthetic memories formed by films such as SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. Ironically, this is achieved using an aesthetic that, thanks to an anachronistic meta-migration, is modeled on the look of earlier news and documentary media. ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO also harnesses the prosthetic memory

53. Köppen, *Das Entsetzen des Beobachters*, 363.

54. Ibid.

effect by borrowing dramaturgical elements. Like in Spielberg's epic, the protagonist looks back from the diegetic present to his personal wartime experience. Bauer`s film thus makes use of a powerful narrative associated with a certain tone and symbolic locations such as war cemeteries. However, this is not enough by itself to explain the great power of prosthetic memories in war films; we must also consider aspects of embodied film experience. I turn to this topic in the next section.

5. Embodied Experience and Postmemory

Modern war films affect spectators in a direct, visceral way. Building on Sobchack's phenomenological thesis that all films should be understood as an "expression of experience by experience",[55] Robin Curtis explores how the experience of war images can bring the spectator visually and viscerally closer to the film.[56] She observes a shift in attention from the representative qualities of the image to its surface, "for only thus are the haptic (or kinaesthetic or proprioceptive) qualities accentuated and does the reception of the film become a uniquely physical affair".[57] War films can thus be understood as a body genre, like melodramas, horror movies or porn films: The exhibition and destruction of the human body, the palpable physical presence of the camera's gaze, and the audiovisual excess of moving stimuli trigger physical reactions with particular intensity, not least through the use of "images that can only be seen or experienced by someone who is about to die or already dead".[58]

In ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO, the audiovisual production of an embodied war experience serves as a counterpole to the disembodied media images at the start of the film (fig. 7). The similarity to

55. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3; Elsaesser speaks in this connection of an "affective turn," which in film and cultural studies has led to "cinema no longer being viewed as a text to be read but as an event to be experienced, which some argue has brought about a revival of the cinema of attractions." (Elsaesser „Saving Private Ryan," 71–72.)

56. Robin Curtis, "Embedded Images: Der Kriegsfilm als viszerale Erfahrung," *Nach dem Film*, no. 7 (2009). https://www.nachdemfilm.de/issues/text/embedded-images.

57. Ibid.

58. Elsaesser, „Saving Private Ryan," 71.

Spielberg's visceral aesthetic strategies is especially evident when an explosion knocks Esteban to the ground during the night-time skirmish. Esteban's temporary loss of hearing is simulated by the sound: His breath sounds distorted, as if he were breathing through a plastic tube, while all other noises sound muted and far away. The subjectivized sound merges the "film's body" with the protagonist's body, so that we too are able, at least to a certain extent, to perceive the war as an embodied experience.[59] These experiences are especially intense if they give us a strong sense of immediacy, of the battle taking place "now".[60] The anachronistic use of the media aesthetic of war films like SAVING PRIVATE RYAN also activates memories of earlier bodily experiences that we had while watching those films (fig. 8).

59. Although this strategy was already used in films like the Soviet masterpiece COME AND SEE (Elem Germanovich Klimov 1985), it was popularized above all by the Omaha Beach sequence in SAVING PRIVATE RYAN.

60. See Elsaesser, "Saving Private Ryan," 63.

Figure 7–8. The "now" of combat: visceral aesthetic strategies in ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO (Tristán Bauer 2005) and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (Steven Spielberg 1998)

The film draws on two modes of memory at once: a reflective, historicizing form (which above I linked to the concept of prosthetic memory) and a prereflective, embodied one, which is similar in certain respects to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory." In a study of descendants of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch showed that even members of the "generation after" can "remember" the "personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" even though they know them only through "the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up".[61] She continues,

> But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.[62]

This point is also relevant to war films, though they rely on the medium's sensuous, immersive, empathy-arousing potential rather than an embodied narrative performance by parents handing down memories to the next generation. The film's historical world is linked to the spectator's own embodied recollections and emotional memory.[63] Haptic and tactile experiences occupy a privileged position in this process. Imaginative empathy with the film's gaze and the experience of a cinematic subject are again consonant with Sobchack's phenomenological theory of a doubled address to the spectator.[64] This process of subjectivation and fictionalization is also reflected at the visual aesthetic level, where there comes to be less focus on the experiences of contemporaries and archival footage, and more on their far more popular fictional recreations. Film scholar Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann observes with regard to

61. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

62. Ibid.

63. This affirms the comparison drawn by Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann between, on the one hand, the emblematic character, repetition, and production of affect by postmemory and, on the other, "the function of stereotypes in structures of film experience." (Tobias Ebbrecht, "Sekundäre Erinnerungsbilder: Visuelle Stereotypenbildung in Filmen über Holocaust und National-sozialismus seit den 1990er Jahren," in *Medien – Zeit – Zeichen: Beiträge des 19. Film- und Fernsehwissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums*, ed. C. Hissnauer and A. Jahn-Sudmann (Marburg: Schüren, 2007), 40.)

64. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 23.

depictions of the Holocaust and National Socialism that "since the early 1990s, a visual aesthetic has increasingly emerged that no longer relates directly to historical events but rather to the media images and narratives of those events that have been handed down".[65] Analogously, a specific war film aesthetic developed in this period that not only created new genre conventions but also, through the migration of media aesthetics, forged referential links to history. Moreover, the multi-immersive war films that emerged in the 1990s have established certain embodied experiences as hallmarks of the genre, using aesthetic devices such as frenzied, dynamically moving handheld shots, the roar of projectiles soaring through the air blasting out in surround sound, and an intimate, subjectivizing focus on the protagonists' suffering bodies. The use of these devices in later films, like ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO, not only provokes physical reactions (vertigo, increased heart rate, nausea) but also triggers memories of watching earlier, stylistically similar films.

These ideas can be productively combined with Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory. While the postmemories activated by watching a film relate to sensuously lived film experiences, as prosthetic memories these experiences also make reference to the underlying historical events. Embodied memories and historical referentialization combine into prosthetic postmemory, which allows us to physically appropriate the represented events and recall them as our own lived (film) experiences.[66] One especially effective strategy for creating such impressions is to use iconic media images, like those of the Falklands War at the start of ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO, or specific aesthetic strategies involving a meta-migration of media aesthetics. These reminiscence triggers seek to produce a feeling of maximum possible

65. Ebbrecht, "Sekundäre Erinnerungsbilder," 38.

66. See Greiner, *Histospheres*, 169–175.

similarity between the film image and the spectator's memory, so that in the moment of perception the spectator has the impression of "false recognition".[67] The more strongly the film's immersive potential fuses the spectator's point of view with that of the film on the historical world it has simulated, the more likely this is to elicit a déjà vu effect. Connecting to the spectator's embodied memories not only enables a concrete relationship to the world, but also transforms the aesthetic film experience into a historical experience.[68]

6. Trauma and Therapy

In the context of war, one especially relevant combination of sensuous experience and embodied memory is trauma.[69] As long ago as 1893, Freud observed a "complete analogy between traumatic paralysis and common, non-traumatic hysteria," from which he inferred the existence of psychic trauma correlated with physical experiences and symptoms.[70] The flashbacks at the start of ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO can, accordingly, also be understood as "intrusive, painful memories of trauma," which often take the form of "sudden flashes of remembered images".[71] The film sequence's striking TV aesthetic draws attention to the close interrelationship between depictions of war in audiovisual media and research on individual and social trauma resulting from war and violence. There is even evidence suggesting that the medium of film has significantly influenced the specific form that trauma takes. Studies have found that historical records of war trauma before the invention of film make no reference to visual flashbacks.[72] A significant rise was only observable after the two world wars, with a further marked increase in recent decades:

67. Ibid., 175–181.

68. Greiner, *Histospheres*, 175–181.

69. Andreas Maercker and Anke Karl define trauma as follows: "An event, either directly and personally experienced or indirectly observed, that poses an acute threat to life, health, and physical integrity." (Andreas Maercker, Anke Karl, "Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung," in *Lehrbuch Klinische Psychologie – Psychotherapie*, ed. M. Perrez and U. Baumann (Bern: Huber, 2011), 970.)

70. Sigmund Freud, *On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena* (n.p.: Read Books, 2013), 9.

71. Maercker and Karl, "Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung," 972.

72. Ibid., 983.

The authors attribute this rise to the gradual development of an "image and film culture" in the twentieth century, in which the use of flashback-like cutbacks and dissolves as dramatic devices is familiar from film and television and possibly affects the presentation of individual memory. The authors conclude that the extent and form of PTSD symptoms may be phenotypically influenced by these cultural processes.[73]

Filmic depictions affect the way we mentally process war, and hence also the form of psychological trauma. It would thus appear that the migration of media aesthetics occurs not just between films, but also at a deeper psychological level.

Links can also be identified between films and trauma therapy. Again, we can refer to Freud to understand the significance of war films for our understanding of posttraumatic stress disorders:

Someone has experienced a psychical trauma without reacting to it sufficiently. We get him to experience it a second time, but under hypnosis; and we now compel him to complete his reaction to it. He can then get rid of the idea's affect, which was so to say "strangulated," and when this is done, the operation of the idea is brought to an end. Thus we cure — not hysteria but some of its individual symptoms — by causing an unaccomplished reaction to be completed.[74]

Psychoanalytic film theories understand the process of film reception as similar to hypnosis, though with certain clear caveats. Christian Metz notes a particular similarity to daydreams:

Just as the spectator knows that he is watching a film, the daydream knows that it is a daydream. Regression is exhausted

73. Maercker and Karl, "Posttraumatische Belastungsstörung," 983.

74. Freud, *On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*, 20.

in both cases before reaching the perceptual agency; the subject does not confuse the images with perceptions, but clearly maintains their status as images: mental representations in the daydream, and in the film representation of a fictional world through real perceptions.[75]

On this view, while watching a historical film we remain certain that the film's historical world is merely an artificial construction, a function of filmic figuration. This certainty — and this is Metz's second thesis — can, however, be overridden in moments of exceptionally intense affective involvement by a temporary state of "paradoxical hallucination" akin to the "brief and quickly passing dizziness that drivers feel towards the end of a long night journey".[76] Metz considers film to be one such journey:

In the two situations, when [...] the brief psychical giddiness [...] ends, the subject not coincidentally has the feeling of "waking up": this is because he has furtively engaged in the state of sleeping and dreaming. The spectator thus will have dreamt a little bit of the film: not because that bit was missing and he imagined it: it actually appeared in the bande, and this, not something else, is what the subject saw; but he saw it while dreaming.[77]

In other words, as perceived by the dreaming spectator, the filmic figuration becomes a hallucinatory experience. War films can thus achieve a potentially therapeutic effect similar to hypnosis, not just for war veterans, but also for those whose primary experience of war is through media. They can allow even spectators with no previous points of contact with the depicted wars to feel as though they were reliving them. Films like ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO achieve this by presenting us with powerful

75. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 133.

76. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 103–104.

77. Ibid., 103.

archive images, creating an archive effect that makes history seem immediately present. These sequences are often given negative connotations by audiovisual devices such as a menacing score. In this way, the films create prosthetic memories of historical wars. ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO even does this for the protagonists' own repressed traumatic memories, which are represented as fragmentary flashbacks with a TV aesthetic. The protagonists' war trauma is thus made available to experience on the basis of empathic engagement. The subsequent multi-immersive flashbacks to the war, meanwhile, draw on the media aesthetic of late 90s war films, activating any memories the spectator may have of the sensuous experience of watching such films. Iluminados por el fuego thus essentially functions in line with Freud's classical theory: The impression of "reliving" the negative experience of war initially induced by archive images and the connection to embodied memories of earlier film experiences once again combines the symptoms (here, the tension felt by the spectator) with the affect that causes them, the media experience of war.[78] The film utilizes Freud's psychological model of trauma to generate intuitive persuasiveness.

The final part of ILUMINADOS POR EL FUEGO reflects once again on these themes. Esteban returns to the Falklands, but this time the naturalistic aesthetic of the present-day sequences is retained. When he climbs down into a dugout in the former battlefield, he finds physical traces of his memories of the war: the watch abandoned in the face of death, a letter, a personal photo of his fellow squad members. The referential realism of the TV images used at the start of the film, which refer to the actual war, and the perceptual realism, the sensuous experience of

78. See Freud, *On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*, 9.

war conveyed through the anachronistic conventions of 90s war films, are now fused together. The apparent "mismatch" caused by the meta-migration of the Second World War media aesthetic into a filmic depiction of a war that took place in the 1980s may thus actually have a stabilizing effect on memory.[79] At the same time, a parallel is drawn between protagonist and spectator: We remember the war together, as a vivid, sensuous experience.

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