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Vietnam by Hollywood – Three Hollywood Films as Narratives of History

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1. Introduction – Cards on the Table

"Every filmmaker, like every historian, has an agenda"
(John Sayles in *A Conversation between Eric Foner and John Sayles*[1])

The above statement holds true also for undergraduate literature students. In this introductory chapter I intend to make my agenda concerning this thesis as visible as possible, while I explain what I intend to do. Hence the title for this chapter – "cards on the table," – which has been taken from a similar chapter in Robin Wood's book *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*.[2] Throughout this work I will try to play with as open hand as possible, and while my agenda may be obscured at times, there is one. Unlike Wood I do not *wish* to be political, but believe that it is unavoidable when writing on subject matter that I am writing about. I *do* wish to be objective, but I realize subjectivity seeps into all humanistic research.

In this thesis I will examine what is gained by looking at historical film – I will define in due time what I mean by historical film – from the point of view of history. In the same vein as Ecocriticism "introduced" *place* as a critical category, I intend to use *history* (or time) as a critical category for my work – this is not to claim that time has not existed as an area or critical thinking this far, any more than place was a completely new concept when Ecocriticism came around. When it comes to using history in a way I intend, and in connection with my chosen material, fiction film, the approach is relatively new, and I believe there is much to be said in this area. To illustrate my view, I will look at how three Hollywood films deal with a historical event (Vietnam War). I will concentrate on that specific event/period and related themes, while I steer away from other possible themes in the films such as war in general, human nature/mind, etc.

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[1] "A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 23.
[2] Robin Wood: *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1-10.

With theory I will start from Hayden White's broader perspective on historiography and art, using his argument that "we do not have to choose between art and science, that indeed we cannot do so in practice."[3] White's concept of narrative history – that is, historians tell stories – is also visible in my title, which speaks of films as *narratives* of history. Using "narratives" instead of word like "representations" is a conscious choice, as I will stress throughout this thesis that historical "texts" or "representations" are always *constructed* narratives, and everything they include in the story they are telling is a result of a conscious choice.

From White's views I move on to "film historians" such as Pierre Sorlin (1980) and Robert A. Rosenstone (1995), with the main emphasis being on Rosenstone's views on film as historical material. I will also take into account contrasting views, such as R. B. Toplin's critique of Rosenstone's views (1996). In practice this will mean treating history as a critical category among others, and will place a lot of responsibility on the viewer with regards to realizing that they are getting only one version of "the story," and that there are other versions. However, I will show that the limitations of the truth claims of film are in no way specific to film, but that all history writing (and literature) must face the same limitations.

What Robin Wood said on his own writing applies to my work too: "(This) is not, in the usual sense, a history… it is not exactly a thesis (though it contains one): the argument is not clearly linear, starting from 'This is what I shall prove' and processing to 'This is what has been proven.' But neither is it a collection of miscellaneous, unconnected essays."[4] This means that I will not set out to write "my version" of the Vietnam War through looking at the movies – I will be giving few historical "facts," though I will include a short appendix on the major events during the war. I will provide, or at least work towards methodology of looking at historical film, but my aim is not to provide a "full-fledged" methodology. The whole field

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[3] Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse – Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 23.
[4] Robin Wood: *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1.

is still very much "work-in-progress," and like Pierre Sorlin in *The Film in History* "I shall give very few final results, I shall ask questions to which there can be no reply and I shall point out problems for which I can find no solution."[5] I will, however, answer some questions Sorlin left unanswered and contribute something towards the methodology of viewing historical film.

The main emphasis of this thesis will be on readings of three Hollywood films, as this is how most can be gained out of this subject. Robert Brent Toplin has a slightly different approach to history and film in his book *History by Hollywood* from what I have, but I wholly agree with his notice that "attention to specific experiences in filmmaking throws light on both the strengths and weaknesses of cinematic history."[6] My attention is focused on specific films, and I want to explain the selection of my material in this introduction.

The first obvious question is "Why Vietnam?" In this I return to my agenda, for the selection of material is an important and subjective choice. I am writing at a time when the 2003 war in Iraq and its aftermath are still an almost everyday topic in news. While the war was not a conscious factor in choosing Vietnam as my area of interest, it is not irrelevant that I am writing in an increasingly anti-war and anti-America atmosphere. To be more specific, in the critical media the war in Iraq has been fairly widely labelled to be the first truly colonial/imperialistic war after Vietnam. It might not be the first, but it certainly is most visible and these arguments have been louder than in any time after Vietnam. To call a war "colonial/imperialistic" is certainly a subjective choice, and there are several who would disagree. The arguments, however, have certainly been a factor in choosing my topic. Vietnam is also a distinctive period and some say a critical one in American history, and most certainly in the Hollywood war movie – indeed the conflict has been given such a large

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[5] Pierre Sorlin: *The Film History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 25.
[6] R.B. Toplin: *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 14.

status in American life that Gilbert Adair has been able to make the claim in his *Hollywood's Vietnam* that "every American feature film made during the decade of 1965-75 must directly or indirectly reflect some aspect of the United States' political make-up and therefore be relevant to the debate (on the Vietnam War)."[7] I should also mention that I enjoy watching war films, so also the genre is of particular interest.

Second question: Why Hollywood? There certainly are movies about the war in Vietnam that have been made outside Hollywood, both in America and in other countries (though interestingly not in Vietnam as far as I know) – I should also add that my main concern is with fiction film. The answer: I wanted to concentrate on fiction film, and mainly the mainstream Hollywood cinema, as that is most influential in forming impressions and opinions, by virtue of reaching most people. I also wanted to concentrate on an American perspective on the war, to keep the research area somewhat in check. And even though "American films can only be reasonably expected to reflect American truths"[8] – as Gilbert Adair notes – I feel that also the absence of certain "truths" is revealing in itself. In addition, the decision to concentrate on Hollywood productions brings with it a few other points to consider. While the directors of the films I have chosen are usually credited for the films – and indeed I will speak of the films in their name – two of the three are even considered to be "Auteurs," but a film is always a collaborative effort, and Hollywood movie is doubly so. There is a huge "machinery" behind each of the films, and this is something that is good to keep in mind.

Question number three: Why these three films? And for that matter, why not two, four or six? For the second part, there is a fairly easy answer: I believe that with three carefully chosen films I can illustrate what I mean to say – two would cut something relevant out, and more than three would simply be too much material for an M.A. thesis.

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[7] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 4.
[8] *Ibid.,* 5.

My first pick was the self-appointed "granddaddy of all Vietnam War movies," *The Green Berets* (1968). Made while the war was still raging, and the first Hollywood movie to tackle the subject, *The Green Berets* was really almost impossible to leave out. Even though it follows the formula of earlier WWII movies and also Westerns, it does say a great deal about American (right-wing, or "hawkish") attitudes towards the escalating conflict, and also gives voice for "dovish" sentiments (if only to crush them utterly). Its openly propagandistic nature makes it an interesting film to study. The second film is Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which represents the most common point of view in American Vietnam depictions – that of a disillusioned soldier. The same point of view is used almost throughout the genre, from *First Blood* (1982) to *Platoon* (1986). *Platoon* is one film I would have liked to include, as it would have represented "buddy-movie" sub-genre in Vietnam movie (opposed to the "lone-wolf" theme of *Apocalypse Now*, as well as that of *First Blood*), but had to be left out because of the reason mentioned above. The version of *Apocalypse Now* I will be using is the European-release version – the significance of identifying the version examined when there are several different versions of the film, will be discussed later on. The third view of the war I have chosen is Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), which – while dealing with several common themes of Vietnam War movies – is also to a degree a chilling parody of the genre, using expectations set by it to "draw the carpet from under the audience" again and again.

Fiction film is probably the best known area of Vietnam War narratives, and for this reason interesting. In the next chapter I will return to what makes fiction film such an interesting area of study, but here I will take a brief look at the other prominent forms of Vietnam narratives. I will not look further into how the war influenced areas such as pop-lyrics and poetry of the time, other than to mention that there is indeed a great deal of lyrical writing that the war inspired (and these would be interesting topic for another paper). But

there are two media that demand a closer look for the influence they have had on my primary material – fiction writing and news reports.

Almost as soon as the first soldiers were shipped to Vietnam, a genre of veteran war writing started to emerge, as it earlier had emerged from the WWII and certainly other wars before that. Most of the early veteran accounts appeared first in newspapers and magazines – a famous example of this would be Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1973) that appeared first in part in the *Playboy* magazine, and in *The Washington Post*, the *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *Worthington Daily Globe* before it was collected into a bestselling book in 1973. O'Brien's book and others like it have been a significant influence to the Vietnam War films that have appeared in the following decades, and many of the themes and even scenes of the films have first seen light in these narratives. Together these films, novels and short stories have formed what C. D. B. Bryan calls "Generic Vietnam War Narrative."[9] These stories demonstrate how the war exists in the minds of most people, and while looking at the literary sources is interesting, the films have reached a larger audience with their narratives than any of the books, which makes them such a fruitful subject for study.[10]

Another important medium from which the image – and here I am speaking of the visual image, "what the war looked like" – of the war comes from is the news reports. Vietnam was the first widely televised war, which is something that is acknowledged by most moviemakers who have tackled the subject. Most obviously this is seen in the almost obligatory "news crew in the front" –scene that appears in so many Vietnam films (I will deal with such a scene in two of the films in my forthcoming analysis). More interesting and important is the impact of TV-picture from the war on the visual nature of the films. Most of the Vietnam War films aim for the kind of a "having been there" documentary nature in their

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[9] C. D. B. Bryan: "Barely suppressed screams: Getting a Bead on Vietnam Literature," *Harpers*, June 1984, 67-72.

[10] For in depth look at Vietnam War narratives and a fairly comprehensive bibliography see: Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War* (Greenwood Press, Westport, 1985).

visuals – the war looks as it did on those news flashes. Prime examples of this style would be *Platoon* (1986) and *Hamburger Hill* (1987) – this does not apply so well to the "high art" war films such as Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, and only with some limitations to Kubric's clinical style in *Full Metal Jacket*. Nevertheless, the influence of TV on the visual nature of the Vietnam War films is a significant factor, and interestingly applies also to a director who fought in the war himself – Oliver Stone of the *Platoon*. The accentuated photographic nature of the war has led to numerous analogies of the war as a movie. I quote a witty remark from *Looking Away* (1975) by Julian Smith:

> Vietnam was like a movie that had gotten out of hand: gigantic cost overruns, a shooting schedule run amuck, squabbles on the set and back in the studio, the first *auteur* dying with most of the script still in his head, the second quitting in disgust, and the last swearing it was finally in the can, but still sneaking back to shoot extra scenes.[11]

This is not only a rather funny analogy, it is also telling of how the war is remembered and processed in the minds of people. It is movies that play a big part in creating an image of the war, and it is only fitting to use a movie analogy to describe a war. I will say more about the connections of war and show business when I am dealing with the films.

There is a great deal of sociological and historical writing on the Vietnam War, and some of these works also make use of fiction film made about the war. Work that deal especially with how the war was treated in popular culture (here meaning mainly film) have been much fewer, and usually primarily getting into a pro-/antiwar debate, or concentrating on historical accuracy of the details. Both of these areas are related to my work, but I write neither as a historian nor a sociologist, but as a literature student who is looking at the history of the films as a critical category. Consequently, I will be "reading" the films with a particular interest attached to them because they are historical films relating to a particular historical event.

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[11] Julian Smith: *Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1975), 103.

In the next chapter I will briefly explain my way of looking at historical film – and my definition of historical film – before moving on to the readings of the films. The films are, as Sorlin also admits, "the most exiting part of our work,"[12] but it is nevertheless necessary to lay down guidelines for the work first.

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[12] Pierre Sorlin: *The Film History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 25.

2. How to Look at Historical Film – My Way

"Much as they may deplore the fact, historians have no monopoly on the past and no franchise as its privileged interpreters to the public"
(C. Vann Woodward, historian[13])

The title to this chapter is in form of a question, and essentially that is the question I intend to answer in this chapter. That is, I will outline my way of looking at an historical film and explain what can be gained from using the method I will outline. Yet I am hesitant to call this "methodology," as it is not my purpose to introduce a "full-fledged methodology" as I mentioned in the introduction, but to simply define where I stand in regard to films I will examine.

By "historical film" I mean *any* film that is set in a clearly identifiable past. But this definition has to be complicated a little: a historical film has to be set in the past that was "past" at the time of the film's making – otherwise almost every film could be considered "historical," as there always is a delay between the shooting and viewing of the film. When I speak of historical film I mean both "documentary" and "fictional" films, although I will deal only with the latter in the rest of this work. It is, of course, debatable when the past in the film is "clearly identifiable" as such, but usually the signs are fairly clear – filmmakers have specific strategies on indicating "past time" that are understood by all "film literate" members of the audience (at this time almost anyone living in the developed world).[14] Still, even if identification of the "past" is kept out of this discussion, there is still an additional definition required. Robert A. Rosenstone has provided such a definition in his book *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (1995):

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[13] C. Vann Woodward: "Gilding Lincoln's Lily," in *The New York Review of Books* (September, 1987), 23.
[14] For fuller discussion on how past is indicated in a film, see: Pierre Sorlin: *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

> To be considered "historical," rather than simply a costume drama that uses the past as an exotic setting for romance and adventure, a film must engage, directly or obliquely the issues, ideas, data and arguments of the ongoing discourse of history.[15]

I agree with this view – it would be pointless to view a film that uses past merely as a setting (for anything else, not only "romance and adventure"), but I feel that the criteria Rosenstone sets is met rather more often than he seems to think. I argue that most films set in the past *do* engage "the ongoing discourse of history." One of the classic examples of costume drama is *Gone with the Wind* (1939) which deals with the issues of the Civil War and the Reconstruction – it certainly uses past as a background for romance and adventure, but it also engages in the discourse of history. We may disagree with the anonymous critic in *Hollywood Spectator* of 1939 when he (probably he) claimed that it is the most accurate depiction of the Civil War ever produced and "there is no flag-waving in the picture,"[16] but as the reception of the film shows, it certainly deals with "issues, ideas, data and arguments" of the Civil War period. It might be added that I do not consider that films dealing with history in an allegorical manner (without being set in an identifiable past) are "historical."

But why should one be interested in looking at films from a historical perspective? One argument for it is presented by R.A. Rosenstone in form of an "impolite question: How many professional historians, when it comes to fields outside their areas of expertise, learn about the past from film?"[17] This of course applies also to the rest of the society. Films reach a great number of people – a whole lot more than academic writing. So it matters what films say about the past. This has also worried historians since the invention of the film – it is outside their control. Rosenstone quotes a letter to the president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer written by a history professor in 1935 demanding the right to review films to ensure historical accuracy and "higher ideals," and while it may seem naïve at this time, the same

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[15] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 62.

[16] "David Selznick's Film Is World's Greatest," in *Hollywood Spectator* (December, 1939).

[17] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 50.

sentiments are still very much around among historians. I am not a historian. Why am I interested in the subject? As quoted in the beginning of this chapter, "historians have no monopoly on the past," and as a literature student I am interested in the past as a critical category to look at, and an interesting point of view to viewing films.

With Hayden White's claim that choosing between art and science in unnecessary and indeed impossible as my guide, I will analyse movies and look for "the kind of knowledge which literature and art in general can give us in easily recognizable examples"[18] instead of the kind of knowledge physical sciences, or "hard sciences," (a group in which history has tried very hard to belong to) gives us. In this it may be an asset not to be a historian by training – training in literature can provide much firmer basis for interpreting the kind of knowledge I am looking for. On the other hand, while speaking of different kinds of knowledge, one should always bear in mind that, as Northrop Frye has said in *Fables of Identity* (1963), "difference between a historical and fictional account is formal, not substantive,"[19] meaning basically that it is a matter of relative weight given to different elements of the text (here in a broad sense).

I do not mean any disrespect for the "objective historians" with this infringement on "their territory," and to elaborate on what I have said above, I again quote Hayden White: "There is no such thing as a *single* correct view of any subject under study but that there are *many* correct views, each requiring its own style of representation."[20] Consequently, a film can provide a view on the subject different from those of historians, and it is this view I will adhere to in my approach. White's premise is one of the guiding principles of my method of working on that material.

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[18] Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse – Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 23.
[19] Northrop Frye: *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harvest Books, 1963), 54-55.
[20] Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse – Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 47.

From early on in the process it is also important to note that "every film has its own 'history'," as Pierre Sorlin notes in *The Film in History* (1980). This means that the researcher should be aware that different versions exist of several films, and identify the version he or she is working on. This can be quite significant, especially when dealing with older film material, which may have been edited time and again for various reasons, but also with some relatively new film with fewer editings. It is quite common nowadays that a film version (as seen in movie theatres) and video/dvd-release may have some differences. One film to which I will return is *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which has been shown with at least two different endings, and later also as a longer "redux" version.

At this point I have to say one thing that may seem self evident, but bears repeating: "The fact that must be understood is that films are understood." In Christian Metz's article "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film" this appeared only in the conclusion, but it is important to make it clear here and now. Watching a movie may seem so easy and the visual quality of the material may make it feel like understanding a movie is automatic and that there is no interpretation involved, but films are interpreted, and they may be interpreted in a way that may seem surprising to those with different interpretations.[21] But before movies can be understood they have to be made – I am going to take a look at another apparent party of movie experience, the filmmakers.

My method on reading a historical film places a primary responsibility of reading the film on the reader, but I think the reader (viewer) has the right to some expectations of the filmmaker, too. I agree with filmmaker John Sayles, however, when he says in a conversation with Eric Foner "I think using *responsibility* in the same sentence as *the movie industry* – it just doesn't fit,"[22] but I think the audience has a right to expect some "truth"

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[21] For more on how films are understood, see: William Costanzo: *Reading the Movies* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1992).
[22] "A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 21.

from a movie if it makes a claim that it is "based on a true story." That slogan may be a good way to sell a movie, but with it also comes a certain responsibility, or as Eric Foner says: "to name a film *Malcolm X* after a real person is a claim of some kind of truth."[23] While naming a film after a real person is not *necessarily* a truth claim (a film may still be about a fictional character), the statement generally holds true – though the researcher will have to remember there are different "truths" on any given subject. There should be some actual event behind the slogan "based on a true story" otherwise it is (if nothing else) false marketing – the filmmaker is promising something he does not deliver.

Here is where the reader's awareness should step in. The reader should be aware that even if there is an actual event behind the story, what he or she sees on the big screen is a version of that event (or person, or period of history), and there may be other versions. The reader should be aware that there is no "absolute truth," that "history is never a mirror but a construction,"[24] as Robert A. Rosenstone puts it. History is always a version, there is always an agenda behind. Claude Lévi-Strauss said in *The Savage Mind* that there never is simply "history," but "history-for."[25] Historical facts are not *provided*, but *selected*. It is imperative that those interested in history or historical film realize that.

My first and foremost guideline for the reader is: be aware and be critical. In my view the reader (in this case the moviegoer) has the ability to think critically of what he or she sees on the screen. That is an outrageous generalization, but I believe it is a valid one on the level that people do not believe everything they see on the screen. I have to admit that the persuasive power of movie to pass as reality is great, and one might be worried – as Eric Foner expresses in *Past Imperfect: History According to Movies* (1995) – that the audience "basically think whatever they see is true." But as important is John Sayles' addition: "While

[23] *Ibid*., 17.
[24] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 52.
[25] Claude Lévi-Strauss: *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 257.

the movie is happening."[26] For those two hours the audience really might be in the world created by the filmmakers, and if he has done his job well, they may accept what they see as "truth," but even if you do not agree with Sayles' rather pessimistic view that "(movies) exist during those two hours,"[27] you have to admit that after the movie is over, other stories come in to compete with its view.

Although it is not the primary focus of this thesis, it is necessary to say a few words about the attention devoted to historical details. The impression of historians commenting on historical films tends to be – and I oversimplify here to make a point – one of some "talking head" "nitpicking" about what sort of hat people used to wear in the spring of 1563, and I wholly agree with Pierre Sorlin when he points out:

> So I think that when professional historians wonder about the mistakes made in an historical film, they are worrying about a meaningless question. They would do better to concentrate on other problems.[28]

The details are not what is the point of the movie (at least they should not be). I would insist, however, that the details are important, too, in creating an illusion of the past. It may not make a whole lot of difference in a story whether the protagonist rides in a carriage or drives a model-T Ford, but if the audience realizes that the car is out of place (that is, had not been invented at that time) the illusion of reality will be momentarily broken and the audience will feel that the filmmaker has not done his job properly. As there always is someone who knows more than you do, filmmakers should pay attention to the details.

Once it is established that any film (or history book, or novel) is just one view on the subject, we can get to the real area of interest – thinking about what the agenda behind the story is and why it is there? The first interesting question is why the filmmaker has chosen this particular event to turn into a story (I am talking about historical films here)? The

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[26] "A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 23.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] Pierre Sorlin: *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 38.

decision is by no means irrelevant and even though we cannot know the motivations behind it, thinking about it may provide useful insights to reading the film. Perhaps the filmmaker wanted to comment on some current event/development by choosing some particular historical event? In some cases the "event" the movie is based on may still be in full progress as the movie comes out, as was the case with several WWII movies, and also *The Green Berets* (1968), on which I will be writing on the next chapter. In these cases it is usually fairly obvious that the filmmaker is commenting on some aspect of the event he is filming. I agree with Robert Brent Toplin in *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (1996) when he says: "Our judgements about the film's treatment of history are better grounded when we know something about the producers, directors, and writers – their backgrounds, their ideas, and their motivations."[29] I do not claim it is impossible to study a film without knowing anything of its makers and the social/political climate in which it was made, but knowing about those things certainly helps.

It is also imperative to identify the point of view of the film, and if the film seems to have a particularly strong point of view, it may be worth asking what the other side of the story is, what has been left out and what has been changed. If the viewer is not an expert on the area in question, he or she cannot be certain weather some "fact" has been changed or what has been left out, but when the viewer thinks of what has been taken in, and what point of view the film follows, he or she will get a feeling of things that probably have been changed and of the side of story that has been left out. If the viewer is interested in those things, there usually are stories from another point of view. A critique of the film may point out some of the things which have been left out of the film or changed. Eric Foner is discussing historical writing when he says:

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[29] R.B. Toplin: *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 21.

> On the other hand, there are limits. If my point of view was completely divorced from the evidence, other historians would know that my views are implausible, and they would point that out because the evidence is there and there are standards.[30]

Though the "standards" in the field of historical study are more strict than the ones in movie industry (or at least different), I think this holds true when talking about movies too. Movies can use invention and speculation more freely than historians, but if a movie makes a claim that is "*completely* [italics mine] divorced from the evidence," there will be people who will point that out in film reviews and TV-shows. The viewers will be largely aware of this discrepancy, as few people go to a movie theatre without any preconception of the movie they are about to see and if there has been an outrage about some claims of the movie, they will be aware of at least some of it. A good, if somewhat extreme, example of this is *The Green Berets* whose depiction of Americans in Vietnam provoked boycotts, demonstrations and even rioting in the theatres, while newspapers were reporting on reactions from laugher to anger when the film was shown to troops in Vietnam (more of this in the next chapter). Interestingly the movie did rather well financially, which has been attributed to its star John Wayne – it was acceptable as a John Wayne movie while unacceptable as a Vietnam movie.

Most (historical) films will not cause an outrage, and still there are changes that have been made, possibly in contradiction to the "historical evidence." This is necessary, for a historical film is a *representation* of the past, and choices have been made on every step of the production. Not only – as John Sayles notes – "the minute someone sits down in an editing room,"[31] but way before that, starting with choosing the subject. Rosenstone says that, "On the screen, history must be fictional in order to be true!"[32] This may sound confusing, but I think it is true. This is because of the "language of the film." The film (or

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[30] "A Conversation Between Eric Foner and John Sayles," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 25.

[31] *Ibid*, 18.

[32] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 61.

any other form of communication for that matter) cannot tell everything, it has to choose some particular group of people, some particular event, some particular place. The film may use this to stand for some "bigger truth," to represent some larger event in history by focusing on some smaller event. Or as Rosenstone puts it:

> Film, with its need for a specific image, cannot make general statements about revolution or progress. Instead, film must summarize, synthesize, generalize, symbolize – in images.[33]

This is in my view the greatest strength and weakness of the film. It must generalize, leave out things, but it is also able to put many layers of meaning to a single frame. In its need to "summarize, synthesize, generalize and symbolize" the film may have to change something to get the story told. The reader has to be aware that these changes are used to tell the story from a certain point of view, and the images seen have been chosen to convey that point of view, with which you may or may not agree.

Rosenstone makes a distinction between ""false" invention (ignores the discourse of history), and "true" invention (engages the discourse of history)."[34] By this he means basically that it is legitimate to manipulate the "facts" in order to tell a "larger truth" about the subject, but inappropriate to use invention for other purposes, or use manipulation in a way that is contrary to the "larger picture." Most commonly "true" invention he speaks of takes place in form of bunching several historical characters into one (fictional) character, or introducing some viewpoint that was around at the time by inventing a character to present it. Of course this type of invention can take almost any form imaginable. Most of the same strategies used for "true" invention can also be used for "false." To take an example from the area I am working on, the character of John Rambo in *The First Blood* (1982) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) could be seen as both a "true" and "false" invention. Rambo is used to convey some points common to the Vietnam veteran experience, like feelings of

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[33] *Ibid*., 62.
[34] *Ibid*., 62-3.

abandonment, not really belonging to "the world" (instead of "NAM") – he is considered a drifter and possibly dangerous, and the society (in this case in form of a backwater police chief) simply does not want to see him around. But Rambo is also used to reinforce the "violent vet" stereotype himself, as he goes on rampage, and destroys an American small town, proving the police chief right. Moreover, he is used as an image of "American supertrooper," as is voiced by his ex-commander: "If we had more men like Rambo we would have won (the war)." This "winning the war this time" theme is much stronger in *First Blood Part II*, as Rambo single-handedly rights the wrongs of the war and frees Americans still held in captivity in Vietnam.

Making the distinction between "true" and "false" invention is not very easy, and always subjective, and this is something Rosenstone does not pay enough attention to. R.B. Toplin stresses that:

> It is worth considering whether the manipulation of evidence developed out of genuine and laudable efforts to communicate broad truths.[35]

This is an important part of reading the movie – remembering that "manipulation of evidence" is not necessarily bad in itself, but always keeping in mind that it has been done for a purpose, and seeing that purpose is more important than simply pointing out "mistakes."

Throughout this chapter I have been dealing with historical film, but I feel that the method is also more widely applicable. Sorlin points out that:

> Fiction and history react constantly on one another, and it is impossible to study the second if the first is ignored. The same type of analysis can be applied to an historical film as to any feature film.[36]

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[35] R.B. Toplin: *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 12.
[36] Pierre Sorlin: *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 38.

It is useful to note that history is constantly created and reworked – influenced by the society's political currents and other factors, which influence the society's film as well as its history writing. These currents work both ways, as history influences fiction and fiction influences history. Indeed "history is a society's memory of its past" as Sorlin says, and fiction influences that memory, as one factor among others.

In my way of looking at an historical film, the reader is given a great deal of responsibility. This is quite natural, because no-one else will take that responsibility. I mentioned a few things the reader should be able to expect of the filmmakers, but the reader himself will be the one who has to choose which point of view to believe, and eventually form his own version of the story. This may sound complicated, but the basic idea is really simple: the reader should be aware that any representation of history is just that, a *representation* constructed by someone, for his own reasons. That is a solid basis for the reader's own critical thinking. In the following chapters I will be putting this method to practice.

3. The Green Berets – Vietnam, John Wayne Style

"John Wayne stars and co-directs this red-white-and-blue depiction of America's Vietnam effort… Wayne wrote to President Lyndon Johnson to request military assistance for the film – and got more than enough firepower to create an impressive spectacle. Its soldiers fit the tried-and-true mould of earlier Wayne war classics…"
(*The Green Berets* 1996 DVD-release)

Sometimes I really have to admire the skill with which "the dream factory" markets its products. The above quotation from the DVD-cover of *The Green Berets* to a large extent sums up all the critique expressed towards the film in the past decades – a totally American point of view, military assistance given in order to produce "a film that favored our role in Vietnam" (as it was put in House Military Operations Subcommittee report)[37], and an attempt to fit the Vietnam War in formula made for WWII films which was quite inappropriate for the war in Vietnam. All this was put into a nutshell and used to sell the movie. Simply ingenious.

Putting marketing aside, the points earlier critics have picked up are valid, and have been examined in more detail than I will be able to in this thesis. This does not mean that there is not much to say about the film – the film's obviously propagandistic nature and WWII heroics seem to have been so *obvious* that the previous critics seem to have neglected going much deeper than stating the fact – with examples from the movie and other sources to support their claims – and condemning the film as a "bad movie" or at least "bad history." My intention is to look at why *The Green Berets* seems to be so obviously what it has been said to be. Where is the line between propaganda and representing a point of view – all of the other films I will examine in this thesis look at the war from the American side? The military has assisted in the production of hundreds of films both after and before *The Green Berets*.

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[37] This quote comes from Subcommittee's report on *Military Assistance to Commercial Film Projects*, as quoted in Julian Smith's *Looking Away* (1975). For fuller account of DOD assistance to *The Green Berets* see William J. Fulbright: *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine* (New York: Liveright, 1970).

Why is it such a big issue with GB? What made the war in Vietnam so different from the Second World War that the formulas that produced many "classics" of the WWII film seem ridiculous and even appalling when applied to Vietnam?

It is the last of the above questions I intend to tackle first, and that requires looking beyond specifics of the film. Before the Vietnam War WWII was the "model" for warfare. The Korean War was temporally too close and too "invisible" to the public to significantly affect the perception of war, and though some advances in military technology had certainly taken place, the paradigm for warfare was still WWII. Beside movies (and other media) this was visible also inside the military, and in the family. These are the three "units" Lloyd B. Lewis identifies as "instrumental in 'teaching war'… by relying almost solely on World War II as the paradigm of modern war."[38]

WWII has been seen as an exceptionally "unambiguous" war, with a clear goal, an easily identifiable enemy, easily drawn front lines, and overall sense of "righteousness." Even more importantly, WWII was "the Big One," the war everybody knows, and the one responsible of the "indoctrination" of soldiers who would fight in Vietnam, long before they were drafted – though the doctrines learned at home and in the movie theatres were "confirmed" by the military. Lewis examines several Vietnam War veteran accounts of the war and constantly identifies the preconceptions set by WWII as it has been represented in the film. He sees "the capacity to provide cinematic frame of reference for structuring experience" as "perhaps the most remarkable aspect"[39] of the movie industry. Reporter Michael Herr puts this more bluntly in *Dispatches* (1977): "they were actually making war movies in their heads,"[40] referring to the soldiers he saw fighting in Vietnam. VW veteran Mark Baker even identifies the source of his expectations about the war in *NAM* (1981): "I

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[38] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 20.
[39] *Ibid*., 23.
[40] Michael Herr: *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 209.

was expecting… the John Wayne type of thing."[41] Even a fictional soldier in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) – which I will be dealing with in the next chapter – echoes the same sort of expectations in his shock when he finds out that they are not on a mission to "blow up a bridge… or something.," but to assassinate a US army colonel.

I have included the above quotations for two reasons. Firstly, to show how important movies are in forming an image of certain (historical) event. Secondly, and more importantly, to show the mindset that is behind *The Green Berets* as well as (in part) the actual war in Vietnam. I have spent some time discussing the expectations set by WWII film – and it was indeed the stories of the war that were on the minds of soldiers fighting in Vietnam (the soldiers were young men, and very few had been born at the time of WWII) – but more needs to be said on what it was in Vietnam that "betrayed" those expectations. I see two primary reasons: the lack of clear purpose, the absence of front line and easily identifiable enemy, and the "invisibility" of the enemy. These are themes that are dealt with in almost all American Vietnam War narratives, even in *The Green Berets*, while admittedly "tacked on" to the WWII type of narrative.

According to Lewis, it was these things that "tended to render WWII heroics unattainable. As a result, it [the war in Vietnam] lost its "taken for granted" status and was ultimately discredited altogether."[42] It was the expectations set by WWII narratives that caused the war being viewed as "shapeless, disjointed and fragmented,"[43] because of the absence of clear front lines and aims for fighting. Perhaps the most important of all was the "invisibility" of the enemy, most clearly seen in booby traps and hit and run tactics that the VC employed with great success. Lewis claims that "such an accidental demise, dealt blindly, often by unseen forces," made "death lose its culturally derived meaning… as

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[41] Mark Baker: *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 83.
[42] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 26.
[43] *Ibid*., 72.

"sacrifice in the line of duty.""[44] That kind of "glorification of death" is all-important for the military in order to keep the fighting morale high, and in Vietnam the only goal often seemed to be just surviving.

But the best way to look at the shortcomings of WWII genre when applied to Vietnam is perhaps looking at *The Green Berets* and how the conventions work (or do not work) there. In the analysis of the characters my intention is not to point out "mistakes" from historical point of view – such as the age of the cast members (all of the cast are much older than the actual soldiers who fought in Vietnam, Wayne especially) – as I do not consider this a very fruitful pursuit. As I mentioned earlier, I agree with Pierre Sorlin in *The Film in History* when he points out that historians who complain about mistakes made in historical film "would do better to concentrate on other problems."[45] Instead I will look at how stock characters from WWII movies look rather odd when placed in Vietnam. I pick a few examples.

The first is of course the protagonist Colonel Mike Kirby (John Wayne), who is essentially a rework of Wayne's earlier role in *Back to Bataan* (1945). In *Back to Bataan* Wayne plays an American colonel who leads his crack team to liberate oppressed people (in the Philippines) from their oppressors (the Japanese), working in a similar manner than in *The Green Berets* side by side with native guerrillas. Julian Smith list further similarities in *Looking Away* (1975):

> The loyal "native" girl who spies on the enemy at the hazard of her reputation; the small allied force fighting in the hills against greater numbers, then attacking the invaders directly and escaping cross-country; the enemy itself, interchangeable automatons given to lemming-like attacks; and the loveable little native boy who receives American military insignia from Wayne's hands late in each film.[46]

What *The Green Berets* ignores is that while the Americans may have been greeted as liberators in the Philippines – after all, the Japanese were foreign invaders there (though it is

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[44] *Ibid.*, 80.
[45] Pierre Sorlin: *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 38.
[46] Julian Smith: *Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1975), 129.

certainly arguable how well the Americans were received in reality) – in Vietnam the situation was quite different. The Americans were seen as the invader by many of the South Vietnamese also, and at the time of the film's release, also by a numerable and loud-voiced group in the home front. This is one feature that certainly added to the confusion of the troops fighting in Vietnam – they were not greeted as liberators.

Another character familiar from WWII films is Sergeant Provo (Luke Askew), gung-ho trooper hungry for front-line duty and a heroic death – which he is duly granted. Provo's only worry seems to be how his name sounds on a memorial – one of the film's sources of comedy that seems so misplaced (his name finally ends up in a sign in front of "Provo's privy"). As Gilbert Adair notes in *Hollywood's Vietnam* (1989), "in a Second World War movie this might conceivably have worked."[47] Provo's implausible eagerness "to get to the front" might have been accepted as genre convention. In the context of Vietnam War, with publicised officer "fraggings" and death bereft of its heroic ring, Provo seems to be "severely disturbed war-lover"[48] as described by Adair. The same applies to the roguish "scrounger" Petersen (Jim Hutton) – a fairly standard comic relief character familiar from the WWII genre – who reminds of the large scale corruption in South Vietnam when placed in the Vietnam War. The list could go on all the way to the end of alphabetical listing.

In addition to characters the plot of the movie seems to be relatively standard WWII fare, and the action in the films bears little resemblance to the actual role of Green Berets in Vietnam. My purpose here is not to "nitpick" about details, but to showcase another strong WWII influence in the film. In L. H. Suid's *The Film Industry and Vietnam War* (1980) the role of the Green Berets in Vietnam War has been described as "reconnaissance, surveillance, and training"[49] which does not promise too much cinematic action, and it is not surprising that changes have been made. "Wayne's film presented the Green Berets in blood

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[47] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 24.

[48] *Ibid*.

[49] L. H. Suid: "The Film Industry and the Vietnam War" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western-Reserve, 1980), 126.

and guts terms borrowed entirely from WWII Commando activities,"[50] says L. B. Lewis. Indeed, the behind-the-lines mission to capture a high-ranking enemy officer and blowing up a bridge in the process is familiar from the "Great War" movies. What the film ignores is that "behind-the-lines" is not a clear concept in a war like Vietnam, and the mission is indeed not a typical Vietnam mission, and seems strongly out of place in that environment. However, there is more to this than simply remaking Wayne's earlier war films. It is interesting to look at the ideology behind those traditions *The Green Berets* uses with unfortunate results.

Many have read *The Green Berets* as a Western that is set in the east – this would be an example of what film theorists call a "submerged genre"[51] – on a surface it reads as a war movie, but contains many characteristics of another genre, the Western. In *How the War Was Remembered* (1988) Albert Auster and Leonard Quart claim that "*The Green Berets* essentially had John Wayne transform Vietnam into pop-patriotic, right-wing version of cowboys and indians."[52] This leap is of course helped by the main star, familiar from so many roles as a cowboy, but that is not the only thing in the film that resembles the Western. In Leo Cawley's "The War about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth" this is summarized as: "The Americans are the good guys, the Vietcong are the bad guys, and the peasants are the frightened townsfolk who need protection and the rule of law. The Special Forces compound is very like a fort in Indian territory. The Vietcong give war whoops."[53] I might add that the harassed compound is aptly named "Dodge City."

One can also easily recognize the genre features of Western as laid out by Michael Ryan in *Camera Politica* (1988) in *The Green Berets* – "[Western] makes dying men larger

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[50] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 40.
[51] Read more in Robert Stam: *Film Theory – An Introduction* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 123-9.
[52] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), XIV.
[53] Leo Cawley: "The War about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth" in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 74-5.

than life and highlights the conventionality of the hero."[54] One scene in which the dying hero is certainly "made larger than life" in *The Green Berets* is a scene of gung-ho Sergeant Provo's death. The imagery of that scene is familiar from so many westerns that making the connection is almost intuitive – a mortally wounded cowboy (soldier) is lying on the yellowish, sun-burned ground, the battle has been won after the timely arrival of the cavalry (U.S. Air force, in the film labelled "Puff the magic dragon"), but at a cost. The warrior who has fought bravely is taking his last breaths, beckons feebly to his leader/comrade, almost whispering the words "Could I have some of that?" while pointing at the whisky bottle (which has miraculously appeared in the middle of the battleground). After the comrade (Colonel Kirby/John Wayne) has granted the last sip, the dying man whispers his last wish, inaudibly this time (though later the audience learns that at the moment of his death Provo has finally come up with a memorial that suits his name – Provo's privy), before passing away with a groan.

The other part of Ryan's definition – the conventionality of the hero – comes through very strongly in the character of John Wayne. Unlike several other characters in the film, Colonel Kirby does not talk much. He observers with a worried look on his ruggedly handsome face, occasionally grunting either approvingly, disapprovingly, or ambiguously. It is one of these grunts that apparently convinces David Jansen's reporter to leave for Vietnam "to see for himself." When Colonel Kirby talks, it is always right to the point, but more often he leads by example, leaving talking to others (such as reporters). Yet he shows a sensitive side too, while walking into the sunset (in the most iconic western image of all) with a little native boy, twice orphaned, explaining to him about life, and reassuring that "You are what this [the war?] is all about." The soundtrack swelling up seems to be explaining the little boy's dream: "He wants to be / one of America's finest / those brave men /of the Green

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[54] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 80.

Berets." No wonder Lloyd B. Lewis sees John Wayne as "the embodiment of American Warrior."[55]

But why is this Western imagery relevant? Julian Smith finds one answer, linking this all the way to De Crévecoeur and Frederic Jackson Turner:

> For lack of a West to conquer, we have gone east, which may explain why *The Green Berets* ends with an old Western star walking off into the setting sun as it slowly sinks into the South China Sea to the east of Vietnam. That's not just bad geography, but sadly revealing metaphor for our hankering after lost frontiers.[56]

I find *The Green Berets* telling of America's difficulty to shake off its WWII self image, and also the frontier and manifest destiny longings. These are long debated issues of American history, made widely known by Frederic Jackson Turner's frontier theory.[57] In essence the theory sees American history as westward expansion, of pushing the frontier further west, and furthering the American "manifest destiny" to rule the "new world" (possibly as a new paradise). After the west has been conquered, the new frontier has been found in other places – an example would be space (made famous as "the final frontier" in the popular TV-series *Star Trek*). However, I am certain that this is not intentional political comment (unlike some other things in the film which I will examine later – *The Green Berets* is an exceptionally openly political for a Vietnam movie), but more telling of Wayne as "the embodiment of American warrior" (at least for the 40's, 50's and to a degree still in the 60´s). Whereas conventional heroism Wayne embodied was already outmoded in the late 60's, together with the WWII imagery for warfare, both seemed to be somewhat acceptable for Wayne. In a way that was what was expected for him, and there clearly was still need for that kind of "conventionality." *The Green Berets* did reasonably well in the box office, despite the boycotts and crushing reviews. The film industry seems to have recognized, however, that

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[55] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 25.
[56] Julian Smith: *Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1975), 129.
[57] Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in *Report of the American Historical Association* (July, 1893), 199-227.

this was mainly due to Wayne's image, and steered away from producing another large scale

Vietnam War depiction for ten years.[58]

With all these "echoes" from the Second World War film and Western, where does

the particularity of the Vietnam War come in? How does *The Green Berets* "engage the

discourse of history"[59] – the definition of "true invention" in Robert Rosenstone's book

Visions of the Past (1995)? In many ways it does not. *The Green Berets* could with a few

fairly minor changes be set in WWII, and a large part of the invention it uses does not

"engage the discourse of history" – that is, it does not tell of any larger truths of the War in

Vietnam. But still, the film has claimed many accusations as "virtually undiluted

propaganda"[60] – this accusation from *Hollywood's Vietnam* – so it would stand to reason that

it does deal with the Vietnam War in some ways. In what ways it does this, is examined next.

The Green Berets deals with the particularity of the Vietnam War in some areas much

more clearly and openly than any other fictional Vietnam War depiction. That is mainly in

the area of politics behind the conflict. I feel this is also the primary reason for the

propaganda accusations – clear opinions on politics combined with the tacked-on nature of

all the particulars of the war. As you remember, *The Green Berets* is an almost scene to scene

remake of *Back to Bataan*, and for this reason much of the commentary on Vietnam is in

form of direct speech (and there is a staggering amount of speaking in *The Green Berets* for

an "action" movie). A prime example of this is the opening scene set at Fort Bragg, in a press

conference held by the Green Berets.

The scene takes place in front of a host of reporters and "general public," and starts

with a few Green Berets introducing themselves and their specialities (among them a trooper

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[58] Research has been done, showing that films of "sensitive subject" (such as lost war) tend to be produced right after/during the conflict, and then there is a gap of about ten years. Pierre Sorlin has examined this in context of WWII films made in Italy, in *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).
[59] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 62-3.
[60] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 32-3.

"fluent in Danish" and bizarrely with a "working knowledge of English"), which, unlike the rest of the movie, does give some indication of the true role of the Green Berets – that is, the training of local guerrillas. After this introduction comes the part in which Master Sergeant Muldoon (Aldo Ray) explains the role of U.S. military in Vietnam – as straightforward as any Hollywood film has ever treated the subject. According to *How the War Was Remembered* "Muldoon's rhetoric is about as close as the film gets to providing real picture of Vietnamese history or society or the war itself,"[61] which is true in many ways. The scene can be said to contain the pro-war "articles of faith" in a nutshell. It is quite clear which point of view the film favours, and while the rhetoric Muldoon uses is indeed quite realistic in a sense that it is the military/government point of view to the war almost word for word, it is easy to see how this has been received as propaganda.

Muldoon first answers the heavily-loaded question "Why is U.S. waging this ruthless war?" with standard military rhetoric: "Soldier goes where he is told to go and fights who he is told to fight," thus cleansing the Green Berets of all possible further accusations. When the reporter played by David Janssen joins the sniping, asking whether the Green Berets are only robots, Muldoon, visibly irritated, asks for the reporters name in response. The answer, however, is forthcoming, as Muldoon's assistant Sgt. McGee answers in length (seemingly to the first question, though it was the second that was aimed at him):

> Intentional torture and murder of civilians… if the same thing happened here in the U.S. every mayor in every city would be tortured and killed. Every professor you have ever heard of, every governor, every senator, every member of the House of Representatives would be tortured and killed… *they need us and they want us* [italics mine].

After hints that the newspapers may have their own reasons for not reporting this to the public, the conversation goes on (again spurred by Janssen's reporter) to "How do we know we should be fighting for this government?" Indeed a valid question, as it is not an elected

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[61] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 33.

government, neither has it constitution nor almost any other marks of democratic government. Again the answer is lengthy and somewhat obscure, invoking U.S. constitution among others, and finally boiling down to "these things take time." But when the public still persists on "Let them handle it" – position that was gaining more and more support during the time of filming – Muldoon finally takes out the big guns, literally, displaying the weaponry captured from the Viet Cong, which can be traced back to Soviet countries, and ending the scene with firm statement: "What's involved here is the communist domination of the world."

It is quite clear with who's point of view the film's sympathies lie in this scene, but it has to be noted that the existence of other points of view is acknowledged, if only to overrun them. This may not seem much, but at least it gives the audience the opportunity to see that there are several points of view, and the film "engages the discourse of history" in giving voice to opinions that were around at the time of filming (and the war) – the public opinion was already turning against the war. In the film the "liberal" or "dovish" point of view is mainly expressed by the liberal reporter George Beckworth (David Janssen), who is a character worth taking a closer look at. Using a character as a stand-in for a certain political (or other) viewpoint is a standard film strategy for commenting on larger issues, and this is what Rosenstone means when speaking of film's "need for specific image."[62] A film needs a "face" for every opinion expressed – someone to speak for this or that position, or some other kind of image to convey the viewpoint.

Beckworth is not "sold" by the "brainwashed sergeant," as he expresses, but the film does not leave it at that. After the press conference, when Beckworth confronts Wayne's character Colonel Kirby, he is silenced with a question thrown back at him: "You ever been to Southeast Asia?" With the implication that you really cannot understand unless you have

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[62] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 62.

seen it – something that is repeated many times in the film. Not surprisingly Beckworth travels with Kirby to Vietnam which is about to change his convictions on the war. Beckworth's anti-war stance slowly disintegrates, as is noted in Adair's *Hollywood's Vietnam*, in face of the "dastardly tactics" of the Vietcong (such as bungee sticks) that are contrasted with the "Queensberry rules" the Green Berets play by – this is the same vein many later movies such as Rambo-films draw from: the belief that if the Americans would have been prepared to be as ruthless as their opponents, they would have won. It has, of course, been noted several times that there was no shortage of firepower or brutality in the Vietnam War. But the scene that really turns Beckworth around is a device used since times immemorial – Beckworth is introduced to the brutality of the enemy when a child from the local village that the Green Berets are protecting is raped (or "abused" in the film's patois) and murdered by the Vietcong attackers. As if this were not enough, Kirby goes on to tell a tale of "murder, torture, mutilation and abuse" of a chieftain's wife from another village by no less than forty Vietcong, making it very clear that the enemy is barbaric and bestial – just like the Japanese in the old WWII propaganda – and that the Americans are the only ones who can defend the innocent local population. Apparently this was what Beckworth could not understand before seeing it, as right after the scene Kirby can comment: "It's pretty hard to talk to anyone about this country till they've come over here and seen it."

The fact that Beckworth will be "sold" eventually is obvious from the moment he is first seen on the screen. As Gilbert Adair notes, the reason why "he is in the film at all has, of course, nothing to do with objectivity and everything to do with his eventual and inevitable conversion."[63] This is where the film's propagandistic aims come through the clearest. The film uses a great deal of screen time to "show" how the liberal reporter is turned to

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[63] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 22.

supporting the war, and while he is shown "what it is like in there" so is the viewer.[64] It is not difficult to see how Julian Smith has come to the conclusion that "*The Green Berets* is not so much about winning the war against the Vietcong as it is about winning the hearts and minds of American public."[65] Surely the film spends a great deal of time to explain why the war is necessary. The conversion of Beckworth takes up more screen time than the combat sequences of the film. But what I feel makes this really so transparent is the "tacked-on" nature of the scenes specifically dealing with Vietnam.

The elements of propaganda in *The Green Berets* are obvious and conspicuous. It is more than bringing out certain point of view; it is consciously promoting that point of view. But as I mentioned before, the film does "engage the discourse of history." It does bring out some of the views on its subject. It does admit that there are different views on the subject – if only to "show" them wrong. But *is* the film propaganda, while it *does* contain it? That is one of the questions to which I do not have a straight answer. Its producer, co-director and star certainly admits that it is, in a famous Playboy interview (quoted here from *Looking Away*):

> Interviewer: "Did you resent the critics who labelled [*The Green Berets*] a shameless propaganda film?"
> Wayne: "I agreed with them. It was an American film about American boys who were heroes over there. In that sense it was propaganda."[66]

It is an interesting point to think about. As I have said earlier, all of the films I examine in this thesis stick with the American point of view. None of them gives much visibility to the Vietnamese – they are always viewed in relation to the Americans. Put simply, they are either enemies or victims. Certainly the other films I deal with are more ambiguous in their politics, though both seem to favour the anti-war stance to some degree. Perhaps that is the

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[64] Similarities of this to the dominant form of Vietnam war documentary is discussed in: Barry Dornfeld: "Dear America: Transparency, Authority and Interpretation in a Vietnam War documentary" in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 283-297.
[65] Julian Smith: *Looking Away: Hollywood and Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1975), 133-4.
[66] *Ibid.*, 135.

key – the anti-war stance is more easily defendable. *The Green Berets* swam against the tide at the time of its release – it was not popular to support the war in the late 60's. Perhaps its forays into propaganda would have gone through with less of an outrage if it had echoed the public opinion?

This brings out another interesting view into Wayne's statement and the film itself. I have examined the many ways in which *The Green Berets* is like WWII films. Why should it vary its line in this regard? Certainly, during "the Great War" the movie industry was supporting the American war effort. Famous directors, such as Frank Capra, worked for the military, producing such series as "Why we fight" and "Know your enemy." Even Disney animators put their famous characters to the front. John Wayne himself starred in many films that certainly showed Americans as heroes and the enemy as inhuman. Much had changed, however, during the decades between WWII and Vietnam. Propaganda had been somewhat associated with the Nazi regime and the infamy of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) certainly contributed to this, when the Nazi atrocities became known. These very negative connotations in the 60's (and today for that matter), did not have the same degree of negativism during the WWII. The war in Vietnam lacked the clear purpose the "big one" always had, and what's more, was increasingly unpopular in the home front, which made the situation for pro-war propaganda very different.[67]

In *Hollywood's Vietnam* Gilbert Adair concludes that "such movies as *The Green Berets*… should perhaps be seen less as *about* the Vietnam war… than *part* of it – at least, of how it was perceived by Americans."[68] This does not only mean that it is part of the war only as a piece of propaganda, and thus part of the "war machine," although that is also true in some degree. *The Green Berets* tells much of the attitudes behind the war, and of the images

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[67] For detailed comparison of Defense Department films from WWII and Vietnam, see: Claudia Springer: "Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam" in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 95-114.
[68] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 99.

in the heads of soldiers fighting it. Its shortcomings are obvious when looking at it as a depiction of the combat zone in Vietnam, with all its WWII war movie influences, etc. Its value to the researcher analysing it some thirty five years after its filming and the conflict in Vietnam is precisely in the mindset that made people boycott it in theatres in 1968. The fact that parts of the film are "virtually undiluted propaganda"[69] tells a great deal of the pro-war sentiments during the war(s) in Vietnam, the rhetoric used by the soldiers in the film tell both of the rhetoric used by supporters of the war and their rationale for the war, and fears regarding the "communist domination of the world."

Even more interesting is how the movie depicts how the war was perceived by Americans. Alongside with news reports and a few documentary films *The Green Berets* was long the only depiction of the war in Vietnam for a truly mass audience. Naturally there was an abundance of independent documentaries – such as *Letters from Vietnam* (1965) and *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger* (1969). In addition, the first books on the war by reporters, veterans, and other people who had been to Vietnam started coming out almost immediately after the conflict in Vietnam escalated to war – books such as Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1973, although it appeared in part in several magazines in 1969), Donald Duncan's *The New Legions* (1967), Ronald Glasser's *365 Days* (1971), David Halberstam's *One Very Hot Day* (1967), and Daniel Lang's *Casualties of War* (1969), to name a few best known and earliest. None of these can compete with *The Green Berets* in the number of audience it reached, and as such it was an important factor in forming an image of the war in American minds. Fortunately the film also roused such a storm of protest for its treatment of the war, that most of the public was aware that there were shortcomings in the cinematic depiction of the war.

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[69] *Ibid.*, 32-3.

The influence of the films like *The Green Berets* does not end (or should I say begin) there. The WWII "classics" – such as *Back to Bataan* already mentioned – influenced the mindset of both those who watched the war on TV and those who fought in Vietnam. Lloyd B. Lewis writes in *Tainted War* on how "WWII combat films became an important socializing influence, giving symbolic form to a number of ideas which thereupon achieved the status of everyday knowledge."[70] In *If I Die in a Combat Zone* Tim O'Brian writes on his own (or at least his fictional self's) upbringing, saying "I grew out of one war and into another… I was fed by the spoils of 1945 victory."[71] One of the most visible spoils of that victory in Europe and in the Pacific was the great tradition of American war film. In the American WWII war film the figure of John Wayne "stands out as the locus of symbolic significance,"[72] Lewis puts it. In his study Lewis identifies several hundred references to John Wayne's influence in the Vietnam War narratives (mainly literary sources) he has chosen to study. Wayne gave concrete form to the abstract notion of heroism, and what it was to be a good soldier. The thing was, as is noted in several of the veteran narratives Lewis has studied, that the kind of heroics displayed in the Wayne movies are rather lethal in actual combat situation – to the soldier attempting to live up to the larger than life warrior. As Al Santoli writes in *Everything We Had* (1981) "They watched too many John Wayne movies. It just wasn't that way."[73]

It is interesting that a film (*The Green Berets*) made into formulas that were responsible for many notions on the modern warfare in the heads of the real soldiers going into the Vietnam War, was actually the film that made those formulas seem entirely inadequate for the depiction of the conflict in Vietnam. In a way this type of film forces the

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[70] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 22.
[71] Tim O'Brien: *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Send Me Home* (New York: Dell, 1973), 20.
[72] Lloyd B. Lewis: *The Tainted War: Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 25.
[73] Al Santoli: *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-three American Soldiers Who Fought There* (New York: Random House, 1981), 202.

same kind of realization on the face of the audience that the war in Vietnam did to soldiers fighting there: "It just wasn't that way." At the same time it provides an interesting glimpse into the mindset behind the war, both political and personal. The politics of the movie are the same as the politics of those who supported the war. It also gives voice to the opposition to the war, only to discredit tit, but a voice nonetheless. It gives some insight on what kind of view the general public (and the soldiers drafted to fight the war) had of war before the war in Vietnam. The film may be "bad history," but, as Gilbert Adair says, "any history of the period omitting [*The Green Berets*] from its data will necessarily be incomplete."[74]

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[74] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 99.

4. *Apocalypse Now* – Narrative of War, Mind and History

"We train young men to drop fire on people… but their commanders won't allow them to write "fuck" on their airplanes because it's obscene."
(Colonel Kurtz [Marlon Brando] in *Apocalypse Now*)

Apocalypse Now (1979) is essentially a movie about war on a psychological level. It is a journey in to the darkness of the human mind as well as (or even more than) a trip to the American war experience in Vietnam. As film critic Kevin Bowen puts it in *"Strange Hells": Hollywood in Search of America's Lost War*: "It is the 'strange hell' of memory, of 'Hells within the minds War made.'"[75] Those are such big themes in the film that they cannot be wholly left aside. This chapter will, however, concentrate on the third part of the title – *Apocalypse Now* as a narrative of history.

According to the criteria I set out earlier, *Apocalypse Now* is a historical film. It is set in a war that really took place. It does not, however, make the claim that it is based on a true story. There was no real Captain Willard with a mission to "terminate the command" of Colonel Kurtz. The movie *is* loosely based on the book *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad, set in colonial Africa under Belgian rule. I think the decision to adapt this story to the Vietnam War is significant, and I will come back to it. Some writers, such as Kevin Bowen, have suggested that in *Apocalypse Now* "Vietnam is a background against which larger questions are projected."[76] I agree with this view to a degree – the themes of war and human mind in general are more important in the film than the Vietnam War specifically. Moreover, I think Vietnam is important in the film, not merely as a background. In this

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[75] Kevin Bowen: "'Strange Hells': Hollywood in Search of America's Lost War," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 226.
[76] *Ibid*., 231.

chapter I will examine some specific ways in which the film "engages the discourse of history,"[77] in line with Robert A. Rosenstone when he speaks of "true" invention.

The critical writing on *Apocalypse Now* (both journalistic and academic) is extesive. It has been accused of being ambivalent in its depiction of the war – an example of this would be Frank P. Tomasulo's article "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film."[78] The film indeed contains both prowar and antiwar elements, and like the rolling waves at "Charlie's Point" in the film, the film itself "can break right and left simultaneously." I see this duality as one of the strengths of the film in conveying some of the themes, but it is also a shortcoming in other areas, which I will deal with later.

Connected to the duality is the issue of different versions of the film. *Apocalypse Now* is a film where it certainly matters which version the researcher is analysing. Apparently Coppola brought two different endings to the Cannes film festival in 1979 where the film was first shown as a 70mm version – so called "prowar" and "antiwar" endings. The version that was seen in the festival was eventually the "antiwar" one, which Tomasulo describes as "Willard renouncing Kurtz's brutality by dropping his machete to the ground (causing the natives to do likewise)… this action is followed by a cleansing rain that symbolically puts out the fire of the opening images of napalmed nature."[79] One further tie to the beginning of the movie and an image of cathartic ending would be the last image of PBR (a river patrol boat) drifting by an upright Buddha statue, a juxtaposition with the upside down head of Willard in the opening scene. This is the more modernist and open ending of the movie. This is also the ending used in the European theatre and video release, and the version I will be dealing with. It is relevant to know, however, that there is another ending for the film, which

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[77] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 61.
[78] Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990).
[79] *Ibid*., 155.

has apparently been used in American theatre release and also video versions. In this (also called 35mm ending) version, as the PBR is leaving Kurtz's compound, we hear radio call from "the Almighty" (radio code for strategic air command), which is followed by spectacular explosions as the compound is destroyed with "apocalyptic air strikes."[80] This has been interpreted as Willard carrying out Kurtz's final orders (echoing Joseph Conrad): "Drop the bomb, exterminate them all."[81] While the ending was apparently added "to provide a circular narrative structure, full-fledged emotional catharsis, and dramatic closure to the mass audiences,"[82] it has been widely labelled as "prowar" ending. Coppola himself has denied – in the commentary of the Redux DVD-release (2000) – that there ever was "alternate endings," but that it was simply a case of leaving out some material, as always happens with films (the destruction of Kurtz's compound was included in some of the preview versions). What, according to him, created the misconception of the two endings, was that in the version displayed at the Cannes film festival, there was no credit sequence, and one had to be added to the theatre release, and Coppola decided to use the explosions at the compound as a background for the end credits. Later (including European) prints include simple black background for the end credits. In addition, there is also the longer Redux-version, which uses the "antiwar" ending, and also brings out the colonial theme of the movie more strongly.

Duality / ambivalence is one of the themes in the film, but there are also others. In the movie most of the themes are dealt through the point of view and narration of Captain Willard (Martin Sheen), as "Willard travels upriver… encountering situations that portray

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[80] *Ibid.*

[81] This is a good example of how the book *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad has been used in the film. In the book similar phrase can be found in Kurtz's report, though without the reference to "the bomb" (a reminder that the "extermination of all" is much more real possibility since the invention of the atomic bomb): "Exterminate all the brutes." Joseph Conrad: "Heart of Darkness," in *The Arnold Anthology of British And Irish Literature*, ed. Robert Clark & Thomas Healy (London: Arnold, 1997), 1183.

[82] Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 155.

different aspects of the war,"[83] as Michael Ryan describes in *Camera Politica* (1988). Also

Willard's narration plays some role in the movie, bringing in some of the "documentary"

quality that is quite apparent in later films like *Platoon* (1986) and *Hamburger Hill* (1987),

but almost absent in "high-art" war movies of the late 70's such as *Apocalypse Now* and *The*

Deer Hunter (1978).[84] In this chapter I, too, will follow Willard's trip upriver, and examine

the scenes, which he encounters. This necessarily entails looking at the film from the

American perspective that is dominant in the film – the point of view in the film is that of a

disillusioned *American* soldier, which is something prevalent in American films about

Vietnam. Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe write in their introduction to *The Vietnam War*

and American Culture (1991):

> We (Americans) are obsessed with the trauma and injury we have suffered, as if the
> United States, not Vietnam and Kampuchea, were the country to suffer the bombings,
> the napalm air strikes, the search-and-destroy missions, the systematic deforestation,
> the "hamlet resettlement" programs.[85]

As I already said in my introduction, that is something to be expected, but necessarily the

film will also deal with the other side, if only through implication and absence.

The character of Willard is interesting from several perspectives. Firstly, he can be

read as "the metaphor of the disarray of the American Army in Vietnam,"[86] as was

demonstrated in *Camera Politica*. In the beginning we see him drifting into consciousness as

the firebombed jungle is transformed into a hotel room and the helicopter into a ceiling fan.

Willard shares some of the audience's confusion by scrambling to the window, and finally

realizing where he is: "Saigon… shit… I'm still in Saigon." He's upside down head in the

beginning can be read as a sign of mental turmoil (and is also an interesting juxtaposition

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[83] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 238.
[84] Similarities between documentary narration and Willard voice-overs are discussed in: John Carlos Rowe: "Eyewitness: Documentary Styles in the American Representations of Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 148-74.
[85] Rick Berg & John Carlos Rowe: "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 2.
[86] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 238.

with the upright head of Buddha-statue – over which Willard's face is double projected – at the end of the film), he is drunk and self-destructive – while destroying his hotel room he also mashes his hand into a mirror hitting his mirror image. Willard's confused state of mind is underlined when the MPs come to pick him up, and he immediately asks what are the charges. Gilbert Adair writes in *Hollywood's Vietnam* (1989) that Willard has "inherited such a legacy of amorality that he hardly knows whether he is due for a medal or court-martial."[87] I see his question as a sign of deep-rooted quilt, but it of course works also as reminder of his week long binge, and inability to remember what actually has happened. All of Willard confusion and feelings can also be read into American feelings of the "tainted war" (title of Lloyd B. Lewis' book on Vietnam) and of America's suicidal tendencies in Vietnam.

Willard also serves the themes of the movie in a more immediate manner. His mission gives a face to the "Black Ops" that became exposed during the war. Willard has apparently killed a government tax collector and some other men, but "is not disposed to discuss such operation if one in fact did exist." Assassinations, government cover up – the whole package. Willard's mission to assassinate Colonel Kurtz is also described as a "typical Vietnam mission" – a mission to assassinate an American Colonel gone crazy. This is actually voiced in the film by Chef: "That's typical – shit – fucking Vietnam mission… we go up there so you can kill one of our own guys… I thought you were going to blow up a bridge… or some fucking railroad tracks or something." This kind of dirty work is often seen as typical for the Vietnam War and Chef is working on expectations set by earlier wars that just do not seem to work anymore. The speculations on the reason the generals want Kurtz dead can also be seen as comment on the public image of the Vietnam War. High ups have given a "moral" reason for assassinating Kurtz (his "unsound methods"), but we can hear doubts in Willard's voice-over: "It wasn't just the insanity and murder – there was enough of

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[87] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 105.

that to go around for everyone. Kurtz got out of the boat – didn't take orders anymore." This is, of course, something you are not supposed to do in the Army.

The film also uses Willard to comment on "the veteran issue." This would be an example of "true" invention as defined by Rosenstone – the boat crew is used as a stand-in (or image) of the kinds of problems associated with the Vietnam veterans: feelings of "otherness," not really belonging to "the world" (as opposed to "NAM"). This has no doubt been an issue in other wars, too, but the scale and degree of documentation during/after the war in Vietnam was unparalleled. This may have been emphasized by the unpopularity of the war towards its end.[88] In *Apocalypse Now* the veteran issue is exemplified by most of the crew on the PBR-boat and most of all by Captain Willard. For example, the surfer Lance – whose full name is L. B. Johnson – is reading a letter from his family, telling about their trip to Disneyland, right after an apocalyptic and surreal scene at the Do-Lung bridge, provoking a maniacal "this is fucking better than Disneyland!" reaction from Lance. Chef, the New Orleans cook "wrapped up too tight for Vietnam," receives a "dear-John-letter" from his wife in the same package. The most explicit reference to the problems of the veterans is Captain Willard's description of his time "home after my first tour… it was worse… I wake up and be nothing… I hardly said a word to my wife until I said 'yes' to a divorce." And Colonel Kurtz had drifted farther away than anyone, "totally beyond the pale of any human conduct," as he is described to Willard by the General giving the mission. Willard is present also in other themes of the film, but for now, let's take the trip upriver with him, through the themes of the film.

One theme many people associate with Vietnam is war at its most brutal, as Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe summarize in their introduction to *The Vietnam War and*

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[88] For closer look at the Vietnam Veteran read, ""They Were Called and They Went": The Political Rehabilitation of the Vietnam Veteran," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 81-97.

American Culture: "the bombings, the napalm air strikes, the search-and-destroy missions, the systematic deforestation, the 'hamlet resettlement' programs."[89] All means of warfare (save the atomic bomb – and that was considered) were employed in Vietnam. This was nothing new. What was new were the televised battles and extensive news coverage, which exposed the horrors of the war in a way that had been impossible during prior wars. The unpopularity of the war partially caused by this led to more and more critical coverage of the war, and the stories of civilian casualties – such as the My Lai massacre where "U.S. patrol wantonly butchered 347 civilians in the village of My Lai"[90] – made the war even more unpopular.

Apocalypse Now shows these horrors and "unsound methods" in several scenes. Destroying a peaceful village filled with schoolchildren so that Lance can surf, gunning down a woman who is only trying to protect her dog and then executing her at point blank range after she is wounded in the machine gun fire are just few examples of atrocities committed in the film. These scenes are also areas of the most heated "anti/prowar" debate. Frank P. Tomasulo, a historian and a film critic, argues that those actions are justified in the film by showing a scene where a woman carries a hand grenade into a helicopter and the peaceful village is in fact heavily defended.[91] To me this "justification" was a point of view of the veteran that is shown in the film alongside the "humanitarian" one. The arguments of veterans who have been accused of murdering civilians have been similar – conditions were such that there was no clear indication who was the enemy and they had to act in order to protect their lives. Tomasulo seems to argue that this "veteran" point of view is somehow stronger than the "humanitarian" one, but I disagree. The sheer madness of destroying a

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[89] Rick Berg & John Carlos Rowe: "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 2.
[90] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 35.
[91] In Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 152.

village for surfing is such that it cannot be justified, and I think this madness comes through strongly in the character of Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore (appropriately named).

But I agree that this is one of the strongest areas of ambivalence in the film. I take the "Charlie Point" (or village raid) scene as an example. Gilbert Adair also sees ambivalence in the scene, but makes a firm distinction between "exaltation" and "exultation."[92] There is no doubt that cinematically the village raid is indeed an exalting experience – the massed helicopters descending from the sun to the tune of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries," followed by spectacular explosions. Adair uses a term originally coined by French critic Andre Bazin "the Nero complex" to describe "the vicarious pleasure afforded us by representation of large-scale destruction."[93] Tomasulo finds this to be a reactionary statement: war is beautiful. Albert Auster and Leonard Quart argue in *How the War Was Remembered* that the horror at the meaningless destruction of the village is "lost in the brilliance of Coppola's cinematic effects and energy."[94] Adair, however, claims that while the viewer may be exalted by the cinematic spectacle of the village raid, no viewer – with a possible exception of "the unrepentant hawk"[95] – will be exulted at the mindless destruction of the peaceful village.

One person who certainly does exult in the destruction, is Kilgore. He is also connected to the ambivalence in the movie, by being fascinating at the same time as repulsive. Auster and Quart read him as a parody of American tunnel vision, as a "suggestive symbol of American arrogance and ethnocentrism in his incapacity to believe that some small Asiatic people could hurt or even defeat his country or that there are other countries and people who have complex political and social interests and needs of their own."[96] Or as

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[92] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 107.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 66.
[95] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 108.
[96] *Ibid.*

Kilgore puts it "Charlie don't surf." For Kilgore the whole Vietnam is just beach parties and surfing. Represented like this Kilgore is a fairly repulsive character, but at the same time there is something persuasive in his complete certainty that he is right and can do anything, in his invulnerability in the middle of the war and self-glorifying cowboy stances – when everyone else dives for cover, he does not even finch, taking his shirt off and looking at the "magnificent peak." And of course, in the movie, he does not get hurt, and the Americans win the fight, no matter how pointless.

How Tomasulo argues the atrocities are "justified" brings me to another major theme of the Vietnam War – the "invisibility" of the enemy. The Vietnam War was the first war that really received mass media coverage where the opponent did not necessarily wear uniforms, and where the "front line" was not as clear as it had been in earlier wars. The Vietcong used guerrilla tactics to which U.S. troops seemed unable to respond. The hostile and strange (to Americans) jungle environment added to their discomfort. The deforestation efforts using chemical weaponry ("Agent Orange") suggest how imposing a jungle battleground really was.

In the film the "invisibility" comes through in many ways. The first and foremost invisible enemy is inside one's head. Everyone is on the edge. When somebody makes a sudden move – to protect a puppy, for example – the response is to fire mindlessly and almost aimlessly. Further examples of this are the several occasions of shooting at the jungle – no enemy is visible but the Americans know it is somewhere. Something very similar can be found also in *Heart of Darkness* where Europeans can be found "squirting lead into… bush"[97] on several occasions. The futility of such effort is made clear in the description of a French man-of-war "shelling the bush… there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a

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[97] Joseph Conrad: "Heart of Darkness," in *The Arnold Anthology of British And Irish Literature*, ed. Robert Clark & Thomas Healy (London: Arnold, 1997), 1179.

continent."[98] Going further, this shows the similarity of the American effort in the Indochina to the aspirations of the European imperial powers in Africa some century before. One occasion in the film shows the hostility of environment in another way too – Chef leaves the boat to pick mangoes and runs into a tiger. Shooting wildly he gets back on the boat and the whole crew fires at the jungle until Chief finally realizes it was only a tiger.

The Vietnamese are also invisible in other ways in the film. Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe note that "we had successfully transformed the 'invisibility' of our enemy, which was its most brilliant military strategy in this guerrilla war, into cultural and human 'invisibility.'"[99] In a film this kind of "facelessness" is all the more striking, for a film "need[s]… a specific image"[100] to convey its meaning, as you will remember from chapter two. In the "Charlie Point" scene I already discussed the "camera angles inscribe the viewer in the helicopter looking down on the Vietnamese villagers, making them faceless and tiny in the frame as they are gunned down, but the camera moves in to isolate the agony of one wounded *American* soldier."[101] This also relates to the point of view I discussed earlier, and is what Ryan criticizes in *Camera Politica* about "Liberal vet" film, that "criticized the war for what it did to good, white American boys, not for what ruin it brought to innocent Vietnamese."[102]

Besides being "invisible," the enemy in the movie is also made out to be somewhat inhuman. "Charlie squats in the bush," as described by Willard, and is faceless. Here the movie seemingly takes the point of view of gung-ho Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore, who is

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[98] *Ibid*., 1154.
[99] Rick Berg & John Carlos Rowe: "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 7.
[100] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 62.
[101] In Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 149.
[102] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 198.

giving out his death-cards to the people his men have killed. All the cards are – as Kilgore notes – worthless cards (small numbers), connected with "worthless people." It is notable, though, that most of the bodies are women and children – when a dead child (maybe at the age of twelve) is shown in a film it is certain to provoke a response, but not for the guy who has killed the child and is dealing out cards to show who did it. Here I think the image speaks for those who really suffered the most in the war, while it is true that the Vietnamese are almost faceless in the film.

The first scene where the Vietnamese people are given face in the film has been labelled "Sampan Scene." In this fairly short and somewhat "superimposed" scene the PBR encounters a sampan of local villagers, and the captain of the boat (Chief) decides to conduct a search. During the search a frightened girl makes an ill-timed move against one of the baskets, and the crew (on the edge) opens fire with the boat's machine guns. As it turns out, the barrel contains a puppy, which the girl was trying to protect. The sole survivor (badly wounded) is executed at point blank range by Willard, to the horror of the rest of the crew. Adair finds the value of this scene to be in that "for the first time we are granted a close look at the 'enemy,' at those anxious, delicate faces painfully familiar from TV and newspaper coverage of the war."[103] I agree with him.

There is also one other important aspect relating to the sampan scene. It is one of the scenes where Coppola's critique of the hypocritical attitude to war comes out, exemplified by Willard's comment after executing the wounded Vietnamese woman in order not to delay the mission: "We cut them in half with a machine gun and give them a bandage." This is definitely a characteristic of modern warfare, of which Vietnam was a prime example. It is also tied to American society, as linguist and a long time critic of America's imperial politics Noam Chomsky has said in "Visions of Righteousness:" "A major theme of our history has

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[103] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 113.

been a combination of hideous atrocities and protestations of awesome benevolence."[104] This kind of view is hammered home by several scenes in the movie. We hear a radio broadcast asking to "keep Saigon clean" in the middle of a war that is all but clean. The most striking example of this hypocrisy is voiced by Kurtz in an impressive soliloquy: "We train young men to drop fire on people… but their commanders won't allow them to write 'fuck' on their airplanes because it's obscene." In the face of horrors the viewer has just seen, the hypocrisy of the modern, "humanitarian" war is made all the more striking, and this is something the film conveys rather well.

I have already discussed how TV was an important part of the war in Vietnam for the first time in the history of war – surely the newsreels and cinema played a similar role already during the First World War, but Vietnam has been called "the first TV war" for a reason. TV (and media in general) were important to the war effort also in making the war increasingly unpopular with images of horror from the front, and the government's attempts to contradict and counter this effect were not very successful. I will discuss this in a greater detail when looking at *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Visually *Apocalypse Now* does not use "documentary" styles adopted from TV-news reports like many other Vietnam movies (the best known of these would be *Platoon*) – indeed, *Apocalypse Now* is visually quite experimental, with "artistic" and symbolic use of lighting, strange colours, etc.[105] It does not aim for a realistic looking battlefield. The director Francis Ford Coppola deals with the presence of TV on the battlefield in a different way, in an important moment of self-reflectivity. There is a small scene where a film crew (headed by Coppola himself in a cameo role) asks Willard and his crew to simulate fighting while they pass the camera. Just beside

[104] Noam Chomsky: "Visions of Righteousness," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 28.

[105] For discussion of religious, national and dualistic (fire and water, light and darkness) symbolism and cinematic effects in *Apocalypse Now*, see: Frank P. Tomasulo, "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 145-58.

the camera Kilgore is handing out his death-cards, and the fighting is already over, but the news crew steers away from the dead women and children, reminding viewers of an important thing about stories – any story, even non-fictional one, is always a version told by somebody.

The director's presence in the battlefield also reminds of a notion expressed by Gilbert Adair: "War and show business overlap and feed each other."[106] War is popular entertainment, not only war movies, but also news reports. War is the best news material there is. Show business has also been tied to the war effort in many ways, not only as propaganda, but also as "R&R" for the troops in the front. I believe Coppola was aware of this connection and wanted to comment on it, not only in the news crew scene, but also in a scene where a USO show is set up on a bizarre, floodlit stage in the middle of the jungle. It is also interesting that the show gets totally out of control as sex-starved troopers storm the stage and Playboy bunnies are rescued with a helicopter. This scene is another indication of the disorder among the American fighting troops, portrayed in almost all Vietnam War depictions.

The USO show scene ties also to another theme of the film – namely colonialism. I mentioned earlier that I do not think it is an insignificant decision to adapt a book that criticised the involvement of European empires in Africa fairly openly in a war that has been criticised of being an essentially imperialistic venture. I will not go too deep into analysing the adaptation that Conrad's book underwent, first in John Milius' and then Coppola's hands – the film is based on the book rather loosely – but the two works share some themes, and the critique of colonialism is one of them. The reasons for the war in Vietnam and American participation in it are still debated, but I see the Vietnam War primarily as an imperialistic and colonial war. What was at stake in Vietnam (and in so many other places) was American

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[106] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 111.

sphere of influence, even though the profits from maintaining and creating an empire were not as clear as they had been during the reign of European imperial powers. Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe find the following reasons for the war:

> We did not go to Vietnam in search of raw materials, cheap labor, new commercial markets. Unlike the French, we didn't want Vietnamese rubber. Unlike the Japanese, we didn't want their hardwood. Unlike the Chinese, we didn't want the fertile lands of the Mekong Delta. We wanted something abstract, utterly immaterial, and (finally) fantastic: a "sphere of influence," a counterweight in the imaginary game of "balance of power" politics.[107]

I think it is a political statement by Coppola to choose a story about imperialistic power (Belgium/England) in a colonized country (Congo) in a not-so-distant past, and put that story in the setting of the Vietnam War.

It is, however, not only through the production history that the anti-imperialistic tact of the movie comes through. According to Adair, Americans bring "the heart of darkness" with them into Vietnam.[108] This can be seen in several ways, the primary way being the many attempts to reproduce American life in Vietnam. The USO scene I already mentioned is one obvious example – an attempt to build kind of "Las Vegas" setting into the jungle. This is contrasted further with the natives both in Willard's voice-over – "Charlie didn't have R&R" – and by fencing the natives out of the show, into the darkness. Also the huge American supply base at which the show is held feels completely unnatural and even surreal in the environment it is placed into. But the most striking example of bringing American lifestyle to Vietnam can be found in Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore, who is totally impervious to the war surrounding him, and is *solely* bend on giving his men the beach-party lifestyle associated with California. In him also the bringing of "the heart of darkness" is most visible – in order to surf he destroys the Vietnamese village. Even when he seems to have some interest in the Vietnamese as human beings – offering his canteen to a Vietnamese soldier

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[107] Rick Berg & John Carlos Rowe: "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 3.
[108] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 110.

who has been mortally wounded in the stomach – he is immediately distracted (before the victim gets a sip) when somebody mentions the tide and the waves coming in.[109]

Apocalypse Now has been criticized for lacking a political perspective on the reasons behind the war. That is a valid critique, and it has been a feature of the Vietnam War films – *The Green Berets* (1968) is an exception to this – to "depoliticise the struggle, turning it into a test of manhood, a rite of passage, or a personal trial,"[110] as Frank Tomasulo summarizes. This is true with *Apocalypse Now*, and I agree with Auster and Quart who claim that in *Apocalypse Now* the "moral and existential rather than political and social elements of the story are the most seductive."[111] I see their problem with the film when they continue that "death and destruction had more to do with the human condition… than with any concrete decision made by the U.S. government."[112] Political reasons are not a primary theme in the story. Here I have to remind that telling any story necessarily involves both *inclusion* and *exclusion*. The story is told from a certain point of view (primarily that of a disillusioned soldier), and there are other areas in which the film excels at. This is not to say that the film does not have a political agenda behind it, only that the film does not deal explicitly or strongly in the political reasons behind the war.

The film *does* deal, however, with the reasons for fighting the war from a point of view of a disillusioned soldier. These comments focus primarily on the futility and lack of reason for the whole campaign in Southeast Asia. The Americans are fighting for a big nothing – as Rowe and Carlos say "something abstract, utterly immaterial, and (finally)

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[109] As an aside, it might be interesting to look at how the beginnings of cinema coincide with the height of imperialism. For more information, see: Robert Stam: *Film Theory – An Introduction* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

[110] Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 147.

[111] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 65.

[112] *Ibid.*

fantastic."[113] *How the War Was Remembered* complains that Vietnam War movies have "left untouched… the surreal and real" nature of the battlefield in Vietnam, and "almost all" have ignored the "political logic (or illogic) behind the U.S. commitment."[114] I think *Apocalypse Now* does rather well at least in conveying the "surreal" and "illogical" part. I will deal with this in two examples.

The first is at the Do Lung bridge – in the film labelled "the asshole of the world" – where Chief compares Willard's mission to the Bridge: "Just like this bridge – we build it every night, Charlie blows it back up again – just so the generals can say the road is open." This epitomizes the abstract nature of the war's goal for the U.S., and even Auster and Quart call the scene "a striking metaphor for a war without moral direction or sense."[115] And even while they feel that meaning is lost in the sensual excessiveness of the scene – "the bizarre atonal music, disembodied voices, and constantly burning fires and flares lighting up the sky and even hulks of aircraft lying in the water"[116] – it certainly adds to the apocalyptic and surreal sense of the scene. What is more, when Willard tries to find the officer in charge at the bridge, he is met only with the question "Ain't you?" No one seems to be in charge of the soldiers at the bridge or the war.

The other example is significant because of who says it. Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore revels in the story he is telling – he "Love(s) the smell of napalm in the morning" – and he is telling about a hill they bombed for twelve hours, and after that they "didn't find one stinking chink body." Kilgore thinks it is great – his war certainly has no direction, he is in Vietnam to have fun. The viewer may think otherwise and perceive the war as just useless, mindless destruction. If you look at it that way it just adds to the gung-ho war crazy image of Kilgore.

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[113] Rick Berg & John Carlos Rowe: "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 3.
[114] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), XIII.
[115] *Ibid.*, 67.
[116] *Ibid*.

Coppola's Vietnam may be viewed as "basically hallucinatory, a war run by 'four-star-clowns' and built on drugs, despair and death,"[117] as it is described in *How the War Was Remembered*. I feel that the lack of military leadership throughout the film can be compared with the lack of political leadership in the country. This can, of course, also be read as Tomasulo reads it – as an indication that if the Americans only had had enough will and strong leadership, they would have won in Indochina.

Even if *Apocalypse Now* does not get deep into the politics that led to the Vietnam War, it certainly has political and personal agendas. In "Eyewitness: Documentary Styles in the American Representations of Vietnam" John Carlos Rowe says: "*Any* representation of Vietnam is bound to be shaped by the assumptions and politics of its authors."[118] In *Apocalypse Now* there are at least two (possibly more) clearly political agendas at work – this might have to do with two screenwriters, Coppola and Milius, the latter well known for his rightist leanings in politics. Milius' political ideology can also be read in his other films, such as *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Red Dawn* (1984).

I argue the strongest agenda in the film is the antiwar theme – despite the duality I have pointed out in several occasions earlier. In a way the antiwar theme of the film is set up right in the beginning – the beautiful jungle scenery is transformed into a hellish firestorm by napalm just as we hear Jim Morrison's words on the soundtrack: "This is the end." It is of course the beginning of the movie, but it is the beginning of the end. Just before the end of the movie we hear Dennis Hopper's reporter explain (in the words of T.S. Eliot): "This is the way the fucking world ends – not with a bang but a whimper."[119] This is well after two hours into the film and we have seen people die, some physically, some mentally, bit by bit, for the

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[117] *Ibid.*

[118] John Carlos Rowe: "Eyewitness: Documentary Styles in the American Representations of Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 156.

[119] The original form in "The Hollow Men" (the epigraph of which is an allusion to the same book *Apocalypse Now* is based on – *Heart of Darkness* – "Mistah Kurtz – He dead.") is *"This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper"* in T.S. Eliot: *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 92.

duration. War is destructive. It wasn't the Vietnam War that was the end, but little by little it is coming closer. I strongly feel that it is this antiwar side that comes out stronger in the film's depiction of the madness of war, despite the visual brilliance of the film.

How the War Was Remembered makes a claim that as Kurtz finally appears "the particularity of the Vietnam War disappears altogether, and nebulous notion of civilization's madness takes its place."[120] This is quite true – Vietnam does make way for a larger context, be it "civilization's madness" or merely madness of war. However, this is also something that C. D. B. Bryan recognized as a feature of the "generic Vietnam War narrative" in "Barely Suppressed Screams: Getting Bead on Vietnam Literature" (1984): "the gradual deterioration of order, disintegration of idealism, the breakdown of character, the alienation from those at home, and finally, the loss of all sensibility save the will to survive."[121] Bryan was mainly dealing with narratives written by Vietnam veterans, whose narratives tended to boil down to the primitive notion of survival in the middle of madness. So, in a way *Apocalypse Now* does carry on with the point of view of a disillusioned soldier to the end.

The other agenda that comes through in *Apocalypse Now* is more covert, and possibly more questionable. In *Camera Politica* Michael Ryan examines the characters of Captain Willard and Colonel Kurtz, finding "disregard for liberal procedures and institutions in both."[122] With Kurtz this is more obvious: he "got out of the boat," as the film describes, stepped out of the boundaries of the military, setting up his own order and utopia/dystopia. Kurtz did not play by the rules, but from Willard's voice-over we learn that his methods were more effective than the more "humane" procedures of the army/government – he executed four South Vietnamese officers he suspected of leaking information to the enemy without

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[120] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 70.

[121] C. D. B. Bryan: "Barely suppressed screams: Getting a Bead on Vietnam Literature," *Harpers*, June 1984, 67-72.

[122] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 239.

any trial or even investigation, and the attacks on the Americans stopped. Apparently "he got the right four guys," as Willard notes. Kurtz is also perceived to be a natural leader, idolized not only by the natives, but also by the previous assassin sent to "terminate his command," implying that there is such a thing as "right" rulers. This applies also to Willard, as he travels upriver, becoming more and more like Kurtz (the father-son motive is one of the strong themes of the movie). He is listened to, feared and respected by the PBR-crew (even if the captain of the boat is in charge of it). Also Willard shows "disregard for liberal procedures." He is an assassin for one, but he also acts in ways that are out of the normal military procedures. He executes a Vietnamese woman in order to not delay his mission. He bullies the supplies he needs from the supply base. Ryan's interpretation of this is that "the film [*Apocalypse Now*] thus privileges an individualist rebellion against liberalism, bureaucracy and large corporate organizations."[123] While it cannot be said that the film automatically gives preference to the politics of its protagonist, I agree with Ryan in that *Apocalypse Now* seems to favour the kind of American version of individualism, which appears to be the philosophy of so many Hollywood heroes – though "heroes" in *Apocalypse Now* are rife.

In this chapter I have discussed *Apocalypse Now* from the point of view of history, and tried to steer away from the larger and more prominent themes the movie presents, though some sidesteps have been necessary to get my views across. I have done this is order to show that while the Vietnam War in *Apocalypse Now* is a background for larger themes of journey into human consciousness and the madness of war, and there remains much to be said in those areas, the film is also a thoughtful, ripping movie about the Vietnam War specifically. I have shown why Vietnam has a much more important role in the film than merely a background. *Apocalypse Now* is a movie about the Vietnam War, and it is an interesting version of the story of that War.

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[123] *Ibid*.

5. *Full Metal Jacket* – Killing Machine Sterilized

"How can you shoot Vietnamese women and children? – Easy, just don't lead them so much."
(Conversation in *Full Metal Jacket*)

Thus far I have dealt with two rather different Vietnam War narratives, and in this chapter I will tackle a different one still. Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) as a version of Vietnam may seen cold and detached, and its visual style is certainly very Spartan when compared to the visual fireworks (both literal and metaphoric) of *Apocalypse Now*. Albert Auster and Leonard Quart have found this to be "essentially disturbing… in as passionate and immediate a universe as Vietnam."[124] The effect may well be disturbing, but as in Kubrick's other films, such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1968), it is intentionally so, and I might add, also a staple feature of film parody. *Full Metal Jacket* is one of the first films to detach itself from the immediate nature of the war in Vietnam, and it is able to look at the war from a certain distance. To some viewers this may lessen the emotional impact of the film, but it also offers a new perspective to the war. In this chapter I will examine how *Full Metal Jacket* deals with the themes of the Vietnam War, detached and parodic, but also "immediate" in a different way than the films I have studied this far.

Before going on to a more detailed analysis of some of the key scenes of the film, it is worth analysing "the big picture." The film essentially consists of two parts, "training sequence" which takes up (almost) the first half of the film, and "Vietnam sequence" which takes up the second half. This kind of division makes reading of the film break into "Acts I and II" almost intuitively, and creates a few interesting parallels between the "Acts." It is worth pointing out that this division did not exist in the short novel *The Short Timers* (1979) by Gustav Hasford, which only used its first chapter (or some 30 pages of 180) in the boot

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[124] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 142.

camp before moving on to the battlefield of Vietnam. Together with his co-screenwriters Gustav Hasford and Michael Herr, Kubrick decided to expand the sequence to the almost painful length in the movie, and it is worthwhile to think of the reasons for this. A fairly obvious one would be putting the viewer "through" the same torment that the recruits endure at the boot camp, and this does not mean that the sequence would be "poor cinema;" on the contrary, it is a very powerful section of the film. Lengthening the sequence makes it *more* powerful in showing the monotonous repetition of the brainwash the marines undergo in the training (I will examine the sequence in more detail later).

The length of the "training sequence" is also important for another reason – in creating the "two part" feel to the film's narration I mentioned earlier. The boot camp sequence is familiar from many other war films (for example *The Boys in Company C* (1978)) and while its treatment by Kubrick can be seen as parody of the military indoctrination system, the result is rather different from what we have come to expect. Traditionally the army system is said to make "men out of boys," and indeed the drill instructor sergeant Harman (Lee Ermey) is determined that "If you ladies leave my island… you will be a weapon, a minister of death, praying for war." The two part structure of the film, however, highlights the disintegration of the killing machine in combat. Michael Kline says that "In the second section of the film the war machine that the sergeant moulded… is demystified: when tested in battle in Vietnam the recruits are panic-stricken, ill-disciplined, and decidedly unheroic."[125] Demystification of the American war machine is one of the key themes of the film – something that the real war in Vietnam did in some degree, though as we know, the military has recovered from this blow, to some extent thanks to Vietnam War

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[125] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 29.

movies trying to "blame" the military defeat on anything from "bad politics" to "liberal ideals."

One striking feature throughout the film is Kubrick's bleak visual style. His shots are fairly empty – I would say totally empty of anything "extra." In a genre such as (Vietnam) war film the effect is startling. Kubrick's shots are perfectly composed, lit in harsh while light, and stripped of anything that would break the harmony (or monotony) of the screen. This is at its most visible in the boot camp, looking almost like a hospital – or a laboratory, for more appropriate analogy – in its white décor and green uniforms of the soldiers, as spotlessly clean as everything else at the camp. Even the camera seems to follow this tyrannical monotony – the long tracking shots in the training sequence are all contained in straight lines. Not once is the camera allowed to move freely, just like the recruits at the camp, moving in carefully instructed turns and straight angles.

The Spartan style of the film does not end in the visuals, but, more importantly extends to the speech of the characters. In *Hollywood's Vietnam* Gilbert Adair recognizes only two modes of speech in the first half of the film, the military speech and that of the recruits.[126] The recruits' mode of speech is weeded out at the boot camp by Sergeant Harman: "The first and last words out of your filthy sewers will be "Sir!"," leaving only the military speech for the second part of the film, together with the "equally codified"[127] language of Vietnamese prostitutes ("Me love you long time. Me so horny. Me love you too much.").

Why are these facts significant? The answer lies within the film's subject matter – the language (both visual and oral) of the film is as rigid and codified as the military. The chosen style functions effectively with the depiction of military training process, and makes the few instances in which it is broken more striking. The first one of these is the red blood of Private

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[126] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 174.
[127] *Ibid*.

Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio) splattered over the clinical white of the barracks shower wall as Pyle shoots himself and Sergeant Hartman at the end of the first part. But is there more to the austere style than this? Adair claims that "Kubrick… as whole-heartedly espouses the latent ideology of Marine Corps training as did Leni Riefenstahl (and I carefully weigh the analogy) that of the florid Nazi pageantry that she covered… for her classic documentary *Triumph of Will*."[128] That is certainly a bold claim, and one I disagree with, but I admit that such "idolization" of the military (Marine Corps) ideology can be read into the film without too much effort. Kubrick does not allow a voice for the recruit's doubts and feelings; basically all we get is the abusive slang of the military. Adair notes that "Throughout the forty minutes of his on-screen presence Hartman is never heard to utter a sentence that is not… an insult."[129] We heart the whole of Marine Corps credo. Auster and Quart note that "the film's most vital figures are also most murderous. Like Sergeant. Hartman, the brutal, Ramboesque GI Animal Mother (Adam Baldwin), takes great pride in being crude and cruel. Still, it is he who rises to the situation and leads the squad in eliminating a young, female sniper who has pinned them down and killed a number of his buddies."[130] This is emphasized by the fact that even the film's protagonist Private Joker (Matthew Modine) is somewhat detached, and while cynical about the war, remains an observer (with a single notable exception I will be wring more about later).

The detached and bleak nature of the film can also be read in another way, as Michael Klein does: "The emotional distance of the film and its departures from the naturalistic presentation of the war enhance the film's critique. Invoking Brecht's 'alienation' effect[131]… *Full Metal Jacket* elicits the kind of multilayered dialectical reception Brecht called complex

[128] *Ibid*., 177.
[129] *Ibid*., 172.
[130] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 144.
[131] For brief examination of Brecht's influence on cinema, and review of his theories, see Robert Stam: *Film Theory – An Introduction* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 145-51.

seeing."[132] Kubrick avoids the "trap" *Apocalypse Now* (among others) was accused of – making war beautiful while criticising it, and thus undermining the effect. Kubrick's "empty" shots leave space for the viewer to "fill in."

But, to return to Adair's view, it is fair to say that Kubrick uses the Marine Corps' point of view (as formulated above) almost exclusively throughout the film. Reasons and implications of this are, however, arguable. While Adair thinks this is a sign of Kubrick "espousing" the Marine Corps ideology, I read it as a feature of parody. Parody often involves looking at its subject from a somewhat unfamiliar viewpoint and emphasising its features to the point of absurdity – which is what Kubrick has done to the military indoctrination system, the military in general, and to a degree also to the tradition of war movie. The parody is quite chilling, and leaves the audience feeling rather cold – Vietnam is still fairly close, and as we are reminded by the 2003 war in Iraq, the images of war continue to haunt the contemporary viewer. It is possible that some parts of the audience were not ready for the kind of parody Kubrick uses, and parody *is* a notoriously difficult form. The line between "espousing" an ideology and parodying it may be difficult to draw. I read *Full Metal Jacket* as primarily a parody, while Adair sees it "espousing" the ideology of Marine Corps.

Kubrick's adoption of the military viewpoint as his sole viewpoint (with very few exceptions) is effective for parodic purposes and in a Brechtian sense of letting the audience "fill in the gaps." It is, however, not without flaws, as is noted by Kline: "The achievement of *Full Metal Jacket* is incomplete, however, insofar as it is rendered through the structured absence of the *potential* for resistance to the war."[133] The film totally ignores the protests against the war. We see no peace movement – except as a button in Private Joker's combat

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[132] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 30.
[133] *Ibid*., 34.

fatigues, emblem of his schizophrenic attitude to the war. We do not hear the thoughts of the recruits on the war, except for few cynical musing of Joker, and "one liners" marines throw at the interviewing camera (I will examine this scene in detail). In sticking to the microcosm of the army, the film paints a very bleak picture indeed, giving no chance for anything else but war.

So far my discussion of *Full Metal Jacket* has been fairly theoretical, and I have given few examples. In the introduction I already stressed the importance of "attention to specific experiences in filmmaking"[134] in R.B. Toplin's words. This applies to looking at specific movies, instead of, for example, whole genres, but also to studying specific scenes in the movies. In the rest of this chapter I will analyse some key scenes and sequences of *Full Metal Jacket*, giving examples of their importance, and clarifying some of the views I have expressed above.

The first scene, or actually sequence, I will be looking at takes up the first half of the movie: the training sequence. The movie begins at an army barbershop, where we see a heterogeneous group of young men getting their heads shaved. None of them is familiar to the viewer, none are introduced, and as Adair notes "their anonymity [is] heightened by the fact that their heads are being shaved."[135] Together with knowledge of genre conventions the soundtrack is the only thing that tells of what is to come: we hear the well known Country & Western ballad "Hello Vietnam." Adair reads that this almost ritualistic "scalping" is a "prelude to, and a metaphor for, the brainwashing that is to follow," and here I agree with him. As a first step the recruits are physically homogenized, their heads shaved and new clothes given to them. In effect, the beginning of the film sees the recruits stripped of their identities.

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[134] R.B. Toplin: *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 14.
[135] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 171.

After the hair and clothes the recruits lose their names, as their drill sergeant Hartman names his "maggots" with names like Snowball, Joker, Cowboy and Gomer Pyle (after a cartoon strip "hero"). This is a significant part of the brainwashing process, as old lives and identities have to be weeded out before new ones can be implanted – something that the drill sergeant clearly identifies in the film: "I've got your name, I've got your ass."

The film emphasises the similarity of the recruits in many ways, through long tracking shots of clean shaved heads of soldiers standing in neat rows, moving in unison, chanting the Marine Corps doctrines in harmony, and also explicitly saying so. One such instance would be Sergeant Hartman's opening speech: "I don't look down on niggers, kikes, wops or greasers. Here you are all equally worthless!" Though I might add that immediately after this, Hartman goes on to name a black recruit Snowball, and tells him that "They don't serve fried chicken and watermelon on a daily basis in my mess hall."

This brings me to another factor of the indoctrination process: constant insulting. As I noted earlier, each sentence coming out of Sergeant Hartman's mouth is an insult, or intended to be perceived as such. As important as the verbal abuse is the fact that the recruits are not allowed to talk back. Private Joker learns this as he mutters a comment about John Wayne under his breath as Hartman is abusing Private Snowball (you will remember the discussion on John Wayne as the embodiment of American warrior in chapter three), and Sergeant Hartman's words are best to describe the penalty: "Who said that?! Who the fuck said that?! Who's the slimy little shit twinkle-toes cocksucker down there who just signed his own death warrant?"

The abuse also has a level of controlling the recruits' sexuality. Not only because most of the verbal abuse is homophobic ("I bet you could suck a golf ball through a garden hose"), but also sexist and hostile towards women ("Hell, I like you. Come over to my house and fuck my sister," "Looks like the best part of you ran down the crack of your mama's ass

and ended up as a brown stain on the mattress"). Excremental, homophobic, racist and sexist language has an important function in the military machine, the aim of which is to crush the individualism of the recruits.

Also the recruits' language is taken from them, and replaced by army speech ("The first and last words out of your filthy sewers will be "Sir!"). The relatively minor fact that every utterance has to be ended with "Sir," has a huge impact on the use of language. Adair says that "the possibility of reverie, of reflection, of open ended communication, is sealed tight as a drum on both sides." Every utterance has to end in the affirmative "Sir." Even more importantly with the army mode of speech also comes the military rhetoric and the Marine Corps ideology. The march songs sung by recruits are male- and national chauvinistic to the extreme, and with the marine mode of speech the recruits necessarily take up some of the ideology as well.

One important character in the indoctrination process is Private Pyle, who is singled out as an object of Hartman's special "attention." Pyle cannot seem to do anything right, and faces Hartman's full contempt. The humiliation he is subjected to (such as waddling along the parade ground, trousers around his ankles, sucking his thumb), makes in Adair's words "the humiliations which Hartman routinely inflicts on the other recruits *come to appear almost benign*."[136] This is important because it gives the rest of the recruits *some* self-respect, as they are at least doing better than Pyle – and thus insidiously made to accept the marine indoctrination. Hartman also consciously turns the other recruits against Pyle, as he punishes the rest of the group for Pyle's mistakes, while forcing the obese Pyle to eat a jelly doughnut.

Pyle is also used in a different way, by Kubrick. One of the features of the film is to build up audiences' expectations (based on genre conventions), and then betray them. In the training sequence this is done by having Joker seemingly befriend Pyle, as he is ordered to

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[136] *Ibid*., 179.

help him out. The film shows how Pyle little by little progresses under Joker tutoring, to the point where the audience is expecting that he will make it, that he will become part of the group. This is a fairly standard formula of "buddy movie" genre (in Vietnam War movie genre represented by such movies as *Platoon* (1986) and *Hamburger Hill* (1987)), and it is savagely trashed as the whole company gangs up one night, giving Pyle hard beating with soap bars wrapped in towels, with Pyle's new found "friend" Joker trashing him hardest of all. After this incident Pyle closes down, and finally kills Sergeant Hartman and himself.

The murder of Sergeant Hartman is significant not only as a transition to Vietnam, but also in relation to the reported officer "fraggings" (that is, officers murdered by own troops), for the first time in war history (which is not to say that it did not happen in earlier wars, but Vietnam was the first in which they came widely known). What makes the scene significant is how it is rendered in the film. Hartman is one of the most unsympathetic characters in the film – he is portrayed as the kind of extreme right-wing redneck with whom very few of the audience is likely to identify with, though he admittedly is one of the most vital and energetic characters of the film and has the kind of "bad boy charm" brought into him by the virtuoso performance of Lee Ermey. Still, the sympathies of the audience are not likely to lie with the bullying drill sergeant, even though he is the first victim of deranged Private Pyle. This is emphasised by how the scene is shot. Hartman struts in in his characteristic style, screaming at Pyle: "What is this Mickey Mouse shit?... What is your major malfunction, numb-nuts?!" He is unceremoniously shot through the chest, in mid sentence, falls down in slow motion, music in the background almost sighing in relief. Pyle's suicide that follows receives a somewhat different treatment. He slowly sits down on toilet seat, places the gun barrel in his mouth, and pulls the trigger, as music swells up again, and Joker (who was standing right next to Hartman) cries out in horror (something which he did not do as Hartman was shot, though it must be said his own life was still in jeopardy at that

point, and he seemed paralyzed) as Pyle's brains are splattered on the wall. The film seems to invite sympathy for the mistreated killer, who is perceived as a result of the training progress – only few minutes earlier we have heard Hartman tell with pride of "motivated marines" like Lee Harvey Oswald and Charles Whitman, ending his sermon in "You will all be able to do the same thing." Hartman (and the Marine Corps) wanted to create killers, and got what he wanted.

It is arguable whether the film's treatment of the murder of Hartman should be read as supporting (or at least understanding) the soldiers who killed their commanding officers in Vietnam, but it is definitely the climax of Kubrick's critique of the military indoctrination system. Michael Kline reads this as the key sequence of the film, showing "the production of soldiers inculcated with conceptions of national and racial superiority… and with a warriorlike conception of masculine misogyny…"[137] These are amongst the most common themes dealt with in Vietnam war depictions, but what makes *Full Metal Jacket* exceptional in this aspect is in how "Kubrick illustrates that these qualities are not inherent in the dark side of human nature… but are instead socially produced."[138] As I noted in the previous chapter, Vietnam War movies have generally made the conflict into "a test of manhood, a rite of passage, or a personal trial,"[139] as Frank Tomasulo writes. *Apocalypse Now* has been (among other Vietnam films) been accused of blaming the atrocities of the war on the "heart of darkness," or the dark side of human nature, rather than political agendas. I discussed those accusations in the previous chapter, but note the discussion here because of the significantly different approach taken by *Full Metal Jacket*.

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[137] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 30.
[138] *Ibid*.
[139] Frank P. Tomasulo: "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 147.

Right after the scene discussed above, the film moves to Vietnam, and the way this is done is significant. The first scene we see in Vietnam is in the city of Da Nang, a street with lots of cars passing by, people walking in American style clothes, under huge billboards that seem to be everywhere. A young Vietnamese woman enters in US style streetwalker clothes (a skimpy top, very short skirt, and high heeled shoes), to the tune of Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots (Are Made for Walking)," and approaches two American soldiers (one of them is the film's protagonist Private Joker). She starts to negotiate her price in American, in a very cliché manner, but as Adair notes, her slang is "probably fairly close to the real thing."[140] This scene is significant for a number of reasons, possibly the most important being how the scene shows capitalism brought to the Vietnamese. The scene is loaded with markers of capitalism: people shopping, billboards and a hooker. In the previous chapter I discussed the war in Vietnam as an imperialistic endeavour. Importing American values was an important part of the conflict in Indochina, and this is also one of the themes in *Full Metal Jacket*. This is said explicitly by a colonel inspecting a mass grave in another scene: "We are helping the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out." In the first scene that is set in Vietnam, we see what is described by Klein as "a parody of the consumer capitalism of its [Vietnam's] foreign invaders,"[141] counting also the Vietnamese culture as a casualty of war. More than simply a parody, the scene in Da Nang was also reality for many Vietnamese women who got their first taste of capitalism by becoming prostitutes.[142]

The scene with the Vietnamese prostitute is not insignificant, and it is repeated later in Hue City. Those two women are the only non-military persons in speaking parts in the

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[140] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 174.

[141] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 31.

[142] Klein says that "Vietnamese sources estimate that three-hundred-thousand women became prostitutes in south Vietnam under French and U.S. occupation. *The Indochina Newsletter* (U.S.: November/December 1982) estimate is two-hundred-thousand prostitutes. In either case it illustrates how disruptive and decadent the process of neocolonization was," in Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 39.

entire film, and while Adair sees their inclusion as "not very significant exception"[143] to the dominant military mode of speech, their inclusion is certainly highlighted by the fact that it is the only exception. Language has such an important part in *Full Metal Jacket* that the changes in modes of speech are bound to have some importance. I will discuss this scene in connection with another theme of the film, but now I wish to continue on imperialism.

Also the film's ending brings out the imperialistic tact of the war. As the soldiers march through the burning Hue City (into the "sunset" that is produced by the flames), they sing, not the march songs from the Parris Island, or the Marine Corps "Battle Hymn," but the "Mousketeer's song" from the Mickey Mouse Club: "Who's the leader of the club that's made for you and me? M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E. Mickey Mouse!" This is fairly obviously a comment on the aimless (and thus leaderless) nature of the war, as I have noted in my discussion on *Apocalypse Now*. Who is in charge in *Full Metal Jacket*? The answer in *Apocalypse Now* was: "Ain't you?" In *Full Metal Jacket* it seems to be "Mickey Mouse," possibly with the same implication as in *Apocalypse Now*: no one is in charge. But more can be read into it. Disney is, after all, one of the biggest multinational corporations, and as such has been a symbol for imperialism, and moreover, accused of cultural imperialism in its products. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart write in *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1975):

> Disney visits… distant regions in the same way his characters do with their bodies; that is, lacking any notion of former reprehensible historical relations, almost as if they were only recent arrivals to the distribution of land and wealth… Just as Disney plunders all folklore, fairy tales and nineteenth and twentieth century literature… so he proceeds with world geography. He feels no obligation to avoid caricature, and rebaptizes each country as if it were a can on a shelf, an object of infinite fun.[144]

To be blunt and mean, Disney is in a way like the United States: it blunders into territories that are of some interest to it, feels free to exploit them, before eventually assimilating them

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[143] Gilbert Adair: *Hollywood's Vietnam* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 174.
[144] Ariel Dorfman & Armand Mattelart: *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (London: International General, 1975), 24.

as audiences and consumers. The inclusion of Mickey Mouse in the scene is made more striking by the iconic imagery of the scene; in Klein's words "the analysis is further historicized through the implied ironic association with the film images of the U.S. cavalry going into the sunset"[145] (you will remember the ending of *The Green Berets* with a similar image). Inclusion of another Hollywood artefact (Mickey Mouse) in the scene is both disturbing and effective – the genre expectations lead to expect a song in the style of "The Ballad of the Green Berets" that ends *The Green Berets*.

What adds strength to analysing these scenes as Kubrick's version of the reasons behind the war, is the striking absence of any other reason. As Klein writes, the soldiers in the movie "have little sense of what they are fighting for."[146] This is exemplified by two scenes in the film: one where the soldiers gather around a dead comrade, and another where they answer questions to a TV crew. As the soldiers stand in a circle around their dead buddy, one of them (Rafterman) says "At least they died for a good cause," and when he tentatively answers "Freedom" when asked what cause was that, "the new guy" is ridiculed, and the murderous Private Animal mother closes the conversation with his nihilistic comment: "You think we waste gooks for freedom? If I get my balls blown off for a word, my word is 'poontang.'" Freedom is no more than a word, with no specific meaning attached.

In the next scene the same soldiers are interviewed, and Animal Mother is first. In his comment one thing is instantly noticeable: in front of the camera he becomes politically correct, and gooks he was just talking about become "Vietnamese." Also other comments are interesting. Private Cowboy describes that the city fight in Hue has been "Like what I thought about, what I thought war was supposed to be. There's the enemy, kill them." Here

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[145] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 33.
[146] *Ibid.*, 31.

he echoes the expectations of many veteran writers I discussed at length in chapter three – expectations set by WWII. When the interviewer starts asking whether the soldiers think America should be in Vietnam, the answers reflect their confusion. One quotes Lyndon B. Johnson's promise not to send "American boys 10.000 miles around the world to do a job Asian boys should be doing themselves," implying a sense of bitterness and lack of understanding why he was sent anyway. One black soldier says that "They took away our freedom and gave it to the gooks. They don't want it. They'd rather be alive than free." Both deny there really is reason for the war. Animal Mother's view is simpler: "I think we should win." The rest of the reasons are of more personal variety. Joker's answer is cynic and witty as most of his lines: "I wanted to meet interesting people of an ancient culture and kill them." For the men in the film there does not seem to be any sensible reason for the war, which gives more weight to Kubrick's perceived reason: bringing capitalism to Vietnam.

The scene in which the camera arrives in Vietnam for the first time (discussed above for its colonial and consumer capitalist implications) is also significant for another reason. The scene is linked to a later scene in several conscious ways, and making that connection opens up another way of reading the first scene. When the scene in Da Nang is seen the first time it is quite easy to see it as a parody of consumer capitalism. The bargaining for the woman's body takes place under a huge billboard displaying a caricatured Asian face – Klein finds this to be "reminiscent of the Dr. T. J. Eckleburg billboard that overlooks the wasteland of the Valley of Ashes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel about the American dream, *The Great Gatsby*."[147] Nancy Sinatra's words on the soundtrack – "One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you" – are easily associated with American military walking over the country. It is, however, to be noticed that it is a female voice saying those words, and they are given a whole new meaning when the same billboard is seen again in another scene and

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[147] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 32.

another city. Again, Klein sees the voice as "an indication – almost subliminal – that some sort of reversal is going to take place."[148]

The first thing that visually connects the scene in Da Nang and the one in Hue City is the billboard, in Hue even more reminiscent of the T. J. Eckleburg poster in the Valley of Ashes, as soldiers approach the ruined city under its looming gaze. The squad comes under fire from a sniper, after the squad leader has been killed by a booby trap – here, like in the earlier battle scenes in the movie, the enemy remains out of sight, invisible, as in most Vietnam War depictions. The trained "killing machine," indoctrinated on their racial supremacy, quickly turn into a frightful and uncoordinated mob. Cowboy, to whom the command is transferred, requests "immediate tank support" against "possible strong enemy forces in front of us." As he is told the support will not be available, he orders retreat, leaving two wounded soldiers behind – the castration of the killing machine made literal by having the sniper shoot Eightball, a black soldier send ahead to scout ("Put a nigger behind the trigger," he complains), through the groin in slow motion. In the scene just before this one the viewer is reminded of what is located there as Eightball displays his "fine specimen of black Alabama trouser snake" to a Vietnamese prostitute, who refuses to deal with "soul brothers" who are "too beaucoup" for her. It is also interesting to note that Eightball's initial reaction is disbelief that he is a victim of racial discrimination even in the other side of the world, though he gets what he wants after displaying that he is not "too beaucoup." The ill-disciplined soldiers, led by Animal Mother, disobey, as Animal leads the charge, finally revealing the true nature of the "strong enemy force" – a single female sniper.

The woman looks rather similar to the prostitute seen before – as Asians sometimes do to a western eye, not accustomed to oriental features – making the role reversal more effective. Also the words over the dying woman remind of the prostitutes seen earlier, "No

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[148] *Ibid.*

more boom-boom for this baby-san." This is a reminder that the Asian women are seen primarily as sexual objects, by the American troops in Vietnam. But as Klein also notes, the scene has implications "beyond mere role reversal."[149] It is not simply that the "boots" Nancy Sinatra sings about are not military, but high-heeled ones of a streetwalker. The shots in which the sniper is finally revealed (after killing three marines) is shot in slow motion, and the viewer has time to pay attention to the details, such as faces of both Private Joker, and the sniper. The eyes of *both* show terror, as the woman realizes she is caught, and as Joker's gun malfunctions at the critical moment. This scene can be interpreted even without Freudian phallic symbolism as implying the disintegration on U.S. war machine in Vietnam, of which the M-16 is a convenient symbol. Other men come in and gun the woman down, but the moment of shared terror that shows the woman and Corporal Joker as equals is an important one. In Marine Corps' ideology a woman irredeemably inferior, and the sniper in the scene is not only a woman, but an Asian one, and probably also a communist, as she is fighting for the VC, making her an almost complete antithesis for the Marine Corps' ideology. Klein feels that "The look in her eyes and in the eyes of Corporal Joker is the only glimmer of potential redemption in Kubrick's bleak and savage film."[150] While maybe not the only one, the scene certainly is the strongest moment in the film where some humanism creeps into the bleak world of Kubrick.

It is worth considering why it is so startling that the sniper is a woman. For one, her gender is breaking genre boundaries – besides the Western, war movie is one of the most male genres there is. When a woman appears in a war movie, she has a very restricted role. Carol Lynn Mithers defines the possible roles for a woman in war movie – or the actual battlefield that is in many ways constructed through those movies – in *Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam*: "they may be healers, reminders of home, pure incarnations of

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[149] *Ibid*., 33.
[150] *Ibid*.

all that men must fight to protect, or sexual objects – whores, rape victims, battle "spoils.""[151] It is clear that the warrior woman in *Full Metal Jacket* breaks these genre conventions, but her "transgression" is much greater than the viewer would think at first. Klein sees the significance of the fact that "The bravest and most skilful representative of the other side is a woman… She thus appropriates the male warrior role of the marines…"[152]

Even in the 21st century, as women are seen in combat duties in many armies (including the U.S.), a woman warrior still feels almost a contradiction in terms. The tradition to think of war as man's work is extremely strong, and this view has been reinforced by war movies from one generation to the next. Mithers notes that "Going to war… is not simply a test of "courage" or "endurance" (or even patriotism) but of *manhood* [italics original]: someone who becomes a warrior has become a 'real' man."[153]She continues on the subject of "impossibility" of woman warrior as she writes: "But if being a man was antithesis of being a woman, and if one *became* a man by becoming a soldier, how could soldiers be anything but men?"[154] Her presence on the battlefield breaks more than simply genre conventions, and that the effect is still startling, tells of how strong the conventional views about war are. The effect must have been even more startling for the actual soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

But does her presence on the screen give justification for soldiers in scenes in other Vietnam War movies, and also in *Full Metal Jacket*, that show shooting of (non-combatant) women? How can soldiers make the distinction when uniform, or even gender is not a fixed marker of the enemy soldier? In *Full Metal Jacket* the issue is dealt with in a chilling parody that is typical for the film. One soldier gunning down tiny faceless peasants from a helicopter

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[151] Carol Lynn Mithers: "Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 83.
[152] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 32-3.
[153] Carol Lynn Mithers: "Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 82.
[154] *Ibid*., 85.

(in a similar manner to the attack at "Charlie point" in *Apocalypse Now*) offers his way of distinguishing: "Everyone who runs is a VC. Everyone who stands still is a well disciplined VC… Ain't war hell." And when he is asked how he can shoot women and children, he answers quite practically "Easy, just don't lead them so much." Joker, a newcomer to Vietnam, is horrified, as is the viewer (possibly while chuckling to himself), but in a way the machine gunner's viewpoint is quite similar to the viewpoint of many Vietnam War films. Klein recognizes this similarity as he states: "We have encountered similar 'war is hell' statements before in combat films that affirm the tragic vitality of American servicemen in battle while denying Vietnamese any significant human presence."[155] I discussed this problem in the previous chapter in connection with some scenes in *Apocalypse Now*, and the critique expressed towards the film for not allowing the Vietnamese a human presence, while foregrounding the sufferings of the American soldiers. While *Apocalypse Now* grants that presence in some scenes, in general the statement is valid, and the machine gunner can indeed be read as a critique of "American tunnel vision" in the same way as Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now*. The critique is perhaps more clear in *Full Metal Jacket*, which does not allow very much redeeming qualities for the machine gunner, though I have to admit that Animal Mother who is quite a similar murderous character is portrayed in a rather heroic manner.

At the beginning of this chapter I emphasized the significance of language, and now I will return to it as I examine reporting the war within the movie – the protagonist Joker is after all a combat correspondent for "Stars and Stripes." Shortly after arriving in Vietnam, Joker sits down in the press room, receiving instructions from the press officer. Most of the meeting goes to defining the terminology of reporting the war: "Substitute 'Sweep and clear' in place of 'Search and destroy'" among others. The viewer is reminded that words matter.

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[155] Michael Klein: "Hollywood and Historical Memory: The Road to Platoon," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 30.

The scene also deals quite explicitly with reporting the war and the importance of propaganda. The press officer says that "This is not a particularly popular war. It is our job to report the news that these 'why-are-we-here' civilian newsmen ignore." He goes on to tell that "We run two basic stories here. Grunts who give up half their pay to buy toothbrushes and deodorant to the gooks: 'Winning of hearts and minds.' And combat action resulting in a kill: 'Winning the war.'" Joker's story does not have a kill (he arrived late and did not see one), so he is told to add one: "Grunts like reading about dead officers." None of this is anything new, of course, but rarely said as explicitly in a film. *Apocalypse Now* had a same sort of scene, though rendered visually instead of having a character say it. In a movie the viewer has to remember that what he is seeing is also a version, just like what "Stars and Stripes" is writing is a version.

In this chapter I have shown how *Full Metal Jacket* deals with the themes of the Vietnam War. Its approach is different from the other films I have dealt with, and in a way I feel its bleak and detached style conveys some of the film's critique better than other films (such as *Apocalypse Now*), though it is not without problems. The bleak world of the film leaves little possibility for change and hope, as was noted by Klein. Adair critiques the film for espousing the ideology of the Marine Corps, and it is debatable whether one can adopt a certain point of view almost totally without favouring it to some degree – while it is difficult to see how one can parody something at the same time as "espousing" it. *Full Metal Jacket* is not the "final truth" about Vietnam some critics seem to be expecting, but I believe that it "engages the discourse of history"[156] – in line with the criteria set for "true" invention by Robert Rosenstone – in its invention to tell a fairly unorthodox story about the war in Vietnam in a striking and provoking manner.

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[156] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 61.

6. Conclusion – Providing Catharsis, or Twisting the Knife?

"Why write anything? … Who wants to be reminded?"
(First line of Ronald J. Glasser's *365 Days*)[157]

The above line from one of the memorable veteran accounts of the Vietnam War has been quoted many times in literature dealing with Vietnam, for example, in Albert Auster's and Leonard Quart's *How the War Was Remembered* (1988) with the very same quote. Like that book and hundreds of others show, there has been a great deal of writing on the War in Vietnam – Americans have been reminded again and again, and apparently also want to be reminded. This is shown by tremendous popularity of the war in the film screen, and the great number of Americans who have gone to see those productions.

The film industry also shows the painfulness of the subject, the fact that they too suspected that the audiences would not want to be reminded. The initial reaction of Hollywood – after *The Green Berets* (1968), which is unlike other Vietnam War films in this aspect as well as many others – "is best summed up in the title of Julian Smith's book – *Looking Away*,"[158] as Michael Ryan puts it in *Camera Politica* (1988). For full ten years after *The Green Berets* Hollywood did not produce a single major production explicitly set in Vietnam. This indicates how tender the subject and how fresh the wound still was. There was some amount of writing in this time, but those books were not aimed for the mass market, and would not bankrupt companies if the public still did not want to be reminded. Hollywood is extremely conservative in its production decisions, but perhaps more accurate in showing how difficult the subject was.

Auster and Quart are probably accurate in writing "There is no way to remove Vietnam from our collective memory. It remains an open wound that has never been healed

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[157] Ronald J. Glasser: *365 Days* (New York: George Braziller, 1980), 5.
[158] Michael Ryan & Douglas Kellner: *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 197.

or fully understood, either by successive political administrations or by the media that helps reflect and shape public opinion."[159] This is not due to the lack of effort. Vietnam is one of the most debated events/periods in American history. After the initial period of trying to look away, Hollywood has also participated in this discussion with a force. Especially towards the end of the eighties, a huge influx of films entered the market – this is, of course, how Hollywood works: success by one begets other productions on the subject. "Serious" directors, such as Oliver Stone and Stanley Kubrick, wanted to show their views on the national trauma. Other less well known craftsmen took their own takes, and it was finally possible to make the Vietnam War into entertainment – which is not to say that these films, such as *Rambo*-series (1982-88) and *Missing in Action* films (three films in 1984-88) starring action stars like Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris, do not have anything to say on the reality of the conflict in Vietnam.

There are two major streaks in the American depiction of the war in literature and the film, and the "action" movies are central proponents of the so called "revisionist" streak. Stephen Vlastos writes in *America's "Enemy"* (1991): "Explaining why America lost the Vietnam War (but need not lose the next time around) is central to the revisionist project."[160] Films such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) seem to support the revisionist view that American solders were courageous, but the government would not let them win. Historian David W. Levy sees in *The Debate over Vietnam* (1991) an emergence of a related sentiment which sees "the war as a tragic mistake, but the men who fought there were brave and deserving of honor and respect."[161]

Other major streak, also in a way related to the first, is searching for some kind of catharsis. Auster and Quart look forward to a "Film [that] will be the indelible act of

[159] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), XIII.
[160] Stephen Vlastos:"America's "Enemy": The Revisionist Vietnam War History," in in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 67.
[161] David W. Levy: *The Debate over Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 180.

remembrance of the painful reality that the Vietnam War deserves."[162] While they recognize that such a work "may be impossible to realize"[163] they still feel hopeful. I do not share their optimism in this regard, but I believe that the story of the war has been told from varied angles, and somewhere in those different narrations may indeed lay the "indelible act of remembrance." I believe that it is indeed impossible to produce a single work – be it film, book or any other medium – that would tell the whole story of the War in Vietnam. Stephen Vlastos reminds that "Writing history necessarily involves not only the inclusion but the exclusion."[164] There is no such thing as single a correct version of any story.

In this thesis I have examined how three films from different decades deal with the historical event known as the Vietnam War. I have shown how each of them "engages the discourse of history"[165] in a way Robert Rosenstone meant when speaking of "true invention." Each of them also distorts and manipulates history in a way that has not "developed out of genuine and laudable efforts to communicate broad truths,"[166] which R.B. Toplin stressed as an important aspect of looking into when dealing with historical film. Each filmmaker has an agenda, and makers of these films are no exception. All of them use their films to comment on issues and themes of the Vietnam War as they saw it.

This does not remove the fact that all three films contribute to the discourse of history, and provide some valuable insights to the conflict. I have examined specific ways in which the films do this, and discussed in detail some key sequences in each film that deal specifically with the themes connected to the Vietnam War. All these films have been influential in forming the public image of the war. In his article "Apocalypse Now" Frances

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[162] Albert Auster & Leonard Quart: *How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood & Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1988), XV.
[163] *Ibid*.
[164] Stephen Vlastos:"America's "Enemy": The Revisionist Vietnam War History," in in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, ed. John Carlos Rowe & Rick Berg (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 72.
[165] Robert A. Rosenstone: *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 62-3.
[166] R.B. Toplin: *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 12.

FitzGerald remembers "journalists waiting for the U.S. helicopters to land humming Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries"… when the American invasion of Haiti began."[167] Over the years many historians have been worried of the power of movies to "teach history," and indeed they have such power in some degree – many people both outside and in the United States have received most of their information about the Vietnam War from movies. Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud claim that the "[film's] power to make images that may displace, distort, and destroy knowledge of history"[168] is the most important reason for studying films. This may seem worrying, as film industry is not subject to same kind of control than academic historiography. However, instead of competing with the historians "truth," the film industry can be seen as complementing it. Films can tell a version of "the story" of Vietnam that is different from the story told by historian. I believe this is what Hayden White meant when claiming that "we do not have to choose between art and science, that indeed we cannot do so in practice."[169] Both film versions and historians' versions of history are needed to form a more complete picture of history.

The story told by historical films has been the main interest of this thesis. I have shown one reading of the story those films tell of the War in Vietnam – and I have hopefully shown that the story can be interesting. Please note that it is *my* reading of the story, and there are other views, some of which I have pointed out in my readings, some I have left out, and some I am not aware of. The same instruction that I gave regarding to reading the films – be aware and be critical – applies as well to this thesis, and all writing for that matter. Please construct your own story. This was mine, and I hope it gives suitable material for building your own.

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[167] Frances FitzGerald: "Apocalypse Now," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 288.
[168] Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud: "America's Vietnam War Films: Marching toward Denial," in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 1.
[169] Hayden White: *Tropics of Discourse – Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 23.

Appendix

This is a short timeline of events related to the Vietnam War. It is not meant to be all-encompassing, but merely to give some idea of the events behind the films I have discussed. Following is timeline is adapted from *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (1995) edited by Linda Dittmar and GeneMichaud.[170]

1954 Historical Events

United States
Eisenhower pledges to continue aid to French in Indochina, later promises that the U.S. will not invade Indochina without congressional approval; Secretary of State Dulles declares U.S. will block communist conquest of S.E. Asia.
Vietnam
French fortress at Dien Bien Phu falls to Vietminh, 6 000 French troops killed or wounded, 10 000 captured; the Geneva conference results in agreements signaling the end of foreign rule in Indochina; to facilitate disagreement of armed factions, Vietnam is temporarily divided into two sections (north and south) until outcome of nationwide elections to be held in 1956 determines who will rule a united Vietnam.

1955 Historical Events

United States
U.S. begins giving $ 100 million aid to Saigon government and assumes training of South Vietnamese military.
Vietnam
With U.S. backing, the prime minister of South Vietnamese government Ngo Dinh Diem announces the formation of the Republic of Vietnam, and refuses to participate in Vietnamese general elections called for by Geneva Accords.

1956-59 Historical Events

United States
Successive U.S. governments continue the support of South Vietnam administration. Diem visits U.S.
Vietnam
Persecution of dissidents in South Vietnam; Diem forms a police state.

1960 Historical Events

United States

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[170] Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud, ed.: *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 298-349.

U.S. warns against intervention in South Vietnam by North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists.

Vietnam

Urban revolts in South Vietnam; National Liberation Front ("Vietcong") is formed in South Vietnam.

1961 Historical Events

United States

Kennedy sends more aid and military advisors to Vietnam. Bay of Pigs invasion fails in Cuba.

Vietnam

NLF begins to consolidate liberated territory in South Vietnam; two U.S. helicopter companies assigned to South Vietnam.

1962 Historical Events

United States

Cuban missile crisis.

Vietnam

Military Assistance Command (MACV) created in South Vietnam; helicopter warfare checks NLF movement; number of U.S. military advisors reaches 12 000; strategic hamlet program begins in South Vietnam.

1963 Historical Events

United States

Kennedy criticizes repressive measures of South Vietnamese government but refuses to reduce aid; Kennedy assassinated in Dallas.

Vietnam

Anti-Diem government protests increase, mass arrests follow, U.S. newsmen beaten by South Vietnamese forces; Diem killed in U.S. backed coup by South Vietnamese army generals.

1964 Historical Events

United States

Gulf of Tokin resolution, giving President unlimited power in the conduct of the Vietnam conflict, passed in Congress; U.S. increases aid to Vietnam; Johnson refuses Hanoi offer to begin peace talks.

Vietnam

General Nguyen Kahn takes control in Saigon; NLF makes significant gains in countryside; U.S. planes bomb North Vietnam; U.S. military bases attacked; civilian government installed in Saigon, but overthrown by military elements loyal to Kahn.

1965 Historical Events

United States

Number of military draftees increases; 25 000 join in anti-war protest in Washington, antiwar demonstrations spread to other cities.

Vietnam

First U.S. combat troops arrive; air war in South Vietnam intensifies; U.S. embassy in Saigon bombed; sustained bombing of North Vietnam begins; U.S. troops clash with North Vietnamese Army regulars for the first time; Ho Chi Minh demands withdrawal of U.S. forces as precondition to peace talks.

1966 Historical Events

United States
Anti-war protest spread; Democratic state governors criticize Vietnam policies.
Vietnam
U.S.S.R. increases aid to North Vietnam; ground war intensifies; U.S. begins shelling of Cambodian targets; U.S. troops increased to over 330 000 by end of year.

1967 Historical Events

United States
Martin Luther King, Jr. urges resistance to draft; war protesters march on Pentagon, draft resistance grows; controversy mounts over North Vietnamese civilian deaths due to bombing.
Vietnam
Hanoi demands U.S. halt bombing before peace talks can begin; South Vietnamese leader Ky announces election date, but is forced to step down by General Nguyen Van Thieu; number of U.S. troops reaches 500 000.

1968 Historical Events

United States
Key anti-war activists indicted for aiding draft violators; Senator Fulbright accuses Defense Secretary McNamara of distorting facts in 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident; Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated; antiwar demonstration on college campuses across the U.S.
Vietnam
Tet offensive begins: Saigon, Hue, and Khe Sahn become key areas of battle; Heavy ground fighting throughout the south; bombing raids on North Vietnamese targets continue; North Vietnamese officials meet with U.S. delegation in Paris, Saigon refuses to participate; number of U.S. troops reaches 540 000.

1969 Historical Events

United States
Campus demonstrations grow; probe on My Lai massacre begins; first draft lottery since WWII begins in December; Nixon orders bombing of Cambodia.
Vietnam
Ho Chi Minh dies in Hanoi; NLF representatives join peace talks in Paris, talks deadlock over MIA issue; heavy ground fighting continues; by year's end, number of U.S. troops is reduced to 480 000.

1970 Historical Events

United States

Demonstrations continue on many college campuses; four students killed by National Guard troops at Kent State University anti-war demonstration; two students killed at Jackson State civil rights demonstration; William Calley goes on trial for My Lai massacre.

Vietnam

Sweden begins sending aid to North Vietnam; American and South Vietnamese troops attack bases in Cambodia; North Vietnam launches spring offensive; heavy bombing in Hanoi area; Paris talks enter fourth year; U.S. troops reduced to 280 000.

1971 Historical Events

United States

Army drops charges against other officers involved in My Lai massacre, court martial of Captain Ernest Medina ordered, Calley found guilty of premeditated murder; antiwar demonstration in Washington leads to mass arrests; 2 000 Vietnam veterans stage antiwar rally in Washington; Calley sentence reduced; Medina acquitted; antiwar veterans occupy the Statue of Liberty.

Vietnam

South Vietnamese troops cross into Laos; North Vietnam and NLF boycott Paris peace talks; Australian and New Zealand forces pull out of South Vietnam; Thieu runs unopposed in presidential election; number of U.S. troops reduced to 140 000.

1972 Historical Events

United States

Burglars arrested in break-in at Watergate offices; Nixon re-elected; Nixon announces reduction of U.S. forces in Vietnam; House committee investigates unauthorized air strikes on North Vietnam; Kissinger resumes secret talks with North Vietnamese.

Vietnam

U.S. suspends Paris peace talks; North Vietnamese and NLF troops launch major offensive; U.S. ground forces leave Vietnam; U.S. mines Haiphong harbor; peace talks resume in Paris; U.S. resumes bombing of Hanoi.

1973 Historical Events

United States

Watergate scandal leads to resignations of several of Nixon's staff; Pentagon admits U.S. bombs hit Hanoi hospitals and killed Americans in Da Nang; Congress overrides Nixon's War Powers Bill veto, thus limiting presidential power to commit U.S. forces to hostilities abroad.

Vietnam

Peace agreements signed in Paris; POWs released by North Vietnam.

1974 Historical Events

United States

Nixon resigns; President Ford offers conditional amnesty to Vietnam era draft evaders and military deserters; Calley conviction overturned.

Vietnam

Thieu declares war has begun again between North and South.

1975 Historical Events

United States
Senate issues CIA investigation report, giving details about assassination plots in several countries; Ford declares U.S. involvement in Vietnam is over.
Vietnam
NLF-NVA offensive routs ARVN forces; Americans evacuate embassy in Saigon; South Vietnamese leaders surrender to North Vietnam.

1976 Historical Events

United States
Senate urges new laws sharply limiting covert actions abroad; U.S. vetoes Vietnam's admission to the U.N., citing MIA issue.
Vietnam
Vietnam is reunified, Hanoi named capital, Saigon is renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

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The Green Berets (USA, 1968) Released by Warner Brothers. Directors: John Wayne, Ray Kellogg. Screenplay: James Lee Barrett.

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