

Chris Aarnes Bakkane

A Protean Figure

A Comparative Analysis of History On Screen:
Depictions of The Battle of Stalingrad in
Popular Culture

Master's thesis in Film and Media studies

Supervisor: Julia Leyda

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Foreword

As I write these few lines at the end of my research, I kept thinking back to the start of my planning and pondering. I had been struggling to collect my thoughts; thoughts concerning what to devote my thesis to and many hours of blood, and tears. Indeed, there had been times where I felt as though I could not finish my work. Thus, discussions, laughter, and frustration have enwrapped me for two years. And now, finally, I can end six years of education, knowing I have created something that I can be proud of. So, as I lay down my virtual pen for the last time – at least for the time being – I want to extend my humblest ‘thank you’ to all of those alluring and inspiring people that have been pushing me towards my goal.

Mother, who despite not fully knowing what I am writing about, have supported my passions since my teenage years.

Father, the strongest man in the world, who I look up to more than anything in the world.

My closest friends, both in Trondheim and in Telemark. You have all kept me going, even though many of us have been apart for long periods of time.

My love and fiancé, who shares my particular interests for anything bizarre and historical. Our discussions have brought me great insight and joy.

And especially to you, Julia. Thank you for your support and understanding during times where I doubted myself the most. Thank you for being my supervisor and thank you for giving me advice as I look toward the future.

Thank you for being my conductor of light.

Chris Aarnes Bakkane, 20.05.2019, Trondheim

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Abstract

In this thesis, I analyse and compartmentalise various depictions of the Battle of Stalingrad in popular media, with focus on cinematic portrayals by different nations, such as Russia, Germany, American and other Western parts of the world. The main subjects for these analyses concern the Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943), and the complex nature of portraying the past on the screen. The first film, *Stalingrad* (2013), is a Russian film that treats Stalingrad as a divine site of memory for its citizens. The second film, *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), is a cooperative effort by the Americans and Europeans to recreate the story of a Soviet Hero through the lens of a Hollywood blockbuster. And lastly, *Stalingrad* (1993), which opts to challenge the way we perceive the Wehrmacht soldiers and their moral struggles. By comparing contrasting films and distinctive aspects such as aesthetics, violence, memory, history and video games, I surmise that depicting war and history on both the silver screen and the computer screen proves to be a demanding, but necessary to immortalise the devastating nature of war for a future generation.

Introduction

“War, as one of the most intensive experiences of passion, survives in our cultural memory, resiliently challenging us to revisit and reconceptualise its battle scenes in relation to our present.”

Elisabeth Bronfen, *Specters of War*, 2012, p 114

This thesis will examine how the history of the Battle of Stalingrad is depicted and reproduced through film. Specifically, if different topics like history, film theory, memory research and aesthetics – in combination with the study of violence and video games – can shape the viewer’s perception of both history and the battle that transpired in Stalingrad, and the nations that participated in it. Can cinema shape our perceptions of the battle? Can cinema have the power to preserve the past or have the ability to portray it? How do different nations depict war and combat in film? Are there stereotypes that are perpetuated through these films? Are these portrayals biased, or can they be perceived as ‘authentic’ or ‘accurate’? Being a battle of great importance and consequence for both the Soviet Union and Germany, the films in this thesis will originate from the participating nations, and those witnessing the battle from afar.

There are three films that will be of interest in this thesis; Fedor Bondarchuk’s *Stalingrad* (Russia, 2013), Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *Enemy at the Gates* (France, 2001) and Joseph Vilsmaier’s *Stalingrad* (Germany, 1993). While there exists a copious amount of war films concerning the events in Stalingrad, these particular films were chosen based on their country of origin, and how they each represent the Battle of Stalingrad. However, a clarification needs to be made before moving forward. Although Annaud’s film is directed by a Frenchman and is a European production, I will refer to Annaud’s film as a ‘Hollywood’ film or a ‘Westernised’ film in this thesis. Reasons being that the film utilises distinct Hollywood thematic structures, such as celebrated actors, a score by James Horner and an aesthetic reminiscent of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (USA, 1998). In the end, Annaud’s film is a European war film concealed in the style of Hollywood blockbuster – inheriting the tropes and narrative structures that follow – which will have its affects on the treatment of history and their participants.

The research for this thesis will be based on a wide array of different topics, subjects and fields of study. Taking into consideration the variety and complexity of the subject of war and history, there is bound to be research and studies I am required to move past for constrictive reasons, as well as for conciseness. Primary and secondary sources range from books, research and Internet articles to video essays, which will provide different and varied perspectives from various fields of research. But an important part of my research, however, was pertained to the literature that concerned war film and its genre, the history of the war and combat film and how depictions of war have changed, both in narrative structure and aesthetics. Additionally, when discussing video games and the particular video game which will be part of my analyses – *Call of Duty: World at War* (Treyarch, 2008) – it will be based on my own experiences with playing and participating in its narrative. Describing myself as a ‘gamer’, my understandings and interpretations of video games may have its relevance when examining articles and literature concerning video game theory and active participation. In closing, the literature applied in this thesis will be further described in more detail in the chapter’s literature reviews.

With research and studies on history – particularly concerning Western culture and society – comes the critiques of the grand narratives and the histories that have been written down through decades of historical changes and discoveries. With the rise of post-modernist approaches in the 1950s to the school of Marxist approaches, a cultural turn came to pass; the study of *historiography* and the use of intertextual interpretations have since attempted to reshape society’s perception of the post-war period. This shift and sentiment can be exemplified by Paul Addison in the book *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000* from 2008:

“With labour history in sharp decline, there was no longer much interest in the history of the white, male working class. Instead the ‘cultural turn’ encouraged historians to explore wartime constructions of gender, race, citizenship and national identity” (Addison & Jones eds. 2008: 4).

This treatment and approach to history can also be applied to the study of film and its role in Western society and culture. Critical literature and debates have been produced concerning the importance of the utilisation of film as a teaching tool and historical documents. Historians, such as Robert A. Rosenstone and David White (both which I will elaborate on in

chapter one), will be critical to the notion of film as a historical source, for reasons which are fully coherent based on the popularity of Hollywood blockbusters in film history. But, being that both historians are not fully informed in the field of film theory, their critical approach may become limited. But there are points which must be taken into consideration; if one wished to utilise film as a source for historical events or for teaching purposes, it should be made clear that issues concerning war history can be “difficult because of the ways they are interpreted” (Marcus, Metzger, Paxton & Stoddard 2018: 117). Economic and political power – in context with national identity – can affect the re-creation and depictions of war crimes, and the marginalised groups that have been victims of them. These types of discussion appear to be the the main interest in the fields of research, which shall also be further elaborated in chapter one. My ambition is, therefore, to put these discussions up for analysis and review, in correlation with the selected films I have chosen for this thesis.

The methods of approach I utilise for this study is qualitative methods, and comparative analyses of the films in question. The approach for my film analyses varies, since the act of analysing any art form may embrace a wide array of methods. Be it semiotic, narrative, contextual or the analysis of *mise-en-scène*, the categories of analysis may overlap in varying degree throughout my thesis. Also, by approaching the films with the previous research laid out in the literature reviews in each chapter, I attempt to gain an insight into the reasons and motivations to the diverse depictions of the Battle for Stalingrad.

For chapter one, I will introduce my main arguments and research questions about how war is perceived and survives in culture and fiction, specifically in cinema. Questions of adapting historical events, and cinema’s possibility to obtain any form of ‘accuracy’ or ‘authenticity’ will arise in this chapter. Further, I will present the literature review for this individual chapter. Then, for context, I will describe the importance of Volgograd – previously known as Stalingrad – and its history, being complicated both in the past and present. In the points to follow, I present the analyses of the films, starting with *Stalingrad* (2013), thus *Enemy* (2001) and closing with *Stalingrad* (1993). Each section provides a basic plot summary, information of the films’ initial perceptions and interpretations and witness reports of veterans from both the Red Army and Wehrmacht, which will aid in establishing a clear link between fact and fiction. The chapter concludes with my findings – or further interpretations – of the films and their importance in the war film genre. Also, in the end, if the collective memory of a nation’s culture, past and present can create their own narratives – fictitious or otherwise – and alter history as is known by historians and scholars.

For chapter two, I will continue with much of the previous insight from chapter one, but shift focus to the aesthetic qualities, and what these singular qualities might disclose about each nation's perception of the Battle of Stalingrad. In combination with an analysis of the aesthetics, I also wish to analyse the way in which violence and death is depicted, referring to war films like Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998). While on the subject of aesthetics and violence, I will include a brief introduction to video games, and the way cinema affects the latter, particularly in an aesthetical sense. Then, after the chapter's literature review, I will present a compressed overview and analysis of *Ryan* and *Line*, to put context to what is known as the 'new war film aesthetic' which was a turning point for war films post-*Ryan*. The analyses of the films serve to contextualise specific tropes, cinematography and cinematic techniques that create the visual representations of warfare, and if these can authentically represent such a ferocious battle. I employ the use of visual examples to substantiate my arguments and interpretations. I thus conclude the chapter with delving into the use of the term 'realism' and the way in which they are employed in this chapter. Also, I surmise my final thoughts on each film, claiming that the Battle for Stalingrad is, in my opinion, an everlasting, protean figure of trauma.

Granted that the arguments I have analysed and studied have been of considerable importance and benefit, my research has not been without challenges. The substantial number of articles, documents and books have made the process esoteric and quite difficult. The wide range of fields and subjects – from history to memory research, and from film and video game theory – made it clear that I had to explore outside my field of study to gain the insight I required for my thesis. In this regard, there was also the challenge of limiting my research and selecting the proper literature that would affirm or contest the ideas proposed in my thesis. As described, there exists extensive research concerning the subjects I have chosen for analysis, and there is no lack of scientific articles, essays or books written upon the subjects laid out in this thesis. While the films have been considerably analysed or have been subjects for study separately, however, I have yet to identify a comparative and collective study of the three films. By bringing these films together, I hope to add to the various discussions and studies and give attention to the importance of history on film and, in turn, films on history.

This rigid dichotomy between interpretations, arguments and, indeed, the films themselves are the foundation for this thesis. Such a divided topic for discussion, the Second World War serves as an example of how delicate and raw the memories are in the West's

collective memory decades later. The horrific events that unfolded on humanity from 1939 to 1945 are still – and will perhaps always be – events that directors and producers want to recreate in their own image and style. Although these recreations and reproductions of the past might be classified as less than satisfactory by historians or critics, one cannot disregard the power of cinema and its attempts to project a distant past. Hopefully, the following analyses and discussions will prove that the matter of retelling the past through cinema – in this case, the Battle for Stalingrad – may be an intricate, but yet a rewarding subject to behold.

CHAPTER ONE: PERCEPTIONS OF STALINGRAD THROUGH HISTORY AND MEMORY

“Battles do change the course of history. They determine the outcome of wars, the shape, and characters of victory and the peace that follows. They also change how the history of war is viewed. In both these respects no battle changed history more than Stalingrad”

Geoffrey Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad, The Battle That Changed History*, 2013, p 137

This chapter was conceived through my passion for war films, anti-war films, and The Second World War, especially how war is perceived – and survives – in fiction film and collective and cultural memory. But also, how this particular war was adapted by the participating nations, both from the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers; how do they represent one another, and themselves? What level of accuracy can be achieved through the filmic medium, and can it be realised? As my research commenced, questions arose, which led to continuous viewings of numerous films portraying war. The varying characteristics that occurred in each film were fascinating and particularly interesting was the way Russian cinema, German cinema, and Hollywood portrayed the Red Army, the Wehrmacht, and the Third Reich. From officers, the common soldiers, the rebels and citizens; to how the films are structured, its environments, and aesthetics. These themes were, in my opinion, especially apparent for films portraying the Battle of Stalingrad, a battle that would define Russian culture and history for years to come. The films that drove the continuing research and analyses were all from

different nations, each representing different facets of the battle. The Russian film *Stalingrad* (2013) by Fedor Bondarchuk seeks to create a mythical approach to the battle through its retelling of the events that transpired with a small group of Red Army soldiers. Then there is *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) by Jean-Jacques Annaud, which is a film that is inspired by true events and reshapes it to recreate a dramatic narrative in the style of a Hollywood blockbuster. Lastly, there is *Stalingrad* (1993) by Joseph Vilsmaier, which is a film exploring the Battle of Stalingrad through the eyes of the Wehrmacht and the suffering of the common soldier. The films have quite different ways of expressing the suffering, warfare, and survival of the individual and the collective, which are perspectives I wanted to explore more intently.

Finally, does cinema have the power to shape our perceptions of the fateful Battle for Stalingrad, and can it preserve the past, now that the generations who survived the war fade away? If these questions are not directly answered, this chapter will try to provide an overview and analytical approach towards the understanding of history and memory, by using these beforementioned films as examples of the differing perceptions and portrayals of Stalingrad in popular culture.

1. Literature review

The war film has always been of great importance in the cinematic discourse. According to James Chapman, the term ‘war film’ “was first used in the US film industry to describe films about the American Civil War” (Chapman 2008: 8). This definition has since changed, however, and generally, it is easy to identify a war film; the combat scenes and warfare are commonly the central focus of the narrative, as well as themes of survival and morality. Its subgenre, the anti-war film, portrayed the brutality of war and human suffering. The ambiguity of the war- and the anti-war film makes them hard to categorise, and the discussions of the genres do not serve as the main point of this chapter. However, they both have an equally important part in the portrayal of the wars that have shaped generations; how do the individual and the collective ‘remember’ history through film? Is it conceivable to translate written historical discourses, and can retellings or representations of our past fulfil their purpose as vehicles of knowledge and learning? Or do historical films lack the capability to render written accounts into images on the screen? Indeed, how does one approach history in filmic terms?

Debates concerning history on film, whether the validity of the history presented or the fictional nature of it, flourishes and thrives as history – both past and present – is a constant source for inspiration. But with these inspirations come critiques and distrust for the medium,

particularly from a historian's point of view. To set the stage for my analyses of the films in my thesis, I review the arguments and the debates of historians like Robert A. Rosenstone and Hayden White; both historians debated the uses and pitfalls of the historical film in the 1980s. Rosenstone, claims that "[film] compresses the past to a closed world by telling a single, linear story with, essentially, a single interpretation" (Rosenstone 1988: 1174). Though Rosenstone may have his grievances with historical film, he still recognises the gravitational pull film has on its audience and history, noting that film is "the great temptation"; a medium capable of dealing with the past and holding a large audience (Rosenstone 1988: 1175). Rosenstone still fears a world where the film is the main source of information about the past, and history, as he puts it, "will be a kind of esoteric pursuit and when historians will be viewed as the priests of a mysterious religion" (Rosenstone 1988: 1174). Though perhaps hyperbolic on his part, it could well be a valid concern for historians, and the reason for doubting the historical film altogether.

Inevitably, the attempt to deconstruct this binary of fact and fiction entered the historical discourse, and this is what White attempted to do, by taking more experimental work into account, as the art and avant-garde film. White claims that experimental films "show us [instead] that the criterion for determining what shall count as 'accuracy of detailed' depends on the 'way' chosen to represent both "the past" and our thought about its 'historical significance' alike" (White 1988: 1199). This statement was in direct reference to Rosenstone's essay and his position in "History in Images/ History in Words: Reflections on the possibility of really putting History onto Film" from 1988. Though Rosenstone does not mention the term *historiography* in his essay, it is a term that is essential to the study of how history can be analysed and interpreted. White expands upon the use of historiography, and *historiophoty*; a term which he coins in his aptly named essay "Historiography and Historiophoty." Whereas historiography – according to White – is "the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse" (White 1988: 1193), historiophoty is describing "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse" (White 1988: 1193). White created the term as "a description of the study of history through film," however, he does not claim in his essay that historiophoty does in fact exist, and perhaps functions more as a rhetorical device (Historiography and Historiophoty, Wikipedia 2018). In this chapter, history, and historiography, specifically concerning the Second World War, the focus will lie on how historians, or in this case filmmakers, "portray the causes, conduct, and outcome of" the war (Historiography of World War II, Wikipedia 2018) in the selected films. Furthermore, discussions on what the historical film entails and

how the historical film may need fiction to convey its message. These discussions can lead to what Sara Brinch, Hege Gundersen, Gunn Ragnhild Bekken, Julianne Rustad & Tonje Sørensen in their book *Forestillinger om Fortid [Perceptions of the Past]* sees as ‘double optics’; that the viewer experience history through spectacles of fiction (Brinch et al. 2016: 16), a different way of perceiving it than Rosenstone, as they remark. The authors claim that historical film should not be kept to the same standard as a scientific text since the purpose of a historical film is to create insight and empathy to times that were/ are so different than our own. However, the authors also claim that if one is to examine historical films and tv-series it has to be through a fictional lens; one cannot be without the other. As the authors point out, fiction’s ability is that of the metaphorical commitment to the past, rather than theoretical and scientific. They also delve into nationality and the construction of identity, which may occur through a narratives’ ideology created through the power of audio-visual texts (Brinch et al. 2016: 14).

Moreover, as important history is in understanding how the war was – and is – portrayed and understood, so is the memory of these traumatic and inhuman events from the past. History in of itself is formed on the memories and documentation of the past, written and revised to fit the common and historical consensus of the times they were conceived. History is, fundamentally, a collection of chronologies and facts sown together by scholars, professors, and writers; the knighted ‘authorities’ on history. These perceptions can result in undeniably biased views and perpetuate myths about war and how memories of it are and will be culturally and politically constructed. History is, after all, written by the victors of these wars and conflicts, which complicates the validity and objectivity of how they are perceived.

Discussions of objectivity in historical accounts are further deliberated in the anthology *Narrative Dynamics* in his chapter *The Historical text as Literary Artefact* from 2002, where he argues that “historical accounts are narratives and ought to be analysed as one does fiction rather than science” (Richardson, Phalen & Rabinowitz 2002: 199). But if history is a collection of chronologies and facts, then this collection is likely moulded on the sensibilities and ideas of our present-day, as well. This hypothesis is further explored by professor Gunnar Iversen in his article *From trauma to heroism: Cultural memory and remembrance in Norwegian occupation dramas, 1946-2009* (2012). He contends that the past is reworked to fit the present (Iversen 2012: 245), particularly when it comes to the collective memory of the Second World War. Though the article focusses on Norway’s outlook of war history and films, it can still be somewhat applied to other perspectives on the portrayal of war and history on film.

Also, in the study of the past and the way people understand and perceive it, the notion of ‘popular memory’ or ‘cultural memory’ has, according to Chapman, “become vogueish” (Chapman 2008: 137). It is important to realise that this does not necessarily the actual memories, but rather the shared beliefs or views about the past. They are more often concerning “episodes in the national past” (Chapman 2008: 137). Additionally, professor Robert Burgoyne’s book *Film Nation – Hollywood Looks At U.S. History* has interesting theories on history and memory from an American point of view. Some examples are how “the use of social memory constructs the concept of a nation” and the concept of “cultural haunting,” which is a form of “possession” of the present by the past (Burgoyne 1997;2010: xii,12,164). Though American, it is still relevant parts that could be utilised in my analyses.

Furthermore, one cannot disregard the writings of professor Jan Assmann and professor Aleida Assmann on memory research. Jan Assmann research on communicative and cultural memory: individual, social, and cultural memory. J. Assmann defines memory as “the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level” (Erlil & Nünning 2008: 109). He outlines a schema with three levels: *inner level (neuromental)*, described as personal memory; *social level*, which is closely connected to communication and social interaction; and *cultural level*, the belief that cultural objectifications are carriers of memory (Erlil & Nünning 2008: 109, 110). To further this discussion, in A. Assmann’s chapter in the book *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis, Volume 5* from 2006 aptly called *Memory, Individual and Collective*, she claims that four memory formats interact with each other. She writes that “the usual dichotomy of ‘individual’ versus ‘collective’ does little justice to the four levels [...]” (Goodin & Tilly 2006: 211). These four formats are (1) individual memory; (2) social memory; (3) political memory; and (4) cultural memory. She concludes by writing that “the interdisciplinary project of the memory discourse is to understand better the mechanisms and strategies of the way memories are formed by individuals and groups under specific circumstances, and how they are transmitted and transformed in processes of continuous reconstruction” (Goodin & Tilly 2006: 222). “Collective memory” as an exclusive entity is therefore cast aside for these four formats, which can be more “efficient to emphasise and maintain the plurality of identities and ‘memory-systems’ within the person” (Goodin & Tilly 2006: 223).

In closing, it is important to note that – besides Iversen, Brinch (et al.), Chapman and Burgoyne – Rosenstone, White and J. & A. Assmann are not scholars in film theory, but

rather in history & cultural and communicative memory research.¹ This fact does not disregard their additions to film theory and discussion, however, and their research will be valuable sources of insight in the coming examinations of the main films in this chapter. These beliefs, views, and discussions of how history is perceived and what part memory plays in understandings history are of key interest. The Battle of Stalingrad and the city itself – in films with different cultures, ideologies, and politics – will be subject for comparative analysis, while also being analysed individually within certain themes and concepts.

Firstly, I want to discuss and examine how the Battle of Stalingrad is remembered and portrayed, specifically how Bondarchuk's film utilises Stalingrad as a "museum of the past," transforming it to a mythical *lieu de mémoire*. In accordance with the discussions by professor Anastasia Kostetskaya's essay "Stalingrad re-imagined as mythical chronotope: Fedor Bondarchuk's 'Stalingrad' in IMAX 3D" from 2016, I explore how Bondarchuk's film attempts to capture and reassess the past through the memories and retellings, opting for artistic freedom rather than claiming historical accuracy.

Secondly, I will explore how the lack of 'accuracy' and 'authenticity' in Annaud's film. By repurposing real people and groups from the Second World War, I want to examine why this decision ultimately brought undesirable attention to the seemingly blunt disregard for said history. Though questions of 'accuracy' and 'authenticity' is not always the most important aspect to study in context with representations of war, it is still important to recognise the basis in a "known memory and history" within collective culture. In correlation with these points, I seek to observe if Annaud's film reflects a Western outlook on the Battle of Stalingrad, and the shortcomings that may follow, and if the marketing of the film could be deemed misleading and manipulative both towards its audience and the individuals it represents.

Lastly, as we venture towards the end of the chapter, I will examine how the Battle of Stalingrad is perceived through the eyes of the Wehrmacht soldiers in Vilsmaier's film and how these representations are perceived. I want to discuss the concept of the Clean Wehrmacht, and if the film perpetuates the sense of victimhood and the ideas that the concept envelops. By discussing these depictions and representations of the Wehrmacht, I hope to gain insight into the possible influence that West-German post-war cinema has had on Vilsmaier's film, and if the film is affected by the unification of Germany, which can bring light to

¹ White himself writes in his essay "Historiography and Historiophoty", that he does "not know enough about film theory to specify more precisely the elements, equivalent to the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical dimensions of spoken or written language, of a distinctly filmic discourse" (White 1988: 1196).

broader societal issues of a traumatic past and broken generation.

This chapter, in the end, will attempt to contextualise the differing, harrowing memories and retellings of the Battle of Stalingrad, perceived through the eyes of various nations, societies, and cultures. But, as we delve further into the Russian, German and French film, we'll realise that the 'truth' – or in this case the 'absolute truth' of Stalingrad - may be as arduous - or impossible - to unearth as the attempt to recreate mediated portrayals of the past on the screen.

2. *The Motherland Calls* - The lament of Volgograd

If one is to understand the film's treatment of the battle, it is essential to grasp some of the city's complicated history, both past and present. Stalingrad, in its physical and metaphysical form, was always – and perhaps always will be – a place of significant history, memories, and national pride and loss. The battle lasted from July 17, 1942, to February 2, 1943, and is one of the bloodiest battles ever recorded in human history. And “like all great battles, Stalingrad was destined to be re-fought time and again – in works of history, in memoirs, in fiction and on the film” as Geoffrey Roberts writes in the book *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle That Changed History* from 2002. Truly, Roberts couldn't be more correct in his statement, which will be evident based on the treatment of Stalingrad in the films. But why do they differ so, and how can such a significant historical event be treated differently by each nation?

Stalingrad – now called Volgograd – has long since been rebuilt and watching over the city is the memorial “*Rodina-mat' zavyot*” (“*The Motherland Calls*”), the centre and symbol of the “Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad”. Still, after 77 years since the battle, the memory of the war persists the passage of time and is a reminder of the sacrifice of the Soviet people to defeat Nazism. For the Soviet Union, particularly Russia, the battle in Stalingrad was a great battle of holy proportions and was a triumph in the Great Patriotic War. It is clear that it was not only a soldier's battle; it was a battle of the people and for the *Rodina-mat'* (*Mother Motherland*), where everyone had the opportunity to participate, truly in the real spirit of Communism.

Not surprisingly, when the city was renamed in 1961 by Nikita Khrushchev as an effort to “erase Stalin's legacy,” as journalist and photographer Sergey Ponomarev wrote in *The New York Times* in 2017, people responded negatively. Perhaps this reaction is based on the nostalgia that is tied to the name 'Stalingrad,' the glory days of the Soviet Union and Stalin himself. Volgograd is a place of identity, memory, and symbolism, and it represents the

Soviet past and mythology.² However, looking past the nostalgia and heroism that envelops Russian culture and politics, it becomes clear that Russia has a very complicated and difficult relationship to its past. Changing the name, they also took away a part of the Soviet identity that the Russian culture had thrived upon since the victory at Stalingrad. This intense patriotism and nationalism have seared a permanent mark upon Russia and embedded in it is both triumph and trauma.

3. Stalingrad as a myth & museum of the past - Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad*

In 2013, February 7th, 70 years after the battle, the city government of Volgograd voted to “officially restore its onetime Communist-era name, Stalingrad, for six days each year” (Roth 2013: *The New York Times*). The Volgograd city lawmaker, Sergei P. Zabednov, claims that “legislators were not trying to rehabilitate Stalin, but ‘return respect’ to the millions of Soviet veterans who fought at Stalingrad and brought fame to the city under that name” (Roth 2013: *The New York Times*). The same year, Russian filmmaker Fedor Bondarchuk, released the film *Stalingrad*, the first Russian film to be released in IMAX 3D, according to its IMDB page. In a press conference in 2012, producer Alexander Rodnyansky claimed that:

We do not do an ideological, didactic picture, but simply make a movie that will make you worry and cry. This is a universal story about people, how to live in conditions of war, and how to die with dignity if destined to die.

Shershakova, 2012: *Vokrug.Tv*).³

When journalists were concerned about the international nature of the project and how the countries involved would view their history on screen, Bondarchuk assured that:

There were no historical disputes in our team. In Germany, there are a large number of unknown war films that are no different from the Soviet ones, and the German soldiers are depicted in them in the same way as we portrayed them. In addition, we all have one common question that worries us: how could we allow what happened in Stalingrad to happen? Our film is about this.

(Shershakova, 2012: *Vokrug.Tv*).

² For clarification it is important to note that the way in which Slavic countries remembers and treats the Second World War – and in turn Stalingrad – is vastly different from each other, though they’ve been equally important in post-Soviet identity making (Fedor et al 2017: 2).

³ Author’s note: translated using Google Translate. This concerns both written by Shershakova.

If Bondarchuk and Rodnyansky succeeded in their endeavour is debatable, however. Their declaration of a non-ideological war film centred in the heart of Russian identity and culture seems incredibly optimistic. Ideology has been a part of Russian cinema since the fall of the Romanov dynasty in 1917 (Gillespie 2003: 103) and has since had an ambiguous and uncertain relationship with Soviet, post-Soviet and Russian cinema. It seemingly would be an impossible task to create a narrative that takes place in Stalingrad during the Stalinist era, with characters serving in the Red Army, without it being affected by ideological and cultural values that still run rampant in people's consciousness in Russia.

When released to American and Western audiences in 2014, some reviewers seem to have grievances with the 'propagandistic' nature of the film. Critic Liam Lacey for Canadian *Globe and Mail* claims that "overall, Stalingrad is a bizarre concoction, part Putin-era patriotic chest-thumping, and part creaky war melodrama, all set in a superbly recreated ruined city" (Lacey 2014: *The Globe And Mail*). Stephen Whitty for the *Newark Star-Ledger* furthers this assertion that "to wave a flag, sing a song and celebrate it as the uncomplicated and inevitable victory of good over evil is the sort of easy message only an old propagandist - or a president for life - could really cheer" (Whitty 2014: *Newark Star-Ledger*).

But how did native speakers perceive the film? According to blogger Elena Pavlovich⁴ in 2014, there seem to be radically different opinions. Some consider the film as a multi-million-dollar, bombastic, propagandistic Hollywood production, while others believe that the film is a valid reminder of the sacrifices made to win the war. She claims that the second point does not negate the fact that the film is spectacular and propaganda, paid for by the Russian state and banks. Although she seems aware of the criticisms towards the film, she still enjoyed the film; even though the film, she states, played with her simplest human sentiments. Writing for *Independent Military Review* in 2013, Igor Plugarev⁵ review titled "*Stalingrad*" without *Stalingrad* has a more critical approach to the film, criticising how the grand scale of the battle has no parallel in world history. He claims that one cannot see the magnificent spirit of Stalingrad in "*Stalingrad*," and that the portrayal of the Nazis is shown in a balanced way, almost "human." All in all, Pulgarey surmises that the film "in general" does not touch the real emotions of the battle, contemplating that Bondarchuk's desire was to "surpass" masterpieces such as *Ryan* or *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) instead of telling a true story, which makes the film more foreign to Russian audiences.

Based on these limited reviews to Bondarchuk's film, there seems to be an obvious

⁴ Translated via Google Translate: <https://momichetata.com/filmi/stalingrad-2013>

⁵ Translated via Google Translate: http://nvo.ng.ru/history/2013-10-11/14_stalingrad.html

disconnect between the film's intentions and the reception it received, both from American and Western audiences to Russian native speakers. A film that was not created as an ideological and didactic picture is seen as an overly ideological and patriotic film. And a film that wanted to convey the emotions of the Battle of Stalingrad via the screen wasn't able to touch the souls of the audiences with its melodrama and contrived love story. But, despite these somewhat rigid opinions aimed at the film, there are still interesting perspectives that could give an insight on the complicated feelings associated with Stalingrad's history and how the bloody war is perceived through stories and memories.

3.1 Plot synopsis *Stalingrad* (Fedor Bondarchuk, 2013)

Fukushima, Japan, 2011; an earthquake has caused a tsunami that initiated an energy accident. The town of Ōkuma is ravaged, and emergency personnel works on the full capacity to rescue the victims of the disaster. Russian rescue workers arrive in Japan to give their assistance. One of the Russian rescuers tries to keep trapped victims calm by telling the story of five soldiers, who all died during the Great Patriotic War in 1942. In retelling these stories, we are taken back to 1942, during the initial attack on Stalingrad.

We're introduced to a small group of Russian soldiers, who protect a residential building that provides cover for a Russian crossing point on the Volga river. A group of soldiers occupies the building, where they meet a young woman named Katya (Maria Smolnikova) who's the sole resident of the building and develops a close relationship with the group.

Meanwhile, a German captain named Kahn (Thomas Kretschmann) tries to eradicate the group of Russian soldiers in the building. But he has a secret: he has fallen in love with a Russian woman, who has an uncanny resemblance to his late wife. Being caught by his lieutenant colonel, Russian civilians are murdered to set an example, which initiates a vengeful attack from the Russian troops. One after the other the Russian men lose their lives, which prompts one of them, Sergey (Sergey Bondarchuk), to take the Katya away from the building. He leaves her there while going back to aid the last of his fellow men.

When the German reinforcement arrives, the bombings kill more men. This leaves two men, Gromov (Pyotr Fyodorov) and Sergey fighting for the radio to order an airstrike. Kahn and Gromov fight before they both shoot one another, leaving them both dying. Sergey aids Gromov and orders the airstrike, sacrificing themselves to purge the overrun building. Katya, watching from afar, cries, knowing their sacrifice.

Back in 2011, the victims have now been saved, and the story has ended. One of the

victims wants to thank the man who told them the story, and for saving their lives. They both meet briefly, sharing a moment of understanding before he leaves in a car.

3.2 The contained city: *Stalingrad* and memories

Stalingrad, as the physical city and the battle in Bondarchuk's film, is portrayed as a contained, mythical and corporeal entity. Its atmosphere and destruction differentiate quite drastically in the three films. According to Kostetskaya, Bondarchuk project's Stalingrad as "a distant planet immersed in the chronotope of an ever-going war" (Kostetskaya 2016: 53). Kostetskaya hypothesizes that the film treats Stalingrad as a mythical chronotope; a contained world in a pocket in time. As a seemingly never-ending nightmare, we're then transported through time, from a natural disaster in Fukushima in 2011 to a man-made war in 1942. The juxtapositioning of Fukushima and Stalingrad builds, according to Kostetskaya, an association between these separate incidents "through the time-space of devastation invites an understanding of war as a natural disaster, similar to an earthquake" (Kostetskaya 2016: 53). Indeed, the likeness between Fukushima and Stalingrad is made more apparent through the *mise-en-scène*⁶; framing both as separate, desolate 'islands,' which have an otherworldly atmosphere that man cannot contain or control. As Kostetskaya suggests, based on another Bondarchuk film from 2008, *The Inhabited Island*, the perception of the city of Stalingrad is reinforced as "yet another 'inhabited island' created by Bondarchuk" (Kostetskaya 2016: 53). Besides the immediate aesthetic likeness and slight thematic approach, however, I would argue that alluding war to 'natural disaster' – in this case, comparing Stalingrad and Fukushima – was not Bondarchuk's conscious intention, at least not in scale and ideological intent. Although this is not to say that Fukushima's fate is far less tragic and devastating, but in the context of history and socio-political and ideological conflicts, one cannot see past the Third Reich's systematic eradication of what they deemed as 'lesser beings', going for the heart of the Soviet Union: Stalingrad. While making a connection through time and space, it does not equate the two cataclysmic events.

⁶ "The contents of the frame and the way that they are organised" (Gibbs 2012: 5).



Figure 1. The connection between Fukushima (above) is explicitly made with Stalingrad (below).

Stalingrad, as a site of memory, does not contain the immediate memories of the battle; memories contained only within hours or days following the event. Rather, the memories of Stalingrad are produced mostly through cultural memory; a form of collective memory that is shared by several people; “they may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another” (Assmann 2008: 111). They “carry” the memories we have invented, creating what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*; which is “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora 1997: xvii). The holy city Stalingrad is created and produced by our social and cultural levels of memory, to show honour to the fallen soldiers who fought bravely and sacrificed their lives for their nation. The “Russian war, after all, is deadly serious, with more visceral immediacy,” as David Gillespie writes in 2003 in the book *Russian Cinema*, and indeed; the struggle against a national extinction by the Nazis was “a people’s war” (Gillespie 2003:129). While on the subject about the “people’s war”, it is important to recognise the sheer devotion of the Soviet people and their hatred for their enemies; Bondarchuk’s film proudly displays the unwavering patriotism displayed by both the anonymous soldiers and our group of five,

and the civilians as they are terrorised by the vicious Nazis. But, as a tool in bringing the viewer a glimpse into the personal memory of the past lives of the residents' in the building in which Katya still resides; the camera composes shots of objects of sentimental value:

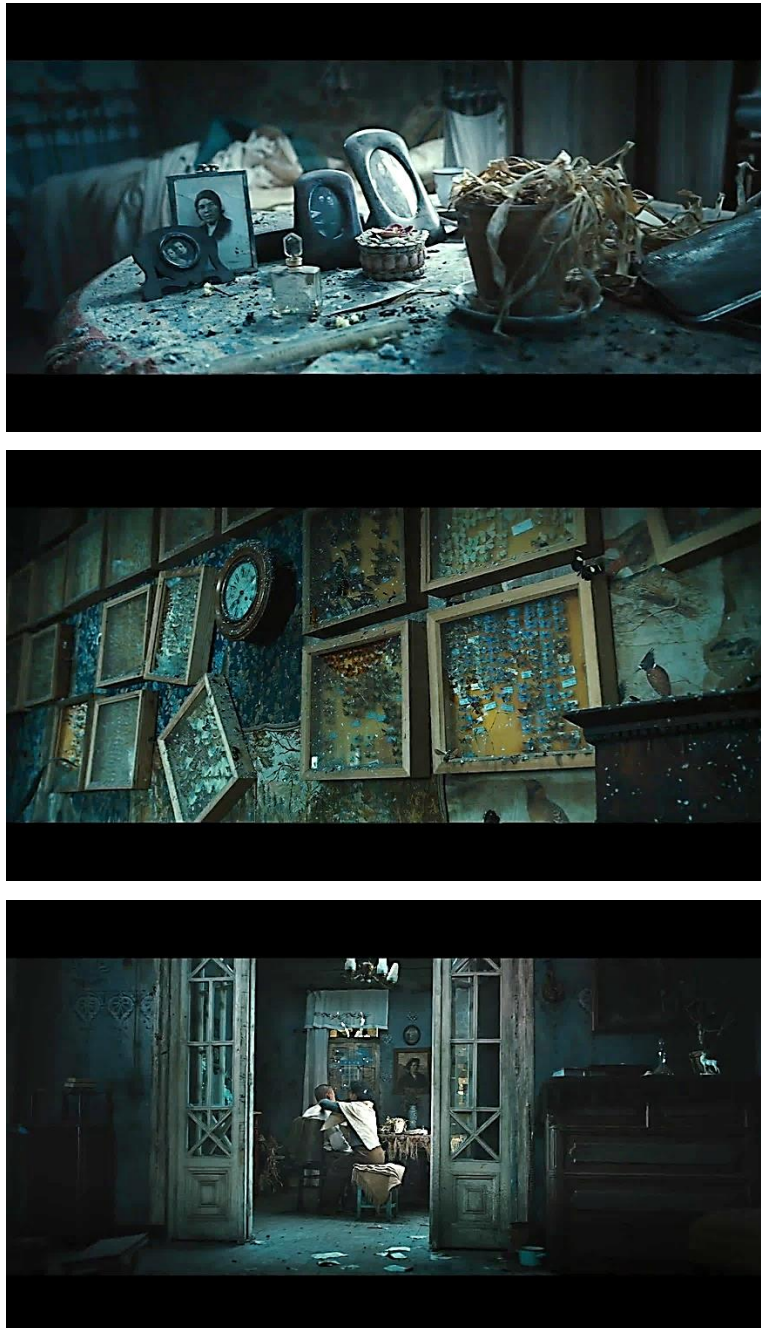


Figure 2. The muted colours create a haunting atmosphere; creating a shadow realm in which the characters inhabit.

As these melancholy images; memories and relics from broken families, slowly float by the screen with the pan of the camera, a narrator, Sergey from 2011, inform us about the apartments where our five protagonists met his young mother, Katya. We, the viewer, has

become a ‘tourist’ in metaphysical ‘museum’ of the past; being led by our ghostly guide.

Kostetskaya, in association with the concept of extreme tourism in war zones, is right to compare the way Bondarchuk’s film evokes a video game sensation. The way the viewer is transported from “level to level” via the 3D effects and camera movements is highly reminiscent of the *Call of Duty*- series, specifically the fifth instalment *Call of Duty: World at War* (Treyarch, Activision 2008), which I will return to in chapter two.

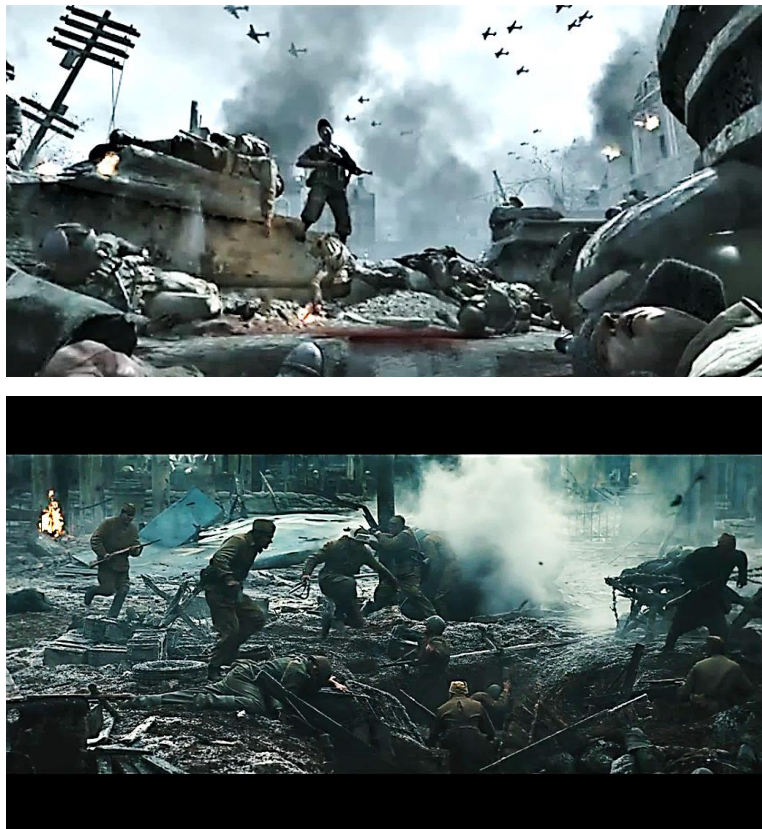


Figure 3. Still from the first screen in the campaign in *World at War* (above) and Bondarchuk’s film (below); both evoking the same aesthetics and atmosphere.

Further, Bondarchuk stands firm on the explicit shots of the brutality and senseless nature of warfare, survival, and killing. A sentiment perhaps in honour of the veterans of the Great Patriotic War, the film portrays the different victims of the war and the atrocities:

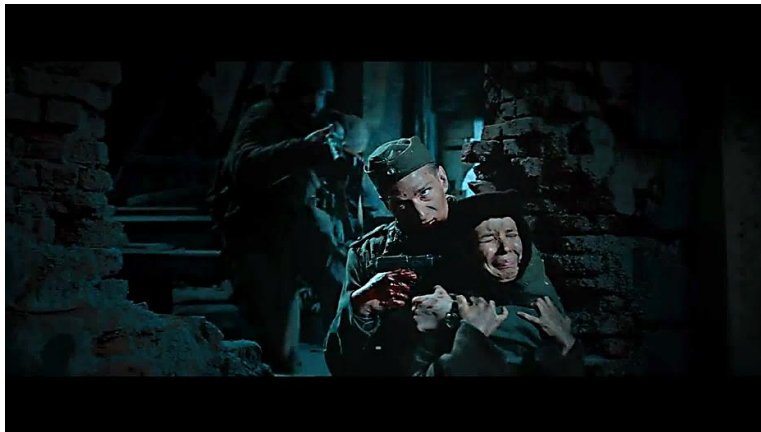


Figure 4. A nation in turmoil; the different victims of the Second World War.

The film portrays Stalingrad almost as an antagonistic force; a living entity that encompasses Hell on Earth. The glory of Stalingrad as it was before the German invasion is long gone and replaced with it is a wound that will probably never heal. Film as an institutional power has its way of “shaping and framing individual memories” (Assmann 2008: 11), and Bondarchuk’s film is no different. The film – as mentioned in previous paragraphs – was not intended as an ideological piece, which is apparent. There is no direct reference to Communism and Stalin as the “Great leader,” though one can see a portrait of Lenin hanging in the residential building. The perpetuations of the Red Army soldiers as avid, evil communists are not pushed onto the viewer, though the film never takes a firm stance on the Red Army’s treatment of their soldiers. The controversial Order No. 227⁷, for example, is not mentioned or explored openly. There is a scene which perhaps treads lightly on the moral ambiguity that would’ve existed in the Red Army, however.

When Gromov and his fellow men plan their next attack, a marine questions the orders Gromov receives to defend the residential building they inhabit. When the marine proclaims that he’ll find his post, Gromov orders Nikiforov to shoot him. The marine is shot dead, without question.

⁷An order issued on 28 July 1942 by Joseph Stalin, in order to control and re-establish discipline in the Red Army. “No commander had the right to retreat without an order. Anyone who did so was subject to a military tribunal of the corresponding seniority level (Wikipedia, 2018).

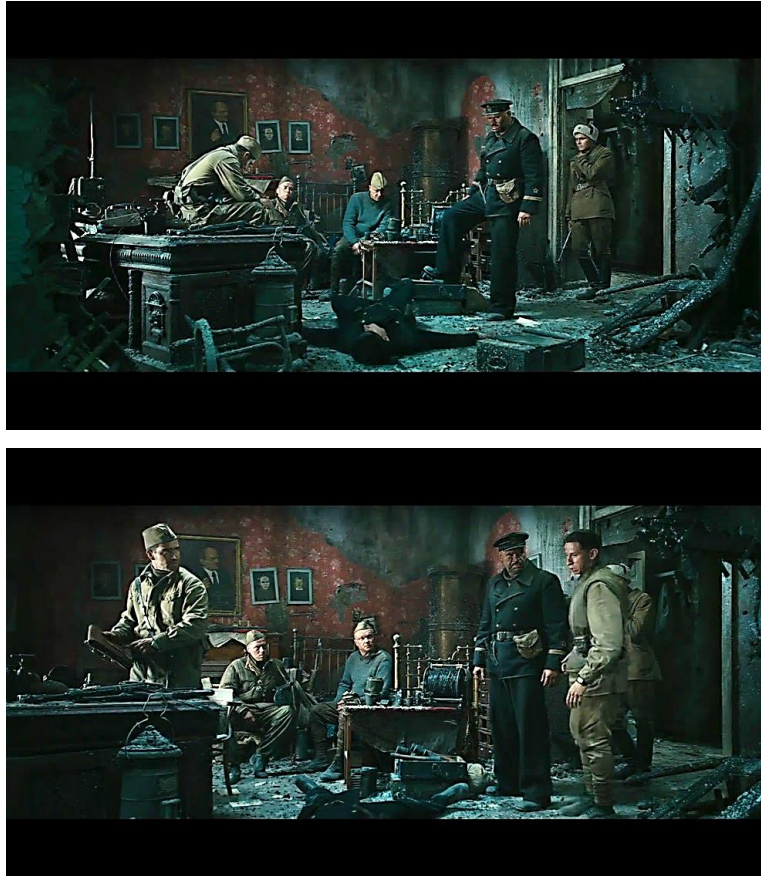


Figure 5. Though the marine was shot by their comrades, there is little to no consequence for Gromov or Nikiforov; only questioning if it was necessary, since the marine could've been useful for something else.

Also, a scene in which Chvanov teaches Katya how to use a sniper rifle is portraying the fury that Red Army soldiers felt during this attack on their national pride. A German soldier, showing that he is unarmed, is getting water near their position. Chvanov tells Katya were to follow and where to aim, just waiting for the right moment.

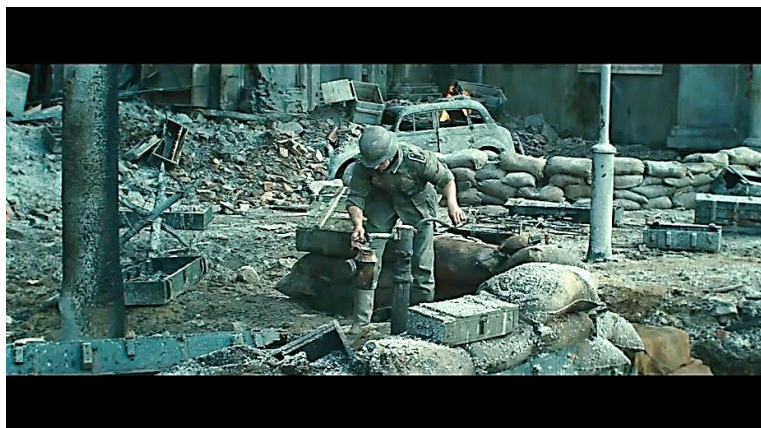




Figure 6. Katya is taught how to use the sniper rifle by Chvanov. The German soldier puts his trust in the “laws of war.”

While Gromov tries to stop them from killing the German, he is too late; the bullet pierces through his heart. Gromov is understandably angry at Chvanov. He has not only compromised their movements, but he also killed a soldier getting water. An argument ensues, where valid points are brought up by both parties:

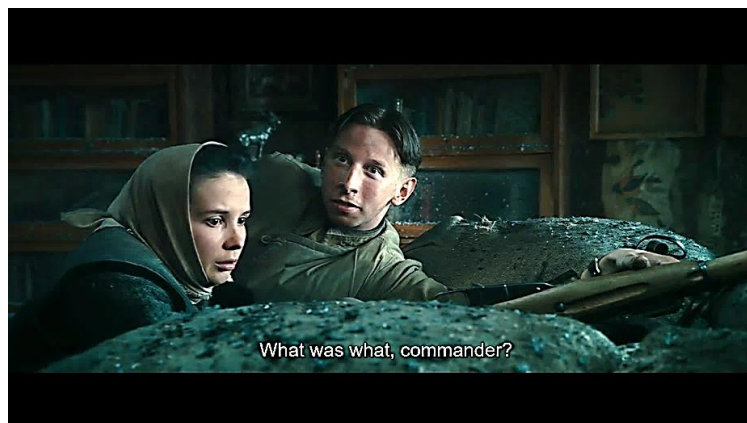




Figure 7. As a captain, Gromov has to upkeep a certain level of control; Chvanov's recklessness may cost someone their lives.

From this point on, Chvanov tells his story of his younger brother, who was killed for having the same name as Lenin. This realisation brings Gromov to more of an understanding, looking sympathetically at him while Katya blames herself:



Figure 8. Katya is crestfallen, having never killed anyone before. She loses her innocence in the process.

These examples provide insight into perhaps a change in Russia's perception of their complex and complicated history of warfare. Admitting that the strong, heroic Red Army soldiers had moments of wavering bravery, moral ambiguity, and insecurities; just like any other human. Subsequently, Bondarchuk – like other Russian directors – have “concentrated on recognisable events and people from the past” (Gillespie 2003: 73), and he is seemingly a part of the “post-Soviet cultural discourse that confronts the past and seeks to reassess and reinvent history” (Gillespie 2003: 79). Not perhaps as radically as Sergo Paradzhanov or Nikita Mikhalkov, but Bondarchuk opts for a film that uses its atmosphere and spatiotemporal environment to capture a myth, but also paying *homage* to the veterans of Stalingrad. Bondarchuk does not claim to be ‘historically accurate,’ which might be wise (something we’ll examine further in Annaud’s film); instead, he captures the sensations and imagery of a mythical Stalingrad. Though the Battle of Stalingrad is long since over, the traditions and memories of the fateful war still linger in the cultural- and social structures in Russia. Surviving through film, the Battle of Stalingrad will never be forgotten, and, even if the city never permanently reclaims its Stalinist name (or if it even should reclaim it), it will always – and continually – be the place where patriotism surge.

4. “One bullet can change the course of history” – Annaud’s *Enemy at the Gates*

Like with Bondarchuk’s film, *Enemy at the Gates* is seemingly an amalgamation of European filmmaking, video game aesthetics and, in my opinion, Hollywoodization. The film is adapted from the nonfiction book by William Craig from 1973 *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for*

Stalingrad. According to Annaud himself, from an interview by Neil Smith in 2001⁸, he explains what drew him to the story and the ‘accuracy’ of what was shown on screen:

“It presented the opportunity to talk about a vast event - the Battle of Stalingrad - through very few characters. It is based on a famous anecdote about a young sharpshooter who became an instant hero in nine days, so much so the German command sent their best sniper to get rid of him. What I loved was that through this miniscule duel I could understand the larger picture.”

Annaud continues:

“It is an extremely famous story, but I do not know how true it is. If you make a movie about Elizabeth I, how much of the dialogue is her real words? Audiences know when they go see a movie that it is fiction” (Smith 2001: *BBC*).

But although Bondarchuk’s film might have alienated its Western audiences with its supposedly ideological themes and Putin-era views on warfare, Annaud’s film has caused more of controversy since its release. Sir Antony Beevor has openly denounced the film as “yet another piece of tawdry multiplex fodder, enticing punters with the come-on line of historical accuracy but adulterating it with lies” (Meek 2001: *Mail & Guardian*). Beevor, who is an acclaimed historian and an authority on the Second World War histories, expressed his grievances with war films in an article he wrote for *The Guardian* in 2018. He contends that:

“The real problem is that the needs of history and the needs of the movie industry are fundamentally incompatible. Hollywood has to simplify everything according to set formulae. Its films have to have heroes and, of course, baddies – moral equivocation is too complex. Feature films also have to have a whole range of staple ingredients if they are to make it through the financing, production and studio system to the box office. One element is the “arc of character,” in which the leading actors have to go through a form of moral metamorphosis as a result of the experiences they undergo. Endings have to be upbeat, even for the Holocaust. Look at *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1992) and the sentimentality of its finale, revealing that in movies only the survivor’s count” (Beevor 2018, *The Guardian*).

⁸ This interview is now archived:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/03/07/annaud_enemy_gates_interview.shtml

Indeed, Beevor's complaints and concerns about Hollywood's treatment of histories of war are valid; the re-constructions historical narratives in films like *Enemy at the Gates* creates a need for closure and happy endings; a falsehood amidst the terrors of war. Allegedly, according to Beevor, Annaud disregarded whether or not if the famous sniper duel between Zaytsev and König was fact or fiction, and told Beevor: "But Antony, who can tell where myth begins and truth ends?" (Beevor 2018: *The Guardian*) The intense duel between Zaytsev and König, presumedly never happened. In British historian Frank Ellis' book, *The Stalingrad Cauldron* from 2013, he attempts to expose the inconsistencies in Zaytsev's accounts of the supposed slaying of König. But, as Ellis surmise, it is still quite possible that Zaytsev fought and killed a German sniper as described; "that his victim was some German über-sniper, who fell for a simple ruse, is a more dubious proposition" (Peck 2014: *Defense Maven*).

Enemy at the Gates's reception was unenthusiastic, but it is not without praise. Of all 33 top critics on Rotten Tomatoes⁹, 17 of them considered the film "rotten," while the remaining 16 considered it "fresh." Lisa Schwarzbaum, the writer for *Entertainment Weekly*, writes in 2001 that it is "a simplified 'happy' hero's story", and Peter Rainer, the writer for *New York Magazine/ Vulture*, writes in 2002 that "it is as if an obsessed movie nut had decided to collect every bad war-movie convention on one computer and program it to spit out a script." In contrast, of the 16 positive reviews, some acknowledged that the film did have some faults, but that they did not matter in the grand scheme. Peter Travers, the writer for *Rolling Stone*, writes in 2001 that "any flaws in execution pale against those moments when the film brings history to vital life." But, if one were to venture to Germany or Russia, its reception was quite different. According to the web site *Lenta.ru*, Russian veterans of Stalingrad demanded to ban the film from rental stores. They write that "veterans who took part in the battle of Stalingrad argue that the course of events in the picture was distorted, the commanders of the Red Army are ruthless despots, and ordinary soldiers and civilians are silent cannon fodder."¹⁰ Although the film did well in Moscow and St. Petersburg – partly, perhaps, because of a younger audience – a protest was announced two days before the anniversary of the battle in 2001. In Germany, the film was received poorly by audiences. Reasons given were that the film glorified war and simplified history and seemed to walk the line between "commercial action cinema and serious engagement with the horrors of war" (Kucharzewski 2007: *Filmszene.de*). On the Berlinale in 2001, according to *Spiegel Online*,

⁹ While Rotten Tomatoes can be considered as an 'oversimplification' of the reception of a specific film, it is a good tool to get an overview over the audiences and critic's opinions as the films were released.

¹⁰ Translated using Google Translate.

the opening for *Enemy* was a flop: the film had “too much heroic pathos and [was] a series of clichés” (Dreier 2001: *Spiegel Online*).¹¹

Annaud’s film is polarising; causing debates and discussions of the power war myths, and ideological narratives have over cultural identity and societies. Zaytsev’s exploits have ultimately immortalised him and the story, making him a perfect hero for the Soviet Union¹², akin to Panikakha. But – as with the other films in this thesis – the critiques can be biased, affected by its critics’ cultural memory or identity, which obviates ‘objective’ judgments. And, in the end, does the Battle of Stalingrad’s success solely lie in the scope of Zaytsev? According to one of the tag lines for the film, it might: that “one bullet can change the course of history.”

4.1 Plot summary *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001)

It is 1942; Vasily Zaytsev (Jude Law) is a young Red Army soldier fighting in the Battle of Stalingrad, where his impressive marksmanship saves the life of commissar Danilov (Joseph Fiennes). Danilov later makes him a propaganda icon by writing of his exploits in the army newspaper to boost morale. They become friends, but both fall for the same woman, Tania Chernova (Rachel Weisz).

Red Army snipers take their toll on the German army, and Major König (Ed Harris) is sent to eliminate Vasily and crush Soviet morale. König’s arrival marks the beginning of a game of cat and mouse between Zaytsev and König. In the midst of it all, Zaytsev and Tania fall in love, and the jealous Danilov tries to get her away from him.

In order to reveal König’s position, Danilov decides to sacrifice lets himself get shot. This leads to König eventually getting shot himself by Zaytsev, finally meeting face to face. Tania gets hurt by shrapnel and is believed to be dead, but she and Vasily are reunited two months after the liberation of Stalingrad.

4.2 ‘Inspired by true events’: The fictitious exploits of the Hero Sniper

What’s most peculiar about the film – besides the off-putting number of British accents – is the portrayal of the Red Army and its leaders and soldiers. Without prior knowledge of the Red Army or the Second World War, it is difficult to know what’s a true rendering of events or what’s embellished or re-purposed to fit the narrative of the filmmaker.

¹¹ Translated using Google Translate.

¹² Although this story might be more fiction than fact, it should not remove any of Zaytsev’s achievements as a sniper and soldier.

Echoing the words of Rosenstone yet again; “no matter how deeply committed they [filmmakers] are to render the subject faithfully, the history that finally appears on the screen can never fully satisfy the historian as a historian (although it may satisfy the historian as filmgoer)” (Rosenstone 1988: 1173). Changes from page to screen is inevitable, according to Rosenstone, and how we understand the past through film.

In contrast from Bondarchuk’s film, though both films have similar ‘video game’ aesthetics and story progression, *Enemy* degrades itself by posing itself as a genuine war story, based on the ‘adventures’ and exploits of the Soviet Hero Vasily Zaytsev. Genuine in a sense that it presents itself as ‘inspired’ by this real-life Soviet war hero, using it as a marketing tool to get audiences in the theatres. Phrases like ‘inspired by’ and ‘based on’ makes the viewer believe, to a degree, that what’s presented is somewhat genuine. Even though Bondarchuk’s film also is very loosely based on real events – Pavlov’s House – it does not pose as an accurate depiction. Instead, Bondarchuk creates fictional characters and places them in Stalingrad, giving an alternate interpretation on how war affects the people involved. Also, Bondarchuk does not market the film as something ‘based’ or ‘inspired’ by; he makes it clear that the film is portraying emotions rather than historical accuracies and ideology. However, this is not to say that the blame should solely be laid on Annaud; audiences should have some reservations toward historical events depicted on screen and not accept it as ‘absolute truth.’ The film is a tool of conviction after all and can be abused to push certain narratives, both ideological and political. *Enemy*, as Youngblood surmises, “illustrates key issues surrounding the post-communist World War II film and allows us to consider the inherent problems in ‘global’ commercial filmmaking” (Paris 2007: 149).

Both Annaud and Alain Godard, his co-writer for the film, did not draw from any historical sources as inspiration for the film. In name, the film is based on the previously mentioned 1973 novel by William Craig. As for narrative structure and basic plot elements, it seems the main source for inspiration was from David L. Robbins’s historical novel *War of the Rats* from 1999 (Paris 2007: 149). According to Beevor, Annaud invited him to come to Germany during filming, perhaps as a historical advisor at first. Beevor himself claims that he never advised Annaud during filming or that his book *Stalingrad* from 1998 was used as a source for the film (Beevor 2018: *The Guardian*). But, while films that romanticise war with fictitious characters and plots are often criticised by audiences and critics, films like *Enemy* are not uncommon. Other films, like *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) and *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) both touch on issues of historical representation and national memory. Even though both these films focus on the American perceptions of these horrific events, there seem to be patterns in

these ‘romantic period war drama’ films; a heightened national pride – particularly in *Pearl Harbor*, in both marketing and imagery – and the artistic license taken to evoke the message the filmmaker wants to convey. These films are, more often than not, very successful financially, often receiving blockbuster status. In the case of *Pearl Harbor* – akin to *Enemy* – was severely criticised for its historical inaccuracies, and many survivors from Pearl Harbor dismissed the film for its generalised ‘Hollywood portrayal.’ But there seemed to be a level of self-awareness during its production, however. Jerry Bruckheimer, the producer for the film, said in a publicity release that they “tried to be accurate, but it is certainly not meant to be a history lesson” (Wetta 2001: 1138). The emphasis is put on the symbolic imagery and nostalgia rather than the actual dramatic events that lead to the bombing of Pearl Harbor; a possible attempt to elevate America’s national pride from its problematic and complicated past.

While *Enemy* is very much a European production, the way in which the film tackles its subject matter is highly American Hollywood, perpetuating Soviet stereotypes, misconceptions surrounding the battle and some anti-Communist ideas in its wake. There are many historical inaccuracies that will be omitted in this analysis. Reasons being that although they are obvious inaccuracies, they are not as harmful as the ones concerning specific people, soldiers, ideologies, and politics. Some of these inaccuracies are technical, however. Weapons and equipment are inconsistent with the year of the battle, the map shown in the film which depicts the invasion of Nazi Germany is a modern one¹³, and depicts Switzerland as being invaded¹⁴, and the use of a modern version of the Soviet national anthem when Zaytsev and Danilov arrives at the banquet with Khrushchev for the first time.¹⁵ These are but a handful of examples, but in this analysis, the main focus will be on the portrayal of the Soviet soldiers and their leaders, and the way Order No. 227 is enforced and generalised in the film, perhaps either willingly or unwillingly.

4.3 “Not a Step Back”: The portrayal of the NKVD & Stalin’s Order No. 227

It is quite simple to disregard Annaud’s film as “just fiction”; a film simply made for entertainment purposes and a film that one should not trust on face value. It is a Hollywood

¹³ It depicts the Ukraine and the Baltic states as independent countries, which wouldn’t be the case during the war.

¹⁴ Switzerland was one of the neutral countries during the Second World War and was never invaded or occupied.

¹⁵ Before 1943, the anthem was a Russian version of *The Internationale*, which its original lyrics were written by Eugène Potter in 1871 and the music was created by Pierre De Geyter in 1888. It was not until 1944 the anthem we hear in this scene would be used (Wikipedia 2019).

film, and in itself, there is nothing harmful that can come of it. But this is where the debates from either historian, film scholars and critics arise, and the worry for the film as a historical source becomes quite clear; audiences put trust in the filmmakers and relies on them to be ‘truthful’ when covering historical events or people. Furthermore, referring to this film, one could argue that the film is in fact – in contrast from Bondarchuk’s film – an ideological tool, perpetuating myths and generalisations of the Red Army’s horrendous actions to its soldiers and people, despite what historical records claim on the matter. Before this claim can be examined or discussed, however, I want to delve deeper into the reasoning for these generalisations by examining the order itself, while trying to comprehend how the order has been misunderstood or taken out of context through the years.

Briefly, Order No. 227 was issued by Josef Stalin in 1942, as a way to re-establish discipline after heavy losses and retreats. According to Stalin himself the concern came from how the nation was starting to view the Soviet military in an unsavoury light:

“The population of our country, who love and respect the Red Army, start to be discouraged in her, and lose faith in the Red Army, and many curse the Red Army for leaving our people under the yoke of the German oppressors, and itself running east” (Wikisource 2017).¹⁶

¹⁶ The publication itself is now in the public domain.

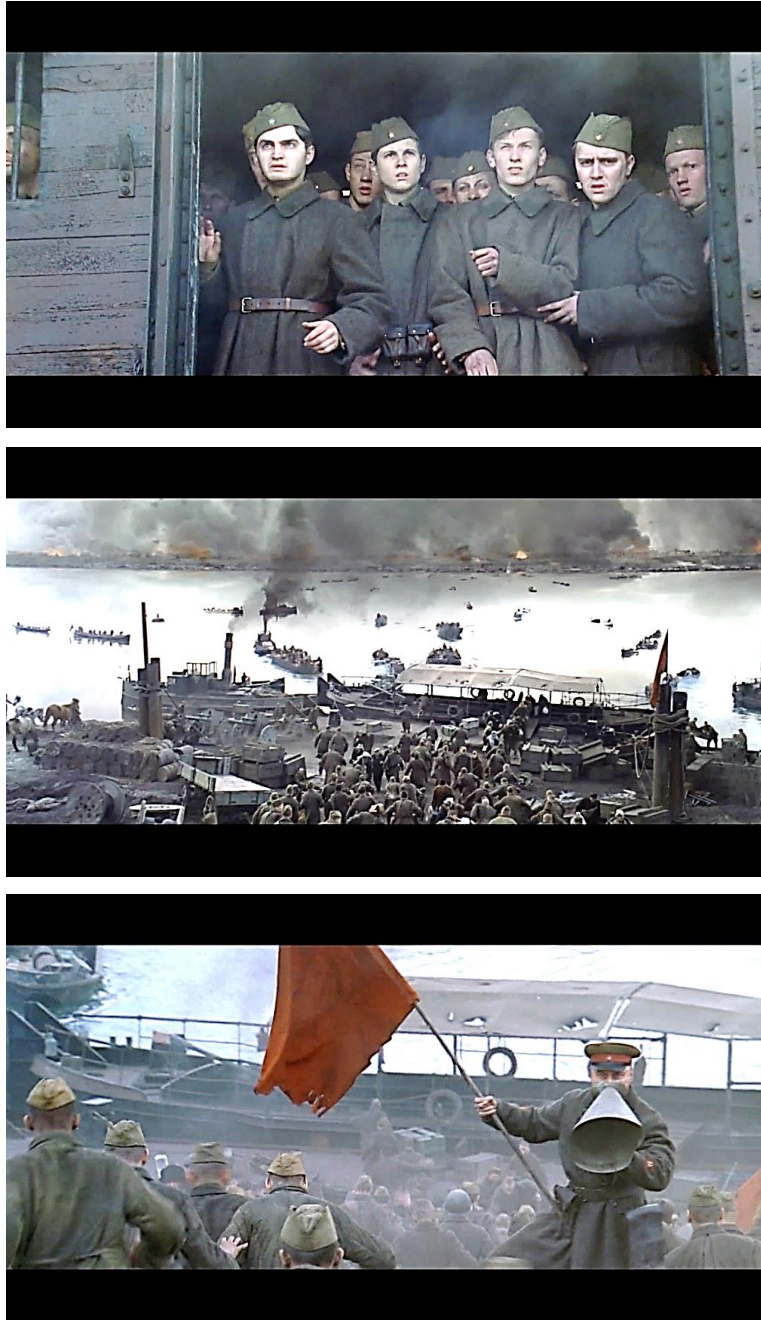


Figure 9. The scope of the battle is revealed to the soldiers.

There was no alternative; the time for retreating was over. “Not one step back! Such should now be our main slogan” (Wikisource, 2017). It was necessary then that the front had to create three penal battalions, which would be sent to the most dangerous sections of the front lines (Roberts 2006: 13). Unwarranted retreats or withdrawals ordered by commanders were subject to a military tribunal. Stalin’s order would prove to be an effective and successful initiative, as the contemporary verdict decrees that the victory at Stalingrad proved to be the most important outcome of the Second World War (Roberts 2013: 131).

But, even though the order was extremely important for pushing back the Wehrmacht

in the Soviet Union, the order seems to be quite generalised in Annaud's film. On face value, the representation of the Red Army appears to correspond with how the Western hemisphere views the Soviet nation; radical, hardened communists that are willing to become martyrs for their leaders and Motherland. These convictions are exemplified at the start of the film. When the Red Army soldiers arrive at Stalingrad, the young men are wavering and disorganised. Swiftly they are dragged out from the train carts and thrown into the crowd of soldiers who're headed for the boats crossing the Volga. We witness the chaos through Zaytsev, who's no braver than any of the other soldiers in the face of battle. Majestic music flow as we see the Volga and Stalingrad; bathing in black, thick smoke. Underneath the shouting we hear the words "not a step backward" uttered (evoking the Stalin's order), while the young soldiers are being shoved roughly into the boats. The communist flag is held up high and guns firing shots into the air used as a tool for persuasion and fear tactics.





Figure 10. NKVD is executing ‘cowards’ and ‘traitors’ to the Motherland.

On the boats, Zaytsev witness the horrors of the war first hand; body parts, blood, and debris contaminate the Volga. He is visibly frightened and confused by what’s unfolding in front of him. His commanders, spouting motivational speeches to re-ignite the soldier’s spirits, reminding them to “not fall back” yet again. Their efforts seem to be futile, however, as German planes fire relentlessly at the boat, killing a lot of soldiers. Panic is now spreading; soldiers are now fleeing for their lives, but as they jump into the water, their commanders start shooting, killing the ones who’re deemed ‘traitors’ and ‘deserters.’ The soldiers still on the boat arrive at the docks of Stalingrad, where the madness and chaos continue. Through the eyes of Zaytsev, we witness the atrocities in these scenes, evoking Soviet victimhood during the Battle of Stalingrad. While these images are violent and chaotic and try depicting war as such, akin to a film like *Ryan*, it also serves as a vehicle for the oversimplification and even over-exaggeration of the efforts of the Red Army and the treatment of their soldiers. The desperate struggle of the Red Army against the Wehrmacht is overshadowed by Cold War propaganda tropes perpetuated in popular culture; promotion of democracy and damnation of communism, perhaps crafting “elaborate comparisons between democratic and communist governments” (Belmonte 2013: 95). In a sense, the film paints the Stalinist government and

military and the Wehrmacht and Nazi Germany as 'equals' in the treatment of their countrymen. The portrayal of the NKVD (*People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs*) as heartless and barbaric continues, however, furthering a popular stereotype that persists in Western popular memory. A silent Zaytsev is yet again pulled into the chasm, left without a rifle, but left with ammunition. "The one with the rifle shoots. The one without follows him. When the one with the rifle gets killed, the one who is following picks up the rifle and shoots." The words cascade through the air while the soldiers are sent to the front lines. "Those who retreat will be shot. There will be no mercy." There is no escaping the wrath of the NKVD; you either die in combat by the fascist's hands, or you die by the hands of your leaders. The barrier troops charges at the Wehrmacht, in a suicidal mission to seize control over Stalingrad. But as the Wehrmacht overpowers the Soviets, they fall back in the wake of their extreme firepower. This leads to the NKVD opening fire on their men after the failed charge, in a heartless attempt at ridding the Red Army of any undesirable cowards, making them "repay in blood."¹⁷ The moving soundtrack swells, and the sounds of the machine gun soften, as the young soldiers fall to the ground, dying by the hands of the Motherland. The battlefield is silent, but the voice of a German soars through the air:

"Russians, surrender. You will see your home again. This is not your war. Join your German comrades; they understand your suffering. And will care more for you than your own officers, who are only sending you to your deaths. The Third Reich is not your enemy. The enemy is bloodthirsty Stalin and his Bolshevik gang..."



¹⁷ In Order 227 it states that: "[...] where ordinary soldiers and low-ranking commanders who have been guilty of a breach of discipline due to cowardice or bewilderment will be routed and put them at difficult sectors of the army to give them an opportunity to redeem by blood their crimes against the Motherland."



Figure 11. The grim depiction of Order No. 227 and the NKVD officers

Although one cannot deny that Stalin's impassioned Order 227 did state that those who wavered should be punished, and forbade retreat, *Enemy* presents it as though this was standard practice in the Red Army. Indeed, penal battalions were created to punish those guilty of disciplinary offences which, between 1942 and 1945, "about 600 such penal units were established, and some 430,000 men served in them" (Roberts 2006: 132). But this new penalising regime following Order 227 was not to punish offenders "but to deter waverers and to reassure those who were determined to do their duty" (Roberts 2006: 132), since, as Roberts puts it: Stalin needed heroes more than NKVD body count of traitors. It is important to note as well that the points in the order does not target the soldiers specifically, but also their commanders and leaders for their unwarranted withdrawal in combat or any unauthorised order that goes against a mission. In turn, the 'eagerness' the NKVD display to tear down the soldiers in the *Enemy* does not represent how the order was employed; there was a high reluctance to shooting their comrades unnecessarily. Though these soldiers would be arrested for their 'cowardice,' most were sent to penal battalions or companies, and fewer were executed; if one redeemed themselves, they would have the opportunity to return to their units (Roberts 2006: 132).

Though barrier troops were an integral part of the Red Army, the popular view of should not be the main force that won the war in Stalingrad. This is not to say that these events depicted in *Enemy* did not happen, but this was most often in extreme cases and does not represent the Red Army and the NKVD's efforts in keeping the soldiers in line. *Enemy* depicts the warfare and Order 227 in such a generalised and exaggerated way in these few scenes alone, pulling fragments of different parts of Stalingrad's history and joining them together to create a concoction of iconic imagery and dramatic incidents to fit the narrative. These scenes, trying to evoke the grim reality of war, fails to create a balanced view on how the Red Army operated (compiling all their sins to these scenes alone), and the result spreads a false image into the popular mindset, which persists in the Western popular memory of the Soviet Union.

Enemy at the Gates, while being impressive aesthetically, is a heavily flawed film, in almost every aspect. Regarding history and the ways it exploits real people's stories for dramatical gains, it feels more akin to a combat film produced in the 50s; glorifying the spectacle of war and the adventure of it. Youngblood considered that perhaps the film should be viewed as "neo-socialist realist film" and evaluate the film in the "context of Soviet tropes for a World War II film and compare it against Soviet films about the Battle of Stalingrad" (Paris 2001: 152). Indeed, the film could be an amalgamation of Soviet stereotypes and

tropes, but looking back at Bondarchuk's film, there are certain similarities in the films. The romantic plotlines in both films are perplexing and feel out of place, almost as though they are 'mandatory' for these types of Hollywood type films to evoke sympathy for the characters and induce conflict in the narrative.



Figure 12. *Enemy at the Gates*'s Tania and Zaytsev (above), and *Stalingrad*'s Katya and Sergey (below); proving love can bloom on the battlefield.

But, though the films have an aesthetically similar style and sense of 'realistic grit' – arguably like *Ryan* – Bondarchuk's portrayal does not rely on names of real people involved in the liberation of Stalingrad. Bondarchuk's film does not try to change or challenge the historical discourse and historiography of Stalingrad; rather, it portrays a story told through memory and how Stalingrad still arouse intense reactions in contemporary Russia. The film never claims historical accuracy, a fact that, in some sense, redeems the meagre, melodramatic dialogue, distracting 3D visuals and convoluted representations of the Red Army and the Wehrmacht. In contrast, however, Annaud's film – while technically a better film, adapting the look of Spielberg's film more successfully – the film construes the source material in a way that undermines the collective effort by the Red Army and their soldiers, while simultaneously opting for artistic liberties rather than grounding the film in historical realism.

The confidence in the medium as a historical, objective source has diminished, with the assistance of sub-par, Hollywood war films like *Pearl Harbor* and *Enemy at the Gates*. And, through the lenses of Western ideology and capitalism, portrayals of Soviet soldiers and communism will always be under the guise of Stalinist dogmas, and well-fed faces in brand new greatcoats.

Yet, while Bondarchuk's film is a mythical tribute to the veterans retold as a story to comfort victims of natural disaster, and Annaud's film is built upon the likely fictitious exploits of a Soviet Hero and generalising the collective effort of the Red Army, where does that leave the Axis powers? Is it possible to witness Stalingrad through the eyes of the Wehrmacht; through the eyes of the enemy? What can their stories bring to the discussions of historiography and memory concerning The Second World War, and how is Stalingrad remembered by those who sought to destroy it? Joseph Vilsmaier's film *Stalingrad* from 1993 may have the interpretation which could lead to a more diverse depiction of Wehrmacht soldiers and their struggles.

5. Through the eyes of the enemy: Reclaiming Victimhood & coping with history in Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad*

Contrary to Bondarchuk's and Annaud's films, Vilsmaier's film has a daring task; to portray the Battle of Stalingrad from the Wehrmacht's point of view. We rarely get to experience the antagonist's reactions and torment of war in this way, portrayed with graphic depictions of the horrors the German forces were subjected to in Stalingrad. Questions arise quickly; however; could it potentially be problematic to create seemingly identifiable characters who're rightfully vilified in history? Are we at all supposed to identify with this group of men? What does one gain to observe the Battle of Stalingrad through the antagonists' lens? Looking past these questions, it is clear that the film does not justify the actions of the Wehrmacht; the characters are not heroic, super soldiers who exude patriotism. They are more like young, inexperienced boys caught amid a war that is fought by state officials. A possible explanation for this type of portrayal of German soldiers is a product of the German culture and treatment of their victimhood post-war in the 1950s. Narratives in West-Germany depicted the soldiers as victims of Nazism and Communism, rather than perpetrators of Nazi atrocities, and this is often called the myth of the Clean Wehrmacht (Wolfenden 2007: 77). Films like *Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever?* (Wisbar, 1959) and *The Bridge* (Wicki, 1959) portrays a point of view which is not often represented in films, that could challenge society's outlook on how to perceive war and our enemies. The post-war

period was a time for rehabilitation and recuperation in West-Germany. But this way of perceiving the past through film culture has later been condemned as “a cinema of continuity and one of amnesia” (Cooke, Silberman, et al. 2010). This, in turn, transforms the villainous Wehrmacht into misunderstood and oppressed heroes and presenting the Wehrmacht with a series of conflicting images, according to professor Omer Bartov in “Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich” from 1991.

Later, during the post-unification of Berlin in 1989 and onwards in Germany, German filmmakers had to rediscover their legacy and culture once again, and these filmmakers often had another way of viewing their legacy and past. Ultimately, the filmmaker’s views have affected the way they decided to represent their own culture and people in these types of films (Cooke, Silberman, et al. 2010). This could now challenge the perpetrator discourse that was so often projected in Germany, and in turn, also rediscover a form of victimhood for the German people. This is not necessarily a distortion of reality, however, but rather a way of coping with one of the darkest chapters in Germany’s history; recontextualise it in an attempt to understand the disgraceful actions of those who possess power. Granted, some of the favourable portrayals of officers and soldiers are questionable, in that it goes against the historical discourse it revolves. As Wolfenden infers in response to Wisbar’s film, is that “Wisbar’s favourable portrayal of [*Oberstleutnant*] Wisse and the Sixth Army is problematic in that it is well documented that members of this division were involved in war crimes on the Eastern Front” (Wolfenden 2007: 73). The critiques of these films are not always directed at the film itself – and the initial sentiments they want to convey – but rather the attempts of “propagating the myth of a *saubere Wehrmacht* at the expense of historical facts” (Wolfenden 2007: 73).

As with *Enemy*, the disregard for certain historical accuracies can manufacture a biased perception of the past and the countries involved. With both *Dogs* and *Enemy* there is a sense of manipulation, giving the impression that the fictional accounts and the re-imagined events are truthful; the only credibility these films depend on are fragmented, historical narratives shrouded in patriotism or national indignity. In Vilsmaier's case he may have – perhaps unwillingly – produced a film which becomes the catharsis for Germany’s pained history; a history of war, repression, and shame, but also a history of re-constructing a national identity torn apart by their government. As it may be his film can bring light to the mythical shroud that keeps Stalingrad frozen in, ostensibly, a never-ending nightmare, only through the eyes of the enemies.

Stalingrad’s reception differs slightly from Bondarchuk’s and Annaud’s, garnering

mostly praise for its ‘authenticity’ and diverse outlook of the Battle of Stalingrad. While having little to no reviews on Rotten Tomatoes unlike the previous films – which can be attributed to that the site was not launched until 1998 – the user reviews on its IMDB page shows over-all positive reactions. Of all the 153 reviews on the page, many exclaims that this film might be one of the only films that tries to show what really happened and being a near perfect portrayal of reality¹⁸ But some reviewers have their concerns on its authenticity, and it highlights an interesting point that is continually expressed in regard to historical films; the question of ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity,’ and the complex discussions that arise from these terms. All of the above discussions of the films have been critiqued based on both, and it is challenging to find definite answers. Like Bondarchuk’s film, Vilsmaier opts for constructing fictional characters as temporal ‘stand-ins’ for real people, but still keeping Stalingrad as the familiar backdrop for the film’s narrative. One could argue that these films seek to attain both, being that they are accurate in setting, but trying to be authentic in how the characters view their own worlds. While on the subject of accuracy and authenticity, does Vilsmaier’s film seek to produce historical accuracy or try to maintain a sense of legitimacy to the way the Battle of Stalingrad was perceived at the time? And does this perception influence the way how both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army perceived?

5.1 Plot summary *Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993)

Lieutenant Hans von Witzland (Thomas Kretschmann) has never been to the front before, but after enjoying leave in Italy in 1942, he is sent to Stalingrad together with his new platoon; Manfred ‘Rollo’ Rohleder (Jochen Nickel), Fritz Reiser (Dominique Howitz), GeGe Müller (Sebastian Rudolph) and Edgar Emigholz (Heinz Emigholz). They quickly discover how horrible the living conditions and fighting are in Stalingrad, and as the battle stretches on for weeks, they also learn of the futility of their cause and the desperate struggle for survival in the harsh Russian winter.

5.2 The divide in unification: Exploration of victimhood

According to Dr. Axel Bangert, the reunification of Germany brought with its different explorations of their past; the experiences of the ordinary German citizens, and how private lives were affected by the regime, and major figures from both enemy elite and resistance groups. The suffering of the individual came to the forefront, “is less interested in questions of

¹⁸ These reviews are not representative of the film as a whole, but it gives a slight overview and context of the feelings from the audience at the time.

agency and more in trying to convey personal experiences and subjective perceptions of history” (Bangert 2014: 23). In Vilsmaier’s film, for example, the portrayal of the Wehrmacht’s officers and commanders are as one would expect them to be; corrupted men consumed by greed and power. These officers – devoted to serving the Third Reich – are irredeemable men, who’ve crossed the ‘point of no return,’ in stark contrast, superficially, to our main characters. It becomes apparent early in the film that the retaliation against the regime is brewing, particularly in the inexperienced lieutenant Hans von Witzland. He is a young, idealistic and patriotic soldier, but also an undisciplined and emotional being; exemplified in his sympathy for the Russian prisoners of war. Daring to speak up about the ill treatment towards the POWs, it is clear that his superiors have no regard for the prisoner’s well-being.





Figure 13. Witzland being mocked for his concern for a fellow human being.

When we first encounter Witzland, however, he is not portrayed in such a reasonable and sympathetic manner. In Italy, Porto Cervo, before the group travels to Stalingrad, Witzland is shown as strict and professional; someone who simply does the Third Reich's bidding, and that he is not accustomed to 'careless' and desensitised soldiers that surround him. This represents the action of Witzland is a common one, and according to veteran of the 71st Infantry Division, Gerhard Münch, it might be based in reality:

“Back then – with regard to one's upbringing – one had a sense of duty toward the Fatherland, and if you were in a position of responsibility, also a duty toward the people you were in charge of. The lieutenant only lies down to sleep on his straw bed when the last man in his company has gone to rest. Before he can go to bed, he has to make sure that all his men are getting a good night's rest [...].”¹⁹

The soldiers would put total trust in their leaders, relying on their judgments and actions to prevail in the face of the enemy. The pressure of performing in these inhumane conditions – where every decision could mean death to your men – would likely take a toll on a person's

¹⁹ From the project Facing Stalingrad: <http://facingstalingrad.com/interviews/gerhard-munch/>

mental health. This is a key element in the film; Witzland journey to earn the trust of his men while being judged for being an inexperienced and privileged soldier.

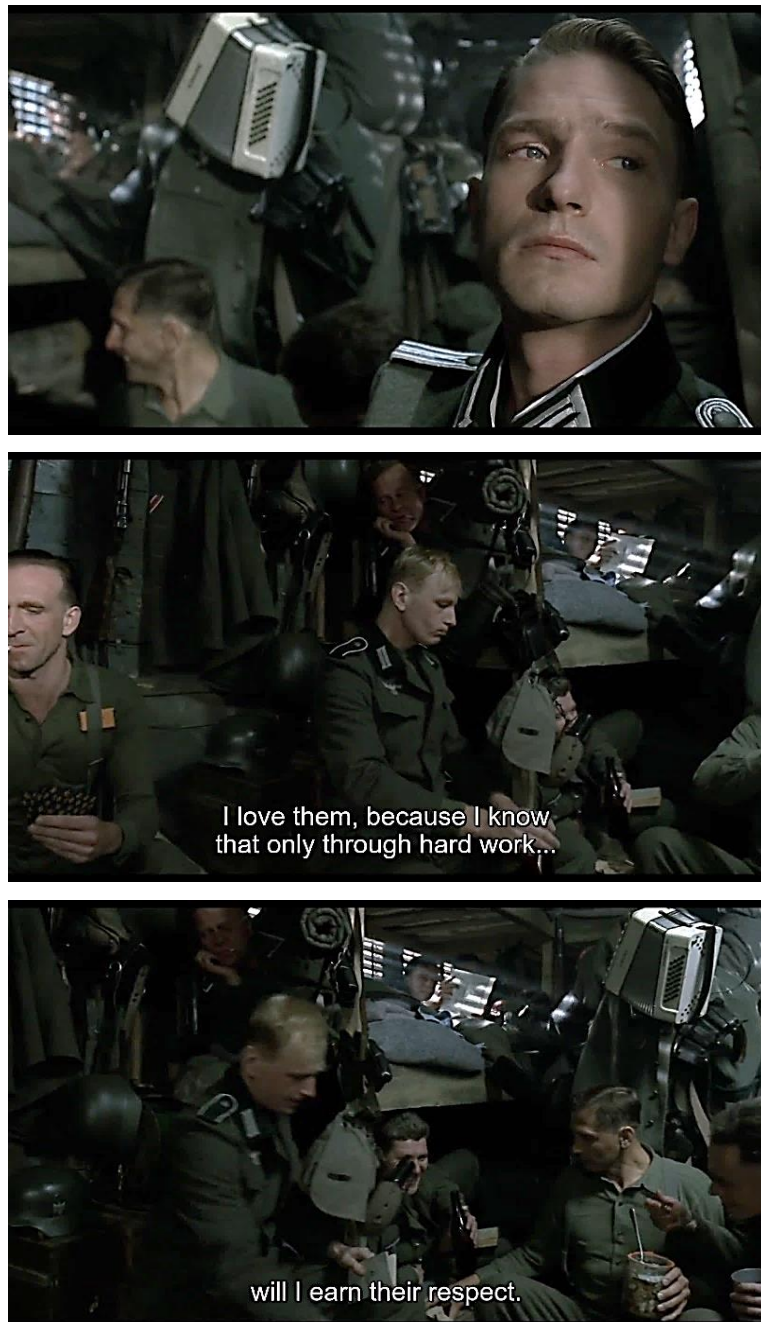


Figure 14. Though confident on the surface, Witzland ponders his predicament.

While in the train cart going to Stalingrad, one of the men, Rollo, confronts him and finds it ‘touching’ that Witzland – as a lieutenant – “keeps them company.” He then requests permission to ask him a question about his previous endeavours, which Witzland discloses that “everybody starts somewhere, right?” But as the men realise that Witzland has the same desires – to survive and go back home to normal life – and suffers as they do, the respect is

slowly built. This experience is yet again something Münch seems to describe in his interview:

“It builds a relationship of trust when the soldiers see the captain. One can talk to the soldiers, they have no inhibitions in the same dirt hole, it does not matter then that the leader is a captain. One has to go through the same tough experiences as the soldiers. And that is how the relationship of trust and respect is built. And it is only out of this relationship of trust that everything that went on at Stalingrad can be explained, how they soldiered on for so long.”²⁰



Figure 15. Witzland tries to console the once confident Rollo.

Witzland, through the hardships and suffering with his brigade, becomes ‘enlightened’ and sees the error of his ways, but more importantly; he sees the errors of the Third Reich. But, Witzland’s portrayal may be perceived overtly sympathetic, considering his connection to his higher officers; he must, in some sense, have been aware of the horrors that his fellow soldiers committed in their wake. As Wolfenden describes in her analysis of Wisbar’s *Dogs*, that the

²⁰ Though Münch’s descriptions are interesting for the examination of Witzland’s character, it is not to say that this was the norm; it is a mere observation that can give insight into the mind of a veteran of the Wehrmacht.

“positive portrayal of the Sixth Army contradicts evidence proving that *Wehrmacht* officers did commit war crimes” and that “this manipulation may be perceived as being necessary in order to give Wisbar’s fictional account of the Battle of Stalingrad credibility” (Wolfenden 2007: 74). But, since Witzland is portrayed as a “fish-out-of-water” and a man who’s never been in battle before, one could concede that he is acting on his instincts and pure emotions, akin to the scene with the Russian POWs. Witzland is thrown to the ground, in the mud next to the beaten prisoner, constructing a vulnerable connection between the two opposing sides.



Figure 16. A Red Army soldier and Wehrmacht soldier are on equal grounds.

While this juxtapositioning – in context with the film’s narrative – gives in to thought-provoking ideas and analysis, the way it portrayed could lead to interpretations that both soldiers are victims of the same regime. Which, in some way, could be construed as accurate, but they are not proportionate comparisons historically. And even though Vilsmaier never omits the horrors of the Wehrmacht – showcasing them in meticulous detail – he may arguably perpetuate the same sentiment as Wisbar, which was blaming the regime and Hitler, who “overrides all military sense,” as Wolfenden infers about *Dogs*. The common Wehrmacht soldiers are pawns for the military and the government, sacrificed “because of Hitler’s poor decisions, thus manipulating the viewer into blaming Hitler for the soldier’s deaths” (Wolfenden 2007: 75).

Stalingrad’s portrayal of the Wehrmacht might incite some controversy by audiences, critics and historians, and producing interest yet again in the representation of our ‘common enemy’. Although reproducing a past that may, on the surface, portray a more human depiction of soldiers of the Third Reich, film does not try to persuade the viewer that Wehrmacht soldiers were fully innocent of war crimes more similarly to *Dogs*. It does not shy away from the horrific and unnecessary acts of violence towards citizens and POWs, and it tries to explore common humanity that both the Wehrmacht and Red Army soldiers struggle to cope with in this trying environment. The Russian soldiers are not monsters; they are presented as strong-willed and powerful, yet also sympathetic and giving demonstrated in later scenes in the film.





Figure 17. The mystical Red Army soldiers appear with a young rebel by their side. Both sides share rations, making both sides human.

The cultural shift has affected the way in which Germany re-visits its past, distancing itself from the post-war films in the 1950s and the West German government's stance on the Wehrmacht. But, it is an interesting film to examine, as the conventions of the Clean Wehrmacht still seem to be somewhat rooted in West German consciousness. In another interview with a veteran from Stalingrad, Franz Schieke discusses that – from his point of view – East Germans remember Stalingrad differently than West Germans:

“I told you that the [West German] books that I read, I returned them, because I did not want my children reading them. Because they were not honest.”²¹

Schieke is a man that has experienced both sides, being an orderly for the 71st Infantry Division, and being incarcerated for seven years in Soviet imprisonment. He has an understanding outlook on how the Russian soldiers treated the Wehrmacht. He questions his role and reasoning for fighting in the war and claims that the East and West were never united. Perhaps Schieke’s statements are rooted in reality; the existence of *Ostalgie* and *Westalgie*, and other cultural practice are examples of these thoughts and beliefs; though physically unified there is still a lack for social unification. The film, though not entirely unifying opinions or discussions concerning it, does not try to describe the acts of the Wehrmacht accurately. Rather, it portrays the authentic sentiment and reality of war; Stalingrad is merely the setting for the story to unfold. Vilsmaier’s film is similar to Bondarchuk’s film, where the search to understand the evils of mankind are the film’s purpose, experienced through the ambiguous eyes of the anguished soldiers in the City of Nightmares, Stalingrad.



Figure 18. From poised to broken, Witzland personifies a sense of victimhood.

²¹ From Facing Stalingrad <https://facingstalingrad.com/interviews/franz-schieke/>

6. Conclusion: History's reliance on cinema

In closing, is there possible to discover the 'absolute truth' of the events that took place in Stalingrad through film? Is film capable to present the past in fair, unbiased ways? What the analyses have demonstrated is that it is a perplexing process. For one, film has the ability to retell and portray history in ways which impact the way society view themselves; bringing the past closer to the present, breaking the barriers of time. It can be used as a tool for learning and understanding, and also inspire change in societal norms. However, film also has the power perpetuate negative influences, misinformation and stereotypes; misrepresenting or re-contextualise the memories and accounts of real people's experiences. Cinema's shortcomings can highlight the problems that are associated with the historical genre (Francaviglia et al 2007: 122). One of these problems are that film tends to condense and simplify histories so that the viewer can quickly understand and take interest in them. Another issue is that film tend to focus on a main character – like how Zaytsev takes centre stage in *Enemy at the Gates* – leaving out other people of interest. Film does not have the capacity to make a comprehensible rendering of history; it can merely imitate it with actors and sets. The 3 films in this chapter about the pained history of the Battle of Stalingrad do suffer these shortcomings, as well. But that does not necessarily remove their value as insights into a nation's history and memories.

Bondarchuk's film – while arguably the most aesthetically different, and with its use of CG special effects – focus on the complicated feelings associated with Stalingrad's history and how the bloody war is perceived through cultural memory. The film is not meant as an accurate, historical retelling of the events; it presents Stalingrad as a mythical place, a story passed down through oral retellings by the narrator's mother. It also evokes emotions that veterans might have felt while fighting for their lives and Motherland, but without directing its focus on ideological issues. While for Western audiences the film might seem overly patriotic and, somewhat, in a state of denial when it comes to controversial acts performed by the Red Army. But, given that *Stalingrad* is not meant to be a historical retelling of the battle or real people, the questions of accuracy does not directly apply in this sense. For Russia, the memory of the Patriotic War against a brutal enemy – the battle between good and evil – prevails over historical accuracy, furthering the lament of the people of Volgograd.

Annaud's film, on the other hand, is a convoluted yet interesting subject to examine. This film highly reflects the Western narrative of Stalingrad; the fear of Nazism – and in turn Communism – and the totalitarian regime that comes with both. It portrays the struggle of remarkable victims, in this case the Soviet Hero Vasily Zaytsev, that are caught in the middle

of two murderous regimes. It is a film that takes history into its own hands, re-contextualising and reshaping how the battle was fought, making the dramatic narrative be the focus. This moulding of history, however, came at Russia's expense; the film was deemed incredibly offensive by Russian viewers, misrepresenting the Red Army's conducts in Stalingrad and the execution of Order No. 227. Advertised as a story "inspired" by true events, it could potentially influence the viewers expectations of how historically accurate the film is. *Enemy at the Gates* is an example of the shortcomings of the historical film embodied, showcasing what occurs when too much artistic liberties are taken and the real impact it can have on society.

Finally, Vilsmaier's film is a unique look into the national guilt and shame of a country responsible for horrific war crimes. It was conceived at the dawn of a new and unified Germany, creating new discussions on how a nation should cope with arguably the darkest chapter in its history. It brings a whole new outlook on the 'enemy', bringing humanity to the previously inhuman in a grounded, collected fashion. But, even though these depictions of the Wehrmacht could be honest and accurate for some of the soldier, *Stalingrad* – perhaps unwillingly – perpetuates a victimhood mentality that is most commonly rooted in the West German attitude about the Wehrmacht soldiers, being that the film is of West German descent. Also, by placing the burden on those who're in a position of power, the film seeks to redeem a decidedly humiliated generation, by demonstrating that even servants of the Third Reich had a conscious. Though I would argue Vilsmaier most likely did not intend to maintain the *saubere Wehrmacht*. Rather, he wanted to display the humanity where humanity is lost; in the hopelessness of war and destruction.

Though these films on the surface are quite different, they also make it apparent that historical films do not have a clear blueprint; there are varied depictions, sources and national identities that shape how we perceive our pasts and history. But the films do have themes that binds them together. Instead of trying to capture the accurate history the films are trying to depict, these separate accounts leave us with a wide range of thought-provoking and symbolic perspectives of the Battle of Stalingrad; accuracy is often abandoned to favour the beliefs and emotions of the memories left behind. These perspectives disclose how the differing nations choose to understand their past. This presents us with the notion that the subjectivity is inherent in our historical perception of the world. As the post-memory becomes more reliant on mediated portrayals, questions of how and to what degree the cinema will affect the way we approach war; are these portrayals broadening our understanding and perspectives and

helping to keep the history alive? Or can they maintain and alter the definite history, and persist in the minds of the audience? Only time will tell if each side of the war will ever be able to make sense of the ferocious Battle for Stalingrad, or if it'll persist as a legend and nightmare in the various narratives captured in the filmic images – surviving in the collective, digital memory.

CHAPTER 2: PERCEPTIONS OF STALINGRAD THROUGH AESTHETICS & VIOLENCE

“[...] In their attempts to attract the audience, two media are fighting each other instead of capturing it by united effort. Since the two media are striving to express the same matter in a twofold way, a disconcerting coincidence of two voices results each of which is prevented by the other from telling more than half of what it would like to tell.”

Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, 1954, p 199

While Arnheim's quote alludes to the uneasiness the 'talkies' brought in its wake in the 1930s, his argument is rather fitting for the chapter at hand; the competitive efforts between cinema and video games. This chapter came about as a way to examine these two mediums and their aesthetical qualities in context with the three subjects for which my thesis revolves. In addition to the three films I will also include a brief overview of Spielberg's *Ryan* and Malick's *Line*, since both were released the same year, and yet *Ryan* would prevail as the superior war film with its innovative cinematography and 'realistic' film style. The main aim of this chapter will then focus on how the warfare in Stalingrad is portrayed and reproduced through visual style, cinematic techniques, and through violence and death. But it will also concern the way the post-*Ryan* war film influenced the video game aesthetic and has, in turn, inspired the video games released after *Ryan*. From the striking colours and sharp contrasts of Bondarchuk's 3D contained cityscape; to the desaturated and gritty coming-of-age story of Annaud's convoluted and Westernised version of Stalingrad; and, finally, to the emotional and inevitable story of survival – or certain doom – in Vilsmaier's anti-war film.

In the end, as shall become clear this chapter's concepts for study are varying and complex – furthering and expanding upon the claims made in chapter one – and the differing

ways in which each film reproduce the Battle of Stalingrad. Hopefully, this comparative analysis of the visual, violent and video gaming attributes will add to the discussion of how The Second World War can – and perhaps should – be portrayed and replicated on both the silver screen and the computer screen.

7. Literature review

“The philosophy of art.” This is what aesthetics entails; answering questions of the role of art in human lives; a gateway to the sublime. But, as in other forms of art, the film is composed of different facets that make it intrinsically its own, which is more “technologically determined” than any other art (Sparshott 1971: 11). Without the camera and the lens, the illusions that film produces would be all but lost, and the film would be more akin to the stage play rather than moving images on the screen. And, since the birth of the medium itself, there has been many ongoing theories and questions on *how* film ought to be created (although questions on *why* are just as imperative and will be explored later in this chapter.) Also, in regard to these questions, categorisations regarding film are produced, as J. Dudley Andrew acknowledge in the introduction of the book *The Major Film Theories* from 1976; “The raw material”, “the methods and techniques”, “the forms and shapes” and “the purpose and value” of film and cinema.

Further, according to Andrew, not every category is necessary to answer the questions bestowed by the individual theorists, however. The reason, Andrew contends, is that “film theory forms a system in which the answer to any one question can be seen to lead easily to the next question, and any one question can be rephrased in terms of another” (Andrew 1976: 8). The transposition of questions and the interdependence of questions are the two essential propositions (Andrew 1976: 8), which makes it possible to compare theorists with decidedly differing perspectives and different questions. It is important that we not only examine the questions asked but also “the basis from which those questions spring and the consequences they imply” (Andrew 1976: 10).

While it seems that film theory often focuses on *why* rather than *how* the film is created, examined, and understood, this is not to say that the technical aspect of cinema is not equally as important. Certainly, when discussions involve the aesthetics of cinema, it would be impossible to bypass the visual and artistic merits of the medium. But historical and theoretical shifts – going from cinema’s commercial and technological origins – initiated the steps that would make film theory a scholarly topic. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes in *Cinema II* that “a theory of cinema is not ‘about’ cinema, but about the concepts that

cinema gives rise to and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices [...]", and that cinema's concepts in itself are not given in cinema; "and yet they are cinema's concepts, not theories about cinema" (Deleuze 2005: 269). What Deleuze deduces is that the 'great cinema authors' are equal to the painter and the musicians, being the authorities of their respective fields; they transform into philosophers and scholars. This development in film theory throughout the 1970s and 1980s "drew upon French theory and the specific developments associated with semiotics, psychoanalysis, and Marxism to shift its focus more fully on deconstructing cinema and its ideological functions" (McDonald 2016: 91). This shift from cinema's aesthetic status to its authorship derives from the historical vicissitudes; the birth of several journals on cinema in the 70s and 80s, concerned with "the relationship between moving images and socially structured forms of inequity" (McDonald 2016: 92).

Furthering Deleuze's statements in the above paragraph, Patrick Fuery in the book *New Developments in Film Theory* asserts that to understand the complex ideas and the nature of the "cinematic apparatus" it is necessary to point the discussion "beyond the celluloid" (Fuery 2017: 1). In his book, Fuery wants to expand upon postmodern and poststructuralist models and the developments of film theory throughout the decades. But, regarding this particular chapter's intended focus, delving into the aesthetic qualities and film style in which my chosen films adorn will acquire a study on *mise-en-scène* and the concepts associated with it. In the book *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation* from 2002, Gibbs defines 'mise-en-scène' as "the contents of the frame and the way they are organised" (Gibbs 2002: 5). The contents of the frame – as Gibbs aptly contends in his first chapter – include "lighting, costume, décor, properties, and the actors themselves" (Gibbs 2002: 5), and the relationship between these elements encompasses what the viewer can see and how the viewer is encouraged to perceive it. Although the contents of *mise-en-scène* are quite easily identified, the technical aspect must also be taken into consideration; which reveals the many different ways a filmmaker can utilise these elements and how they are expressed. *Mise-en-scène* was, and still is, of great importance for the filmic discourse, inviting the individual to assess and examine the varying stylistic choices presented to them: "attending to the relationship between style and meaning is a very good way of becoming aware of the consequences of your own stylistic decisions" (Gibbs 2002: 98).

While the study of film theory – including themes of aesthetics and *mise-en-scène* – is of great importance for the further studies of my selected films, a case must also be made for the contents portrayed in the films beyond art: violence. Particularly in film and video games,

there has always been the discussion of how violence has contributed to real-world violent actions; does portraying violence for ‘entertainment’ value reshape how the viewer perceives violence around them, for example? How can perceptions and representations of violence change in regard to cultural shifts, aesthetics, or history? And what makes them different, if at all? Can film violence, in a way, be seen as a moral retrogression of our current society? In Asbjørn Grønstad’s book *Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema* from 2008 he discusses violence, death, and masculinity, where he argues that before any conclusion can be drawn on the phenomenon on screen violence it is important to recognise and get familiar with the “forms, structures and, above all, figures of film aesthetics” (Grønstad 2008: 30). Exploring the differing approaches of empirical research on film violence and the way in which violent films are contextualised, Grønstad’s book aims to broaden the understanding of how to approach violence, by going beyond older traditions of methodical research to a new understanding of the subject and its use in context.

From method to history, Jim Kendrick’s book *Film Violence: History, Ideology, Genre* from 2010 gives a brief overview of violence in cinema; from the birth of cinema to more contemporary examples and subjects. Kendrick clarifies that the discussions relating to film violence are based upon fictitious narratives and interpretations, not on “documented footage or real-life violence that was captured either purposefully or inadvertently on camera” (Kendrick 2010: 17). A fair distinction to make, as a portrayal of violence in documentaries and news footage, is a different discourse and field of research altogether. In relation to my thesis and subjects for analysis, it could be compelling to examine fictitious violence versus ‘real’ violence, as my films are intrinsically bound by the real history and viciousness that The Second World War brought in its wake (again; questions of authenticity and accuracy in regard to documented war crimes comes into relevancy once more). “The cinema has always been fascinated by images of brutality,” Kendrick contends, and since films’ conception, the attraction towards violence and chaos has always been imminent (Kendrick 2010: chapter 2). *Violence*, in its semantic equivalency and terminology, suggests an “inherent connection” to describe actual events and the mediated representations and portrayals that exist in cinema (Kendrick 2010: 18). The complexity of the term itself is noteworthy and cannot simply be categorised as “media violence”, an all-encompassing category “that can contain everything from movies, to television shows, to comic books, to newspaper photographs, to video games, to televised news reports and documentary footage” (Kendrick 2010: 19).

With violence in the film, however, comes apprehension and debates; there has always been a sense of distrust towards audio-visual media, particularly in context with children and

teenagers, and how media can desensitise or inspire impressionable minds. In Western popular culture, there have been many cases where film, music, and video games have been accused of being sources for inspiration. The most famous example is the mass murderers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, responsible for the Columbine High School massacre of 20 April 1999. The young men were avid listeners to heavy metal and rock, watched violent films and played violent video games, which caused debates and lawsuits toward the respective industries.²²²³²⁴ In relation to this topic J. David Slocum writes in the book *Violence and American Cinema* from 2013 that the massacre “forcibly renewed discussions about the role of violent films and other media in the development of American children and adolescents” (Slocum 2013: 1), which, based on the news articles from the time after the massacre, seems undeniable. Violence, inherently, is a complex and extensive concept, and Slocum contends that “film scholars have traditionally treated violence as a secondary concern” (Slocum 2013: 2), rather than expanding upon *what* – instead of *how* – these representations of violence can tell us about our own history and culture. This discussion and debates on the role of violent imagery about children and adolescents (and in our culture in general), can be useful tools to come closer to a discussion to further the discourse of filmic violence. Even though it is not fully relevant to the selected films for my analysis and the context for which they exist, I wanted to acknowledge previous research to set the groundwork for my own research and analysis.

In addition to the subject of violence – and in context with the films selected specifically for my thesis – we need to depart from Columbine to The Second World War, however. When discussing war and combat films, violence, and death are obviously deeply linked; one cannot exist without the other. After the revival of the combat film in the 1990s and the early 2000s, courtesy of films like Steven Spielberg’s *Ryan*, Malick’s *Line*, a profusion of combat films followed suit (films in which I will later expand more upon). This is what Slocum states in his article *Cinema and the Civilizing Process: Rethinking Violence in the World War II Combat Film* from 2005. While his article is mainly concerning the way in which American culture and history is treated through these war films, he also brings up the fact that “only sporadic attention has been devoted to the ‘violence’ represented in Hollywood’s war movies” (Slocum 2005: 35). The celebration of *Ryan*’s opening sequence, with its disorientating cinematography and intense, violent imagery for example, contribute

²² Archived article from BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1295920.stm>

²³ Archived article from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1160375.stm

²⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/04/20/columbine.pop.culture/index.html>

rather to the discussion of its 'realism' and 'authenticity' rather than to a more thoughtful and broader discussion of the violence of combat. Slocum claims that the experiences of conflict during the 1960s "is understood to have influenced contemporary (and subsequent) Hollywood and its onscreen renderings of violence" (Slocum 2005: 36) and that "the horrors of war appear to be more political and moral than corporeal or psychological" (Slocum 2005: 36). To venture beyond the discussions of 'authenticity' and to expand the understanding of film violence in combat films is Slocum's main objective with this article, which separates his body of work from debates only concerned with the apparent 'effects' on behaviour, akin to what occurred in the aftermath of the Columbine massacre. Slocum's arguments and discussions can be part of the crux of information that my thesis will be built upon since he brings up interesting ideas for ways to deconstruct the concept of film violence in war films and understanding it in a more historical, cultural and societal way.

When dealing with the aestheticization of violence in cinema – bringing together the two main subjects for my research – Stacey Peebles' article *Gunning for a New Slow Motion: The 45-Degree Shutter and the Representation of Violence* from 2004 gives an insight into the cinematic technique – the 45-degree slow motion shot – and the way it renders and captures images more sharply than the "standard 180-degree shutter" (Peebles 2004: 45). With its debut in *Ryan*, the 45-degree shutter would attempt to portray onscreen violence more convincingly. Thus, the utilisation of this 'enhanced realism' is "paradoxically based on visual distortion," which is used to "visually reference historically relevant documentary films and photographs, and thus heighten the sense of realism" (Peebles 2004: 45). While Peebles' subjects for analysis are the films *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967) and *Ryan*, there is no doubt that the examination of the 45-degree shutter and the discussions around it will be of interest for my own analysis, particularly Bondarchuk's film, since it relies heavily on these slow-motion tropes in order to convey the combat in certain scenes.

While in the realm of war and violence it is, in my opinion, to understand the influence that video games have had on cinema and vice versa. Are not video games and film strongly bound together in an artistic sense and, in some cases, in a narrative sense? Alas; video games and film have often been separated by a disagreement of their purpose in and intent in our cultural spheres. The film is regarded as an art form, providing filmmakers the tools to 'paint' their renderings of the physical – and metaphysical – world using celluloid and digital files as their 'canvas.' In contrast, video games struggled to earn a place in both academic discourse and as an art form and have often garnered criticisms and controversy for its 'violent' content in news media outlets. Despite these assertions towards video games, films have aspired to

recreate somewhat or evoke a type of “video game” style from narrative structures to the aesthetic qualities. According to Will Brooker in his article “Camera- Eye, CG – Eye: Videogames and the ‘Cinematic’”, films like *Edge of Tomorrow* (Liman, 2014) or *Hardcore Henry* (Naishuller, 2015) “suggests a certain form of narrative, based on the cycles of character-death and reset” (Brooker 2009: 124). But the overlap between cinema and video games can contribute to mixed implications; however; the rules and structures of video games are not always compatible to a film’s more traditional narrative rules. Thus, films that try to adapt a non-traditional, video game storytelling are usually received poorly with critics and audiences. Attempts such as *Streetfighter* (Souza, 1994), *Mortal Kombat* (Anderson, 1995) and *Doom* (Bartkowiak, 2005) have all tried but ultimately failed to reproduce or adapt the addictive gameplay, fundamental plot elements or character motivations to the *silver screen*. Video games that utilise cinematic tropes and motifs – including cut-scenes, cinematic framing devices, and classical continuity editing – do not receive the same form of criticism for these inclusions, however. Video games have had experienced vast technological developments and innovation from the 1960s *Spacewar!* and the 1970s *Pong*, to the 1990s *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill* to the 2000s *Half-Life 2* or *Fable*; they have changed from ‘mindless’ fun and entertainment to “the evolution of visual storytelling techniques that establish a unique mode, distinct from cinema – or more precisely, distinct from mainstream Hollywood” (Brooker 2009: 126 – 127). By applying cinematic techniques to engage the player in the then new three-dimensional space, with integrated camera-angles, cinematography, and voice-actors, video games can be more like films than ever before, even though it may not be its main purpose. Brooker’s article compartmentalizes the varying and complicated relationship between cinema and video games, but he does not demonize the latter. Rather, as Brooker concludes: “as cinema, the videogame would be not youthful rebellion, but the mature challenge of the avant-garde” (Brooker 2009: 128).

Comparing and applying subjects – a metaphorical ‘marriage’ of both cinema and video games – can have its benefits for new exploration between these differing mediums. It gives rise to innovative studies that have the opportunity to engage scholars from other fields of interests. This is what Sue Morris attempts in chapter 4 in the book *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces* from 2002, and her exploration of the “operations of subjectivity” in relation to the first-person shooter’ (FPS) genre in computer games – “through the identification of the game ‘apparatus’” (Morris 2002: 81). By adapting the categories of the cinematic apparatus to pertain to computer games, then compromising the technical basis of games (Morris 2002: 85). Her dissection of the FPS game may be a good source for my

analysis and study of a sequence in Annaud's film and a part of the *Call of Duty: World at War* campaign 'Vendetta,' even if her examples used are slightly outdated. Lastly, the various connections of video games and cinema – be it art, aesthetics, narrative, and violence – could be expanded upon in certain chapters in the books *Game on, Hollywood!: Essays on the Intersection of Video Games and Cinema* from 2013 and *The Art of Videogames* from 2009. Vital information and data can add to current discussions and debates on the relationship between video games and cinema; how both video games and cinema adapt to each other and the modes of storytelling that occur between the mediums, for example. The different approaches that both books present could in themselves be adaptable to my subjects for analysis, predominantly when it comes to Bondarchuk's and Annaud's films respectively, and the depictions of soldiers and Stalingrad through a video game lens.

In closing on this section of this chapter, the objective of these chosen articles and books is to assist my own research in my comparative study. But the scope of research on aesthetic, violence, and video games – in connection with war, history, and culture from chapter one – cannot be fully represented or comprehended in this singular thesis. The hopes for this chapter is to create a compressed overview of the different approaches, with the complexity of the different subjects interwoven with one another to aid my study of the films:

Firstly, I want to examine the aesthetic choices utilised to reconstruct a type of video game-inspired Stalingrad in Bondarchuk's film. Referencing the formalist theories of filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein, I contend that the juxtapositioning between Soviet victims and Wehrmacht soldiers is due to the usage of the montage. Further, the use of cinematography and the "spatiotemporal experienced of urban warfare inspired by 3D video game reconstructions" (Kostetskaya 2016: 49), it can be surmised that the film caters to a younger audience – who mediate war through video games such as the *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honour* – series. Regarding these games, I introduce the first-person shooter *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008), which striking Soviet iconography is reminiscent of the 2013 film in a campaign taking place in Stalingrad. Can the aesthetical reproduction of Stalingrad with IMAX 3D and CG special effects create an ongoing visceral battle, akin to a campaign in a first-person shooter? Does this 'video game' format and 'cyclicity,' comparable to characters in a video game, impact how Stalingrad is perceived by the 'player'? And does the 2013 film – with its blockbuster aesthetic and extravagant special effects – manage to pertain a sense of historical authenticity?

Secondly, I wish to delve into the post-*Ryan* aesthetic, which Spielberg's film conceived in the late 1990s that would inspire the aesthetics and portrayal of violence in

Annaud's film. Often, critics cite Spielberg's film as the reawakening of the war film, creating a new, visual aesthetic for the war film, employing cinematic techniques like the 45-degree shutter to recreate warfare more realistically. Being called "an audacious but leaden rehash of *Saving Private Ryan*" by Neil Smith for the BBC²⁵, I want to attempt to understand these comparisons, and analyse the aesthetics in *Enemy* in light of the progression of the war film – what Phillipa Gates refers to as the "moral realist combat film" (Gates 2006: 307-308). I also want to focus on the specific sequences that linger on the NKVD's slaughtering of Red Army soldiers, and the aestheticized Soviet imagery and history, which produces a Westernised and Hollywood depiction of Stalingrad. I also want to juxtapose two distinct sequences from different mediums, *Enemy* and a campaign from the game *Call of Duty: World at War* from 2008 and see how the post-*Ryan* aesthetic and cinematic style inspired first-person shooter video games – and how both handle the lurid portrayal of death. Is there ideological reasoning for the particular stylistic choices used in the film? Can artistic freedom and manipulation of the image overshadow and create stereotypes of a troubled nation?

Lastly, conceived five years before *Ryan*, I want to explore the war film aesthetic and violence in Vilsmaier's film from an era when the war started to recede to the background, giving room for the characters to be the focal point of the films. The inner struggle of the Wehrmacht soldier, as well as the divide of their company this becomes another battle which they must inevitably lose; the rehabilitation of the German soldiers – and in turn the Nazis – seems like an impossible feat. Questions of 'authenticity' and 'accuracy' arise yet again, but in the case of Vilsmaier's film, it is the question of if the history portrayed in the film can further harmful myths, like the myth of the Clean Wehrmacht, described in chapter one. I will also take Robert C. Reimer's arguments from the book *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective* from 2003 into account going forward in my analysis. His interpretation of the 1993 film's subtext provides an insight into the 'rehabilitation' of the German soldiers, and how it is portrayed visually. Additionally, I touch upon the Soviet people as the 'other'; the unknown force of mystery that lurks in the shadows of Stalingrad, and the inherent threat they enact on the German protagonists. And – as in *Enemy*'s lingering shots on the Red Army soldiers slaughtered – does the 'morally righteous' violence toward the Wehrmacht, in contrast, create a sense of catharsis and exultation?

²⁵ Archived http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/03/07/enemy_at_the_gates_2001_review.shtml

8. Rejuvenating the war film aesthetic – *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Thin Red Line* (1998)

What makes for an interesting, visual representation of war? While culture, history, and memory can be determining factors in how cinema depict and interpret historical events and narratives, it can also have its influence on how these events are expressed artistically and thematically. War film, in particular, has an extensive array of different artistic interpretations; from *Ryan*'s realistic battle sequences to *Come and See*'s (Klimov, 1985) uncompromising subjective – and surreal – rendering of the victims of The Second World War. But to reach high degrees of realism are seeming, more often than not, the main goal for war films, seeking to render the past in the most authentic way (which was greatly discussed in section one in this thesis.) Furthering this assertion, it also becomes clear that the word 'realism' is the main descriptor for war films: when a war film is 'realistic' it is often considered a great film by default. This is particularly true for *Ryan*, which was praised not only by critics but also D-Day veteran's memories reawakened by the film's portrayal of the battle (Chapman 2008: 22).²⁶ Beyond the praise for its realism and emotional weight, Anthony Beevor had a different outlook on Spielberg's classic; calling the film a "work of intriguing paradoxes [...]" and a "uniquely American definition of history, with no reference to the British let alone the Soviet role" (Beevor 2018: *The Guardian*).²⁷ Beevor is adamant that the film is trying to "rediscover American innocence," a form of reassurance to the American people after the moral strain of the Vietnam War.

8.1 Plot summary for *Ryan*

In 1944, Captain Miller of the 2nd Ranger Battalion land on Omaha Beach – as a part of the Normandy Invasion – receives orders to search for Private James Ryan. Being the last surviving son of the Ryan family, and he is to be brought home from the front lines to his family.

8.2 Plot summary for *Line*

At the island of Guadalcanal, in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War, soldiers from different companies and infantries are sent as reinforcements to secure and seize the island from Japanese troops. Following a diverse group of young soldiers due to relieve

²⁶ Chapman refers to an article by the name 'Spielberg War Film Reawakens Veterans' Fears' from 1998 in *The Times*.

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/may/29/antony-beevor-the-greatest-war-movie-ever-and-the-ones-i-cant-bear>

battle-weary Marines, the struggle for survival is threatened by advancing Japanese troops.

8.3 The making of the “aesthetic of pastness” – The war film renaissance

Besides Beevor’s strong conviction on Spielberg’s film and its underlying themes of American patriotism and innocence, one cannot deny the impact its aesthetics have had on modern, war cinema. The rendering of American soldiers landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day is shown in visceral detail, producing a “new set of reality effects through a pastiche of documentary aesthetics” (Tait 2009: 341). Furthermore, cinematographer Janusz Kaminski utilised particular techniques to recreate “the verité style of the combat cameraman” (Haggith 2002: 335). By using hand-held cameras, this would, in theory, cut the distance between the camera and the audience; the vibrations of the camera movement created a sense of unease and nervousness, which would simulate the harrowing emotions of the soldiers. In combination with the cinematography they used less saturated film, using a technique called Technicolour ENR²⁸, encoding the film with an “aesthetic of pastness” (Tait 2009: 341) and ‘duplicating’ the atmospheric and iconic photographs taken by Robert Capa at Omaha, according to Spielberg during an interview with Mark Cousins on BBC2²⁹ in 1998. Bringing these varying techniques together creates “an imaginary of historicity and verisimilitude” (Tait 2009: 341).

Although Spielberg’s film has indeed marked itself as a highly influential war film, “Post-*Ryan* 2000s” films – as Stuart Bender writes in the book *Film Style and the World War II Combat Genre* from 2013 – “show a greater resemblance to the wartime productions than they do to Spielberg’s apparent ‘benchmark’ film” (Bender 2013: 77). Regardless, *Ryan* was at the time of its release unique in regard to its film style and camera movements, particularly when portraying the battle sequences. This style of filmmaking would later be utilised and expanded upon in the miniseries *Band of Brothers* (Hanks & Spielberg, 2001); a form of “documentary realism,” as Bender contends, that would bring the audience into the American soldier’s subjective experience. By avoiding overtly cinematic techniques like the slow-motion shot, crane shots or point of view shots, the series and the film ostensibly achieved the sensation of being a part of the battle. Furthermore, it appears that the critical and public discourse has acclaimed that *Ryan* – along with Malick’s *Line* from the same year; the ‘antithesis’ of *Ryan* – as ‘realistic’ reproductions and portrayals of combat and soldier’s

²⁸ “A processing technique which incorporates an additional black and white bath in order to retain some of the silver in the emulsion of the film” (Tait 2009: 341).

²⁹ On the program *War Stories: Mark Cousins Talks to Steven Spielberg*.

experiences of war. Even though both films portray The Second World War, the films are significantly different; *Ryan* relays the combat in meticulous detail and cast the audience into the chasm side-by-side with the soldiers on Normandy. *Line* explores the war in the Pacific Theater and, rather than depicting the gruesome violence and warfare as explicitly, it consciously averts extensive amounts of blood and violence most of the time.





Figure 1. Pictures of *Ryan* (above) and *Line* (below): visceral and intense yet executed differently.

Both *Ryan* and *Line* respectively utilise their violence to convey the turmoil of war in different ways; *Ryan* aims for impeccable realism mercilessly, bringing the viewer as close they can get to the front lines. *Line* explores the emotional toll the war imprints on the individual, leaving much of the horrors to the imagination – told through testimonies of the past.

Although Spielberg and Malick's films are not the main research subjects in this chapter, it is important to recognise the influence these films had on future war films and other media, particularly *Ryan* with its low-saturated colours, intense action, and hand-held, chaotic camera movements³⁰. Going further, I shall seek to understand the perpetuating influence that this new war film aesthetic has had on the different films in this thesis.

9. The lingering torment of Stalingrad - Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad*

In stark contrast from Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad*, Annaud's *Enemy* and Spielberg's *Ryan*, Bondarchuk's film has rather intense, saturated colours and dark, low-lighting to create a specific modern, video game style; the images have a cold tint of blue throughout the film but intertwined with red from the explosions and inferno that consumes Stalingrad. The ash and

³⁰ Not a part of thesis, will rewrite.

debris falling continually from the sky covers the surfaces and characters, exhibiting the destruction and deterioration of the once flourishing and lively city. Its imagery conveys the sensation of melancholy; an infinite cycle of pain and sorrow that seems never-ending for the ones unfortunate enough to be caught amid warfare.





Figure 2. The cold tint of the blue cast against the intense red is the colour pattern most utilised in the film. Creating clear, sharp contrasts.

While it could be compelling to interpret these colours and their meanings, it may not be a constructive way of analysing the film’s aesthetics; according to Eisenstein in his essay “Colour and Meaning” from 1942, no colour on its own has meaning; “that yellow, for instance, might signify jealousy and red, passion” (Andrew 1976: 46)³¹. For Eisenstein, colour meaning:

“[...] derives from an interrelation of neutral particles: green takes on a particular meaning when it appears in a relational system involving other colours and other codes” (Andrew 1976: 46).

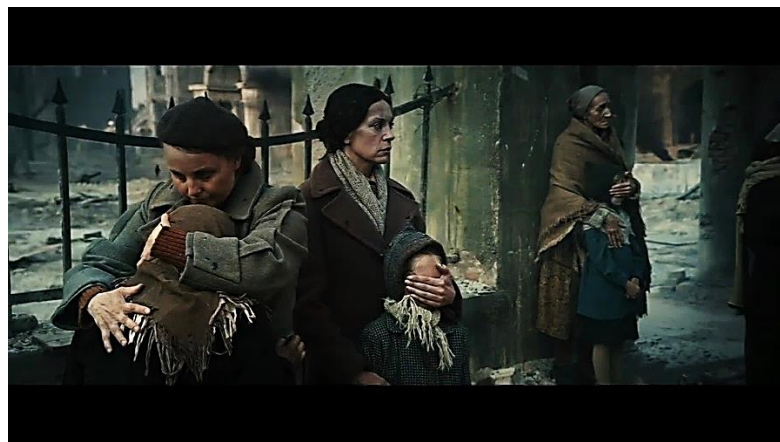
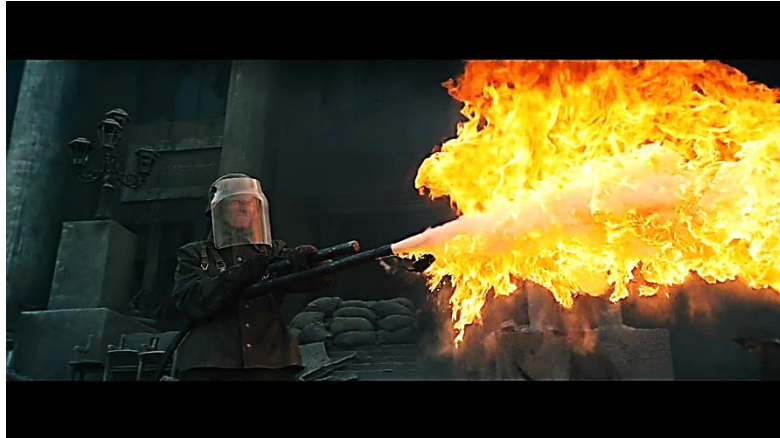
The traditions of the formalist film theories – particularly the *montage* and the cinematic techniques it entails – views film as the raw material, and that the process of editing is what

³¹ Drawing on J. Dudley Andrew’s accounts and summarization of Eisenstein’s theories, since reading Eisenstein can be “an interesting, but tenuous business; and it makes summarizing him nearly impossible” (Andrew 1976: 43).

creates meaning within the selected shots. Eisenstein surmises in *The Film Sense* from 1942, that:

“The artist thinks directly in terms of manipulating his resources and materials. His thought is transmuted into direct action, formulated not by a formula, but by a form” (Eisenstein 1942: 215).

Thus, editing is the crux of the film, and can be part of ‘solving’ the issues linked to it, Eisenstein argued. Also, the linkage of shots could create an emotional response – a form of manipulating the audience – while also being utilised to create metaphors. Ideas of the film should then be born from the juxtaposition of separate and independent shots, which draws upon his formal categories of montage: metric, rhythmic, tonal, over-tonal and intellectual montage (Eisenstein 1949: 72). In regard to Eisenstein’s theory of montage – and in correlation with the aesthetic values that materialise within – remnants of Eisenstein’s montage are still highly relevant; observing Bondarchuk’s film, the various way shots are juxtapositioned to convey the brutality and carnage are explicitly constructed and related together to evoke an emotional response from the audience. A scene where a Russian woman and her child is burned alive is, in itself, a horrid event. But when the varying reaction shots are intertwined with the shots of them burning, it emphasizes the gruesome actions of the Wehrmacht:



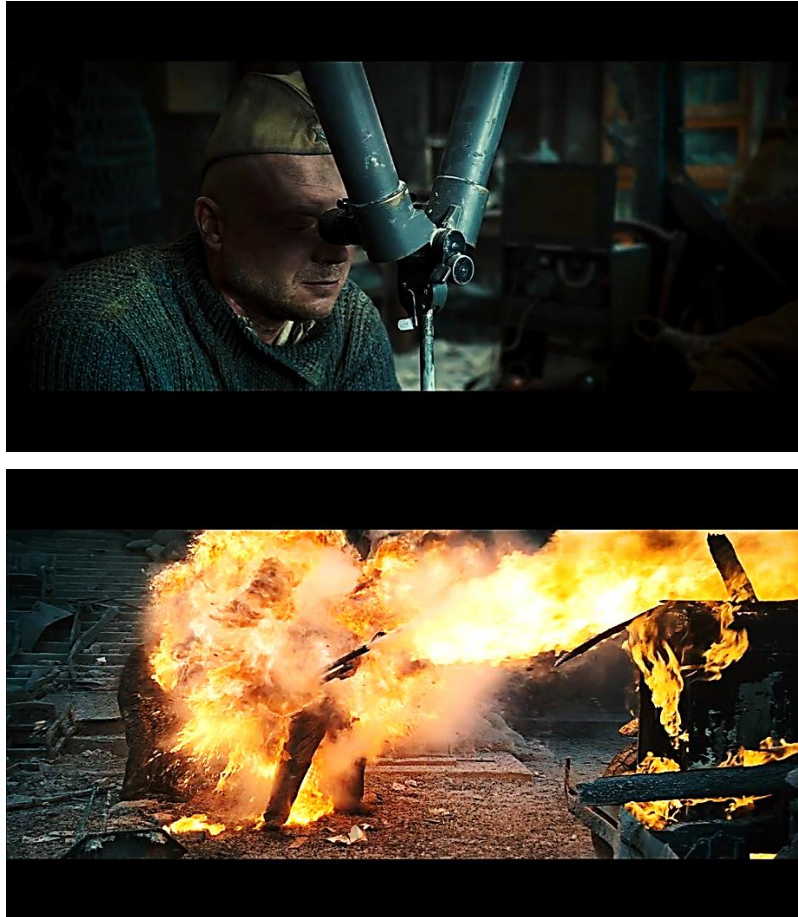


Figure 3. The viewer's reactions are portrayed in the characters on screen.

The individual shots are conveying intense emotion, but together they create a stronger – and perhaps somewhat ideological – narrative; the nameless woman and her child transform into representatives of Russian victims by the hands of the Wehrmacht. The power of the scene gives power to Russian soldiers, which drives them to initiate a vendetta, a promise of revenge for the loss of innocent lives. Although the techniques of the montage still survive in modern film making, the editing and shot compositions will be put aside momentarily for the next point in this analysis; the deconstruction of the visual aesthetic qualities of Bondarchuk's film related to the aesthetic of the game *Call of Duty: World at War* (Treyarch, 2008) and how war is visualized.

“I need your help. Do what I say, and we can avenge this massacre”. These are the first words uttered in the campaign ‘Vendetta’ by Reznov, a wounded army sergeant to you, a voiceless private, Petrenko, lying in the Barmaley Fountain in Stalingrad, September 1942. Petrenko lies amidst his fellow men, butchered by the Wehrmacht, as he slowly gains consciousness, grasping the horror surrounding him. As Petrenko moves through the dead soldiers, Reznov asks for his assistance to use his sniper rifle to take out general Heinrich

Amsel, the ‘architect’ of Stalingrad’s destruction. Lurking in the shadows of Stalingrad, Reznov and Petrenko try their best to survive long enough to get revenge on Amsel and on the Wehrmacht. The opening sequence to this campaign opens *in medias res*; the events that lead the player to Petrenko and Reznov are unknown, but it is not hard to envision the turmoil that preceded this meeting. Though we know very little about Petrenko and Reznov respectively, it does not matter in the end; this is the very beginning of their journey.

That *Ryan* has been an artistic inspiration for this game is apparent. The fact of the matter is that the first-person shooter *Medal of Honor*, concerning The Second World War, was developed simultaneously with *Ryan*, and has had the same inspirations as other games and films that came after it. *WaW*’s aesthetic style is reminiscent of *Ryan*, in that the grisly details of death and annihilation are mercilessly projected on the screen. Transitioning from black and white to the de-saturated colours akin to *Ryan*, *WaW*³² keeps its visual style in the realms of the ‘realism’ and ‘authenticity’ *Ryan* wanted to reproduce.



Figure 4. The first opening shots of ‘Vendetta’: soldiers left for dead in the Barmaley Fountain.

But, in contrast to *Ryan*, this campaign does not rely on a type of realism in the same regard. Although the violence and brutality and the subjectivity of the first-person perspective which

³² What I will refer to *Call of Duty: World at War* from now on.

Ryan also adorn are kept intact, the artistic liberties taken in *WaW* are greater; the inner lives and emotions of the Soviet soldiers are far more important than the authenticity of the setting. For these reasons, I believe that Bondarchuk's film has the same ambitions as *WaW* since the collective is hailed in both mediums more than in *Ryan*. It is not as simple to compare and analyse Bondarchuk's film and *WaW*, since the two mediums are vastly different from each other, however. The transformation from 'viewer' to 'player,' as Tanine Allison writes in the essay *The World War II Video Game. Adaption, and Postmodern History* from 2010, "promises a different relation to the narrative and experience of the game, as well as a different relation to history" (Allison 2010: 183). Indeed, more often than not, the player is subjected to the Allied Forces – the winning side – of history. Nevertheless, although the physical act of playing a game and watching a film is quite different, I argue that the experience of the narrative and the characters intertwined within is still alike the typical narrative and plot developments as in the cinema.

Beyond the discussions of the complexity of interactivity and interpretation of video games and films, the questions of the aestheticization of violence and ruin in the 2013 film surfaces. As previously discussed in chapter one, the film is relentless of its portrayal of Russian victims, whether soldier or civilians. It particularly emphasises the decay of innocence and memories:

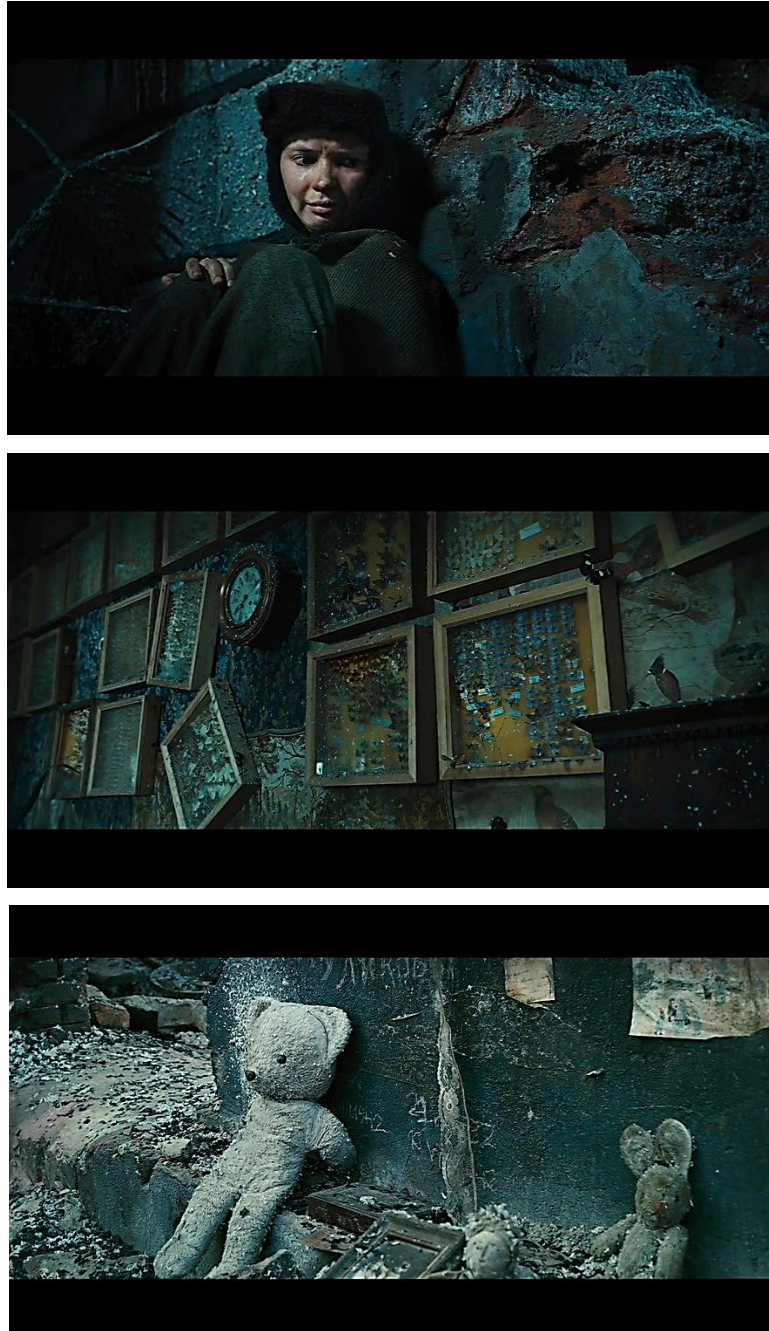


Figure 5. The aesthetic of decay in *Stalingrad* 2013

The isolation of Stalingrad is not just in terms of civilians but also in spirit. The ruins of apartments and shops – along with the vacant expressions on the civilians – serves as a constant reminder of the sacrifice and suffering of the Russian nation. Also, the 2013 film’s reliance on cinematic techniques such as the slow-motion, 180-degree shutter shots as stated in the literature review in this chapter, puts an emphasis on the violent events unfolding on screen. By slowing down shots that run at 24 frames per second, it creates an illusion of time coming to a halt or a form of disorientation, which adds emotional weight to the sequence unfolding. However, since this practice has become a blockbuster standard, the initial power

of the technique has “lost much of its power to shock or disturb” (Peebles 2004: 45). The smooth, fluid shots of Bondarchuk’s rendering of war-torn Stalingrad is then reminiscent of Hollywood blockbusters such as the *Transformers* franchise by Michael Bay and superhero films such as *The Avengers* (Whedon, 2012). Contrasting from *Ryan*’s innovation with the 45-degree shutter to “render images in a staccato and intermittent fashion” (Peebles 2004: 45), the 2013 film does not aim to reproduce or reference historical imagery to convey a nation in turmoil, or to “heighten the sense of realism” (Peebles 2004: 45).

It seems that the then ‘new’ combat film aesthetic – that would shape how the first-person shooter games portrayed war has had its hold on war films since its conception in 1998. But, interestingly enough, what started as a realistic and authentic visual style in *Ryan* has evolved into a particular visualisation of war. The popularity and success of Spielberg’s film prompted those who endeavoured to recreate the aesthetic, films like *Pearl Harbor* or *Enemy*. Still, these films did not garner the same success, which proves the importance of not only some form of visual accuracy, but also some historical accuracy. But this historical accuracy, as discussed in my previous chapter, is not always necessary to evoke the intense emotions that come with war. Despite this, the 2013 film can be perceived as ‘romanticising’ events, with aid from its modern, 3D generated, video game visuals. It is not uncommon of Russian – or in this case, Soviet cinema – to romanticise history; under Stalin’s rule, the films, according to Peter Kenez in his book *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* from 2001, became “uniquely Soviet” and homogenous, until his death in 1953 (Kenez: 2001: 5). But, as Kostetskaya contends in her article, Bondarchuk’s film’s use of IMAX technology and “postmemory narrative” of this modified Stalingrad makes the film more accessible for a younger audience “familiar with war mainly through film and computer games” (Kostetskaya 2016: 59). Then, akin to *WaW*, the 2013 film reproduce a sense of disjuncture between the history of Stalingrad and the eternal cycle of the mediated, extra-temporal space of Bondarchuk’s recreation.

Even though I still contend that the 2013 film is not intentionally ideological, it cannot be denied that the film furthers a sense of Soviet iconography of the Stalinist era, and an ingrained myth of Stalingrad as an everlasting war imprisoned in space-time. But there is an important detail to account for; that the events of Bondarchuk’s film are told through Sergey, the rescue worker in Fukushima at the start of the film. The memories of his mother, his ‘five fathers’ and the stories she has told him about Stalingrad are reflected in the patriotic manner Stalingrad is remembered and the heroic way they perish, risking their lives for the Motherland.





Figure 6. The ‘five fathers’ sacrifice everything to protect Katya. They are remembered as heroes through their sons’ eyes.

Undoubtedly embellished aesthetically and historically, Bondarchuk’s *Stalingrad* serves as an example of a nation’s dependency of the past; a nostalgia for the glory days of war without moral ambiguity. *Stalingrad* is a film of healing, an opportunity to reconcile with the past and face the traumatic events that would change history and The Second World War. Though ending rather melancholy, Sergey – in the final voice-over in the film – utters his patriotic sentiments to us; perhaps providing the younger audience an insight into the lingering torment of Stalingrad:

“Still to come were months of bloody fighting that would turn the tide of human history and the history of my great country. Mama wanted me always to remember the people to whom millions upon millions owe their lives and freedom.”

10. “A distorting mirror” and artistic freedom – Annaud’s *Enemy* and *WaW*

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, *Enemy* has been criticised for being “an audacious but leaden rehash of *Saving Private Ryan*” (N. Smith 2001: *BBC*)³³ and “long on drama, short on historical accuracy” (S. Smith 2001: 45)³⁴. Since the film’s ‘historical accuracy’ has been discussed and explored in the previous chapter, I will focus on the visual and aesthetic qualities Annaud’s film and the methods employed to portray the Red Army historically.

Though reviews of Annaud’s film have been critical of the historical accuracy of the story of Zaytsev and the execution of Order No.227, reviews concerning *Enemy*’s visual style are often positive, comparing it to *Ryan*’s attention to detail, editing and aesthetic. Fred Harvey from the web site *The History Place* from 2001 writes that “the few battle sequences

³³ Archived http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/03/07/enemy_at_the_gates_2001_review.shtml

³⁴ http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v20/v20n2p45_Anaud.html

are very well done, arguably on a par with *Saving Private Ryan*”³⁵, and the late film critic Roger Ebert wrote that “*Enemy at the Gates* opens with a battle sequence that deserves comparison with *Saving Private Ryan* [...]”.³⁶ After all, the massive acclaim Spielberg has received for his ‘realistic’ depiction of war must garner some inspiration to the war film genre. In contrast to Bondarchuk’s *Stalingrad* – which portrays Stalingrad as an eternal purgatory where its heroes must continually fight the Wehrmacht – Annaud opts for the lower-saturated colours and the somewhat chaotic cinematography that Spielberg utilise in *Ryan*. This particular aesthetic evokes immediately the sense of ‘realism’ or ‘authenticity,’ now ingrained in Western popular culture. But, in the case of *Enemy*, this hyperrealism seems to serve a different purpose than *Ryan*; the ideological aspect of *Enemy*’s portrayal of the NKVD and the execution of Order No.227 burdens the narrative. While this could also be critiques aimed towards Spielberg’s film as well, *Enemy* – being “inspired by true events” and portraying individuals highly respected in Russian culture and history – appears to adapt *Ryan*’s war film aesthetic as a means to manipulate the viewer with its ‘convincing’ rendering of warfare. As Annaud’s film is quite similar in an aesthetic sense as Spielberg’s, this analysis will focus on the visualisation of death and violence, in context with the sequences of the initial combat which Zaytsev first endures in Stalingrad, and the introduction to Commissar Danilov in the Barmaley Fountain, since this scene was most likely the inspiration for *WaW*’s ‘Vendetta’. Drawing on both *Enemy* and ‘Vendetta,’ the hopes are for an in-depth and balanced analysis of aesthetical violence in Annaud’s film. Furthermore, do artistic liberties, and ideological critiques attempt to ‘moralise’ or justify the violence towards Red Army soldiers against their own?

With cinema comes the realisation that death, dying and violence will be repurposed to create a form of ‘objectification’ to “recuperate ethical space around death” (Sue Tait 2009: 334). The visual representations of death evoke an ethical response in the viewer, the binary which envelops brutality and violence. And “just as the corpse, particularly the corpse rendered monstrous by violence, may provoke disgust rather than empathy, the mortification of the body may repulse, titillate and fascinate” (Tait 2009: 335). Death, being an imperceptible, brutal and visceral in film, can “encode an ethical space between the viewer and screen thus warrants interrogation” (Tait 2009: 335). In *Enemy* – and as in most war films – the viewer is indeed provoked to respond to the slaughter of the young, Red Army soldiers;

³⁵ <http://www.historyplace.com/specials/reviews/enemy-gate.htm>

³⁶ <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/enemy-at-the-gates-2001>

the use of slow-motion shots, the emotional score in a gradual crescendo over the carnage as the camera, ‘us,’ observe the horrors unfolding on screen:



Figure 7. The mutilated bodies of Red Army soldiers

Despite this, the sheer number of casualties and brutality gives no respite. Although Toby Haggith writes about *Ryan* in his article “D-Day Filming: For Real. A Comparison of ‘Truth’ and ‘Reality’ in ‘Saving Private Ryan’ and Combat film by the British Army’s Film and Photographic Unit” from 2002, many points can be compared to that of *Enemy*. In this new type of war film, not every casualty is repaid or avenged; “neither is death clean and instant: for many it is painful and slow [...]” (Haggith 2002: 334). Exemplified by lingering shots of the wounded, dying or dead – particularly in shots of NKVDs executes fleeing privates –

Enemy appropriates *Ryan*'s meticulous attention to detail to portray the misconduct of the protagonists. By presenting these images in such a manner, *Enemy* has moved away from simply relaying the events that took place in Stalingrad; rather, it reshapes the corporeal and generates a new, cinematic 'realism' for which Annaud's Stalingrad resides. The cityscape of Annaud's alternative Stalingrad, while existing in the realms of *Ryan*'s realist aesthetic and confronting body horror, also exists in a realm of a curious iconographic obsession with the murderous images of the NKVD; which ostensibly can serve as a rigid critique of Communism, and those who serve under its leaders. This iconographical approach, for which I contend, is reminiscent of the way *Stalingrad* (2013) portrays its soldiers and military, but therein lies the discrepancy; *Enemy* employs an embellished – almost satirical – Soviet iconography, akin to the Bolshevik influence on Soviet cinema in the 1920s.



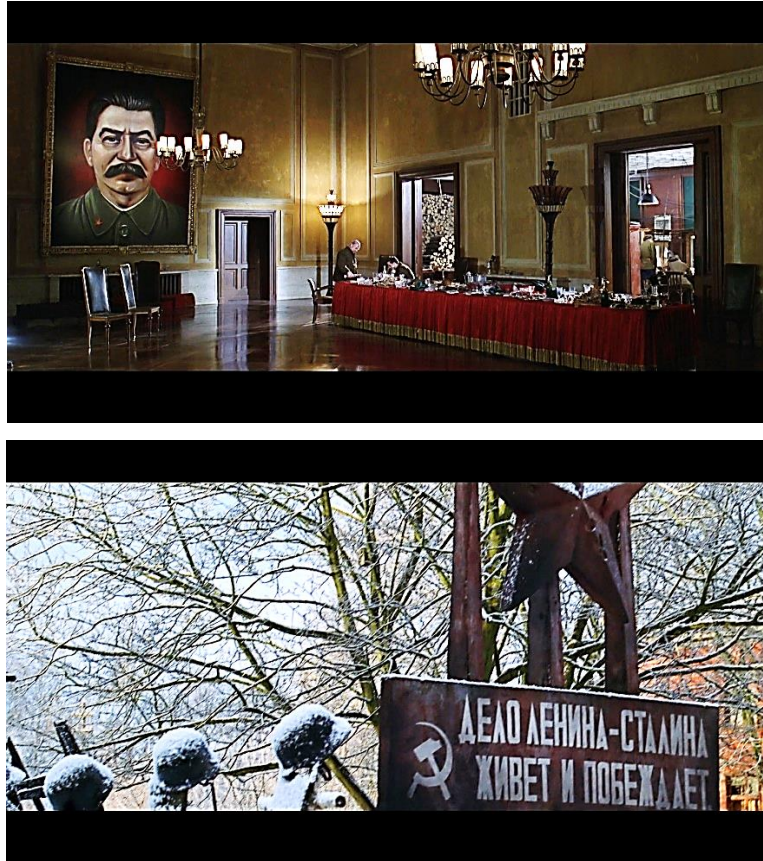


Figure 8. Striking icons of the Stalinist Soviet Union

While it is important to take note of these arguments, it is also important to recognise that films follow the conventions of society and politics; that “cinema, even in the best case, is only a distorting mirror” (Kenez 2001: 4). In the case of *Enemy*, the iconography could have been an intentional ploy to reap the benefits of the cinematic and narrative conventions of the time, being so closely conceived after *Ryan* and *Line*. *Enemy* might have attempted to cast light on problematic societal and political issues ingrained in Soviet Russia; how censorship and propaganda undermined the suffering of the Soviet Union, using film to spread fundamental information of how the people should exist and behave. Nonetheless, it is evident that *Enemy*’s use of aestheticized Soviet imagery and history produces a Western and Hollywood depiction of Stalingrad; to elevate the supposed *ennui* of preceding historical films and conventions.

Going further into *Enemy*, there is a particular sequence which I want to analyse; the first meeting between Commissar Danilov and Zaytsev. After the initial battle with the Wehrmacht – and the slaughter by the NKVD – we are introduced to Danilov escaping the heavy fire by the Wehrmacht. His car is destroyed, leaving him vulnerable to other attacks. He manages to run over to the Barmaley Fountain, where he is forced to hide amongst dead

Red Army soldiers. As the Wehrmacht approaches the fountain, they open fire at the dead, hoping to kill the ones who are hurt or hiding. Every shot fired misses Danilov and he manages to drag himself toward the edge of the fountain. He then notices a German officer bringing warm water to another taking a shower, and he decides to arm himself with a rifle to kill them. As he takes aim, he hears a voice amongst the dead; it is Zaytsev, warning against Danilov taking the shot in the risk of getting captured. Danilov pulls the trigger, but the rifle does not fire. This prompts Zaytsev to drag himself over to Danilov, asking permission to take hold of the rifle. After reloading the rifle, Zaytsev gives it back to Danilov, who is now ready to take aim yet again. Danilov poses the question of whom to kill first, which Zaytsev answers that he should wait until there is an explosion; this will overpower the sound of the gunfire. Doubting himself, Danilov asks Zaytsev if he can shoot. Zaytsev replies: “a little”, and Danilov turns the rifle over to him. More Germans arrive in a car, and one of them is put on guard duty. As he slowly starts to venture over to the fountain, Danilov urges Zaytsev not to fire or they will be seen. Ignoring the pleas from Danilov, Zaytsev fires just when there is an explosion. Killing the German in the shower unnoticed, this leads to an impeccable showcase of Zaytsev’s abilities as a sniper, killing the five German soldiers nearby. This leads to Danilov and Zaytsev’s introduction to each other.





Figure 9. Desaturated and visceral: Danilov and Zaytsev's first meeting

In contrast with the initial combat sequences, these scenes are reserved, giving room for the audience to breath and reflect on the horrors just witnessed. The horrors continue, however, as the scope of the number of victims becomes more apparent. The accumulation of mutilated corpses and ruins are covered in smoke and fire, amounting to a homogenous mass of death. The usage of 'natural' lighting, sparse use of the score and relatively quick-paced editing creates a sense of disorientation and urgency, but in a rather subdued manner unlike *Stalingrad* (2013), for example. The shaking camera is not as utilised as in *Ryan* but is served as a point of view shots for Danilov and Zaytsev. This changes when Zaytsev manages to show his abilities in combat; the score accompanies Zaytsev's concentration and focuses before firing and increases as he is victorious. After killing every soldier, a slow-motion shot accentuates Zaytsev's triumph in familiar 45-degree shutter speed. The score soars, and it becomes clear that he is our hero; the man who would become a Hero of the Soviet Union.³⁷

Going back to *WaW* for a moment, it becomes clear that this specific sequence from *Enemy* has inspired the opening sequence of the 'Vendetta' campaign. On the *Call of Duty*

³⁷ "The title Hero of the Soviet Union was the highest distinction in the Soviet Union, awarded personally or collectively for heroic feats in service to the Soviet state and society" (Prokhorov 1982: 594) + Wikipedia

Wiki, it states that “the level bears a striking resemblance at times to the 2001 Jean-Jacques Annaud film *Enemy at the Gates*”³⁸ and further describes the similarities that the game adapted. While the characters in *WaW* are fictional, the character of Reznov is evoking Zaytsev, in his implied ability as a remarkable marksman. But since his arm is injured, he turns the rifle over to the player, Petrenko, forcing “us” into the role of an alternate Zaytsev. Although the basic plot elements are similar, both mediums approach and utilise the aesthetic properties differently. Being a video game in an FPS perspective – and thus POV shots – the experience in *WaW* transforms into a more subjective and active experience; the player is immersed into the 3D space, taking hold over a digital puppet tasked to execute every command deemed necessary by the player. The opening is created “in-engine,” recreating long takes and tracking shots that are uninterrupted through the entire campaign, “unifying the experience and linking the elements of active player and passive watching” (Howells 2002: 116).



³⁸ <https://callofduty.fandom.com/wiki/Vendetta>

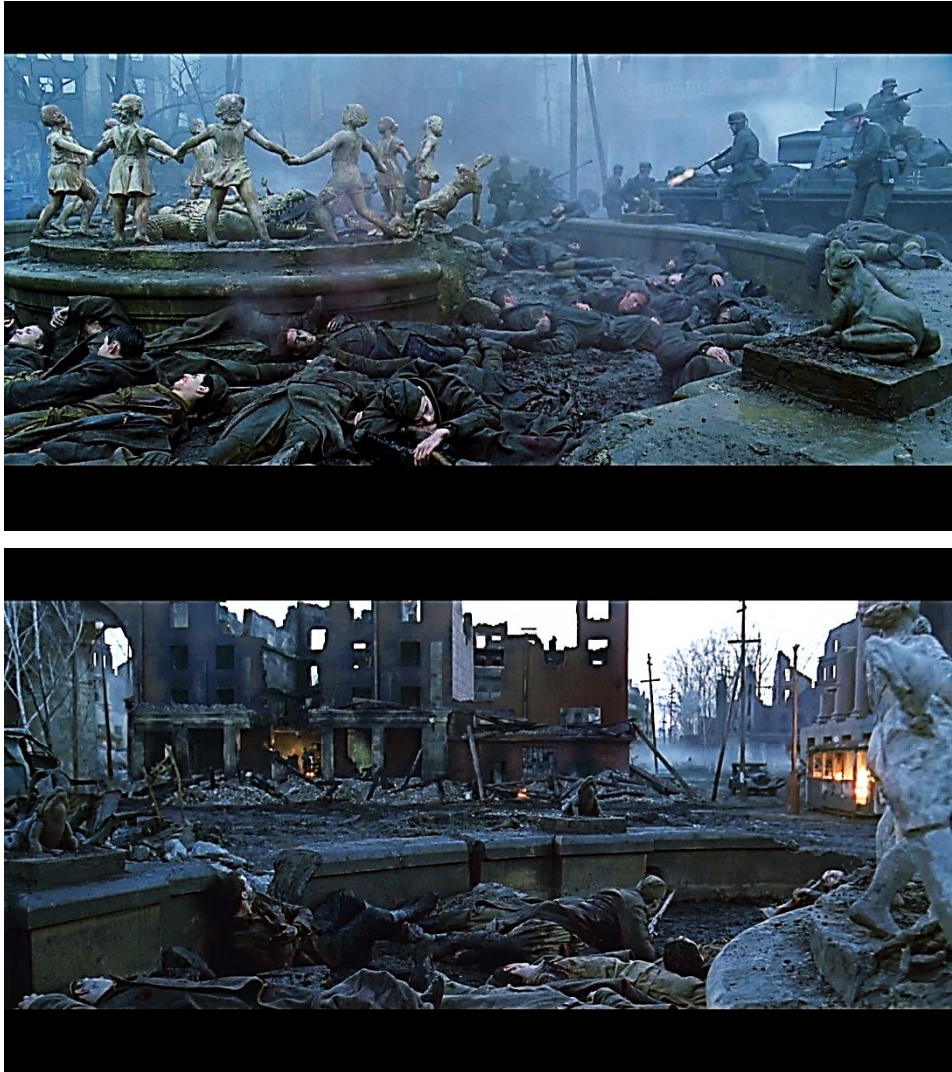


Figure 10. The Barmaley Fountain in *WaW* (above) and *Enemy* (below)

Fundamentally, *Enemy* cannot be as immersive, since the role as ‘viewer’ consists of being passive; as a viewer one has no “control over the direction of his or her perceptions and no control over possible reactions to possible arousing events”, according to Torben Grødal (Vorderer & Zillmann 2000: 201). This does not remove the power of cinema, however. The acclaim of the film still prevails over video games, with associations with the latter often resulting in sacrificing “any claims to serious art” (Brooker 2009: 124).

Ultimately, both *Enemy* and ‘Vendetta’ depend more on formative approaches than realism – at least in the sense of André Bazin’s theories – in reproducing the warfare in Stalingrad, akin to the theories of Eisenstein or Rudolf Arnheim. As Arnheim contends in *Film as Art* from 1957: “art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves of, where the conditions of representation serve in some way to mould the object.” The importance lies within how depictions are formed and understood, rather than the subjects and objects in its

pure, physical forms. By employing cinema's formal components – and the inherent artifice of the medium – I believe that both mediums attempt to visualise the emotional lethargy and impact of war through these aesthetic apparatuses, fused with a mimetic form of realism, similarly to *Ryan*'s realist characterisation.

Contrary to *Stalingrad* (2013), which serves as an example of a nation's societal and cultural nostalgia, I contend that *Enemy* appropriates Soviet iconography and tropes to reproduce a Westernised depiction of The Battle for Stalingrad. The deliberate focus on the slaughter of Red Army soldiers by the NKVD and the use of specific editing and scoring can be seen as an attempt at coaxing its viewers; perhaps as an effort to create moral ambiguity or to seem less biased in its approach. Though unlike *Enemy*, *WaW* struggles in another degree; being disregarded as 'just a game' which cannot portray or reproduce The Battle for Stalingrad and its participants in a tasteful or accurate manner. According to the late film critic Roger Ebert, video games could never be art, claiming that "no video gamer now living will survive long enough to experience the medium as an art form" (Ebert 2010). Constricted by its own rules, objectives and its outcome; the ability to win, video game franchises such as *CoD* could not achieve the same praise as cinema in Ebert's mind. But – as in the case for *Enemy*'s validity as a historical film – the intention of these different forms of media should not be upheld to the same standards as the documentary or historical documents. However, vast amounts of artistic freedom can lead to misinformation and harmful stereotypes, despite the initial intention of the studio or filmmaker. In this sense, *Enemy* serves as an apt example of how artistic freedom and narrative manipulation can reign over the integrity of a nation's problematic past.

11. The exorcism of inner demons – Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad*

So far in this chapter, *Ryan* has been hailed as the prime example of how the war film had changed and developed; how it inspired a new cycle of war films, which marked a new phase of the genre (Gates 2006: 297). The advancement in digital technology and innovative cinematic techniques made it possible to convey the horror and violent images of warfare more realistically than ever before. But, as has been discussed in this thesis, while a film can aim for an 'authentic' portrayal of dress, equipment, location and the general affairs of combat, the difficulty often lies in achieving 'accurate' portrayals akin to historical documents, photographs or newsreel footage. It is, then, important to have clear distinctions between aesthetic qualities and narrative; one can perform and accomplish its purpose, but it may be at the cost of the other. So, while the post-*Ryan* style of war films may evoke a

realistic image of war and combat, it does not mean that “the narrative it presents is a ‘true war story’” (Gates 2006: 301).

The other films in my thesis have been concerned with the horrific influence and damage the warfare in Stalingrad had on the Allied forces; whether it be the Red Army, Americans, or civilians. Vilsmaier’s film existed in a time before the renaissance of the new war film, a time where the focus on combat receded to the background. The exploration of the “misguided patriotism and questionable government policies that put young men in harm’s way,” as Robert C. Reimer argues in chapter fifteen in *Light Motives*, exemplifies the futility of war and the inevitable destruction that comes with it. Further, Reimer contends that the 1993 film “adopts familiar war film iconography,” yet also adapting the familiar ideas and images found films about the Second World War, “as well as he [Vilsmaier] must” (Gemunden, McCabe, McCormick, Rogowski, Nenno 2003: 305-306). According to Reimer, Vilsmaier’s film is perceived as an emotional film, or rather a film that seeks to gain the emotional attention from the viewer by the use of its musical score, which is a sombre, march rhythm; the closer the German soldiers get to Stalingrad, the more mournful the score becomes. The inevitable doom of the Wehrmacht is then aptly conveyed, with the assistance of the contrasting edits in Italy accompanying the contrast soon to come.







Figure 11. The soldiers enjoying their leave in Cervo, Liguria, Italy (above) versus the inhumane conditions in Stalingrad (below)

An important part of the film's aesthetic is its pathos that its imagery creates. The film – as other anti-war films – attempts to unify the two opposing sides, linking them together in war, but also death. Illustrated by an earlier example in chapter one, our protagonist Witzland and a Soviet POW are positioned at an equal level, both wet from rain and mud. The following confrontation between Witzland and his superior makes it clear that the focal point of the film is not necessarily just the combat itself, but rather in the confrontations between the Wehrmacht soldiers and their officers. In a way, the divide between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army gets increasingly reduced as the plot progresses while the “divisions between the leadership and the enlisted men into outright hostilities” (Gemunden et al. 2003: 310). The film does not rely heavily on subtlety or the power of interpretation in its imagery, however. The Nazi officer whom Witzland confronts is reminiscent of stereotypical portrayals from Hollywood films; his grin and subsequent laugh as Witzland asks for mercy for the POWs makes it clear that there is no sympathy or humanity from their superiors (Gemunden et al. 2003: 314).

As is indeed common in anti-war films, there is a need to present the explicit details of

war and combat. The aestheticization of war in Vilsmaier's film does not diverge from another anti-war film like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Milestone, 1930) or Wisbar's *Dogs*. Neither does the film rely on digital special effects as with *Ryan* or *Line* to convey the combat or to enhance the atmosphere of death in Stalingrad. But its particular portrayal of violence and death is telling; with slow, sweeping pan shots and emotional score accompanying scenes of young Wehrmacht soldiers lay dead or dying, one recognises the utter turmoil and hopelessness that awaits the rest of Witzland's men. The viewer is invited to reflect and sympathise with the young men and to curse their superiors who abuse their powers to force the soldiers into their physical and ideological warfare. Thus, most on-screen violence is ultimately toward the Wehrmacht, in its visceral yet striking aestheticization, particularly in the battle sequence in the winter in Stalingrad.





Figure 12. The striking depictions of war, violence, and death in *Stalingrad*

While the contents within the mise-en-scène cannot be considered ‘beautiful’ in an emotional sense, the composition of the subjects within the frame and the cinematography forms striking and shocking visuals, but still keeping them appealing to the eye. There seems to be a clear purpose in portraying the deaths of the young men in this manner, but not necessarily in the same fashion as the post-*Ryan* films; while it pertains a certain realism that can be recognised in later films, the 1993 film does not attempt to recreate photographs or newsreel footage. A consequence then, according to Reimer, is that the visual ‘beauty’ of the compositions makes the viewers “apt to see composition before they see the composition’s content” (Gemunden et al. 2003: 307). This would then lead to diminishing influence of the anti-war messages that Vilsmaier wants to convey. I would argue, however, that the embellishment of the horrors of war produces stronger sentiments in its viewers; the beauty of composition contrasting the grotesque nature of war reminds the viewer of the inherent artifice of film. As explored in chapter one, the difficulties of rendering historical events through an artificial apparatus such as film are apparent. History through art is, in its purest form, inevitably affected by the filmmaker’s vision and ideological position. But, as Reimer later contends, the apprehension

does not come from the violent images and their effect alone. Rather, it is the strong subtext relating to the “rehabilitation of the fighting man’s image [...]” (Gemunden et al. 2003: 318) or the furthering myths of the Clean Wehrmacht.

There is no doubt that Vilsmaier’s film concerns complicated subject matters, which will be equally as complex to visualise on screen. While there is no lack of representation of the Wehrmacht and their struggle for survival, the portrayal of the Red Army and the Russian resistance fighters are rather interesting. Briefly touched upon in chapter one, the Soviet soldiers are not depicted as outright monsters or fiends; they are fighters who serve to protect the Motherland, no matter the cost. But more interestingly, it is their apparent lack of visual depiction at times which rouse interest for an aesthetical analysis of Vilsmaier’s film. The Soviet soldiers are a clandestine force, hiding in the shadows of the ruined Stalingrad. Shrouded in mystery, they are perceived by the Wehrmacht as bruited beasts with no sympathy or humanity. The Soviet soldiers are ultimately transformed into the ‘other.’ ‘Otherness’ is commonly used to “denote that which resides outside the margins of the dominant cultural representations, outside the social-symbolic order” (Plate & Jasper 1999: 4). For the Wehrmacht – and the Nazis – those who would not submit to their demands would become the ‘other,’ and so the Soviet Union became the untrustworthy alien community in need of purging. Despite this ‘otherness,’ the deaths of the Soviet soldiers in Vilsmaier’s film are moving and dramatic. Their deaths serve a purpose; to influence the Wehrmacht soldiers who ultimately slay them, burning themselves into their minds. These same depictions of Soviet victims are portrayed in the same manner akin to films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Dogs* respectively.





Figure 13. *Stalingrad* portraying the victims of Stalingrad; Soviet civilians, rebels and soldiers

Indeed, the Soviet soldiers, resistance fighters and civilians in Stalingrad transforms from the ‘other’ to martyrs; narrative ploys to aid in character development to our protagonists while representing the victims of Stalingrad to the viewer. The interaction of elements – such as the melancholy score, editing, and atmospheric colours – to convey their martyrdom creates an artificial and even nostalgic view of the past; placing them almost on the same level of victimhood as the common Wehrmacht soldier.

The complicated discussions of Vilsmaier’s film does not only pertain to its narrative structure, valorised characters, and the traumatic history that has afflicted Germany. As Omer Bartov contends in chapter ten in *Russia: War, Peace & Diplomacy* from 2005, the battle in the film “is fought in a political and historical void”, where questions of the German soldiers’ origins, their plans when victorious, their motivation and how many died on their way to their own graves (Erickson, Erickson, Beevor, Stone & Strachan 2004/2005: 139). While not as aesthetically innovative or striking as *Ryan* – or indeed Bondarchuk’s film – it can be perceived as a proto *Enemy* and *Line*. The artistic liberties taken to ‘enhance’ the experience of war and violence can regrettably overshadow the contents of the film and their inherent meanings or sentiments. As in both Annaud’s and Bondarchuk’s case, the visual reproduction

of destruction, mutilated bodies, and warfare the usage of violence can be “the key to understanding their ideology” and, as James Kendrick continues, how “violence is acceptable when used in a morally righteous way that respects an unchanging, masculine code of honour” (Kendrick 2010: 97). Certainly, one could argue that the violence afflicted on the Wehrmacht would be considered ‘morally righteous’; after all, these are men of serious, dubious morals whether they are our protagonists or not. And their affiliation with the Nazi party – which often takes the form of “seduction into evil” (Bacon 2015: 58) in fiction – grants the viewer varying ways of interpreting the ending. After the death of their men and the resistance fighter Irina, Witzland and Reiser find themselves on the snowclad steppes outside Stalingrad. Escaping certain doom in the city, they eventually die a peaceful death, covered in snow. We linger on the last shot of their bodies as the score soars, granting the viewer a form of catharsis – and the consequent exorcism of a Nations inner demons – while also reminding us of the devastating loss of life in Stalingrad:

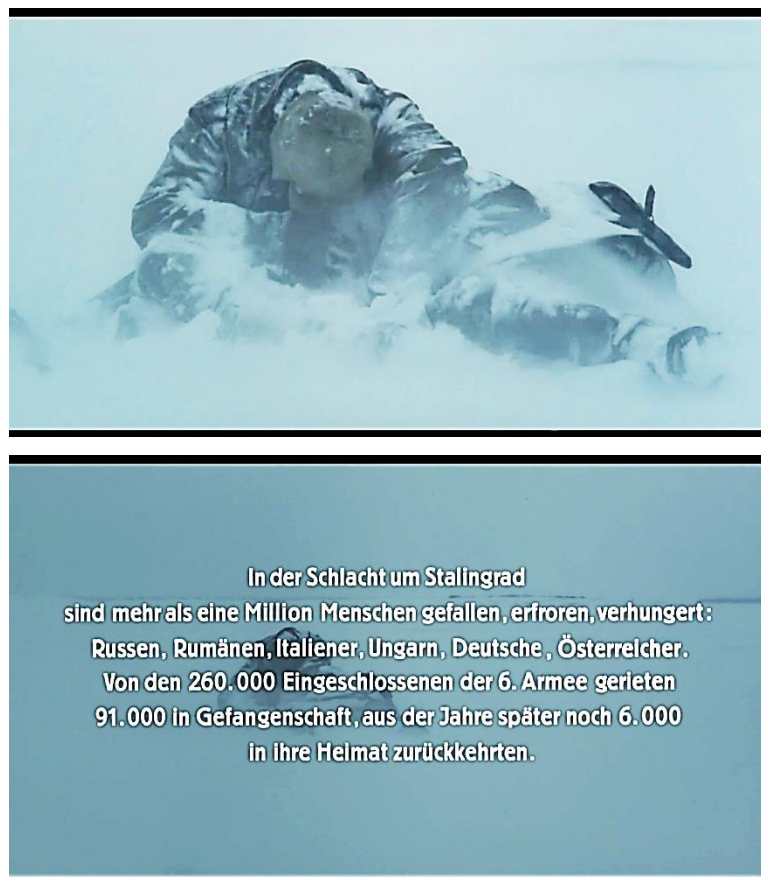


Figure 14. The last shots of *Stalingrad*; encapsulating the hollowness and devastation of war

“In the Battle of Stalingrad more than a million people died, in combat, of starvation, or froze to death. Russians, Romanians, Italians, Hungarians, Germans, Austrians. Of

the 260,000 trapped in the 6th Army, 91,000 are in captivity, from which years later only 6,000 returned to their homeland.”³⁹

6. Conclusion – Stalingrad: a protean figure

It becomes apparent that the complexity of the subjects discussed in this chapter are not fixed and easily unpacked. The evolving aesthetics of the war film – from *Enemy* in 2001 to *Stalingrad* in 2013 – exemplifies how societal, cultural, and ideological changes can have grave ramifications on our different forms of media, particularly when it comes to discussions on war, both from participating sides and the victims of them. There is no surprise, then, that some depictions of documented wars of history will contain the biased opinions and interpretations of the events that unfolded. The past is lost; one may never relive or reclaim it in the present, without the use of artificial mediums such as film or photography. Thus, the past – although captured in a specific moment in time – will be in itself artificial no matter the rendering. However, what the mediums such as film and video games can hope to achieve is a near-truth; an allegorical – or emotional – connection that ties both past, present, and future together. The Second World War, according to Chapman, has the ability to portray “a wide range of meanings depending upon the context,” which could vary from relieving previous glories, exorcising past demons, collaboration or resistance (Chapman 2008: 249). The futility of war is perhaps the most important allegorical intention with war films and anti-war films. But, as Chapman contends, it is also “ironically, the genre is condemning the very subject that sustains its existence” (Chapman 2008: 250).

During the research for this chapter, a term that surfaced often was ‘realism.’ Indeed, it has been a term frequently used in correlation with the war film genre, and as the main descriptor for the post-*Ryan* war films and the aesthetic that follows. But what does the term ‘realism’ entail regarding the subjects for study in this thesis? One could argue that the term can be utilised in a Bazanian sense; film as ‘objective reality,’ the usage of deep focus shots or wide shots, while avoiding heavy editing of the raw material. And, as Katherine Thomson-Jones argues in the book *Aesthetics and Film* from 2008:

“[...] it is quite surprising that the contemporary argument about film realism still focuses on the photographic basis of the film given that the traditional medium of film is fast being replaced by digital formats” (Thomson-Jones 2008: 18).

³⁹ Author’s note: translated from *Stalingrad* (1993) via Google Translate.

For Bazin, the realism derived from the physical material of film and its technical abilities – the film image *is* the object (Thomson-Jones 2008: 18). How he could have defended his position in an age where the term ‘film’ no longer correlates with its physical form, but rather with digital images and formats in powerful hard drives, we can only speculate. But in relation with the war film, it seems as though ‘realism’ ultimately concerns how one recalls events from the distant past and reproduce it through artifice; *Ryan*, for example, evokes ‘realism’ in its corporeal quality and its participatory nature. It is the reproduction of news-reel footage and the photographs of Robert Capa that separated Spielberg’s film from the rest. The traditional narrative, plot, or characters could not fall under the same praise or distinction, however.

‘Realism’, in context with the main subjects for my analysis, I contend that neither of the films falls under the term in such a way that it can be applicably used; though not the main plot point, Bondarchuk’s *Stalingrad* exists through the narrator, Sergey, retelling the stories his mother told him about Stalingrad and its brave participants. Every action, character motivation, and visual stylisation is then affected by his inner sentiments and pride for victory at Stalingrad. Its aesthetic reflects his feelings, observed in the juxtapositioning of suffering Soviet civilians with the cold, horrific actions of the Wehrmacht soldiers. This, in combination with its video game-like qualities – an encapsulated and limited city, slow-motion sequences and ‘shoot-to-win’ mentality – defines a film that wants to pay respect to the veterans of Stalingrad, while simultaneously inviting a younger and less experienced audience into the traumatic, yet patriotic history that is the Battle for Stalingrad.

While Bondarchuk’s film is a nostalgic and fanciful rendering of Stalingrad, Annaud’s *Enemy* bears quite the different aesthetical shroud in its depiction of the Red Army and Stalingrad. The film employs a similar style and aesthetic as *Ryan*, but it does not manage to maintain this ‘photo-aesthetic’ throughout the film. The overt fixation with Soviet iconography – transforming it into a cinematic *idée fixe*⁴⁰ – renders the film’s intentions quite transparent; a seemingly explicit disregard for the history which the film is depicting. Although described in more detail in chapter one, the lack of balance in its portrayal of the NKVD and the Order No. 227 does not only pertain to the narrative structure or characters but also, its choice of editing, scoring and use of violence. The comparison of the sequences between Danilov and Zaytsev and the ‘Vendetta’ campaign from *WaW* is an apt example of

⁴⁰ “An idea that dominates one’s mind especially for a prolonged period: OBSESSION”: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/id%C3%A9e%20fixe#note-1>

how the two mediums influence each other aesthetically. It is also interesting to observe the different depictions and interpretations that arise from two types of storytelling. Thus, *Enemy*'s appropriation of cultural, historical, and visual themes creates a Westernised Stalingrad that has to be changed in order for Western audiences to gain awareness of the Battle for Stalingrad.

In 1993 – in a now unified Germany – Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad* attempted to bring back the debates on the German people's suffering under Nazism. Comparable to other anti-war films like *Western Front* and, arguably, being an adaptation of *Dogs*, *Stalingrad* intends to portray the futility of war primarily through the eyes of the Wehrmacht; the young and inexperienced men who cannot control the situations they are subjected to. The real enemy in *Stalingrad* is Nazism and its followers, and the war in Stalingrad is then not only the physical combat with the Red Army but also a moral war against the authoritarian regime. This is not only conferred through the plot and characters but also through its visual style and aesthetic. The warmth and soothing atmosphere in Italy serve as a strong contrast to the cold and intense in Stalingrad, where no mercy can be found. The scale of the city feels enclosed and bleak, encasing the main characters in a tomb of concrete, snow, and blood. Despite the pleasing shot compositions and cinematography; however, the film's subtext – which can be construed as portraying a sympathetic Wehrmacht – can be perceived and interpreted as problematic in context with history. *Stalingrad*, although an important film that challenges the perpetrator-discourse in war films, should not be held to a historical account. Rather, it can be understood as a nostalgic treatment and exploration of the country's history in a post-unified Germany.

The war film aesthetic had its renaissance with *Ryan*, which set the standard for how the war would be portrayed in future war films and anti-war films. This would also affect the way war would generally be portrayed and reproduced in another visual medium, particularly in video games, which would in turn influence film with the spectacle that comes with it. Representing the diverse war film aesthetics that dominated at the time of their release, the subjects in this thesis all attempted – in varying degree – to portray one of the bloodiest battles in human history, and the battle that changed the course of the Second World War. Although the films perhaps cannot accurately portray the physical past and the events that transpired, the search for a common humanity and exploration of trauma through the artifice of cinema continues, turning the city and battle of Stalingrad into a protean figure; ever-changing, immortal and 'cursed' to repeat its crimson history in art, and as a commemoration

of the resilient human spirit and the futility of war.

CONCLUSION

13. Summary

In this thesis, I have attempted to contextualise and compartmentalise the various forms of depicting the Battle of Stalingrad, by analysing – and comparing – three films from different nations.

In chapter one, the analyses are set in context of the reproduction of history and memory, and if cinema has the power to change how the battle is perceived by its audience. The concern is then the films' approach and treatment of the Battle of Stalingrad, and if culture, ideology and memory have a coherent or distinct effect on the narratives presented in this thesis. Studying how the individual and collective remember history – particularly war – through film can be of aid in understanding the capabilities of the medium, and if it is possible to render written and oral history to art on the silver screen. Trauma has also its role in these narratives, for history and trauma cannot exist without each other. But it is the way these traumatic experiences are handled by filmmakers that were of specific interest, both in terms of artistic and narrative constraints that may occur when adapting history to film. And, if culture, society and sentiment can affect the choices made in these reproductions of the past. Historians who show concern for film being employed as narrators of the past may be valid; films have, usually, a need to adhere to a narrative structure, which cannot always comply with historical accounts. A distrust for the medium, then, derives from this fear of reconstruction, and that films would overtake the role of the historian or scholar. Furthermore, concerns of validity and accuracy prevail, and the inevitable pitfalls that cinema brings in its wake; the single, linear story and interpretation of history. Despite these qualms and arguments against the historical film, it cannot be denied that film has a unique ability to render something akin to a familiar past; a reflection – a “cultural haunting”, as Burgoyne deduce – based on our present-day interpretations and observations. These discussions, points and topics oscillate in correspondence with the dichotomy between collective and individual memory, and the history that is documented both in writing, photographs and newsreel footage. The films analysed in this thesis are, in of themselves, important pieces of art and their value as such cannot be revoked. However, the difference in each film's portrayal of the Battle of Stalingrad is both narratively and discernibly different.

At the start of this chapter, I sought to examine how Bondarchuk's *Stalingrad* serves

as a mythical *lieu de mémoire* – a site of memory – a surviving and symbolic fragment from a traumatic national past. Taking shape in Russia’s collective memory through generations, the Battle of Stalingrad was and still is the “people’s war”, and the film consistently upholds this perception through its use of melancholy imagery and patriotic dialogue. Though never overtly ideological, the film pertains a Soviet sensibility; evoking strong connotations to a nostalgic perception of the Great Patriotic War, rather than conforming to be a historical retelling of the events. More akin to an *homage* than history, *Stalingrad* preserve a cultural myth of a perpetual battle between good and evil. The analysis of Bondarchuk’s film in chapter one was an attempt to unpack the underlying themes of the film, and the choices that make the portrayal of the Battle for Stalingrad so singular and otherworldly. Citing Anastasia Kostetskaya’s article on the mythologization and reimagining of Stalingrad was, in part, a way to expand on the point in which she argues and discusses. Particularly her points that concern the defiance of linearity wherein time folds in on itself – following a romantic and folkloric depiction rather than a historical one – proved valuable and guided my own analysis of the film. I surmise that Bondarchuk’s film, although perhaps lost in its aesthetics and triumphalist tone – reproduce Stalingrad through the collective and the traumatised; through Sergei Astakhov’s eyes, Stalingrad is a legend passed down from his mother to him. The film becomes the disembodied voice of a nation hailing Stalingrad as a bloody, but successful battle. In the end, I believe that *Stalingrad* should be viewed as a film trying to depict historical ‘authenticity’ rather than ‘accuracy’, fostering the emotions of the people in an act to rehabilitate a nation build on conflict and warfare.

In light of the previous analysis, Annaud’s *Enemy* is quite different in comparison. In this analysis, my objective was to examine if the lack of historical accuracy and reproduction of historical figures has the ability to change society’s perception of a culture or nation. In this case it concerned the depiction of the Red Army, the NKVD and the Stalin’s Order No. 227. *Enemy*’s approach to history is that of a Hollywood blockbuster; an action film impersonating a historical war film. I put emphasis on the film’s marketing, arguing that by utilising the phrase “inspired by a true story” it creates a misguided outlook on how the Red Army treated their soldiers. My interest was particularly roused when I came across Anthony Beevor’s critiques of the film, where he outlines the inherent difficulties with the film industry and its treatment of history; the need for closure and happy endings. Basing *Enemy* on a famous tale which may not have a valid source – that of Zaytsev’s duel with a German sniper – I contend that the film alters the events of the battle in favour of creating a dramatic plot with famous, Hollywood actors. As my analysis continued, I came to the realisation that Annaud’s film

could be perceived as rather anti-Communist; character motivations – particularly that of Commissar Danilov and the NKVD – act in a generalised manner, creating a binary which omits any form of levelled discussion about Communism and of Order No. 227. Though technically pleasing and impressive, *Enemy* construes its source material to fit its Hollywood narrative, furthering potential harmful stereotypes at Russia's expense. I conclude, therefore, that the film recontextualise history to such a degree that it cannot be representative for the battle itself. *Enemy* can be perceived as 'authentic' in an aesthetical sense, but it cannot serve as a film yearning to tell historical truths or, at least, a nonpartisan understanding of the Battle for Stalingrad.

In the final part of chapter one, I had the desire to examine and discuss the perception of the Battle for Stalingrad through the eyes of the Wehrmacht; soldiers caught in the middle of two violent regimes, struggling with their morality and attitude towards warfare. Contrary to Bondarchuk's and Annaud's films, the 1993 *Stalingrad* opts to challenge the perpetrator discourse and the treatment of victimhood in context with the Axis Powers. My interest lay in the ways in which the Wehrmacht soldiers and the Red Army were portrayed, based on the complicated history of Germany, particularly in the pre-unification years. For context, I briefly present the history of West-German film and culture and the way Wehrmacht soldiers were portrayed in what has been named the myth of the Clean Wehrmacht. Films from post-war Germany often omitted undesirable details and actions executed by the Wehrmacht, and the events that took place in Stalingrad served as a perfect setting to portray the victimised German soldiers. My initial research began with questions referring to the Clean Wehrmacht, and if Vilsmaier's film in any way perpetuates the themes, narratives and characters from the post-war West-German film, in a need to reconstruct its national identity. Realising that while it cannot be denied that the film portrays the Wehrmacht soldiers as victims of both regimes – particularly by its own – I conclude that the film, in a post-unified Germany, attempts to comment and bring light to a broader issue to a broken generation; the inherent futility of war and the destructive ramifications that comes with it. *Stalingrad*, in context to history, may not accurately portray the actions of the Wehrmacht. But it presents a unique glimpse into the mind and morality of the enemy, and the sentiment – though somewhat misguided and ambiguous – pursue to display the raw nature of war, and the humanity that is hidden underneath the debris and death in Stalingrad.

In concluding chapter one, I came to the realisation that war films and anti-war films do not have a particular set of rules that need to be followed. The varied depictions – which

are conceived based on a nation's identity, culture and history – are part of the way society perceives their world and how they confront a traumatic past. But these depictions can also be part of perpetuating harmful stereotypes and convictions of a past endured with trauma and suffering, as have been explored in my analyses of the films. In closing, the diverse ways each nation choose to understand their pasts are, in a sense, compromised by the inherent subjectivity that envelops history and memories. These mediated portrayals can be essential and compelling subjects to analyse, in an attempt to understand the post-memory depictions through cinema. Though not historically accurate vehicles of knowledge, they can serve as historical vehicles of endurance; preserving the age of which the films were produced, but also serve as a warning that history – just as repeated viewings of film in general– may repeat itself.

In chapter two, I focused on the aesthetical qualities of the films, and how warfare is portrayed and reproduced through cinema and video games, particularly the different ways the films depict violence. For this chapter, I felt it necessary to briefly discuss and examine Spielberg's *Ryan* and Malick's *Line*, since the aesthetics of both films are quite influential, particularly *Ryan* and its lasting impact on war films since 1998. Calling it a rejuvenation of the war film aesthetic, I attempt to contextualise the various cinematic elements and visual styles that follow with this new aesthetic; desaturated colours, disorientating cinematography and visceral, realistic violence. Going further, I analysed the contrasting visualisations of the Battle of Stalingrad and if the new war film aesthetic has had any impact on the subjects in my thesis. Also, I examined the way in which video game aesthetics have influenced war films, and how the war film influenced video games in return. Using the video game *Call of Duty: World at War* as the main example of this influence, I put it up against to both Bondarchuk and Annaud's films, since the video game aesthetic became more common post-*Ryan*. I did not discuss the video game aesthetic when analysing Vilsmaier's film merely because it was produced and released pre-*Ryan*. In this case, I opted to analyse the way Vilsmaier's film portrays German suffering, and the contrasting and evocative visuals accompanying the sombre narrative. Moreover, I had to define the term 'realism', since its use in my thesis has been prevalent and in varying meanings, both in the sense of narrative, aesthetics and violence. My findings indicate a clear evolution of the war film aesthetic from before to after *Ryan*, but I also came to understand that the varying visual depictions might be correlated with the nations from which they originate; the varying ways societal, ideological and cultural changes have affected filmmaking and other forms of media. The renaissance of

the war film aesthetics came with *Ryan* and, perhaps, will persist in cinematic history for decades. Its impact has transformed the various ways war films depict the battles and events that the Second World War, unfortunately, exposed to the world.

To begin with, I sought to analyse the aesthetics and portrayal of violence in Bondarchuk's film, in correlation with certain formalist traditions. Being a Russian film, I found it particularly fitting to draw on some of Sergei Eisenstein's theories of the *montage*, and the composition and editing that generates the meaning to the film. The sentiment derived from the shots and editing – in context with the violence shown towards civilians and soldier – is that of sacrifice and suffering, putting emphasis on the gruesome actions by the Wehrmacht. Realism in context with Bondarchuk's film is not in the same manner as *Ryan*; rather, it seeks to portray the inner life and emotions of the experience of war, as a Stalingrad veteran might feel in retrospect. I conclude that the artistic liberties and triumphalist approach to the Battle of Stalingrad are quite reminiscent of post-war cinema in the Soviet Union, although it may not have intended to be. Russian cinema has transformed and evolved, and the ideological influence has since the Second World War been on a modest decline. But while the fall of the Soviet Union and Communism did change the way stories would be told in Russia, its influence would still persist in the films' aesthetic and visual style, predominantly in the war and combat films. The aesthetics of Bondarchuk's film reflects, as I surmise, the manifestations of the narrator Sergey Astakhov's inner sentiments towards Stalingrad and his patriotic honour towards his 'fathers'. This particular point in the film allows for some artistic liberties and themes of nostalgia without being detained in the chains of realism and reality as *Ryan* would. But, in addition to the CG effects and video game aesthetic, it invites a younger audience to experience a familiar Stalingrad, akin to *WaW*'s depiction and cityscape. In the end, this aesthetic may be a cause of concern for historians, however. Its video game and blockbuster aesthetic might draw attention away from the films' narrative and message, pertaining style over substance.

In the analysis of Annaud's film, I wanted to put focus on the Soviet iconography utilised in the film and the portrayal of the slaughtering of the Red Army soldiers. It was natural, then, to continue discussions on the post-*Ryan* war film aesthetic, since *Enemy* pertains a similar style and depiction of violence. I contend that Annaud's film appropriates a Stalinist approach while perpetuating stereotypes and Westernised myths concerning the Red Army. The specific representation of the NKVD and Order No. 227 – the murderous and unforgiving nature in which they operate – cast a mimetic form of realism superimposed on its visual style, akin *Ryan*. Annaud's film creates a filmic universe where a lone Soviet hero

can change the way in which the Battle for Stalingrad was fought and – consequently – won. *Enemy* is an aesthetically scintillating film, utilising the visual style of the new war film to convey the horror and visceral nature of war. In addition, I came upon an interesting coincidence while preparing for this chapter; on the subject of video game aesthetics I realised that *Enemy* and *WaW* were linked in both visual style and plot elements. It is clear that the 2008 game was inspired by the 2001 film, based on similar stories and events during the siege of Stalingrad. The comparative analysis between Annaud's film and the FPS video game served as an example of the influence the post-*Ryan* war film aesthetic has had on popular culture since its conception. Concluding the analysis, I argue that the fascination with Soviet and Stalinist iconography renders a distorted and Westernised depiction of Stalingrad, appropriating Russian culture and history in its wake. Annaud's vision and commemoration of the Battle of Stalingrad, in closing, perpetuate the history of Stalingrad in a manner that simplifies the events and accounts with the aid of the post-*Ryan* aesthetic, and the juxtaposition of the violent NKVD and mutilated Red Army soldiers.

Finally, returning to Vilsmaier's anti-war film, the aim for this analysis was to examine the war film aesthetic pre-*Ryan* and the depiction of the deaths of Wehrmacht soldiers and the Soviet people as the 'other'. Another important aspect to this analysis was Robert C. Reimer's analysis of the film, since his interpretation of the film's subtext opens for discussions on the emotional portrayal of the German protagonists. There is a decisive subjectivity exuding from the shots of the broken Wehrmacht soldiers; an intimate look into the lives behind the uniform and Swastika. Vilsmaier's film – in its visual representation of the city and soldiers – bears a close resemblance to *Ryan* and *Enemy*, and it is clear that the war film aesthetic was progressing toward the aesthetic that continues to govern the war film genre. Contrary to *Enemy*, which portray the deaths and mutilation of Red Army soldiers in excess, Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad* depicts the brutal deaths of the Wehrmacht soldiers and their officers. Beautifully constructed with slow, sweeping cinematography and striking imagery, the film aestheticizes war in a seemingly serene sense. The invitation for the viewer to sympathise with our German protagonists can be perceived as complicated and problematic, particularly when alluding to West-German history and cinema. Enhancing the experience through the use of provocative imagery and ambiguous morals, the film does indeed challenge the perpetrator discourse, and can be perceived as a purification for the German, unified nation. As with Russia, Germany is bound to repeat its history through mediated images on the silver screen, regardless of the traumatic ramifications that follow. Seeing past the myth of the Clean Wehrmacht – even though interpretations regarding the concept are valid and

important – I conclude that Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad* is an exercise in exorcising a nation's inner demons.

14. Final thoughts – further research and debate

As my research comes to its conclusion, I am left with varying thoughts regarding depictions of the Second World War on film. History on film, being an already complex subject in academia and in popular culture, can present many challenges for historians, filmmakers and scholars. Important issues concern the study of society's perception of war, and how war is continually portrayed through different mediums. Such as with other forms of art, the subjectivity that envelops film and its production can have both positive and negative ramifications, as has been examined and studied in this thesis. Cinema has the opportunity to reshape a past interpreted through a lens of present day's beliefs, going against the intent of history and its objectivity. Referencing the arguments by historians Robert A. Rosenstone and Hayden White, the apprehension in regard to film being a source for historical accounts is a valid concern, since film is an all-encompassing art form capable of adapting an extensive quantity of narratives. Its visual influence and gravitational pull on society and culture – even politics – compose a palpable challenge to written accounts. But, with all oral or written accounts, the approach to these texts should be critical; the historical film should not be upheld to the same critical standard as a scientific article, however. A film is, as stated above, a piece of art, and its limiting subjective nature keeps it from being regarded in the same scholarly fashion as a scientific article or study. Film can, therefore, only construct a fictitious past – an imitation of known history – based on individual, social or cultural memory.

In spite of these convictions and arguments, the historical film is a vital source for bringing insight into a nation's treatment of history. How a nation chooses to interpret war and conflict are particularly fascinating, since film can mirror society's attitudes towards the surrounding world. As my research concluded, I realised that historical films – in this case, the war and anti-war film – do not necessarily need to pertain to a specific outline to elicit conversations regarding these portrayals. The various depictions can still be relevant in an effort to create a levelled understanding of a nation's history, and the ways in which each nation experiences and treats the traumatic events that survive in history books and by oral retellings. But what are the reasons for having a critical approach towards history being reproduced on screen? In the case for the chosen films in this thesis, the delicate nature of the horrors that warfare brings in its wake evokes strong sentiments of national pride and identity. In regard to the Battle of Stalingrad, this is particularly true, and the three films have all

accumulated controversy in various forms. For Russia, being a nation built upon conflict – resolution and war – Stalingrad serves as a highly patriotic site of memory and pride, which still elicit strong sentiments in its current state as Volgograd. Representations of the Patriotic War are vital for the nation’s national identity, and the history and traditions of representation are ingrained in Russian filmmaking. This intricate history often creates a divide between the Western world’s perception of Russian film and Russia itself, however.

In the early stages of my research and conversations with lecturers and fellow students, I observed hesitation and criticism towards Bondarchuk’s film. Being a production from Russia, the inherent scepticism of the portrayal of Russian society, ideology and politics surface. Still, being critical to such a complicated and delicate topic is to be expected and understandable in context with Russia’s propagandistic history. But looking beyond the political and ideological aspects of Bondarchuk’s film, the film can serve as an appropriate example of a nation trying to move forward, leaving behind the Stalinist iconography from the glory days of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, one cannot disregard that the ingrained traditions in Russian filmmaking and storytelling are present in the film.

Concerning Annaud’s *Enemy*, the controversial treatment of the Battle for Stalingrad garnered negative reactions from Russian citizens and Western critics and historians alike. In this case, the absence of historical accuracy – refuted in accordance with written accounts and witness testimonials – formed the greatest concern. The film portrays the Red Army’s exploits in a generalised manner, being almost hyperbolic in its approach to the battle. This is also the case for Vilsmaier’s *Stalingrad*, where the sympathetic depiction of the Wehrmacht soldiers could be perceived as humanising their actions and beliefs.

Lastly, as this thesis comes to an end, there are still themes and material that would be alluring research further. Questions regarding historical accuracy and authenticity are subjects that could cover chapters alone. Also, a more extensive analysis and discussion on cinema’s role in correlation with history could be useful for further research. Case studies of other films concerning the Battle for Stalingrad would also be of interest, to identify the specific iconographical tools utilised when depicting Stalingrad, its soldier, its enemies and its people. Ultimately, the truth still stands; no matter how historians and scholars may perceive history reproduced on the silver screen or computer screen, there will always be a subjective influence on historical films. The artificial nature of cinema – and of art itself – will inevitably turn history into fictitious narratives, where we focus on set protagonists and sides, and where

the contained narrative concludes without further deliberation. However, the need for historical films persists despite arguments uttering otherwise. Film then – such as the three case studies in this thesis – immortalise traumatic pasts for a prospective generation, so that events such as the gruesome Battle for Stalingrad may never repeat itself outside of our own digital screens.

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Stalingrad (Fedor Bondarchuk, 2013)
Enemy at the Gates (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001)
Stalingrad (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993)
Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998)
The Thin Red Line (Terrence Malick, 1998)
Pearl Harbor (Michael Bay, 2001)
The Inhabited Island (Fedor Bondarchuk, 2008)
Schindler's List (Steven Spielberg, 1992)
Titanic (James Cameron, 1997)
Stalingrad: Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever? (Frank Wisbar, 1959)
The Bridge (Bernhard Wicki, 1959)
Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)
Edge of Tomorrow (Doug Liman, 2014)
Hardcore Henry (Ilya Naishuller, 2015)
Streetfighter (Steven E. de Souza, 1994)
Mortal Kombat (Paul W.S. Anderson, 1995)
Doom (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2005)
Come and See (Elem Klimov, 1985)
Band of Brother (Miniseries, Tom Hanks & Steven Spielberg, 2001)
Transformers (Michael Bay, 2007)
The Avengers (Joss Whedon, 2012)
All Quiet on the Western Front (Lewis Milestone, 1930)

List of Video Games

Call of Duty: World at War (Treyarch, 2008)
Medal of Honor (Electronic Arts, 1999-)
Spacewar! (Steve Russell, 1962)
Pong (Atari, 1972)
Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996)
Silent Hill (Konami, 1999)
Half-Life 2 (Valve Corporation, 2004)
Fable (Big Blue Box, Lionhead Studios, 2004)

