

**“What the Hell Do We Do Now, Sir?”:
Combat Films and Spectacle in 1990s Hollywood**

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**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Communications**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies) at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

June 2007

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-34463-7
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-34463-7

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Abstract

“What the Hell Do We Do Know, Sir?”: Combat Films and Spectacle in 1990’s
Hollywood

Craig Stewart

This thesis examines a period of Hollywood filmmaking between the December 1989 release of Oliver Stone’s Vietnam veteran film *Born on the Fourth of July*, and the July 1998 release of Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* in which very few films were made about combat in the Second World War. This thesis deploys genre theory and analysis, as well as a political economic exploration of the decade to examine the status of spectacle in combat films in the 1990s and explore some of the factors involved in making this period a relative low point in the U.S. combat film genre. Only a handful of specifically World War II combat films were made and released about American soldiers fighting overseas in those eight years before Spielberg’s lauded film, despite that the Second World War offers narratives of American heroics and moral certainty (with notable exceptions such as the Japanese internment and the dropping of the atomic bomb). This work uncovers aspects of the relationship of the U.S. film industry to popular ideas about war in light of an arguably triumphalist stage of American history following successes in the first Gulf War and the forty-five year Cold War. Notably, this period also marks the 50th anniversary of the entirety of World War II.

Acknowledgments

I began the MA program in Media Studies by saying that I was excited to be here, and all the people involved in the program—students and faculty—have sustained that feeling over two years. I would like to thank those people who have thought of me whenever they saw the words “war” and “film” together in an article or book: it has proved immensely helpful. My gratitude goes out to those fellow students who have given me expert feedback on my creaky prose: Neil Barratt, Heather Peters, Jeff Traynor, and Rebecca Reeve. The exemplary instructors who have shepherded me through this process deserve utmost credit for their indefatigable enthusiasm for their respective areas: Monika Kin Gagnon, Rick Hancox, Bill Buxton, Kim Sawchuk, and Leslie Regan Shade. I must especially thank Charles R. Acland, whose dedication to both scholarship and teaching is breathtaking. I am indebted to his decision to supervise my work. Lastly and most importantly, Lisa has helped me in too many ways to count.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Let me see your REAL war face!”
--Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in Full Metal Jacket

When Home Box Office aired the first episode of its ten part television miniseries based on the World War II exploits of a group of paratroopers in Europe, *Band of Brothers* (2001), American screen culture was in the midst of something of a World War II boom. Films like *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay 2001), *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud 2001), *U-571* (Jonathan Mostow 2000), and *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick 1998) had displayed the great conflict in preceding months. The television series had cost an astounding U.S. \$120 million to make. Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks were involved in the project, both of them serving as executive producers and Hanks directing one episode. The series aired three years after their 1998 success with *Saving Private Ryan*—a film about American soldiers in northern France during World War II. One of the taglines for *Band of Brothers* was “There was a time when the world asked ordinary men to do extraordinary things.” The series was riding a cresting wave of World War II popular culture narratives and sought to make a definitive statement on the experience of American ground infantry in the European theatre.

Thirty-six hours after the first episode of *Band of Brothers* aired, American Airlines flight eleven struck the north tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. In the ensuing scramble in the U.S. media world to reconsider various film releases and television airings in light of the catastrophe, *Band of Brothers* managed to keep its Sunday night time slot, though all advertisements for it were pulled. The series later went on to be nominated for three Golden Globe awards (winning one) and twenty-one Emmy

awards (winning six). It was also one of the best-selling DVDs of the year when it was released in November 2002.

This strange contemporaneousness of a lauded and popular screen memorial for fighting American G.I.s fifty-seven years earlier in the world's greatest conflagration with a new "Pearl Harbor" is complicated at best. Since World War II, U.S. war and combat films have frequently depicted events and issues of those four years in which the nation revoked its isolationism to intercede on behalf of itself and other countries in the fight against Germany, Italy, and Japan. The World War II combat narrative, in fact, has proved its dogged longevity up to and beyond that harrowing day in September 2001. There is a mythology at work in America and its relationship to that specific history of combat that replenishes some vessel of U.S. national identity. Notably, the horror of September 11, 2001, despite its unprecedented nature, was still cast in the shadow of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, sixty years earlier. *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich highlighted the recently anachronistic nostalgia that *Band of Brothers* displayed, writing on Saturday, September 15, 2001 that the tagline for it noted above "enshrines the complacency of the day before Tuesday, with its assumption that the prospect of civilians having to make any kind of extraordinary effort for a national good was as far in the past as the knights of the Round Table." Yet he also cast the collective post-9/11 sentiment squarely in the tropes solidified in part by that nostalgia. The accretion of a cultural World War II over six decades helped to frame the tragedy as something more familiar, something Americans had been dealing with in film for years and years: a sneak attack by a military enemy.

The terrorist attacks in 2001 came when combat films were reaching back to historical wars in different ways. Film scholar Thomas Doherty suggests that eventually, people might think that the 9/11 attacks caused the resurgence of war films when in fact

The latest cycle of star-spangled and combat-ready pictures...was born of Y2K-ruminations and CGI revolutions: part historical retrospection, spurred by the fin-de-siècle glance back at World War II, the twentieth century's most dramatic and film-friendly event; part technological innovation, a product of the digital magic that made cost-effective the cyberspace creation of antique ordnance and battalions of lifelike troops. The greatest generation meets computer generation... ("The New War Movies" 214)

This highly visible blooming of the combat film genre at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century is odd precisely because of its timing, or indeed lack thereof. How did the film version of World War II develop since its origin in relation to the wider genre of combat films? During a period of its uncertainty, how did the combat film maintain itself? In the face of the power of its mythology in popular film, what historical moments checked its exuberance? The 1990s are a period that fits that bill, notably between the December 20, 1989 release of Oliver Stone's film about Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and the July 24, 1998 release of Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* about U.S. soldiers set against the backdrop of the later stages of World War II in Europe and the Allied invasion of Normandy. This is a period in the beginning of which American films about World War II were "box office poison" according to Doherty in his 1993 book *Projections of War* (297).

Marking the start of the period with a film about Vietnam is intentional; the 1980s witnessed a "second wave" of films about the Vietnam War that dominated this period in the war film genre and which more or less ended with the completion of the decade. Obligated to address the uncomfortable legacy of a lost American war, the most

representative of these films either loudly claimed malign forces external to U.S. soldiers which precipitated the loss on the ground (for example, *Missing in Action* [Joseph Zito 1984] and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* [George P. Cosmatos 1985]) or avowed solidarity for their unfortunate plight (*Platoon* [Oliver Stone 1986]). The war could not handily be cast as a victorious one for the U.S.—this in stark contrast to the Second World War.

A collision of variables confounds intuitive expectations of World War II combat films in the 1990s. First, this period—1990 to 1998—roughly coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the war. Second, World War II itself was, according to Doherty’s eloquent characterization, long “a beloved backstory, a precious source of dramatic material and atmospheric settings” in the ensuing years of peacetime and also during other wars (271):

More than any other war—more than any other twentieth-century American experience—it was motion picture friendly. The magnetic pull of the war years wasn’t merely the attraction of adventure, romance, or high melodrama but the consolation of closure and the serenity of moral certainty. For Hollywood and American culture the Second World War would always be a safe berth.
(*Projections of War* 271)

Third, the 1990s also inaugurated the end of the Cold War and a sense of American triumph about the way in which it concluded, and an expected “peace dividend.” The Cold War, a forty-five-year super power stand-off in which full combat meant nuclear Armageddon, had been hatched within months of the end of World War II and offered Americans a political and social system (and a people) in the Soviet Union which could focus a united antipathy. Like World War II, the Cold War stance could be used to reinforce the notion that America stood for freedom and provided clear examples of powerful sovereign nations with which to contrast its democracy.

America had entered the First World War in the third year of the fighting, and helped to bolster the British and the French forces—which in particular were facing

widespread mutiny and insubordination. President Woodrow Wilson's centrality in helping to settle the peace terms—his phrase “self determination” is still invoked today (MacMillan)—signaled the eminent status of the United States in Europe at the close of that war. Thus, despite its isolationist stance leading up to World War I and in the inter-war years, the United States had been involved in worldwide conflicts for “freedom” for almost a century by 1990. With such historical precedents and the end of a century of globally occurring wars directly involving the United States, one wonders why the war that most easily facilitates the image of America as both beneficent and courageous would be virtually absent in popular U.S. fiction films in this time. It is also worth mentioning what respected military historian Sir John Keegan says with regard to how 1941 to 1945 changed the United States:

In 1945 the United States was to find itself not only the richest state in the world, as in 1939, but the richest there had ever been, with an economy almost equal in productivity to that of the rest of the world put together.... In the final enumeration of Hitler's mistakes in waging the Second World War, his decision to contest the issue with the power of the American economy may well come to stand first. (219)

America's birth as the preeminent global nation, then, began with the end of World War II.

Films about the commitment of U.S. troops to Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s dominated the cycle of war narratives just before this period of 1990 to 1998 (which ended with Stone's 1989 film). The second wave of U.S. Vietnam War films most visibly ended with Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* released on August 18th, 1989 and Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* released on December 20th, 1989. Although almost no films were released during the Vietnam War that directly represented the conflict (with the notable exception of John Wayne's and Ray Kellogg's “go get ‘em”

picture *The Green Berets* from 1968), the late 1970s and 1980s saw two waves of Vietnam War films. The first wave included *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby 1978), *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino 1978), and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola 1979), while the second wave included *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick 1987), *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin 1987) and De Palma's and Stone's mentioned above. Also noteworthy are the financially successful, if not critically celebrated, films like the *Missing in Action* series (*Missing in Action*; *Missing in Action 2: The Beginning* [Lance Hool 1985]; *Braddock: Missing in Action III* [Aaron Norris 1988]) as well as the *Rambo* films: *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff 1982), *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, and *Rambo III* (Peter MacDonald 1988). Following all these films, which in one way or another dealt with the troubling legacy of a war in which America was defeated despite overwhelming technological superiority, was something of a transitional phase of movies about the American military, in particular films about group dynamics of U.S. combat soldiers. There did not appear to be great confidence on the part of Hollywood as to what sort of war narratives would bring in box office dollars after the ostensibly anti-war and retrospectively-won narratives in the Vietnam film waves.

What was happening in the American film industry in that period? What were some of the choices made that indicate a sense of what Hollywood thought would be profitable in regards to combat films? In the era of a redeemed American military fighting in Iraq in the first Gulf War in 1991 and the American victory in the 45-year Cold War, what was happening in the production of popular films about U.S. military endeavours? This thesis is an attempt to explore these questions by focusing on the combat films made for U.S. audiences in this eight-year stretch. It is a cultural studies-

based approach that makes use of a political economic perspective so that the films can be considered in both their generic and economic contexts with a view to attaining a more complete picture. The cultural texts, figured in their political economic surroundings, provide insight into a collective sharing of notions of World War II through its instances in genre films. This thesis will show that the 1990s before *Saving Private Ryan* was a period of uncertainty and a lack of clear direction with respect to the World War II combat film. It will note too, the curious status of spectacle in combat films during this time, since, as Geoff King notes, “War, like space or ‘action’ defined more generally, is an arena that lends itself to the spectacular impact sought by many contemporary Hollywood films” (118). This study will therefore note the particularity of this historical moment instantiated by cultural material, highlighting that what comes after amounts to an efflorescence of the genre.

Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* eventually demonstrated the enduring profitability of a well-made combat film about a group of U.S. soldiers and re-established the notion that World War II films could be well received by both audiences and critics. It was a memorializing effort to exploit sentiments of indebtedness to the “everyday” Joes, those citizen-soldiers who donned uniforms and faced Hitler’s and Hirohito’s war machines. Aging American baby boomers could help assuage their guilt over their 1960s counter-cultural dismissals of their parents’ hardships and sacrifices during the Great Depression and the war years through a simulated experience of the horrors of war at movie ticket prices. Spielberg has clearly shown the way in terms of financial success in the majority of his pictures. In this way, he has attained something like a “popular auteurism”—people will pay to see how he tackles his subject matter.

The cultural shift from a more recent lost (or retrospectively won) war in Southeast Asia to the triumphalism of a citizen-soldier English teacher leading a charge to help destroy encroaching worldwide totalitarianism in an earlier war, as depicted in *Ryan*, marks a notable transition. Spielberg's film marks an endpoint of the uncertainty of World War II combat genre films about a group of soldiers, in large measure through the spectacularity of its realist depiction of the Normandy landings near the beginning of the film. The film re-emphasized the heavy personal sacrifice those men endured, arguably calling forth an attendant simplicity in patriotic moral righteousness. Troubling moral ambiguity is somewhat lessened in the Hollywood narrative focus on the individual faced with the stress of deadly battle. Troubling and more complex questions such as who specifically organized the Holocaust or who ordered the atomic bombs to be dropped on Japan do not usually figure in combat films—the oft-depicted regular ground troops do not typically order the deployment of city-destroying bombs. Such subjects do not have the same box office potential as a well-made combat film.

Jeanine Basinger's 1986 book, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, explicates continuity across a legion of war pictures, despite differences of place or setting, to provide something of a Proppian analysis of the genre. She notes the abiding plot structures of *The Last Stand* or *The Lost Patrol* for films about ground forces. She refers to *Bataan* (Tay Garnett 1943) as a premium example of the genre since there is a cast of characters that slot themselves into types like the hero, the hero's adversary, the comedic relief, the peace lover, and the minority (and there is always a character from Brooklyn). The films about ground forces offer a particular and close relationship to battle conditions and are also closest to depicting what the Army might consider the

average soldier. It is this basic template that was negotiated between Hollywood and Washington during World War II so that the team won out over rugged and intransigent individualism so as to aid the war effort (Doherty *Projections*). Such films are the most clearly represented narratives when war films are considered, superlative examples being *Saving Private Ryan*, *Platoon*, *The Big Red One* (Samuel Fuller 1980), *Apocalypse Now*, *The Longest Day* (Ken Annakin et al 1962), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan 1949), and *Battleground* (William A. Wellman 1949). Typically, the group of ground troops is pressed into military service to portray a microcosm of American society and various debates about war.

Numerically speaking, combat films have been on the increase since *Ryan*. There have been approximately 380 war films (feature length documentary and fiction /fictionalized) released in the United States between December 20, 1989 and 2006. If we divide this period up between those films released before *Ryan* and those after (both periods roughly eight years), we find that between Stone's film in 1989 and Spielberg's in 1998 there were 120 war films released in the U.S. Following Spielberg's film to 2006 there have been 258 war films released, a 215 percent increase. If we focus in further on fictional war films specifically about or set during World War II we find a starker ratio before and after *Ryan*: twenty-four WWII war films released in the United States in the eight years before *Ryan* and seventy-nine afterwards—a 329 per cent increase.

Looking at the twenty-four fiction films about, or set during, World War II shown in the United States between December 20, 1989 and July 24, 1998, we see that only one of them depicts a group of American soldiers at the front. This is *A Midnight Clear* (Keith Gordon 1992). Another theatrical release, *Memphis Belle* (Michael Caton-Jones

1990), focuses on a B-17 bomber crew in Western Europe. There were also two notable HBO television movies: *When Trumpets Fade* (John Irvin 1998), set in Europe in November 1944, and *The Tuskegee Airmen* (Robert Markowitz 1995) about the all-African American 332nd Fighter Group. The other twenty films (both theatrical releases and television movies) do not focus on combat, or on a group of combatants as their principal subject. The most high-profile of these other films are *Shining Through* (David Seltzer 1992), *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg 1993), *A Walk in the Clouds* (Alfonso Arau 1995), and *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella 1996). All of them take dramatic or romantic angles on World War II and do not confine themselves to the plot of soldiers in combat. This is the principal trope, as will be shown below, of the combat film established in World War II: a group of soldiers who must come together to fight the Good Fight. The men debate the conduct, the mission, the issues, acting as a microcosm of American society at war in a popular/commercial context. It is this social dynamic, and the representation of battle that the soldiers face, that most obviously mark the combat film. While noting the Hollywood film environment of the 1990s, this thesis will examine the four combat film noted above in that period and use scholarly work on the business of Hollywood, genre, and spectacle.

In the current climate in 2007 in which World War II combat films have reached a level of awareness unseen in years, the nineties offer a chance to pull out some of the other, less dominant trends in the genre that immediately preceded the current moment. In so doing, what is exposed is a sense that America, without a contemporary and galvanizing enemy, does not clearly know what to do with representations of its military in film. What eventually develops in the form of *The Thin Red Line* and *Saving Private*

Ryan are narratives notably set *in the past* that play up the existential threat to American forces before 9/11 once again provides evidence that America is beset.

What happened in the 1990s? Our proximity in Canada to the United States leaves us exposed to some of the latter country's trials and tribulations. The 1990s in the United States witnessed the end of the Cold War and the redemption of its military in the first Gulf War, the rise of the Internet and globalization, a two-term baby-boomer Democrat president after the neoconservative Reagan-Bush years, and a general sense of reorientation in on one-superpower world. That these developments ran into the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, the dot-com bust in 2000, the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999 (and the rise of the anti-globalization movement), along with a return to a neoconservative presidential administration (whose moral and political power was greatly enhanced by 9/11), only helps to characterize the decade as a peculiarly transitional one. America moved slowly in ten years from facing the caricature of a hardy folk led by despotic godless leaders to fighting the insubstantial and racialized, but still ubiquitous, "terror."

Yet while the 9/11 terrorist attacks "changed everything," the 1990s was also witness to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing by a United States citizen who fought in the first Gulf War, Timothy McVeigh. Surely this was something that undermined the sanctity of the United States as a country free from terrorist acts? And McVeigh was not alone:

Local incidents of terrorism proliferated throughout the 1990s: according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, in the peak year 1993 there were almost 2,400 bombings across the nation, leading to 70 deaths and 1,375 injuries.... thousands of politically motivated acts of violence were carried out in the United States during the 1990s... figures dwarfing anything carried out by Al Qaeda—but this homegrown terrorism has received little media attention. At the

time of the Oklahoma City bombing... militia groups were at their peak, with membership estimates as high as 4 million (including over 400,000 paramilitary activists). (Boggs and Pollard 30, 31)

Loosely characterized, this evidence makes the United States seem like a militaristic nation cannibalizing itself in lieu of squaring off against an external enemy. And while the United States projected a precision-based and technologically advanced image of itself in the Middle East against a former ally in 1991, it was still involved in military strikes during the ensuing decade in Iraq, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia—instances which did not necessarily provide equivocation of its military with moral purity and military or strategic efficiency. As well, the rise of, and euphoria associated with, the Internet and new media was rampant in the 1990s. From its commercialization to countless tales of money to be made from it to the promises foreseen down the line of continued technological advancement, the Internet seemed to help ensure an “American way” of profit and free market economic exchanges. And the end of the Cold War did not precipitate a return to isolationism, since by the 1990s, the U.S. had “firmly established itself as an unchallenged superpower backed by the largest war machine ever, with bases in 130 nations, a growing military presence in space, and consumption of more resources than all other major armed forces in the world combined” (Boggs and Pollard 6).

William Jefferson Clinton, the first baby boomer to become President of the United States, was also the first Democratic candidate elected twice since World War II president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This signaled a shift in the internal and external relations of the new administration out of the Reagan- and Bush Sr.-inspired conservatism. But as Billy Crystal so pithily reminded the audience of the Seventy Sixth Annual Academy Awards Ceremony in 2004: “It was thirteen years ago when I first

hosted the Academy Awards, and things sure have changed since then. George Bush was President, the economy was tanking, and we had just finished a war with Iraq. Yeah, things really have changed.” Were the 1990s just a blip, a hesitation in America’s belligerent flailing for its post-Cold War national identity? What happened during the 1990s in the combat film genre that might indicate some sense of the ideas Americans had about warfare at the time? First, we must examine the idea of genre, and the combat film genre in particular.

Chapter Two

Genre

*"We've had good deals before, but this is the best one yet. This is great. I don't ever wanna go back. I found a home in the army."
--Pfc Holley in Battleground*

To name a group of films is to assert continuity between them. For that assumption of continuity or other organizing principle by which such a group might be determined, one is obliged to make a case. In this capacity, genre study has proved very useful but has not provided any definitive solution to date. This is in part because, inevitably, not everyone agrees. This is also the result of the fact that genres are scholarly and industrial, academic and avowedly commercial. In discussing genre, scholars have attempted to introduce the obvious industrial context of the art of popular film and move away from literary and artistic-based reliance on the author as principle meaning-maker of a cultural text (Feuer 117). Auteur theory had come along in the 1960s to North America from France to emphasize the author (meaning the director) despite that industrial context. Genre study, similarly to auteur theory but with a different emphasis, was an attempt to move away from the Theodor Adorno and Frankfurt School template of cultural analysis that sought to descry the pernicious influence of all mass culture, including, and perhaps most sensationally, Hollywood. Genre study was sometimes a retrospective attempt not only to take industrially produced culture seriously, but also to determine cultural value therein without attributing it to one person in the shape of an author.

Genre study, then, was to look at films without focusing on the auteur as the sole determiner of meaning. Jane Feuer notes that in film, genre study itself "has had a historically and culturally specific meaning. It has come to refer to the study of a

particular kind of film—the mass produced ‘formulas’ of the Hollywood studio system” (116). The organizing principle first fell to various discernable visual and narrative codes (Ed Buscombe said in 1970 that “the major defining characteristics of genre will be visual” [20]). The western, starting with *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin Porter 1903), and the gangster film were two of the more established, venerable, and visible genres. War on film was first depicted in a series of actuals made about the 1898 Spanish-American war in Cuba, but most of these focused only on visual spectacles of men, material and landscapes, not actual combat (and had enchanting titles such as *Mules Swimming Ashore at Daiquiri, Cuba*). Even commonly seen footage of men going “over the top” in World War I was no such thing but a re-enactment well behind the lines. The filmic fallout of the Great War itself was a mixture of anti-war narratives and home front impact (like the biggest box office hit to that time, 1925’s *The Big Parade*, directed by King Vidor, and the Best Picture Oscar winner from 1930, *All Quiet on the Western Front* [Lewis Milestone]) and not so much depictions of “go get ‘em” heroic soldiering. It was not until the Second World War that Hollywood began to produce films of combat whose heritage is still to be clearly felt in the sense of a general paradigm of morally righteous technological violence.

Jeanine Basinger observes that while antecedent elements were folded in later, the U.S. combat picture really began with the conflagration of 1941 to 1945, and that it was in fact so dominant a template that she conflates all combat films after this as World War II combat films with variations or inversions. This chapter will situate and explore the work of Basinger, who’s 1986 book, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, is something of an authoritative and definitive account of the combat genre up to

that time. Admittedly, this thesis will look to extend her work up to 1998, while at the same time qualifying her conceptual framework and looking at some other elements that may have been a factor on the combat film genre in the 1990s. To begin to situate Basinger's tome, a brief purview of genre study is first in order.

Genre study developed in relation to other theories of art and culture, as well as other theories of filmmaking. Film critics James Agee and Robert Warshow offered early nomination of genres in the 1940s (Staiger 189) but it was not until the 1970s and the influence of structuralism and semiotics that genre returned to be critically and academically consequential. In the interim, auteur theory was imported from France when Andrew Sarris introduced it in a 1962 article entitled "Notes on Auteur Theory," originating from François Truffaut's 1954 essay in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, in which he wrote about the *politique des auteurs*—the "policy of authors" (Cook, 11). Peter Wollen points out that auteur theory

was developed by the loosely knit group of critics who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and made it the leading film magazine in the world. It sprang from the conviction that the American cinema was worth studying in depth, that masterpieces were made not only by a small upper crust of directors...but by a whole range of authors, whose work had previously been dismissed and consigned to oblivion. (553)

In this sense, auteur theory seems like a saving activity, a result perhaps of obsessive cinephilia. Wollen quotes Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, who emphasizes the "discovery" element:

One essential corollary of the theory as it has been developed is the discovery that the defining characteristics of an author's work are not necessarily those which are most readily apparent. The purpose of criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs...is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another. (quoted in Wollen, 555)

From this, it is assumed the viewer or scholar conducts the saving and discovery of aesthetic value tied to whatever kind of authorship in the face of what by implication is a meaningless factory of mass entertainment, and thereby avers the ability of certain authors to nevertheless mark their films with a stamp of individuality.

Auteur theory for a time proved more suffusive than genre theory. The notion that a film is the product of one determining mind and spirit regardless of the constraints upon them, after all, has easy connections to popular conceptions of artistic production—one only need glance at descriptions of famous artists from Andy Warhol on back to Leonardo Da Vinci. Yet auteur theory was insufficient to fully explore those constraints placed upon the auteur, and so genre study was expanded upon to account for some of them. Paul Willemen, in a brief presentation opening Steven Neale's 1981 book on the subject, notes that genre theory was related to auteur theory insofar as both were reacting against what he calls "establishment" film criticism, which was based on taste and the critics' personal artistic appreciation attributes, as in art criticism (3). He maintains: "auteurism proved the least difficult element to accommodate within establishment criticism which, by means of this recovery manoeuvre, re-established its massive dominance... the journalistic establishment in effect made genre theory redundant and regained its position at relatively little cost" (3).

Auteur theory, in whatever form, was still limited in its ability to fully account for cinema production. Remaining relatively unexamined was the mass of film work that could not be "saved" as discernibly "authored." Furthermore, Steve Neale argues that the tension between subject and convention, or system versus individuality (as auteur theory describes) comes down to "a fundamentally complicit acceptance of the basis of 'high

art' ideologies: i.e. that the artist has a self-consistent, potentially autonomous and transcendent self and that art is its (more or less realized) expression" (8). He adds that as a result of this figuration, "the only argument concerns the value to be placed on pure self-expression (high art) on the one hand, and self-expression mediated by established conventions (popular art) on the other..." (*Genre* 8). Auteur theory, while useful in reexamining popular films for authorial marks and finding value in denigrated culture, was simply unable to properly account for that industrial context which constrained that same author. A model of an art producer who internalizes and processes a sheaf of influences, ideas, and other input and who then produces an expression that is only tainted once studio executives get their hands on it is not credible in the face of the strength of film genres. It rather seems that the genre offers both a reprieve from completely (and daunting) free directorial and creative reign and the opportunity to work with a historical body of texts against which a creative mind can focus his or her energies. Jane Feuer suggests exactly this when she writes of the relationship of genre and auteur theory: "it was discovered that certain authors expressed themselves most fully within a particular genre" and that "the genre provided a field in which the force of individual creativity could play itself out" (117). She adds that some people therefore "viewed the genre as a constraint on complete originality and self-expression" but that others "felt that these constraints were in fact productive to the creative expression of the author. Thus genre study evolved within film studies as a reaction against the Romantic bias of *auteur* creation" (117). This ultimately implies that the production of anything creative (at least in popular film) is in some sort of dialogue with other forms that came before it. Ultimately, though, *both* auteur theory and genre study were methods by which

the singularity of a film text was questioned: recurrent motifs by the director or generic constraints established rationales for the grouping of film texts. Yet genre theory did not rely as much on the idea of a sovereign creator.

The elucidation of the ways in which cinema production is in continuous dialogue with itself is an attempt to discern what partly constitutes a film, understood not simply as a work of art. Neale extends this idea somewhat dramatically in suggesting that

All forms of signification and meaning entail pressure: no subject is transcendent of such pressure or in control of its modalities, hence no subject is in a position to simply operate these forms, whatever the conditions of production and consumption, whatever the form of economic relations within which production and consumption take place.... no audience, no individual spectator or reader—is free... it becomes important, indeed essential, to differentiate between the various modalities of pressure involved, and to relate them to the various modalities of the political, ideological and economic conditions in which they function and take effect. Generic conventions and the genre form itself should be viewed as one of the variants of the modalities of that pressure. (*Genre* 10)

While this understanding brings art (and cinema) down a notch from being solely the fruit of a creative mind, the inevitable call for “exemplary” genre films means that genre study can still end up overemphasizing a singular film as representing the imagined or presumed canon, a model similar to “the great work of art”—an occupational hazard perhaps, since examining a singular text gives clues to the system or process of which it is a part. Nevertheless, this general determination of the imposition of “pressure” on cultural creation must be accepted if we are to get anywhere in our discussion of genre. It is also worth noting here that Neale’s characterization signals some of the language that was particularly rampant at the time of his writing in 1981—notably the words “signification” and “ideological,” coming from the burst of semiotic film theory and Althusserian neo-Marxism in the 1970s.

Genre study, as represented most prominently by Neale's work and Thomas Schatz's 1981 book *Hollywood Genres*, developed in the wake of a decade of theoretical work on cinema and laboured to validate itself. The heritage of genre debates that had occurred up to the time of their work and Basinger's 1986 book offered a rich pool of ideas about the nature, function, and power of genres. In the cornucopia of theoretical and critical pursuits that was North American academia in the 1970s, Freud and Lacan, Barthes and the Frankfurt school, Foucault and Althusser and others were stirred into the pot. Laura Mulvey's preeminently influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" melded some of those theoretical interests with film study and the journal *Screen* also loomed large. The shifts introduced by feminism also brought to bear a productive tension with some of the gender-biased theories of Freud and Lacan (see for example Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics*). Some of the preeminent scholars in the field of genre study published important works in the early 1980s, including Neale and Schatz. In the intellectual moment following a thirteen-year period in which the prominent profiles of Barthes, Lacan and Althusser stood tall and Mulvey and second wave feminists were examining film, semiotics, structuralism and psychoanalysis had massive academic currency. Genre theory escaped some of the excesses of these theoretical methodologies to some degree, while understandably being influenced by them (Neale makes much use of psychoanalysis and borrows heavily from Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* while Schatz cites Noam Chomsky's 1964 linguistic idea of "deep structures" and uses semiotics godfather Ferdinand de Saussure to compare the film genre and the genre film to *langue* and *parole*, respectively).

The study of genres inevitably invoked a taxonomic task, a requirement of which was to list what was gleaned from whatever conceptual outlook was used. Itemization struggled with theorization to describe genres adequately. Rick Altman noted in 1984 the then relative discomfort with theory Americans displayed compared to the French: “Whereas the French clearly view theory as a first principle, we Americans tend to see it as a last resort, something to turn to when all else fails,” and particularly in this case, “since we all know genre a when we see one” (27). The material focus and observational basis of genre work brought back the filmic “real” with more consequence than in more purely theoretical pursuits (though I do not mean to imply that Yankee materiality trumps French ethereality).

While genre study had the benefit of being not too cloistered in theoretical abbeys of limited practicability, it seems that it is nevertheless bound to fail in fully describing genres and their boundaries, and needs some theoretical work to determine why this is so. This is a saving grace, though, because to succeed with some of the basic idealizations of genre study would mean some unimaginable and unachievable map of exact genre borders, shifts, and movements through time (or at some frozen idealized moment): an impossible task. In the meantime, genre study works fundamentally to encounter the popular film, to a marked degree, on its own turf without dismissing outright its cultural value or presuming its exact meaning or interpretation.

The unrealizable aspect of genre (clearly mapped out boundaries, borders and categories) also results from the fact that the Hollywood film industry itself uses such operational divisions between its films. What is interesting in itself is the degree to which the scholarly and the industrial uses and definitions of genre overlap or are in tension.

Some genres have been named only retrospectively (film noir) while scholars have taken up others directly from industrial usage (such as the Western or gangster film).

Motivationally, then, we might provisionally conclude that the naming of genres is meant to accomplish different things for different people. For Hollywood, genre divisions offer opportunities for easy nomination of the qualities films will offer viewers, and thereby may ensure a measure of box office predictability. This does not imply, however, that the naming of only one genre in the selling of a film is profitable: just the opposite. While genres offer shorthand for what elements are in any particular film, the obvious motivations of studios trying to produce profit require that multiple genres would sometimes be cited, in the hopes that there might be something for everyone and that this will make for good box office (Staiger 190). And Janet Staiger particularly rails against the assumption that “classical Hollywood” (roughly 1930 to 1960) *ever* had pure genres in the first place. Despite this very valid argument, the notion of genres, implicitly idealized as “pure”, has seemingly determined major amounts of scholarly and industrial work. Robin Wood, though, pithily maintained: “it is probable that a genre is ideologically ‘pure’ (i.e., safe) only in its simplest, most archetypal, most aesthetically deprived and intellectually contemptible form—such as the Hopalong Cassidy films or Andy Hardy comedies” (63).

The Hollywood system of genre film differentiation offered itself up to the willing scholar as a structure to be explored with a theory partly developed for folk tales and ethnographic studies. Structuralism, following from the work of people like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp (whose book *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* looked at the recurring motifs in popular tales), came to be tied in with semiotics to find essentially

definitive meanings within large groups of popular texts. Rick Altman contends, though, that

The contributions of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Frye, and Todorov to genre studies have not been uniformly productive, however, because of the special place reserved for genre study within the semiotic project. If structuralist critics systematically chose as the object of analysis large groups of popular texts, it was in order to cover a basic flaw in the semiotic understanding of textual analysis. (28)

This basic flaw was Ferdinand de Saussure's assertion that no one individual could effect change within that language and that the system was to be considered frozen in time for the sake of analysis, which in turn implied a fixed linguistic community. Altman continues by suggesting that by "preferring narrative to narration, system to process, and *histoire* to *discours*" these early stages of semiotics "ran headlong into a set of restrictions and contradictions that eventually spawned the more process-oriented second semiotics" and that this is the way in which we should consider "the resolutely synchronic" attempts of the four authors named by Altman above "and many another influential genre analyst" (29). The perfunctory categorization of genres itself was not seen as a conceptual obstacle as it should have been, argues Altman. And the themes, motifs, and recurring elements were described irrespective of spectatorship, a notable and key limitation:

Unwilling to compromise their systems by the historical notion of linguistic community, these theoreticians instead substituted the generic context for the linguistic community, as if the weight of numerous "similar" texts were sufficient to locate the meaning of a text independently of a specific audience.... Treating genres as neutral constructs, semioticians of the sixties and early seventies blinded us to the discursive power of generic formations.... Instead of reflecting openly on the way in which Hollywood uses its genres to short-circuit the normal interpretive process, structuralist critics plunged head-long into the trap, taking Hollywood's ideological effect for a natural ahistorical cause. (29)

The influence of structuralism meant that film texts could not easily be seen as unique products capable of changing film history, but rather as minor instances of the film industry system, perhaps as a manifestation of its ideology for the subtle critic to discern. And while the power of one film to shift or change a genre is a debatable point, and the need to indicate recurring elements is a valid one, structuralism as Altman defines it seems to have overdetermined the power of the genre over any genre film.

Thomas Schatz contextualizes the influence of structuralism, an auteurist version of which, argues Willemsen, “put the notion of meaning production on the agenda and programmed the appeal to semiology as the discipline that was to account for the way texts work as signifying structures” (2). Schatz states:

Perhaps the most evident manifestation of this concern for the conventionalized nature of American movies and their production is in the burgeoning field of popular culture, which itself is founded on something of a structuralist concept in its basic assumption that members of a mass-mediated society develop and participate in complex systems of unexamined beliefs. This culturally responsive perspective already has been evident in structuralist film theory—whether semiological or psychoanalytic—which seeks to delineate the various signification systems that inform virtually all Hollywood film. (“The Structural Influence” 92)

Schatz meanwhile claims, keeping his eye on the audience (Altman’s “interpretive community”) that “not until we examine the genre film in its ritualistic capacity will we fully appreciate its cultural and aesthetic value” (94). For him, the genre film is a contract that provides for “*active but indirect audience participation* in the formulation of any popular commercial form. And that participation is itself a function of the studio system’s repeating and handing down, with slight variation, those stories that the audience has isolated through its collective response” (italics original, *Hollywood Genres* 12). He augments the idea of genres as ritual by highlighting them as “social problem-solving

operations” because they “repeatedly confront the ideological conflicts (opposing value systems) within a certain cultural community, suggesting various solutions through the actions of the main characters. Thus, each genre’s problem-solving function affects its distinct formal and conceptual identity” (24). Genres as rituals of problem-solving for a large audience is a compelling idea when we consider the combat film’s portrayal of credible and severe threat to a group of men who are meant to be a microcosm of American society (glaring gender disparities aside). Representative characters can voice a variety of issues before their narrative, if not real, resolution—which itself may or may not be satisfactory. Schatz also uses Noam Chomsky’s linguistic theories of grammar to refer to “deep structures” that influence genre films other than the auteur’s psyche: “industrial, political, technical, stylistic, narrative, and so on—which inform the production process.... The genre’s preestablished cultural significance in effect determines the range and substance of any one director’s expressive treatment of that genre” (9). This maintains the idea that (established) genres are endemic problem-solving social rituals irrespective of what the substance of each particular instance is, and what directorial hand shapes it.

Schatz somewhat makes up for his dubious reliance of Chomsky’s linguistic theory by offering a schematic of how genres change and develop (the language analogy can only be useful to the degree to which one de-emphasizes the particular aspects of visual communication). Calling upon Henri Focillon’s *The Life of Forms in Art*, Schatz suggests that genres go through four distinct stages: experimental, classic, an age of refinement, and the baroque age. He says that Focillon

observes that the continual reworking of a conventionalized form—whether it is an architectural style or a genre of painting—generates a growing awareness of

the conventions themselves. Thus a form passes through an *experimental* stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a *classic* stage, in which the conventions reach their “equilibrium” and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of *refinement*, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a *baroque* (or “mannerist” or “self-reflexive”) stage, when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they themselves become the “substance” or “content” of the work. (*Hollywood Genres* 37-38)

Schatz contends that this development occurs because of the sophistication of film audiences. He notes, “a genre’s progression from transparency to opacity—from straightforward storytelling to self-conscious formalism—involves its concerted effort to explain itself, to address and evaluate its very status as a popular form” (38). Interestingly for this study, he also claims “in the war genre, the prosocial aspects of supporting a war effort directly ruled out any subversion or even the serious questioning of the hero’s attitudes. War films that did question values were made after the war and generally are considered as a subgenre” (40), thereby claiming a particular internal relationship of the genre that is at odds with Basinger’s, as will be seen below. Incidentally, and obviously, this “subgenre” to which Schatz seems to be referring is most particularly evident in some of the combat films that dealt with the Vietnam War.

Schatz argues that film genres move from being windows into collective rituals to opaque surfaces of film artistry: “There is...a shift in emphasis from one cultural function (social, ritualistic) to another (formal, aesthetic)” (41). With the solidification of the real social problems that film genres are called upon to “solve,” the genres are permitted, or perhaps obliged, to introduce more aesthetic or baroque airs: “These story formulas have articulated and continually reexamined basic social issues, weaving a cultural tapestry whose initial design became ever more detailed and ornate, ever more beautiful” (41). It would seem that once the film genres play out the various solutions, they are left with

self-referentiality since they can no longer credibly refer to social situations with those narrative “solutions” any longer. The “beautiful tapestry” Schatz refers to is perhaps a positive correlation of the realization of never-ending cultural conflicts.

Feuer meanwhile warns that a version of this concept of genre development leads to either a genre’s most perfect manifestation or its being broken down eventually into its constitutive parts:

According to the most teleological version of the theory of generic evolution, a genre begins with a naïve version of its particular mythology, then develops toward an increasingly self-conscious awareness of its own myths and conventions. It is implied that the genre is also progressing toward a higher version of its type.... Another theory of film genre development argues that after a period of experimentation, a film genre settles upon a classical “syntax” that later dissolves back into a random collection of traits, now used to deconstruct the genre. (130)

Into this argument, Basinger’s work will offer a vivid example of the combat film genre’s development through time in specific historical circumstances. However, we should also consider the meaning of changes in genres in light of the ideas of ideological management—that genres are not just problem-solving rituals but also devices of control.

Feuer helps to corral genre work and calls attention to three major (and sometimes overlapping) ways genres have been discussed: *aesthetic*, referred to in passing above as the variety of visual (and aural) codes grouped together, to which Feuer adds that this approach “also includes attempts to assess whether an individual work fulfills or transcends its genre” (119); *ritual*, “an exchange through which culture speaks to itself” (119); and *ideological*, in which the genre “positions the interpretive community in such a way as to naturalize the dominant ideologies expressed in the text,” perhaps with contestation allowing for “the production of meanings by the viewer as well” (119-120). Genres, because they are culturally and financially consequential, do not escape the

politically minded theories of culture that seek to unearth less-than-beneficial values and ideas therein.

Steve Neale and Rick Altman each take more of an ideological approach to genres than Schatz. This conception loads more power and influence on genres as mechanisms of Hollywood's assumed conservative social values than the indirect influence of the consuming public. Feuer argues that for Altman, "the genre serves to limit the free play of signification and to restrict semiosis" and "usurps the function of an interpretive community by providing a context for interpreting the films and by naming a specific set of intertexts according to which a new film must be read" (118). She goes on to say that Altman sees this "as an ideological project because it is an attempt to control the audience's reaction by providing an interpretive context. Genres are thus not neutral categories, but, rather, they are ideological constructs that provide and enforce a pre-reading" (118). Neale asserts, meanwhile, that "it is important to stress the financial advantages to the film industry of an aesthetic regime based on regulated difference, contained variety, pre-sold expectations, and the reuse of resources and materials" ("Questions" 178). Neale takes issue with the ritual approach, noting the restrictions of choice through which the audience has an "indirect influence" on the development of genres:

Quite apart from the doubtful assumption that consumer decision-making can be considered a form of "cultural expression" and quite apart from the tendency of such an approach to conflate the multiplicity of reasons for consumer "choices" and a multiplicity of readings of these "choices," the ritual theory of genres is open to question on other grounds. ("Questions" 179)

His view is something of a corrective to the ritual view's underemphasizing of the constraints already placed on the viewing audience in their influence on the development

of Hollywood film, but perhaps too much so. Yet worth taking away is the sense that genres are useful tools for Hollywood, and commercially so.

That genre names are commonly used is not hard to spot, but what is meant by that usage is something else. In discussing genre there is still a need to discuss quality, but on qualified terms, such as “it’s a good horror film”, “that was an awful musical.” The genre title acts as a knowing addendum to praise or derision, helping in either direction. This implies a familiarity with other films in the genre. Further, it implies that the person offering the review is not someone who has necessarily seen thousands of movies and is fully aware of film or Hollywood history, but has maybe seen an unspecified—though perhaps only a handful—of genre films, and that this can qualify one as someone able to pass judgment. This, naturally, undermines the sense that only experts and specialists can comment on this culture. Of course, the relative strength of influence of the major film critic and the genre filmgoer is glaringly different since the film critic has channels to reach a large section of the population, while the genre filmgoer is a constitutive part of that large population. Yet an element to consider in this is the question of who maintains the genre film financially. It may be the critic who praises a genre film, but it is filmgoers who maintain it with their box office disbursement. Critics, while powerful in their ability to sell or hinder a film (and more effectively so when they collectively agree), do not solely determine box office, to the great relief of the Hollywood majors. There are moments when filmmakers complain that critics ruin a film’s reception before audiences get to see it, and film websites have taken to collecting major reviews and assigning some kind of aggregate score, the better to balance the majority of film reviews to an easily understandable numerical figure or letter

grade. “Good buzz” means both positive early reviews and strong word of mouth and this can at least offer a good chance of a film’s early success at the box office. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Peter Jackson 2003) had one of the highest “approval ratings” from critical notices and also went on to become the second biggest grossing film in the world, not adjusted for inflation. In that rather unique case, the critical reviews seemed to merely confirm the mounting positive attention the film trilogy had so far received and seemed to be relatively inconsequential individually, other than confirming the expected. Regardless, as Neale observes, genres are still shorthand for reviewers, and advertisements negotiate genre boundaries constantly: “reviews nearly always contain terms indicative of a film’s generic status, while posters usually offer verbal generic...description...as anchorage for the generic iconography in pictorial form” (“Questions” 163).

Feuer, in an article discussing genre and television sitcoms, notes that “film and television criticism still tend to take their category names from current historical usage” and suggests that “one of the goals of film and television genre criticism is to develop more theoretical models for these historical genres, not necessarily remaining satisfied with industrial or common-sense usage” (115). Citing Rick Altman, she maintains “The constitution of a generic corpus is not independent of or logically prior to the development of a methodology” (116). In this sense, then, the person organizing the material is simultaneously producing it as an object of study. It is a back and forth process that Feuer likens to taxonomy in biology:

The literary concept of genre is based upon the idea, also common to biology, that by classifying literature according to some principle of coherence, we can arrive at a greater understanding of the structure and purpose of our object of study. Thus the taxonomist begins with already existing examples of the type. From

these, he/she builds a conceptual model of the genre, then goes on to apply the model to other examples, constantly moving back and forth between theory and practice until the conceptual model appears to account for the phenomena under consideration. (Of course, this is a lot easier when the genre is already complete...). (116)

This way of looking at a genre is as a hypothesis that is to be tested by each new instance, each new film in a genre, out of proportion to the relatively conservative and static inclinations of the structuralist. Interestingly, Edward Buscombe wrote in 1970, “In trying to be more specific here, one is inevitably on dangerous ground, for unless one has seen all the westerns ever made (or, to be absolutely logical, all the westerns that ever could be made), there cannot be any certainty that generalizations will hold” (16). Which is why “hypothesis” is the most operationally productive we can hope to be: no one can claim definitiveness any longer, in the gap between Buscombe and Feuer.

Before turning to Basinger and the combat film genre, it is worth mentioning the frequent comments on the constitutive part celebrities play in the construction of genres. A number of scholars note the genre-related aspect of certain film stars, and inevitably the example used is John Wayne as someone who would stand out in a British “kitchen sink” melodrama, to take an extreme example. Wayne’s persona communicates a healthy amount of the type of film one is going to see, and ties two genres together rather intimately: the western and the combat film, as when he uses the phrase “saddle up!” instead of something like “lock and load!” when having the men get ready to move out in his Oscar-nominated performance as Sergeant Stryker in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Notably, Wayne himself was acutely aware of this persona, refusing the role of Major Kong in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick 1964), and making the only avowedly pro-war film about the Vietnam War during the

conflict, *The Green Berets*. In this sense, the casting of Tom Hanks as Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan*, particularly when offset by his sergeant played by the very tough-seeming (and subsequently troubled) Tom Sizemore, plays to specific expectations. An actor with a venerable heritage of comedic roles, along with two Oscars from dramatic ones, signals a particular countenance (particularly in considering those Oscar-winning roles); a known face is here introduced to negotiate genre convention.

The notion of genre is awoken the moment one makes the assertion that there is such a thing as a combat film. Its existence may be taken for granted, but its exact discernment is something else. For one invokes definitions, parameters, boundaries, and characteristics, all of which are contestable, subject to considered argument but arguable nonetheless. Our task in the face of the discussion of genre in regards to combat films is to approach a workable object, but perhaps more importantly to present a history of the genre to show its shifts and movements keeping an eye on the period in question, the 1990s.

Jeanine Basinger somewhat cheekily offers a snapshot of the perfect combat film culled from her experience of watching over 1000 U.S. combat films over five years in her book *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. Basinger uses what Janet Staiger elsewhere calls the “the *empiricist* method”, in that she aims to “determine from empirical observation the necessary and sufficient characteristics to include a film in the category” (italics original, 187). Yet for this kind of method, Staiger argues, “a circularity exists. The critic cannot observe objectively, since the critic has already predetermined which films to include in the group in order to find the necessary and sufficient characteristics” (187). A large part of Basinger’s discussion in the book therefore

involves boundary control—what films to include and exclude in her definition. She has the position, however, as one of the few writers whose purview is the something akin to the entire genre of the American combat film up to 1986, to be somewhat authoritative in this listing. Yet one is left with the sense that she is necessarily working to maintain boundaries, whether she really wants to or not. In any case, her group of war films offers some insights.

As a result of her viewing of a great many films, she has reached the following observations: the presence of genres are assumed by most film scholars, helped by industry labels and agreed-upon lists of canonical texts (4); that “no one has ever attempted to define a genre specifically, based on the actual viewing of the hundreds of films involved” (5); and also that this method remains insufficient, noting that genres “change, shift ideology, vary themselves, merge with other genres, hide their stories in new clothes, lie dormant, and then reappear” (5). While obviously valuing her own front-line work in the front row, Basinger also mentions the work that would give a more complete picture: the study of the political economy of the studios, biographies of key players, technological developments, audiences, historical circumstances, other media, other fields, and “anything and everything else” (6). She simultaneously suggests that her efforts to elucidate this one genre nevertheless confirms available scholarship while at the same time she seems to fall victim to something Neale warns against: a division between form and content. Basinger notes the difficulties of genre boundaries and the impurity of genres, as well as their continual development:

The value of historical research is that it destroys certain inaccurate clichés that have been passed around and gives proof to ideas that scholars have known for a long time. Clichés about genre include the idea that they are easily defined and recognized, that they are fixed and never change, that they are based only on

recognizable literary devices—such as characters and plots—and that films are either one genre or another. Actually, genres are hard to define, tricky, and contradictory. The cinematic form in which they are contained—the way they are presented through cutting and composition—and the use of color, sound and wide-screen are as significant as their plots and characters. They are inconstant, moving their stories from place to place, and demonstrating curious affinities for one another. (8)

When she notes, “the cinematic form...[is] as significant as their plots and character,” she maintains that division between form and content that Neale criticizes. And while otherwise safely provisional in her casting of what genre is, not claiming anything too radical about it, there is the supposition that her watching the films as exhaustively as possible (as much as anyone has so far cared to do anyway) gives her the authority to claim that what she has found confirms genre scholarship. She goes on to use a kind of shorthand, culled from her screenings and based on certain repeating plot structures, to describe two dominant types of (infantry) combat films. In this sense her efforts recall the work of Vladimir Propp, who had influenced structuralism with his book *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* in seeking to establish elements of folk tales that make repeated appearances. Both of these preeminent combat film plot structures Basinger describes are relatively self-evident as to their meaning: *The Lost Patrol* and *The Last Stand*. She uses these phrases to conduct the reader through her exploration without adequately explaining some of the “cultural conflicts” (Schatz) or ideological discourses (Neale). She talks around genre theory with these phrases as if it is something of an enigma, but winks at the reader as if we can see exactly where she is coming from.

Regardless, to obtain a more complete picture of the World War II combat film in the 1990s, we are served by Basinger’s historical analysis. Her schematic is useful because while there is some overlap in the multiple waves of film cycles as she

distinguishes them, they help us see some of the ways in which the genre has evolved. And while there are antecedent elements to what Basinger calls the World War II combat film, it is obvious that this kind of film only begins in the first full year that the U.S. was involved in the conflict, 1942. Whether the differences in films about World War I and II had to do with the realization by the Second that film had a part to play as soon as battle was joined and it was *not* to lament the wasted youth mowed down on foreign battlefields, or that the Second was perceived differently at the start somehow, it remains the case that the films about World War II had a different substance, flavour and feel to them. Basinger says that the WWII combat genre, in its birth during the unprecedented conflagration, served particular purposes. It

filled the needs of the wartime public for information placed in a narrative, and thus more personal, context. Juxtaposed as it was with actual newsreel and documentary film, as well as with numerous newspaper and magazine photographs of “reality,” this genre provided comparison, contrast, and emotional relief. The World War II combat genre existed for the period of the war, but by virtue of its popularity has remained a genre (or accepted story pattern for films) until the present day. Furthermore, once established, the combat film influenced the entire concept of the war film. The pattern of the World War II combat movie is now the most common pattern for all combat movies. (9)

The unprecedented nature of the global war, along with Hollywood being near the peak of its studio or “classical” era, coupled with its close relationship with the Pentagon, seemed to have solidified this kind of war film as the basic template for all war films after it.

I want to emphasize at this point Basinger’s separation of the war film and the combat film. She says that “war” is a “vague category” and “too broad”:

The war film itself does not exist in a coherent generic form.... “War” is a setting, and it is also an issue. If you fight it, you have a combat film; if you sit at home and worry about it, you have a family or domestic film; if you sit in board rooms and plan it, you have a historical biography or a political film of some sort. It’s

very hard to be in war and not be in combat (although the effect of the war on civilians has become a familiar genre-type in foreign films, since when civilians sat home they were still in a war zone). “War” can be a metaphor, or it can be a background to other stories. (10)

She goes on to list key combat film elements: “The hero, the group of mixed ethnic types (O’Hara, Goldberg, Matowski, etc.) who come from all over the United States (and Brooklyn), the objective they must accomplish, their little mascot, their mail call, their weapons and uniforms” (16). This relatively stable set of elements are augmented by a quick snapshot of examples of the parameters guiding characters (and audiences):

Leave your boots outside the foxhole at night, and you’ll get shot when you stick up your head to reach for them in the morning. Stop to pick some flowers, and the enemy sniper in the long grass will shoot you. In other words, remember home through your mail call if you want to, but never forget your military training. Thus boots become a symbol of military discipline or order, and losing them means losing your life (or your legs). (16)

Citing an example of a soldier throwing a snowball as if it were a baseball in one combat film, Basinger attaches the warning: “Do not play with battle terrain, or assume it is as it would be in peacetime, is the axiom, demonstrated once again. The price of enjoyment of nature is death” (160-161). She takes from this same film, *Battleground*, the conclusion that “Safety lies in being a typical American, with a typical American’s knowledge of popular culture.... If you don’t know your popular culture, you are not a true American” (161-162). These rules of conduct help maintain the generic conventions in war films, which above all includes the remonstrance that one

cannot relax in combat. Moments of repose are not moments of complete relaxation. A state of total combat exists, and to assume the world one is in is the world of nature is an error that will destroy. One is in the world of combat, a man-made thing, or more specifically, in the world of the combat film where rules of death operate confidently and surely. (161)

Death is allowed to operate as a convenience of plot and narrative (as well as spectacle), since it stalks the soldiers continually. And typically, Basinger argues, “the combat patrol must leave behind a wounded comrade, with no chance of survival, in the jungle or the desert or the frozen north or wherever, with only a few salt tablets, his rifle, and a little water to hold him until discovered by the enemy or destroyed by thirst and starvation” (18-19).

Basinger claims that the “purest” kind of combat picture is the infantry film, followed by the submarine film, and then by surface navy and air force films, due to their relative proximity and exposure to danger (21). She notes the sorts of story conflicts that occur in each space:

On land, men occupy foxholes or tents, which are purely combat spaces...the air force film is often about professionalism, the pressure of duty, the responsibilities of leadership. The navy film is about domestic strife, not only the kind that grows up among the men on board (as in family life), but also the kind they left behind with women who resent their long months at sea. The land infantry film is about combat. Thus, the *infantry film almost always becomes the pure combat movie*, whereas the navy film tells the story of the domestic lives of military men and the air force film that of the problems men have in the chain of command. (italics added, 22)

The characterizations of the “pure” infantry combat film Basinger reduces to two dominating plot configurations: *The Lost Patrol* and *The Last Stand*, noted above. *The Lost Patrol*, as it suggests, focuses on a group of soldiers lost in inhospitable territory. Dynamics between the men are stressed, and some die, all while in a desperate attempt to get back to safety and/or accomplish the mission. In *The Last Stand* scenario, as she notes, the mission is holding the front line while outnumbered—a classic real-life inspiration of which is the “Battle of the Bulge” during World War II in December 1944, when a German counterattack created a large bubble in the Allied advance and cut off

American soldiers at Bastogne. This event figured in *Battleground* and also in *Band of Brothers*. The men must come together in both of these war scenarios if they are to survive, and inevitably, not everyone does. These handy combat film scenarios help Basinger to de-individualize films after citing specific examples, and also supports her claim that “no one film ever appears that is quintessentially the genre.... When later, filmmakers create films of the same type (because they were popular and made money and can still speak to an audience about issues they want to hear) they make the memory of the accumulated film” (18). Her catchy phrases act as shortcuts to an amorphous non-specific combat film plot, gleaned from her work watching lots of examples and they present the genre as relatively stable (and supported for example, by *Saving Private Ryan*—a Lost Patrol of Miller’s 2nd Rangers which ends with a Last Stand at “the Alamo,” a bridge in small French town).

Importantly, though, these recurring or dominant combat film motifs do not determine the audience’s interpretation; Basinger lobbies for ambiguity in the combat film, suggesting that

The messages I see and hear may not be the ones you do—even if you were meant to. For instance, a film which says “war is hell,” but makes it thrilling to watch, denies its own message. A film that says war is fun, but shows too much violence and death, may not deliver what it intends either. In film study, too often this problem is overlooked. It makes the medium extremely difficult to categorize generically. (95)

This is a particularly interesting point in regard to the combat film as determined by Basinger: genres are *not* about communicating an unambiguous message. In combat films involving U.S. soldiers born of a need to win a global war, this may be particularly startling. The gestation of this genre may have been born at a time when Americans

looked for stories that narrated their concerns in drama, but that does not mean that we could say that combat pictures then or since were unambiguously pro-war.

Recalling elements of Schatz's stages of genre, Basinger invokes a sense of need for the combat film genre and lists its non-combat elements, which might appear in other kinds of films when the genre itself is not, as she says, "required":

In an era that does not call forth the need for combat movies, do films...keep the relevant issues of military service, competition, male camaraderie, patriotic sensibility, duty, war preparedness, combat capability and procedure, and inventiveness before the public? Yes. This illustrates a phenomenon of generic development: that genre recedes and emerges as needed or desired, and that it also lies dormant in other forms (musicals, comedies, adventures) until needed. (107)

Yet Feuer meanwhile points out that "the concept of audience 'need' is a substitute for an explanation of shifts in culture, in an industry, and in a narrative form; in itself it does not explain anything" (126). Low ebbs in the genre explained as a lack of need for it do not fully explain things. Nevertheless, this point of genre elasticity (though not rigid developmental stages) that Basinger makes here is crucial in looking at the combat film in the 1990s, irrespective of how such developments are accounted for. Collapsing filmmakers, studios and audiences as one integrated "we," Basinger rather too sweepingly suggests that

When war exists, we make films about it. When it goes away, we make films about military battle maneuvers, or films about how awful the war was (awful, even if glamorous). We also make other genre films that serve similar purposes, of course. As war nears, we change our minds, and get involved in the new mechanized war and a new understanding of it. To do all this, we tell stories in the old way, updating them with new equipment and new ideology, slowly moving toward a period of time when the new war breaks out and the issues it will provide can be amalgamated into the story. After World War II, we know we need the group—the definition emerges, and never goes away. Once defined, the genre is strong, and although it undergoes an evolution it never disappears. (118-119)

This summation, which ascribes an inherent national need to see combat films only when the nation is at war, does not explain the nature of the genre when the nation is not. Her statement is too generalizing to be properly applicable to combat films in the 1990s, a period after the time of her writing. And notably, the cresting wave of World War II films over 1998 to 2001 took place when only the former Yugoslavia was in combative turmoil in U.S. news—which hardly warranted an explosion of Good War movies.

Still, Basinger competently describes waves of World War II combat films since the war, each of which was dominated by some basic defining feature. Of particular interest are the third and fourth waves. She notes that the third wave, between 1949 and 1959, was a period “which puts reality into the genre in significant ways, in order to unify an audience that is made up of people who know war only through films and people who experienced it directly” (122). She adds that the Korean War in this period helped solidify the World War II combat film genre and added new elements of concern: family and the communist enemy. Its attempt to fold in some measure of a discourse of reality (due to the increased proportion of veterans in the audience) through actual war footage, accurate maps, and true stories is also important to note. This is because the fourth wave, which Basinger says began in the early 1960s, was developed to “bring epic re-creations, officially replacing ‘reality’ with ‘filmed reality’” (122). Here we can observe that the real war footage of the third wave, while spectacular for its time, was only as good as the relatively amateur (other than some exceptions like John Ford) and mortally endangered cameramen who shot it. Hollywood, wanting total control of the spectacle of combat the better to manipulate it for narrative cinema, seemingly had profit in mind in recreating the spectacular footage and attempting to garner its own notoriety (and was by this time

competing with the small screen of the hugely popular television). Basinger characterizes the fifth wave, from 1965 to 1975, as “The Testing of the Genre (Presenting an inverted, parodied, satirical and opposite reality)” (201). Films such as *MASH* (Robert Altman 1970) and *Catch-22* (Mike Nichols, 1970) are stand out examples. This was followed, as outlined above in the introduction, by the first and second waves of Vietnam War films, which will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Basinger’s claim of the longevity of the combat genre despite permutations after World War II speaks to Schatz’s notion of the genre film as a perennial problem-solving solution between two opposing systems of value. This longevity is indicative of the unresolved nature of the tensions that can be associated with the genre. She writes in relation to four World War II-era combat films that

If all the combat films [during World War II] had been about generals and victories, we might have seen the last of them after 1946. But they were about ordinary men and defeat, things that would still be with us when the war was over. Emphasizing despair and death, madness and loss, and with a sense that half of ourselves will die no matter what we do.... It is a striking thing. If our films had been happy, or optimistic, or proud, perhaps the genre could not have lived. It may be that here we find the reasons we wanted more of it, as we moved into an America of Korea, assassination, and Vietnam. (152-153)

As Basinger claims, the elements the genre broached early on were not simply heroic charges and sweet victories. On the one hand, genre combat films released during the war provided a guiding template able to stretch itself around new developments of America at war, while on the other hand, as the genre progressed, it could culturally process what had happened in the past. In regards to World War II, the genre could help America contain the trauma retrospectively:

We had won the war. We could be proud of it. The reexploration process would help us understand what happened, to whom it happened, and how it happened, and it would help us understand how it changed and affected us, and to justify

what we did during those years. The subject could now be presented for earned national pride, understanding, and justification—not just propaganda. We could resolve the war, finish it off once and for all... The most important aspect of these films, especially those in the first half of the decade, is that they seem to provide a ritual in which the American audience can watch the war together, celebrate its satisfactory completion, reenact its combat, and come together in their understanding of it. To do this, the films re-create earlier films more than reality, even though they provide real historical reference points... (154-156)

Notably, the post-war films reference other films, not the real war because the films were already capsule snapshots of the conflict. The real war, other than for those who fought in it, was actively being replaced with a filmic doppelganger: “To gain recognition and acceptance, these films relied on earlier films to reach the public. The war was now war movies. The films became a faithful recreation of a creation” in which we can see the “displacement of fact of history with legend” (156). The post-war third wave films, she contends, brought the war “down-to-earth, removing the ‘why we fight’ propaganda of the war years and treating those who fought it like fallible human beings who are rising to the occasion out of the instincts of survival” and in which “fiction met fact, and unification was complete, on film and in the audience” (157). In this relative early stage of the World War II combat film genre, fictional film as a medium gained an important sway of cultural influence over how war was to be represented to and seen by American audiences.

One thing that we can learn from this look at the combat film genre is that it is not clear exactly what its meaning is for audiences. Genre films, while relying on audience knowledge do not reduce to unambiguous meaning for the sake of profit. Basinger notes that it is a cliché that WWII films celebrate war (8). And Schatz also points out that genre films can have it both ways, offering two conflicting “systems of values and attitudes, *both of which* are deemed significant by contemporary American culture” (italics in

original, 34). Yet we sometimes still rely on the dubious equation that we know of, and therefore know what is, a genre. While genres can be seen as ideological in that they constrain readings through intertextual references which profits Hollywood filmmakers and distributors, the cultural ritual is a valid claim to the reason for a genre's continued existence, and particularly with something as socially and nationally traumatic as World War II.

Basinger's own work short circuits some of the theoretical concerns of Neale, Altman and Schatz by using tropes like *The Lost Patrol* and *The Last Stand*. This thesis takes her work as foundational to a description of the combat genre and relies on the history she relates to examine a period beyond the scope of her 1986 book. Yet the eight years between the second wave of Vietnam War films and *Saving Private Ryan* yields a field of inquiry on which to test some of her ideas. How did the World War II combat film manifest in this time if it is the preeminent template of the genre? In what other places did it show up? How do the motifs she described make themselves apparent? Basinger's generic study, while exhaustive and noteworthy, could have benefited from other analyses, as she herself notes in the introduction of her book. It is very clear that the World War II combat film genre returns with *Ryan* and its followers, but before that it is not enough to say, as Basinger does, that "When it goes away, we make films about military battle maneuvers, or films about how awful the war was (awful, even if glamorous)" (118). The period examined by this thesis is one that remains somewhat opaque by her methodology.

It nevertheless remains impossible to fully describe or delineate the complete combat film genre, since it is still alive and is invested with a lot of hard Hollywood cash.

In the words of Steven Neale, “genres constitute specific variations of the interplay of codes, discursive structures and drives involved in the whole of mainstream cinema”

(48). Yet he points out that

genres cannot, in fact, be systematically characterized and differentiated one from another solely on the basis of such instances, taken in isolation as if they constituted specific genre essences. Time and time again it emerged that generic specificity is extremely difficult to pin down in general statements that are anything other than rudimentary and banal, such as: the narrative setting of the western is that of the frontier... The apparent contradiction here is an important one, since it is symptomatic of the very nature of the genres themselves as systemic processes and, also, it is indicative of their function to produce regularized variety. (*Genre* 48)

Neale’s warning emphasizes the process involved in maintaining genres. They are profitable for Hollywood, acting as organizational and marketing tools with which to entertain audiences continually. This usefulness runs into the inevitability that genres require work to maintain in a Hollywood that increasingly throws around huge financial sums. In light of this, a genre such as the combat film is better understood by a survey of the financial environment in Hollywood. In the 1990s, this was a particularly interesting aspect of the film industry.

Chapter Three Political Economy

"I'm not exactly sure what country we're in.... I don't know what day it is. I have no watch, so I don't know what time it is. I'm not even sure of my name. The next thing you know, they'll be making me a general."

--Sergeant Will Knot in A Midnight Clear

The economic environment in which the Hollywood combat film genre found itself during the 1990s was shifting as a result of the changes wrought by the reintegration of the major studios. Without suggesting the complete uniqueness of period, the reintegration of major Hollywood studios and their amalgamation into massive media corporations in the late 1980s and early 1990s ensured the decade was dominated by synergistic business models and saturation marketing. The number of theatres and screens in the United States and Canada greatly increased along with the supposed quality of the viewing experience through their enhanced design and technological capabilities. In major films themselves, digital special effects left their mark on an increasing number of releases. The cost of film production continued to rise, making it more difficult for independent companies to secure distribution relative to the cost of production. Any company without the global reach and ancillary market presence of the majors faced stiff competition since it was the latter that had the capital to fund, and thereby choose, the distribution of films domestically and internationally in a variety of venues. The globalizing shift in the 1990s was characterized by anxieties and questions of corporate size, access to foreign markets, as well as copyright protection issues.

The combat film about World War II was relatively absent during this time. Combat narratives, however, showed up in other places, and in depicted conflicts other than World War II. Yet from 1990 to September 11, 2001, America was without an

international adversary, as before and after this decade, capable of instilling the same kind of fear or anxiety that America's heartland could be punctured by an enemy if not conquered overseas in advance. Since the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and up to the end of the 1980s, America could square off against totalitarian enemies, invoke a united front, and claim the value of freedom around the world—the last of which it was to do again stridently after the 9/11 attacks. Talk of freedom was part of the 1990s, but a clear consensus on an objective to which to apply the concept was not attained. The United Nations involvement in the former Yugoslavia did not have the same kind of nationwide involvement as the Cold War and the so-called War on Terror, and was most visible only at the end of the decade. In contrast, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing created the specter of internal enemies capable of inhuman destruction. The Unabomber, the Branch Davidians and other cults and internal enemies created instead a different kind of climate of fear, one of a nation turning in on itself, finding strange things under the rocks now that it had time and energy to look. Wedded to this developing and troubling awareness was the impending and apocalypse-invoking turn of the millennium—just a number for some, a historical reckoning for others.

The 1990s began with the United States as the lone global superpower, the result of a history of a U.S. foreign policy of isolationism in the early years of the twentieth century shifting to global attempts to stem communism's so-called "domino effect" by the end of the Cold War. Bush Sr.'s intervention in the affairs of Kuwait and Iraq in 1991 garnered him a reputation of military capability with foreign affairs (and gave him the opportunity to claim that the "Vietnam Syndrome" was licked), but his domestic policy

was seen to be underdeveloped, which might be seen in connection to the 1992 riots in Los Angeles as the most visible sign of domestic unrest.

During the years of the nineties overseen by Bill Clinton—the only Democratic president elected for two full terms since Franklin Delano Roosevelt—meanwhile, trade agreements and institutions like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were established and gained power and influence. Global aggression on the part of the United States, therefore, arguably shifted to an economic, free-market aggression, made more palatable by Clinton’s democratic rhetoric. The isolationism had shifted to, if not some fearsome variation of economic imperialism, then at least efforts to organize the economy of the world into one dominated by so-called “free trade” and a neoliberal framework.

During the 1990s, it would seem that films depicting combat situations were not required (recalling Schatz’s and Basinger’s work) by the nation as a problem-solving ritual. Nuclear holocaust was no longer the same imminent presence in the cultural imagination as it had been. Combat elements such as fighting men “all in it together” in major films shifted to alien invasion narratives like *Independence Day* and combat sequences were subsumed under other plot elements as in *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis 1994). Elements of combat and war films were displaced into other narratives, calling into question the ability of the combat genre to claim exclusive propriety over some of its more salient tropes. Yet the studio conglomeration that took place between the late 1980s and the mid 1990s, along with models of so-called “synergy” and newly sophisticated digital special effects seemed to augur that certain characteristics of combat

films would be foregrounded in the future. This chapter will explore the confluence of some of the factors that affected the combat film genre in the nineties, including linkages between the entertainment industry and the military as well as economic and corporate shifts and changes.

The later 1980s under the regime of Ronald Reagan's conservative ethos had profound impact on Hollywood. Anti-trust laws that had been in place for decades were weakened. The Supreme Court anti-trust decision of 1948, otherwise known as the Paramount Decree, had been filed against the industry in 1938 and finally settled ten years later, taking another number of years to be implemented. The Paramount Decree forced the major Hollywood studios to divest their exhibition venues, thereby preventing the assurance of their products reaching the market under the studios' own control. Janet Wasko, a noted scholar on the political economy of Hollywood, quotes Michael Conant's 1960 book on the subject, and says that the majors

had depended on their theatres and those of others to book films in packages, i.e., block booking. But the changes in industry practices and the divorcement of exhibition from production and distribution demanded by the government meant that the sale of individual films was no longer guaranteed. Each film had to be sold "theatre by theatre, picture by picture." Thus film sales and profits were even more unpredictable. (*Movies and Money* 105)

At the same time, due to the shift to the suburbs by large sections of the U.S. population (before all the suburban malls had multiplex movie theatres), and the increase in television ownership from one in ten homes to nine out of ten homes over the ten years from 1949 to 1959, film attendance rates began to decline from their peak in 1946 (Doherty *Cold War* 4). As a result, Hollywood focused on making fewer films with larger budgets—films that Schatz calls "widescreen Technicolor spectacles, precursors to today's blockbusters"—and attempted to reassert the spectacular visuals that films could

provide in contrast to the expensive small home and tavern screen that was the early incarnation of television (Schatz "Introduction" 3). Films like *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille 1956) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean 1962) exemplify this trend towards seventy-millimeter film and epic grand visuals in longer features. To use Julian Stringer's exploration of the term blockbuster, such films

announce themselves as such. Blockbusters constitute the most public kind of popular cinema, and a key part of the genre's attractions has always been its ability to flaunt its assets in a loud voice—in short, to create audience awareness. Public consciousness is achieved through the thrilling assurances held out to the blockbuster's spectator; this movie will excite you, expose you to something never before experienced, it will prick up your ears and make your eyes bulge out in awe. (5)

While such a description is resonant with today's Hollywood and its successes, this did set up a trend that was to backfire on occasion. Expensive epics, rolled out by roadshowing, a method in which exclusivity and buzz is created by having the film released in different cities one at a time, proved not to be profitable with some of the supposed epics, such as a film about the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (Richard Fleischer, Kinji Fukasaku and Toshio Masuda 1970). The downturn of the economic prospects of Hollywood in the years 1968 to 1972 made such investments risky. The era of classic studio Hollywood had by this time ended, the Paramount decrees among other things having taken effect.

In the latter part of the 1960s companies that were not primarily in the visual culture business acquired Hollywood studios, most emblematically represented by the purchase of Paramount by a conglomerate that mostly owned manufacturing companies, Gulf & Western, in 1966 (Wasko *Movies and Money* 185). Unprofitable films could be offset by profit from other unrelated areas of the company's business. Wasko, avowing

that the film business is not as risky a venture as one might be led to believe for those companies that have the capital, says that such claims

ignore or at least downplay the ongoing power and strength of the dominant distribution companies in the industry, as well as these diversified and global organizations. From the 1950s on, the Hollywood majors became part of diversified conglomerates, no longer depending on movies as their only source of income but becoming involved in a wide range of cultural production, from audiovisual products to theme park operations. (“Show Me” 143)

The traditional World War II combat picture lay low in the late sixties and early seventies. Another, dirtier war was being fought, its themes finding themselves in films about Korea, for instance (with *MASH* far outstripping the film adaptation of Joseph Heller’s satirical novel about the bombing campaign in Italy during World War II, *Catch-22*—hardly a conventional genre film—at the box office). The shift in the ratings paradigm brought about by Jack Valenti and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)—from the no longer observed Production Code to General (G), Parental Guidance (PG), Restricted (R), and X—in 1968 and the rise of counter culture aesthetics brought about shifts in depicted violence and film artistry, which, along with the ongoing Vietnam War on the evening news, brought about a shake-up to the major studios and their production of films about combat.

The studios regained some economic certainty as the triumvirate of “New Hollywood” directors Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg George Lucas each scored big at the box office with *The Godfather* (1972) for Paramount, *Jaws* (1975) for Universal and *Star Wars* (1977) for Twentieth Century Fox, respectively. Their work inaugurated a resurgence of the blockbuster and what Justin Wyatt has termed “high concept” filmmaking. By the 1980s, and beginning with media mogul Rupert Murdoch’s purchase of Twentieth Century Fox in 1985, companies involved in the new wave of

consolidation, in contrast to the late 1960s, primarily had their hands in various media worlds. Ben Dickenson, in a book entitled *Hollywood's New Radicalism*, provides a summative perspective on the rush of corporate consolidation: "In the 1980s Hollywood companies completed 190 merger/acquisition deals with overseas partners, worth \$17.22 billion. By the early 1990s Columbia, MCA, Paramount and Time Warner ...were buying up global theatre chains" (47). He apportions blame to the sitting U.S. president (on top of the neoconservative policies of the Reagan-Bush era) and asserts that these corporations "re-read the Supreme Court anti-trust decision of 1948, and Clinton did nothing to stop them exploiting the ruling that a buy-out of theatres had to be of *proven* detriment to competition. Every buy-out from 1983 to 1999 was scrutinized by the Justice Department and every one sanctioned" (italics in original, 47-48). Jon Lewis adds to this evocatively by saying that

Since the 1980s...increasing deregulation and a dramatic reinterpretation of antitrust guidelines, the introduction of junk-bond financing and its use in leveraged mergers and acquisitions, and the growing consolidation of assets and power by large corporations within the deeply incestuous and collusive industry subculture have dramatically altered the way business is conducted in Hollywood. (87)

These media conglomerates ensured that films would be made which more than ever before consistently and consciously anticipated the profits to be made by the same, consolidated, parent company in spin offs like albums, books, video games and assorted merchandise. It was in the interests of these new global media companies to facilitate the movement of its cultural content through varied platforms and means of delivery to the consumer. Easily recognized characters would become the focus of synergy or what came to be called "content streaming," something exemplified by Mickey Mouse, but also comic book characters or Harry Potter currently. Wasko therefore reasonably claims,

“many different kinds of deals are involved in the licensing of rights to characters, stories, and music that flow from the initial film product” (“Show Me” 142).

Wasko is noted for her political economic study of the Walt Disney Company, which she calls “possibly the most synergistic of the Hollywood majors” (*Hollywood in the Information Age* 52). The idea of synergy is one that has particularly taken off in the capacity of new communication technologies to move cultural content into different formats and venues. Wasko avowed in 1994 that for all the talk of new technologies and new methods of media reception, it remains Hollywood films that become the hook, the reason for getting the extra cable channels (or these days the personal digital device). Wasko elsewhere quotes Larry Gerbrandt, chief content officer and senior analyst for Kagan World Media as saying “The movies really provide the economic foundation and much of the leverage that these companies have in terms of being able to do other business” (“Show Me” 144). Far from being marginalized in a world of technological convergence, Hollywood films remain the star at the center of the show.

Cultural production by now has become the neutrally defined “content” in that a snappy and successful Hollywood film can drive the take-up of new information and communication technologies. Aida Hozic characterizes the “large corporate buyouts...[as transforming] Hollywood into a colony of international capital and a premier ‘software’ producer” (64). Hozic cites Sony’s purchase of Columbia Pictures in 1989, representing a trend of a hardware producer’s interest in software which speaks to a wider environment of media convergence with such binaristic terms now sounding like a nostalgia for their clear separation. Hozic curiously suggests, though, that films are now marginalized, saying that “the establishment of merchant links across national borders and across

various media sectors...have brought about a marginalization of cinema itself' (58)—though the undefined object here warrants suspicion: cinema defined materially as a strip of celluloid or as a reigning narrative aesthetic of popular culture? Whatever it had become, the 1990s was one of the more consequential periods for the international movement of cinema.

Concomitant with the increasing economic power of major media corporations in the 1980s and 1990s was an imperative to ensure that profit from their content was protected. In the age of Napster, the MPAA's *raison d'être* increasingly became the financial protection of Hollywood products from being pirated. Fortuitously for them, international trade agreements were stepping up to the plate on this issue and responding to injunctions to protect copyright coming from the culture industries. Copyright, as Toby Miller points out, is big business. He mentions that the Intellectual Property Association "estimates that intellectual property is worth...\$360 billion per year in the U.S., putting it ahead of aerospace, cars and agriculture" ("A View from a Fossil" 59). A theatrically released film, whose opening weekend performance alone gives an indication as to how the film and its spin-offs will perform in other venues, can potentially be seen as one of the central vortexes of profits from copyright (Wasko "Show Me" 139). The entertainment industries are implicated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a driving force behind the demand for broadband. In the age of Youtube and viral advertising, the onus is now on Hollywood to produce popular content that will maintain a level of technological development and pervasiveness amicable to major telecommunications companies. The specific content of popular films theoretically falls outside the parameters of such economic concerns, other than it is

hoped to be regularly facilitated by the talented people the task is entrusted to: producers, filmmakers and screenwriters, et cetera. We might conclude from all of this that the combat films, to be produced at all, had to be mindful of this ever shifting fiscal landscape, while the conglomerates may have been increasingly discerning in their search for the synergistic capabilities of any particular narrative, combat or otherwise.

Hollywood's international preeminence was aided in the discussions at the WTO and the GATT, since culture was being considered as nothing more than a tradable commodity. While to read this as the classic cultural imperialism argument is to put too crude a cast on it, the commoditization of culture internationally could only help major Hollywood film companies. One of the questions was whether films were a product or a service, though in either case film was being subsumed under the purview of institutions whose neoliberal market framework was inevitably not going to benefit all countries equally. Political economist Robert McChesney characterizes the trend thus:

Once the national deregulation of media took place in major nations like the United States and Britain, it was followed by transnational measures like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), all intent on establishing regional and global marketplaces. This has laid the foundation for the creation of the global media system, dominated by...conglomerates. (11)

The New World Information and Communication Order debates in the 1970s at the United Nations between the "free and balanced flow" versus just "free" encapsulates the anxieties of cultural imperialism. The victory of the discourse of the latter by the 1990s especially benefited those producers and distributors of content that had solidified their product over 100 years of government subsidization, the support of major banking institutions, and which had continually been developing its product in response to vast numbers of audiences (the development of genres); Hollywood and the U.S. had had a

head start. Wasko notes the “U.S. film industry developed global marketing techniques as early as the 1920s and maintains its dominant position in international media markets” (“Show Me” 135). Trade agreements that then suggested that cultural products should not be exempt from the rules governing any other commodity on the market would and did solidify the economic might of the Hollywood majors internationally. Hozic suggests that “the size of the American market allows Hollywood producers to sell movies abroad at lower prices, and to achieve economies of scale in distribution” and adds that “few other national industries can afford to make as many prints of the same movie or spend as much as a third of the production costs on the advertising and marketing of films” (63). Not only did the new trade regime benefit companies that could straddle the globe effectively (something Hollywood continuously developed) but it now gave Hollywood a newly enforceable international legal framework in which it could tighten its lock on the international reception of its films.

The talk of globalization in the 1990s made international markets increasingly important, though they always had been. Ted Magder and Jonathan Burston suggest that the power of Hollywood conglomerates was such that they could demand the opening up of the cultural sector of other countries through international trade fora because U.S. culture in the form of these companies essentially needed no such “cultural” protection (indeed, copyright protection was far more important) (“Whose Hollywood?”). The international reach and economic scale of the Hollywood majors had recently been upgraded with their many mergers and acquisitions. Wasko indicates that the majors “have distribution profits, enormous film libraries, and access to capital” and “still dominate, as indicated by the fact that eight companies received 95 percent of the box

office revenues in the United States and Canada in 2000” (“Show Me” 144). Yet the future lay overseas in the 1990s. Viacom CEO Sumner Redstone said that “companies are focusing on those markets promising the best return, which means overseas” (quoted in McChesney 9).

Like the threat of television in the 1950s, cable, home video, and the increasing sophistication of home theatre environments in the 1980s and 1990s had been expected to dampen Hollywood’s economic situation. By the nineties, however, movies “were making an impressive comeback,” indicated by the fact that total admissions increased by around 25 percent over the decade and that the total number of screens in America was 23,689 in 1990 and 37,185 in 1999—an increase of 57 percent (Magder and Burston 209).

The development of exhibition venues, increasing concern with international markets in a shifting trade paradigm, and the focus on the synergistic potential of films clearly point to reinforced investment of the majors and their conglomerate connections in bringing the audience back to the theatre in the 1990s. The majors were far from being opposed to home video technologies by this time and learned to utilize them as a “second window” of opportunity. The video release offered viewers the opportunity to have more control of the film viewing experience since it could be bought, hoarded, treasured, and watched repeatedly. Hollywood majors could still claim monopoly, though, as they did in the 1950s and 1960s in the face of the threat from television, the particularly wonderful experience to be had by the viewer in the film auditorium. Only there could the intended impact of the continually developing film technologies of visual and aural power be properly felt. The video release became a window devalued with the common one-off

criticism, “it’s a renter.” Hollywood films in the 1990s continued to offer the sensory effects of ante-upping big budget spectacles such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron 1991) or *Independence Day*. Stringer notes that “...it is sometimes claimed that Hollywood’s biggest productions of the 1950s and 1960s deservedly won Academy Awards for best picture” while “action blockbusters of the 1980s and 1990s are often believed to have been justifiably relegated to less showcase technical categories” like best sound, original song, art direction, and visual effects (8). Blockbusters of the 1990s are seen to have dropped the epic storytelling of the 1950s for sheer film spectacle, precipitating an attendant loss in cultural status and respectability.

What are some the key films that constitute the decade? Tino Balio conveniently provides a characterization of the 1990s in terms of high-profile blockbuster Hollywood films in an essay entitled “Hollywood Production Trends in the Era of Globalisation, 1990-99.” Giving us a broad overview, he highlights the specific push of fewer, more expensive films:

The majors released close to thirty features a year at the start of the 1990s and about half that on average at the end.... The goal of every studio was to gross \$1 billion worldwide each year to offset overhead expenses and to feed cable, video and satellite platforms, domestic and foreign. To hit this target, studios relied mainly on high-concept blockbusters and star-vehicles for the mainstream theatrical market. (165)

Relying on *Variety*’s list of the top grossing films of the decade, and quoting reviews from *Variety*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*, Balio sees loose amalgamations in these “bellweather” categories of film (sometimes straddled by hybrid films): disaster, science fiction, horror, animation, family, action, comedy, and drama (166). *Titanic* (James Cameron 1997) is noted as a film which, quoting a review, is a “spectacular marriage of technology and passion, special effects and romance” and which

“differed from other high-concept disaster films of the 1990s by appealing to a predominantly female audience of all ages” (166). He states that science fiction films—mostly summertime releases—“like the disaster trend...contained a mixed bag of elements and relied heavily on technical wizardry and special effects” (168).

Especially exemplifying digital effects in film was George Lucas’ *Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), which was remarkable for “taking special effects cinematography to new heights” and which “used almost 2000 effects shots that took up sixty minutes of screen time” (168). We might compare this to Janet Wasko’s singling out of Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* from 1993, in reference to which she says “new heights in special effects were reached” because “the film includes about six and a half minutes of digitized dinosaur footage, which required 18 months of work by 50 people using \$15 million worth of equipment” (31). This appears to be notable growth in digital effects technologies in only six years by two star directors who had earned their reputation in the 1970s by their box-office-record-breaking, spectacle-laden blockbusters. Hozic reminds us of the particular efficacy of digital technology, which

translates all information—visual, textual, or audio—into standardized digital “bits” whose transmission requires less space and time than information translated into analog waves and frequencies. The standardization of “bits” also allows for the collapse of all the various distribution systems in the entertainment industry—cable, broadcast, satellite, Internet, and even theatrical exhibition—into a single one, and blurs the distinction between different media. (71)

This blurring of media connects the digital special effects *in* film, to models of distribution *of* films for major media conglomerates—digitization is now foundational to both the production and the distribution of films. If any two people in Hollywood could realize the implications of this, it is surely to be both Lucas and Spielberg, adept at both special effects use and the business of Hollywood.

Balio also perceives the nineties as a period of boom for animation features, most notably by the Walt Disney Company. He points out that *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff 1994) “was the number-one box-office hit of 1994 and sold more than \$1 billion worth of licensed merchandise, including Disney’s first number-one soundtrack since *Mary Poppins*” (Robert Stevenson 1964) (171). Balio continues: “The animation boom of the 1990s began with *The Little Mermaid* ([Ron Clements and John Musker] 1989), which launched a string of record-breaking hits from Disney that included *Beauty and the Beast* ([Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise] 1991) and *Aladdin* ([Ron Clements and John Musker] 1992)” (171). *Toy Story* (John Lasseter 1995), meanwhile, was a “film that made computer animation a commercial and artistic force” because its “computer-animated characters were admired for having the same facial mobility as hand-drawn characters of cel animation” (171). Interestingly, the first item on the trivia page on the Internet Movie Database for *Toy Story* is the following: “First fully computer-generated full-length feature film. Each frame took 4 to 13 hours (depending on the complexity of the shot) of time on a RenderFarm consisting of 87 2-CPU SparcStation 20’s, 30 4-CPU Sparc-Station 20’s and a SparcServer 1000.” The technological specifications are a clear indicator of the future possibility for entirely-animated, realistic-looking characters but presumably already provokes incredulity at the antiquated machinery among computer animators working today. (One is also obliged to note here the poor box office showing of *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* [Hironobu Sakaguchi and Moto Sakakibara 2001], “The first computer-generated animated motion picture with photo-realistic characters,” which grossed only 23% of its budget domestically [IMDb].) Balio highlights that other studios followed the new resurgence of

animated features and the notes the creation of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2001, first won by *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson 2001).

Of the action film, Balio gives us, quoting the work of *Los Angeles Times* critic John Clark, a snapshot of the decade, noting the shift to (one could say scramble for) new clearly-defined villains:

Whether mixed with fantasy, adventure, comedy or suspense, action films followed the same basic formula. As one film executive described it, “You need antagonists, the bigger the better. Also, most of our films are about one lone underdog triumphing over a system of some kind. And so you need as easily identifiable a system as possible.” The end of the Cold War meant that film-makers turned away from using Soviets as villains and substituted “the world’s seemingly endless supply of rabid nationalists, religious fanatics and all-round trouble makers.” (174)

Meanwhile, elements of war and combat films instead seem to have shifted to other genres in this period. Film critics Kenneth Turan and Roger Ebert note this, Turan writing that Tom Hank’s film *Apollo 13* (Ron Howard 1995) is “a quintessential guy movie, filled with tough talk, cigarette smoke and no end of significant man-to-man looks. What it resembles most is *a war movie without a human enemy*, a kind of ‘combat lite’ where heroism and camaraderie can be displayed without the messiness of blowing anybody away” (my italics, quoted in Balio, 174). Ebert wrote in his review of *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack 1993): “I realized that law firms have replaced Army platoons as Hollywood’s favorite microcosm. The new law thrillers have the same ingredients as those dependable old World War II action films: various ethnic and personality types who fight with each other when they’re not fighting the enemy” (quoted in Balio, 179). In these film spaces shown as still being dominated by men (NASA and law firms), though not requiring their physical or masculine strength to be put to the obvious “test” against a barrage of enemy bullets, we might consider these movies as examples of the fluidity of genre boundaries.

Interestingly, both Ebert and Turan remark on the *lack* of the “dependable old World War II action film” genre in these instances.

Two major box-office champions from the middle of the decade, however, do have notable combat sequences. One has a Vietnam War sequence that forms a centre of gravity for the film but is very much unlike the wave of Vietnam war films in the 1980s in that “the hero” is most emphatically that: a hero, and one of his companions pointedly *resents* being saved by him. This film was also noted for its digital effects. *Forrest Gump* “relied heavily on computerized visual legerdemain for comic effect, in particular from placing Forrest next to US presidents and leading figures in newsreel and television footage” (Balio 179). The second of these films involves the former Gulf War fighter pilot President of the United States leading a rag-tag group of civilian and military pilots against a ruthless extraterrestrial enemy. *Independence Day* can be seen as an earnest combat film with “big antagonists,” as John Clark might say, in which combat nevertheless plays second fiddle to computer know-how. It meanwhile

clearly depicts the elevation of the American people to the status of the new elect, whose first demonstration of legitimacy is the distribution to the armies of the world the means of destroying the alien vessel. In so doing, the United States “illuminates” the world with its saving light like the legend of the City upon a hill, a new Jerusalem which embodies the hope of mankind. The film blurs in this way all the boundaries between theology, politics and strategy, for the purpose of a tale of the testing, regeneration and election of America among the nations of the world. (Valentin 63)

The air force is the salvation force in this depiction, as well as a computer engineer who has developed a nasty computer virus to knock out the alien shield. The antagonists are essentially fascist, locust-like aliens counterpoised against Americans who demonstrate the breakdown of class and racial divisions throughout the film (the President’s wife

hangs out with Ordinary Americans, and a professionally unambitious Jewish computer whiz and black trash-talking Marine fighter pilot save the day).

Similarly, Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997) pits future Earthlings against alien arachnids that only seem to want to dismember human bodies for all eternity. Based on the novel by Robert A. Heinlein, this film suggests that "war will make fascists of us all" according to the director's DVD commentary. It features what a *Sight and Sound* review calls "astonishing special effects and some of the most harrowing battle scenes in movie history." The review adds that the film "may strike many viewers as a chilly, off-putting work, lacking the reassuring moral certitude and myth-informed sentimentality of a Lucas or Spielberg epic" (O'Hehir 255). The reviewer claims that *Starship Troopers* "clearly follows the pattern of numerous war pictures: a group of civilians is moulded into a warrior band and tested in the crucible of combat where some are killed and others are hardened" (256). The *San Francisco Chronicle* review says the film "begins like a comic-strip version of a recruiting film. It almost has the form of a World War II propaganda movie that follows raw recruits through basic training into battle—but with a difference. In '40s war movies, no one ever got his brains sucked out by a big bug..." (LaSalle). There is a Pearl Harbor moment when the arachnids destroy Buenos Aires and the review suggests the plot follows the broad strokes of Pacific theatre of World War II. Yet the good guys do not convey what might be expected for a combat film intended for U.S. audiences: "With his Aryan cast for whom we're meant to root, Verhoeven seems to be commenting on the power of popular dramatic forms to mask noxious ideologies" (O'Hehir 256). The *San Francisco Examiner* review tellingly evinces something of the contextual film moment in suggesting that

Jingoistic politics are not proper or prudent in the pluralistic human society of the 1990s. It's much easier to assuage these baser urges by facing a real nonhuman enemy that just wants to kill you. War is gore. You or them. That message is the real strength of "Starship Troopers," although many may find it morally flawed. No matter, this is powerful entertainment that appeals to our most basic instincts. (Powell)

Aliens and combat scenarios provide a showcase both for film techniques and unabashed jingoism; the *Examiner* review of *Starship Troopers* observes the central place of special effects,

which were the most massive yet in this \$100 million monument to blockbusters, 1990s-style. "Troopers" contains an awesome 550 visual-effects shots. The recently released "Jurassic Park" sequel, "The Lost World," had 170 such shots. Models, miniatures, pyrotechnics and computer-generated imagery combined with the otherworldly scenery of Hell's Half Acre in Wyoming make what's going on seem very real... (Powell)

Aliens as inherently evil beings were tossed around with glee in Hollywood, and one need only mention the hilarious *Mars Attacks!* (Tim Burton 1996) in passing—perhaps indicating how far Hollywood had come from the halcyon days of the late 1970s and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg 1977) when aliens were directly associated with angels, and before *Alien* (Ridley Scott 1979) and its sequels solidified the deadly serious predator version of the extra terrestrial.

Known for his adept abilities with both special effects and films about (friendly) aliens, one of the biggest and most well-known Hollywood players of the 1990s was Steven Spielberg. As an indication perhaps of the respect Spielberg had garnered by that time, Balio tells us that though "serious dramas dealing with social problems, politics or humanistic concerns were few and far between... the most prestigious of the group was *Schindler's List* (1993)" (180). He says that this film was a "departure from the Spielberg canon" and also a departure "from standard studio practice—the film was shot in black

and white to give it a documentary look, contained no major stars and lasted three hours and fifteen minutes” (180). And yet the financial and critical success of this film was such that some might assert it to be the definitive popular statement by Hollywood on the Holocaust.

Yet *Schindler's List* seems to be something of an exemption from the dominant trends of the 1990s, which Balio sums up thusly:

The globalisation of Hollywood kept production tightly focused on the two main segments of the theatrical market, the “teen and pre-teen bubble” and the “boomers with kids”. Satisfying these segments meant that studios devoted their resources to high-concept projects that could easily be pitched in national marketing campaigns and released simultaneously in thousands of mall theatres.... Familiar formulae in familiar production trends aided by increasingly sophisticated computer-generated imagery and attuned to changing pop-culture trends kept audiences entertained. (181)

Balio also underlines the reliance in the 1990s on external source material. We can recognize the trend of studios’ pushing of films that are based on popular old television shows, best-selling novels, high-profile comic books, as well as the production of sequels of successful films as signs of the overarching aim of financial success, not the lofty goal of a quality American cinema as an art form—a charge Spielberg among many others is prey to, since his films are more often than not based on external and very popular source material. Balio seems to hand the laurels of the decade in popular film to him:

Hollywood’s answer to Bill Gates, Spielberg had “the unprecedented distinction” of being associated with a string of \$100 million-plus blockbusters year after year either as director and/or (sometimes uncredited) executive producer. Spielberg’s 1990s hits, which include *Jurassic Park*, *Schindler's List*, *The Flintstones*, *Twister*, *Men in Black*, *Antz*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *American Beauty*, are a microcosm of the 1990s production trends. Spielberg’s commercial success can be attributed in part to a combination of a childlike sense of wonder and an ability to expertly manipulate the medium’s most evocative techniques. (182)

That “childlike sense of wonder” was sometimes brought to bear upon serious historical events. Steven Spielberg had tackled weighty historical themes as subject matter before the 1990s, notably in films like *Empire of the Sun*, based on J.G. Ballard’s novel, and *The Color Purple*, based on the novel by Alice Walker. But it was with his 1993 film *Schindler’s List* that Spielberg garnered for himself a rank and reputation as an eminently respectable American filmmaker, accepted into the ranks of “mature” film artists. The film earned the status of a cultural touchstone for discussions of the Holocaust, with some arguing that the film profited from the exploitation of history; notably, Spielberg did not take any salary, saying that it would be “blood money” (IMDb). Spielberg now had a Hollywood halo of a director who had two different films win the biggest worldwide box office gross in history and the Oscar for Best Picture (*Jurassic Park* and *Schindler’s List*, respectively) in the same year, 1993. At the American Film Institute Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony in Spielberg’s honour, Dan Aykroyd, referred ebulliently to Spielberg in the hallowed light of Thomas Edison as the world’s first “artist-industrialist.” It seems as though Spielberg is the superlative example of the marriage of cultural storytelling and the business of making money. His powerful talents tackling the combat film could only capitalize on his now unassailable reputation. In that way he was not really taking a major risk with *Saving Private Ryan*, though it may have appeared so from the state of the combat film genre in the nineties.

There were few combat films released by the majors in the 1990s, and even fewer films about World War II until Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* was released on July 24, 1998—this despite the fact that the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was December 7th, 1991 and of the end of the war in August of 1995.

War films in the 1980s had dealt indirectly with the miasma of Vietnam, with films like *Firefox* (Clint Eastwood 1982) and *Top Gun* (Tony Scott 1986) focusing on state-of-the-art military planes, not military helicopters and ground infantry, which are the tropes of the Vietnam War film. *Starship Troopers* depicted a militarized, co-ed citizenry fighting giant space bugs a few centuries in the future in an tongue-in-cheek World War II “go get ‘em” format, which comes across as a sly and cynical mockery of a film like *Independence Day*. The first Gulf War was depicted on film in the nineties, but after the fact, in *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick 1996). This was a film about the awarding of the Medal of Honor posthumously to a female soldier played by Meg Ryan. The film is centred on various reconstructions of two key events during the conflict: both the investigator Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Serling’s (Denzel Washington) own friendly fire incident and Captain Walden’s (Ryan) helicopter crash in hostile territory. In this, battle is depicted as a traumatic past, repressed, indeterminate and smothered in conflicting emotions. The plot turns on whether Ryan’s character, Captain Walden, was brave enough to merit the award—something of a unique look at gender in the combat film, but rather predictably hinging on the question of the reconciliation of being a good mother and a good soldier. Yet the question of bravery seems to be for the nation: how courageous was America in the brief and suddenly resolved conflict in 1991 dominated by images of sophisticated military technology?

In any case, all combat films face a question of realism. In general, combat films utilize both hardware and military technology and face the task of representing military behaviours on the ground, as *Courage Under Fire* ably demonstrates. For combat films

that have been made for the past two decades, two people are especially important to the efforts to depict military and combat realism: Philip Strub and Dale Dye.

In order to make a combat film that is at all convincing, filmmakers are required to use the materials of war, which may or may not include tanks, planes, rifles, bombs, and uniforms. Credible military language, behaviour, and conduct are also requisite. This has precipitated a historical relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon since World War II and before. Film journalist David Robb provides a diagrammatic overview of the specific instances of this negotiation between filmmakers and representatives of the armed forces over the years on specific films. In his book *Operation Hollywood*, he maintains that since the military holds out its resources in the hopes of getting the armed services to be depicted in a positive light, its interference in filmmaking amounts to censorship. Citing numerous examples in which negative portrayals of the military are marked as “deal breakers” or “show stoppers” for Phillip Strub, the liaison officer in charge of greenlighting Pentagon support since 1989, it is obvious that the military sees popular Hollywood cinema primarily as a recruitment opportunity. In the meantime, filmmakers benefiting from the negotiations can save money, attain greater accuracy of military conduct and procedures, and offer more realism—all of which can enhance a film’s quality and potentially its profit. Robb emphasizes: “Strub has clout. Top filmmakers regularly trek to his office at the Pentagon, pleading for assistance. If he likes a script, he can recommend that the Pentagon give the producers access to billions of dollars worth of military equipment—nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, tanks, and jet bombers—to help them make their movie” (41). The relationship is reciprocal since “the Pentagon has what Hollywood wants—access to billions of dollars worth of sophisticated

military hardware to put into movies; and Hollywood has what the Pentagon wants—access to the eyeballs of millions of viewers and potential recruits” (26).

Strub says that for the Pentagon to lend assistance, “the military depictions must be historically accurate or feasible, of information value to the public, and of benefit to recruiting and retention” (quoted in Robb, 78). Arguably overstating the power of film to shape behaviour and thought, Robb points with alarm to the fact that the Pentagon “religiously tracks the box office reports of all the movies it assists” and “exposure” is how it “sees its relationship to the moviegoing public. ‘Expose’ them to enough military propaganda and they’ll be more inclined to join up and support future increases in the Pentagon’s budget” (88). Robb indicates that these negotiations take place on a level unbeknownst to most people and adds, “most Americans have no idea who Phil Strub is. Very few would give this bureaucrat the authority to tailor the films and programs that they watch” (21). He avows the fundamental place that popular films have since the Vietnam War in relation to general impressions of the U.S. military in his insistence that “Funding and recruitment depend on favorable public impressions—impression often shaped in subtle, indirect exposures to films. The military’s decline after the Vietnam War galvanized its commitment to stay active and vigilant in presenting (or procuring) positive images of its work” (14). And invoking images of a military-entertainment-complex, Robb relates the following:

The military...moved to eliminate the funding of Strub’s office. He was saved by lobbying from the movie industry, particularly Motion Picture Association of America chief Jack Valenti, who insisted that he continue his work.... For people like Valenti, the issue is not censorship or propaganda, it is the bottom line.... The major studios tend to produce the type of portrayals of the military that Strub prefers: uncritical and intensely patriotic. (21)

Robb adds: “dozens of top Hollywood film executives also wrote letters on Strub’s behalf. And in the end, the DOD decided to keep him on” (42). To this situation filmmaker Oliver Stone claims, “they want a certain kind of movie made... They don’t want to deal with the downside of war. They assist movies that don’t tell the truth about combat, and they don’t assist movies that seek to tell the truth about combat. Most films about the military are recruiting posters” (quoted in Robb, 25).

The list of films assisted and not assisted is mostly unsurprising. A case in point is *Mars Attacks!* in which alien weaponry decimate the American military forces. Robb says that after reading the script, “Strub decided that he wanted no part of a film that portrayed the military as less effective at combating alien invaders than Slim Whitman” (119). *Courage Under Fire* was denied military assistance because only Serling (Washington) and Walden (Ryan) are depicted as good soldiers (120). In light of this fraught relationship over military hardware and assistance, and the question of the authenticity of combat behaviour, another key figure has stepped in to assist: Captain Dale Dye.

Retired United State Marine Corps Captain Dale Dye is a combat film fixture of the last twenty years. If one has seen some of the more high profile combat films in that time, he will be recognizable. He has made appearances of generally increasing military rank in *Platoon* as a captain, *Casualties of War* as a captain, *Born on the Fourth of July* as a colonel, *Starship Troopers* as a general, *Saving Private Ryan* as a colonel, *Rules of Engagement* (William Friedkin 2000) as a general, *Band Of Brothers* as a colonel, and *The Great Raid* (John Dahl 2005) as a general. More importantly, Dye has acted as a military or technical advisor on thirty-nine films since 1986. He is the “founder and

principal of Warriors, Inc., which provides technical advisory services to the entertainment industry worldwide. Services included performer training, research, planning, staging and on-set advisory for directors and other key production personnel” (IMDb). (His official website is <http://www.warriorsinc.com/>.) Dye offers to his effeminate colleagues in Hollywood who deign to don the uniform what it means to be a man in combat. One of the extra features on the DVD of *Band of Brothers* is a video diary shot by actor Ron Livingston (who played paratrooper Captain Lewis Nixon) throughout their training with Dye. At the end of the training, in somber ceremonial fashion, the actors “get their wings” after doing a *simulated* parachute drop from a platform inside a hangar—presumably the actors’ insurance could only be stretched so far.

Dye is an interesting link between life in the military and life in the military on film. He highlights the make-believe of film while grounding his work in reverence for the troops. In an biographic article in *The New York Times* touching on the then recently released film *Casualties of War*, Dale indicates that film combat is a picnic:

Hell, it’s so much fun, we’d almost do it for nothing... We get to go back and do it our way, do it right: we get to win. It is the ultimate little-boy thing. All the dreams and schemes and fancies that we were never in a position to pull off when it was for real, we get to do on movie sets. Any weapon you want, no problem, help yourself. People would say, “You’re one sick puppy.” But those are our toys, and the movies give us the opportunity to play with them. (quoted in Norman)

Dye is more somber when he states that

No matter what the war, I believe that warriors are noble human beings, among the most self-sacrificing and benevolent people on earth... Now, it’s unfortunate they are necessary and it’s terrible what they have to endure. So I don’t celebrate war, but what I try to do is get in there on a set and force into the equation the nobility of the warrior so there is the essence of him doing what he thinks is true and good. And that nobility is not locked up with the politics of the thing, but with

a certain spirit of sacrifice, which is the epitome of the warrior's path. It's the business of not confusing the warriors with a bad war. (quoted in Norman)

The storytelling capacities of displaying the experiences of a relatively small number of people and implicating them as being representative of thousands or millions of others who have experienced combat puts a lot of pressure of Dye, something of a mandate he has taken upon himself.

It was not the realism of the combat so much as the realism of the actors playing soldiers that concerned Dye and prompted him to his work. In the late 1980s, war movies “made him bristle; everything about them was wrong—the costumes, the equipment, action. What unsettled him most was the way the actors were playing military people” since soldiers were not typically “the hapless drunks, crazed addicts and blood-thirsty executioners who often marched across America's movie screens” (Norman). And yet, importantly, Dye “had a sense of the theatrical; what was a uniform, if not a costume, a parade if not a performance” (Norman). Dye got the attention of Oliver Stone who was preparing for the production of *Platoon* and organized a “boot camp” for the actors: “He made them tired and dirty and thirsty. It was boot camp and infantry training and guerilla warfare school rolled into 14 torrid days—and they loved it” (Norman). Tom Berenger attested to the value for the actors, saying that

It was like being part of a team, the male camaraderie thing. I think Dale gave us a sense of everything except death and the absolute fear aspect of it all.... we learned the boredom, the tiredness, the lack of sleep, the lack of food. We were all pretty cranky and strung out when we were finished with the training cycle. But we were so tight as a group... (Norman)

The article underlines the contrast of the impression of typical Hollywood actors before and after their time with Dye, noting that “Warriors Inc. has become well known for its method of ‘performer training,’ its way of turning Southern California's pampered golden

boys into what on screen passes for first-class fighting men” (Norman). It is the humility in face of the imagined experience of actual soldiers that the actors are meant to communicate to the audiences, suggested by Michael J. Fox in reference to his time with Dye in preparation for his role in *Casualties of War*: “But we were making a movie; nobody was getting killed or shot at. Even at our small level of discomfort, with a minimum risk of injury, it was not fun. So it gave us a real respect for those poor kids who went to fight and what they risked, what was lost. It really hit home” (quoted in Norman). This concern for verisimilitude in acting as soldiers according to the work of Dale Dye has coloured more than a few high profile combat films in the past twenty or so years.

The influence of both Strub and Dye since the late 1980s casts an interesting dynamic: for the former it is the ability to have some say in how the U.S. armed services are portrayed and which can be particularly acute for filmmakers who are desperate to keep their budgets down; for the latter it is the ability to lend authority to what constitutes believable and realistic military behaviour for soldiers. Crudely speaking, Strub tries to ensure that Hollywood films about the military are effective for recruitment, while Dye tries to ensure that the fighting men are not depicted as flunkies and slackers without honour or morality. This is simplifying the work that both of them have done, but it is not overstating things to say that these two men have had a pronounced effect on U.S. combat films for the past two decades.

These two figures represent something of a reconciliation to the terms between Hollywood and the Pentagon that had found a low ebb around the Vietnam War. Writing on the legacies of the relationship of these two institutions following World War II,

Thomas Doherty says that Hollywood began to nurse a “blithe ignorance” about the military after the Vietnam War. He argues:

Where the classical Hollywood directors had served in the armed forces and knew the nuances of military etiquette and the behavior of men in groups, the movie brats who rose to eminence in the 1970s simply hadn't a clue as to how men in uniform behaved. Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese knew mobsters, Steven Spielberg and Joe Dante knew the whitebread suburbs, but almost no one in Hollywood knew what the interior of the barracks or the base Officers Club was like. Insignia and ribbons were misplaced or worn upside down, hair length and uniforms regularly nonregulation, and gestures and personal interactions ludicrously misinformed. (290)

However (and it must be remembered that the first director Dye worked with was Stone):

The one authentic voice and unimpeachable witness was writer-director Oliver Stone. The appearance of Stone, Vietnam combat veteran and Hollywood auteur, was greeted with a rapture bordering on desperation.... Wellman, Zanuck, Ford, Huston, and Wyler, the classical Hollywood artists who had earlier weathered the crucible of combat, embodied a direct connection between war film and war reality. *Platoon* became a cultural landmark not because it presented “Vietnam as it really was” but because it repaired a broken link between cinematic art and combat experience. (290-291)

Doherty asserts that it was television that had provided access to the Vietnam War, attaching its own associations of non-narrative, live-ness, and uncomfortably intimate private home viewing: “Against the coherence and forward order of the newsreels and combat reports, Vietnam video was a blizzard of white noise and snow, pointless statistics and random action” (291). The grand war epics of Cimino and Coppola, says Doherty, re-inscribed the media hierarchy when it came to representations of war. Vietnam may have been a living room war but it is marked with historical profundity through film.

John Wayne, that preeminent fixture of both the combat picture and the Western, ventured the only film about the Vietnam during the actual hostilities: a heroic movie with which the military fully cooperated called *The Green Berets*, and which was widely

reviled. When the Vietnam War *was* addressed after the war, films were obliged to face with the reality that

From 1964 to 1972, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world made a maximum military effort, with everything short of atomic bombs, to defeat a nationalist revolutionary movement in a tiny, peasant country—and failed. When the United States fought in Vietnam, it was organized modern technology versus organized human beings, and the human beings won (Zinn, 469).

Wayne's heroics, with all the support the Pentagon could offer, were never going to be able to change that. What films could ever be capable of such cultural work?

Attempts to overturn the outcome of the Vietnam War were made, however. John Storey contends that the films on Vietnam in the 1980s permitted the possibility of the 1991 Gulf War to be characterized as a military effort that cured the "Vietnam Syndrome." He maintains that they "helped to create a memory of the war, and a desire to win the war retrospectively, that enabled Bush to say, with some credibility and conviction, that the Gulf War would not be another Vietnam" (101). The Vietnam Syndrome, according to Storey, began in the 1970's and was a term used to describe the psychological problems experienced by American Vietnam veterans. This also became known as "Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome" (114n6). Storey quotes General Westmoreland, who was the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam during the war, and who prefers the term "psychosis," indicating that its impact on politics "can be a real liability to us as we look to the future" (114n6). Noam Chomsky is then quoted by Storey to give a counterpoint: "See, they make it sound like some kind of disease, a malady that has to be overcome. And the 'malady' in this case is that the population is still unwilling to tolerate aggression and violence. And that's a change that took place as a result of the popular struggle against the war in Vietnam" (quoted in Storey, 114n). Thinking about

the combat film genre, following Schatz, as a social ritual that temporarily solves recurring social problems by being sublimated into a resolvable plot, we might conclude that the Vietnam films of the 1980s perhaps dealt sufficiently with the legacy of America's troubled time in Southeast Asia for the general population. The war, on film, could be fashioned into a narrative that, while difficult, worked to heal wounds between citizens and the veterans of Vietnam. Certainly that is what Dye said of *Platoon*, that the film brought about a thaw in the tensions between Vietnam veterans and everyone else, "...between America's Vietnam Veterans, their families—who knew nothing about the experience—and even those who were against the war in America" (*Operation Hollywood*).

Storey contends that "Hollywood's Vietnam" remade the war as a just and noble cause, thwarted by feminized, spineless, negotiating politicians, weak leadership in the field and civilian betrayal at home (108). Here the battle of collective memory and official history is fought and "memories are forgotten, revised, reorganized, updated, as they undergo rehearsal, interpretation and retelling. Moreover, the more important the event remembered, the more it is vulnerable to reconstruction, as it will be more frequently rehearsed, interpreted and retold" (103). Their work was cut out for them. In these films, American atrocities "tend to be presented (when presented at all) as isolated moments of understandable madness or as individual acts of sadism, and never the inevitable result of the logic of America's prosecution of the war" (107). John Storey points out the things left out of Vietnam War films, which include 503,926 members of the U.S. armed forces having "engaged in what the US Defense Department described as 'incidents of desertion'" between 1966 and 1973, and that by 1970 there were 209

verified “fraggings”—the killing of officers by their own men (105). Michael Klein says “the death toll from fragging by soldiers disaffected with the war may be as high as 5 per cent of the total loss of life in combat sustained by the US armed forces during the war” (quoted in Storey, 105). The Vietnam War films focused on the trauma suffered by the soldiers, and sometimes ventured an alternative ending to the war through the commando might, guerilla tactics, and ingenuity of John Rambo or Colonel Braddock.

Yet the 1980s, for all their post-traumatic focus on the decade before, was also the era of a revitalized relationship between the Pentagon and Hollywood. *Top Gun* was the biggest box office success of 1986 in the United States, and was released just eight months before *Platoon*. Robb asserts that this film was “no doubt the biggest boost ever for navy recruiting”: the navy set up recruiting booths at theatres to catch the adrenaline and found that “recruitment of young men wanting to become naval aviators went up 500 percent after the film was released” (182). Philip Strub meanwhile says that

Top Gun was a milestone picture because it signified the rehabilitation of the military as acceptable subject matter in a positive context. It showed to me, and to great many other people, that you could make a film that portrayed the military in a positive way and make money, and not become a pariah in Hollywood. I’m not saying it was the first picture to do that, but I’m saying it was the most important picture that symbolized that change in public opinion. (*Operation Hollywood*)

Top Gun, recalling Basinger’s separation of the services and the types of narratives that more typically employ, expounds on the professionalism of fighter pilot training and tough decision-making. And in direct contrast to the second wave of Vietnam films focusing on ground forces which surrounded it, the combat in *Top Gun* takes place with astronomically expensive, ultra-advanced military technology, and depicts the relative bloodless consequences of combat, along with a romance with an attractive female naval instructor (pointedly a contractor from a private corporation since naval instructors

apparently do not sleep with trainees, according to the Pentagon's complaints before filming).

The image of the U.S. military as a force utilizing the latest in sophisticated technology and weaponry is one way in which the Pentagon attempted to convey a sense that Vietnam was behind them. By 1995, the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) marked the initiation of a concerted effort to modernize the armed forces. In 1996 the U.S. National Research Council convened a conference in California that brought together the Department of Defense, Hollywood studios and Silicon Valley. One of the offshoots of this conference was the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), whose mandate was "to enlist the resources and talents of the entertainment and game development industries and to work collaboratively with computer scientists to advance the state of immersive training simulation" (quoted in Burston, 166). Henry Jenkins writes that the U.S. National Research Council, "acting as an adviser to the U.S. Defense Department... [recognized] that the consumer electronic entertainment sector was outpacing defense research in developing simulation and artificial intelligence techniques" and "sought ways to collaborate with industry to develop games that could help them to recruit and train a next generation fighting force" (74). One of the related offshoots was the video game *America's Army*, which Jenkins notes has "the ambitious vision of developing itself as a general popular culture brand for all kinds of media, hoping to extend outward to include comic books, television series, youth organizations, perhaps even feature films" (76). Jenkins also notes that the game facilitated a forum for free expression of ideas about the military, and says that the game "may be more effective at providing a space for civilians and service folk to discuss the serious

experience of real-life than as a vehicle for propaganda” (79). Yet Burston quotes James

Der Derian and claims

the recent maturation of digital technologies of virtual representation constitute nothing less than “the passage from material to immaterial forms of war.” On the battlefield, the enemy soldier has become nothing more than an avatar in a video game, “an electrically signified ‘target of opportunity’”—one that we may eradicate with greater psychic ease than we can his carbon-based ancestor.... New wars...“are fought in the same manner as they are represented, by military simulations and public dissimulations, by real-time surveillance and TV live-feeds.” (quoted in Burston, 167)

Hozic, meanwhile, writes that a

focus on economic power, competitiveness, and export performance made conversion of military technologies to civilian use a top priority for the US economists and, eventually, for the US government. Thanks to the considerable overlap between the entertainment industry and information technology, Hollywood almost naturally started replacing the military industrial complex as the engine of growth in the “infotainment” sector. That, and Hollywood’s excellent export performance, significantly improved the status of the industry in Washington, well beyond the usual glitz and glamour presumed to be the only link between politics and entertainment. (70)

While this opens up a trove of imaginative associations of American cinema and military might and their particular imbrications in the 1990s, we might claim for the combat film genre that these sentiments and anxieties over military intervention in Hollywood are indicative of fears more than any incontrovertible doom of Hollywood as nothing more than a war machine.

The subject of World War II, a key olive branch in the relationship of Hollywood and the Pentagon, was generally absent in combat narratives between Basinger’s fourth wave of combat films (epic recreations) and *Saving Private Ryan*, separated as they are by the counter cultural influence on Hollywood during its financially dark days of 1968 to 1972, Vietnam, Watergate, Vietnam’s eternal filmic return, and the change in circumstances with the end of the Cold War. Hollywood and the Pentagon enjoyed the

best times in each other's company during the production of a film that recreated the D-Day landings in Normandy during World War II, while the historical moment was a period of stand-off with the Soviet Union in a completely different kind of war. This "high point" was the 1962 film *The Longest Day*, directed by Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki, and Darryl F. Zanuck. It is a major epic film with a host of major Hollywood stars in small parts. The Good War is depicted during a major turning point for the Allies, and the military was presumably only too keen to help out with logistics, information and material. Basinger notes that this was part of a wave of war films that replaced the reality of the war film entirely with a location-based Hollywood reproduction, essentially replacing the traces of the real war with a replica (188). The then almost 20-year old heroic military moment is in this film concretized into a filmic memorial without reliance on actual footage and with the full support of the military. Albert Auster notes that World War II "has become for Americans that mythic, edenic moment when the entire nation bent itself to victory over evil and barbarism" and "the indispensable symbol of American Patriotic virtue and triumph. It can be brought forward to exalt American arms and the American spirit whenever contemporary events require it" (Auster 212). By the late 1990s, films had long claimed a particularly high-minded mandate to show war with Coppola's and Cimino's films about Vietnam, and World War II was brought back with a bang. This time, World War II was to fit into the unique political economy end of the century.

This survey of Hollywood films in the 1990s shows that combat narrative elements found themselves in odd places, from fighting aliens to signifying past traumas to operating as a back-story for the U.S. national fable that is *Forrest Gump*. Dale Dye

and Phillip Strub championed realistic portrayal of troops and positive depictions of the U.S. military, respectively, with each of them making their mark in this period. One movement in the 1990s was an increase in the use of computer technology, notably in the increased visibility and development of the animated feature, and also the ability to render complete animals and people ever more realistically by decade's end. Film budgets increased while the merged media conglomerates which now owned the Hollywood majors focused on international markets and arguably sought more branded and popular source material. Trade agreements reduced cultural protection so that those same companies could lean on international agreements to help solidify their global economic power. The United States military became more conscious of its image and found the Gulf War redeeming after the debacle of Vietnam. The military also focused on technological sophistication of its weaponry and made connections with Hollywood companies to help with their efforts of enhanced digital simulation, prompting charges of a "military-entertainment-complex." The World War II combat film barely functioned in this time, unable to claim a compelling reason to exist in light of the films that dominated the period.

The genre was given new life in a way that represented the trends it found itself surrounded by. Ben Dickenson asserts that the "best example of Disney-style strategy at DreamWorks is... not to be found in animation. Instead it is perhaps the cross-pollination of *Band of Brothers*...and *Saving Private Ryan*... Geffen produced the soundtrack, of course, and this, together with countless, videos, DVDs and other merchandise created a Second World War DreamWorks brand that became...synonymous with that historic event" (50). And he says that the violent landing sequence on Omaha beach on D-Day

near the start of the *Saving Private Ryan* “benefited from an exchange of technology, research and manpower between DreamWorks and the Department of Defense” (50). He goes on to paint a picture of the alignment of the forces of visual culture and military arms:

The Technology Reinvestment Project and Advanced Technology Program, initiated by Clinton in the mid 1990s, set out “to stimulate the creation of an integrated civilian-military industrial base.” Spielberg and Katzenberg led the way in this exchange by visiting military leaders, sharing their digital-imaging technology used to create special effects, bringing military technocrats and researchers onto their sets and into their development labs, etc.... These kinds of military-cinema partnerships won research grants for corporations including DreamWorks, Sony, Lucasfilm and AOL Time Warner. The military were paid back with advances in flight simulators (which can also be found at fairgrounds), submarine sound detection (also used to enhance music recording technique), Ozone data monitoring systems (also used in digital imaging) and missile targeting technology (also used in computer games software). (50-51)

Dickenson adds that this collaboration “rewarded Spielberg with a Distinguished Public Services Award from the Department of Defense ... something usually reserved for military personnel who do good works (51). This might be an example of what could be referred to as the military-entertainment complex, and its economic power provokes alarm:

...the easy dismissal of the entertainment industry is equally improbable in the realm of political economy, where entertainment revenues, not the great scientific enterprises of the former military industrial complex, are now driving twenty-first century high-tech innovation... and where conglomeration and other less formal instances of trans-sector cooperation work continually to consolidate the strength and durability of the military entertainment establishment. (Burston 173)

The interconnections mentioned in passing here warrant further exploration elsewhere as an emblematic situation that ended the decade of the 1990s, yet for that reason, the combat films about World War II that came before *Ryan* are worth looking at since they did not claim anywhere near the kind of attention that Spielberg’s work did.

Chapter Four *Spectacle*

*“Keep the sand out of your weapons, keep those actions clear.
I’ll see you on the beach.”*
--Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan*

A *Trivial Pursuit: 90s Edition* question asks about a film for which a telephone hotline was offered for veterans having flashbacks to World War II because of its realistic depiction of combat. This hotline, and its status as an official trivia question, highlights the apparent veracity of *Saving Private Ryan*, so much so that the men who faced the trauma in the first instance are “brought back” to the beach by Spielberg’s film. As the preeminent authorities of such experiences, veterans are frequently invoked *en masse* as a stamp of approval on a film’s ability to convey a sense of being in combat. The communication of the story of the hotline is symptomatic of the desire on the part of film audiences to attain some simulated approximation of the combat experience, proffered this time by the particular combat experience that is the narrative and sensory ordeal of *Ryan*—a film that above all attempts to be the superlative celluloid memorial to the American men who fought and died in the Second World War. The D-Day landing sequence near the beginning of the film is especially noted in this regard of putting the audience “there.” But what are the implications of this? Was this something that the combat film had been somehow unable to achieve until then, or is it a matter of degree, to which Spielberg is seen to have come the closest? Instead of a schematizing a hierarchy of penultimate achievement of combat reality within such films, we might instead ask *where were they* since the lapse of the last wave of Vietnam films in the late 1980s?

The realism of battle in *Ryan*, achieved in part with digital special effects, was foregrounded by the narrative and purported to suggest that this film, finally, was going

to show the viewer what combat was “really like”—a perennial claim of the combat film since its inception while it has continually negotiated the constraints of the Hollywood Production Code and later ratings systems, social mores, and film technologies. Spectator immersion in battle is only a part of this film, but one that is entirely pivotal with regard to the film’s reception. A new incarnation of combat spectacle is one of the tools Spielberg picks up here, which he folds into a traditional combat film narrative, its natural home. Its deployment in *Ryan* is nowhere more pronounced than in the landing sequence: visually intense, violent, aesthetic and overwhelming, the audience is brought powerfully into the space of these mortally threatened men. Spectacular imagery is a unique type of mediation with associations that run from musicals to action blockbusters. How are we to parse its specific meaning in this combat film, as well as others in the eight years leading up to *Ryan*? The images of spectacular bodily violence in *Ryan* sets up the viewer such that one is inclined not to question the bravery of these men or the fact of their violent fate—or to put it another way, to question the necessity of the violence depicted or to see its larger ramifications. And yet the spectacle of violence in this sequence very soon becomes conventionally narrativized by character identification and clear plot development as the men make their way up the beach past the defensive bunkers of the German army. The audience is only meant to squirm for a specific and limited duration. Narrative and spectacle strike a powerful balance here; indeed one could easily say that the film is a narrative of spectacles, an impressive visual rendering whose thin plot structure serves more as an excuse for the combat set-pieces.

Spectacular action sequences have long been part of military combat films, but in the 1990s they were less visible as combat films were not demonstrably large in

number—particularly World War II combat films. Perhaps this was because, as film scholar Thomas Doherty suggests, that by the early 1990s, “conventional Hollywood wisdom considered the 1941-45 background ‘box-office poison’ because multiplex mall crawlers and the crucial 18-to-24-year-old demographic find Frank Capra’s *Great Struggle* as remote and irrelevant as the Peloponnesian Wars” (297). In any case, the particular kinds of discussions of spectacular realism and authenticity of *Ryan*, and of some of the films released concurrently and in its wake (which constituted something of a filmic World War II surge), are *not* at play in discussions around two theatrically-released and two Home Box Office films whose subject is American men in combat between 1941 and 1945: *Memphis Belle*, *A Midnight Clear*, *The Tuskegee Airmen*, and *When Trumpets Fade*. These four World War II combat films in the 1990s before *Ryan* created no comparable stir, and none of them reached the same heights of spectacular realism in combat as a tool to bring the viewer to a moral position *vis á vis* the film. At best, their reduced resources limited the extent to which they could offer the viewer anything approximating battle immersion. Two of them, *Memphis Belle* and the *Tuskegee Airmen*, employed stock World War II footage—the only improvement on combat films that used the same technique in the 1950s was that the footage was colourized. *When Trumpets Fade* introduces the viewer to the period via newsreel footage of generals and parades while *A Midnight Clear* uses no extraneous footage at all.

By making spectacle more of a principle operational device, war films at the end of the 1990s like *Saving Private Ryan* and others that it may have influenced, like *Enemy at the Gates* and *Pearl Harbor*, sought to be bankable by distancing themselves from the moral debates and less manifestly spectacular imagery of the last wave of Vietnam films

in the 1980s. That wave of combat films had had a different agenda: they had worked to solve the legacy of the Vietnam War on film, and were arguably successful. The Allied triumph in the Gulf War of 1991 helped. As Doherty argues, “If the stated geopolitical purpose of the Gulf War was to frustrate a little Hitler and free a captive nation, the cultural impulse was to erase the last war and replay the good war. For forty-three days the backfire from the thousand-day war was zapped off the screen” (293). In contrast, the late 1990s and early 2000s World War II films generally inclined towards visual grandeur and moral simplicity while utilizing a type of realism that above all aimed to bring the viewer closer to the physical and emotional situation of these soldiers. But it is more than that. Spielberg set a particular tone: filmic viscera as a time travel device to a supposedly simpler era in America, when men followed orders given by a conscientious Everyman without question. In this regard, spectacular imagery played a key function.

This chapter examines the relatively negative correlation of spectacle in World War II combat films in the 1990s up to *Saving Private Ryan*, this period of relatively low production in the genre. It begins with a discussion of the term spectacle and Guy Debord’s famous use of it and follows with discussions of what kinds of spectacles we see in a combat film, alongside of a discussion of the four films mentioned above via film critics’ reviews. Somewhat counterintuitive though it seems, talk of spectacular imagery in Hollywood films does *not* generally attach to *Ryan* in film criticism from a cursory glance at the reviews. As one reviewer emphasized: “This is the biggest movie of the summer, but it is in no sense a blockbuster. Blockbusters come and go and are forgotten as soon as the next one shows up. ‘Saving Private Ryan’ will stick with us” (Graham). This paucity of comment seems to convey a common sense, or at least popular press,

understanding of the word as something more negative and to be applied to films whose cultural work is less important for national viewers memorializing the wartime past. The tensions endemic to combat films include their relationship to history, to the military today, and to the work of honouring those whose job was to fight and possibly die in the name of the nation. Spectacle wades into these concerns both as tool of access to combat and also as a barrier between the audience and a solemn idealized capacity for memorializing the dead.

The word spectacle as a descriptor is rampant. In film, it conjures up Busby Berkeley films of coordinated, costumed people marking the music with visual abstractions seen from a camera positioned high above. It calls up the big budget Hollywood action film, and with it the notion of large amounts of money spent to make a violent and visual feast for the spectator. And in critical cultural theory “spectacle” inevitably refers to Guy Debord’s famous 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle* and the Situationist International in Paris, France. The Situationists’ antecedents included the Dada art movement after World War I and an anarchist group called the Lettrists. By 1957 the latter group precipitated the birth of the Situationists, who were “trying to work out a new *revolutionary* critique of society” (italics original, Gray 11). Christopher Gray, writing in 1974, illuminates some of the key developments in the group, as when they became influenced by Paul Cardan and *Socialism ou Barbarie*, “a neo-Marxist group devoted largely to redefining the nature of capitalist exploitation during its present bureaucratic and consumer-oriented phase” (11). This influence

left them with the need for developing a new revolutionary critique of political economy: of the commodity form denounced by Marx as the basis of all our social and individual alienation. They developed what was to become their most famous concept—that of the *spectacle*.... a one-way transmission of experience, a

form of “communication” to which one side, the audience, can never reply; a culture based on the reduction of almost everyone to a state of abject non-creativity: of receptivity, passivity and isolation. Now they saw the same structure applied not only to culture and leisure “activity”, not only to political organization (whether that of the ruling classes or that of the so-called “Left”) but that this experience of passivity, isolation and abstraction was the universal experience imposed by contemporary capitalism: an experience radiating from its basic alienation, the commodity. Henceforward, consumer capitalism was to be simply the society of the spectacle. (11-12)

Obviously indebted to other theories of alienation and the villainous characteristics of mass culture like those of the Frankfurt School, the Situationists’ presumed that their position allowed them to arrest the deleterious effects of the spectacle through intellectual labour. The Situationists declaimed a manifesto in the form of Debord’s book (and later film of the same name). Gray suggests that the downfall of the group was a narrow intellectual purview:

There was no concern whatsoever with either the emotions or the body. The SI thought that you just had to show how the nightmare worked and everyone would wake up. Their quest was for the perfect formula, the magic charm that would disperse the evil spell. This pursuit of the perfect intellectual formula meant inevitably that situationist groups were based on a hierarchy of intellectual ability... (23)

Not unlike the “magic bullet” theory of the social science-based communication studies, which sought to show a link between media and specific effects, the Situationists’ particular cast of instrumental fatalism is their most pronounced characteristic.

Regardless of the theory of the spectacle’s political failings, the work of Debord et al cannot help but cast a shadow over any use of the word spectacle. The supposed pervasiveness of *the* spectacle, in the singular, belies a monolithic conspiratorial outlook born of its Marxist origins and 1960s radicalism.

Yet if the spectacle is all around, and we are a society of it, how or what can the term sufficiently describe? Availing ourselves of the definition in Merriam-Webster’s

Dictionary, we find spectacle is: “1 a: something exhibited to view as unusual, notable, or entertaining; *especially*: an eye-catching or dramatic public display b: an object of curiosity or contempt <made a *spectacle* of herself>”. Interestingly, film itself fits into this definition in both of its meanings. Films meant for public consumption on a wide scale cannot be advertised as anything *but* “unusual, notable, or entertaining,” though typically in more hyperbolic ways. At the same time, some popular films garner contempt for flaunting their spectacle in a way that is basely solicitous of viewers’ attention and money without redeeming features such as “plot.” This exhibitionism goes back to the early days of cinema, in which the astonishment of the spectators was focused not on the unfolding plot but on spectacle, and this is in fact a constitutive feature of cinema. Spectacular combat scenes in films are directly linked to the idea of viewers gaining visual access to events they could not otherwise witness.

Tom Gunning’s phrase, “cinema of attractions,” aptly describes this heritage. He characterizes the original context of early cinema before 1906 in which narrative was not a determining feature (56). Early cinema was avowedly exhibitionist—actors mugging for the camera, undermining a fictional diegesis—or what we might call, recalling the dictionary definition, making a spectacle of itself (57). Gunning here notes the relation of film at this time to the large amusement parks that were then emerging and argues that “the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself” (58). In this way, film provided the access for a group of public spectators to something that existed in the world far from everyday life. The film camera’s point of view became a time and space traveler by which the spectator

was meant to be enraptured. The element of media as transporting is far from being exhausted and plays a part in combat narratives and spectacles of battles. Gunning emphasizes this aspect of cinema, asserting “I believe that it was precisely the exhibitionist quality of turn-of-the century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde—its freedom from the creation of a diegesis, its accent on direct simulation” (59). Simulation as a unique power of film has woven itself through the century or so of narratives; simulation of combat can be a particular aspect of this.

The combat film ostensibly provides access for its audience to an idea of what combat is all about, or the *notion* of some kind of access to it, its situation through representation. This may involve spectacle, but with the introduction of narrative and the later constraints of genre expectations, such films as D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915) would eventually strike a considered balance between narrative and spectacle. A hierarchizing of cultural value was brought to bear in the early twentieth century, since it was non-narrative cinema that figured in the sights of reformers in the 1910s (60). Gunning argues that cinema was “narrativized” from 1907 to 1913, culminating in feature films (60). Trying to distance itself from the vaudeville halls and an unruly public audience, cinema clearly took legitimate theatre as its model, producing “famous players in famous plays” (60). The class divisions at play here involve the place of early cinema in major American cities newly crowded with immigrants with a lack of a complete grasp of English. While such explorations are ultimately beyond the scope of this thesis, the cultural value of narrative from “legitimate theatre” over and above the low cultural associations of spectacle and transporting simulation establish a pre-history to how combat realism would be used in stories about war on film.

“Low” spectacle has never really gone away. Gunning notes Laura Mulvey’s assertion that “the dialectic between spectacle and narrative has fueled much of the classic cinema” (61). He also emphasizes that “the Hollywood advertising policy of enumerating the features of a film, each emblazoned with the command, ‘See!’ shows this primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation” and asserts “clearly in some sense recent spectacle cinema has reaffirmed its roots in stimulus and carnival rides, in what might be called the Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects” (61). Fitting, then, that some of the most conspicuous work of these three directors Gunning mentions as a hyphenated triumvirate are films about war, albeit in different forms: *Saving Private Ryan*, *Star Wars*, and *Apocalypse Now*. While it would not be fair or accurate to suggest that these directors’ abilities with spectacle cinema make them particularly adept to the filmic representation of war and combat, it may be fair to say warfare in their hands collects associations of the spectacular. The three directors represent combat and fighting differently, but there is an excessiveness of the idea of visualization, a fetishization of the look of the film, of spectator access to remarkable sights in battle: Omaha Beach in its visual and sonic immediacy, aerial combat in space with unrealistic sound explosions, and the aesthetic of the foreign jungle wracked by explosions and gunfire as an all-too-visible (and neocolonial) metaphor for the darkness of men’s souls.

Yet the combat film could not have survived on combat alone. It in itself does not necessarily provoke emotion. For that we need to be able to identify with, or have sympathy or empathy for, people. And emotion, which Debord et al did not consider carefully in regard to the spectacle, is a fundamental currency of Hollywood cinema. War

films have been called “male melodrama” (Palmer). In the emotions of men with men facing the mortality of combat, the intimacy of their relationships in such circumstances is a perennial part of the classic World War II combat film. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, writing on melodrama, wrote that discussions of early film melodrama’s origins tend to “crystallize around two distinct lines of descent, the dramatic narrative of theatrical performance and the visual spectacle derived from the elaboration of cinematic elements” (3). Flitterman-Lewis notes that these are often “solidified into opposing categories” with the second focused on “the heightened symbolization and visual display resulting from the amplification of visual (and auditory/musical) figures and motifs” (3). However, she stresses that the imbrication of these two categories is “at the base of melodrama’s specificity” (3). Utilizing her comments in relation to combat films helps us to negotiate some of the tensions between combat spectacle and narrative flow in films like *Saving Private Ryan*. She specifies the way in which these two things instantiate in the melodrama:

As with all dichotomies, it is the very interconnection of only apparently contrasting elements that defines the form and in fact makes the perceived entities inseparable. In one way, then, film melodrama can be seen to achieve its effects from the perpetual dialectic of a performance of its cinematic tropes and the atavistic traces of its historical roots as a form. (3)

She discusses the centrality of women in melodramas, saying that it is “the female character’s suffering that provides the central articulating crisis of the films” and that “The body of the woman becomes the stage across which the melodramatic spectacle is played out” (5). Noting a moment in D.W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms or The Yellow Man and the Girl* (1919), Flitterman-Lewis says, which also relates to the shorthand achieved by the combat film genre: “Rich with a complex of meanings, the gesture bears

the burden of symbolizing what can only be alluded to by indirection” (12). And if we think of the reliance of the visual staging of battle scenes in combat films, we could easily transpose her comments when she suggests “the narrative elaboration, whether through specific actions or suggestive effects, merely provides the background, alibi, or pretext for the intensification of vision provided by these shots” (12). Finally, complicating the easy division between spectacle and narrative, she says that “At its roots, cinematic melodrama is a complex interaction of plot complications and visual display, of discursive structure and poetic form.... the different textual processes of narrative action and visual spectacle are often indistinguishable” (13). In combat films, it is clearly the body of a man that becomes “the stage across which the melodramatic spectacle is played out,” though the gender differences complicate this transposition, most obviously in the sorts of violence that occur.

The spectacle implies a static spectator. Conventionally, spectacle can be anything that packs a visual wallop, from a show of fireworks to a view of Rome. It produces a pause in the viewer, a momentary stillness to “take in the spectacle.” This implies, then, that the viewer of spectacle is passive while observing the scene with their eyes, and is making sense of something that is visually overwhelming. It may only be momentary, but it is this passivity that Debord understood as a fundamental value of spectacle for capitalism—consumption as mere contemplation. He suggested that where “modern conditions of production prevail” life was nothing more than an “immense accumulation of *spectacles*” (italics original, 12). He observed that the sense of sight has replaced the “special place once occupied by touch” because “the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day

society's generalized abstraction" (17). Films could be considered as instances of society's generalized abstraction, particularly combat films in which the relations of the troops play out various philosophies of warfare. Yet that overarching dismissal is unproductive in attempting to discern some of the particular interaction of elements in specific films.

Debord's intransigence and profound pessimism is well known. *Society of the Spectacle* is an eminently quotable, vitriolic, scathing, and obliquely referential guide for those who seek to overturn the world of images machinated by capitalism. Its instrumental use for the analysis of specific instances of popular culture broaches something of a radical, reverential covenant despite that Debord's connection to the term spectacle is undeniable. He was right to point out some of the political implications of spectacle, but the instances of spectacle in film indicate a complex trove of motives and forces, particularly when looking at the combat film—a genre which contrasts strongly with the musical, which Richard Dyer ties to spectacle.

Just how different are musicals and combat films? Naturally the more salient differences scream out: mortal danger versus romantic conflict; triumphant, melancholic or dramatic orchestrations versus buoyant or melodramatic or sad music and songs; mostly drab military uniforms versus a variety of costumes. However, the narrative of both genres is momentarily suspended during the spectacles of a musical number or a battle sequence. And while there are clearly imbrications of narrative and spectacle in these moments, such as when the song advances the action or the battle establishes goals to be achieved, there is still some suspension of the narrative. The audience is offered abundance. For Dyer, this entails "lavish sets; tactile, non-functional, wasteful clothing"

and the “enjoyment of sensuous material reality” in the musical (180)—to be conspicuously enjoyed in and of itself as an image. In a combat sequence, perhaps to belabour the comparison, this abundance is usually one of possible deaths, plot conflict made manifest as bullets and bombs. This abundance is essentially images of the materiality of death, and its material effects represented for the audience to see and ideally to be accosted by.

Of course, combat films do not all have the same kind of combat sequences. Some are more visceral than others, more balletic, more violent, more awe-inducing. In the 1990s, the four World War II combat films mentioned above which were released before *Saving Private Ryan* did not produce awe at combat spectacle. The audience was once removed, obliged instead to identify with the men on screen, to imagine the battle immersion endured by them, and to be coaxed along with certain shots but not “immersed” in the combat itself. The two theatrically released films centred on combat in World War II between *Born on the Fourth of July* (representing the ebbing of the 1980s combat films dominated by Vietnam) and *Saving Private Ryan*, *A Midnight Clear* and *Memphis Belle*, were not big budget spectacles by the standards of the early 1990s. *Memphis Belle* grossed just over \$27 million in the U.S., while *A Midnight Clear* made just \$1.5 million.

Chronologically, the first of all four World War II combat films in this time (including the two HBO films), *Memphis Belle*, is based on the forty-five minute William Wyler documentary from 1944 called *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress*. It is a drama of young men that takes place aboard a B-17 bomber during the war, and as such does not profess to offer the effect of “being there” beyond “being with these men” and

using their depicted fear as an access to the combat reality. It takes the fictionalized crew through its 25th and last bombing mission over Germany. Army Public Relations man Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Derringer (John Lithgow) is keen to have them sell war bonds back in the United States afterwards. The drama hinges on whether they will be able to complete this deadly assignment—dreaded Bremen in Germany—unscathed. The film opens with the men playing football in the field as their characters are introduced via another character’s smarmy narration. It is an idyllic scene; boys having a good sporting time on a spring day. The iconic shot of Eric Stolz’ character cheering while an Allied bomber barrels in overhead brings us into the narrative. We watch the men on the ground waiting for all the planes to return. As the last one comes in to land the men begin to turn away, until someone notices that one of its two main landing wheels is not down. The men turn back to watch with mounting dread as the plane skids to a stop and a few moments later explodes in a huge fireball. The reaction of the men is momentarily extreme. And then they shuffle off. The event reminds the viewer of the continued peril the men face: despite landing at home base, your plane might blow up. This moment also holds out the danger that the *Memphis Belle* crew will face the exact same fate. This type of foreshadowed demise for the crew is somewhat curious since landing gear malfunctions do not intuitively rank with enemy flak and fighter planes that the men will face on their mission. It serves to underline not the threat of the enemy’s means of combat fighting, but rather the antiquated and potentially unreliable old metal birds these guys had to use to do their job. It thus marks the distance in time for 1990s viewers: not only is the question asked, “could you do this?” but also, “could you do it in such obviously rudimentary machinery?”

The completion of their mission, and the end of their duty in Europe, inevitably comes at the price of physical injuries, and yet the crew survives. Yet could it ever have been in doubt? Having the bulk of the film's drama hinge on the crew's return as the only possible happy ending seems to ensure that it happens—it is something of a conventional genre narrative, after all. The war, more than forty years old at the time of filming, is dramatized as the deadly thing these young American men are doing *over there*, in this idyllic English countryside where they play football and go to dances like it is summer camp when they are not doing their job. The drama does not rest on whether or not they will survive, but how they will conduct themselves. Captain Dearborn (Matthew Modine) is wooden and earnest, but rouses the troops for a second attempt at the deadly bomb run. The fearful Lieutenant Lowenthal (D.B. Sweeney), sure that this will be the end of him, saves everyone from apparently certain death by manually lowering one of the prophetic wheels in the nick of time as they land back in England. Dynamics between the men are played out on the plane with rudimentary characterization, mostly pointing to their youth in the face of such danger. The war beyond this crew is reduced to a one-minute montage of grainy old stock footage and the voices of the letters of grieving relatives as Derringer reads them, given to him by an admonishing Colonel Craig Harriman, who is resentful of Derringer's opportunism. *Memphis Belle* moves labouriously and slowly. The men are grounded after they have prepared and taken their positions in the B-17 bomber. Forty-two minutes into this 107-minute film, the lumbering planes finally get off the ground, to the accompaniment of dramatic and somber martial orchestral music.

Adding to the sense of temporal distance between the 1990s and the 1940s are aspects of the *mise en scène* and the music. The song “Danny Boy,” performed by Harry

Connick, Jr.'s character early in the film at the dance becomes the theme, an orchestral version of which takes us into the final credits in which a dedication is offered "to all the brave young men, whatever their nationality, who flew and fought in history's greatest airborne confrontation." And despite being set in May, *Memphis Belle* conveys a sense of wearying physical coldness. Obviously the coldness is more evident when they are on the plane flying at altitudes at which they would quickly die if they removed their oxygen masks (as they often do). Even while the men are playing football in the beginning and when they are at the dance in the hangar, the feel of the film is one of clunky oldness—actors inhabiting period costumes and playing at "innocence" of that earlier time as in a mediocre stage play. The uniforms may look smart and clean (too much so perhaps), but the buildings look drafty and miserable, casting a chill over the whole film. The browns and greens of costumes, material and scenery create a particularly bland environment. The film is thus adept at putting that time *back there*, preventing it from feeling contemporaneous.

The producer of *Belle*, David Puttnam, had produced *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson 1981), a film about two British sprinters who won medals in the 1924 Olympic games. *Chariots* had made ten times its budget and was described by film critic Roger Ebert as "one of the best films of recent years." Hence, the *Washington Post* film critic referred to *Memphis Belle* as an unsuccessful attempt at "'Chariots' with wings: American World War II pilots in bomber jackets instead of British athletes in running togs" (Howe). The other *Post* critic, also disparagingly, opens his review saying that the film "is what 'Top Gun' might have looked like if it were drawn with crayons" (Hinson). He goes on to wonder about the timeliness of the story:

...why this particular moment was chosen to tell this story is hard to fathom.... The characters look as if they were lifted out of a Norman Rockwell lineup. This is a Brit's-eye view of American youth, and rampant with clichés. You'd think from *Memphis Belle* that all this country produced was earthy farm boys and wisecracking street toughs....

The reviewer notes that the cultural context at that time was not supportive to such a filmic throwback, adding intimations of his ennui at the supposed action:

The fight scenes are about what you'd expect; they're competently shot, but even when they deliver thrills, every scene, every passage, is familiar. We've seen it all before. This may actually have been the filmmakers' intention. They wanted, it seems, to deliver a picture that conjures our memories of Hollywood's Golden Age. But when films like the ones *Memphis Belle* attempts to reproduce first came out, they served a patriotic purpose that this one cannot lay claim to. *Memphis Belle* can't boost our morale in the way those earlier films did. And without any real context, all the movie can do is give us a warm glow. Or in this case, a lukewarm one.

The review highlights the apparent anachronism involved in making a “feel-good” picture about World War II in 1990, and clearly suggests that this is not the time. Roger Ebert, meanwhile, says in his review that he was “(a) mentally ticking off the clichés, but (b) physically on the edge of my seat. It was a classic case of divided loyalties: the intelligence maintaining its distance while the emotions became engaged.” Ebert differentiates the film from “a high-tech pinball machine like *Top Gun*” and conveys a yearning for human drama in the face of military technological sophistication when he writes: “These days wars can be fought by pushing a button. It is somehow more fair when the combatants have to risk their lives to push the buttons.”

Producer Puttnam intended to convey exactly this sentiment, saying that *Top Gun* had angered him:

I felt that it trivialized courage and turned war into an arcade game. Wyler's [1944] documentary showed what people actually went through. It wasn't plastic courage; it wasn't guys zipping through the air with whoops of glee. It was real courage, the kind you needed if you were an ordinary person in an extremely

slow-moving and vulnerable aircraft knowing that it wasn't *whether* the flak would hit you but where it would hit. (quoted in Suid, 622)

Puttnam is arguably complaining about spectacle here. He wanted to create drama with *Memphis Belle* by showing more honest bravery in contrast to *Top Gun*. The antiquated weaponry depicted in the former film, while removing an aspect of nineties audiences' ability to be immersed in the combat since the historical distance is emphasized, avows a lack of combat spectacularity in getting across a "real" experience. In their attempts to acquire the assistance of the United States military, producers Puttnam and Catherine Wyler wrote that the film will "vividly portray the courage, heroism and interdependence of these young men and give contemporary audiences a 'you-are-there' awareness of what it was like to be in the front ranks of the air war during this awesome moment in history" (quoted in Suid, 622). Understandably, the producers wanted to bring audiences "there," to the cramped cold space on the bomber and into the middle of dangerous combat.

Despite the aims of the filmmakers, Suid points to the seeming absence of the real war in *Memphis Belle* and indicates that this hurt the film (implicitly suggesting that their "recreation" of the war was nothing of the kind):

Wyler and Puttnam may well have recognized that they could not match the dramatic impact of the real war in the air during World War II as captured in William Wyler's 1944 documentary. As a result, they decided to create a fictional drama that showed fliers playing at war rather than performing as professional warriors against an implacable foe whom they could defeat only through devotion to their fellow crew members and their fellow comrades... (625)

Suid's apparent agenda, the "realistic" depiction of military combat and behaviour according to his own standards, and castigating those films that do disservice to the military is in evidence here, but the absence of the "real war" that Suid mentions is worth

noting. His comments point up the lack of drama produced by the German enemy in the film and imply that its drama is somehow devalued because contrived. Suid's position of staunch watchdog for military realism betrays befuddlement at the exigency of this heroic story of *Our Boys* at this historical moment in the 1990s.

This combat film of World War II, which calls upon issues of professionalism as per Basinger's description of films about the Air Force, cannot escape the charges of being cumbersome and cliché-ridden in this period: it is too sentimental and nostalgic, not attempting to do something new, but to re-do something old. The film does not announce itself as using spectacular effects but instead uses the body of the plane rather less effectively than *Das Boot* (Wolfgang Peterson 1981) used the cramped interior of a German U-Boat in World War II. Yet *Memphis Belle* makes a spectacle of the boys who fought in its dedication to all of them from every nation—a dedication which prompted film critic Stanley Kauffman to say, "I'm willing to wait another century or two for the objectivity to salute the Luftwaffe" (quoted in Doherty, 296). The collapsing of all national boundaries even more clearly communicates a disparity of the time represented and the time of filming; by the latter, it ultimately does not matter whose side the boys were fighting on when it comes to the dedication. This reduction of all the fighting boys to one group also reduces the complexities of history to a sense of "what a tough war it was, for all of them"; it essentially makes a spectacle of history, contains it as something we have escaped safely.

When represented in film, history has always been subject to revisions for dramatic purposes. And Jonathan Crary argues that as much as any single feature,

Debord sees the core of the spectacle as the annihilation of historical knowledge—in particular the destruction of the recent past. History, he writes,

had always been the measure by which novelty was assessed, but whoever is in the business of selling novelty has an interest in destroying the means by which it could be judged. Thus there is a ceaseless appearance of the important, and almost immediately its annihilation and replacement... (106)

Memphis Belle, while not the destruction of recent history, nevertheless limps onto screens as a lame history grasping for sensationalism that momentarily forgets its constitution in the Allied and victorious countries. The spectacle, in Debord's way of thinking, amasses its own representational catalogue of history so that it can control what it deems to be novel. If we ascribe such premeditation to Caton-Jones' film, we are undoubtedly overstating the effects of fictionalizing on historical knowledge. Still, though, the film war is detachable from the real war almost fifty years prior: its veracity in this film is not finally the point when it comes to box office take for the presumed audience of 18 to 24 year-olds, because its emotional veracity is what counts. In this way, Suid's indignant characterization of *Memphis Belle* as a "film [that] did as much disservice to the plane's crew as the original movie had paid homage to its bravery and accomplishments" smacks of a stance similar to Debord's concern for the spectacle's consumption of historical knowledge. Instead of attacking history *per se* as spectacle for profit, Suid simply believes the *right* history should be told in war films, saying of the film that

most viewers would think they were seeing a true story when, in fact, it bore little resemblance to what the fliers experienced in the air war over occupied Europe, with two exceptions... *The Memphis Belle* used young actors of the same relative age as the actual fliers. And the film used actual combat footage, which did create an authentic ambience of the war in the air. (625)

The literally one minute of spliced-together real combat footage in the middle of the film is a mark of the authentic for Suid, while Debord might suggest that taken together, the combat footage and the film around it amount to a recapitulation of warfare in imagery;

neither kind of film is to be more celebrated than the other as any kind of referent to reality due in part to their excessive manipulation in a fiction film. Yet the frequent comparisons to *Top Gun* bespeak that *Memphis Belle* was intended (and received) as an antidote to what the former seems to represent: high-tech military machinery with elite men making warfare look like a game. The latter film's awkwardness was intended as its humanity, its response to the unbelievable *Top Gun* flyboys like "Maverick" and "Iceman."

In contrast to *Memphis Belle*'s heroic narrative and mark of "the real" with its brief use of combat footage is *A Midnight Clear*'s altogether different kind of narrative released two years later. Based on a novel by William Wharton, it is about a small Intelligence squad of U.S. soldiers in Northwestern Europe in December 1944. It is the only film in the eight-year period in question that follows in the tradition of Basinger's group of G.I. ground forces who must interact effectively to achieve their goal in a Last Stand or a Lost Patrol. They are asked by their irritating superior officer Major Griffin (cast to type in actor John C. McGinley, the sycophantic Sgt. Red O'Neill from *Platoon*) to occupy a mansion in the forest and report any enemy movement. The ranking officer, Sergeant Will Knot (nicknamed, indicatively enough, "Won't Knot"), played by Ethan Hawke, fails to attach his newly acquired rank insignia to his uniform and defers militarily to lower-ranking Avakian (Kevin Dillon, "Bunny" in *Platoon*)—a clear contravention of military protocol—while being concerned about the mental health of the soldier nick-named "Mother" (Gary Sinise). As they encounter members of the German army, it is clear no one wants to fight and the Germans would rather surrender after some Christmas carols and a faked firefight before the Battle of the Bulge begins in earnest.

The viewer is clearly meant to have empathy for the poor young (and elderly) German soldiers who only want to lay down their arms to the Americans in a way that maintains some semblance of dignity. This is the only combat film about U.S. ground troops in Europe between 1941 and 1945 released theatrically over the fiftieth anniversary of the entire U.S. military involvement in the conflict. It depicts a narrative in which the U.S. soldiers are unprofessional, undisciplined, and mean to save the lives of their enemy—“good Germans” who distance themselves from the Nazis. The roots of the film are not about visual representation since it is based on a novel, which is one reason spectacular combat scenes are absent here.

As for film criticism of *A Midnight Clear*, it leans towards the positive. Ebert says in his review that the opening shots of the film have “a clarity and force that linger, casting a spell over the entire movie” noting the “primeval forest” and that “everything is dark or blinding white.” He argues that director Keith Gordon is “uncanny in the way he suggests the eerie forest mysteries that permeate all of the action.” Meanwhile, Hal Hinson’s review in *The Washington Post* suggests that this film is a “war film completely unlike any other, a compelling accomplishment that’s more soul than blood and bullets.” Deeson Howe, also writing for the *Post*, opens his review by saying that “with the cabbish sentiments of a boy’s comic strip, and enough requiem music for three state funerals, ‘A Midnight Clear’ tells a wartime yarn that’s quietly, often lyrically, winning.” Howe adds that “one refreshing aspect of this GI movie...is its lack of psychological trauma,” unlike films about Vietnam. Howe concludes that the film clearly gives the “sense that these are just kids—stuck in the middle of a grown-up situation they should never have found themselves in.” Especially telling, Howe says that the film “in a good

sense...feels like a sentimental baseball movie. This is 'Field of Dreams' gone to war, its players headed for different dugouts." And similar to Ebert's comments on *Memphis Belle*, he says that there are "war-movie clichés everywhere, but Gordon reprises the genre with such disarming innocence, those clichés feel pleasurable." Also similar to *Memphis Belle*, *A Midnight Clear* focuses on the youth of the fighting men, their innocence, and their improvisational means of getting through harrowing situations. And yet the situations are not harrowing because of the abundance of visually represented death, but rather it is that death stalks the characters. Violent death lurks around the men of both of these films, an atmospheric presence rather than stark, brutal, uncompromising, visceral reality.

Despite its apparently similar use of war film clichés and the sense that these are kids in a situation above their heads, *A Midnight Clear* garnered more accolades than *Memphis Belle*. The more "serene, nearly ecclesiastical" (Hinson) tone of the former film, though, makes it a different kind of combat film. In this case, "combat film" does not adequately describe *A Midnight Clear*, despite the fact that the characters are essentially on the front lines for almost the entire duration of the movie. The combat is mostly non-combative: the Americans at one point find themselves in the sights of three German soldiers who then suddenly disappear; a snowball is thrown back from an enemy foxhole. The staged battle at the end that is to allow the Germans to be taken prisoner with less shame turns ugly when Mother, who has not been privy to the plans and shows up unannounced, interrupts the proceedings by shooting one of the German soldiers, prompting confusion and escalating lack of control of the situation on all sides. This climatic event is cast as the folly of war, as the soldier nick-named Father (a priest), who

was most open to the Germans' solicitations, is also killed. The actual firefight is quick and confusing, highlighting the boys' inexperience in dealing with something that can turn so violent so quickly and not the military procedural guidelines for such a strange situation. It does not linger on the aesthetics of the situation of being there as much as it shows a lack of control on the part of a U.S. military *Intelligence* squad. At no moment in the entire film is there any obvious portrayal of the scope of the war beyond this time and place, other than a brief scene at the base camp where we see other men, other companies in the background, furthering the sense of isolation of the characters.

A Midnight Clear, with all its parable-like literary inclinations, feels something like an anti-spectacle film. It is essentially an anti-war film taking on one of the most sacred myths of America's history. While it may feel contemporary in part due to the actors themselves (mostly high-profile young B-list actors) and the mood, it nevertheless begs the question of whether a film like this could be made just fifteen years later in 2007. Following the resuscitation of The Good War narrative, *A Midnight Clear*, though hardly a deconstruction of that narrative, reads as an anachronistic moment in the film context of the nineties. Spectacular immersion is absent. Early in the film, Ethan Hawke as Will Knot conversationally narrates us into the story, and begins by mentioning that their commanding officer worked in a funeral home before the war. He continues:

It's thanks to Griffin and his military mortuary skills that I've made my recent headlong leap to three stripes. We lost half our squad, attempting one of his map-inspired, ill-conceived recon patrols. When I say "lost," I mean "killed." Nobody in the army ever admits that someone on our side is killed. They're either "lost," like Christopher Robin, "hit," as in a batter hit by a pitched ball, or they get "it" like in hide-and-go-seek. Or maybe they "get it," as with an ambiguous joke.

Not only does this narration introduce a sense of inept military leadership, it also directly connects that observation to the effects of everyday occurrences of banal military deaths

and injuries. At one point during this narration, we see the apparent effects of some kind of explosion: a still, low-angle shot of some dirt and a boot raining down in slow motion, no humans or fire in sight. Here is the ecclesiastical tone: somber because of what it represents, pretty because of how it is filmed—a film moment as an obvious indexical relation to some crew members throwing some dirt and clothing on the ground, and hardly spectacular.

This film is more difficult than *Memphis Belle* to frame in relation to the “real history” because its relation to other combat films (the genre it is nominally attached to) is one of understated revisionism. The film does not appear to be trying to “go one better” in its depiction of combat but to imagine a different kind of story that happens to be set during war. This aspect of the film is where its supposed “freshness” comes from, not in its ability to put the spectator “there” in the middle of represented combat. *A Midnight Clear* does not especially contend with the genre in its pursuit of combat realism, and therefore it does not raise commentators’ anxieties of what it might be changing in its representation of historical events. It might also be the case that the film was too far below the radar for anyone to care a whit about this question, which in itself is telling of the general stance to a World War II “combat” film at this time—that is, no time for it. The film does take us to some of the confusion and trauma of combat, allowing the audience to access an idea that warfare is not always explicit in its intentions for young men. The film does not wish to, nor can it accomplish, a massive memorializing effect on the scale of a *Saving Private Ryan* or a *Pearl Harbor*. It is content to dramatize an instance of intelligence, and willingness to forego combat, being trumped by circumstances which inevitably deal in death. Instead of making a glorious spectacle of

history and the boys who fought as *Memphis Belle* does, *A Midnight Clear* marks itself, announces itself, as essentially anti-spectacle. It emphasizes the insanity of war without relying on horrific carnage. The deaths resulting from the sudden shift in circumstances at the end of the film are not spectacular but tragic.

More apparently related to the 1990s historical moment since it can be situated in a “black film wave,” is the Home Box Office film that aired in August 1995, *The Tuskegee Airmen* starring Laurence Fishburne and Cuba Gooding, Jr. *Variety* sums the plot up in its typical pronoun-deficient prose thus:

Robert W. Williams, WWII pilot in the legendary U.S. Army Air Force Fighting 99th, first African-American combat squadron out of Tuskegee Air Force base, and scripter T.S. Cook have combined fact and fiction to create a sentimental, even traditional, service teleplay in which Laurence Fishburne quietly, commandingly limns an Air Force cadet. With characters based on a combo of real-life people, worthy telefilm brought in for a budgeted \$ 8.5 million salutes the courage and determination of young black men demanding to fly during World War II.... The script’s familiar, since air combat isn’t a new genre by a long shot, but the additional mission of the men proving themselves gives telepic its extra dimension. (Scott)

This film was made during a black film wave that began in the mid-1980s in Hollywood, most obviously represented by films like *Boyz N the Hood* (John Singleton 1992) and *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee 1992) (Guererro). The film had been in the works for ten years (though original Tuskegee Airman Bob Williams had been trying to get it produced for forty-five years), but finally got off the ground when HBO decided to get behind it (Weinraub). HBO president Robert Cooper said that he was drawn to the project because it was turned down everywhere else and that it was HBO’s job to “stand out from the rest” (Williams). The producers had asked for some assistance from the United States military, which was given after some changes were made to the script: the army did not like the first draft of the film’s screenplay because “There was too much racism in it, too

much ‘black-white hatred’” (Robb 106). Originally, the racist character that fights any advancement by the Tuskegee airmen was a general, but was changed to a stern southern senator played by John Lithgow, who provides the scientific study that “proves” that black men are simply not as capable as their white counterparts. The director Robert Markowitz, in an interview with Robb in December 2002, suggested that because of the military’s involvement, the racist historical reality had to be reduced in the film version of events. He says that the “film would have been darker and closer to what really happened” if the military was not involved in the production of the film (quoted in Robb, 108).

The only character in the film based on a real person is Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, played by Andre Braugher with suitable severity. When brought before the very same racist senator who wants to shut the whole Tuskegee “experiment” down, Davis delivers a compelling speech:

We’ve been in combat for months, with no replacements, sir. My men are tired. Other units get four fresh bodies a month, but something always seems to go wrong with our paperwork or our movement orders.... Most have flown well over fifty [missions], which is the standard cut-off point at which white pilots are sent home.... They don’t know what else to do with us, sir. White pilots rotate back to the States as instructors, but since the army won’t allow black pilots to train white cadets.... We’ve been stationed so far from front line action, we rarely *encounter* an enemy plane, let alone the opportunity to engage one.... I was brought up to believe that beneath it all, Americans are a *decent* people with an abiding sense of integrity and fair play. The cheers I heard across this country when Joe Louis and Jesse Owens humiliated Hitler’s “master race” didn’t just come from proud colored folks. They came from everyone. How are we to interpret that?

Music begins in the background as Davis concludes:

There is no greater conflict within me: How do I *feel* about my country and how does my country feel about me? Are we only to be Americans when the mood suits you? A fair and impartial opportunity is *all* we ask—nothing that you yourselves wouldn’t demand.

The film does not rely that much on combat, and as Basinger points out with regard to other films about the Air Force, raises issues of professionalism—though in this case that means not reacting to the continual racism surrounding them. This story of the 332nd fighter group, who never lost a bomber to enemy action, brings the tried and tested combat genre to talk about the black experience at a time of increased public awareness of its issues and a wave of new films on the subject. Laurence Fishburne, whose character in *Boyz N the Hood* is described by Ice Cube's character (citing two major black leaders) as "Malcolm...Farrakhan," plays Hannibal Lee, the most accomplished of the pilots. His promotion to captain at the film's end is quite moving: he has lost countless friends and persevered, and the (formerly) racist bomber pilots now are requesting him and his men specifically because of their stellar track record. *The New York Times* review, however, says that the "cliché bound script is an equal-missed-opportunity employer" that limits the talents of actors like Fishburne and John Lithgow (Goodman).

The Tuskegee Airmen is obviously more limited than many combat films in its means of showing combat, and like *Memphis Belle*, relies on grainy stock footage, though in this case it is meant to represent the actions in real time of these characters, not a montage of "the war" as in the latter film. For crashes, we see only diving planes followed simply by cuts to explosions on the ground. Much, of course, is made of the pilots in the cockpits: the drama of confined spaces in supreme danger. Yet the nature of the film as a story of a conspiracy to prevent the pilots from seeing enemy action makes it more of a training film than a combat film. Coming at a time in which World War II combat films were anachronistic at best, the film was not so much attaching itself to the combat/simulation aspect as to the black film wave, in which it functions as a

retrospective unearthing of a story long known but infrequently, if ever, told. The low ebb of the combat genre perhaps provided this opportunity to look back, to mark the accomplishments of African Americans in the face of institutional racism two decades before the civil rights movement, without being under the mandate of bringing the spectator into the middle of a realistically-depicted combat spectacle. The lack of the studio pressure financially to attract young audiences to the theatre perhaps made this film one which could explore the issues seriously rather than attempt to “wow” people with combat spectacle. It is an open question whether a major theatrical release version of this film with spectacular combat set pieces could have done more cultural work to bring awareness of the Tuskegee Airmen to a wider audience, without diminishing the narrative of struggle and racism. The hypothetical film could have let spectacle interfere with the issues, *or* given large audiences access to the experience that may have elicited more compelling identification.

The Tuskegee Airmen, *Memphis Belle* and *A Midnight Clear* remain films in which identification with the characters can or does occur despite the lack of spectacular representation of combat. “Male melodrama” is very much in evidence in these three films, particularly in *The Tuskegee Airmen*, in which the group has two sets of antagonists: the Axis combatants and the American racists which beset them on all sides.

In the eight years of the World War II combat genre before *Ryan*, the film that most obviously makes of The Good War a bad war and most ambitiously attempts to knock the glory down a notch or two is *When Trumpets Fade*, which aired on HBO on June 27, 1998, a month before *Saving Private Ryan* was released theatrically. Directed by

John Irvin, who had previously directed the Vietnam film *Hamburger Hill*, the film tells this story:

It's late fall of 1944, and soldier Ron Eldard is the only survivor of his unit after a week of bloody fighting along the German border in the Huertgen forest. Eldard, a rookie only a week ago, is now both an experienced soldier and an admitted coward, and all he wants is to be declared mentally unfit and sent home. Unfortunately, his commanding officer thinks Eldard's survival instinct makes him a perfect leader of fresh troops and promotes him to lead an entire unit. (Krewson)

The film opens with solemnly played horn music over the start of the credits. This quickly and abruptly shifts to jaunty big band jazz music as archival footage unreels to a foreboding narration, which tells us that by the autumn of 1944 everyone thought the war in Europe would be over soon. The song "Over There" is sung by a chorus of men, which, played over images of American troops marching down the Champs Élysées, makes it seem as though the men in the stock footage are singing. The footage is slowly injected with colour as the credits and narrations end. Like the opening of *Courage Under Fire* a few years earlier, this film uses real media images to bring us back to the time of the war, in this case foreshadowing that this happy promise of the war in stock footage being over by Christmas will not be the fate of the characters we will soon meet. The footage becomes a sign of the *lack* of reality, a spectacle of parades and the victory that had not yet been attained. Unlike the combat footage of *Memphis Belle* and *The Tuskegee Airmen*, the footage used only in the opening credits of *When Trumpets Fade* deigns not to show us combat, but the unreality of newsreel footage at that time.

As we fade in from black after the jaunty opening, a rough title reads: Huertgen Forest, November 1944. It is a dark place with burned and battle-scarred small-bole trees. We hear a two-man dialogue and soon see a man carrying another on his back, coaxing

him to try to stay alive. The carrier, private David Manning (Ron Eldard) is obliged to put the other, badly scarred soldier, down for both a moment to rest, a mile from the safety of their own lines. The wounded man seems to have trouble maintaining consciousness. Manning ends up shooting the dying man—it appears to be a mercy killing. Manning returns to base camp and discovers he is the only survivor of his platoon. He is therefore promoted over his objections that he should be discharged with a section eight because he thinks he has serious mental health issues. Leading another squad up to the front line, which is described as a “death factory,” Manning takes command. Later he is obliged to shoot one of his men when the latter bolts in fear when they are attempting to sneak up on German soldiers manning the deadly 88s that are slaughtering the rest of their battalion. A soldier afterwards says that if Manning had not done this, they would have all been dead. The film ends with that same soldier who defended Manning’s harsh action, Sanderson, piggy-backing Manning back the mile to the safety of their own lines, coaxing him to stay alive, as Manning did with the wounded soldier at the beginning. The end titles tell viewers that the three-month battle in the Huertgen Forest caused 24,000 American killed or wounded but was immediately overshadowed by the Battle of the Bulge.

The few reviews for the film generally celebrate the drama of *When Trumpets Fade*, disparage the dialogue, and note the lack of special effects. One reviewer calls the film “gritty” and “workmanlike” and adds: “In a year when two epic war films were made, *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*, this low budget movie also made at the same time holds its own with those films. It lacked only the great cinematography” (Schwartz). The reviewer says that by the end of the film, however, this “tightly drawn

tale now begins to become too formulaic and predictable.” Another critic opens his review by stating: “War doesn’t bring only death, destruction and suffering. Due to military leaders’ stupidity or some banal events beyond anyone’s control, all that death, destruction and suffering can prove to be utterly pointless” (Antulov)—comments one might associate with films about the Vietnam War. Antulov notes that the “Nature of terrain prevented the use of heavy equipment or aerial supremacy and the only way for Americans to push their way into Germany was the old-fashioned slugging match between infantries.” He goes on:

When Trumpets Fade was shot for cable television and its relatively low budget means that it couldn’t be as spectacular as Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* or Mallick’s *The Thin Red Line*. But the lack of spectacle actually worked in this film’s favour. The battle [was]...relatively easy to reconstruct. John Irvin... concentrated less on pyrotechnics and more on drama. And the drama, unlike in Spielberg’s or Mallick’s film, is unburdened with cheap sentimentalism, patriotic sermons or snobbish philosophy.... [the] banality of war shows itself in utter randomness and unpredictability of death. Irvin doesn’t shy away from showing blood and gore, but even greater discomfort for the viewers come when reality of war starts to take its psychological toll and seemingly dependable characters turn into complete wrecks. The film’s bleakness is underlined in the ending, unconventional compared with 1990s Hollywood standards. (Antulov)

The film depicts some combat situations in which men blow German guns up and German tanks shoot at American G.I.s. It is rendered believably, but it is the atmospheric forest which is a dominant visual motif, not unlike *A Midnight Clear*, though in this case it is not ambiguous and mysterious, but menacing and deadly. The film is very dark looking. The woods are reminiscent of *First Blood* in which Rambo wages his one-man war with authorities: silent, foggy, brimming with mortal threats—essentially the trope of the jungle in Vietnam War films transposed to the evergreen forest of western Germany (though it was filmed in Hungary). The conversations take place in claustrophobic dark tents or surrounded by the mud-covered base camp. It seems to be perpetually dusk

(except for the night scene) with full body bags and smoke filling the surrounding terrain. Manning's haunted eyes make him seem ghost-like on top of his apparent lack of emotion. The location is of course markedly different from the tropical locations of films about the Vietnam War, but that conflict is never far away in terms of the dread of the new recruits and potential madness that abounds.

This film may in fact be about ordinary men doing extraordinary things, as per the more standard group of World War II combat films, but it shows this phrase to be hollow. Manning has an innate self-preserving instinct, which the film suggests is not noble. Yet it is valuable to his superior officers. Manning is lifeless, wants out of this hell, but when that is thwarted, he decides to take a few willing men across the lines at night to disable the tanks that will inevitably tear apart the suicidal frontal push the Lieutenant Colonel (played by country music star Dwight Yoakam) is planning for the next morning. His plan B after claiming he is unfit for duty is thus to take dangerous initiative and achieve something that will give the rest of the fighting men a chance. The question is: is he saving himself or is he thinking of the battalion? It does not matter in the end, because he and his fellow men achieve their aim while Manning dies from his wounds. The heroism depicted is therefore ambiguous. On top of this begrudging heroism, Manning is also constantly disrespectful of rank and position in the army—a clear provocation of fundamental army protocol—but this is overlooked due to his skill in the field.

This movie comes closest of the four films so far discussed to bring the Vietnam mentality to the World War II film. The violence is not rendered spectacularly, not highlighting battle immersion, but rendered much more banally—of men going mad, of limbs lying here and there in the forest. These men are not fighting a futile war, but a

futile battle in the face of the overwhelming (according to the film) expectation that they will prevail easily. Regarding Thomas Doherty's claim that there has been no "successful big-budget 'deconstruction' of the Second World War mythos on screen" and that while "historical memory can conjure the Army Signal Corps footage of the Holocaust, there won't be," this film appears to be an attempt to do just that (296). It inclines towards reinscribing Good War heroism as insanity-induced desperation from which we should not necessarily deduce that the citizen soldiers did their duty out of love of country and freedom.

The realism depicted in *When Trumpets Fade* was one based most of all on the psychology of Manning. It is not the sort of realism we see in *Saving Private Ryan*. Krin Gabbard, citing Paul Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, says that the latter author claims that fighting men

who rushed enemy machine guns acted as much from desperation, panic, and/or fear of shame as from what is usually called courage. The Allies won the war not just because of Yankee ingenuity and true grit but because America had the men and material to wear down a German army that was already depleted and exhausted from years of fighting, especially on the eastern front. American politicians and generals were willing to draw on a huge population of eighteen-year-old boys, giving them minimal training and then throwing them into the war as cannon fodder. (134)

And notable in regards to the European theatre of World War II, Gabbard states:

Fussell also exposes the myth of World War II as "the good war," pointing out that few Americans had *moral* convictions about the need to fight Hitler. In general, white Americans harbored deep racial hatred for the Japanese after their "sneak attack" at Pear Harbor and regarded the Japanese as inferior to everyone except perhaps African Americans. The United States fought Germans primarily because Germany had declared war on America after Pearl Harbor. (*italics original*, 134)

Within only weeks of the airdate of *When Trumpets Fade* came a film that acts more like a “reconstruction” of the Good War myth.

In the spectacular nature of its representation of violence, and its redemptive creation of World War II after the debacle of Vietnam, *Saving Private Ryan* stands out in marked contrast to the four films it follows in the genre. Obvious and notable differences that undermine any direct comparison to the previous films include the scale of this film with its budget of U.S. \$70 million, its star actor and star director, its corporate parentage (the first film released by the newly created DreamWorks SKG film studio), and its use of the best in special effects. The film is the story of a small squad of men charged by then United States Army chief of staff General George C. Marshall to find the sole surviving son of a mother whose four other sons had all been killed in action (KIA) within the same week. It manages to produce both of Basinger’s tropes of *The Lost Patrol* and *The Last Stand*, along with a beach assault that is a hallmark of films like *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Longest Day*, the Normandy landings being “Perhaps the quintessential setting for victory in the good war” (Boggs and Pollard 72). Lawrence Suid comments on the reception of *Saving Private Ryan*:

In the initial rush to judgment, critics heaped praise on *Saving Private Ryan*. Most called it the greatest war movie ever made. Reviewers, veterans, and the average filmgoer accepted Spielberg’s claim that the unrelenting violence of torn bodies, blood, gore, vomit, particularly in the opening twenty-four minute landing sequence on Omaha Beach perfectly captured the reality of combat. And without question, Spielberg made brilliant use of his handheld cameras to create images of men in battle trying to survive in a hostile environment. Whether images of extreme violence alone produce the reality of combat becomes the crucial issue in judging the place of *Saving Private Ryan* in the galaxy of great war movies. (626)

Suid suggests that Spielberg’s knowledge of war was *only* from the movies, despite the fact that the latter’s father was stationed in the Pacific, and claims that “if truth be told,

the director had appropriated virtually every scene in *Saving Private Ryan*” from other war films (627). He notes, unsurprisingly, that only the veterans who took part in the actual battles could ascertain how close Spielberg came to representing reality, but objects to the director’s “pretentiousness in believing he alone had captured the verisimilitude of combat” (628). Suid stresses that

Spielberg himself acknowledged that his use of violence simply reflects the time in which he created *Saving Private Ryan* as much as the reality of Omaha Beach. By the late 1990s, audiences expected and even demanded blood and gore in their movies. Consequently, for Spielberg to make a movie that differed from the gratuitous violence then dripping from theatre screens, he had no choice but to follow his fellow filmmakers. So he simply threw more arms, legs, heads, guts, and vomit all over the screen and then justified the images as necessary to capture the realism of battle... (628)

Noteworthy in the means of the achievement of this realism is not just such violence.

Geoff King’s astute description of the landing sequence highlights the immersion aspect:

Impact effects based on cutting are generally eschewed in favour of camera movement, thus maintaining a greater sense of the substance of the pro-filmic event.... Increased shutter speeds remove the element of blurring inherent in conventional camerawork, creating a strobe effect... The impression given is that the cinematic technology is unable to keep up with the pace and violence of the events. (121)

Suid argues that for “military historians, for those who landed on the Normandy beaches, and for those who may simply recognize implausibilities and contrived drama or careless filmmaking, *Saving Private Ryan* contained a story filled with errors and a lack of believability” (628). These include the fact that the men traipse carelessly into enemy territory while talking easily. This is the scene in which Upham is rebuffed by the men when he mentions that he is writing a book about the bonds of men formed in combat, (though the shot of the men walking on a ridge at night silhouetted by bomb flashes also

comes to mind). Suid is also skeptical of the jitters Miller's men show before they hit the beach, saying that these were experienced and elite troops:

They knew what to expect and they knew they had a good chance of dying on the beaches. They had already made their peace with God and went forth understanding why they were assaulting the beaches and cliffs. Instead, Spielberg shows the men vomiting, crying, and lacking discipline. Some soldiers undoubtedly vomited on their way to the beaches, but mostly because they were simply seasick from bouncing around in tiny landing craft for several hours, not out of fear. (633-634)

Consistent with many of his criticisms of films involving the armed services, Suid balks at the portrayed lack of professionalism in the men depicted. He disparages the merit of the film when summarizing:

All combat films contain some implausibilities, distortions of fact, historical inaccuracies, and errors of military procedure or regulations in order to create a dramatic impact. In this, *Saving Private Ryan* remains no more or less a traditional war movie, differing only in the amount of graphic violence Spielberg put on the screen. It probably does not matter whether he believed he needed the violence to create his message or was simply using violence to market the film. Instead, the director too often painted by the numbers and recycled the clichés from the countless war movies he had watched over the years, rather than allowing his creative juices to lead him. (636)

Suid seems to be in limited company with his reservations about the film.

The reviews for *Saving Private Ryan* at the time of its release heap superlative plaudits on the film. Ebert wrote, "people will weep" and "the movie's opening sequence is as graphic as any war footage I've ever seen." *Variety* reviewer Todd McCarthy suggested the film is "arguably second to none as a vivid, realistic and bloody portrait of armed conflict," adding: "Perhaps realizing that there was no avoiding the old truism that war is hell, Spielberg decided to underline, italicize and boldface it in startling terms that no one could miss. No further commentary is needed when the raw brutality of combat is presented as indelibly as it is here." This is especially the point: "no further commentary

is needed”: the spectacular depiction perhaps beggars intellectual containment. Another reviewer noted that the landing sequence “might be the most visceral ever put on film” and that “the battles in *Saving Private Ryan* make most World War II pictures seem like Hollywood kid stuff” (Edelstein). *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin is ebullient:

He restores passion and meaning to the genre with such whirlwind force that he seems to reimagine it entirely, dazzling with the breadth and intensity of that imagination. No received notions, dramatic or ideological, intrude on this achievement. This film simply looks at war as if war had not been looked at before.... As he did in “Schindler's List,” Spielberg uses his preternatural storytelling gifts to personalize the unimaginable, to create instantly empathetic characters and to hold an audience spellbound from the moment the action starts.... the finest war movie of our time.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* review avowed that “Steven Spielberg’s magnificent tribute to the memory, now fading, of the American effort in World War II is an overwhelming experience” and “launches and climaxes with two of the greatest extended battle sequences ever put on film” (Graham). The review goes on to say of the landing sequence that it is “unrelenting in showing the horror of the event” and that audience members should “prepare to weep.” For the sake of contrast, online film reviewer “Mr. Cranky” says

This is a very small story in a very big war and as such, Spielberg has utterly depoliticized the entire thing, which is probably okay except that it means listening to Neanderthals root for people to be shot in the face and utter “cool” and “neato” when people’s limbs fly across the screen as Spielberg sets new standards for cinematic war realism...

Spectacle reintroduces itself forcefully in *Saving Private Ryan* in its war realism; commentators seemingly bow before the power of spectacle in this film. And yet, the film is a balance between visceral combat sequences and a narrative that negotiates between them, providing them with context and meaning. Take away the battle sequences and the film is a sentimental stock combat film. The portrayal of the men is one that seems to be

invested with making real people out of movie clichés and so is more than compelling than otherwise, but it is the battle scenes that are referred to as the reason the film is so powerful.

The abundance of the possibilities of death that is the spectacle of the landing sequence somehow becomes an abundance of meaningfulness in the film as a whole for reviewers in comparison to the four World War II combat films in the 1990s before *Ryan*. The desaturated cinematography and John Williams' sonorous orchestral score are arguably efforts of overdetermination of what the film *means*. The film's heavy memorializing bespeaks desperation to assert its own emotional power. As Frank Tomasulo observes, recalling Flitterman-Lewis's comments on melodrama above,

Although the film has been praised for its gritty "realism," it also contains oodles of melodrama, particularly in its tear-jerker climax. Perhaps there is a fine line—in real life and in cinema—between legitimate human sentiment and bathetic sentimentality, but Miller's stoic death scene seems to cross the line into pathos. (126)

On one hand, for people with an even rudimentary awareness of twentieth century history, all the film has to do is remind viewers of the threats leveled at these men, and utilize the aesthetics of visualization and music to produce an empathetic emotional response, which it does admirably. On the other hand, the film does this so well, in a context that had not prepared for this particular union of emotion and combat spectacle, that it was named best film of the year by more than seventy critics and selected for more than one hundred and sixty top ten lists, was the top grossing film of 1998, and won five Oscars. These plaudits, both critical and popular, stress something of the unprecedented nature of the film, despite its obvious debts to what had come before.

Some argue that the film is Spielbergian manipulation at its best. Functioning as a memorial, the film ends up as a sanctimonious homily to men whose morality, bravery and fortitude are presented as beyond dispute. Jeremy Davies' character Upham serves as the initiate, and the audience's ostensible point of identification (a recurring combat film character, as Basinger points out). As a translator who is writing a book about men in combat, and who has never fired his rifle after basic training, Upham appears as the equivalent of a baby boomer brat who thinks he knows war by studying it. His initiation to the world of war involves losing his moral balance after his beloved commander is shot in the chest, which is a direct result of Upham's own cowardice, since he allowed the shooter to pass him without a fight earlier. Upham is also the audience's conscience when we see the men's desire for revenge on a captured German soldier after the death of their medic Irwin Wade (Giovanni Ribisi). In what becomes a moral quandary that invokes the specter of American atrocities like the My Lai massacre (though in this case with a lone enemy combatant and not civilians), the unity of the squad appears to hinge on this desire for illegal revenge. Tomasulo argues that the function of the landing sequence at the beginning of the film, or what he describes as "twenty-five minutes of seeing and identifying with Americans killed and maimed as cannon fodder in an apparently futile assault," allows audiences to accept the squad's "brutal and unmerciful retaliation against their adversaries—even if they do not play by the accepted international rules of engagement or the code of conduct Americans usually expect of their screen heroes" (119). And yet, Captain Miller will let no such atrocity happen, to his own ultimate detriment, since this same soldier later shoots him in the chest. Here, the potential specter of Americans illegally killing prisoners of war is bafflingly dispersed diegetically with

the sudden acknowledgment by Miller to his men that he is an English teacher. His Everyman status is here indelibly tied to the down-to-earth response of letting the prisoner go rather than exacting violent revenge. American citizen-soldier humanity is redeemed.

Spectacle, both as a method of depicting battle sequences, and more generally as Debord's triumph of appearances for contemplation only, is clearly evidenced in *Saving Private Ryan*. The audience is arguably induced into passive contemplation of the relatively horrific battle sequences, which, with all the attendant praise shoveled on the film, are discussed as finally communicating what it feels like to be in combat. The emotional aspect of spectacular imagery, what Gray determined was an oversight of the Situationists' critique, here functions like a well-oiled machine. The four World War II combat films before *Ryan* and after *Born on the Fourth of July* do not vault themselves into the fray of transporting verisimilitude with such obvious toil. They rely much more on the standard elements of storytelling in film without galvanizing spectacular set-pieces, as *Ryan* does emblematically.

The resonance of Spielberg's film in the capacity to make an impact at the box office through the simulation of decades-old combat is what brought the World War II (and other) combat films back into prominence, including *The Thin Red Line*, *Band of Brothers*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Enemy at the Gates*, *U-571*, *Tigerland* (Joel Schumacher 2000), *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott 2001), *Hart's War* (Gergory Hoblit 2002), *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace 2002), *Windtalkers* (John Woo 2002), *The Great Raid*, *Flags of Our Fathers* (Clint Eastwood 2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood 2007). While the films discussed here are inevitably prey to Debord's vituperative overarching

statements such as the idea that “history itself is the specter haunting modern society” and that “pseudo-history has to be fabricated at every level of the consumption of life...[or the] *frozen time* that presently hold sway could not be preserved,” it has to be said that they nevertheless offer anti-spectacle melodrama and stories for which spectacular combat sequences are not the most effective device (141). In the 1990s lull in the combat genre the understated films *Memphis Belle*, *A Midnight Clear*, *The Tuskegee Airmen* and *When Trumpets Fade* made contending and interesting claims about the heroism of youth, racism and the insanity of warfare.

Chapter Five **Conclusion**

“What the hell do we do now, sir?”

--soldier on Omaha beach to Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan*

Harper's magazine ran an article in November 2005 on the film *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes 2005) discussing the question of supposedly anti-war films being read as pro-war. The illustrious film editor and sound expert Walter Murch, who worked on such critically and popularly revered films as *The Godfather*, *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola 1974), and *The English Patient*, found himself employed by director Mendes as the editor for *Jarhead*. The film includes a scene in which the soldiers, knowing they will soon be sent to Kuwait to square off against Saddam Hussein and his army in the Gulf War of 1991, watch the scene from *Apocalypse Now* in which U.S. military helicopters storm a Vietnamese coastal village to the tune of Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*—a scene Murch himself edited in the late 1970s. The soldiers are exultant in their simultaneous reenactment of the scene and they revel in the spectacle of Wagner's score and Coppola's images (and Murch's editing) in a “veritable paroxysm of ecstasy” (Weschler 67). *Jarhead* was based on the memoir of Marine sniper Anthony Swofford, who says that the fighting men can watch the same films other people see as anti-war but instead be

excited by them, because the magic brutality of the films celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills.... Filmic images of death and carnage are pornography for the military man; with film you are stroking his cock, tickling his balls with the pink feather of history, getting him ready for his real First Fuck. It doesn't matter how many Mr. and Mrs. Johnsons are antiwar—the actual killers who know how to use the weapons are not. (quoted in Weschel, 66)

The question on which the *Harper's* article turns—whether combat films produce, in the full range of viewing audiences, either a pro- or anti- war inclination depending on who you are—seems to reduce the complexities of combat cinema.

The idea of war films producing war-like people circulates much as the undying idea of the “effects” of media violence creating violent audiences, as if both are predictable and causal relationships. And as J. David Slocum writes on media violence, citing the reductive stress on its physical form, “...the trope of ‘film violence’ effectively delimits the scope and focus of attention to cinematic brutality and bloodletting. It also enables the ready attachment of moral judgments—of Hollywood film being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for its violence—to these supposedly more objective or scientific evaluations” (23). We might transpose these comments to say that the tropes of the “anti-war” or “pro-war” film, often described as objectively inherent in a film text, serve simply to morally condemn or praise a combat film, irrespective of the potential meaning viewers may take away. The *Harper's* article points to the inevitability that readings of a film might be unpredictable, but such readings are still cast in the article as a binary: pro- or anti-war.

Inevitably, the status of spectacle enters this debate of pro- and anti-war films.

Geoff King, quoting Claudia Springer, argues that

The filmmaker who wants to present an antiwar statement has to do so clearly in the *narrative* dimension, “for it has to compensate for the more ambiguous signifying system of spectacle”. The provision of large-scale spectacle is one way Hollywood films can avoid nailing their colours to clearly to any particular mast, since the visceral thrills offered can be open to multiple readings. (emphasis added, 131-132)

Recalling the “narrativization” of early cinema that Gunning describes and the raising of cultural value that that was meant to entail, the spectacle is perhaps less beholden to *particular* signification, or to a *particular* reading that viewers are intended to receive. In

this way, it is not the battle scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* that determine its message of heroic sacrifice, but its conventional narrative framework that surrounds such scenes. Yet it is also the historical subject matter itself that determines a resistance to “low” spectacle in *Ryan*. King notes that “Spectacular films based on real conflicts face a rather different, critical, and often self-imposed agenda. Particular demands have to be met if Hollywood products are to be treated as ‘respectable’ representations of war rather than more ‘lowly’ works of action-exploitation” (118).

Saving Private Ryan made an indelible mark, an exclamation point in the re-assertion of the mythos of World War II. Jeanine Basinger herself, twelve years after her exhaustive study of the World War II combat film, notes that the “opening sequence is a nightmare. Today’s audiences are shocked into silence while watching. No one talks, and no one munches popcorn or rattles candy wrappers” (“Translating War” 43). It is the spectacle of battle immersion that produces this reported awe. It is realist in intention, and we might remind ourselves that realism

is not a fixed group of textual attributes but a continuum of signifying potentialities, a range of strategies used by filmmakers to mediate information about characters and their situations in reference to dominant conceptions of what constitutes reality. Realist films are those which combine these formal and thematic properties in combinations that are labeled “realist” by the discourses of criticism, critical reviewing, promotional literature and advertising. (Hallam and Marshment 123)

Hallam and Marshment here note Roland Barthes’ comment that “verisimilitude is never anything more than the result of opinion; it is entirely dependent on opinion, public opinion” (123). In the combat film, we might add that the development of the genre might also have something to say about it—that the opinion of the interpretive community through time bears some responsibility. The authors argue that *Ryan* is a

“paradigmatic example” of realism as visual spectacle, for which “there have to be iconographic elements which center attention on the performance of realism as a signifying value within the film’s narrative structure” (117). They claim that *Ryan* supercedes its generic context in the landing sequence, since it is not only “the gory depiction of the detail of battle (dismembered limbs, intestines spilling from blasted bodies)” but also “the sense of being in the thick of the action, a feeling intensified by the soundscape of the film (bullets whistling through the air as if close to your ear, inarticulate cries and shouts, deafening explosions) which excites many of the film viewers” (117). They add that it is not the “spectacular staging” of the battle scenes that foregrounds the realism but the “the intimate view of the battlefield constructed by using a handheld newsreel camera, its lens splattered with blood and water, to create a sense of total immersion and chaotic immediacy within the heart of the action” (117-118).

Yet Hallam and Marshment also elucidate the filmic and generic constraints that inform *Ryan*, including the fact that at the end of the battle scene on the beach, “bodies remain whole, with no heads or limbs littering the place, no-one still screaming in agony” (118). They say:

Death is still quick and ultimately clean. With its contemporary associations of news footage, the bleached colour and handheld camerawork is emblematic of a style of 1940s newsreel realism that typified the documentary war work of well-known studio directors such as John Huston. Located in a narrative structure which vacillates between the meandering search for Private Ryan and the highly motivated, character-driven causality of the need to fight to survive, this spectacle of realism is incorporated within an intertextual generic framework that reminded at least one critic of a composite of every combat movie Spielberg was likely to have seen. (118)

The spectacle of combat in *Ryan* is an attempt, says King, to ground the film in a “bid for respectability in the name, above all, of ‘authenticity.’ We are not meant to wallow in the

glorious sensual experience of Hollywood-created warfare but to be stunned by a sense of what the 'real event' must have been like" (119). He adds that authenticity, like realism,

remains a special effect and, like all special effects, can be viewed both as an absorbing recreation of reality and as impressive special effect in its own right. The strategic intention in *Saving Private Ryan* appears to be to emphasize the former and downplay the latter, again in the name of cultural respectability. Too much enjoyment of the spectacle might damage the film's claim to be something more than "gratuitous" entertainment. How this really plays is open to question.... Does the unrelenting nature of the spectacle make it genuinely uncomfortable, or just allow the viewer to enjoy the dizzying hyperreal spectacle freed from any feelings of guilt? (122)

In any case, the balance of spectacular combat scenes and strong narrative melodrama is what characterizes *Ryan* particularly, the film being partly constituted by "the hyperrealistic spectacle-of-authenticity rather than authenticity itself (King 136). King adds: "Such are the knots into which assertion of 'realism' become tied" (136). In this sense, Spielberg's influential film proposes an idea of access to combat through immersive spectacle while trying to avoid the baser cultural associations of spectacle as a thrilling ride.

Hallam and Marshment acknowledge that *Ryan* is not the first film about the D-Day invasion of Fortress Europa, but they claim that it is "the first film about the Second World War to be made in an era where filmmakers have at their fingertips the technological armoury to create an arsenal of special effects characteristic of blockbusters such as *Jurassic Park* and *Titanic*" (118-119). They offer, recalling Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions," a characterization of the Hollywood of which *Ryan* is a part:

The tendency towards big budget spectacles, seen as an intrinsic element of the contemporary Hollywood industry, favours a style of entertainment based on aggregate forms with their roots in show business, rather than narrative forms with their roots in novels, plays or short stories. Aggregate forms of entertainment are essentially non-narrative, based on a loose structure of acts which typically present the spectacle of performing. (71)

It seems that Hollywood, above all else, hopes as much as possible to maintain a monopoly on movie spectacle as a way of holding a preeminent economic position.

Immersion is a term that became ever more present in discussions of *Saving Private Ryan* and other films which foreground their visual effects. And it is not just two-dimensional spectacle: digital imagery and films by the late 1990s wanted the viewers to be immersed in the fog of war. In her article entitled “The New Spatial Dynamics of the Bullet-Time Effect,” Lisa Purse argues that the special effects in *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski 1999), in particular what she terms “bullet-time” (when we see bullets travel through space in slow motion while the camera moves around the film space), is “uniquely contemporary, a response perhaps to our cultural impulse towards the immersive or interactive spectacle” (152). She argues that these moments of “bullet-time” “are moments of intense hypermediacy, in which the act of mediation itself is the focus of the spectator’s pleasure and amazement” (154).

Released a year after *Ryan*, *The Matrix* was a science fiction story that posited a dystopic future run by artificial intelligence using humans as batteries and stimulating their physiology to make them think they lived on late twentieth century Earth. *The Matrix* does not have the same point of view shots that suggest that you are on the beach with Miller and his men, but rather, “in bullet-time’s defining camera movement, the spectator is drawn fully into the diegetic space, disrupting the conventional spatial relationship between the spectator, the screen, and the filmic world.... The camera...no longer feels like a fixed point or two-dimensional plane in relation to the action; instead it probes into the three-dimensionality of the diegesis” (Purse 157). This difference between the two films seems to introduce a degree of disparity in the commitment to, or

identification with, the characters on screen. She adds that this effect: “creates a sense of the camera’s autonomy, so that the spectator has, for a moment, and increased sense of accessibility to the filmic world” and suggests that as viewers, “we are no longer external witnesses of the action. This creates a sense of momentary immersion in the film’s fictional universe” (158). This seems to be overstating things a bit, indicative perhaps of the supposedly emblematic, though hardly representational, position of *The Matrix* at millennium’s end. Purse is admittedly correct, though, in pointing out affinities between this effect and some “contemporary technologies which similarly engage with these notions of envelopment and temporal simultaneity,” including “the three-dimensional world of computer games through which you can move an avatar, and choose the angle from which you see the action; the continuing project to make virtual reality environments as immersively seamless as possible; the interactivity with different cyberspaces available in modern technological interfacing” (158). Predictably, visual technologies, as per Debord’s emphasis on sight as the preeminent sense in the society of the spectacle, promise some idea of mastery of sight—and sight is certainly a life-and-death aspect of combat. Purse notes that “bullet-time” is

an explicit expression of the need to see everything, to see the whole. It is an expression both of the film’s mastery over the visual—its ability to *show* everything—but also the spectator’s mastery of the visual—his or her ability to *see* everything.... [offering] the spectator an omniscient view of space, time, and movement of the action. Thus the film invokes a fantasy of omniscience.... The ultimate mastery of the visual is not just to see all that can be seen, but to be *in* the spectacle itself. (Purse 159)

The shift from *Saving Private Ryan* to *The Matrix* is one in which spectacular realism moves more clearly into a promised spectacular immersion, a fantasy of omniscience. Characterizing this effect as unprecedented seems to imply progress to this point, that this

is what everything has been developing toward. This supposition arguably contains millennial fever and posits the spectacle as potentially *accessible* in some way, something certainly contrary to Debord's conceptualization of it.

Pearl Harbor stepped into the blockbuster ring two years after *The Matrix* in May 2001 as a combat film contender that sought to memorialize the infamous attack of December 7, 1941. It relied more on *Titanic* as a model than *Ryan*, however, in its protracted eye-roll-inducing love story enfolding forty or so minutes of aviation and battleship combat spectacle. *Ryan*'s somber reverential tone is here turned to barely-polite deference to the catastrophe and the men and women affected by it. Nevertheless, Philip Strub, at the Pentagon film liaison office, commented in the documentary film *Operation Hollywood* (Emilio Pacull and Maurice Ronai 2004) that "We were quite gratified, in fact, that up to the release of the picture and long after the release of the picture, an enormous amount of attention—in fact, more attention paid on Pearl Harbour, the survivors, the combatants, than during the fiftieth anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbour, by a substantial margin." Nicholas Cull suggests that *Star Wars* was the inspiration for the scenes with the attacking Japanese Zero planes and that in reality "such acrobatics would have been impossible" (3). He adds: "Just as George Lucas used World War Two combat footage as an inspiration now World War Two is reconstructed in the image of *Star Wars*, using Lucas's own Industrial Light and Magic effects" (3). The quintessential 1940s American popular artist is invoked as shorthand for sentimental old Americana: "The costumes, framing and color scheme, and the faces of the actors cast reflected the wartime paintings of Norman Rockwell," (but, Cull claims, without the smoking pervasive at the time) (3).

Cull suggests that in the cycle of turn-of-the-century World War II films including *Ryan* and *Pearl Harbor*, “one is left with the realization that spectacle is placed ahead of ethical or historical questions. *The Thin Red Line* pursues universal truths about men in combat, while HBO’s *Band of Brothers* pays admirable attention to questions of balance and historical authenticity, but for the most part the films play fast and loose with historical fact” (5). This anxiety over the cycle’s representation of authenticity and fact attend to the combat film genre in general. Stakes are seen to be involved. Cull claims that World War II is “a convenient morality play in which the Americans are perpetually in the white and the Germans in black, which eases generation guilt and delivers the warm glow of nostalgia for the politics and film of a ‘simpler era’” (5). He argues that the war film has particular obligations, however, since it depicts “a social ill...that rests on the willingness of populations to participate” and therefore he claims “the war filmmaker has specific social responsibilities... the representations of the Second World War have real political consequences” (5). He adds that this cycle of World War II films amounts to new propaganda:

By portraying the war in an idealized way; by emphasizing the United States as a wholly moral power and ignoring such gray areas as an alliance with Stalin, the dropping of an atomic bomb, and both mismanagement and misconduct by American troops, Hollywood has given the US government a new vocabulary of propaganda. The return to “guts n’ glory” on the screen, now reinforced by spectacular realism is film by film eroding the hard learned lessons of the Vietnam conflict, restoring warrior virtue and selling the notion that a man can prove himself in war. (5)

This easy dismissal of the recent wave of combat spectaculars seems to indicate the belief that all war films are pro-war for being “idealized” in film, but that does not in any way address the four films that have been the subject of this thesis. Small and unmemorable

though they may be, *Memphis Belle*, *A Midnight Clear*, *The Tuskegee Airmen*, and *When Trumpets Fade* cannot be appropriately described by Cull's statement.

In broad terms, Hollywood cinema in the nineties could be characterized by the increasing sophistication of digital special effects, an increase in animated features, the rising costs of production and distribution, the reduction in numbers of films released by the majors, an increase in the number of screens and the luxuriousness of auditoria, the increasing importance of overseas markets, and the continuing preeminence of high-concept blockbusters. In this cinema environment, combat narratives did not often depict the "last good war," or indeed any war the United States military had been involved in. Combat films, such as they were in the 1990s before *Ryan*, cannot easily be compared to it and others films like it: they did not announce themselves as films offering combat spectacle in the way that something like it or *Top Gun* did. The Hollywood majors evinced uncertainty after Vietnam on film had played itself out in the 1980s. Perhaps risking too conjectural a supposition, we might say that the sensitive relationship of Hollywood and the Pentagon in the nineties precipitated a lack of combat narratives because this was a new era of world-wide, post-Cold War re-ordering and reconciliation of international relations. America did not want to assert past military heroics with the same nations with which it was now negotiating major trade deals of consumables and culture. To re-live World War II in popular film too obviously (despite the anniversary) at such a time would have been too awkward or strident an assertion that despite Vietnam, America can still be the kid nobody can vanquish in the playground. It would have looked too much like national insecurity, or a shame-faced and contrived re-mythologizing. A burst of American World War II movie spectaculars in the early 1990s

would have been in bad taste and displayed bad timing. At a time of “new beginnings” and escaping the continued dread of World War III, it would have been hardly appropriate to make high profile movies taking the gestation of that dread as their subject.

Rather, for the most part, as this study shows, the combat film in the nineties dramatized marginal stories and aspects of World War II that do not conventionally come to mind in thinking about the genre. Perhaps as a result, their profiles were generally very low. These films’ exploration allowed for different perspectives on World War II that the genre had not frequently entertained in regards to that conflict—that it could feel completely futile, that racism was rampant despite the fact that the Allies were fighting Nazi Germany (whose abiding administrative program was racist genocide), and that insanity was just around the corner. Of the four films, only *Memphis Belle* attempts to produce a feeling of untrammelled patriotism, and as a result it feels particularly dated, old fashioned, and anachronistic. In exploring these specific four films in an era when the now-restored genre was weak, we are reminded of the potential for combat films to attend to other aspects than the spectacle of combat, and competently so. The genre’s dogged longevity may have something to do with enduring militarism of the United States, since genre works as a social problem-solving activity, but that does not make it eternal propaganda in support of such a stance, as Robb, Cull, and Boggs and Pollard all stridently assert. One might ask what the United States would be like had there *not* been something called a combat film genre by which the nation wrestled with the meaning of warfare away from the front lines. Boggs and Pollard in fact collapse the entire decade of the nineties, morphing the Gulf Wars together in polemically stating that most Hollywood films “tend to be violent, technology-driven extravaganzas largely devoid of

historical, social, or dramatic authenticity,” are the “lifeblood of corporate profit-making,” and that “Their greatest influence...is on youthful mass audiences that are the main targets of increasingly desperate Pentagon recruiters anxious to renovate a crisis-ridden U.S. military” (xi). This may be true in general, but the specific instances when this is *not* true are dismissed or downplayed. Pursuing specific instances of cultural analysis such as this thesis has done works to qualify such sweeping assertion while attending to their concerns. And one is obliged to note that of course films that are not avowedly combat pictures are still able to address the issues of war.

Ideologically, the combat movie tropes of *Lost Patrol* and *Last Stand* may make use of what King says is an American Frontier mythology, the result of which is some sense of national identity being dependent on a few hardy types who are tested by enemy combatants and the elements. The resulting violence could be seen in that mythology as warranted or necessary. Combat films today may be at a “baroque” stage, but *Ryan* appears to have been an effort at reconstruction at the genre, a re-centering of the alignments of combat and the nation today in an emotional and sentimental package. The beneficiaries of this re-inscribed mythology are perhaps those most able to mobilize it politically.

The nineties were a period in which the power of the major Hollywood studios set a tone of synergy and corporate profit making which we are still surrounded by. While there are ideological implications of this, specific examinations of culture reveal a more complex picture. Despite the so-called military entertainment complex, and the supposed stages of genre towards extinction, the combat genre is not easily predictable. The combat genre represented by the four films described in this thesis did not follow the

dominant Hollywood trends until *Saving Private Ryan* emblazoned a nostalgic spectacle of violence across U.S. screens and in turn set the tone to follow for a few years.

After the lull in the combat genre, which has been the subject of this thesis, combat films made about World War II gave audiences emotional cinematic rides, rendering the genre more contemporary with an emphasis on spectacular immersion and violent realism. The developing corporate structure in Hollywood could see war cinema by this time as part and parcel of the genre of high concept extravaganzas, with dubious historical references lending extra dramatic weight. While aspects of the combat genre revealed themselves in other places, perhaps by this time Hollywood could once again see the financial potential, and salience, of a clearly indicated combat genre—its shorthand called into service once again. Film auditoria providing ever more effectively the means to enjoy spectacle facilitated a “cinema of attractions” dressed in military fatigues. The prized demographic of teenage boys could be proffered action and excitement as in *Star Wars*, and historicizing the military elided questions of the current state of American Armed Forces. As Geoff King writes:

More recently, in an age in which the big Hollywood studios have become absorbed into giant conglomerates, the prevalence of spectacle and special effects has been boosted by a growing demand for products that can be further exploited in multimedia forms such as computer games and theme-park rides—secondary outlets that sometimes generate more profits than the films on which they are based. Spectacular display might also be driven by the increased importance of the overseas market in Hollywood’s economic calculations, as it tends to translate more easily than other dimensions across cultural and language boundaries. (1-2)

Warfare as videogame and market-driven spectaculars should give us pause if the boundaries of reality and media were indiscernible, but they are not.

Yet the stakes for Boggs and Pollard, Cull, and David Robb (the journalist wanting to expose the Pentagon’s influence in Hollywood) are the kids, the young men

and women who may sign up for duty for the glory presumably depicted in Hollywood films. The supposition is the perennial claim that combat films can never show the reality of combat and so anything less than that is somehow propaganda for it. As Boggs and Pollard claim,

If the Hollywood war machine does not fully constitute a modern propaganda apparatus, its role in the legitimization process no doubt *surpasses* that of any such apparatus, since its spectacular images and narratives, produced and marketed as “entertainment,” probably are more effective than any heavy-handed attempts at media censorship and control. (Boggs and Pollard 18)

Ryan is not a celebration of combat in the way that *Top Gun* is, but it is a celebration of the myth of unity that World War II can apparently still represent to Americans under the right circumstances: that “we” all came together to fight the good fight as we have not done since. That mythology does not necessarily mean that young American men and women are signing up because of the glory of landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day cannot be resisted. The anxiety of this quote speaks more to the idea that the real wars, America’s wars today, can no longer claim the same mythic unity. The concerns of Boggs and Pollard would be much reduced (or their voices less heeded) if ninety percent of Americans indefatigably supported every American conflict since World War II. Clearly, this has not been the case. The tensions and anxieties over Hollywood combat films and their “effects” more ably speaks to the tensions and anxieties over America’s current war in Iraq, which has garnered ever-increasing comparisons with the Vietnam War. George W. Bush, somewhat surprisingly, has been *unfavorably* compared with Richard M. Nixon, who resigned in 1974 before his impending impeachment due to his hand in illegal activities and ensuing cover-up (not to mention the antiwar protests and his illegal carpet bombing of Cambodia).

What still invites speculation is the status of the combat film before and after *Saving Private Ryan*, before 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Cull comments that the three years prior to 9/11 witnessed, “the most successful cycle of war movies since the surge of Vietnam War films of the late 1970s and 1980s” (Cull 1). And Basinger notes that “the really interesting questions about *Saving Private Ryan* are: Why now? And for what purpose?” (“Translating War” 47). She continues:

What has reactivated the combat genre? In asking the question, it’s probably a good idea to remember that World War II did not exactly disappear from American lives. It has remained with us in movie revivals, television shows, books, magazines, documentaries, and the History Channel. Among the many reasons being suggested for the new movie versions are: male directors who watched combat films as boys and now want to make their own; a new conservatism that takes us backward to simpler times; the millennium that makes us want to reevaluate the century; and so forth.... It’s a new chapter for the evolutionary process, and what we know now is that *Saving Private Ryan* may be the seminal film. It certainly will be the first key movie in the new era. (“Translating War” 47)

World War II has by now been raked over for film material, recently proffering two acclaimed films directed by Clint Eastwood about the U.S. attack on the Japanese Island of Iwo Jima in the latter days of the war, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. The first film deals with the trauma of the battle but more importantly on the feelings of inadequacy felt by three soldiers who happened to have helped raise the flag in the famous photograph as they embark on a bond-drive tour across the States, required as they are to acquit themselves as heroes. The latter film, rather remarkably for a U.S. release, shows the 35-day battle from the point of view of the Japanese, who encounter U.S. soldiers only in combat or as prisoners of war (or when taking them as prisoners). These latest contributions to the film war of 1941 to 1945 indicate that America is not finished with it.

Yet it is more than the opportunity of cheaper special effects and the anxiety over a new war that brought about the revival of the combat film. The political economy of the film industry in Hollywood in the 1990s transitioned into being conscious of an idea of globalization's opportunities. The conglomeration trend introduced more than ever before a film text's tenuous self-identity in the face of the ever-increasing number of venues for its reception. With this in mind, Hollywood majors focused their efforts on making films that were more visually overwhelming than ever before. Theatres in the nineties developed more than ever before into spaces where one went to be dominated by sound and image, by spectacle.

In the cornucopia of sound and image, the resurging combat genre takes history and makes it spectacular. As noted above, Crary underlined an idea of Debord's, who postulated that a central facet of the spectacle was the destruction of historical knowledge in an effort to determine anything to be constituted as "new" (106). Each new thing is pronounced as central and important, only to be immediately replaced (106). The recent combat film surge, with its strong spectacular aspects, perhaps works in part to obscure history—most particularly, our most recent past. Doherty refers to the confluence of things that brought the combat film back at a time when America is once again embroiled in warfare when he writes that

Decades from today, undergraduates hazy about the historical timeline will likely read these films not as emanations from the penumbra of Y2K but as bursts of patriotism ignited by 9/11, expressions of a renascent nation ready to kick ass.... All of the war-minded films embrace a set of suddenly au courant values—a respect for public servants in uniform, a sympathy for military codes of conduct, and a celebration of the virtues forged in the crucible of combat.... Now (and, one suspects, for the duration) the nitwits, psychos, and conspirators that served so long in Hollywood's military ranks have been supplanted by a duty-honor-country cadre recruited from chapel hour at the Citadel. ("The New War Movies" 214)

Schatz's description of film genres as problem solving social rituals acknowledges that, pro- or anti-, combat films will continue. Doherty, discussing two post-Y2K incarnations (*We Were Soldiers* and *Black Hawk Down*), emphasizes eloquently one of the gendered reasons for this: "The pagan oaths and blood rituals in both films preach the gospel of the oldest war story, older than Hollywood, older than Homer: that war is not hell but a place called heaven, far nobler than the candy-ass homefront, a celestial arena for true glory and mystical brotherhood" ("The New War Movies" 220). Admittedly, such a quintessential element of the combat picture, indeed one of its driving forces—that "mystical brotherhood" for which audiences continuously pay—cannot be contained by the combat picture as defined by Basinger: it is the group of beset adventurers, common to *Star Wars* and Harry Potter. This crucial feature of the combat film, whether it is "bad war" or not, will thus give life to the genre for years yet to come.

Fortunately or unfortunately, combat films will continue to offer spectacle, as well as stories that attempt to individualize war and explore aspects that spectacle cannot. Of course, no matter what, the war experience in film will never be "real"; as Basinger remarks with regard to one of the best and most prolific directors of the genre, "[Samuel] Fuller made the definitive comment on the attempt to put the war experience on film by saying, 'You can never do it. The only way is to fire live ammo over the heads of the people in the movie theatre'" ("Translating War" 44).

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The Longest Day. Dir. Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki, and Darryl F.

Zanuck. Perf. Robert Mitchum, Henry Fonda, Rod Steiger, Jeffery Hunter, Sean Connery, Red Buttons, John Wayne, Paul Anka. Twentieth Century Fox, 1962.

The Lord of The Rings: The Return of the King. Dir. Peter Jackson. Perf. Ian McKellen, Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen. New Line Cinema, 2003.

Malcolm X. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett, Albert Hall. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1992.

Mars Attacks! Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close, Rod Steiger, Darah Jessica Parker, Martin Short, Michael J. Fox. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1996.

Mary Poppins. Dir. Robert Stevenson. Perf. Julie Andrews, Dick Van Dyke. Beuna Vista Distribution Company, 1964.

MASH. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Donald Sutherland, Elliot Gould, Tom Skerritt, Sally Kellerman. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1970.

The Matrix. Dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Laurence Fishburne, Hugo Weaving, Joe Pantoliano. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

Memphis Belle. Dir. Michael Caton-Jones. Perf. Matthew Modine, D.B. Sweeney, Billy Zane, Tate Donovan, Eric Stolz. Warner Brothers, 1990.

The Memphis Belle: A Story of Flying Fortress. Dir. William Wyler. Paramount Pictures, 1944.

Men in Black. Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld. Perf. Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith. Columbia Pictures, MCA/Universal Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, 1997.

A Midnight Clear. Dir. Keith Gordon. Perf. Ethan Hawke, Kevin Dillon, Frank Whaley, Gary Sines. Interstar, 1992.

Missing in Action. Dir. Joseph Zito. Perf. Chuck Norris, M. Emmet Walsh. Cannon Group, Hoyts Distribution, 1984.

Missing in Action 2: The Beginning. Dir. Lance Hool. Perf. Chuck Norris, Soon-Tek Oh. Cannon Film Distributors, 1985.

Mules Swimming Ashore at Daiquiri, Cuba. Edison Manufacturing Company, 1898.

Operation Hollywood. Writ. Emilio Pacull and Maurice Ronai. Prod. Mark Edwards and Benedicte Felix. ARTE France-Les Films d'ici, 2004.

Pearl Harbor. Dir. Michael Bay. Perf. Ben Affleck, Kate Beckinsale, Josh Hartnett, Cuba Gooding Jr. Buena Vista Pictures, 2001.

Platoon. Dir. Oliver Stone. Perf. Charlie Sheen, Tom Berenger, Willem Dafoe. Orion Pictures Corporation, 1986.

Rambo: First Blood Part II. Dir. George P. Cosmatos. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna. TriStar Pictures, 1985.

Rambo III. Dir. Peter MacDonald. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Richard Crenna. TriStar Pictures, 1988.

Rules of Engagement. Dir. William Friedkin. Perf. Tommy Lee Jones, Samuel L. Jackson. Paramount Pictures, 2000.

Sands of Iwo Jima. Dir. Allan Dwan. Perf. John Wayne, John Agar. Republic Pictures, 1949.

Saving Private Ryan. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tom Sizemore. DreamWorks Distribution LLC, 1998.

Schindler's List. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Liam Neeson, Ben Kingsley, Ralph Fiennes. Universal Pictures, 1993.

Shining Through. Dir. David Seltzer. Perf. Michael Douglas, Melanie Griffith, Liam Neeson. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1992.

Shrek. Dir. Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. Perf. Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz. DreamWorks Distribution, 2001.

The Siege. Dir. Edward Zwick. Perf. Denzel Washington, Annette Bening, Bruce Willis, Tony Shalhoub. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1998.

Starship Troopers. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. Perf. Casper Van Dien, Denise Richards. TriStar Pictures, 1997.

Star Wars. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1977.

Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Ewen McGregor, Liam Neeson, Natalie Portman. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1999.

The Ten Commandments. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Charlton Heston, Yul Brenner, Anne Baxter. Paramount Pictures, 1956.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day. Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, Edward Furlong, Robert Patrick. TriStar Pictures, 1991.

The Thin Red Line. Dir. Terrence Malick. Perf. James Caviezel, Ben Chaplin, Elias Koteas, Nick Nolte, Sean Penn. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1998.

Tigerland. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Perf. Colin Farrell, Matthew Davis. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2000.

Titanic. Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet. Paramount Pictures, 1997.

Top Gun. Dir. Tony Scott. Perf. Tom Cruise, Kelly McGillis, Val Kilmer. Paramount

Pictures, 1986.

Tora! Tora! Tora! Dir. Richard Fleischer, Kinji Fukasaku, and Toshio Masuda. Perf.

Martin Balsam, Sô Yamamura, Joseph Cotton, Jason Robards, Twentieth Century
Fox Film Corporation, 1970.

Toy Story. Dir. John Lasseter. Perf. Tom Hanks, Tim Allen. Buena Vista Pictures, 1995.

Twister. Dir. Jan de Bont. Perf. Helen Hunt, Bill Paxton, Cary Elwes. Warner Bros.

Pictures, 1996

The Tuskegee Airmen. Dir. Robert Markowitz. Perf. Laurence Fishburne, Cuba Gooding,
Jr., Andre Braugher. Home Box Office, 1995.

U-571. Dir. Jonathan Mostow. Perf. Matthew McConaughey, Bill Paxton, Harvey Keitel,
Jon Bon Jovi. MCA/Universal Pictures, 2000.

A Walk in the Clouds. Dir. Alfonso Arau. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Aitana Sánchez-Gijón,
Anthony Quinn. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1995.

We Were Soldiers. Dir. Randall Wallace. Perf. Mel Gibson, Madeleine Stowe, Greg
Kinnear. Paramount Pictures, 2002.

When Trumpets Fade. Dir. John Irvin. Perf. Ron Eldard, Zak Orth, Martin Donovan.
Home Box Office, 1998.

Windtalkers. Dir. John Woo. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Adam Beach. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
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