

# The Anti-Experience as Cultural Memory: Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and the Vietnam War

Svenja Fehlhaber  
Hannover, Germany

**Abstract:** Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of trauma studies and of memory studies as well as on prominent postwar discourses, this paper investigates the position and function of Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 Vietnam War film *Apocalypse Now* with regard to a materializing collective memory of this war. The paper starts out by establishing the theoretical framework of memory studies as well as those intratextual and intertextual criteria through which a respective cultural product may enter the realm of cultural memory. It contextualizes the film within the interrelated history of Hollywood war cinema, the reintegration of Vietnam veterans into US society, and the political and medical discourses surrounding the conceptualization of PTSD. The close reading of the film reveals that the functional unity of an intratextually generated "experiential mode" (Erl 390), which enables a mass audience's experience of Benjamin Willard's 'anti-experience,' actualizes *Apocalypse Now's* potential through the use of intertextual generic and contextual references to become part of an active cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

"It is impossible for words to describe  
what is necessary to those who do not  
know what horror means."

*Apocalypse Now* 2:04:45

**W**alter E. Kurtz's above comment from Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 *Apocalypse Now*, the Vietnam War film this paper focuses on, establishes issues that are of central interest to my reading of the film: the commonly recognized incapacity of language to entirely encode individual experiences and, moreover, to convey the prolonged impact that horrific—at times even traumatizing—

experiences have on the individual. Implicitly, Kurtz's comment also registers the problem of making these experiences available within a larger context in order to generate a memory of the United States' military involvement in Vietnam.

Since it was coined by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 (Assmann, "Transformations" 51), the term 'collective memory' has spawned lively debates across the disciplines as to its exact definition; its relation to other "formats of memory," to use Aleida Assmann's term ("Four Formats" 22); and its actual formation and manifestation within a social group, society, or even nation. The particular aspect of memory studies this paper is interested in is the medium of film, which, in Astrid Erll's words, "seems to have become the leading medium of popular cultural memory" (395) and thus poses new questions within the field. Indeed, since the emergence of motion pictures in the late nineteenth century, the movie industry has undoubtedly become an influential producer of warfare representation that has been pervading mass culture in the United States. As products within an ever-expanding network of proliferating images and discourses that serve as a pivotal point of reference for mass audiences, war films have the potential to become part of the cultural memory that materializes as an aftereffect of a historical moment. *Apocalypse Now* stands out as one of the first films to find a cultural mode of dealing with the traumatic aftereffects of the Vietnam War, which were often all too present to returned soldiers yet also registered in the social, cultural, and political realm.

This paper neither restricts itself to a contextual reading of *Apocalypse Now* nor merely focuses on how the film operates in representing the Vietnam War or trauma. Rather, I am interested in productively relating theoretical, sociocultural, and medical debates to a close analysis of the filmic material in order to draw conclusions about *Apocalypse Now's* position and functional role within a larger historical and social framework. I start my study with an outline of central theoretical concepts of the different formats of memory, particularly Erll's work on the relation of mass media to cultural memory, are used to answer the central question of my argument: How exactly and by the fulfillment of what criteria may a respective cultural product enter the realm of cultural memory? This chapter also provides a meaningful basis on which the following chapter on Hollywood war representations further contextualizes *Apocalypse Now*. The latter presents and critically reflects on the intersection of political, social, and medical discourses of trauma in the aftermath of the indisputably problematic Vietnam War as well as on the film's position within the tradition of warfare representation in Hollywood. The subsequent close analysis of the film reveals how *Apocalypse Now* is positioned in and simultaneously influences these aforementioned discourses and, thus, its potential to enter cultural memory. I argue that a functional unity of an intratextually generated "experiential mode" (Erll 390), which enables a

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mass audience to vicariously experience Benjamin Willard's 'anti-experience,' and of a subversive use of intertextual generic references actualizes *Apocalypse Now*'s potential to become part of an active cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

### THE FORMATS OF MEMORY

The theorization of memory is an interdisciplinary endeavor that continues to produce at times conflicting conceptions—some “skeptics” even question the very existence of the meaning and real-world existence of a collective memory (Assmann, “Transformations” 49).<sup>1</sup> Having acknowledged the inherently discursive nature of the field, this chapter serves to position the paper within memory studies and to establish its theoretical foundation on the basis of which well-founded conclusions can be drawn in the chapters to follow.

Initially, it is important to understand that memory, or the process of remembering, denotes an individual neurological capacity that cognitively incorporates new sensorial data into an existing framework (van der Kolk and van der Hart 170). Furthermore, I understand individual memory as essentially dynamic and of a compositional character: In the words of Assmann, a “process of continuous reinscription and reconstruction in an ever-changing present” (“Transformations” 53) marks its nature to the effect that even external stimuli like pictures, films, or narratives in oral or written form are frequently synthesized with existing recollections of the past (“Transformations” 50).<sup>2</sup>

The concept of collective memory, though evidently understood as an antipode to the aforementioned form, is—if at all—not easy to pinpoint, neither in its actual intersubjective manifestation nor in its precise origin. Halbwachs's notion that the formation and maintenance of collective memories only occur in certain “social frames” (qtd. in Assmann, “Transformations” 51) that are produced and continually reinforced by “shared practices and discourses” is nevertheless useful to approximate a theoretical definition (Assmann, “Transformations” 52): Collectives evidently “do not ‘have’ a memory—they ‘make’ one” (Assmann, “Transformations” 55).

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1 The rapid development, convergence, and proliferation of contemporary media environments introduce complex questions and objectives to the study of memory.

2 In his seminal 2002 study *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, Harald Welzer argues that the individual biographical memory is, in essence, of a communicative nature. Biographical narrations, as he shows, are frequently constructed along internalized structures of cultural products like film or literature—in some instances, the fictional material even replaces or is synthesized with individual experiences (12, 195).

Assmann's study "Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past" puts the theoretical basis of my analysis in more concrete terms as it reconceptualizes the vague concept of collective memory as three constitutive subcategories: political, social, and cultural memory (22). While social memory materializes as a subject-bound phenomenon within generational, familial, and/or territorial confines, political and cultural memory manifest themselves in enduring material carriers (22-23). The former is deliberately produced and normalized by institutions as a coherent and independent narrative in the form of (annual) "commemoration rites" and "material and visual signs," e.g., memorials or monuments (26).<sup>3</sup> Rather vaguely, Assmann conceptualizes cultural memory as the societal compensatory strategy to counteract natural processes of forgetting. She identifies a subdivision of media that become part of the "active memory" as well as specific traces and artifacts that exist as or are gradually included in the "archival memory" (31). Instead of "the constitution and continuation" of cultural memory within a social frame, the latter is characterized by a process of "storing" to the effect of being "severed from living memories" (31) but able to "travel across centuries" (Erl 390).<sup>4</sup>

Erl's contributions to the field provide further essential insights for my reading of *Apocalypse Now* as, similar to my project, her work focuses on the relation of contemporary "[mass] media of circulation, which [...] make cultural memories today and are forgotten tomorrow" (390), to an active cultural memory. In "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," Erl asks a question that is indeed decisive: "What is it that turns *some* media (and not *others*) into powerful 'media of cultural memory,' meaning media which create and mold collective images of the past?" (390). As part of her answer, she deduces four rhetorical modes that she claims to be decisive for a fictional narrative's potential to enter the realm of cultural memory. The "experiential [...] mode," often used in literary texts, recreates the past as a "recent, lived-through experience" (390) and commonly employs first-person narration and/or stream of consciousness to "convey the specific inner experientiality of the trenches, combat, and trauma" along with an authenticating use of language and depiction of everyday life (390-91). The "[m]ythicizing [mode]" applies to narratives that are concerned with "the remembrance of foundational events which are situated in a faraway, mythical past" while the "antagonistic mode" is characterized by its affirmation of one version of the past and its categorical rejection of others (391) and

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3 For a more detailed account of the 'production' of political memory and tradition, cf. Eric Hobsbawm's seminal essay "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914."

4 Note that the formats of memory do not always allow for a keen distinction. Also, visual or narrative historical material frequently enters the realm of social or individual memory (Assmann, "Four Formats" 31).

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the “reflexive mode” (390) unites narratives that “draw attention to processes and problems of remembering” (391).

In the second part of her answer, Erll delineates intertextual instances of “‘premediation’ and ‘remediation’” of certain historical events on a temporal axis as another dynamic that distinguishes cultural products that potentially become part of an active cultural memory (392). Premediations “provide schemata for future experience and its representation” (392; cf. 394) and can be productively related to Barry Keith Grant’s notion that genres establish a scaffold of “conventions, iconography, plots, themes, and characters” (116). These elements constitute the horizon against which audience expectations are formulated and each remediation is read.

Concurrent to Assmann’s emphasis on discursive formations, Erll finally identifies “pluri-medial contexts” within which the potential to become part of the cultural memory must be “*realized* in the process of reception: Novels and movies must be read and viewed by a community [...] [in] a certain kind of *context*, in which novels and films are prepared and received as memory-shaping media” (396, 395). Erll’s notion evidently stems from the recognition that through these contexts, a variety of representations or thematizations in literature, popular culture, or the press as well as political, academic, or social discourses are “circulated” (396). While it is impossible to retrace these pluri-medial networks in their entirety, the concept is indeed insightful for postwar discourses. This paper retraces these discourses in their function as a multifaceted context in which *Apocalypse Now* and the reception thereof are embedded and take effect. It will be interesting to see how these initial theoretic implications already resonate within the contextualization of *Apocalypse Now* in the framework of (cultural) memory studies.

## **THE HOLLYWOOD (WAR) MACHINE, MEDICINE, AND TRAUMA: MEDIAL ‘TRUTH’ MEETS PSYCHOLOGICAL ‘REALITIES’**

Cinematic representations of warfare compose a long tradition of documenting, commenting on, and reacting to conflicts in US history (cf. Slocum, “General Introduction” 2; Westwell 2), thus recording continual discursive (re)definitions and reinstatements of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the cultural realm. In this manner, motion pictures naturalize their asserted ‘truth’ of US warfare and “solidify cultural memory [by] creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons of the past” within a generic framework that spans the history of US military involvement (Erll 393).

In pre- and remediations of World War I and World War II, for instance, motifs of “togetherness, brotherhood, and team work” (Auster and Quart 7) alongside “a well-organized national military structure, [...] strong leadership, [and] discipline” promoted American (democratic) values and myths while also promoting positive connotations of warfare (Boggs and Pollard 13-14).<sup>5</sup> In doing so, these mediations implicitly legitimized military venture—their function has indeed often been equated to a “catalyst of cohesion” (Westwell 36). As causality dictated, this positivistic take was maintained in representations of the Korean War and thus provided the images of glory and heroism with which soldiers initially went to Vietnam (Auster and Quart 1, 13)—and equally shaped the audience’s expectations when they went to see (Vietnam) war films at the movie theater.

The United States had only witnessed the Vietnam War within its national boundaries through ubiquitous coverage in television, radio, and newspapers (cf. Slocum, “General Introduction” 6-7), but the conflict certainly registered in the United States in the physical form of returning soldiers who became the embodiment of a national traumatic experience. As Vietnam veterans went through an often problematic process of reintegration<sup>6</sup> and many<sup>7</sup> experienced posttraumatic symptoms, the trauma of the war was also markedly felt within the nation itself. Twenty-one years after the official end of the US military’s involvement in Vietnam, Robert M. Slabey writes: “‘Vietnam’ has become an American metaphor for [...] a syndrome for which no cure exists” (Preface 1).

Symptoms of combat trauma were recorded much earlier than the Vietnam War. Already in World War I, they were conceptualized as physical injuries, but only since the Korean War were psychiatrists an integral component of the military.<sup>8</sup> It was in the 1970s that medical innovations introduced clinical drugs that seemed “indeed marvellous” in ‘curing’ symptoms of acute combat stress reactions (CSR) near the frontline (Shephard 364).<sup>9</sup> The second edition of the American Psychiatric

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5 This is indeed evident when considering the funding of selected productions by the Pentagon and the fact that film releases at times coincided with successful recruitment (Westwell 3).

6 Jonathan F. Borus states that veterans were “essentially ignored by the military for the first 8 years of the war” (32) and that early suggestions in the US Senate to launch programs to facilitate reintegration and offer medical help were turned down due to a denial of sufficient cause (39).

7 Indeed, it is difficult to reconstruct the exact number of PTSD cases from the numerous sources, which differ in method and (temporal) scope (Shephard 366). The Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, issued by the US Congress, records 829,000 cases (15.2%) of PTSD among veterans in 1990 (Bieber 218-20).

8 Psychiatrists’ context of employment, however, paradoxically dictated the avoidance of in-depth treatment in order to preserve the fighting power (Shephard 343).

9 In 1970, Peter G. Bourne praised that since soldiers could rapidly be sent back to duty on “tranquilizing drugs,” the number of hospitalizations was decreased (19). At no point in time were more than twenty psychiatrists stationed in Vietnam (Shephard 343).

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Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM-II), published in 1974, divorced CSR and symptoms of combat trauma; therefore, the latter was often diagnosed as schizophrenia and equally treated with "massive doses of anti-psychotic drugs" (Shephard 362; cf. Anderson 82).

It was in the late 1960s, however, that groups such as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War formed. They soon established a cooperation with well-known psychiatrists, such as Robert Lifton and Chaim Shatan, who joined formerly established 'rap sessions' to provide professional therapeutic help (Shephard 356; cf. Gilbert 96-97). Psychiatrists thereafter initiated an offensive against the biological trend and sought both professional and public recognition of the veterans' psychological condition. Utilizing pluri-medial channels, "[t]he media [...] was fertile ground for those wishing to highlight the plight of the Vietnam veterans" in political debates and thereby "create[d] a climate of emotional pressure" (Shephard 366)—"[w]hat happened between 1970 and 1980 was as much a social negotiation as a clinical programme" (Shephard 396). During public events, veterans related the circumstances of military action in Vietnam and discussed their experiences (Shephard 356). Not until 1979, the year when *Apocalypse Now* was first shown in movie theaters, did the US Congress finally agree on "a separately funded and separately sited national system of Veterans Outreach Centers" (Gilbert 97; cf. Shephard 362).<sup>10</sup>

A landmark moment of the medical and collective recognition of trauma is the American Psychiatric Association's eventual inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the DSM-III in 1980. Care and treatment became government funded and the recognition of PTSD gained popular appeal: The vogue for trauma was soon taken up and utilized in "therapeutic television" (Elsaesser 196); PTSD questionnaires and an upsurge in counseling merged the medical concept with popular culture (Shephard 385-87). In another realm of the pluri-medial context, the Vietnam War "helped to create a new 'consciousness of trauma' in Western society" by "redefin[ing] the social role of psychiatry and society's perception of mental health" (Shephard 355). Trauma also gained interdisciplinary academic significance: In the 1980s, studies on different forms of trauma, such as war trauma, abuse, or natural catastrophes, proliferated in numerous disciplines (psychology; gender, cultural, and literary studies; and historical sciences) for the first time (Caruth, "Trauma" 3-4).

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10 A climate of mutual repudiation between the Veterans Administration (VA) and Vietnam veterans had formerly complicated the matter: The VA often found their therapeutic methods incompatible with problems such as alcoholism, alienation, unemployment, and PTSD that Vietnam veterans faced (cf. Gilbert 94-96). In the mid 1980s, "Vet Centers were treating about 150,000 vets a year and another 28,000 were in treatment for PTSD in one of the 172 Veteran Administration Hospitals" (Shephard 392).

My analysis relies on the conceptualizations of scholars that have defined PTSD as resulting from an abrupt event “outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 69), that transcends the individual’s cognitive capability to process the “unthinkable” (Hirsch 13; cf. Alexander 6). Its unification with existing cognitive systems of knowledge and experience is, thus, hindered—the event remains external from consciousness, unchanged and isolated (Hirsch 9, 22-23; cf. Caruth, “Recapturing” 153). At the moment of traumatization, the mind enters a state of “numbing” and precludes a conscious experience of the traumatic event in the first place (van der Kolk and van der Hart 175). I refer to the momentary outcome of this incongruous relation of individual cognizance and the event that is happening at this moment with the term ‘anti-experience.’

The traumatized individual consequently experiences belated but literal “behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 172) that persist over time as a “repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (Caruth, “Trauma” 4-5). These returns are, however, far from incidental: It is an “increased arousal to [...] stimuli recalling the event” that Caruth lists as symptomatic of PTSD (“Trauma” 4). A striking “*paradox*” (Caruth, “Recapturing” 152), which she accentuates, notably aligns with cinematic warfare representation in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, as will become evident. The traumatic experience is ever-penetrating, while concrete memory of it can neither be accessed nor put into a meaningful linguistic form (“Recapturing” 152). The common therapeutic method to integrate it into an existing mental framework is narration: “There is [...] an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one’s story [...] in order to be able to live one’s life” and reaffirm one’s identity (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 63; cf. Elsaesser 198)—a notion that becomes central when analyzing the realization of *Apocalypse Now* on the level of narration.

Complications arise when certain episodes in a nation’s history and former (self-)conceptions do not converge: The US military involvement in Vietnam as well as its aftereffects were evidently incompatible with positivistic, self-confident premediations of US warfare. With the exception of a few patriotic 1960s Vietnam combat films, e.g., John Wayne’s 1968 *The Green Berets*, cultural production entered a “state of collective denial” (Boggs and Pollard 89; cf. Westwell 60-62) and was evidently struggling with the question of how to consolidate generic formulas with the problematic legacy of the war. Guy Westwell reads the tendency of various productions from the early to mid 1970s to employ a mere “Vietnam subtext” (60) as a compensatory strategy that locates the psychologically challenged Vietnam veterans in America as “a crazy, dysfunctional time bomb” (Shephard 393) or “socially disruptive forces” (Auster and Quart 49) in movies such as Martin Scorsese’s 1976 *Taxi Driver*. In

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their thematic focus, these films are nevertheless part of the pluri-medial context of the time, which negotiated the aftereffects of the war with different approaches.

Joshua Hirsch's work on a phenomenon he labels the "discourse of trauma" is indeed insightful at this point (18): He observes that

there exists a period of time in the life of a society that has suffered a massive blow—after the initial encounter with a traumatizing historical event but before its ultimate assimilation—in which [...] a posttraumatic historical consciousness [materializes]—a kind of textual compromise between the senselessness of the initial traumatic encounter and the sense-making apparatus of a fully integrated historical narrative. (18-19)

Accordingly, Hirsch calls the resulting films "posttraumatic cinema" (19). Analogous to Erll's experiential mode, posttraumatic cinema, among which I include *Apocalypse Now*, "attempt[s] to formally reproduce for the spectator an experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable," which is transported in similarly unexpected, unconventional cinematic forms (Hirsch 19), as the analysis will illustrate.

Parallel to the upsurge of countercultural movements in the 1950s and '60s, whose public negotiation of the war in demonstrations is part of the pluri-medial context,<sup>11</sup> the New Hollywood generation of university-trained filmmakers introduced new ways of critical aesthetic expressions that broke with Hollywood conformity in representing wars. Raising questions of morality and legitimization, their films depict the "horrors and futility of warfare, [...] disillusionment, [and] the terrible costs of war at home and abroad"—*Apocalypse Now* is no exception (Boggs and Pollard 89-90). At the sneak preview in Cannes in 1979, the film was highly applauded exactly for its "indistinct logic of the ending" (Cowie 127)—an insight that illuminates a cross-medial negotiation that is strongly reminiscent of Erll's pluri-medial networks. Premediations within the genre served as formulas against which productions by the New Hollywood generation were pitted; they thus correspond to Hirsch's aforementioned notion of posttraumatic cinema as innovative yet often marked by a trace of incongruity.

It will indeed be interesting to see how Coppola's film positions itself within this subversive trend, how it plays with the complexity of thematic and cinematographic Hollywood conventions, and how—and to what end—it employs aesthetics and cinematography in order to generate an experience of the Vietnam War. As the analysis will show, this is accomplished through an intriguing realization of Erll's experiential mode in the light of a persisting rupture still clearly felt individually, culturally, and collectively within the United States.

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11 The title *Apocalypse Now* is a reference to a hippie badge that read "Nirvana Now" (Cowie 118).

## REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTABLE, EXPERIENCING THE ANTI-EXPERIENCE: *APOCALYPSE NOW*

*Apocalypse Now* tells the story of Captain Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen), a US Army special operations officer who is sent on a mission to assassinate Green Beret Colonel Walter Kurtz (Marlon Brando). Kurtz is presumably insane and resides as the 'king' among an indigenous tribe in Cambodia. The following close reading will analyze the film with regard to its mode of narration and its referencing of the established context in order to allow for an assessment of its memory-making potential in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

### A Pathology of the American Soldier

The opening scene already exemplifies the film's recurrent disruption of genre conventions that had been gradually established in premediations of US warfare: Strongly informed by these premediations, the audience has formulated expectations as to the film's subject matter and generic framework when the film ingeniously opens with the sound overlay of an approaching helicopter, after which a slow fade-in introduces a prolonged and stable long shot of a jungle's edge. When a napalm detonation suddenly ends the tranquility of the jungle and the synchronized first line of The Doors' emblematic song "The End" resounds, however, the film begins to show a psychological profile of its protagonist that produces a different experience for the audience with regard to their aforementioned expectations of Hollywood war representations.

A transparent inverted shot of Willard's head as he lies in his Saigon hotel room slowly fades in to establish the general mood of the film: extremes of psychological distress, instability, and isolation. The detonation sequences fade in and out, come and go, intensify and dissolve again unexpectedly; they obstruct visual clarity and thus underline Willard's inability to understand and control them even when he is asleep (*Apocalypse Now* 0:03:27).<sup>12</sup> His vacant and wandering gaze persists a considerable period of time, yet it appears that he perceives anything but the meaningful arrangement of the recurring transparent overlay of the detonation with the ceiling fan above his head (0:01:45), which is constantly overlapping with the ceiling fan's movement and sounds of helicopter blades (0:02:45). In line with Miriam Hansen's reading of Willard's "state [as one] of trance and tension" (123), it seems that for lack

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12 All subsequent references to film refer to: *Apocalypse Now*. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Perf. Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen. United Artists, 1979. DVD.

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of a better categorization, some scholars, like Westwell, merely describe this audiovisual match as the “fan recalling the blades of a helicopter” (63). Others, such as Jeffrey Chown, more accurately read it as “suggesting the inescapability of the horror the character has experienced” (127).

In very concrete terms, however, I find that the scene employs a cinematographic style that is strikingly reminiscent of symptomatic, ubiquitously penetrating, literal intrusions of combat impressions that blur the boundary of inner and outer ‘reality’ for PTSD patients. Thus, I argue that the fan epitomizes the stimulus for Willard’s belated intrusive return of the traumatizing events in flashbacks and reenactments, which the audience witnesses in this scene. The repetition of the fan motif throughout the film indicates the helicopter’s iconographic status in modern warfare (representations). In *Apocalypse Now*, however, it also simultaneously exemplifies “the frequency of the flashback trope” in trauma cinema (Turim 207). Sensations of sudden terror are inexplicable by any perceptible force within the diegesis (0:04:56). What they suggest, however, is equally symptomatic: Visual or audible triggers activate a literal return of the traumatizing event. The audience is invited to read the film in its entirety against the backdrop of this pathologizing portrayal offered in the opening scene.

When the camera pans from an array of personal documents and pictures to Willard’s motionless body with a newly intruding overlay of the jungle scene (0:03:03) and then pans to drugs and alcohol, it creates a tableau that had become symptomatic of the depiction of Vietnam veterans in the previously mentioned cinematic premediations in the 1970s: (Social) isolation, psychological numbing, and drug abuse characterize the stylized image of an individual who tries to escape a haunting past. In a similar vein, a point of view shot of Willard’s voyeuristic gaze through the closed blinds (0:04:22) underscores his passivity, spatial seclusion, and alienation from the outside world as well as his mental entrapment.

In line with the experiential mode, the narration consists of Willard’s first-person voice-over, which sets in at this point to inform the spectator about his failed reintegration and reciprocal longing for the ‘other’ place when he had gone back home after a first mission (0:04:25): “I’ve been back there and [...] it just didn’t exist anymore” (0:48:50). Here, voice-over and visual material complement each other in conveying an equally felt displacement in combat and at home, which was a generally recognized problem of returned Vietnam veterans, who frequently suffered from the inability to reconcile their experiences with the ‘normality’ they returned to (Borus 36). Caruth adds that one’s own survival of the traumatic event is in fact often experienced as a crisis of the self (“Trauma” 9)—and this is clearly the case for Willard. When

shattering the mirror with his fist (0:06:55), his psychologically challenged self is identified as an alien, uncontrollable enemy who he tries to repel with desolation.

The claustrophobic feeling Willard describes in the comment “each time I looked around, the walls moved in a little tighter” becomes graspable for the audience through the filmic realization of the scene (0:05:57). Visual and auditory material gradually intensify and gain a surreal momentum of their own. Although Westwell also mentions that “we see Willard [...] suffering flashbacks” with reference to the opening scene, he fails to explain how this is cinematically realized and, interestingly, reads the intruding images of Kurtz in Cambodia as a “hallucination in which he sees the final scenes of the film, a premonition of events about to happen” (63), and, hence, he reads the story at this point as a chronological narrative. However, being strongly reminiscent of the collapse of a coherent chronology in PTSD, the flashbacks evidently disrupt the clear spatial and temporal structure so very intact in World War II films. For instance, the ritualistic placing of bowls (0:05:50) and dance elements at the end of the opening scene (0:05:58), the intensifying psychedelic music and chiaroscuro lighting, as well as frames that show Willard’s eyes and blackened face devoid of emotion and combined with faces carved in stone and fire in the jungle (0:06:24) literally reproduce aesthetics and images that are temporally located at the end of the film (2:20:19, 2:05:35).

I showed that the temporal structure of *Apocalypse Now*, contrary to premediations of US warfare, remains highly ambivalent. Reading the film as a cultural negotiation of contemporary debates on the conceptualization of PTSD, the aforementioned intrusive flashbacks that reappear at the end of the film and statements like “every time I think I’m going to wake up back in the jungle” (0:04:42) strongly suggest that the mission to kill Kurtz has preceded Willard’s present stay at the hotel in Saigon. In present-tense narration, he states that he is desperately “waiting for a mission” (0:05:28), and, thus, he evidently seeks the stability of a clearly formulated objective. The reenactments and sequences from the end of the film, however, are abruptly concluded by a slow fade-out into black (0:07:26). Moreover, Willard’s voice-over conspicuously changes to the past tense, and hence, to retrospective narration, which sets out to show how two soldiers pick up Willard for the Kurtz mission, which provides the sequential scaffold of the film. In his retrospective narration, Willard explains: “It was a real choice mission. And when it was over, I’d never want another” (0:07:49). The expression of hope for a heroic closure and stability before the mission to kill Kurtz is, however, prevented by PTSD symptoms witnessed in the opening scene. Hence, the objective of a new mission indeed seems to Willard like the only realistic one at this point.

Against the backdrop of the temporal disruption on the narrative level, I read the plot sequences after this introductory scene in the hotel room as Willard’s recapturing

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of past events. From a detached point of view, in strikingly short, straightforward, past-tense utterances that accompany the visual material of the film, he explicitly mentions his objective to narrate his story (0:09:45) and to finally be able to 'possess' his anti-experience of the Kurtz mission. Willard's narrative—a reconstitution of his own history, memory, and identity—intriguingly correlates with a gradually materializing active cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

As already illustrated in the first scene of *Apocalypse Now*, the film references and cinematically refines structural and temporal elements of PTSD. This first conclusion allows important insights into the film's embeddedness in the contextual discourses and its contrastive function against the horizon of generic premediations. Along with its experiential mode that makes the traumatizing event graspable for the audience, the film also incorporates the network of discourses within which a cultural memory of the war only slowly materializes.

### **A Traumatizing Journey up the River**

As the film continues, Willard's narration redirects the nonlinear plotline to before the mission and to his epic journey up the river on a patrol boat in the company of four other soldiers: the machinist Chef from New Orleans; the young surfer champion Lance Johnson from California; the inexperienced African American teenager Clean from the South Bronx; and the conscientious captain of the boat, Phillips. I read this journey as a cinematic portrayal of the potential origins of PTSD in the context of service during the Vietnam War. As the story itself is mediated through Willard's retrospective narration, the filmic material is imbued with a visual and emotional immediacy for the audience that I read as a potent cinematic realization of the experiential mode, as I shall argue. As previously outlined, the experiential mode is crucial for the assessment of the film's role within a materializing cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

The prelude to Willard's journey up the river is significantly portrayed in a realistic *mise-en-scène*: The helicopter slowly approaches the camp in bright sunlight; the picture is no longer hazy (0:09:13). The prelude also depicts how the protagonist still functions as part of what Elaine Scarry calls the "single gigantic weapon" of the Hollywood war machine (70). With an implicit reference to the political dimension of collective memory, Willard's authorities entrust him with the confidential mission to be the "caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's memory" (0:09:36). They inform him about the dangerous circumstances and the measures that he is to take to complete his mission: "Terminate with extreme prejudice" (0:17:42). This sequence markedly depicts and remediates the teleological plot and visual style as well as the positivity and

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moral distinctness of earlier premediations, thus corresponding to the generic expectations of the audience.<sup>13</sup>

The following sequence is, however, significant for my analysis because it includes two combat scenes that exemplify the film's ambivalent relation to traditional Hollywood formats in what Westwell labels a "structure of ambiguity" (68). I understand the scene Willard faces when he finds the division that is to take him to the Nang River as an indication that warfare positions itself outside of common parameters of reason and order that had previously permeated Hollywood premediations of US warfare. The pointless destruction in this first combat scene demonstrates the scope of confusion in the filmic material (0:25:52): a slow pan over a wounded child, a soldier who orders a Vietnamese to climb down the tree, and burning houses. A loudspeaker announcement declares, "We will not hurt or harm you," while, at the same time, Colonel Kilgore distributes 'death cards' (0:28:20).<sup>14</sup> In the second combat scene, this strategy is repeated when a pan across a tranquil scene showing white-clad children in a courtyard of a village is abruptly terminated by the violent American attack from above (0:38:05). This is systematically juxtaposed with a later shot of this exact courtyard showing, however, the suffering of wounded US soldiers (0:42:40).

Both of these combat scenes conspicuously repeat collectively intelligible elements of premediations within the genre, which constitute the horizon on which the structure of ambiguity is crafted. Colonel Kilgore, who commands a former cavalry division, continues to proudly wear the cavalry hat, and he is commonly filmed from a low angle that highlights his heroic and self-aware as well as steady and calm pose while bombs hit nearby (0:26:23). This portrayal marks him as a remediation of the frontier and war hero who appears temporally displaced yet no less phenomenal.<sup>15</sup> Kilgore's heroic appeal is utterly subverted and assumes an absurd character when, for example, he stops to provide a wounded Vietnamese with lifesaving help but then suddenly leaves him in order to meet the surfer champion Lance (0:29:29). Furthermore, he attacks a Vietnamese village in order to reach a good surfing spot on the next day (0:39:05). Similarly, a prodigiously grandiose diegetic replay of Richard

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13 These expectations might also have been raised by TV commercials that advertized the film with an emphasis on mystery and dramatic elements (Cowie 128).

14 As explained in the film, these playing cards with the division's logo on the back side are thrown on or attached to corpses to leave a marker of the victorious division's identity.

15 Willard's comment emphasizes this association: "He was one of those guys that had that weird light around him. You just knew that he wasn't gonna get so much as a scratch here" (0:31:30). While *Apocalypse Now* certainly entails mythical elements in this particular scene, I contest Ertl's categorization of the film as a mere representative for the mythicizing mode (390-91), as the analysis shows.

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Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" demonstrates cultural superiority during the attack on the small village, whose final destruction is concluded by Kilgore's comment "I love the smell of napalm in the morning" (0:47:38). A metafictional comment (and reference to the pluri-medial network the film positions itself in) is furthermore weaved into the scene to deconstruct and preclude any ideological function of this remediation of US warfare—Coppola himself and his crew appear on screen and encourage the soldiers to continue their activity: "This is for television. [...] Just go by like you're fighting" (0:26:42). While the apparent glorification of US (technological) warfare is conspicuously reminiscent of conventional Hollywood premediations, its remediation in *Apocalypse Now* evidently never fails to cynically undermine its efficacy to normalize images of military heroism within the nation.

Notably, the sequence also operates according to the experiential mode, by means of which the film conveys Willard's anti-experience of the war. *Apocalypse Now* ingeniously actualizes this mode's employment of immersive strategies like I-narration or stream of consciousness in its cinematographic style: Thrilling combat action coupled with vivid cutting and camera movement such as tracking shots or point of view shots (0:39:15) ensure the spectators' immersion and "vicarious enjoyment of the spectacle" (Chown 134), yet the scene, as I have argued, never fails to self-consciously subvert this very enjoyment on the content level.

Evidently, Coppola's New Hollywood background finds expression in his productive rethinking of the war film genre. *Apocalypse Now* conspicuously utilizes generic conventions as counterpoles that are referenced yet simultaneously subverted:<sup>16</sup> Diametrically opposed meanings and emotions are functionally integrated and generated to realize the scene's intriguing and poignant critical vitality, which disrupts the very legitimization and moral foundation of the US military in this form of posttraumatic (war) cinema. Regarding this indeed productive remediation of US warfare, the film has the potential to enter an active cultural memory, thereby also dynamically promoting the very formation of different formats of memory in the aftermath of the war, as the following quote confirms:

[It] lies not in the unity, coherence, and ideological unambiguousness of the images [...], but instead in the fact that they serve as cues for the discussion of those images, thus centering a memory culture on certain

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16 Though Grant's insights are indicative for my reading of *Apocalypse Now*, I do not consent to his evaluative notion of a film's aesthetics as elaborated on in his work "Experience and Meaning in Genre Films." Strikingly, Kenneth von Gunden also reads *Apocalypse Now* along a transgression of genre boundaries, yet he analyzes elements of the Western, of samurai films, of the fantasy genre, of the thriller, and also of hardboiled detective fiction (41-42).

medial representations and sets of questions concerned with them. (Erlil 396)

Following the Kilgore episode, the crew is persistently exposed to intensifying but mostly indistinct stressors that produce initial perceptible stress reactions. Kai Erikson asserts that not only one traumatizing event but also a “*persisting condition*,” a prolonged exposure to highly stressful situations, can trigger “an enduring state of mind” that (185), according to Arthur S. Blank’s review of medical studies, can even aggravate the duration and severity of later PTSD symptoms (19). As the film progresses, the characters in focus (particularly Willard and Lance) react very differently to the scenes unfolding around them since “one [potentially traumatizing] event does not initiate a traumatic reaction in everyone” (Shephard 391); this is only the case if the event transcends the individual’s cognitive capability of processing and resists a connection to prior knowledge (cf. Hirsch 13; Caruth, “Recapturing” 153). When Willard and Chef first penetrate the jungle, eye-level pans followed by extreme long shots are employed to present them as enveloped by and almost invisible in the threatening shadow of the overwhelmingly spacious obscurity: the seemingly impenetrable jungle (0:50:20). *Mise-en-scène* and cinematography are employed to generate a sense of what Bourne calls “anticipatory psychic stress” for the audience to experience (7). A sudden confrontation with a tiger prompts acute stress reactions (0:53:00): overwhelming fear, impulsive firing, momentary disorientation, and emotional breakdown. Chef frantically repeats to himself the rule to “never get out of the boat” (0:53:24). A close-up of Willard’s vacant stare accentuates his momentarily dazed state; the images remain bleak and shadowy, thereby underlining his withdrawal from the situation (0:54:04). Subsequently, the lighting, for the first time, becomes more subdued before a ‘mending’ but no less bizarre and surreal interlude at Han Phat temporarily restores the film’s mood (1:05:15).<sup>17</sup>

In fact, due to the military tactic of attrition during the Vietnam War, a clearly demarcated front line, and hence “meaningful tactical objectives” (Gilbert 92), did not exist. Guerrilla warfare made the “invisible foe” (Anderson 59) difficult to distinguish from those to be ‘protected’—soldiers were thus exposed to constant stress and “immersed in seemingly aimless violence” (Anderson 58; cf. Anderson 55-59; Bieber 203-07). This motif is not only reemployed in the jungle scene but repeatedly throughout the film, for instance when establishing shots show the dense jungle metaphorically closing in on the boat (1:10:05).

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17 The Han Phat scene is characterized by references to US consumer culture and, self-referentially, the invigorating and curative effect of entertainment (Playboy bunnies, cigarettes, motorcycles).

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In what follows, the soldiers encounter a sampan boat in another infamous episode. The highly charged situation escalates due to a woman's sudden movement, after which all Vietnamese farmers are gunned down by Clean and Lance. In this potentially traumatizing situation, Clean lifts his sunglasses like a veil from his eyes to perceive the unthinkable (1:15:33)—what he is capable of obviously transgresses his (self-)understanding. Meanwhile, in an attempt to retreat to a secure and innocent relation, which is symptomatic of CSR (Blank 10-11), Lance channels his attention to a puppy (1:16:04), which he also does later in order to refrain from confronting his comrade's death (01:30:19). Conversely, Willard kills a wounded woman to continue his mission without delay (01:16:46), thereby reclaiming conscious control of his actions. Chown comments: "Whatever the rationale of his action, it assaults the sensibilities of the viewer and should destroy [...] any sense of vicarious identification with the adventurers" who "methodically" kill (138, 129; cf. Hansen 125). While identification with the protagonist is conventionally employed in Hollywood (war) films to further the audience's intensified experience of the central conflict, it gradually becomes more complicated throughout *Apocalypse Now*.

After a fade-out into black at the end of the sampan scene, fifteen seconds pass before the fade-in—a distinct break that marks a transition in narration and filmic aesthetics. Generic schemes of experiencing war in films, while still functional in the Kilgore episode, are obviously eliminated when the soldiers reach the Do Long Bridge. The audience is confronted with a reorganized logic of viewer immersion as the experiential mode now operates on the level of aesthetics. Neo-noir style, sharp light accentuations (explosions and fire) (1:18:33), and unidentifiable sounds (1:21:00) are employed to create a surreal, gradually amplified mood of mental and perceptual numbing in a distorted, dystopic environment. Focusing on trauma(tization) in this paper, mise-en-scène and cinematographic aspects allow for a reading that emphasizes how visuals invariably evoke the connotation specific to an individual's fragmented anti-experience when facing a traumatizing event: A state of numbing and impeded perception is effectively engendered by the lighting that alternates between a dim spot of light on Willard's passive gaze in a medium shot and absolute darkness (1:22:26). Remarkably long takes and slow camera movement generate this effect, which implicitly references CSR symptoms like "psycho-motor retardation" (Blank 10; cf. Blank 10-11). Also, Chown attests to the potential of this filmic actualization of the experiential mode when he concludes that "[t]he greatest success of *Apocalypse Now* is in its visual texture, the total immersion the viewer feels into the look and sensations of the Vietnam War" (127). *Apocalypse Now* evidently takes the audience to another level of experiencing the filmic realization of war.

The remarkable cinematic implementation of Willard's anti-experience by a potent experiential mode drastically transgresses the rationality and superiority in Hollywood premediations of US warfare. The audience witnesses multiple manifestations of soldiers' natural coping mechanisms at the bridge: Panicking soldiers desperately beg to be taken home (1:19:19), act mindlessly in a state of impenetrable daze, wander aimlessly, or are paralyzed (1:22:26). Other acute stress reactions include withdrawal, paranoia, or psychomotor retardation, symptoms that studies attest to have no absolute but a significant correlation with later occurrences of severe PTSD (Blank 11). Van der Kolk and van der Hart report that many trauma survivors experience an automatic "dissociation" from the traumatizing event (168), which, due to the disintegration of the traumatic event, is symptomatically not accessible to the traumatized individual.

I concur with Gabriele Weyand's assertion that in the Do Long episode outer and inner world share characteristics of disturbed perception in a mode of psychological realism (107). However, it is important to note that in my reading, the filmic material conveys Willard's attempt to eventually access and integrate the traumatic event into an existing mental framework by narrating it. On the level of cinematography, this filmic implementation of the anti-experience is still marked by a partial cognitive inaccessibility that the film nevertheless expresses in its particular aesthetic mode. The Do Long episode, not exclusively but most prominently so, thus exemplifies some traces of Erll's reflexive mode. The reflexive mode references the therapeutic method according to which Willard produces a retrospective narration, which is cinematically encoded, as an individual memory.

As mentioned, the narration of *Apocalypse Now* mostly relies on Willard's voice-over, which, along the lines of the experiential mode, is conspicuously marked as an authentic register by a range of acronyms, jargon, and the like.<sup>18</sup> In the context of trauma studies, Bernd Hüppauf explains that the "decomposition of the soldiers' self was marked by the end of narratives" (62), and it is exactly this causality that the film follows: The foundation on which Willard may still coherently fashion a narrative until it is reduced to a minimum (at the Do Long Bridge and in Kurtz's dwelling) is supplied by the dossier that contains signifiers that chronologically record Kurtz's career and professional demise.<sup>19</sup> Willard painstakingly tries to follow this dossier and make sense of it through a chronological, causal narration. As the film proceeds, the audience is left to witness how the soldiers' amplifying psychological stress, and the cinematic encoding thereof, coincides with Willard's review of Kurtz's development. As outlined above, the audience's immersion and vicarious experience of the psychological

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18 Such as "COMSEC Intelligence" (0:08:40), "Charlie" (0:26:25), or the military alphabet (1:10:55).

19 These include official documents, photos, contracts, articles, letters, and maps.

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development follows a reorganized logic that ensures its continuation. When the dossier gradually comes to its limit in providing the material for a logical narration and meaningful representation of an individual's traumatic experience, Willard's comment "I felt I knew [...] things about Kurtz that weren't in the dossier" intriguingly reflects this very shift in the film's logic (1:18:20).

### **In the End, There Is the Beginning**

In what follows, Phillips and Chef are tragically killed in attacks out of the jungle, and anticipatory psychic stress intensifies. The effects primarily register on the inexperienced Lance; for example, he begins to paint his face as though hiding behind a protective mask, withdraws from interaction, dances while in a trance, and lets out screams and moans of suffering and desperation during and after the attacks (1:29:53). While the company approaches Kurtz's dwelling, temporal and spatial demarcations are increasingly blurred by impenetrable fog (1:32:04) and persistent cross-fading (1:38:09). They pass dark territories where torches and large crosses are visible against a light emanating from unknown sources (1:38:19); in daylight, corpses, skulls, and spears complement the scene (1:38:35).

Having reached Kurtz's dwelling and facing the psychedelic, utterly dystopic atmosphere that accompanies Kurtz's intense but often elusive monologues, Willard becomes increasingly passive and withdrawn from his surroundings. Repeated static frames of a motionless, staring figure in the dark emphasize this fact (1:51:12); his replies to Kurtz's questions are delayed and short. Willard's psychological state is significantly aggravated when he is taken captive: A slow zoom-in on Willard's face, smeared with mud, reveals his suffering and helplessness veiled by an apparent immobilizing withdrawal from his surroundings as a symptom of a prolonged exposure to psychological stress (1:58:20). His head moves only slowly and he never looks straight in the camera. When Chef's cut-off head is placed into his lap (1:59:00), horror seizes him, and the shot of his violent outcry and distorted face is symbolically terminated by a slow fade-out. As a counterpole to the static, enduring frames, much of the filmic material in this episode consists of cross-fades (2:01:28, 2:03:13), which provide the temporally and spatially fragmented impression that returns to Willard in the opening sequence of the film.

The visual style and Kurtz's monologues interestingly continue the film's unique inclusion and negotiation of postwar discourses. Chiaroscuro lighting envelops Kurtz's body in darkness and intriguingly only illuminates his skull (1:50:28). The workings of the human brain are thus again conspicuously accentuated as a focal point of the film—an effective realization of Erl's reflexive mode and reference to medical discourses

of that time.<sup>20</sup> Implicitly drawing on and engaging in moral discourses on the US military involvement on a national and individual level, Kurtz's monologues furthermore envision a state of human perfection: to attain absolute moral "freedom from the opinion of others" (1:51:35) and simultaneously reduce one's action to a mere functionality in emotionally charged situations, thereby excluding potentially traumatic events from consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

It is exactly Kurtz's 'ideal' of human functionality apart from conscious experience that Willard gradually evolves toward: "Seeing clearly what there is to be done and doing it. [...] Directly. Quickly. Awake. Looking at it" (1:10:50). Kurtz's eventual assassination is likened to and cross-cut with a sacrificial rite (2:13:28). As though in trance, Willard functions mindlessly and emotionlessly while mechanically and silently executing his mission as an impersonal silhouette against the background that is illuminated by fire (2:12:31). The manner in which Willard executes his mission to assassinate Kurtz categorizes him as being in a state of perfection in the war taking place around him. The moral absolution is paradoxically granted by the mission itself because it was an order. The film, in a now established manner, implicitly codes this very functionality as a precursory state of PTSD in the portrayed dissociation of the individual during traumatization, exemplified by the blurred images (2:15:35).

The ending has often been criticized to be empty of or indistinct in meaning (cf. Auster and Quart 71). Considering the established internal logic of the film and the context of its production, the lack of meaning and closure is, however, vague in a meaningful manner: At the height of psychological strain, the images of helicopters, napalm explosions, and primitive symbols (2:20:45) as well as the resounding leitmotif "The End," which opened the film, complete the temporal cycle back to the film's opening sequence. Willard's state of mind and his prospects of returning home receive no further comment than the repeated toneless whisper of the voice-over that can, at this point, express nothing but the enduring incomprehensibility and cognitive disintegration of the anti-experience: "the horror" (2:20:40).

## CONCLUSION

My paper set out to investigate Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* in the greater context of memory studies, primarily with regard to its potential to become part of the active cultural memory of the Vietnam War. By returning to the question of an actual

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20 Repeated extreme close-ups of Willard's eyes are employed to similar ends (1:09:46).

21 Kurtz's example is the hacking off of children's inoculated arms (2:06:20).

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implementation of the criteria that enhance some cultural products with memory-making potential, and the realization of this potential, some answers can be provided.

The examination of the prominent discourses in the aftermath of the Vietnam War serves as a contextualization of the film's close reading and, more important for the assessment of *Apocalypse Now*'s memory-making qualities, also serves as the analysis of both aspects' interrelation and dynamic functioning in the postwar era. It goes without saying that the film is a product of a historical moment. The aftereffects of an unexpected military 'defeat' were manifold, as shown in the analysis of the interrelated discourses: The war's frequent and not yet conceptualized traumatic impact on veterans as well as their adequate medical treatment and social reintegration were objects of public, medical, and political debates. On the cultural level, a disruption of the United States' (military) self-perception necessitated a reconceptualization of cultural modes of expression, particularly in the movie industry. While an empirical verification of *Apocalypse Now*'s inclusion in an active cultural memory of the Vietnam War is certainly unattainable for this study, the reviewed discourses and their negotiation within the film itself are indeed indications of a positive realization of the film's memory-making potential against the backdrop of Erll's pluri-medial contexts.

Reviewing my analysis, Hollywood premediations within the genre of the war film constitute an intertextual scaffold that *Apocalypse Now* employs on the level of iconography, Hollywood monumentality, and cinematographically generated immersive power. This intertextual scaffold simultaneously serves as the anchor for a structure of ambiguity that strongly permeates, for instance, the Kilgore episode. By cynically subverting generic conventions and offering a critical take on US warfare in Vietnam, *Apocalypse Now* positions itself within a tradition of pre- and remediations that, according to the theoretical basis this paper draws on, have the potential to enter the realm of an active cultural memory. The film's subversion of Hollywood conventions additionally inscribes cues that, in turn, stimulate further discourses that negotiate the war and its aftereffects within the United States and, thus, promote the formation of a memory of the war across the different formats of memory.

On the level of narration, the analysis reveals that *Apocalypse Now* materializes as a self-therapeutic method that the antihero utilizes in an attempt to counteract the intrusive symptoms of PTSD and to thereby eventually 'possess' his individual memory on a content level. The film, however, not only portrays the causal relation of an exposure to constant psychological stress, CRS, and PTSD but also utilizes a skilled and sensitive cinematography that has been vested in *Apocalypse Now* with an intense visual efficacy that enables the film's narration to transgress the level of the voice-over. In a reorganized logic of viewer immersion, the aesthetic dimension equally encodes Willard's experience of the mission that, at times, still refuses a coherent and cohesive

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linguistic representation. The analysis of the mise-en-scène and aspects of cinematography in the most central scenes reveals that the film employs an indeed powerful filmic actualization of the experiential mode that, once again, attests to the potential of *Apocalypse Now* to become part of an active cultural memory.

Against the established context, I read Willard's apparent partial inability to meaningfully encode his experience as an implicit comment on the traumatic aftereffect of the Vietnam War, which, in 1979, was far from resolved—both in many individual cases and on a national level. Returning to Hirsch's notion of a posttraumatic historical consciousness that materializes in posttraumatic cinema halfway between the anti-experience of the traumatic event and a coherently and completely integrated historical narrative, one can nevertheless conclude that it is indeed exactly in *Apocalypse Now*'s self-conscious, reflexive emphasis on its own 'failure' to realistically represent the traumatizing experience that a unique filmic language of its own virtue for representing the anti-experience is found.

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