

Framing War: Commemoration, War & the Art Cinema

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Terrence Malick's 1998 *The Thin Red Line* and Miklos Jancsó's 1968 *The Red and the White* offer images of war which defy the standard generic tropes of the combat film. Despite the fact that they cover different wars, World War Two and the Russian Civil War, and were made thirty years apart, these films have significant formal properties in common which shape the way in which they remember war and address the process of that remembering. These films fall under rubric of art cinema as described by David Bordwell in his seminal 1979 article "Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" and further elaborated in his book, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Bordwell specifies that the art cinema can be seen on a sliding scale of cinematic modes. The relevant part of the scale can be imagined with the art cinema at the centre sandwiched between modernist cinema to the left and Classical Hollywood Cinema to the right. *The Thin Red Line* relies on certain icons and conventions of genre cinema and can, therefore, be placed on the right hand side of the art cinema category, while *The Red and the White*, eschews in depth character psychology and relies on extreme narrative ambiguity, and falls somewhere on the left hand side of the art cinema. Orienting these films with respect to one another and Bordwell's art cinema allows for analysis at the sites where their formal structures overlap, intersect and diverge. A few examples of this matrix of influence is the use of deep focus, deep space, the moving camera, long shots in each film. André Bazin privileges these stylistic techniques as "representing a realistic continuum of time and space" and Bordwell further categorizes these as part of the aesthetic foundation of the art cinema. In representing war with the structuring principles of the art cinema, *The Red and the White* and *The Thin Red Line* disrupt previously unified narratives of good wars, just causes and noble sacrifices. Through the ambiguity and causal gaps of art cinema form, both of these films force the cinematic spectator and diegetic soldier alike to step back and consider, in long shot, how they remember war.

At this point it is necessary to offer a definition of the art cinema in order to further theorize on the effects of representing war with the aid of its schema. Bordwell defines the art cinema as a mode "possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures." Although Bordwell's use of historical timeframe is practical for limiting his categorization of the art film at the time of his article's publication, it does not allow for the consideration of more contemporary films, such as *The Thin Red Line*, which use all the other principles and practices of the art cinema. This paper relies on the assumption that Bordwell's timeframe is less important than his other points, and considers *The Thin Red Line* to be appropriately considered as part of a less rigid model of the art cinema. Bordwell further describes the structuring basis of the art cinema as based on "'objective' realism, 'expressive' or subjective realism,

and narrational commentary." In brief, the art cinema relies on a recognizable authorial voice (or narrational commentary), self-reflexive stylistic choices, causal gaps in the narrative, episodic structure, ambiguity in reading, and a plot which relies on complex psychology rather than goal fixated action to provide forward momentum.

The Thin Red Line and *The Red and the White* make use of the elements of the art cinema to shape an alternative vision of war, and also an alternative structure for remembering war. The process of remembering is ordered by various groups inside and outside of the film, such as the filmmakers, the soldiers and the spectators. Through the films these groups attempt to make sense of the reality of war and, more importantly, attempt to invent a method and image of commemoration in order to secure that meaning.

The Filmmakers Remember Authorial Voice

Because the art cinema relies on authorial presence through self-reflexive stylistic techniques and narrational commentary, it is useful to examine this process of remembering in the context of the lives and oeuvres of the two filmmakers in question. Hungarian born Miklós Jancsó studied law, art history and ethnography during World War Two before beginning a career in film. He started his career directing documentaries and newsreels before moving on to feature films with 1958's *The Bells Have Gone to Rome*. Although Jancsó's films demonstrate a deep suspicion of the exercise of state power and ideology, he remained committed throughout his life to the ideals of Marxism. Of his global perspective Jancsó has said, "Marxist thinking offers the most suitable method of analyzing the ways of the world." Jancsó made thirteen major films of which *The Red and the White* (*Csillagosok, katonák*) is the fourth. Jancsó's films, deeply influenced in style and scepticism by the European New Wave, deal primarily with revolutionary events in Hungarian history, from Hapsburg imperialism to Stalinist domination. Motifs which recur over the course of his work include extensive uses of long shots and long takes (*Elektra* is filmed in only twelve shots); the framing of violence in long shot or off screen; the repetition of the removal of clothing and uniforms, and constant power reversals.

Jancsó's oeuvre also expresses a unique view of history and remembrance. As he notes, "[h]istory does not exist...it is always given through the eyes, the conscience of others." His films, as expressed in this statement, do not attempt to capture the historical accuracy of a specific event but rather attempt to analyze that event, and to examine the ways in which events are remembered and interpreted. Further to this, Jancsó has said, "historical events must not be accepted but understood." These motifs, thematic interests and this brief biography outline the context of the authorial input and commentary of Jancsó as filmmaker in *The Red and the White*.

Reclusive American director, Terrence Malick has made only three films in the span of thirty years, but is widely renowned, and marketed, as an auteur. Malick studied at both Harvard and Oxford and for a time taught philosophy at MIT. He was a member of the first class of the Centre for Advanced Film Studies at the well respected American Film Institute in 1969. Over the course of his three films Malick has developed a reputation for sophisticated and breathtaking cinematography and metaphysically curious protagonists. In *The Thin Red Line*, the multiplicity of narrators (in voice over) serve to express a characteristic existential preoccupation, as many of the frequently unidentifiable soldiers question the nature of man and his place in the world. "Maybe all men got one big soul, who everybody's a part of? All faces of the same man." wonders Private Witt in a voice over midway through the film. Malick self-reflexively expresses his views on violence and war through the voice overs in *The Thin Red Line*. "War doesn't ennoble men" the voice over tells us, "it turns them into dogs." *The Thin Red Line* mourns this transformation through a cinematographic juxtaposition of the beauty of nature and the violence of war.

Despite their presence as auteurs, in the style and content of their films, Malick and Jancsó did not construct these treatises on war from an isolated creative source inside themselves. They are men who remember and recreate war as part of a wider community. Maurice Halbwachs' definition of the term "collective memory" in his influential book of the same name, claims that all memories are collective in that they are influenced by the social forces surrounding and infusing the subject. Jancsó does not fashion a singular commemoration of the Russian Civil War of 1919, he pieces this memory and artistic vision together from the social tools available to him. This is not to inflict a strictly symptomatic reading on the war films of Jancsó and Malick. These films are not simple echoes of their times, as should be visible in their use of art cinema structures which work to break apart the unity of traditional narratives and question dominant ideologies. While the Halbwachs' collective memory is certainly applicable to *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White*, the term is too large to be practical in this context. Similarly, Ionia Irwin finds that "the apparent adaptability of 'collective memory' to whatever research circumstances may lead to glossing over some key empirical questions". It is for this reason that she narrows down socially influenced memory to "communities of memory". These communities are formed around the experiences and are related to the personal relevance of the experience, rather than any direct lived relationship. Irwin's refinement of collective memory into communities offers a greater applicability to the group dynamics of the films, and their relationship to commemoration and art cinema structure.

The Thin Red Line and *The Red and the White*, released thirty years apart, concern wars that were fought approximately fifty years previous. Jancsó and Malick form part of a generational community of memory which commemorates the wars of their respective parents' generation. Both Malick and Jancsó are remembering their

nations' wars from the other side of a generational gap. How does this generation gap influence the films and their views of war and commemoration? First and foremost, these wars represent a trauma that Irwin's describes as influential in the formation and continuation of communities of memories. This also highlights the process of narrative as imperative to commemoration. Jancsó and Malick are telling their parents' stories (or at least the stories of their parents' generation) as they were told to them, either through family stories, official state histories or the cinema itself. Jancsó and Malick are part of a generational community of child-listeners and also of filmmaker-tellers. Like Irwin, James V. Wretch draws on Halbwachs' collective memory to approach history. Wretch's "general point is that no matter how collective memory is formed and who controls it, the same basic structural tools - narrative texts - must be employed." The importance of the text is key here. As Jancsó and Malick are members of generational communities of memory on both sides of the text (as child-listeners and filmmaker-tellers). The fact that they have chosen to structure this text as art cinema changes the form of the collective memory. Art cinema composition in *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* creates fissures and gaps in the narrative of history and remove causal clarity. These breaks in the suspension of narrative disbelief and remembrance are, in part, caused by the self-reflexivity and authorial presence of the filmmakers. Malick stops the unified predictability of the combat film, and the unified process of the spectator's remembrance of World War Two, to make a comment on the human condition. "Do you imagine that your suffering will be less because you loved goodness?" asks a voice over in *The Thin Red Line*. The disruptions presented by Malick's film seem to ask the audience, "Do you imagine that the human race will suffer less because we have been remembering this as a good war?"

The Soldiers Remember The Psychology of the Art Cinema

As Malick and Jancsó form part of communities of memories as filmmakers, so too do the soldiers in their films. In long shot, at opening of *The Red and the White*, a Cossack horsemen captures a Red soldier and ask him: "What are you?". This question (asked frequently in *The Red and the White*) is a central concern of the art cinema which relies on complex character psychology rather than action to fuel its narrative. In both *The Red and the White* and *The Thin Red Line*, the question of who and what people are is the focalizing concern of the films. Both of these films utilize the psychological profile of the art cinema protagonist in unusual ways. Firstly, both films divide art cinema character traits over many characters rather than focusing on the struggle of a single soldier. The psyche of the protagonist in the art cinema is a significant part of the expressive and subjective realism that Bordwell describes. Bordwell claims that art film's primary goal is to present a complex character for the spectator's intellectual consideration. Often in the art cinema, the spectator is invited inside the head of the protagonist through

flashbacks, hallucinations or dreams. The art film protagonist does not have any distinct goals or motivations and as such slides from one sequence of the film to the next. Bordwell's art cinema protagonist frequently finds himself in great metaphysical crisis, and the art film's emphasis on this philosophical struggle "enhances the film's symbolic dimension."

In dividing these characteristics among groups of soldiers, Malick and Jancsó connect the art cinema to communities of memory, because this complex, reactive and fluctuating psychology describes groups of soldiers, rather than simply one alone. The voice over narration in *The Thin Red Line* creates an uncertainty to this psychology as it is never clear which soldier's existential questioning is heard and frequently the voice over is only tenuously related to the accompanying visuals. In one such instance a soldier torments a Japanese prisoner of war without any remorse or mercy. The sequence begins with one voice asking: "Is this darkness in you too? Have you passed through this night?" and ends with another voice asking: "What are you to me? Nothing." The effect of mixing unidentifiable voices is that the American soldiers are grouped together in a community of memory around the experience of combat to such an extent that their complex subjectivist are interwoven over the course of the film.

Malick's film also invites the spectator into the memories and fantasies of his soldiers through flashbacks, especially of those belonging to Private Bell. Bell's memories of his wife are frequently shown as he addresses her in voice over. These sequences are complicated after Bell's wife writes to him requesting a divorce. At this point we are shown Bell's wife alone at the sea shore. It is unclear whether this vision is a memory, or a parallel cut to her in the present at home in America or whether it is Bell's fantasy of her at the moment when he reads the letter. Another such instance occurs when Witt remembers the past in America. This sequence blends the present in Guadalcanal with the death scene, as the roof of his mother's house is missing and in its place is the blue pacific sky. This complication of temporal and spatial orientation is a trait of the art cinema as outlined by Bordwell. The moment of spatial juxtaposition also underscores Witt's meditations on death and his wish to meet death in Guadalcanal with the same calm as his mother did in America. The spatial and temporal uncertainties in Bell's flashbacks function to underscore his confusion and devastation at the loss of his perfect vision of his relationship with his wife.

The identities of the soldiers in Charlie Company are fragmentary, overlapping and indistinguishable in their trauma. This confusion has drawn wide criticism from mainstream film critics, who were disappointed in their expectation of generic standards. Of the multiple voice over narration one critic complained that all the soldiers "speak the same generic, prettified ersatz poetry in the same generic, prettified ersatz Southern accent". Given the mainstream's oppositional relationship to the art cinema, it is not surprising that Malick's soldiers should be so ill

received. This reinforces the similarities of the soldiers of *The Thin Red Line* to the soldiers of Jancsó's Russian Civil War, and distinguishes them from those of Steven Spielberg's World War Two.

Jancsó overlaps and fragments the psychology of his soldiers to achieve similar effects as Malick; However he does this in a different manner. Rather than inviting the spectator into the inner thoughts and dreams of his soldiers, he places them at great distance and frames them in groups. Jancsó's camera keeps his subjects at a distance, psychologically and geographically. The men fighting the war in *The Red and the White* have no names and rarely speak; many of them die without narrative pause, and few show any signs of emotional commitment to each other or their cause. What is significant about the characters in *The Red and the White* is their movements and reactions in groups. This authorial commentary on the power relationships of groups exhibits Jancsó's Marxist sensibilities. Jancsó also renders those individuals who are separated from their groups extremely vulnerable. One example occurs during an air raid on Red forces. The commander of the unit accuses his soldiers of cowardice and prepares to execute them. His method of selecting his victims is a completely random count off. A further example occurs when Red soldiers are singled out by their White captors to serve as target practice. Separation from the carefully composed groups is often fatal. These episodes also illustrate Jancsó's reliance on chance, or coincidence as a factor in the organization of his film. Bordwell assigns the narrative reliance on coincidence or chance as part of art cinema narration and Jancsó makes full use of this in his constant power reversals, accidental meetings and random executions. The reactive nature of his characters throws them into situations over which they have no control. Narration in *The Thin Red Line* is restricted to the subjective voices and memories of the community of soldiers, whereas the narration in *The Red and the White* is restricted to distant shots of groups of men. Yet all are unified in a community around the memory and experience of war. Despite the art cinema's favouring of character psychology as a means to uncover greater truth, "no man goes to war alone. However the conflict develops, it is always a social activity" and therefore it is appropriate that *The Red and the White* and *The Thin Red Line* rely on multiple characters to access the truth behind remembering war. Another characteristic of the groups of soldiers in both *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* is their refusal acknowledge themselves as victims. In terms of communities of memory formed around the trauma of war this is a surprising choice on the part of the filmmakers. Irwin points to a "narrative of shared suffering [as] greatly strengthening the sense of moral obligation to the communal past." In her studies on the psychology of the German public under Nazi rule, she claims that a narrative of victimization was the most widely held belief and the strongest communal tie for average men and women. To bind a community of memory under a shared sense of oppression or victimization is not only common, it is extremely powerful. Why do the soldiers of the Red and

White armies and those of Charlie Company refuse to see themselves as victims? Why do Malick and Jancsó refuse to represent them as such?

There are several contributing factors which provide answers to these questions. The first relies on Jay Winter and Emmanuel Siva's work on remembrance and war. Winter and Siva's explain that to acknowledge oneself as victim is to deny one's status as agent. Those who are traumatized and abused have no control over what happens to them during this process and as long as they are controlled by these memories. The rapidly reversing power structures in *The Red and the White* along with Jancsó's career-long preoccupation with power relations means that his films do not reflect this kind of victim hood, for to do so would over simplify his narratives and resolve all loose ends. Jancsó's reluctance to use labels such as "victim" and "oppressor" shows the influence of European New Wave rather than Soviet filmmaking on his artistic vision. Marxists are an excellent example of a community of memory who, traditionally, bind themselves around the founding trauma of class oppression. However, Jancsó defines his soldiers under the structures of the art cinema rather than Marxist meta-narratives.

To define oneself as a victim also results in the assumption of a stable self/other border and a clear definition of identity boundaries. As previously discussed, both *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* eschew such boundaries as their soldiers are not separate entities from the communities they inhabit. Nor are they clearly designated as the polar opposites of their enemies, as both films show shocking brutality on both sides. Examples of the equally cruel behaviour of both sides includes the graphic long take of American corpses in *The Thin Red Line* along with the brutal treatment of Japanese prisoners of war; in *The Red and the White* the Red army executes a nurse for treason while the White soldiers play games with their prisoners by offering them fifteen minutes to escape a monastery whose exits have all been sealed off. To assign the label of victim to characters or to groups within the films would be to reduce the ambiguity and fragmentation so central to their form and meaning.

The Ritual of Remembering Patterns, structures, repetitions

The art cinema stresses an episodic narrative structure and a loosening of the chain of cause and effect. *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* use these techniques to emphasize patterns and repetitions to produce an elegiac and ritual effect. The plot of *The Red and the White* relies heavily on repetition. The film is loosely based on the following formula: Group A fights Group B. Group A wins. Group A introduces themselves and demands that Group B do the same. Group A commands Group B to line up. Group A commands Group B to undress (to varying degrees). Group A lines up. Group B runs. Group A shoots. Repeat substituting Group B for A. While this schematic seems overly simplistic, it is nonetheless appropriate. This outline underscores Jancsó's extensive use of pattern stresses an arbitrary and unstable power balance.

The dressing and undressing of the soldiers in *The Red and the White* is another example of the use of repetition. At varying times in the film, as seen in the formula above, characters are commanded to undress (themselves or a peasant woman in one instance). Not only does this pattern of undressing highlight an equalizing and vulnerable humanity under the military uniform, it serves to redefine groups of men in relation to one another as soldiers take up the cast off clothing belonging to their enemies. The women of *The Red and the White* are not excluded from this ritual (un)dressing. The moments of female (un)dressing vary in meaning over the course of the film. In an early instance a peasant woman is undressed by soldiers under the command of their Cossack officer who has the intention raping her. True to Jancsó's pattern of reversals, this Cossack officer is interrupted and executed before he can commit the crime. In another, more surreal, instance a White officer insists that a group of nurses be dressed in formal wear and taken into a birch forest where he instructs them to dance to the music of a military band. In a sequence close to the end of the film, a nurse expresses her desire to undress for a Red soldier. The repetition of the commands that women dress and undress has a malevolently sexual connotation, yet the expectation of assault is never realized. The later variation involving the nurse is an active decision to partake in the ritual of undressing in the interest of intimacy. Jancsó uses this repetition to signify shifting power relationships, and also to play with expectations in order to complicate the relationship between power, sexuality and war.

The formula of *The Thin Red Line* is episodic in organization. Similar moments and phrases recur at different points in the film with small, but significant variations. Over the course of the film there are repeated instances where medals are awarded to soldiers who are indifferent or hostile to the offering. Sergeant Welsh is offered the silver cross when he delivers morphine to a dying man in the line of fire. Welsh becomes angry and threatens violence as a response. Captain Gaff is offered the congressional medal of honour when his men take a Japanese bunker. This offering comes as an unsatisfactory response to his demand for water for the soldiers, and Gaff is irritated rather than honoured. A final example is the nomination of Captain Staros for the purple heart and the silver star when Tall relieves him of command. In all of these cases medals are unwelcome and sublimely insufficient at marking the tragedy of the situation. These ceremonial gestures serve only to elide injustice or mask incomprehensible trauma. These recurring moments counter the spectator's expectations of the generic conventions of the war film. The giving and receiving of medals is traditionally a ritual of deep appreciation for courageous deeds and noble sacrifices for the greater good built up around the collective memory of war. That these moments counter generic expectation is a self-reflexive authorial critique regarding the inadequacy of popular understanding of military commemoration.

Another repetition in *The Thin Red Line* is the use of the phrase: "you are like my son." This ritual naming

repeats itself in various situations throughout the course of the film, in conversation and in voice over. There are two significant situations where this phrase appears. Firstly, after the Japanese bunker has been taken Lieutenant Colonel Tall names Captain Graff as his son. He says, "You are like a son to me, John." The moment of male bonding should be reciprocated by the younger man, however this emotional offering, like the medal is rejected. It is treated as a formal military gesture that must be tolerated, much like the use of salutes. The second instance occurs when the new commanding officer, Captain Bosche, gives a pep talk at the close of the film. Bosche's speech divides up the family roles among the military hierarchy. He is the father, his sergeant is the mother and the rest of the company are his sons. As this speech becomes muted, we hear Lieutenant Colonel Tall in voice over saying, "Everything a lie, you're in a box, a moving box. They want you dead or in their lie." Tall sees the naming of sons in the military family from both sides, as a supporter and sceptic. Naming other men as your sons, unified in a family of the military is revealed through patterns of exposition, to be not only a lie but a futile gesture at human connection.

These repetitions of motifs, speech patterns and actions take on a ritual or ceremonial quality when viewed as part of the film on a whole. The communities of memory which form within and around these reiterations, are reminiscent of those commemorations which are reinforced by religious rituals and ceremonies. Baptism and burial ceremonies are influential in the elegiac structure of the both *The Red and the White* and *The Thin Red Line*. The re-combination of art cinema structure with ritual structure plays with resonance and dissonance inside the communities of the film (of soldiers, and nurses) and the communities of spectators viewing the film. Halbwachs considers collective memory to be an "agreement with those about us [which] is so complete that we vibrate in union, ignorant of the real source of the vibrations" Through these repetitions, and rituals, Jancsó and Malick experiment with these vibrations and their effects. Misrecognition, frustrated expectations, narrative gaps and ambiguous causality add to the effect of resonance/dissonance.

Images of the Judeo-Christian tradition of baptism are used in both *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White*, through the cleansing potential of water. The ritual (un)dressing in *The Red and the White* recalls this ceremony, especially as soldiers frequently end up in or near rivers in similar white shirts. *The Thin Red Line* is less subtle in its invocation of baptism, as Witt comforts grieving soldiers by pouring water on their heads. At the moment of Witt's death there is a flash of him swimming with aboriginal children in a moment of sublime rebirth. Although both films employ the regenerative qualities of water, and by extension baptism, they also investigate the sinister side of this ritual. Water is the site of death for many of the soldiers in both films, and proves vastly inadequate at truly soothing or cleansing humanity or the world of war. By recalling the repetitive motions and motifs of baptism, and showing with

its more menacing side, Malick and Jancsó break down some of the unity of the performance of religious ritual. This rupture corresponds with the guiding principles of art cinema. This also recalls the art cinema's commitment to the project began by literary modernism, which actively questioned the apparatuses of organized religion. Rituals for mourning the dead are also deeply influential in the formats and stories of both films. Halbwachs and Irwin agree that collective memories, and communities of memory are "socially articulated and socially maintained 'realit[ies] of the past'". It is through repetition and ritual that the communities of memory surrounding *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* are actively mourning and preserving the image and meaning of war. The grieving rituals, or lack thereof, in the films bind the groups of soldiers together and act as sites for debating the memory making process. In *The Thin Red Line* Sergeant Welsh stands over Witt's grave and asks, "Where's your light now?". In this sequence Welsh mourns a fellow soldier and questions how to remember him, and keep him active in the community of which he was once a part.

The mourning rituals over the dead in *The Red and the White* are significant in their absence. Death in *The Red and the White* happens with such dependable frequency, that there is never time to pause for reflection, burial or mourning. There are two notable exceptions. One occurs after the harpooning death of a Red patient. A nurse, naked from swimming, is forced to watch his violent death, and falls to her knees on the dock covering her face in grief. This spectacle of pain and vulnerability is shot in extreme long shot and kept to the far left corner of the frame. The spectator is removed from the act of violence and the raw emotional pain that follows. The second instance occurs at the close of the film, when a Hungarian Red soldier is shown in an unusual medium close up saluting his dead comrades.

The singularity of these moments is indicative of the crisis in mourning rituals in the Soviet Union at the time of the film's narrative and the rule of Stalin soon after. Many scholars have pointed to the extensive state censorship of public memory and historical records perpetrated by the Stalinist government in the U.S.S.R. One such infamous governmental policy was the ban on traditional funerary and death rituals in the favour of cremation. The two relevant elements of these abandoned rituals were the reverence bestowed on the body after death and the importance of the grave site as a gathering place for the family. Through the unique grieving scenes in Jancsó's film, and their contrast with the great numbers of un-mourned and unburied deaths, *The Red and the White* meditates on these erased rituals.

The nature of death in *The Red and the White* also reflects a questioning of traditional Soviet methods of war commemoration, which celebrated triumphant martyrdom and demanded the "sublimation of other griefs." The soldiers' deaths in *The Red and the White* are not glorious, they are anonymous, random, unnecessary and barely noticed off screen or at the edges of the frame. In accordance with the rules of the art cinema, the framing of

these violent deaths demands intellectual engagement much more than emotional involvement. The use of patterns and the invocation of religious rituals in *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* creates an underlying elegiac quality to the films. These are films which commemorate the losses of war by presenting horror and indiscriminate death. These films also employ art cinema tropes to fracture previously unified visions of war and, through re-combinations, render unfamiliar traditional ceremonial patterns of commemoration.

Forgetting Uses of Silence and Absence.

As both films actively commemorate wars, they also highlight the silences, absences and exclusions involved in the process of commemoration and narrativization. These silences and absences are manifested visually in both films. Violence is frequently absent from the frame in *The Red and the White* and large scale military engagements are not included as part of the plot of the film. Sound in *The Thin Red Line* is muted and distorted to reflect both psychological subjectivity and to emphasize the disorienting effects of the experience of war. While the soldiers in *The Thin Red Line* openly question their circumstances in voice over, the soldiers in *The Red and the White* are unable to vocalize those questions and remain silent for the majority of the film's duration. Catherine Merridale identifies a pattern in the collective memory of the Soviet era of silence as a method of self preservation. She states that:

[f]or those who suffered most directly, silence may have been preferable to repeating a story which could not publicly be acknowledged. Because there was no chance of healing recognition, the rehearsal of the experience would have brought only further suffering, material as well as psychological.

Jancsó uses this refusal to speak in his film not only to ensure his characters' resistance to standard historical narratives, but also to secure an ambiguous reading of character motivations and power balances.

Malick plays with levels of silence in his film. Moments of muted, and accentuated sound call attention to non verbal questions. During the close of the battle for the hill, Charlie Company violently secures a Japanese encampment and takes several prisoners of war. The opening of this sequence places unusual emphasis on the mechanical clicks and slides associated with the soldiers' rifles, while muting all of the screams of the Japanese soldiers and noises from the explosions of gunfire. The eerie silence demonstrates the moral questioning of the soldiers who circulate through the scene. At the close of this sequence, the sound of waves dominates the sound track and bridges into a shot of Witt happily bathing in a waterfall. The juxtaposition of the dirty battlefield and the cleansing water picks up the questions asked earlier in the scene by the voice over, "Who's doing this? Who's killing us? Robbing us of life and light, mocking us with the sight of what we might have known." The absent image of "what we might have known" and of what we already knew, but lost is a conspicuous presence in *The Thin Red Line*. This

is reinforced by the punctuating low angle shots of the back lit jungle canopy and the bird noises underscoring battle sequences. It also appears in the prelapsarian aboriginal village which Hoke and Witt visit when they go AWOL. These villagers flash in front of Witt at the moment of his death. Private Bell's flashbacks of domestic bliss also share this quality of "paradise lost". The *Thin Red Line's* observance of the principles of the art cinema subverts an unproblematic mourning for "paradise lost". Bell's wife, as representative of an absent domestic paradise, admits that she is having an affair and asks for a divorce. Witt returns to the aboriginal village only to be awakened to the reality of disease, poverty and in-fighting. A haunting image of scavenger dogs feeding on dead soldiers competes with previous healing images of nature. For the community of soldiers who believe that they are lost, paradise is absent, even as a unified, clearly defined concept.

The Spectators Remember "Implicit Viewing Procedures"

Just as the myth of the Fall is fragmented over the course of *The Thin Red Line*, so is another powerful myth, that of the "Good War." In his study of the reception of *The Thin Red Line*, John Streamas compares Malick's film with Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, released that same year. Spielberg's film relies heavily on genre to present a stable image of a good war. "Idealised, the Good War resists historical analysis" concludes Streamas. Malick's film refuses to use the conventions associated with commemorating a "good war" and as such invites spectatorial analysis and engagement with history. Malick's film does not completely abandon all the icons of the combat film, but experiments with the spectator's expectations. Rather than the sounds of battle, the soundtrack delivers poetry. Malick uses the graphic violence of the combat genre, yet in one case frames two dead and dismembered American soldiers in a grassy clearing and holds the shot uncomfortably long. Malick's war invites historical analysis because it fractures an idealized and glorified celebration of the Second World War. In addressing *Saving Private Ryan*, Streamas points to the publicity tagline that ran with the film's U.K. release: "The Film that Made the World Remember." Clearly, the good war has powerful market sway as it is used in publicity campaigns to sell the film. The tagline also privileges the relationship between memory, commerce and the good war. Collective memories of a good war, which embrace the founding trauma narrative avoided by Malick and Jancsó, are valued in an era with a comfortable distance from Vietnam.

The spectators of these films form another community of memory around the experience of war. For the duration of the film, and any intellectual questioning thereafter, the audience becomes a unique community of memory that experiences war through the cinema. Logically, there is a limit to the scope of this unique community, especially given Irwin's insistence that the experience must have personal relevance. However, seen in terms of transforming the experience of war into the story of war, the

audience becomes a necessary part of the filmmakers' journeys towards expression. They are also listeners and witnesses to the communities of memory formed within the films' diegeses. Jancsó and Malick use the techniques and practices of the art cinema mode to create ambiguity for their spectators. Within these gaps, the spectator questions the unity of the "good war" narrative, for example. In this questioning, the audience remains part of its own community of memory; one which has seen these art films and begun to question the structure of war commemoration.

On the sliding scale of the art cinema *The Thin Red Line* and *The Red and the White* occupy opposite ends of the spectrum yet they both play with spectator assumptions and expectations to complicate their narratives. Each film presents characters who have ambiguous motivations, and whose inexplicable psychologies frame the narrative. The groups of soldiers presented in each film blend with one another, creating the impression of interchangeability. Each film creates multiple communities of memory (filmmaker, soldier, spectator) which question generically structured, and unified versions of war commemoration in their interactions. Both films, despite their difference in subject matter and time period, have suffered the same criticism. Each has been called impersonal and overly cerebral; and each filmmaker has been accused of blinding the spectator with unneeded technical flights of fancy. It is these very traits which secure *The Thin Red Line* and *The Thin Red Line* a place within the art cinema mode, and (more significantly) it is these traits which structure the films as self-reflexive and sceptical of the processes of representation and commemoration. If it is true that "the story of war will remain collective property," then it is important to be sure that we pay attention not only to the subject matter, but to the way in which it is written. ☺

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