

Hermann Kappelhoff

## Front Lines of Community. A Postscript to Hollywood War Cinema

2019

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/18731>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kappelhoff, Hermann: Front Lines of Community. A Postscript to Hollywood War Cinema.  
In: *ZMK Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*. Blockchain, Jg. 10 (2019), Nr. 2, S. 11–24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/18731>.

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 3.0/ Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - Share Alike 3.0/ License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

## Front Lines of Community

### A Postscript to Hollywood War Cinema

*Hermann Kappelhoff*

AFTER HAVING WORKED ON the Hollywood war film for quite some time,<sup>1</sup> I am still occupied with the question of this genre's relation to the experience of historicity. As it happens, the war film has become a privileged object of theories on the relation between audiovisual images and history: cultural memory, trauma and genre memory are prevalent paradigms here. But while I am rather skeptical about these concepts of collective memory, I would still hold on to the fundamental question: What relation does the war film genre bear to the experience of historicity?

In search for an answer, it is necessary to go back in time, and to find a frame of reference beyond cinema: *The Limits of Community*—this is the title of a famous book written by Helmuth Plessner during the twenties of the last century.<sup>2</sup> The book deals with the opposition between democratic societies, based on the difference of opinion, and those forms of government that claim a communal »we«—a »we« divested of all dissent. Plessner thus forcefully pleads for the calming procedures of democratic forms of government. In fact, his skeptical view of the mobilization of communal feelings—be they nationalist or communist—was historically confirmed to a harrowing degree, which is why the idea of political community had been discredited for a long time. Only toward the end of the last century did the term »community« surface again, starting from debates in French political philosophy—a phenomenon that has held to this day.

When it comes to an understanding of politics and community, at least within continental European philosophy, it might initially seem out of context to refer to an American author. However, one of this author's books urgently showed me one thing about American liberalism: how much its understanding of democracy is marked by an idea of political community. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has brought this book an amount of attention that is both belated and overwhelm-

---

<sup>1</sup> My book, *Front Lines of Community* (2018), is based on the findings of a research project that ran for several years and draws on a comprehensive corpus of film-analytical studies.

<sup>2</sup> Helmuth Plessner: *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism*, trans. Andrew Wallace, Amherst 1999.

ing: it is a lecture by Richard Rorty, published in 1998 and titled *Achieving Our Country*.<sup>3</sup> Here Rorty calls for a return to the liberal idea in American history as a permanent struggle to »improve our country«. In his view, its driving force should neither be sought in general principles of human justice nor in the evolutionism of the free competition of economic, political, or social forces; rather, speaking of »our country« always already requires a decision for solidarity with a »we« of the political community. Like Helmuth Plessner—but now portending the opposite—Rorty speaks of an affective bond to the community. He defines this fundamental feeling as a »sense of commonality«, a feeling for the communal. It is the actual incitement for »achieving our country».

Now the question is as follows: who is included in this »sense of commonality«, and who is excluded? Rorty is very clear about this and compares the »we-feeling« (which he declares to be the basis of political action) to the solidarity of a familial bond. The question of who can participate in this »we«, who belongs and who does not, is the driving force behind the permanent struggle over the boundaries of community. This also means that the limits of that »we« are subject to a permanent process of refiguration. This is where Rorty's conception of political action sets in. He moves it very close to poetic making, as the ideal type of describing and redescribing the limits of community is brought to bear in artistic-literary practice. In its fictional renditions it maps out ever new perceptual worlds that change the feeling for a commonly shared world. The controversy over a common sense of shared opinions is thus replaced by the permanent refiguration of a feeling: the feeling of belonging to a commonly shared world.

To approach how American society seeks to come to an understanding about the sense of commonality, Rorty chooses films about platoons, the smallest military unit. Thus, for me, Rorty's lecture is a historical document in the strict sense of the term. He describes—on the level of political philosophy—a sociocultural situation of conflict that led to the remarkable and much discussed revival of films about the Second World War at the end of the last century. Films by Terrence Malick, Steven Spielberg and John Woo sought to revive the archive of audiovisual images of war. They implement cinema as a space of historical experience by converting the surviving audiovisual images into new cinematic movement images.

As Rorty exemplifies the feeling for the communal with the platoon, he precisely follows the poetic logic of the war films that were shown in cinemas at the same time. Here the forms of military communitization are addressed as the destruction of the sense of commonality. Thus, what reveals itself is an internal social conflict, and not at all as a question of enemies and opponents of war. Indeed, our

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Rorty: *Achieving Our Country*. *Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, Cambridge 1998.

studies on the Hollywood war film—through all its historical and aesthetic changes in media—always came to the same conclusion: Its fundamental social conflict consists in the irresolvable contradictions of the sense of commonality itself.—A reading that is also linked to the name of another figure of American Pragmatism: Stanley Cavell.

Cavell does not think of Hollywood cinema in terms of genre poetics<sup>4</sup>; he defines its genres as cycles of films that are connected through certain family resemblances. Every cycle, however, is an expression of fundamental social conflicts concerning the front lines of community: Genres are media that articulate types of behavior, ways of feeling and sensibilities shifting these front lines. In this sense, the fundamental conflicts around which the war films have crystallized as genre of Hollywood cinema arise from a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion.

On the one hand, the »we« implicit in »our country« presents itself quite literally as an embattled front line—both arbitrary and unstable; on the other hand, it collapses inward into mutually exclusive claims by competing communities. Among the internal frontline positions, perhaps the most radical is the one between the formation of military communities and forms of civil communality.

Hollywood war films make very concrete how state force ends up in the sharpest contradiction to a liberal idea of communality, when military mobilization encompasses a society in its totality. The reconstruction of such a view of things in film analysis seems to open up an experiential space of historicity in the first place—brought into our present by films of Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, or Sam Fuller and many others. Above all, these films open up the internal perspective of experiencing a »we«, while we—the present-day spectators—still remain excluded from the experiential world of the films. Cavell has understood this kind of participation of non-participants as a split structure of perception in the process of film viewing—as a specific form of cinematic realism. We experience the cinematic world as if it were our everyday world—as it *is* in fact our perception in which these images take shape as cinematic movement images. But we do not have access to this world; we are absolutely excluded from it.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stanley Cavell: *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge 1979.

## 1. What does the film document document?

But what kind of world is it that emerges as a common world for the spectator in the cinematic staging of war? What are its distinctive features? How does it relate to the shared world of human beings, from which we are banished as soon as a society has transformed itself into a society at war? Here, combat footage that had been produced during World War II can serve as an example—commissioned by the US-government and directed by John Ford, who was active as Chief of the Field of the OSS Photographic Branch, and who had a whole staff of cameramen at almost all fronts of the Second World War to gather military intelligence.<sup>5</sup> The following images were shot on D-Day, June 6, 1944.



Fig. 1: John Ford's D-Day

In the battle over Normandy, the Allies' landing boats not only carried thousands of soldiers but also small cameras, which were turned on when the bow doors opened. The material generated at Omaha Beach disappeared into the secret archives of the US military, where it remained for 54 years. In the late 90s, the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Andrew Sinclair: John Ford's War, in *Sight and Sound* 48/2 (1979), pp. 99–104, here: 102.

historian Douglas Brinkley eventually disclosed the spectacular findings in the *New Yorker*.<sup>6</sup> He reported on the long archival research and the lost material. But what also becomes clear in his report is how closely the fate of these film images is bound to the history of Hollywood genre cinema. For one, the main reason to look for the material might have been the fact that it had been filmed under John Ford's direction; at least equally significant, however, is the circumstance that another famous director had dealt with this material: Steven Spielberg used it as a significant reference in one of the biggest blockbusters of the last century. The famous opening sequence in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* (USA 1998) is in fact created from completely fictional footage, but it is staged to give the impression of a re-enactment; that is, the fictional recreation does not so much concern the invasion of Normandy itself: What is recreated is the work of shooting the film footage on D-Day.

Spielberg shows us a perceptual spectacle, presenting to us what might have been visible if fifty cameras with today's film technology had been thrown into the battle. The impression of being a filmed document gives the movie an aura of certified witness, but this is part of staging a mode of aesthetic experience, which one may conceive as the illusion of being-there. This mode forms the basis for all the expressive modalities of the action film; of a genre that does not guarantee reality or authenticity. However, only in the opening sequence of Spielberg's blockbuster does the production of the cameras at Omaha Beach become a historical event for a global audience: in the experiential space of genre cinema. Yet the aspect of reality that is of central concern in the Hollywood war film is not at all about historical facts, but rather a subjective sensation; a subjective experience against which every media representation remains deficient. That is, the reality these films refer to is the ›I sense‹, ›I think‹, ›I feel‹ of a concrete, physical-sensory being-in-the-world; it is the awareness of an experience of horror and suffering, which, in the American war film genre, is always the suffering of the soldier. In the following I would like to exemplify this with another combat report from 1944: *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA*.

---

<sup>6</sup> Brinkley traced the lengthy research work that eventually led to the fact that the film material, mostly shot in color, was only found in 1997/98 in the National Archives in College Park. Cf. Douglas Brinkley: *The Color of War: John Ford stormed to the Beach at Normandy on D-Day, armed with Full-Color Film. What happened to the Footage he shot?*, in: *The New Yorker* 74/20 (1998), pp. 34–36, here: 35 f. Brinkley, who took part in the preservation of the film material as director of the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans, concedes that the entirety of the material could not be found.

## 2. A memory image on film

WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA is based on color material which was shot by a military unit during battle. This footage also circulates today in various documentaries on history channels and online platforms.

At the beginning of the film, soldiers embark on the ship. They are briefly introduced: »These are the men of the Second Marine Division.« While we see the Marines climbing up the guardrails, the off-screen voice switches into speaking in the register of an eyewitness: »We're now embarking on a full scale amphibious operation after many months of intensive training.« The voice-over largely operates without modeling its expression, and the steady pitch of the voice suggests extreme objectivity in its cool, laconic diction. Even the fact that it is about film documents that were shot during employment does not seem to be worth mentioning. The camerawork establishes a gaze that imitates the gesture of a chronicling report. We see the destroyers and airplanes in the sky accompanying the transport of the troops; we observe one of the briefings at which the individual platoons are informed about the operation area. Now we get quite close to the soldiers, looking into their faces, lost in thought. We see their daily work, cleaning weapons, filling munition belts. The drill looks like a relaxing physical exercise, as the change in the music takes up the rhythmic movements to an almost comical effect. And the laconic off-screen voice attributes a precisely defined function to all the activities, integrating them into the wheelwork of an all-encompassing machinery: the destroyers guarding the aircraft carriers, the Airforce bombarding in preparation for landing, the briefing of the Marines, the cleaning of small arms... The correspondence between the steady intonation, the laconic way of speaking, and the gesture of an objective camera gaze gives the impression that an eyewitness report—claiming to concentrate exclusively on what is most necessary for the soldiers' work—without any sentimental addition. And still, these words and images express nothing more than a subjective sensation of perception. Indeed, very soon the voice switches into another speaking mode. It articulates a subjectivity that imagines itself as the »we« of the soldiers. The way of speaking and the gesture of the camerawork articulate an uninvolved perceptive consciousness, registering every detail, in which the second Marine division itself gets a personal contour—it appears as an impartial ego that is not shocked by any horror, not knocked off its stride by any hardship. Soldiers in war—whether now dead or still living—speak with one and the same impartial voice; their fate is no longer decided according to individual happiness, but to the life of the community, the »we« of the platoon, the corps, the nation.

The spectator might initially recognize the staging of military professionalism here (fig. 2, p. 17)—and this corresponds to the modern hero image of the soldier:



Fig. 2: Staging military professionalism

someone who responsibly carries out his work, come what may. Over the course of the film, however—and this creates its dramatic tension—this attribution will be radically called into question.

The next scene conveys a proximity to the men represented, which is slightly disturbing at first. This footage, the color of which has now largely faded, moves the modern viewer in a similar way to photographs of complete strangers whose death we know about. We see faces and bodies of people completely unknown to us, as if we were leafing through an old family album, to whom it belongs we cannot say; we study the traits, the clothing, the postures, and the gestures of the soldiers, we look for their gazes, the moment when their emotional life will be disclosed. And we do this in complete conviction that they were on the deck of a warship at the time the footage was shot, on the way to the battle of Tarawa. No doubt that the sunlight falling on the camera lens, defining the faces in the film material, was the same light that burned down on these men's foreheads. Already with the first scenes we sense this effect, which we associate more with photography, as Roland Barthes has described it,<sup>7</sup> and not with film.

<sup>7</sup> In Barthes we read: »In the cinema, no doubt, there is always a photographic referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favor of its reality, it does not protest



Also shown in *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA*—like in many other combat reports—is a religious service held in open air. But even if the music conveys solemnity in a similar way, the scene affects us differently; instead of a strict ritual, the staging presents an image of soldiers in their everyday lives. We see faces, unshaven, sweating; men with open shirts and sleeves rolled up; body to body, face to face, row after row, arranged as a group image. We try to read into the individual faces; some of them are accentuated by the sunlight, others are obscured by shadows, as if the screen itself had become a face, connected in its traits out of the many faces, each of which is special and none of which is familiar to us. Suddenly, we are met by the gaze of a single soldier (fig. 3, p. 19). He looks up briefly, turning his eyes upward and looking into the camera positioned above. Almost in the same moment he lowers his eyes again: a child that knows he got caught secretly trying to squint through his fingers.

The soldier's gaze, which breaks the rule not to look into a running camera, directly addresses the spectators. They see themselves as found out, as recognized, exposed as the hidden eye in the undefined ›up there‹ of the camera's off-space; as an eye that observes the filmed faces, pondering godlike on the death of these living beings. Some of these young men might indeed have returned to an ordinary life; but in each individual face we seem to be moved by the thought that they were on board this ship, precisely in this moment—in order to be brought to a military operation in which many of them have died. And, indeed, we hear the steadily intoned voice saying: »Many of these men were killed the following morning.« The faces that are shown to us in their unmistakable ordinariness seem to be bound to this one moment—a moment that was already past in the fleeting gaze of the camera, in order to be relocated in any spectator's present: as the point in time of their own history.

The elegy of the scene comes from the temporal split that is inscribed into the film image itself. On the one hand, it is the exposed camera shots that are located precisely in time and space; on the other hand, it is a cinematic image that only emerges in the spectators' perception. This image itself becomes the basis of a temporally split perceiving consciousness, remembering the deaths of the soldiers whose living faces it is only now seeing for the first time. Such consciousness is

---

its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a *specter*. Like the real world, the filmic world is sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl says, ›the experience will constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style‹; but the Photograph breaks the ›constitutive style‹ (this is its astonishment); it is *without future* (this is its pathos, its melancholy); in it, no protensity, whereas the cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic (what is it, then? – It is, then, simply, ›normal, like life). Motionless, the Photograph flows back from presentation to retention.« Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981, pp. 89–90.



Fig. 3: The soldier's gaze

necessarily linked to a physical presentness that sees itself recognized and called upon by the fleeting gaze.

At the same time, the elegy of the scene prepares us for the fall, the dramatic switch to representing battle. A change in the music brings attention to this abrupt cut: We see the palm-covered island in the dawn light; the voice changes its intonation, for a brief moment the manner of speaking becomes dramatic: »D-Day, this is the day we attack!« Then the music goes quiet for the duration of the combat. A montage sequence begins where shots alternate in rapid succession; the camera seems to be present everywhere at once, up close with the thundering cannons of the heavy artillery on the warships and at the soldiers' back in the boats; at the guardrail of a large warship, the gaze focused on the small landing boats full of men, swaying on the troubled waters, and at the bow doors of one of the boats, with the island's beach in sight. We see fountains of earth fly up, palms shot up, fireballs blazing up, clouds of smoke. The voice coolly reports on the amount of explosives that had been dropped down on the island in the last three days. We see large warships in the distance on the horizon, and smaller cruisers that run close along the landing boat that is carrying the camera.

The montage suggests a strictly planned succession of the actions: first the artillery, then the airplanes, which first bombard the bunker locations, then go on to

shoot free the beach with machine gun fire, then return again to clear the field for the artillery: »We were a team, working together.« The military plan of operations provides the storyboard for the landing action: it appears as a functional intermingling of human material, transport, and weapons technology. For a brief moment one might think that we are moving in the action mode of genre cinema, which comes to the fore in so many war films whenever staging the fighting power of weapons technology. But the more insistently the repeating shots of fire-spitting cannons power the montage sequence, the more decidedly the camera moves closer and closer to the soldiers, inserting contemplative gazes into the rapid succession of intermeshing actions. Accompanied by the thunder of cannonry, the camera gaze once again moves in quite close to the soldiers; so close that we imagine we can almost touch the uniforms, the helmets, sense their texture. At no time does the film allow free reign to the pleasure of the action movie. The battle action represented, the fighting power of the weapons, is once and for all crosscut with the bodies and faces of the soldiers who are given space in all their vulnerability.

In the few minutes dedicated to battle action, this short film about conquering a small Japanese base hardly omits any horror that might have been associated with such a landing operation. A horror emerges precisely in the gesture of the even-tempered, observing gaze—a horror that Spielberg imitates in the fireworks of special effects. We see the soldiers pressed up against one another on the beach, fixed in place by constant fire, unable to go forward or back. We see their bodies bent over, their uncertain movements, when they try going in one direction or another. Yet others run from one small hill to the next, without even being able to guess what the cause or the goal of their overhasty movements might be.

Next, we see the immediate effects of the attacks. The soldiers under fire lose orientation, their movements appear headless, paralyzed; as if they were searching for a way out, driven on by the deafening screams of battle, a way out that does not exist. We see how the military structure of precisely aligned, interweaving actions begins to unravel in the situation, according to which all the simulation games, all the training, all the drill had been calculated. The unleashed destructive violence of the war machine set into action leaves the proportions of human sense operations and possible courses of action far behind. In these few minutes of battle action, the beach, the island, the sea become a space for the spectator that seems to explode under the pressure of detonations.

The camera seems to be present everywhere and is nonetheless radically partisan. The enemy's viewpoint is absolutely excluded from the world of this film, and even the enemy himself remains largely invisible. His face is equated with the enigmatic threat that embraces all the apparitions waiting in every treetop, behind every bush or shrub, behind every hill and in every cave. In *WITH THE MARINES*

AT TARAWA, the paranoid mode of perception itself is the point of the scene: the water, the clouds, the beach—everything that is visible on the island turns into the menacing face of the enemy (fig. 4). Seen from the landing boat the island lies in troubled waters, as if it were a prostrating monster shot down in the roar. It spits out earth, fire, and smoke.

In genre cinema the paranoid view of things becomes a central element in the affect rhetorics of the war film. From *BATAAN* (USA 1943, Tay Garnett) to *APOCALYPSE NOW* (USA 1979, Francis Ford Coppola), from the films about the Second World War to the Vietnam movies: nature, the island, the jungle, and the bluff are staged in the mode of the horror film as the menacing face of an invisible enemy. It is a different story in *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA*. In the documentary gesture of the impassively observing camera unfolds a physical presence of the soldiers, which—at the same time—is the foundation of the horror. It is based, much like the opening scene of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, on the precision with which the physical details step out of the dynamic flow of the montage sequence. *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA* shows everything that had so far been omitted from American mobilization and propaganda films. We see bodies shot up, the burned corpses of the enemy, captives crouching naked on the ground; and we see fallen Marines, half-naked bodies, washed up on the beach or floating in the wa-



Fig. 4: Paranoid perception

ter—shirtless men walk over the sand between the corpses to ensure that the dead can still be identified after the battle. The horror comes from the lack of feeling that registers every physical detail along with the camera, as if there were no difference between the human and the technological bodies, the shot-up palms and the thundering munitions, no difference between the washed-up corpses on the beach and the bare chests of the soldiers trying to identify them.

In propaganda and mobilization films of the US, scenes of open combat are almost always staged in the mode of action cinema; in *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA*, however, the documentary gesture of the impartially registering camera gaze remains formative, even in the battle scenes. The physical presence in which the film lets the fighting soldiers become visible for the spectators is fundamentally different. The effect is precisely not based on the illusion of being-there; much more, as I already mentioned above, it is based on a temporal fold that has its roots in the media structure of the cinematic image itself. The poetic calculation of the film's staging is entirely aimed at keeping the presence of the recording camera present in each moment and in relating it to the presence of the spectator. The film relates the camera's gaze, this is the operative point, to a present that is forever past. *Exactly these soldiers, who I now see before me, scared, wounded, or dead, were on the ship's deck; they were there at exactly that split second when one of them looked into the camera. Exactly at the moment of this glance they were at this site from which their gaze meets us in our present.*

The moment in which the light inscribes the soldiers' movements into the film material works in conjunction with the arbitrary points in time in which this material is being engaged with—when a cinematic image is created in the act of film-viewing, in the physical activity of the senses. Thus, the physical presence with which the soldiers in *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA* encounter the spectators is a media effect that is due to a poetic calculation—but it is no illusion. Rather, what it shows is the split structure of perception that Cavell attributes to the media technology that is film.

In view of our film analyses, this perception structure can now be described as a temporal relation in which radically separated presents can be interrelated. In just the same way, it opens a choice for the spectator between two opposing ways of relating to the past, as we find worked out in Cavell as the two main possibilities for how to watch films. By making a past event from our common world present, the film world of *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA* is an illusion in which the spectators grasp their own world in the audiovisual image as the entirety of the world. But in being aware of this indissoluble singularity, the effect of physical presence rescues the possibility of a way of thinking history that is constituted precisely in the experience of temporal contingency. We imagine the endless production of film footage of the Second World War as a virtual space in which

countless shots of a Marine glancing into the camera can exist side by side, waiting to appear in a cycle of alternating affections between sensing body and film body. The film image provides the spectators with a way to see back into an absolutely past present, back to a world from which they are radically excluded; but the spectators provide the image with the presence of a perceiving and feeling body.

In the poetic concept of *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA* the possibilities of media technology are worked out into a specific mode of the documentary film image, which I have tried to describe as »perception folded in time«, a mode that can be called the cinematic »memory image«. This is not meant to create any analogy between individual memory and the production of media images. Instead, »memory image« means a temporal correlation in which present and past are brought into a mutual relation of definition, without having been linked with one another in a linear temporal arrangement beforehand.

Deleuze understood such film images as time crystals.<sup>8</sup> But a time crystal can also be reconstructed using Spielberg's *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*. For in a similar way, one might relate the audiovisual images of the film's opening sequence to combat footage, which forms the basis of the production of *WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA*. In fact, at the turn of the millennium, each of these audiovisual images was itself part of cinema's many-voiced reminiscence to the found footage of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Oliver Fahle: Zeitspaltungen. Gedächtnis und Erinnerung bei Gilles Deleuze, in *montage a/v* 11/1 (2002), pp. 97–112, here: 103 ff: »Deleuze defines two decisive forms of crystal images. He situates one directly in the past, the other in the present [...] The images of the past, the first form, designate the displacement into pure memory, which Deleuze had defined, following Bergson, as an autonomous area, that is, independent of present functions. Projecting into the memory, however, no longer provides any primarily chronological order, but simultaneous sequences of images, for only from the point of view of a present consciousness oriented to an action can time be grasped as successive. Current perception, says Bergson, is thus also oriented in spatial relationships. If, however, we look for memory in its own area, then the images are no longer arranged spatially, but in purely temporal viewpoints. This liberation of time from space is decisive for understanding Deleuze's philosophical approach. Pure memory or retention are exactly such pure time-images, in which the various images coexist instead of following one another. In pure memory, there is no automatism of movement, but regions, sediments, and layers [...] The second form, the time-images of the present, are the direct expression of the division in time described above. In order to understand an event, we normally assume that it has a present that can be distinguished from its past and future. But this, Deleuze maintains, is a view of the event that basically also ties understanding time to spatial concepts. Namely, we can also understand time as the simultaneity of the present of the past the present of the present and even of the present of the future, for [...] time (occurs) exactly at the intersection of keeping and passing. It is therefore not about what is kept or what passes, but about both at the same time. The actual event contains several temporal moments *simultaneously*, which are commonly thought of as elapsing after one another, it therefore consolidates all these different moments into one event.«



Figure 5: WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA (left) and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (right)

war years. In the contemporary spectator's watching of films emerges a network of relations between the old film images and current cinema, which as a whole behaves as a time crystal (fig. 5).

The combat films from the Second World War are thus not only unfamiliar to us due to their historical distance; in their unfamiliarity they create, for their part, the necessary distance to the self-conception of a political community on which they are founded and to which they refer—a self-conception that we have always already overlooked when we unconditionally take it to be our own. This means that films create the possibility of a methodological alienation with which political ideas, notions, and conceptions of another present and culture can be dislodged from what was always already known. The sense of commonality as a specific feeling for the social thus only emerges in the difference to other presents and other cultures. Therein lies the specific experience of historicity brought about by cinematic images.

Picture credits:

Fig. 1: HOLLYWOOD UND DER KRIEG – WIE STARREGISSEUR JOHN FORD DEN D-DAY DREHTE (Michael Kloft, D 1998)

Fig. 2, 3, 4: WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA (Louis Hayward, USA 1944)

Fig. 5: WITH THE MARINES AT TARAWA (Louis Hayward, USA 1944), SAVING PRIVATE RYAN (Steven Spielberg, USA 1998)