

ang070 S/Ü "Key Concepts in Cultural Studies"
Assignment 3: Identity, Discourse, Media – Film

Please analyse the following frames by addressing the tasks below:

1. Formal and media-specific analysis

- 1.1 Describe the mise-en-scène in the given frames, i.e. the visual and the cinematographic design. Include the literary design / writing in the given frames and take into account the larger sequence.

Visual Design

- The set in the given frame: outside, on a beach in Vietnam, after the bombardment of the Viet Cong-held coastal mouth of the Nung River; in the foreground: destroyed plants / debris and four figures, in the background: water, palm trees and soldiers / civilians lined up, napalm clouds and smoke
- Lighting and colors: natural (diegetic) light, high key lighting; the dominant colors of dark browns and greens contrast with the orange-red of the smoke in the right middle ground, as well as the skin colors of the bare chests and faces of the soldiers, the silver of the army tag, watch, wristband, hat accessories which glitters against the darker fore- and background colors
- Costumes: military / combat clothing, helmets, and weapons, but incomplete when it comes to Lance, a famous surfer, and Lieutenant Captain Kilgore; Lance with open shirt and without helmet; Kilgore with naked chest and army tag, cavalry / military hat with silver badge, wristband and watch
- Make up / hairdo: Lance without the characteristic military haircut; no visible makeup, but slightly dirty faces and arms
- Performance / acting: the soldiers in the foreground of the shot are either seated (with nervous, insecure facial expression), kneeling or standing (while looking down, bare-chested); in the background, US soldiers are taking Viet Cong soldiers and/or Vietnamese civilians prisoner / freed prisoners, Kilgore: casual yet authoritative stance with his hands on his hips and legs apart, uncharacteristic for a military commander's posture, which gives him the greatest presence; Kilgore talking down to the soldiers and seemingly oblivious to the battle around him; whereas the other soldiers are crouching around him; Lance squinting and looking away from Kilgore, while listening; Willard looking up at Kilgore

Cinematographic Design

- Distance: medium shot in the foreground, long shot in the background
- Angle: eye level / slightly low angle or tilt
- Point of view: zero ocularization, or 'nobody's shot', suggested over-the-shoulder on Willard's part
- Focus: Shallow focus
- Arrangement: Kilgore at the center of the shot; he stands in the foreground while two soldiers, Lance and Willard, sit or cower toward the left of the shot's center and another to right of the center of the shot; all soldiers' faces are arranged below his crotch; in the background and between Willard and Kilgore: American soldier pointing a gun at Vietnamese soldiers/civilians

Literary design:

- Kilgore's story / comment signifies the triumphalism of higher ranked military personnel, but also a certain casualness, as it is linked to a kind of paternalism suggested by the use of the word "son" as he addresses Lance (see acting)

1.2. Identify various discourses in the given frame by considering terms / vocabulary; visual motifs; settings / institutions; subject positions / roles.

- a) Discourse of war: “napalm,” visual motifs: weapons, helmet, military uniforms, soldiers, smoke, battle-field, cavalry hat, soldier’s tag, etc.; setting: Vietnam War combat situation; subject positions: Lt. Captain, soldiers under his command, 'enemies'
- b) Discourse of masculinity (Kilgore’s gender performance of the casual but authoritative Lieutenant in contrast to the anxious, nervous soldiers); setting: the hierarchical structure of the US military; subject positions: male subjects that relate to one another within that structure
- c) Discourse of imperialism / ideology / nationalism; [settings and subject positions from (a) equally apply in this case]: motifs of American military vs. Vietnamese in the background; trail of smoke; domineering acting and posture of Kilgore, the American Lt.; soldiers’ uniforms and weapons; setting: coastal battle-field; subject positions: American military vs. Vietnamese prisoners / enemies
- d) Discourse of psychology / trauma: “napalm,” destruction of the battlefield, anxious facial expressions of the soldiers, prisoners in the background; setting: battlefield; subject positions: American soldiers, prisoners/freed prisoners / Vietnamese enemies
- e) Discourse of family: “son” alongside the casual posture of Kilgore and the bare chest, Lance’s open shirt indicate disarray; Kilgore’s comment likewise indicates a setting outside of strict discipline and order; setting: military battle-field (as opposed to a family weekend); subject position: son (vs. father figure of Kilgore)

2. Functional analysis: Toward a problem-oriented sample analysis

Based on the data generated through your formal and media-specific analysis, provide a **coherently written** analysis with a clear **research problem** that addresses the following points:

- 2.1 the *discursive construction of identity* as represented in the frame (taking into account who / what conceptual tools construct identity);
- 2.2 the *relevant contexts* (historical, cultural, literary, generic, etc.).

- e.g. masculine gender performance and identity constructions of the Vietnam War as represented in *Apocalypse Now* (see Butler)
- the construction of identities of (male) soldiers in the US military/nation and the crisis of national / masculine American identity during the war in Vietnam (see Fluck)
- the construction of US imperialism and the discourses that intersect with it (see Norris; e.g. "The Cavalry hat also serves to underline the genocidal destructiveness that overlays the U.S. Army's mythic role of chivalric rescue", 739): in particular, the ideology of American exceptionalism; further, the structures of *ersatz* family / kinship dynamics within the military

3. Comparison and / or contrast:

Suggest one other frame from the film that contrasts and / or corresponds with the given frames in an aspect relevant to your research problem. Briefly discuss how these frames relate to the problem by addressing differences in representation and their possible functions.