"Trauma Narratives, Mixed Media, and the Meditation on the Invisible"

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TRAUMA NARRATIVES

MIXED MEDIA, AND THE MEDITATION ON THE INVISIBLE

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Abstract

This essay examines the relationship between the history of trauma narratives and the development of media representations. Starting in the late 19th century, modernist cultures were increasingly forced to represent and reflect upon the traumatic experience of destruction and war. In this process of reflection, the 'invisibility' or unrepresentability of traumatic incidents became a recurring theme. Taking up W.J.T. Mitchell's suggestion that all media are "mixed media," I argue that the technological, semiotic, and narrative hybridity of mixed media has a special relationship to this theme. More specifically, I want to show that the explicit or overt presentation of mixed media has historically been invoked as a trope of reflexivity and a way of expressing the difficulties of representing traumatic experience. I will begin my investigation with literary and visual examples from American modernism and conclude with more recent instances of mixed media hybrids combining analogue and digital media.

Résumé

Cet article examine le rapport entre l'histoire du récit de l'expérience traumatique et le développement des représentations médiatiques. À partir de la fin du 19ème siècle, les cultures de la modernité ont été forcées de représenter l'expérience traumatique de la destruction et de la guerre, puis d'y réfléchir. À travers cette réflexion, *l'invisibilité,* ou la non-représentabilité des incidents traumatiques est devenue un thème récurrent dont je suggère ici le rapport particulier à l'hybridité sémiotique et narrative suivant la suggestion de W.J.T. Mitchell que tous les médias sont multimédiatiques. Plus précisément, je veux démontrer que, traditionnellement, on a invoqué la présentation explicite ou ouvertement multimédiatique comme un trope de réflexivité et comme une façon d'exprimer les difficultés qu'on rencontre en essayant de représenter l'expérience traumatique. Je commence mon étude avec des exemples du modernisme américain pour en arriver à des exemples plus récents de l'hybridité multimédiatique en combinant les médias analogues et numériques.

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's story "Soldier's Home" begins with the description of two photographs. The first shows the protagonist Harold Krebs before he goes to Europe in 1917 to fight in the First World War. The second shows him in Europe before returning as a traumatized war veteran to the United States. About this second photograph, the narrator writes: "There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture" (111).

As the photograph indicates, the war has affected the young men who have begun to outgrow their uniforms. Yet, curiously, the Rhine which would provide a geographical reference point for the conflict between France and Germany is not visible. Something seems to be missing in the photograph, which prefigures what will emerge as one of the story's central implications: Conventional images and stories of war are deceptive and misleading. They do not capture how the individual soldier remembers his experience. Rather, Harold Krebs, Hemingway's traumatized and alienated veteran, feels as out of place after his return as is implied by the grotesque scene at the beginning of the story.

The narrator's line "The Rhine does not show in the picture" may thus serve as a first example of reflecting on the limits of visibility and representation that will be addressed in this essay. Taking stories about war as my point of reference, I want to develop an argument that links trauma theory and media theory. On the one hand, the theme of invisibility will be related to cultural memory and traumatic experience. In the work of Cathy Caruth, Thomas Elsaesser, and others, trauma is seen as an external event overwhelming the subject and returning in belated form through flashes of memory. In this essay, I propose that, in dealing with war, the 'meditation' on the invisible can be seen as an attempt to address the impact of traumatic experience which in itself cannot be represented.[1]

On the other hand, I want to discuss how mixed media have contributed to the discourse on the invisible by showing that mixing media can be seen as a way of making the non- representability of trauma obvious to the readers or viewers. Mixed media often signal a lack of the visible and knowable, yet by creating hybrid forms of signification, they can also be understood as highly reflexive and creative responses to this feeling of lack. The act of 'mixing,' therefore, as a semiotic as well as technological process, may have two major implications: firstly, it evokes something that is not visible and cannot be represented; secondly, it creates multi-layered, hybrid objects that are aesthetically complex and rich in connotations.

In her work on trauma, E. Ann Kaplan has proposed four modes of being addressed by trauma narratives: the melodramatic mode of empathy, the vicarious traumatization of horror, the voyeuristic position of television news, and the position of being addressed as witnesses (cf. Kaplan, "Melodrama"). This last mode will be most pertinent to the following examples from different periods and media in American cultural history. In stories about war, the act of mixing is important because it directs our attention to the practice of witnessing: witnessing the event but also the forms and technologies of mediating it. In order to develop this argument, my analysis will move from Modernist examples in literature and visual culture to more recent forms of mixing analogue and digital images. In these examples, other media are incorporated into the dominant discourse of a specific medium by adapting or 'quoting' their characteristics, functions, and, as far as possible, their sign-systems. In this way, representation is linked to different technologies and semiotic systems while at the same time being related to forms of traumatic experience that have overwhelmed the subject in the past.

Following suggestions by Mark Seltzer and E. Ann Kaplan, the late nineteenth century may be seen as a crucial period for the emergence of both trauma narratives and new forms of mixed media. Seltzer stresses the pivotal importance of novels such as Stephen Crane's

The Red Badge of Courage published in 1895, while Kaplan points out that "industrialization provided the social conditions for the train and machine accidents and the large-scale wars which in turn prompted attention to the traumatic symptoms which these produced in men" (Kaplan, "Melodrama" 202). The literary, visual, and audiovisual examples that I have chosen thus imply, on the one hand, that trauma narratives, at least from the Civil War onwards, have played a special role in the cultural history of the United States to "work through" the experience of war and death. On the other hand, they should be understood as aspects of a larger, transnational development in industrialized nations that linked the (potentially) traumatic impact of the machine age with the Modernist impulse of aesthetic experimentation.

Conceptualizing Mixed Media

The concept of "mixed media" has been used in different theoretical contexts, and it is usually defined in a wide sense. In cultural studies approaches, it denotes the interconnectedness of cultural forms; environmental media theorists have linked it with the process of technological convergence, and in the new media discourse it is seen as an element of "remediation," in which new media reconfigure and redefine old media (cf. McLuhan, Bolter and Grusin). For the purpose of this essay, however, I want to focus on a visual culture studies perspective. W.J. Thomas Mitchell, in particular, has questioned the usefulness of trying to define media according to the notion of "purity," a notion that would be based on one sign-system or one register of sensory perceptions. He claims that most mediated forms and perceptions are hybrid: "All media are mixed media, with varying ratios of senses and sign-types" (91).

Mitchell goes on to argue that the emphasis on mixed media allows us to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the cultural material we are actually dealing with, such as the literary techniques of *ekphrasis* and description, the combination of word and image, the digital hypertext, and so on. He writes:

> The postulate of mixed, hybrid media leads us to the specificity of codes, materials, technologies, perceptual practices, sign-functions, and institutional conditions of production and consumption that go to make up a medium. It allows us to break up the reification of media around a single sensory organ (or a single sign-type, or material vehicle) and to pay attention to what is in front of us. (95)

In this wide sense then, the concept of mixed media stresses the connections and overlapping areas between signifying practices that have often been treated as separate phenomena. Yet, to make this deliberately fuzzy notion of 'mixing' more concrete, this essay will focus on a specific type of war-related mixed media examples. Like Hemingway's story, in which the description of the photograph creates a mental visuality, a virtual image that the literary narrative proceeds to take up and modify, these examples make the act of mixing explicit and noticeable, in order to reflect on the forms and limits of representation and knowledge. They are presented as a deliberate rupture or clash of signs and sign-systems.

Care must be taken, however, to distinguish between two different aspects of this process. Firstly, *how* this clash is performed in the text or aesthetic object may vary strongly. It may result from a mixing of the aesthetic, rhetorical, or stylistic registers of language, or it may follow from combining image and word, or different media technologies. Secondly, in terms of its cultural function, the clash of sign systems, despite its differences at the aesthetic level, usually has a common denominator: it reflects on trauma and representation by focusing on the act of seeing and the experience of vision: i.e. it implies that visuality and technologies of looking are related to knowledge and the experience of trauma. For stories of war then, the act of mixing often signals that something is not visible and cannot be represented. At the same time, mixing furthers aesthetic complexity: By incorporating different kinds of screens, by using strategies like double-framing, or by presenting competing screen-based narratives in the overall image space, the 'semiotic clash' creates multi-layered objects that point to themselves as mediated artifacts and posit trauma as a primarily visual experience.[2]

Hemingway, Crane and the Dialectic of Wound Cultures

In my initial example from American literature, Hemingway's story "Soldier's Home," photography and literature are juxtaposed to reflect upon each other. The imaginary photograph does not show what it seems to promise, and a literary narrative is called upon to fill in the gaps.[3] Yet, as the internal focalization of the story makes clear, the verbal discourse of language is ultimately also insufficient to grasp the enormity of the war experience. Soon after Krebs's return, he painfully notes the gap between truthfulness and having to lie. He wants to inform his hometown about his individual war experiences, yet he realizes that there exists no adequate forms of recounting and representing what happened: "His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told" (111). As this passage shows, neither atrocity stories, nor the less spectacular actualities, or the slightly exaggerated lies may serve as models for Krebs's testimony. In the end, therefore, both verbal *and* visual forms of representation fail to signify what he believes to be the most valuable and genuine aspect of his selfhood, the actual experience of fighting in a war.

The dominance of atrocity stories that Harold Krebs bemoans testifies to the ambiguous fascination of war as thrilling spectacle but also as the ultimate dissolution of individual and collective identities. Atrocity stories allude to the most traumatic events imaginable, the worst fantasies of cruelty and debasement, yet in Hemingway's story, they are safely projected onto the decadence and sickness of the European situation. The Modernist discourse on invisibility that Hemingway exemplifies thus explores two related issues: on the one hand, there is the failure of representing the experience of war in a truthful way, and, on the other hand, there is the attempt to block out of sight those stories that would endanger the "imagined community" (Anderson) of individuals making up the nation—in particular, its cultural definition of gender and sexual difference.

This dialectical movement between subjective experience and collective self-images, between private body and public sphere, characterizes what Mark Seltzer has called a "wound culture". In this view of modern cultures it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the boundary between subject and world. Indeed, the wound becomes the crucial sign of the collapse of boundaries between the inner world of the subject and the outer world of the group or nation. Mass-mediated societies, according to Seltzer, are founded upon "the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (3). Trauma may be an event beyond representation, yet "wound cultures" compulsively return to the scenes of traumatic experience.

The key transitional, proto-modern text for this clash of subjectivity, national identity, and wounded bodies in American literature is Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* from 1895. In this story of Henry Fleming, a Union soldier fighting in the Civil War, the wound becomes an ambiguous sign. It not only signifies injury or death, but also social acceptance and national pride. In one scene of the book, Fleming is looking at his fellow soldiers and becomes envious of their bodily signs of combat. At this point in the story, he has not yet been injured and feels ashamed: "He was continually casting sidelong glances to see if the men were contemplating the letters of guilt he felt burned into his brow. At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage" (110).

In Crane's exceptional psychonarration, the wound thus becomes a "switch point" (Seltzer) between the agitated mind of the subject and the collective identity of the group. For Henry Fleming, the trauma of torn bodies paradoxically represents the ultimate proof of acceptance into the inner circle of male and national identity. In this case then, the reflection on the invisible revolves around the contrast between thoughts and signs, interior fantasy and outward action, or the invisibility of shame and the peculiar honor of an injured body.

Although it may be less obvious than in Hemingway's story, Crane's novel also depends on the mixing of semiotic modes. Photography plays only a minor role, but painting becomes a crucial reference point for a style of writing that has often been called impressionistic.[4] The confluence of literature and painting is made explicit on the first few pages of the novel when the narrator explains Fleming's fascination with the war: "He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds" (46).

The shift from reading to seeing, from literature to 'large pictures extravagant in color,'—from well-structured historical narratives to chaotic yet highly imaginative and suggestive impressions—becomes the model for Crane's own mode of writing. In its colour schemes and episodic structure, it is painterly, yet the exploration of the invisible goes deeper. Just as with Hemingway's juxtaposition of literature and photography, Crane's use of language signals the need to find new expressive means in order to grasp the experience and enormity of modern warfare, the "machines of steel," as Fleming calls the enemy at one point. His story is not a retrospective account of the war; it is the story of trauma in the making as Fleming is drawn to the spectacle of destruction: "The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. Its complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go close and see it produce corpses" (105).[5]

The more opaque and terrifying this machinery of modern warfare becomes, the stronger the urge to find new combinations of sign-systems to register its impact on the subject. In many cases then, the explicit act of 'mixing' represents an attempt to narrate traumatic experience by creating a new mode of subjectivity, and the stories of Crane and Hemingway can be seen as complementary cases. They introduce the wounds of war as internal and external injuries that are directly related to the well-being of the collective national body.[6] Yet, by their explicit allusion to different signifying practices, they depict this direct link to be full of ambiguities and

blank spots: Henry Fleming's busy mind is incapable of comprehending the big picture; he is overpowered by the intensity of sensory impressions. Harold Krebs, in contrast, is equally incapable of creating meaning out of his war experience, yet for different reasons: he has lost the power to express what has happened to him, or "the times", as the narrator writes, "that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself" (Hemingway 111).

For the relationship between individual and group or nation, mixed media in American literary history may thus serve a double function: they signify an element of crisis and doubt as to the meaning and representability of traumatic experience. But they also create a more complex and creative aesthetic object capable of evoking this crisis of representation in a new and intensified form. In Crane's novel, outer reality is reconfigured as an extension of the subject's emotional landscape, while Hemingway's Modernist use of language deconstructs social reality as an intricate web of patterns and repetitions. In both cases, the subject as the locus of perception and emotions disintegrates. Something that happened in the past via the faculty of vision appears to be beyond visibility and the act of mixing evokes the ungraspable nature of its experience, the feeling of loss and lack.

Painting, Photography, and World-War II

This double-movement of representational scepticism and aesthetic complexity can be found in other historical periods and signifying practices, such as painting and film. Two examples shall demonstrate how they may diverge from but also continue the trajectory that has been sketched out so far. The first example, Ben Shahn's 1942 painting "This Is Nazi Brutality" is related to Hemingway's atrocity discourse and addresses the question of using traumatic events for the purposes of propaganda. The second example, Paul Haggis' film *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) continues, in technologically advanced form, the discourse of a wound culture. As indicated in the introduction, Shahn's painting may be seen as belonging to a unique American tradition of trauma narratives related to the experience of war,

yet his work, in particular, was also engaging with transnational Modernist movements in photography, collage artworks, and painting. In the European context, Dada artists, such as George Grosz and John Heartfield, developed elaborate forms of caricature and photomontage addressing the experience of the First World War, as well as the atmosphere of violence in the Weimar Republic and the early Nazi regime. In the United States too, hybrid combinations of image and text proliferated in New Deal related art programs—Shahn worked as a photographer for the Farm Security Administration along with Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans—but also in magazines such as *Life* or *Time* (cf. Stange).

For the relationship between trauma narratives and mixed media, the work of war correspondents stationed overseas during the Second World War was crucial. Among a diverse group including photographers like Margaret Bourke-White, Lee Miller is a particularly interesting case. She had been Man Ray's model in Paris in the 1930s, but became a professional portrait and fashion photographer in her own right. In the 1940s, she worked as a war correspondent for *Vogue* magazine reporting from liberated concentration camps and the final weeks of combat in Germany. She produced an intricate word-image-rhetoric in her photo-essays for *Vogue* that expressed the difficulties of war reportage in the face of mass death—a recurring issue for future reflections on the relationship between trauma narratives, media representation, and the historical experience of the Shoah (on Miller cf. Penrose).

At the home front, the painter and part-time photographer Ben Shahn worked for the Office of War Information in 1942, creating paintings that were intended to help the war effort. In the 1930s, Shahn had experimented with photography and painting, translating his New York-photographs into meticulously crafted word-image-combinations. For his OWI-paintings, Shahn moved beyond the intermediality of these earlier experiments. In "This Is Nazi Brutality" from 1942, he juxtaposed and combined three different layers of media communication: the radio telegram recalling the official

announcement from Berlin about the destruction of Lidice, the explicatory sentence "This is Nazi brutality" pointing out the dominant meaning of the war poster, and, finally, the painting of a hooded, handcuffed, and imprisoned figure (see fig. 1).
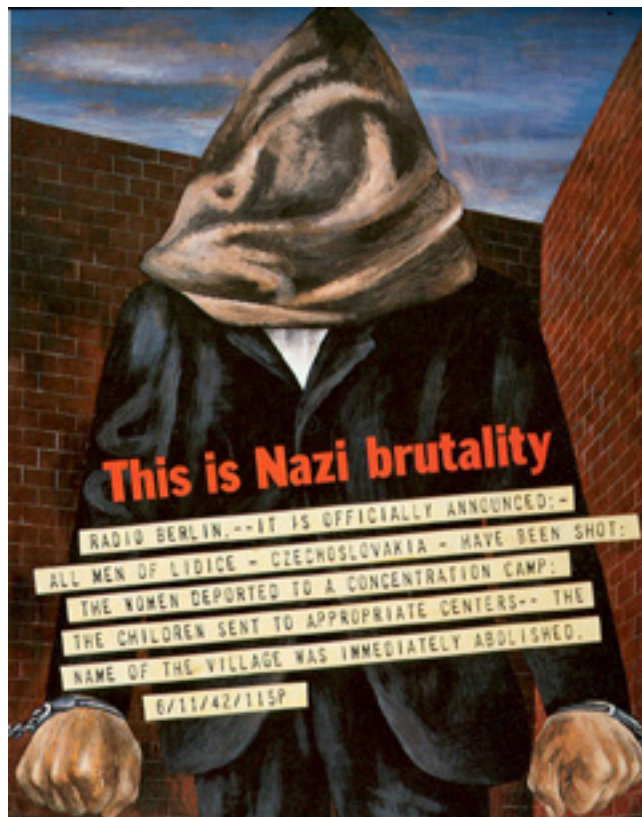

Fig. 1: Ben Shahn "This Is Nazi Brutality" 1942, Photo-offset in colors, $37^{7/8}$ x $28^{1/4}$ inches (Pohl 69)

By creating this hybrid combination of image and text, Shahn produced war propaganda, but he also reflected upon the act of creating it. Although the poster stems from the Office of War Information, the viewer senses a desire to subvert all kinds of official announcements and a desire to contrast them with more immediate and powerful images of suffering. The Nazi telegram is framed by its American designation as an exemplary case

of brutality. What becomes most striking in the painting is the enormous human figure, looming both over the telegram and its commentary. Clenched fists signify attempts at resistance, while the dark suit and white shirt add the connotation of the man's belonging to the class of intellectuals. This is one of the men mentioned in the telegram, about to be shot inside the prison walls. However, the crucial part of his body capable of creating the most powerful effect of empathy is not visible: his face. An enormous, elaborately painted hood dominates the upper third of the painting and covers his head. It leaves the man's strong hands as the only visible marker of bodily agitation.

Thus, in Ben Shahn's case, too, emulating and mixing different forms of media communication triggers a reflection on the invisible. By covering the man's face, Shahn resisted the temptation of presenting him as an easily identifiable victim. Rather, he stressed the invisible and unknowable quality of the traumatic experience alluded to in the telegram, and evaluated as an act of brutality in the telegram's framing. The most effective visual reference of the verbal signifier "brutality" is withheld as the suffering face remains hidden. Shahn's painting, at first glance a straightforward indictment of Nazi brutality, reveals itself to be not just a reflection on the invisible, but also on the difficulties of creating propaganda for a democratic culture committed to a strong notion of individualism. Shahn worked for less than a year for the Office of War Information. Frances Pohl suggests that he was pursuing a different notion of propaganda which was ultimately incompatible with the official line: "Most of Shahn's paintings were being rejected by OWI officials because they were too 'violent' or not 'appealing enough'" (68).

Mixing Digital and Analogue Media

From today's perspective, Shahn's painting bears an eerie resemblance to images from the Abu Ghraib prison where military personnel of the United States army abused prisoners during the war in Iraq (2003 to 2011) and photographed their actions. As E. Ann Kaplan has shown, the historical discourse on trauma narratives was not just shaped by questions of post-traumatic

stress disorders or the experience of the Shoah; in the American context, it was also a response to the Vietnam War (cf. Kaplan, *Trauma* 25-41). Similarly, with the illegal actions in Abu Ghraib prison, the war in Iraq came to be viewed as an instance of both, experiencing but also inflicting traumatic injury.[7] In the 1970s films, such as *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978) or the *Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) portrayed the returning war veterans as symbolic for the struggle to cope with a sense of individual and national defeat. The cinematic representation of the war in Iraq continued that tradition, but shifted it into the digital age, creating intricate forms of mixed media. My final example, then, returns to the relation between trauma and national identity by highlighting the contrast between new digital media and the old analogue medium of film. *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) by Paul Haggis is the story of a father investigating the death of his son, a soldier who returns to the United States from Iraq and is killed by his fellow soldiers shortly after his return. While the father talks to the members of his son's military unit, he receives short digital clips that his son had taken in Iraq. Slowly, the two lines of investigation meet and the father eventually realizes that his son had turned into a sadistic torturer while stationed overseas. The grief over his death is superimposed with a feeling of shame and remorse vis-à-vis this painful discovery.

The film is exemplary for the incorporation of different media in the context of a cinematic narrative. Visually and aesthetically, this process takes place at different levels and in different ways. It includes the 'clash' of the cinematic images with the incorporated visual screens and photographs. Usually the cinematic frame serves as the background to the digital screens in the foreground, yet mixing and hybridity may also lead to more flexible relations between them.[8] Furthermore, the incorporation of frames and screens fulfills narrative purposes. Historically, the cinematic screen has served as a kind of 'deep' space, defining, delimiting and often containing the functions of photographs or television and computer screens. However, the digital age has subverted this hierarchical tradition. In Paul Haggis's film, photographs serve their well-established function

as 'frozen' images, traces of memory and sentimental longing for the past (see fig. 2). Digital media, in comparison, play a more ambiguous role: they compete with the cinematic narrative and turn into a source of disturbingly personal, aesthetically inferior, yet morally illuminating counter-images (see fig. 3).
Fig. 2: Traditional, 'nostalgic' uses of photographs as memory traces

Fig. 3: The new hybridity of analogue and digital media

A brief excerpt may serve as an example of mixed media in this film, revealing the crucial moment in which the father realizes that his son maltreated prisoners in Iraq.

[CLIP *In the Valley of Elah*, appr. 2 minutes]

The scene exemplifies how new electronic and digital media are often incorporated into film narratives. They are presented as small screens on which a complementary or counter-narrative unfolds. Visually, the small screen is framed by the larger cinematic image while a tracking shot moves toward it until the two frames merge, and the viewers are temporarily transported into the "alien" medium (see fig. 4 and fig. 5).
Fig. 4: Framing computer screens in *In the Valley of Elah*

Fig. 5: Immersion in the digital image
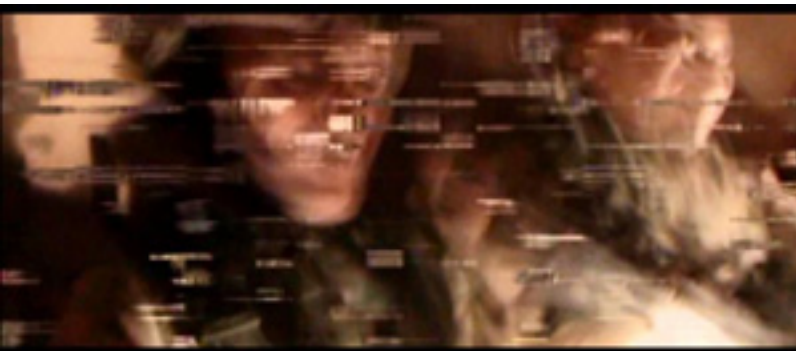
Yet, the quality of the digital medium is low, making it difficult, if not impossible, to perceive and comprehend what is being shown. The introjected digital images and sounds promise to represent what happened—historical truth—but fail to produce a narrative that is as visually illuminating and coherent as the cinematic frame. They invoke traumatic experience, but due to their technological inferiority, displace it beyond the limits of visibility and knowledge.

Only stopping the images and investigating them closely reveals that they serve as prime examples of a "wound culture." In this case, however, Stephen Crane's notion of the wound as a "badge of courage" is completely reversed. As the father witnesses how his son brutalizes the wounds of Iraqi prisoners, he realizes that they signify a national disgrace. In the moral reading of the film, the

loss of the mourning parents is thus overshadowed by the wounded body of the prisoner as a visible sign of shame and guilt (see fig. 6 and fig. 7).
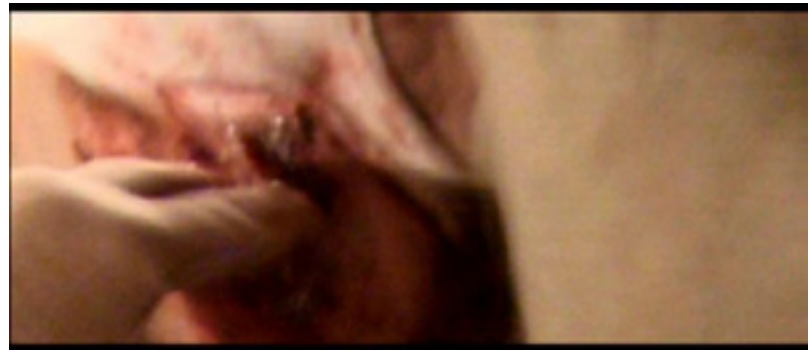
Fig. 6: The wound in *In the Valley of Elah*

Fig. 7: Watching the son's abuse

Just as in Hemingway's story, the imperfection and 'unprofessional' use of the new medium is partially made responsible for the fragmented and ruptured character of the representation. And like the painterly imagination in Crane, the digital images take on the character of an autobiographical journal. They individualize the narrative, making it more subjective and personal.

In the end, this private realm of subjective experience is incorporated into the public realm of national identity represented by the father. Ultimately, this public sphere is the patriarchal and patriotic space of "dominant fictions" (Silverman 15-51) related to war. What the reflection on the invisible manages to introduce into this traditional

space is the disruptive quality of trauma and torture as historical fact and national shame. The imperfection of digital media points to the necessary imaginative supplement needed to grasp what happened: the trauma of the tortured prisoner as well as the traumatic loss of the parents. Eventually, and similar to the confluence of photography and literature in "Soldier's Home," *In the Valley of Elah* suggests that even though the cinematic narrative is more coherent and dense, more comprehensive and decipherable than the digital mode, it, too, does not arrive at a point of closure.

The confluence of digital media and film, therefore, brings out a final observation. Mixing media may signal the attempt to represent traumatic experience, but it may also function as a defense mechanism against its overwhelming emotional quality. The 'alien' medium, in this case the sounds and images taken by a cellphone, allows the cinema to evoke, but also to distance, the violent, traumatizing event and to position itself as a narrative institution that re-establishes a sense of order and meaning, however fragile it may be.

The Practice of Witnessing

To conclude, in this essay, I have discussed war-related examples of mixed media taken from American culture as ways of reflecting upon the relation between representation and trauma. I have argued that mixing sign-systems and media technologies can be seen as an 'aesthetic reaction' of artists and art to deal with the non-representability of trauma, in particular, the excessive impact of the machinery of modern warfare. Yet in the various examples, the act of mixing has served different purposes. It has explored the limits of representation; it has foregrounded the clash of different time schemes as the belated return of memories; it has created new ways of expressing subjective experience; and it has made the unknowable accessible for a debate on the self-definition of American society and culture.

In that debate, it seems that one central theme emerges as the crucial paradox. It is the desire to make the war-related narratives more subjective and personal, while at the same time showing how the individual disintegrates in the act of being traumatized. No easy resolution is offered for this paradox in the examples discussed. And yet, they achieve a crucial effect: By framing and doubling the act of perception, they address the spectator as a witness of traumatic events *and* of the process of mediation. In other words, they offer a viewing and reading position that allows for empathy, but also for a critical reflection upon the act of witnessing as an ambiguous cultural and technological practice.

Notes

1. For an overview of the discourse on trauma and media history, cf. Kaplan, Trauma Culture 25-41.

2. With this emphasis on visuality care must be taken to recognize the differences between the mental images of language and the graphic images of visual media. However, the mixed media discourse implies that at some level both types of images ultimately participate in similar mental processes. As Mitchell writes, literature "involves 'virtual' or 'imaginative' experiences of space and vision that are no less real for being indirectly conveyed through language" (95). In a related sense, Winfried Fluck argues that images and literature activate the cultural imaginary in similar ways: "No less so than in the case of literature, although with different modalities, the aesthetic experience of the image, including pictures and motion pictures, is one in which non-identity and doubleness are constitutive" (34).

3. For an extended analysis of the photograph, cf. De Baerdemaeker, Kennedy and Curnutt.

4. For the discussion of Crane's "impressionism," cf. Kwiat, Rogers, and Bender; Whiting discusses the sources on which Crane drew for his expressive visual style.

5. The confluence of vision and trauma in this passage is exemplary for the novel as a whole and demonstrates its exceptional pre-modernist character. Crane's innovative re-definition of realist fiction creates a subjective viewpoint and concept of reality that changes "as the

angle of vision shifts" (Rogers 293). In a later scene, Henry Fleming comes across a dead soldier and the elaborate description of colors serves to highlight the sense of subjectivity: "The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants" (Crane 101). The intensity of this act of perception comes to haunt the young man and epitomizes the traumatizing process of vision: "He was pursued by a sight of the black ants swarming greedily upon the gray face and venturing horribly near to the eyes" (Crane 102).

6. The importance of the notion of "injury" has been emphasized by Elayne Scarry: "Visible or invisible, omitted, included, altered in its inclusion, described or redescribed, injury is war's product and its cost, it is the goal toward which all activity is directed and the road to the goal, it is there in the smallest enfolded corner of war's interior recesses and still there where acts are extended out into the largest units of encounter" (18).

7. For a creative collage of the discourse developing around the war in Iraq cf. Weinberger 144-224.

8. Mixing may thus lead to a new, hybrid object, but it can also re-establish a sense of hierarchy. As two media meet, one may function as a frame for the other, eventually emerging as the more powerful in establishing a dominant sense of narrative order and meaning. Historically, this has often been the case; media vie for the spot of superior producer of cultural meaning by introjecting their competitors, often stressing their inferior position and dangerous effects; for a more extended discussion cf. Decker.

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Bio

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Bio

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