



# Cinematic Histospheres

## On the Theory and Practice of Historical Films

Rasmus Greiner

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## ABSTRACT

In this open access book, film scholar Rasmus Greiner develops a theoretical model for the concept of the *histosphere* to refer to the “sphere” of a cinematically modelled, physically experienceable historical world. His analysis of practices of modelling and perceiving, immersion and empathy, experience and remembering, appropriation and refiguration combine approaches from film studies, such as Vivian Sobchack’s phenomenology of film experience, with historiographic theories, such as Frank R. Ankersmit’s concept of historical experience. Building on this analysis, Greiner examines the spatial and temporal organization of historical films and presents discussions of mood and atmosphere, body and memory, and genre and historical consciousness. The analysis is based around three historical films, spanning six decades, that depict 1950s Germany: Helmut Käutner’s *SKY WITHOUT STARS* (1955), Jutta Brückner’s *YEARS OF HUNGER* (1980), and Sven Bohse’s three-part TV series *KU’DAMM 56* (2016).

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.*  
F. Scott Fitzgerald

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This book, including all quotations from German works not previously translated into English, was translated by Andrew Godfrey, with revisions by Hilla Czinczoll and the author. In the original German, much of the argument revolves around a distinction between two aspects of experience that is difficult to capture in English. The term “experience” has generally (though not exclusively) been reserved here for the sense of *Erfahrung/erfahren*, which focuses on perceptual/cognitive access to the external world gained through experience (and can sometimes be rendered in terms of “learning,” “discovering,” or “finding out”). *Erlebnis/erleben*, meanwhile, which focuses on the inner lived or felt quality of an experience, has typically been rendered as “living encounter” or “live” (as transitive verb).

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

The film opens with shots of a barbed wire fence, warning signs, and barriers, accompanied by a dramatic score and an omniscient voice-over that embeds the historical situation depicted on screen within a particular narrative. The narrator explains that the film is the story of East German factory worker Anna Kaminski (Eva Kotthaus) and West German border guard Carl Altmann (Erik Schumann). The year is 1952, and the two lovers are separated by the inner German border. Following a series of almost static shots, the camera pans slowly, awakening the film to life. Finally, human figures appear: refugees making their way along an overgrown path on the bank of a border river.

As we watch Helmut Käutner's *SKY WITHOUT STARS* (*HIMMEL OHNE STERNE*, 1955), we construct a spatiotemporal structure out of moving images, sound, and words that allows us to experience the history of Germany's division. The audiovisual figuration of the past becomes a living encounter in the present. Conceptions of history are inscribed into the filmic world's formal and aesthetic features even before the plot begins. The iconic images of the border and the voice-over commentary localize the action in a historical setting distinguished by landscape, costumes, set dressings, and the way the characters act and comport themselves. By creating visual and aural spaces, the film both represents and constructs history, producing a fluid historical world that we can synesthetically "live." This blend of historical model and fiction draws us powerfully into the world of the film, and the immersion is helped along by the flow of the

montage, the music, and the subjectivized gaze of the camera-eye. All these operations bring us “physically and mentally closer to the action of the film.”<sup>1</sup> I shall use the term *histosphere* to refer to the “sphere” of a cinematically modeled, physically experienceable historical world. The prefix “histo-” refers here not just to (popular conceptions of) history, but also to a particular *bodily* dimension. In the phenomenological space between audiovisual figurations and historical experience, a histosphere functions—in the manner of *histology*—as an innervated tissue that relays the potential semiotic meanings of the cinematically constructed past via physical-sensory stimuli.<sup>2</sup> In this book, I conduct a “vivisection” of the praxis of histospheres—an exploratory surgery on a living organism.

The narrator of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* speaks auspiciously of the refugees’ hope of a life in freedom. While the repetitive score accentuates the tense atmosphere, a close-up focuses on Anna’s watchful gaze. The situation intensifies further when the smuggler betrays the refugees to two border guards, causing an elderly man to suffer a fatal heart attack. The film cuts to a dramatic zoom-in on Anna’s face, which strengthens the sense of subjective experience and creates closer identification with the protagonist. To the sound of soaring strings, she seizes the initiative and leaps into the river. One of the guards shoots and hits her, but despite her injury she makes it to the other bank (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4).

By combining our living audiovisual encounter with our imaginative empathy, the sequence allows us to experience the awful consequences of Germany’s division. It also activates our own memories, whether of other films or of our personal lived experiences. These kinds of associations are accompanied by conceptions of history that are in turn closely bound up with our individual biographies.<sup>3</sup> The popular historical fiction film (or simply, as I shall call it, the *historical film*<sup>4</sup>) thus comprises a dynamic process that makes the past present in order to produce meaning in the here-and-now. Against the general assumption that the constitutive feature of historical films is that they *represent* history, I argue that it is instead their audiovisual *modeling* and *figuration* of historical worlds, which enables an immediate *experience* of history. This would imply that the essential criterion of a historical film is the presence of a histosphere.

Although in film theory the boundaries between fictional and nonfictional forms have become increasingly porous, it can nonetheless be helpful to distinguish between fiction and documentary films. In recent debate, there have been efforts to free theory-building from getting bogged down in questions of ontology; however, without wishing to take sides on this



**Figs. 1.1–1.4** Subjectivized experience and close identification with the protagonist in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

issue, in my study I shall primarily investigate histospheres as an element and phenomenon of historical *fiction* films. I implicitly acknowledge that specific forms of this phenomenon can also be found in documentaries and other nonfictional film types, but believe that a theory of how histospheres operate in nonfiction films would require further work and cannot simply be tacked onto a discussion of their functioning in fiction films.

Despite their powerful immersive potential, historical films do not enable an all-encompassing illusion. Our living encounter with a film is only incompletely present; this encounter makes the past sensuously available, but does not allow it to be changed. In this respect, the spectator's perspective is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's remarks on the "Angel of History" in Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. Plunging backward into the future, the angel looks with horror at the rubble of the past that piles up before his eyes<sup>5</sup>; the "storm of progress" drives him "irresistibly into the future" and is so strong that the angel can no longer close his wings. The medium of film, by contrast, seemingly has complete mastery of the dimensions of

space and time. Historical films can thus, I argue, achieve what Benjamin claims the Angel of History cannot: They can “pause for a moment” to “awaken the dead and [...] piece together what has been smashed.”<sup>6</sup> Applying Benjamin’s deliberations to histospheres, this would imply that they are capable of changing the direction of our movement through time: In the historical film we are no longer moving away from but closer toward the past, entering thoroughly into it and allowing it to sweep us along. Moreover, we can turn around and peer into an imaginary future from the perspective of the past simulated by the film.<sup>7</sup> Our historical knowledge is (at least temporarily) overridden by our immersive, living encounter with the histosphere. Although we *know*, even while watching *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, that Germany was reunified on October 3, 1990, at the same time we *live* the reality of the histosphere, in which the division of Germany is far from over. Film transforms the past into a space of possibilities. In his *A Baedeker for the Soul*, Béla Balázs writes:

Do you not also see the many branching paths that you could also have taken, that we could have taken, had we not been pushed by some chance? They all belong to our past.<sup>8</sup>

Balázs conceives of the past in a way that also includes options and eventualities that did not come to pass. His deliberations can also be applied to the relation between film and history. On this view, cinema’s unique accomplishment would be making it possible to walk down, to experience, the paths not taken in the past. This space of possibilities is manifested not just in films’ modeling of a counterfactual or alternative history, but also in the playful suspension of our historical memory. During our living encounter with a film, our knowledge of the course that history actually took recedes into the background and gives way to a sense of contingency. The histosphere gives chance a second chance. Until the very last moment, we believe it is possible—we fear, or we hope—that *this* time perhaps things will turn out differently.

Our conceptions of history are also influenced by the present: “History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now,” writes Benjamin.<sup>9</sup> Even historical films cannot cut themselves off from the present. A histosphere is always a product of the time the film was made. It is like a “tiger’s leap into that which has gone before,” which seeks out “what is up-to-date, wherever it moves in the jungle [*Dickicht*: maze,

thicket] of what was.”<sup>10</sup> The time of a film’s production is inscribed into its audiovisual modeling of a bygone era. To fully understand this ambivalent nature of histospheres, we must also discuss the effect of film on our perceptions of the world. Siegfried Kracauer drew attention to film’s tendency to explore the “texture of everyday life” and help us “not only to appreciate our given material environment, but to extend it in all directions.”<sup>11</sup> Films thus “virtually make the world our home.”<sup>12</sup> Along similar lines, Balázs says that film teaches us “to see the intricate visual details” of “our polyphonous life.”<sup>13</sup> In order to establish the sense of intimacy and familiarity with the world described by Kracauer and Balázs, films model audiovisual “lifeworlds,” worlds of lived experience.<sup>14</sup> In a historical film, these constructions form part of the histosphere. Sometimes, there can be multiple competing lifeworlds in a single film. One example is *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, whose histosphere is made up of two lifeworlds: West and East Germany (both still in the early years of their existence). Anna alternates between these two lifeworlds, without truly being at home in either. Her son Jochen (Rainer Stang) lives with her parents-in-law in the West, while her frail grandparents live across the border in the East. Eventually, she and Carl discover an abandoned railway station in no man’s land; an *other place* where they can be intimate.<sup>15</sup> For a brief time, their lifeworlds overlap. This fleeting utopian moment anticipates and models the reunification of Germany. On this construal, *SKY WITHOUT STARS* enables a “mixed, joint experience” on the fine line between utopia and heterotopia, which Michel Foucault describes using the metaphor of a mirror.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation can also be extended to historical films in general: If we understand a histosphere as a filmic figuration that audiovisually models historical worlds and makes them available to experience, then the spectator’s perception oscillates between a mode of observation that strives for objectivity and an immersive, living encounter. On the one hand, as spectators we enter into the film’s depiction of a possible world; on the other, we constantly compare this depiction with our own picture of reality. This picture in turn depends on our experiences and memories, which themselves include films and audiovisual media.<sup>17</sup>

Standard theories of fiction based on possible-worlds semantics conceive of the universe as a *constellation of worlds*. As film scholar Margrit Tröhler explains, these worlds “can be thought of like a solar system or like a soap bubble ball made up of multiple chambers adhering together.”<sup>18</sup> A film’s histosphere can be understood as one such chamber. Although it forms a self-contained sphere that models a possible historical world, it is



also in direct contact with countless other chambers, including other filmic histospheres. The walls between the individual chambers are permeable membranes, which result in a dynamic interchange between them.<sup>19</sup> The cinema screen can likewise be understood as a membrane between two worlds.<sup>20</sup> Contra Kracauer's criticism of the finite nature of the cosmos presented in the historical film,<sup>21</sup> as part of a constellation of worlds a histosphere always points beyond itself and influences our conceptions of history through a complex interplay with other possible worlds and media experiences of reality.

With the digital revolution, the mediatization of our perception has gained in intensity. "We are all part of a moving-image culture, and we live cinematic and electronic lives," the American film and media scholar Vivian Sobchack observed back in 1988, and coined the notion of a "technosphere" that surrounds us and profoundly shapes our lifeworld.<sup>22</sup> Since then, audiovisual technologies and media have become ever more pervasive in our daily lives, so that nowadays filmic histospheres are even more easily accepted and readily accessible to intuitive experience.

As I shall set out in the following chapters, a histosphere is far more than a model-like representation of a historical period. As an immersive experiential field, it does not merely address our senses of sight and hearing, but entirely absorbs us. My theory of historical experience mediated through film experience builds on Sobchack's work on the phenomenology of film.<sup>23</sup> Sobchack describes film itself as an embodied experience that addresses *all* the viewing subjects' senses by way of a synesthetic interplay of moving images and sound. Film is a mode of embodied being-in-the-world with the capacity "to not only *have* sense but also to *make* sense" through direct, prereflective experience.<sup>24</sup> At the heart of her theory is the idea that a film has its own body. Sobchack understands film as simultaneously a visible object—a world of film images—and a subject that has its own point of view on the world.<sup>25</sup> While film, like photography, objectifies "the subjectivity of the visual into the visible," the cinematic "qualitatively transforms the photographic through a materiality that not only claims the world and others as objects for vision (whether moving or static) but also signifies its own materialized agency, intentionality, and subjectivity."<sup>26</sup> Building on this phenomenological account, the historical film can be understood as "an *experiential field* in which human beings pretheoretically construct and play out a particular—and culturally encoded—form of *temporal existence*."<sup>27</sup> Through a living encounter with a film, history is made experientially available, and on the foundation of synesthetic

perception, the film addresses the spectator's entire body. We do not merely see and hear the filmic figuration of a historical world; rather, it completely surrounds us, so that it is as if we can physically feel it. Although we are aware that this living encounter with history is based on perceiving an audiovisual construction—a histosphere—the filmic experience of world corresponds closely to our everyday perceptions, which the film experience extends to spheres of past time that are inaccessible outside of cinema.

The evolution of histospheres over the course of film history closely tracks the changing relationship between film and history. Back in 1896, Max Skladanowsky filmed his brother Eugen playing the Prussian king Frederick the Great. Less than twenty years later, D. W. Griffith's *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (1915) and *INTOLERANCE* (1916), two now-controversial works that revolutionized film aesthetics, revealed the historical film's immense potential for a complex making-present of the past. Griffith's lavish productions ushered in the era of historical epics. Then, in the second half of the twentieth century, movements such as Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, and New German Cinema articulated an understanding in which contemporary American genre cinema was seen as part of a cultural renewal.<sup>28</sup> This development was accompanied by a democratization of perception that decisively altered the relation between film and history. Avant-garde montage concepts aimed at mobilizing the masses gave way to a subjectivized address to individual viewing subjects. From the perspective of a new society founded on egalitarian democracy, the "form of aesthetic experience in the cinema" was now understood as "the potential of an adequate experience of the world."<sup>29</sup> This formulation captures the essence of the histosphere: Observing and adapting the film's subjective perspective on a historical world enable us to have an individual experience of history. Movement in space, as the basic element of film images, was now joined as an object of filmmaking by perceptions and explorations of time.<sup>30</sup> For historical films, this meant a (at least partial) move away from simply representing historical events, toward a phenomenology of the way the historical eras modeled by films are perceived.

The cinematic renewal movements that emerged from the 1950s onwards not only created new ways of accessing history, but also redefined the relation between image and sound. The essayistic historical fiction films of the French New Wave led to a changed understanding of film sound's historical relevance. The director and film theorist *Éric Rohmer* went so far as to describe *Alain Resnais's* *HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR* (1959) as "the first modern film of sound cinema."<sup>31</sup> The film presents a dialogue

between a French actress and a young man from Hiroshima in which personal recollections of historical events are explored and their reliability as historiographical accounts questioned, and closely interweaves this dialogue with film images and other auditory elements. This move toward film sound needs to be reflected in theoretical accounts of historical films too. While previous research on film and history has primarily focused on visual aspects, my study of histospheres also explicitly considers the *audio history of film*.<sup>32</sup> Taking account of sound and the diverse ways it interacts with moving images provides the foundation to develop a theory of *audio-visual history*. The lavish historical productions that began to appear in the early 1990s<sup>33</sup> furthermore combine the subjectivized spectator experience with a multi-immersive approach, pairing a living audiovisual encounter with strategies of imaginative empathy so as to make history into an embodied experience in which visual and aural perceptions extend synesthetically to the spectator's whole body.

In order to explore the different aspects of histospheres in greater depth, I shall analyze selected film sequences that help to ground and illustrate my theses. I concentrate primarily on mainstream productions, which thanks to their commercial marketing are well known and reach relatively large audiences. However, I by no means wish to marginalize experimental, noncommercial, and postcolonial films. My reason for not considering such films here is, rather, that they lie beyond the scope of the theories developed in this book, and so an equally detailed analysis of non-mainstream historical films would have to be undertaken in separate, supplementary studies. The present work, by contrast, focuses on three popular productions: firstly, Helmut Käutner's *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, which depicts the (at that time still fresh) history of German division; secondly, Jutta Brückner's autobiographically inspired *YEARS OF HUNGER (HUNGER-JAHRE, 1980)*, which tells the story of an adolescence in the oppressive, narrow-minded Germany of the *Wirtschaftswunder* years; and thirdly, Sven Bohse's three-part TV series *KU'DAMM 56 (2016)*, in which a Berlin dance school becomes embroiled in existential conflicts over the repression of the Nazi past and the struggle for women's liberation. From the perspectives and horizons of their own times, each of the three films creates its own distinctive histosphere for the 1950s. An era torn between the shadow of the past, national consolidation, and an economic boom is evoked by motifs such as returning soldiers, the question of collective guilt, the division of Germany, and the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Inspired by Benjamin's "Angel of History," which falls backward into the future with

his gaze fixed on the past, I have chosen films made at three different points in time—1955, 1980, 2016—each with very different historical coordinates that determine their perspective on the world of the 1950s. Depending on whether a film was produced at a gap of three (*SKY WITHOUT STARS*), twenty-five (*YEARS OF HUNGER*), or sixty (*KU'DAMM 56*) years from the time it is set, the construction of its histosphere will be subject to different political, social, and cultural contexts. *SKY WITHOUT STARS* was influenced by the same discourses evident in films like *THE HEATH IS GREEN* (*GRÜN IST DIE HEIDE*, 1951; dir. Hans Deppe), *THE GREAT TEMPTATION* (*DIE GROSSE VERSUCHUNG*, 1952; dir. Rolf Hansen), *AREN'T WE WONDERFUL* (*WIR WUNDERKINDER*, 1958; dir. Kurt Hoffmann), and *ROSEMARY* (*DAS MÄDCHEN ROSEMARIE*, 1958; dir. Rolf Thiele). The shock of Germany's division was still relatively fresh, and the integration of displaced persons and returning soldiers had left its mark. Aesthetically, Käutner's film still bears the strong imprint of classical German entertainment films, with the same careful framing, orchestral score, and linearly told melodramatic plot. A quarter of a century later, things had changed. Politicized New German Cinema was challenging interpretations of history and criticizing the ills of society. Taking a pessimistic view of the *Wirtschaftswunder* period, Brückner's *YEARS OF HUNGER* engages with a pivotal contemporary discourse that also motivated works such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's BRD Trilogy.<sup>34</sup> With its extreme documentary closeness, use of multiperspectival devices such as polyphonic voice-overs, and essayistic incorporation of archival footage, the film adopts some of the experimental aesthetic approaches of the late 1970s. *KU'DAMM 56*, finally, is a prototypical example of the multi-immersive films that emerged in the 1990s. The depiction of family conflicts caused by the reintegration of traumatized soldiers returning late from the war has parallels with Sönke Wortmann's box office hit *THE MIRACLE OF BERN* (*DAS WUNDER VON BERN*, 2003) and Oskar Roehler's *SOURCES OF LIFE* (*QUELLEN DES LEBENS*, 2013). The clash between the rock-'n'-roll-loving youngsters and the reactionary wartime generation recalls the comedy *LULU & JIMI* (2009), also directed by Roehler. One topic that is not addressed in *KU'DAMM 56* is the prosecution of Nazi war crimes, which is a central theme in some other films produced in the same period about the Hessian district attorney Fritz Bauer<sup>35</sup>; however, the Auschwitz trials initiated by Bauer only took place in 1959—three years after the events of *KU'DAMM 56*. This selection of films spans a wide period of time, allowing us to identify differences that reveal how histospheres have evolved over the course of film history.

In summary, this book develops a theory of histospheres and attempts to connect it to debates in film studies and other disciplines. My central thesis is that historical films model audiovisual figurations of history and make them available to experience in the mode of an immersive encounter. The first three chapters begin by setting out the current state of research, presenting some general findings on the relationship between film and history, and formulating some initial points of connection with phenomenological theories. My approach is based on the observation that the constructivist and phenomenological models that film studies have regularly alternated between over the past ninety years stand in a dialectical relation to each other.<sup>36</sup> In order to illuminate different aspects of my theory of histospheres, the following chapters are grouped under pairs of concepts: “Modeling and perceiving,” “Immersion and empathy,” “Experience and remembering,” and “Appropriation and refiguration.” On the basis of these concepts, and taking account of overarching audiovisual/perceptive and historico-cultural factors, I also discuss functional dimensions of histospheres: the spatial and temporal organization of historical films, mood and atmosphere, body and memory, and genre and historical consciousness.

## NOTES

1. On the concept of immersion, see Christiane Voss, “Fiktionale Immersion,” *montage AV* 17:2, 2008, p. 71.
2. I am grateful to Hannah Schoch, University of Zurich, for drawing my attention to this connection.
3. This is based on an understanding of artistic experience as a relational process between object and spectator. See Bernhard Groß, *Die Filme sind unter uns: Zur Geschichtlichkeit des frühen deutschen Nachkriegskinos: Trümmer-, Genre-, Dokumentarfilm*, Berlin 2015, p. 58.
4. Definitions of historical film range from fairly unrestrictive conceptions where any film that makes reference to or engages with history is classed as a historical film to ones that impose stricter semiological and discursive conditions. On this point, see the section “Historical films” in the next chapter.
5. “There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a

- chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [*verweilen*: a reference to Goethe's *Faust*], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm." Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 2005, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (last accessed May 1, 2020), thesis 9. I previously discussed the significance of film as an agent of history in the afterword to my dissertation on cinematic depictions of new wars: Rasmus Greiner, *Die neuen Kriege im Film: Jugoslawien—Zentralafrika—Irak—Afghanistan*, Marburg 2012, pp. 468–469.
6. Benjamin (2005), thesis 9.
  7. See on this topic Thomas Elsaesser, "Returning to the Past Its Own Future," 2018, <https://film-history.org/issues/text/returning-past-its-own-future> (last accessed May 1, 2020). See also Elsaesser's reflections on a "poetics of mistakes" that "engage[s] with the consequences of catastrophic errors of judgment, and do[es] so in a way that allows the agents their motivations without immediately casting them in the (negative) light of what we now know retrospectively to have been the 'wrong' decision." Thomas Elsaesser, "Diagonale Erinnerung: Geschichte als Palimpsest in STERNE," in Hermann Kappelhoff, Bernhard Groß, and Daniel Illger, *Demokratisierung der Wahrnehmung: Das westeuropäische Nachkriegskino*, Berlin 2010, p. 96.
  8. Béla Balázs, *Ein Baedeker der Seele: Und andere Feuilletons*, Berlin 2002, p. 57.
  9. Benjamin (2005), thesis 14.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, p. 304.
  12. Ibid.
  13. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Scotts Valley 2015, p. 55.
  14. On the concept of "lifeworlds" and our pretheoretical experience of them, see Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, Evanston 1973, and Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston 1970.
  15. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 1984, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (last accessed May 1, 2020), p. 4. Elsewhere in the same essay, Foucault speaks specifically of

- cinema: “a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space.” *Ibid.*, p. 6.
16. “The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” *Ibid.*, p. 4.
  17. Margrit Tröhler notes that even the real world “only represents one possible, ‘furnished,’ and reduced world, and is always a *construction*,” albeit one that, as a “reference world,” enjoys a “special status.” Margrit Tröhler, “Von Weltenkonstellationen und Textgebäuden: Fiktion—Nichtfiktion—Narration in Spiel- und Dokumentarfilm,” *montage AV* 11:2, 2002, p. 17.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
  19. Analogies can also be drawn to Jurij Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere: a semiotic space that surrounds every language and constantly interacts with other semiospheres. Yuri [Jurij] M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990, p. 123. See also the next chapter, “Fiction film and history.”
  20. Once again, parallels can be drawn here to Foucault’s heterotopias, which “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.” Foucault (1984, p. 7).
  21. Kracauer (1997, p. 81).
  22. Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic ‘Presence,’” 2016, <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/2-1-sobchack/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
  23. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992.
  24. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

25. “That is, in terms of its performance, it is as much a *viewing subject* as it is also a *visible* and *viewed object*.” Ibid., pp. 21–22. And: “Seeing is an act performed by both the film (which sees a world as visible images) and the viewer (who sees the film’s visible images both as a world and the seeing of a world).” Ibid., p. 56.
26. Sobchack (2016).
27. Vivian Sobchack, “‘Surge and Splendor’: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic,” in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III*, Austin 2007, p. 300.
28. Hermann Kappelhoff, *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Realism*, New York 2015, pp. 59–60.
29. Ibid., p. 60.
30. On this topic, see the discussion around Gilles Deleuze’s notions of the “movement-image” and “time-image.” Deleuze assigns postwar film images, which enable direct explorations of time, to the latter category. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Minneapolis 1986 and 1989.
31. Cited in Kent Jones, “HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR: Time Indefinite,” *Criterion DVD Collection*, 2003, <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/291-hiroshima-mon-amour-time-indefinite> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
32. Audio history of film “investigates how film sound can generate and shape audiences’ experience of history. Our concern lies not just with the aesthetic dimension of film sound production, but also with its material, technical and cultural dimensions and their potential to model and produce history. Our endeavour attends not simply to imagined or ideal spectators (often stand-ins for the scholar’s own subject position), but also to how real audiences use elements of film sound to interpret history or to how critical and marketing discourses comment on sound and thus co-determine the reception of historical films.” Winfried Pauleit, Rasmus Greiner, and Mattias Frey, “Audio History of Film: Introduction,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/audio-history-film> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
33. Two notable examples are the American productions SCHINDLER’S LIST (1993; dir. Steven Spielberg) and FORREST GUMP (1994; dir. Robert Zemeckis), which triggered a veritable boom of historical films.
34. In order: THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN (DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN, 1979), VERONIKA VOSS (DIE SEHNSUCHT DER VERONIKA VOSS, 1982), LOLA (1981).
35. LABYRINTH OF LIES (IM LABYRINTH DES SCHWEIGENS, 2004; dir. Giulio Ricciarelli), THE PEOPLE VS. FRITZ BAUER (DER STAAT GEGEN FRITZ BAUER, 2015; dir. Lars Kraume), DIE AKTE GENERAL (2016; dir. Stephan Wagner).
36. See Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Filmtheorie: Zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2007, pp. 164–165.



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## CHAPTER 2

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# Fiction Film and History

The idea of a semiotic representation of the past is deeply rooted in film theory.<sup>1</sup> In my reflections on the basic features of histospheres in the first section of this chapter, I therefore make reference to a classic semiological model according to which a film's aesthetic and narrative production of meaning is determined by its specific arrangement of signs. I draw parallels to debates within historical studies that have enabled a reassessment of fiction film as a historiographical medium and mode of conceptualizing history. The second section discusses theories of the relation between fiction film and history. Building on the semiological and poetological considerations set out in the first section, I posit a genre of popular fiction film defined by its referential relation to historical events, individuals, and lifeworlds. *Historical films*, I show, are constituted by a specific constellation of aesthetic and narrative devices. Concepts of credibility and authenticity are developed and constantly transformed in a process of negotiation between filmmakers, films, and spectators. In the third section, I argue that this is less a matter of incontrovertible factual accuracy than of generating a *feeling of authenticity*. As well as taking stock of the existing literature on film and history, this chapter aims to develop a terminological apparatus for describing the conceptual core of the historical film.

## POETICS AND SEMIOTICS

A tall barbed wire fence, border signs, barriers, no man's land—the montage at the start of Helmut Käutner's *SKY WITHOUT STARS* can be understood as a narrative organization of signs referring to historical states of affairs and their temporal and spatial coordinates. Consequently, semiology can—all epistemic and other limitations notwithstanding—make a contribution to a cartography of histospheres (Figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4).<sup>2</sup>

Viewed through the lens of semiology, the concept of the histosphere is closely related to Russian semiotician Jurij Lotman's notion of the "semiosphere." Based on Vladimir Vernadsky's concept of the biosphere, the semiosphere is a model of a semiotic space that is both "the result and the condition for the development of culture."<sup>3</sup> Every "language" (which for Lotman explicitly also includes cinematographic expression) is immersed in a semiosphere with which it stands in a close reciprocal relation.<sup>4</sup> The semiosphere of a "language" is in turn surrounded by other semiospheres, which are always connected to a culture's total semiotic



Figs. 2.1–2.4 Narrative organization of signs in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

space.<sup>5</sup> History and fiction film, I argue, are closely interwoven within this semiotic fabric. This connection has existed since the invention of motion pictures, which has implications for our understanding of both history and film. Film projection as it were makes the past immediately present, drawing (to quote film scholar Gertrud Koch) on the “camera’s ineluctable recording function” and the “diegetic function of the moving image.”<sup>6</sup> Regardless of whether a film is categorized as documentary or fictional, this process can be understood in terms both of documentation and of artistic arrangement and play. Although Koch does not call for the distinction between documentary and fiction film to be erased, she does suggest that the relationship between film and history is largely independent of this categorization.<sup>7</sup>

The modern distinction between fiction and nonfiction is relatively new. In ancient and medieval times, there was no sharp separation between poetry/literature and history.<sup>8</sup> It was only with Romanticism’s aesthetics of creativity that poetry came to be defined as the sphere of the “marvelous” (*das Wunderbare*), the “ideal,” and the “imagination” of an inventive poet.<sup>9</sup> However, one feature still shared by historical and creative writing is the “*narrative* composition of their elements”<sup>10</sup>; fictional and nonfictional elements are fused together in the mode of narration. This is the basis of Hayden White’s theory of history, developed against the backdrop of the linguistic turn.<sup>11</sup> White maintains that history is structured by unconscious linguistic patterns of perception: To quote Axel R uth’s summary of White’s theory, the historian “generates meaning by synthesizing disparate ‘raw material’ (individuals, actions, events, etc.) into a meaningful narrative.”<sup>12</sup> Film scholar Bernhard Gro  describes how White’s *Metahistory* attempts “to reconstruct the rhetoric and genres of nineteenth-century historiography and philosophy of history, that is to say, to distinguish history according to the rules of literary and rhetorical models.”<sup>13</sup> White draws a connection between historical writing and literary methods, thereby calling the objectivity of history into question.<sup>14</sup> Gro  identifies in this view “the constructivist supposition that history too is unable to get around the mediality of its objects, which means that facts do not exist or cannot be known prior to their representation but are themselves a product of this representation.”<sup>15</sup> This implies that fictional films can also be a mode of historical expression. If, however, the knowability of facts is necessarily tied to their mediality, this will be a crucial differentiating factor, and so any attempt to equate written history and historical films based on White’s theory will prove unworkable. For example, while film scholar

Eleftheria Thanouli's argument that historical films are essentially "magnified miniatures" of written history may apply at the narrative level that she is investigating, a phenomenologically based theory of mediated historical experience will make the limits of her approach apparent.<sup>16</sup> Below, I shall show that the relation between filmed and written history is one of referentiality and mutual complementarity, rather than similarity.

White's thesis that historical writing is necessarily narrative<sup>17</sup> also invites closer attention to cinematic modes of narrating history. The montage of visual signifiers of the inner German border at the start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, in combination with the dramatic orchestral score and the explanatory voice-over, creates a meaningful narrative. Like a historian, the film selects certain elements from the countless events of the past and weaves them into a historical narrative. The deliberately composed series of images at the start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is linked together by montage and the continuous soundtrack. The impassioned voice-over does not simply explain that the inner German border exists, but asserts that it originates in "discord and hate." As the historian Siegfried Mattl observes of history in general:

History in the modern sense—and the regulative idea of comprehensible, and consequently "necessary," developmental processes as objects of historiographical knowledge—comes about only through being embedded in series and chains of events, and hence in a way of thinking based on the logic of cause and effect.<sup>18</sup>

For historical films, this entails that the narrative logic must necessarily point beyond its own boundaries. In order to be perceived as historical, it refers to other historical narratives that have shaped our conceptions of the historical period in question. In semiotic terms, the elements of films involved in this process of historical reference are *signifiers of signifiers*<sup>19</sup>; narratively organized significations of other narratively organized significations that in turn refer to the signified—the past. Actual historical reality necessarily remains imaginary; films and other forms of history can merely represent the past, they cannot "restore" or reproduce it. Like the medium of film in general, historical films also generate meaning through a process of signification. In film, the signified has "a conceptual character; it is an idea. It exists in the viewer's memory and the signifier merely actualizes it."<sup>20</sup> Historical referentiality can be understood analogously. By systematically arranging audiovisual signs into a histosphere, historical films allow

a “bygone world”<sup>21</sup> to be imagined, though this requires a complex process of negotiation between film and spectator. Koch suggests that it is precisely the artificial, constructed character of the “cosmos of signs” that makes a historical film so immersive:

One might think that it is precisely the concretist character of the sets, the artificiality [*Kulissenhafte*] of the painted and sawn scenery, that constantly signals to spectators that this is an invented story. But the opposite appears to be the case: The more symbolic and self-contained the aesthetic cosmos of signs that envelop the spectators, the more readily they will succumb to the myth.<sup>22</sup>

The credibility and immersive potential of a histosphere are, thus, determined not by factual accuracy or naturalist faithfulness to reality, but by the homogeneity and consistency of its cosmos of signs.<sup>23</sup>

For a finer-grained analysis of the connection between cinematic signs and conceptions of history, it is worth turning our gaze to the early film theory of Béla Balázs. His deliberations on physiognomy explicitly distinguish between a deliberately crafted and styled film aesthetic, and a striving for realistic reproduction.<sup>24</sup> Balázs believes that, by attending to physiognomy, cinema can open up a new dimension; aesthetic devices such as close-ups make the world shown on screen our own.<sup>25</sup> Although this approach is still strongly influenced by a poetological understanding of film,<sup>26</sup> at a semiological level Balázs does also create the theoretical foundations for a histosphere that does not merely represent historical worlds but creates and gives structure to them in the first place. His approach remains helpful for a better understanding of histospheres, as shown by a sequence from *SKY WITHOUT STARS*.

When Anna enters her parents-in-law’s home after her illegal border crossing, the camera follows her gaze. On the wall is the portrait of a young man in a *Wehrmacht* uniform. The iron cross, artificial flowers, and black ribbon on the frame make clear that it is a picture of the couple’s son, Anna’s husband, who died in the war. We hear the rumble of an engine, and the photograph starts to vibrate; it almost looks like it will fall from the wall. A reaction shot shows Anna briefly pause and then turn away (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6). This audiovisual metaphor may evoke associations with air raids, death, and destruction. As in Balázs’s writings on the physiognomy of film, emotional impressions are conveyed using audiovisual figurations that make the filmic world itself into a means of affective





**Figs. 2.5–2.6** Audiovisual metaphor for the war in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

expression. However, while in the 1950s this device would have been able to awaken German audiences' memories of their own lived experiences, for modern spectators it can only be comprehended indirectly, by reference to other audiovisual or written representations. What this shows is that filmic signs "evolve."<sup>27</sup> Which of the references in the historical cosmos of signs spectators will actually pick up on depends on their individual historical experiences and knowledge.

Cinema's access to the past can also be conceived in terms of Jacques Rancière's philosophy of history, with histospheres comprising a specific poetics of history that separates film from other arts.<sup>28</sup> According to Rancière, the poetic relationship to the past mobilizes a "history-forming power" that allows film to contribute to the writing of history. On this construal, film is carrying out the aesthetic program of Romanticism: "the reconciliation of feeling and intellect, individual and universal, subjectivity and community."<sup>29</sup> A histosphere utilizes this potential of the cinematic medium in order to audiovisually model a historical world. Although film is a product of the late nineteenth century, the modern cinematic poetics of history goes beyond Romantic thinking. Like historiographic texts from the second half of the twentieth century, which make their method explicit and thereby possess a critical self-reflexivity, cinematic representations of history prompt us to think about our own historical conceptions.<sup>30</sup> This potential is already inherent in the cinematic perspective on the world; we can refer here again to Balázs's theory, which (according to Matthias Hein) is intimately bound up with the idea of "expanding" our access to the world by means of the camera"; cinema not only fosters "greater awareness of the world around us"<sup>31</sup> but, in the case of the

historical film, also a relational, reflexive awareness of the connection between history and the present. The tension between direct, immersive participation in a film's historical world and the evolution of the signifiers used in the film keeps our perceptions of the depicted historical era labile and open. When we watch the above-described sequence from *SKY WITHOUT STARS* today, different historical levels are layered one on top of the other. The film's cosmos of signs comprises both the diegetic present and the diegetic past (the time of the Second World War) as well as the cinematic conventions of the mid-1950s that are evident in the film; the conceptions of history formed from this histosphere, and its own historicity, are dependent on our sensuous experience.

### HISTORICAL FILMS

A large hall behind glass-paned double doors, a counter with bar stools, a display cabinet—in a series of almost monochromatic images, the opening sequence of *KU'DAMM 56* models the lobby of the Galant dance school. Spacious musical tones create a spirited-away atmosphere. A young woman steps into shot, expectantly opens a box, and takes out a new pair of sneakers. Then she is flying through the air, swirled around by her dance partner (Figs. 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10). In film, writes Balázs, even “the most intimate human experiences can be the result and reflection of great historical events.”<sup>32</sup> So too at the start of Sven Bohse's TV series. The focus of this historical experience is not some momentous geopolitical decision, but Monika Schöllack competing in “Berlin's first rock ‘n’ roll championships.”

According to film scholar Jonathan Stubbs, this historical reference is enough to classify *KU'DAMM 56* as a historical film, a concept that Stubbs defines very broadly. He classes as historical cinema all “films which engage with history or which in some way construct a relationship to the past.”<sup>33</sup> The historian Pierre Sorlin prefers a more restrictive semiological approach and suggests that the criterion for whether a film belongs to the genre should be whether it contains signifiers that allow us to identify it as being set in a particular historical period.<sup>34</sup> In *KU'DAMM 56*, such signifiers include the interior of the dance school and the costumes worn by the characters. Sorlin emphasizes that historical films are concerned less with accurately reproducing the past than with establishing relations.<sup>35</sup> Robert Burgoyne likewise considers it a constitutive feature of historical films that they bring the past into dialogue with the present.<sup>36</sup> Burgoyne also stipulates that the



Figs. 2.7–2.10 A personalized historical experience in KU'DAMM 56

action must be based on documentable historical events (by contrast with costume dramas).<sup>37</sup> Robert Rosenstone adds the further condition that a historical film “intersects with, comments upon, and adds something to the larger discourse of history.”<sup>38</sup>

All these approaches assume that film is able to represent history. By contrast, media scholar André Wendler suggests that historical films cannot simply invoke, reference, cite, or relate to “history,” but must instead “create interfaces between the complex *dispositif* of the ‘historical film’ and the no less complex media cluster of ‘history.’”<sup>39</sup> What Burgoyne describes as cinema’s reenactment of historical periods<sup>40</sup> is thus (to repeat my opening thesis) based not so much on *representation* but rather on audiovisual *modeling* and *figuration* of a historical world, which in turn enables an immediate *experience* of history. As a definition of the “historical film” genre, I therefore suggest that a histosphere functions as the core of the “communicative pact”<sup>41</sup> between filmmaker, film, and spectator. As an aesthetic-narrative construction, it not only determines the film’s relation to history, but also constitutes a formal criterion that allows historical films to be distinguished from other genres.

Historical films are generally considered highly significant for our conceptions of the past. Koch describes film as a powerful social institution

that uses both *documentary* and *fictional* representations to create imaginaries that have been of undeniable significance in the history of mentalities, at least insofar as this history can be grasped in terms of the forms and contents of social memory.<sup>42</sup>

Simon Rothöhler goes even further, claiming that films themselves “produce and furnish us with historical knowledge that, were it not imparted through the aesthetic medium of film, would be unavailable to us (at least in that form).”<sup>43</sup> He attributes this capacity to film’s “amateur” status, as manifested in its aesthetics.<sup>44</sup> In fact, form and content, audiovisual, and conceptions of history cannot be disentangled. A histosphere is not just a tool or medium for communicating history; it must be experienced. To put it another way: The histosphere offers a discrete mode of historical thought.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, it also always interacts with the period in which the film was made.<sup>46</sup> When we travel back to the 1950s with Monika Schöllack (Sonja Gerhardt) in *KU'DAMM 56*, we encounter a subjectivized figuration of a historical world, composed of images and sounds, from the perspective of 2016. The readings and conceptions of history that we can derive from a film are thus also dependent on the historical horizon against which its histosphere was constructed.

However, historical films’ special relationship to the past has also made them the target of criticism. Siegfried Kracauer, for instance, complains that the medium of film depicts the past anachronistically by imposing modern aesthetics.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, Koch claims that the aesthetic devices of cinema “are so bound up with modern perceptions of time and space, of fragmentation and discontinuity” that they can only be fused into historical representations “at the cost of aesthetic regression.”<sup>48</sup> On Koch’s view, a historical film can only achieve its effect by denying the historicity of its own perception.<sup>49</sup> However, Kracauer’s criticism is primarily aimed at more historically distant periods when the medium of film did not yet exist. His objection can instead be understood as a general criticism of history per se that could also be extended to modern historiographical publications whose methods of exposition were (analogously to the case of cinema) not fully developed during the period of time they are about. The same lack of specificity applies to Benjamin Moldenhauer’s “unease about films that tell stories of the historical past while remaining within the conventional framework of genre cinema.”<sup>50</sup> Although Moldenhauer, by contrast with proponents of apparatus theories,<sup>51</sup> does not believe that spectators are directly manipulated, his unease is based on reservations of

a very general sort that other film genres must also contend with. While sweeping criticisms such as “formulaic characters” and an “unreflective evocation of empathy”<sup>52</sup> might well apply for certain films, there are many other examples where they do not and where a histosphere enables a nuanced negotiation of historical meaning on the basis of film experience in which the spectator is included as an actively thinking subject. Films like *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, *YEARS OF HUNGER*, and *KU'DAMM 56* engage with many historical discourses of the 1950s, such as the confrontation with the Nazi past, the division of Germany, or the fight for gender equality. They all adopt an empathy-driven perspective that is, by and large, tied to the characters; but it is precisely because the spectators are immersively, emotionally absorbed that the historical discourses addressed in the films will continue to work on them even after watching.

### THE AUTHENTICITY FEELING

We see a jetty. In the background is a low building, perhaps a café. Between the jetty and the building are trees and tables laid in white linen, over which a string of lights is hanging. Jutta Brückner's *YEARS OF HUNGER* opens with a shot of this timeless setting, presented in high-contrast black and white. A first-person narrator reflects on her life in a soft-spoken voice-over. As she speaks, long, drawn-out tone sequences play. The film cuts to an empty rowing boat, besides which an empty drinks can is floating in the water. “And I forced myself to remember”—the voice-over takes us on a journey through time. The facade of a large apartment block fills the screen, and the camera moves across from window to window. Concurrently with the cut to the apartment block, the narrator's voice changes. Now far younger, she reads from a book with gentle emphasis. On-screen text reveals that the year is 1953 (Figs. 2.11 and 2.12).

Filmic representations of the past feel authentic if they are able to offer us a “credible historical experience [*Erlebnis*].”<sup>53</sup> To describe this phenomenon, Mattias Frey has coined the notion of an “authenticity feeling”—the “sensation of a media-produced, purportedly successful historicity.”<sup>54</sup> In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the narrative layering of different periods of time, as an integral part of the histosphere, not only draws attention to the film's construction, but also conveys a sense of authenticity. The narratorial voice, the camera's observing stance, the filming in black and white, and the on-screen text with the year serve as authentication strategies and foster a documentarizing mode of reception.<sup>55</sup> The histosphere



**Figs. 2.11–2.12** Cinematic time travel in *YEARS OF HUNGER*



**Figs. 2.13–2.14** The car as status symbol in *YEARS OF HUNGER*

combines these audiovisual devices with the film’s “reality effect.”<sup>56</sup> When we travel back with the protagonist to the time of her youth, we feel like we are coming into contact not with a media representation but with the past itself. To achieve this effect, audiovisual details, such as the architecture, scenery, and costumes, are used to mark out the histosphere as a historical world.<sup>57</sup> Vincent Bisson refers to such details as “historical signifiers.”<sup>58</sup> Historical signifiers can include the way characters act and comport themselves, the depicted social milieu, cultural practices, and media and its content. Iconic historical signifiers that are closely associated or even equated with a particular time are especially effective. In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, for instance, an extended close-up in which the young Ursula (Sylvia Ulrich) and her parents (Britta Pohland and Claus Jurichs) studiously polish the family’s new car emphasizes its importance as a status symbol (Figs. 2.13 and 2.14). The car, an Opel Olympia Rekord, can be

easily dated to the early 1950s thanks to the voluminous design with lots of chrome parts, inspired by American models such as the Chevrolet Bel Air.

Another strategy for generating a feeling of authenticity is to incorporate historical footage into the fictional action. Such sequences possess the “that-has-been” quality that Roland Barthes ascribes to photography.<sup>59</sup> In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the Communist Party ban introduced in West Germany on August 17, 1956, is depicted using archival footage of clashes between police and demonstrators (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16). A voice-over by the retrospective narrator connects the sequence to the fictional action of the histosphere. However, we remain fully aware that the images and sounds—after the voice-over we hear a speech by then interior minister Gerhard Schröder (not to be confused with the later chancellor of the same name)—once served another purpose. Film scholar Jaimie Baron terms this the “archive effect.”<sup>60</sup> According to Baron, the use of archival material creates a feeling of the immediate presence of history and awakens a desire for direct, affective contact with the past.<sup>61</sup> The archive effect makes use of our yearning for the past, and can engender feelings of nostalgia.<sup>62</sup> However, Baron stresses that this is merely a potential effect, not an inevitable one, and says that the precise effect of using archive footage will depend on the interaction between film and spectator.<sup>63</sup> It could bring us uniquely close to the past, but could equally well be perceived as an artificial insertion or interruption. Koch attributes this heterogeneous effect to the dissonance between the archival material and the film in which it is inserted:



**Figs. 2.15–2.16** Use of archival footage in *YEARS OF HUNGER*



The film spectator regards as real above all anything that gives the impression of reality; by contrast, they will not be very impressed by anything that disrupts, rather than conforms to, the medium's illusory character. Accordingly, it will not necessarily be historical images that themselves make history, that shape our picture of history.<sup>64</sup>

Through its interaction with the histosphere's immersively lived spatio-temporal structure, modeled out of filmic figurations, the archival material develops a hybrid character. Integrating the material into the film's audiovisual fabric and narrative logic allows it to fuse with the film. But at the same time it remains to some degree a foreign body that can sometimes disrupt the living, immersive encounter with the film. In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the archival material falls short of the "medium's illusory character" due above all to the lack of sound; the mute images are accompanied merely by the interior minister's speech. The sequence feels like a documentary interlude, during which the immersive historical world is paused. Nonetheless, the inclusion of the footage heightens the feeling of authenticity. The archive effect makes it seem possible to grasp history directly, and so the footage contributes to a "credible historical experience."<sup>65</sup> This tension between historical film images and the fictional elements of the histosphere makes one thing clear above all: In historical films, the authenticity feeling is fundamentally dual in nature, involving two, interrelated aspects—a feeling of credible experience and a feeling of credible historical referentiality.

## NOTES

1. See Gertrud Koch, "Nachstellungen: Film und historischer Moment," in Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Berlin 2003, p. 226.
2. Roland Barthes observes that "film cannot be defined as a pure semiological field," since it "cannot be reduced to a grammar of signs." Roland Barthes, "The Problem of Signification in Cinema," in his *Signs and Images: Writings on Art, Cinema and Photography*, London 2016, p. 22.
3. Yuri [Jurij] M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1990, p. 125.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. See Koch (2003, p. 226).



7. For discussion see Bernhard Groß, *Die Filme sind unter uns: Zur Geschichtlichkeit des frühen deutschen Nachkriegskinos: Trümmer-, Genre-, Dokumentarfilm*, Berlin 2015, p. 53.
8. See Margrit Tröhler, “Filmische Authentizität: Mögliche Wirklichkeiten zwischen Fiktion und Dokumentation,” *montage AV* 13:2, 2004, p. 157.
9. Dietrich Scheunemann, “‘Fiktionen—auch aus dokumentarischem Material’: Von Konstruktionen der Geschichte in Literatur und Film seit den sechziger Jahren,” in Hartmut Eggert, Ulrich Profitlich, and Klaus R. Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur: Formen und Grenzen der Repräsentation von Vergangenheit*, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 296–297, and Tröhler (2004, p. 157).
10. Tröhler (2004, p. 157).
11. On the linguistic turn, see Georg G. Iggers, “Die kulturelle und die linguistische Wende,” in his *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2007.
12. Axel Rüth, *Erzählte Geschichte: Narrative Strukturen in der französischen Annales-Geschichtsschreibung*, Berlin and New York 2005, p. 18.
13. Groß (2015, p. 55).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Eleftheria Thanouli, *History and Film: A Tale of Two Disciplines*, New York and London 2019, p. 98.
17. Hayden White, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” *History and Theory* 23:1, 1984, pp. 1–33.
18. Siegfried Mattl, “Populare Erinnerung: Zur Nahbeziehung von Film und Geschichte,” *Nach dem Film* 15: *Das Unsichtbare Kino*, 2017, <https://nachdemfilm.de/issues/text/populare-erinnerung> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
19. This is to treat film as analogous to writing, which—according to Jacques Derrida—as a signifier of the signifier *comprehends* language and whose “literal” meaning consists in metaphoricity. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore 2016, pp. 7, 15.
20. Barthes (2016, p. 30).
21. Koch (2003, p. 225).
22. Ibid. Myth is understood here in the sense of Barthes’s definition of a “second-order semiological system,” as an articulation of an unconscious collective meaning. See Barthes’s essay “Myth Today” in *A Barthes Reader*, London 1993, p. 99.
23. Gertrud Koch concludes from this that “a world constituted wholly by signs” is a mythical world and thus generates mythical conceptions of history. See Koch (2003, p. 226).

24. Béla Balázs, *Visible Man*, in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, New York and Oxford 2010, p. 44.
25. Matthias Hein, *Zu einer Theorie des Erlebens bei Béla Balázs*, Würzburg 2011, p. 158.
26. See for instance: “The hidden pattern of angles, the physiognomy of set-ups touch off the association of our ideas and conjure up thoughts, moods and emotions, as metaphors do in poetry.” Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Scotts Valley 2015, p. 112.
27. Barthes (2016, p. 25).
28. Jacques Rancière, “Die Geschichtlichkeit des Films,” in Hohenberger and Keilbach (2003, pp. 230–246).
29. Groß (2015, p. 65).
30. “A cinematographic reading of history presents the historian with the problem of his own reading of the past.” Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, Detroit 1992, pp. 19–20.
31. Hein (2011, p. 12).
32. Balázs (2015, p. 268).
33. Jonathan Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction*, New York 2013, p. 19.
34. Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, Oxford 1980, p. 20.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
36. Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, Malden, MA, 2008, p. 11.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
38. Robert A. Rosenstone and Constantin Parvulescu (eds.), *A Companion to the Historical Film*, Malden, MA, 2013, p. 1.
39. André Wendler, *Anachronismen: Historiografie und Kino*, Paderborn 2014, p. 19.
40. Burgoyne (2008, p. 11).
41. The definition of genre as a communicative pact is taken from Francesco Casetti. See Francesco Casetti, *Communicative Negotiation in Cinema and Television*, Milan 2002, pp. 21–36.
42. Koch (2003, p. 219).
43. Simon Rothöhler, *Amateur der Weltgeschichte: Historiographische Praktiken im Kino der Gegenwart*, Zurich 2011, p. 9.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
45. See Robert A. Rosenstone, “The History Film as a Mode of Historical Thought,” in Rosenstone and Parvulescu 2013, pp. 71–87.
46. Koch (2003, p. 226).
47. Siegfried Kracauer, “Der historische Film,” in Siegfried Kracauer and Karsten Witte (eds.), *Kino: Essays, Studien, Glossen zum Film*, Frankfurt 1974, pp. 43–45.

48. Koch (2003, p. 225).
49. Ibid.
50. Benjamin Moldenhauer, “Die Lücken, die das Bild uns lässt: Geschichte, Gewalt und Reflexivität in THE ACT OF KILLING und L’IMAGE MANQUANTE,” in Heinz-Peter Preußner (ed.), *Gewalt im Bild: Ein interdisziplinärer Diskurs*, Marburg, 2018, p. 391.
51. On apparatus theory, see Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, New York 1986.
52. Ibid.
53. Mattias Frey, “The Authenticity Feeling: Language and Dialect in the Historical Film,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/authenticity-feeling> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
54. Ibid.
55. See on this point Roger Odin’s proposal of a “documentarizing reading,” which is inaugurated not by the reality of what is depicted but the “presupposed reality of the enunciator.” Roger Odin, “Dokumentarischer Film—dokumentarisierende Lektüre,” in Eva Hohenberger (ed.), *Bilder des Wirklichen: Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms*, Berlin 1998, pp. 286–303.
56. On this point, Barthes writes: “Flaubert’s barometer, Michelet’s little door finally say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of ‘the real’ (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.” Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in his *The Rustle of Language*, Berkeley 1989, p. 148. Siegfried Kracauer attributes to film images a “reality character” that spectators respond to directly: “First, film records physical reality for its own sake. Struck by the reality character of the resultant images, the spectator cannot help reacting to them as he would to the material aspects of nature in the raw which these photographic images reproduce. Hence their appeal to his sensitivity. It is as if they urged him through their sheer presence unthinkingly to assimilate their indeterminate and often amorphous patterns.” Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, p. 158.
57. Mattias Frey, by reference to Jonathan Stubbs and Vivian Sobchack, speaks of historical films’ “qualitative and quantitative excess of detail” that is intended to demonstrate their historicity and is “reconfirmed with perpetual references, both within the films themselves and in extratextual discourse.” Frey (2018).

58. Vincent Bisson, "Historical Film Reception: Mediated Legends," in Kathryn Anne Morey (ed.), *Bringing History to Life through Film: The Art of Cinematic Storytelling*, Lanham, MD, 2014, p. 139.
59. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981, pp. 76–77.
60. Although Baron is thinking here mainly of appropriation films (where the use of archival material and found footage plays a significant role), the concept of the archive effect can also be applied to the use of archival material in fictional films. Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History*, London 2014.
61. "[A] sense of the 'presence' of history"; "our desire for an affective encounter with the past that cannot be reduced to desire for its meaning." *Ibid.*, p. 13.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
64. Koch (2003, p. 223).
65. Frey (2018).

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 Sky without Stars (Himmel ohne Sterne); dir. Helmut Käutner; Federal Republic of Germany 1955.  
 Years of Hunger (Hungerjahre); dir. Jutta Brückner; Federal Republic of Germany 1980.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Audiovisual History

Histospheres make history sensuously and experienceable through a complex interplay of visual and aural elements not reducible to a simple stimulus–response model. By utilizing several different sensory channels at once, historical films create a synesthetic reality effect that cannot be broken down into its individual components. Nonetheless, it still makes sense to consider relevant theories of visual and audio history whose ontologies a histosphere absorbs and elaborates. The first section of this chapter surveys the relatively new field of visual history, supplemented by some reflections on the cinematic movement image. I argue that a histosphere creates not just disparate images but a visual sphere in which history is brought to life. Research into audio history, especially the history of film sound, is an even newer and less developed field. In the second section, I therefore sketch the outlines of an *audio history* of film, and examine the aesthetics and function of film sound, understood as an equally important expressive dimension of histospheres. The two aspects are brought together in the third section: In the perceptual mode of *audiovision*, film images and film sounds model an internally consistent spatiotemporal structure that can be synesthetically experienced and stands in a referential relation to the past. I suggest that this fusion of sound and vision makes the historical film not just a model of a historical world, but a form of perception in its own right. Consequently, a histosphere is far more than the sum of its visual and aural parts: It is a distinctively cinematic mode of access to history that goes far beyond visual and audio history in isolation.

## VISUAL HISTORY

Early on in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the photograph of a soldier adds an additional historical dimension, supplementing the diegetic present with a personal past. The *Wehrmacht* uniform, the black ribbon, Anna's wistful expression, the photograph, and its incorporation into the film's world tell a story that emphasizes the role of the individual in the larger historical context of the Second World War.

Although written sources and accounts remain the primary focus in studies of history, the iconic turn has raised awareness of the fact that images also have the potential to constitute reality. Since the late 1990s, a growing number of historians have recognized that "images, whether in the form of films, photographs, or posters, constitute a specific framework of meaning within which people perceive history and construct social meaning."<sup>1</sup> Under the general heading of "visual history," historian Gerhard Paul explores the special role of visual media in the production, communication, and popular understanding of history. He distinguishes several ways in which images can figure in the historian's work: They can be analyzed as sources; they can serve as "mediums" of history; their use in "visual practices" that generate their own realities can be studied; or else the production and distribution conditions of "visual agents and actors" can be investigated.<sup>2</sup> Increased attention is being paid to visual aspects of history, especially in studies of modern and contemporary history, but some historians still harbor reservations about images, which André Wendler attributes to two problems that have not yet been definitively resolved:

Firstly, there's the question of whether and to what extent images can function as sources and documents, and secondly, there's the question of what information and historiographical knowledge can be found in images and what methods must be used to unlock or apprehend this knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

The methodological uncertainties become more marked when studying moving images.<sup>4</sup> Visual history centers primarily on photographs, which can be easily archived and analyzed under controlled conditions. Apart from the value of documentary footage as a source, film plays a relatively minor role in historical studies, though as far back as 1947 Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*<sup>5</sup> attempted to understand the rise of National Socialism through the lens of Weimar Republic cinema. As well



as their potential for ideological critiques of this kind, films also offer a dynamic aesthetic language that can influence the form and perception of history. The definition of the cinematic movement image<sup>6</sup> as a meaningful construct of changing image spaces always also involves the dynamics of the spectator's body. Visual history must rise to this challenge. In this connection, Paul notes another potential of cinema that historians have “relatively rarely” paid attention to, namely the moving image's unique ability “to allow people to participate in events either as they happen or retrospectively: its capacity for immersion.”<sup>7</sup> I believe that the histosphere model provides the key to theoretical understanding of this aspect. The photograph of the soldier in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* demonstrates the powerful historical charge images can be given if they are integrated into spectators' reception at an immersive, emotional level. The photograph's simulated historicity—it is black and white and depicts a *Wehrmacht* soldier—requires no further clarification. It refers symbolically to the Second World War, which briefly obtrudes into the 1950s setting. Furthermore, the still photograph is integrated into the framing and montage of the film images, allowing it to be experienced as part of the histosphere (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). Cinematic technology *animates* the previously static image and reconstitutes its “visibility [...] and perceptual verisimilitude in a difference not of degree but of kind.”<sup>8</sup> In the scene from *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, this figurative animation is accompanied by literal movement on the screen: The picture on the wall starts to vibrate and, in combination with Anna's pain-filled gaze, awakens associations with wartime air raids. By being included in the histosphere, the photograph's concrete referential level is greatly expanded;



**Figs. 3.1–3.2** Incorporation of a photograph into the framing and montage of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

it is not only the subject of the image that becomes significant, but also its meaning for the character in the diegetic present of the 1950s. Here, we see the histosphere not just producing a visible historical cosmos but establishing relations between different historical times.

## AUDIO HISTORY

If we only have the visual level to go on, it will be an inexplicable mystery why the portrait of the soldier suddenly starts shaking in the early scene from *SKY WITHOUT STARS*. The answer only becomes clear if we also listen to the sound: A loud rumbling noise suggests that the shaking is being caused by a heavy truck outside. This noise also awakens associations with the drone of the bombers that reduced German cities to rubble during the Second World War.

The history of sound and its potential to model history is still a relatively new field of research. Within the discipline of history, a first foray into this area was made by Paul, whose visual history approach had earlier heralded a paradigm shift from the dominance of writing to the dominance of images. With Ralph Schock, he co-edited *Sound des Jahrhunderts* (Sound of the Century, 2013),<sup>9</sup> an extensive collection of texts on the cultural and media history of sound, the acoustic history of politics, and the relevance of sound to twentieth-century history of memory. However, just as in earlier work on visual history, film's specific formal features are largely neglected.

In film studies, meanwhile, the 1980s marked the start of increased interest in the topic of sound, which as a discrete dimension of meaning generates what Michel Chion calls “added value.”<sup>10</sup> Subsequent work has focused on sound design and the aesthetics and meaning of noise in film.<sup>11</sup> This was the point of departure for the study *Audio History of Film*, which explores a field that provides the missing link between film studies, sound studies, and historical studies.<sup>12</sup> The aim of the study was to “investigate [...] how film sound can generate and shape audiences' experience of history,”<sup>13</sup> considering not just the aesthetic dimension of film sound and its potential to produce history, but also its material, technical, and cultural dimensions in relation to models and figurations of history. An example of this can be seen at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*: Drawn-out tone sequences and resonance effects create a spirited-away atmosphere, helping to situate the action in the past. We see the rooms of the dance school. Monika enters the shot and unpacks her new sneakers. Then a speaker announces

“Berlin’s first rock ‘n’ roll championships,” thereby locating the scene within a particular historical period. At the same time, percussive rhythms and the sound of cheering spectators set in, creating an air of excited anticipation. Monika races into the crowded venue, where the first couples are already lining up. On the stage in the background, the band is getting ready. A close-up of the first guitar riffs synchronizes the aural and visual levels, and brings the sound of the 1950s rock music to life (Fig. 3.3). But when Monika is flung into the air by her dance partner, transcendent notes underscore the moment’s special character and stylize it as a historic event. The audio history of film emphasizes that films create historical experiences not simply through intensely affective images, but also by synesthetically combining images with sound. This idea builds on Vivian Sobchack’s phenomenological approach, which understands film in terms of an embodied experience that implicitly also addresses the sense of hearing.<sup>14</sup> At a narrative level, film sound structures cinematic narration of history by means of continuities and breaks, conjunctions and oppositions. Auditory stimuli are also crucial in determining the mood of a film sequence, by causing spectators to respond emotionally to the depicted historical events and situations.<sup>15</sup> The “instant credibility” of film sound helps to generate a feeling of authenticity,<sup>16</sup> while sound design shapes, organizes, and structures the historical cosmos.



Fig. 3.3 Synchronization of image and sound in *KU'DAMM* 56

## HISTORY AS AUDIOVISION

The clattering and squealing of a subway train. The voice of a young man (Trystan Pütter) breezily reading out a newspaper article about the scenes of mass hysteria and wild excitement at an Elvis concert. We hear a middle-aged passenger complaining about this performance, but the young man continues reading. The next stop is announced over the PA system. There is the sound of footsteps, and the young man briefly flirts with two young women, who respond with a slightly amused air. At the same time, the score swells from gentle piano accents to an insistent rhythm. Suddenly, there is a loud roaring sound. This is the information provided to us by the soundtrack. But was that really everything? Let's start again, this time with the images: We are inside a moving subway car. A young man reads a magazine article aloud, annoying an older man. But the man's companion, a friendly old woman in a hat, smiles mischievously. At the same time, a young woman with sad eyes and a suitcase in her hand walks slowly through the car. Nobody appears to notice her except the young man. She pauses by one of the exits and glances at a letter with the handwritten name "Frau Caterina Schöllack" on the envelope. Then she takes a deep breath and opens the sliding doors, even though the train is going at full speed (Figs. 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7).



Figs. 3.4–3.7 Subway ride and suicide attempt in KU'DAMM 56

These may sound like two different films, but in fact they are both the same sequence from KU'DAMM 56, with the focus on auditory perception in the former case and on the visuals in the latter. It is only the combination of the two levels, the jaunty excitement in the young man's voice and the defeated expression of the young woman, the interplay of gazes and the montage, the increasing urgency of the music and the interaction between the characters, that creates an immersive pull, culminating in the climax of the sequence: Monika tries to leap to her death, but Freddy Donath (Trystan Pütter) grabs her. Film image and film sound cannot be separated from each other here, even though they are telling different stories concurrently. Moreover, each mode of perception influences the other: "You do not see the same thing when you hear, and you do not hear the same thing when you see," observes film theorist and composer Michel Chion.<sup>17</sup> Chion introduced the notion of "audiovision," a fused mode of perception in which sound complements sight with a "series of effects, sensations, and meanings."<sup>18</sup> *Valeur ajoutée*, or "added value," is the "sensory, informative, semantic, narrative, structural, or expressive value that a sound heard in a scene allows us to project onto the image."<sup>19</sup> The combination of the two perceptual levels creates an impression that cannot be found in the image or sound taken alone.<sup>20</sup> A histosphere can likewise be understood as an audiovisual form of perception, whose immersive core lies in the specifically filmic relation between image and sound. In the above-described sequence, Freddy sounds almost euphoric as he recounts the scenes of tumult and excess at the Elvis concert. Monika, by contrast, appears withdrawn and almost apathetic. But when she opens the doors and we can see how fast the train is racing through the dark tunnel, the inner turmoil she is concealing becomes visible. In this sequence, the subway train can be interpreted as a self-reflexive metaphor for the medium of film: At the emotional fracture points where feeling bursts out, the audiovisual excess draws attention to the underlying apparatus that produces it. Monika's suicide attempt transcends the bounds of the narrative. Through the open doors, we see the outside world racing past us like a filmstrip, and we understand that we have embarked with the film character on a journey into the past.

In an essay on "historical sight and hearing," historian Thomas Lindenberger calls for historians to treat audiovision as an object of study with a status equal to writing:

In order to properly interpret the experiences and stories of today's "co-livers" [*Mitlebende*], they must also be understood as "co-listeners" [*Mithörende*] and "co-viewers" [*Mitsehende*]. Their lifeworld has been and continues to be determined by the everyday presence of audiovision, their experience of reality also mediated by the sounds of records and radio, the photographs in magazines, the moving (sound) images in newsreels, feature films, and television.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, the ubiquity of audiovision implies that history too must find a valid mode of expression for this way of perceiving the world. Histospheres have the potential to fulfill this role. Film images and film sound model historical worlds that we measure against our prior (media) perceptions, and that interfere with and transform our previous conceptions of history. But how a histosphere itself is perceived is also determined by subjective factors. In the very moment of reception, film images and sounds are augmented or overlaid by visual and aural associations.<sup>22</sup> In the process by which a film makes the past present, a histosphere is not only a figuration of a historical world that can be synesthetically experienced, but also an arena for negotiating conceptions of history.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1. Gerhard Paul, "Von der historischen Bildkunde zur Visual History: Eine Einführung," in Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Visual History: Ein Studienbuch*, Göttingen 2006, p. 29.
2. Gerhard Paul, "Vom Bild her denken: Visual History 2.0.1.6.," in Gerhard Paul, Jürgen Danyel, and Annette Vowinckel (eds.), *Arbeit am Bild: Visual History als Praxis*, Göttingen 2017, pp. 15–74.
3. André Wendler, *Anachronismen: Historiografie und Kino*, Paderborn 2014, p. 86.
4. Ibid.
5. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton 1947.
6. Hermann Kappelhoff defines the movement image as "the meaningful construct of dynamically changing image spaces [...] that originates in the interaction between media consumers and the moving audiovisual image." Hermann Kappelhoff, *Kognition und Reflexion: Zur Theorie filmischen Denkens*, Berlin 2018, p. 37.
7. Paul (2017, pp. 57–62).

8. Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic ‘Presence,’” 2016, <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/2-1-sobchack/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
9. Gerhard Paul and Ralph Schock (eds.), *Der Sound des Jahrhunderts: Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen 1889 bis heute*, Bonn 2013.
10. See Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma*, Paris 1982; Michel Chion, *Le son au cinéma*, Paris 1985; Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York 2019; Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, New York 1992; Volko Kamensky and Julian Rohrerhuber (eds.), *Ton: Texte zur Akustik im Dokumentarfilm*, Berlin 2013.
11. Barbara Flückiger, *Sound Design: Die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films*, Marburg 2012; Frieder Butzmann and Jean Martin, *Filmgeräusch: Wahrnehmungsfelder eines Mediums*, Hofheim 2012.
12. See the articles on “Audio History of Film” at <https://film-history.org/approaches/1418> (last accessed May 1, 2020); and Rasmus Greiner and Winfried Pauleit, *Nach dem Film 14: Audio History*, 2015, [www.nachdem-film.de/issues/no-14-audio-history](http://www.nachdem-film.de/issues/no-14-audio-history) (last accessed May 1, 2020).
13. Winfried Pauleit, Rasmus Greiner and Mattias Frey, “Audio History of Film: Introduction,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/audio-history-film> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
14. See Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992, p. 4.
15. Michel Chion understands film sound as an “insidious means of affective and semantic manipulation” that “works on us directly, physiologically” as well as influencing our perception. See Chion (2019, p. 34), and Rasmus Greiner, “Sonic Histospheres: Sound Design and History,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/sonic-histospheres> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
16. I believe that Roland Barthes’s notion of “that-has-been” can be extended from photography to film sound, which is (often incorrectly) assumed to have a direct indexical relation to reality. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981, pp. 76–77.
17. Chion (2019, p. xxi).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
21. Thomas Lindenberger, “Vergangenes Hören und Sehen: Zeitgeschichte und ihre Herausforderung durch die audiovisuellen Medien,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 1/2004, [www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Lindenberger-1-2004](http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Lindenberger-1-2004) (last accessed May 1, 2020).



22. See Sven Kramer, "Recent Appropriations of Documentary Film Material from the Shoah Era," in Delia González de Reufels, Rasmus Greiner, and Winfried Pauleit (eds.), *Film and History: Producing and Experiencing History in Moving Images and Sound*, Berlin 2015, pp. 32–33.
23. The concept of an arena for negotiation (*Arena für Verständigungen*) forms the basis for Angela Keppler and Martin Seel's definition of film genres. Inasmuch as a histosphere functions as an arena for negotiation in this sense, generating meaning at the intersection between film and spectator, it can be regarded as a constitutive element of the historical film genre. See Angela Keppler and Martin Seel, "Über den Status filmischer Genres," *montage AV 11:2*, 2002, p. 65.

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- Thomas Lindenberger, “Vergangenes Hören und Sehen: Zeitgeschichte und ihre Herausforderung durch die audiovisuellen Medien,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 1/2004, [www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Lindenberger-1-2004](http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Lindenberger-1-2004) (last accessed May 1, 2020).
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- Sky without Stars (Himmel ohne Sterne); dir. Helmut Käutner; Federal Republic of Germany 1955.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Film/History/Experience

Histospheres model historical worlds that spectators are able not merely to audiovisually perceive, but also to physically and sensuously live. This chapter describes the interactions and intersections between film experience and historical experience. In the first section, I introduce the phenomenological theories underpinning the notion of film experience and apply them to the historical film, focusing on concepts of embodied film perception in which spectators have an impression of making direct contact with a film's historical world. This imaginary contact with history bears similarities to Frank R. Ankersmit's theory of historical experience, which I examine in the second section.<sup>1</sup> The interconnections between Ankersmit's concept of historical experience and Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological theory of film experience<sup>2</sup> are considered in greater depth in the third section, and related to other theories of film and history. The aim is to synthesize existing theories and develop a concept of histospheres in which sensuous and cognitive perceptions are fused into a unified cinematic experience of history.

### PHENOMENOLOGY OF FILM

The fear of injury and death, the deep water of the river, and the dramatic music at the start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*. Trees and a jetty, the peaceful tweeting of birds, and the calm voice of the narrator in *YEARS OF HUNGER*. Joy and excited anticipation, dancing and cheering in the first few minutes

of KU'DAMM 56. We *feel* the histosphere before we *understand* it; it is intuitively *experienceable*. If we wish to analyze this form of film experience more closely, a phenomenological methodology lends itself especially well. Although constructivist and semiological methods of film analysis can explain how audiovisual processes can model a historical space–time structure, they cannot wholly make sense of how we are able to *intuitively experience* a histosphere. The existential phenomenology of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as applied to film by Vivian Sobchack, provides an explanatory model based on the interrelationship between the living body and the lived world.<sup>3</sup> Viewed through this phenomenological lens, the figuration of historical worlds in historical films appears in a new light.

The film scholar Thomas Morsch describes the concept of embodied perception central to Sobchack's phenomenological theory as follows:

Film not only makes a world visible, but also a perspective on this world. It is the only medium to afford access to something that otherwise remains barred to us: the embodied perception of someone other than ourselves. Anyone can see that someone else is also seeing something, but we cannot see this seeing itself.<sup>4</sup>

Sobchack herself writes:

A film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood.<sup>5</sup>

She posits two levels of perception: The primary structures of a film are founded in conscious experience and constituted as systematic communicative competence, while the secondary structures generate systematic distortion constituted as ideology, rhetoric, and poetics.<sup>6</sup> Sobchack's theory complements conventional methods of film analysis by offering an alternative approach. Instead of abstracting the "wild meaning" of a film into discrete codes, she argues that the film "makes sense by virtue of its very ontology."<sup>7</sup> The sensuous and meaningful expression of experience becomes an experience for the spectator in its own right.

On Sobchack's account, methods of constructivist analysis that dissect films down into their individual components do not merely simplify but distort; they reduce films to their production, structure, and aesthetics, so

as to make them describable by theory. Phenomenology, by contrast, describes perception as a holistic experience that elicits a multilayered, prereflective impression. The histosphere model is based on a similar notion of holistically experiencing a world. The river, the escape from the guards, and the sound of gunshots in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*; the tranquil lake-side idyll in *YEARS OF HUNGER*; the dynamic dancing and rhythm of the music in *KU'DAMM 56*: Audiovision and movement form an elementary experience that precedes and inaugurates the secondary, more abstract meanings.<sup>8</sup> The audiovisual figurations thus prefigure the historical significance of the histosphere, which is only manifested as such in the process of reception—whether in the guise of the families torn apart by German division in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the day-to-day life of a lower-middle-class family in the *Wirtschaftswunder* period in *YEARS OF HUNGER*, or a young woman's struggle to shape her own destiny in *KU'DAMM 56*. Histospheres have their origins in sensory perception: a point anticipated by Siegfried Kracauer, who wrote that “unlike the other types of pictures, film images affect primarily the spectator's senses, engaging him physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually.”<sup>9</sup> A phenomenological approach to film builds on this recognition. While Sobchack describes embodied perception as the aesthetic core of the medium, Steven Shaviro bases his theory of the “cinematic body” on the spectator's perceiving body, which undergoes a genuine sensuous experience in the movie theater.<sup>10</sup> Both approaches can be understood as part of a paradigm shift “connected to the establishment of the body as a focus of interest in film theory.”<sup>11</sup> Sense and meaning, Thomas Morsch explains, are inherent in the sensuous material rather than being added to the embodied perception at a later stage by “intellectual transformation.”<sup>12</sup> Following Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories, Morsch argues that “the corporality of the spectator should be understood as a productive power of aesthetic experience.”<sup>13</sup> The somatic constitutes “a form of experience that is already meaningful in itself,” a “fleshly understanding” that cannot be replaced by a cognitive notion of understanding.<sup>14</sup> The film as embodied perception does not simply evoke affective somatic responses such as desire and disgust, but uses our body “as the ‘universal medium’ in which perception occurs and through which experience and meaning are mediated.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, a key aspect of film experience consists in “*embodied understanding* of cinematic materiality.”<sup>16</sup> Film as embodied perception thus refers to our day-to-day perception of the world, but differs from it materially. This difference is discernible in particular in the haptic, olfactory,

and gustatory qualities of the filmic world, which are disclosed only through the indirect (and unconscious) route of our synesthetic perception of film image and film sound.

Proceeding from this premise, Sobchack's phenomenology of film is based around a dual structure of seeing and being seen.<sup>17</sup> A film itself "sees" a world of visible images. As spectators, we simultaneously perceive these film images as a filmic world and as an intentional perspective on this world.<sup>18</sup> The film constructs, as Morsch puts it,

a visible visual relation between an embodied eye and the sensuous world, and mediates this relation in the form of cinematic expression as an experience for the spectator.<sup>19</sup>

However, he argues, the intentionality of the film and that of the spectator are not identical; the film's perceptive activity is understood as being *like* mine but not *as* mine.<sup>20</sup> Both Morsch and Anke Zechner support this distinction with a comparison between film and photography: Film not only makes an object and a perspective on it visible, but expresses this relation in a way that, according to Morsch, determines "its specific communicative character and aesthetic structure."<sup>21</sup> Zechner observes that film, by contrast with the fixed, representing photographic picture, is not perceived as an object "but as the experience of world by an anonymous intentional subject that '*pictures to themselves a representation [sich eine Darstellung vorstellt]* of the objective world.'"<sup>22</sup> This point can be illustrated by the example of the soldier's portrait hanging in Anna's parents-in-law's home early on in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*. What enables a historical experience here is not the photograph as a historical source showing a soldier from the Second World War, but the film's perception, its intentional gaze, which here coincides with the gaze of the main character. We see not just the purportedly historical photograph but also the film's perspective on the process of coming to terms with the war that was underway in the mid-1950s. The picture also points to something else: Classical film theory describes a productive relationship between *cadre* and *cache*, where the aesthetically framed moving image creates a relative off-screen space. Sobchack distinguishes here once again between the gaze of the film and the gaze of the spectator: The film image may appear to *us* like a geometric window in the darkness through which we can perceive a world, but no boundaries of image exist for the gaze of the film itself.<sup>23</sup> The film peers upon an unlimited, internally consistent world. The more we make

the film's perception our own, the more the frame will blur until it dissolves entirely into the horizons of an open world.

Sobchack also refers to the joint act of seeing by film and spectator that underlies every film experience as the "address of the eye,"<sup>24</sup> which implies an embodied, situated mode of being and a material world that can only be perceived if the seeing and visible subject has its own body. The film's body has similar sensory capacities to that of the spectator.<sup>25</sup> Just as the human body cannot be reduced to its physiological and anatomical features, nor can the film's body be reduced solely to discrete technical mechanisms; rather, it is part of a complex phenomenology.<sup>26</sup> We can intentionally live through and physically experience the film's incarnate vision as if we were perceiving information from our own body.<sup>27</sup> But even if the film's perception largely accords with our own, we are, as Sobchack emphasizes, fully aware while watching the film that we are living through another subject's perception as part of our own perceptual experience.<sup>28</sup> In terms of the histosphere model, this would mean that the film sensuously perceives the simulated historical world and thereby makes this world sensuously available to the spectator. It does so by evoking the impression of being materially connected to the historical world. Although Sobchack describes the film's body as being invisible and genderless,<sup>29</sup> it nonetheless has a physical presence that is expressed in audiovisual actions, a particular stance, and an intentional style.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, the audiovisual processes that structure the histosphere mold the presence of the film's body into a historical body. If, when watching a historical film, a diffuse sense of historicity sets in, this is attributable not just to the historical world that the film presents to us but also to our visceral connection to the film's perceiving body. The embodied cinematic subject does not simply convey the perceptual impression of a being-in-the-world, but is itself shaped by the audiovisual processes that model the perceived historical world. The film's perception of world is also highly subjective. A film always also tells a personal story, which the medium itself inscribes with a subjectivized historicity. As Sobchack puts it, film experience allows us to explore a world in the mode of an "autobiography" writing itself.<sup>31</sup> In our presence we live the film's perception "as a visual, kinetic, and gestural discourse, as the immediate and direct enunciation of its own *present* engagement with the world enabled by a bodily presence in it."<sup>32</sup> The historical world modeled as a histosphere becomes experienceable as the perception of another through whose eyes we see and through whose ears

we hear. This allows the spectator to identify closely not just with the film's characters but also with the cinematic subject and body.

Sobchack's phenomenology of film can also help give us a better grasp of the temporal aspect of histospheres. The present moment of a film's perception is linked to the time of its production by technical and stylistic traces. In *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, we live through the early 1950s on the perceptual foundation of a cinematic body from almost the same time. In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, by contrast, the representation and perception are based on a cinematic body from the 1980s, while *KU'DAMM 56*'s cinematic body dates from the 2010s. Cultural and political factors and developments in film design and technology can affect our individual perceptions and thereby also the form of the film's body. As spectators, we do not need to consciously assume the perspective of a subject from the time that the film was made; rather, we prereflectively adopt the specific perception of the contemporary cinematic subject. At the same time, what is visible to the film and the spectator as "images" is always the result of a process of selection. Within the context of a certain culture and history, the film selects which parts of the filmic world will become visible and which will remain invisible.<sup>33</sup> What we see has already been organized and structured by our vision and that of the film in a way that reflects a particular intention toward the world.<sup>34</sup> The histospheres in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, *YEARS OF HUNGER*, and *KU'DAMM 56* are not simply a representation or recreation of a bygone era; the historicity of the film's body is manifested in the film's perspective on the audiovisual figurations, and is thus also inscribed in our film experience.

### HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

The sequence in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* in which Anna stares at the portrait of the soldier in her parents-in-law's home can help give us an initial sense of what is meant by historical experience. The protagonist is shocked by the presence of the photograph, and pauses for a moment. Although the way the scene is staged suggests that this is primarily a response to the violent loss of her husband, the sequence also depicts a phenomenon that the philosopher of history Frank R. Ankersmit describes as "authentic contact" with the past.<sup>35</sup> For Anna, the photo blurs the boundary between aesthetic and historical experience, and her present moment comes into contact with another, earlier layer of time. The kind of phenomenon that

is here presented as an effect of trauma can also, I argue, be triggered by our perception of a film.

The topic of experience has attracted growing attention in both film and historical studies since the early 1990s. In both cases, this is at least in part a reaction to the linguistic turn, with a physical-sensory, prenarrative concept of experience serving to counteract an “overemphasis on the autonomy of the linguistic constitution of objects and production of meaning.”<sup>36</sup> This represents a return to history’s original conception of itself as a science of experience.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, there do still remain some points of connection with language that cannot be neglected. Although Ankersmit claims that narrativism is fundamentally antagonistic to historical experience,<sup>38</sup> elsewhere he emphasizes language’s potential to make backward inferences from narratives to prelinguistic experience.<sup>39</sup> This apparent contradiction can be resolved by reference to the category of aesthetics. When Ankersmit speaks of how fragments of historical texts can give rise to a historical experience, he assumes a performative act, a living encounter with the historical textual artifact. The associated aesthetic experience goes beyond the potential of the symbolic linguistic code, and in many respects resembles the notion of historical experience mediated through film experience that I shall set out in subsequent chapters.<sup>40</sup>

While Jörn Rüsen defines historical experience as the “experience of difference [...] between one’s own and the other time,”<sup>41</sup> Ankersmit’s conception goes further than this. His notion of historical experience centrally involves the surprising subjective impression of making direct contact with the past. Referring to the work of cultural historian Johan Huizinga, Ankersmit argues that this contact is always accompanied by “an absolute conviction of authenticity and truth.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he notes that for Huizinga even relatively unimportant objects can provoke historical experiences,<sup>43</sup> a further point of difference from political history. Historical experience, in Ankersmit’s view, dislodges a single aspect from the broader context of the past while simultaneously decontextualizing the historian’s own existence.<sup>44</sup> The willingness to sacrifice context on the side of both subject and object is “the condition for an intimate encounter between object and subject in a historical experience.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as a singular event, a historical experience cannot be repeated or evoked at will; “it ‘overcomes’ the historian and cannot be forced.”<sup>46</sup> Ankersmit emphatically uses the term “surprise” to underline the sudden and unintended occurrence of historical experience, which he believes emanates from the power of an object.<sup>47</sup> This gives an impression of its being “*as if* any



temporal gap between today and the past had disappeared for a brief moment.”<sup>48</sup> For Ankersmit, this “disappearance of temporal dimensions”<sup>49</sup> represents the most important feature of historical experience, the impression of direct and unmediated contact with the past.<sup>50</sup> He believes one way to explain this phenomenon lies in the “recognition that a historical experience, despite being stimulated by an object given to us in experience, at the same time [assumes] the character of a self-experience.”<sup>51</sup> Put another way: Assuming an impression of authenticity, a historical experience allows us to become aware not just of the world but also of our own self. Taking the example of apparent perspectival inconsistencies in a painting by Francesco Guardi, Ankersmit develops the thesis that historical experience is characterized by an “improbable probability” that “is able to transform into probability not *despite* but precisely *because* of its improbability”;<sup>52</sup> it is precisely the artificial transformation of conventional visual experiences that evokes an impression of authenticity. This point will also prove significant in my discussion of the relation between historical and film experience.

The bodily dimension of historical experience represents one fundamental point of analogy to the phenomenology of film. Ankersmit notes that in the moment of this experience, the illusion is created that one can physically touch the past.<sup>53</sup> Based on Aristotle’s epistemology and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “tactile seeing,” he assigns historical experience to the sense of touch.<sup>54</sup> By this he means not just haptic perception of the physical world, but also a simultaneously occurring form of self-experience.<sup>55</sup> According to Ankersmit, in historical experience “tactile seeing” makes not just the past but also our own embodied existence palpable<sup>56</sup>; the sense of touch is characterized by immediacy, experience through self-experience, and contiguity of object and subject.<sup>57</sup> He assigns different human senses to different modes of access to history: Historical experience is like “being *touched* by the past,”<sup>58</sup> whereas historical texts seek to control and structure the past, for which reason Ankersmit associates them with the metaphor of seeing.<sup>59</sup> Historical debate, meanwhile, attests to the relativity of all historical insight and is therefore connected to the metaphor of hearing.<sup>60</sup> These classifications make clear that Ankersmit does not wish to pit historical texts and debate against historical experience.<sup>61</sup> Rather, the metaphorical schema in which different forms of history are associated with different senses is used to describe a complex process of mutual exchange. Historical insight is produced synesthetically in the mode of self-experience.<sup>62</sup> We can see here a point of connection with the medium of film, which likewise combines the senses of seeing and hearing to create worlds that can be physically experienced by the spectator.

Subsequent work has both criticized and built on Ankersmit's theory. In one study by Thiemo Breyer and Daniel Creutz examining the relationship between experience and meaning, they suggest that it is *narrative* that "configures the meanings of the sensory structures inherent in historical experience."<sup>63</sup> Consequently, they criticize Ankersmit's theory for semantically narrowing the actively exploratory sense of experience (*Erfahrung*) to a passive, receptive one (*Erlebnis*).<sup>64</sup> For Breyer and Creutz, experience always also involves taking a stance, always has an inherent self-reflective aspect.<sup>65</sup> However, one problem with their account is that they discuss historical experience solely in instrumental terms, where the function of historical experience is to produce meaning.<sup>66</sup> They are thus largely unreceptive to Ankersmit's concept of physical-sensory experience. The assumption that experience can in principle be narrated instead leads them to an expanded conception of narrative based on its "structuring function in terms of temporality, relevance, and belonging to a configured unit of representation."<sup>67</sup> The core of this conception is a multilayered model of historical experience comprising short-term eventful moments, experiential contents that become habitual/socialized over the medium term, and ones that are biologically/anthropologically formed over the longer term.<sup>68</sup> However, although the remainder of Breyer and Creutz's study concentrates primarily on historical narratives and the historical experiences evoked by them, their ideas can nonetheless also be productively applied to fiction films, which address spectators both sensuously-aesthetically and narratively.<sup>69</sup>

### FILM EXPERIENCE AND HISTORY

The epistemological paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism in the 1980s paved the way to address the subjectivation of historical processes.<sup>70</sup> Bernhard Groß believes that the relation between the individual and history is nowadays inextricably bound up with the understanding of film that developed after 1945.<sup>71</sup> In the postwar period, Hollywood cinema has become one mode of adequate experience of the modern life-world: "Popular genre cinema could become emblematic of the idea of a new society founded on egalitarian democracy," summarizes film scholar Hermann Kappelhoff; "the cinema audience no longer functions as the representative of a new collective way of existing, but is addressed as [...] a gathering of anonymous individuals."<sup>72</sup> A phenomenological approach to film responds to this process of democratization and individualization and understands the film image in terms of a "physical-sensory

being-in-the-world.”<sup>73</sup> On this foundation, histospheres offer a view of historical worlds from the inside. The status of historical films and their makers as amateur historians as postulated by Simon Rothöhler<sup>74</sup> can, consequently, be expanded to film spectators too. Furthermore, film functions as an externalized process of individual (as opposed to cultural) memory.<sup>75</sup> Expanding on this idea in phenomenological terms, the individual experience of history develops not just through the externalization of the process of remembering into film, but also through its embodied reappropriation in the process of film experience.

The ending of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* shows that film and historical experience are underpinned by a similar principle: When the expansion of border fortifications means it is no longer safe to meet at the abandoned train station in no man’s land, Anna and Carl decide to flee to the West with Anna’s grandparents. But the plan goes awry. The East German border guards shoot Carl, while Anna is hit by a bullet when the West German border police return fire. As the patrol dogs wage a bloody proxy war, the dead lovers lie side by side, their hands almost touching (Figs. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4). However, it is not the sight of the corpses but the starkly lit,



Figs. 4.1–4.4 The death sequence in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

almost three-dimensional-seeming gravel on which they lie that creates a vivid moment of shock. The sensuous experience it evokes is strikingly close to Anke Zechner's description of a sequence from Michelangelo Antonioni's *THE ECLIPSE* (1962):

Our perception is directed to the surface textures, and connected to memory via subjective inner time. Associations emerge directly out of our memory. We get "flashes" of disconcertment, but also of similarity.<sup>76</sup>

Walter Benjamin often wrote of such momentary "flashes" of recognition.<sup>77</sup> With regards to the "aesthetics of shock [...] in film reception,"<sup>78</sup> Benjamin gives an interesting analogy between film perception and historical knowledge that he does not elaborate on further: The past can only be held fast as it *whizzes by*, "only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognizability."<sup>79</sup> A moment of shock halts thought and produces a dialectical picture; a monad in which our whole conception of the world is reflected.<sup>80</sup> Christa Blümlinger concludes from this that

Following Walter Benjamin (and contrary to his reservations about film as mass art), it can be maintained that no art can historically articulate the past in the way cinema can, for inherent in the transience of the film image is a specific possibility of experience and thought.<sup>81</sup>

Walter Benjamin's concept of shock has some important parallels to Ankersmit's concept of "surprise."<sup>82</sup> For instance, Ankersmit's (Aristotelian) view that we must "suffer" the moment of historical experience corresponds to Benjamin's thesis that shock can overwhelm our mental defenses and have a traumatic effect.<sup>83</sup> This thesis can also be transposed to the aesthetics of shock in film reception; a point that is especially relevant to historical experience in historical films is that "to articulate what is past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was.' It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger."<sup>84</sup> Consequently, we can posit a conceptual similarity between film and historical experience. A special role is played by the incomplete representation of reality in film. The two-dimensional film image in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* merely simulates the spatiality of the depicted world and douses it in shades of gray. The sound is rather tinny and dull. While film theorists like Rudolf Arnheim claim that the more limited a film's means for realistic representation, the greater its artistic effect,<sup>85</sup> artificiality has the opposite

consequence for historical experience. “It can’t be so!” flashes through our head—and yet “It must be so.”<sup>86</sup> Just as in Ankersmit’s theory, in film too historical experience is characterized by its coming to seem probable not *despite* but precisely *because* of its improbability.<sup>87</sup> The technical and aesthetic limitations in the representation of the historical world are perceived as a valid expression of historical authenticity. It is no longer the filmmakers, during the production of the film, who judge what is authentic, but the spectators, in the process of watching the film. “The authentic contact with the world always has something paradoxical about it, an incompleteness, defect, or awkwardness,” Ankersmit continues.<sup>88</sup> Historical films take advantage of this fact. Since the early 1990s, there has been a tendency for films to deliberately simulate older films’ technically limited aesthetic devices and aging-related defects in order to create an impression of authenticity and label the audiovisually configured world as historical. Benjamin’s mirror metaphor also plays an important role in theories of the relation between cinema and history. For instance, Kracauer describes the film image as a mirror that makes the horrors of historical reality bearable and so allows us to experience them.<sup>89</sup> This point is also illustrated in the final sequence of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*. It is only the “physical reality”<sup>90</sup> of the stony ground, which we can link back to our own experiences of reality, that allows us to grasp the violent death in all its senselessness. The associative chain can also be expanded by Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, which in the mirror of the film image is connected to utopia.<sup>91</sup> The heterotopic *other place*, the past, blends with an unreal, utopian cinematic space. This provides the basis for reflecting on the fate of this unfortunate couple and understanding it as a metaphor for divided Germany. The small, affecting moment draws our attention to the big picture. A histosphere is both things at once: utopia and heterotopia, experience of history and shocking self-experience.

To better understand the connection between film perception and historical experience, it will be helpful to return to Sobchack’s phenomenological theory. Sobchack understands film as a communication system that uses sensuous experience to make meaning visible, audible, and tangible;<sup>92</sup> film is able to deliberately simulate and model historical experience. This view is supported by Breyer and Creutz’s thesis of a mediating intersubjective dimension “that makes it possible to understand the experiences of others or imaginatively transform one’s own experiences.”<sup>93</sup> Film experience functions very similarly: It is not just based on our own perceptions and reflections on them, but also allows us to perceive and reflect on the

experience of the cinematic subject.<sup>94</sup> A histosphere thus makes historical experience available in two senses: Firstly, we have the impression of making direct contact with the past ourselves; secondly, we can apprehend the perception of the cinematic subject, which is sometimes more, sometimes less closely connected to the perception of a film character. The portrait of the soldier in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* connects both the diegetic present of the protagonist Anna and the present of the film spectator to an earlier period of time. The rumble of the engine, which is almost physically palpable for the spectator, and the shaking of the apartment evoke associations with the wartime air raids. These associations function on two levels: Firstly, they create connections to earlier (film) experiences on the part of the spectator; secondly, they reflect the experience the film character is depicted as having in this moment.

If we take plot into account when considering the relation between film experience and historical experience, more general questions of narrative theory will also come into focus. For historian Jörn Rüsen, the basis for historical experience resides in the fact that the past is always already there, not as history “but as absolute presence, just as the pasts of a tree trunk (spread over the years) are there in its rings in the here-and-now.”<sup>95</sup> According to Rüsen, this prenarrative simultaneity of past and present is transformed only at a later stage, when it is worked into a chronological narrative.<sup>96</sup> Historical films function in a very similar manner: By stimulating the spectator’s senses, they activate a chain of prenarrative associations already present in the spectator’s memory, so that the past becomes an experience in the present. Although film makes use of narrative elements to help produce the historical experience, the spectator’s perception plays out in the “anteroom of history”<sup>97</sup> and is only subsequently transformed into conceptual thought, and then into a historical narrative. The introductory voice-over in *YEARS OF HUNGER* describes a similar process, albeit in terms of trauma and repression, highlighting the importance of conscious remembering for the historiographic process.

I had tried to forget—for years on end. I remembered cities, houses, places, other people. But I had expunged *myself* from my memories. I constantly invented new goals so that I always had to look forward. If I came too close to myself, I escaped into hectic work—or debilitating illness. I was thirty by the time I realized the past wouldn’t let me go. I was living with a petrified heart that was still thirteen years old. And I forced myself to remember. That summer ....

Despite the autobiographical nature of the voice-over, the narrator's words also have more general import. This appears to be another case where Rüsen's theory can fruitfully be applied to the medium of film; for instance, his observation that the past already exists in the memory "as moment, as image, as gesture, as idea" even before it has been made present through narrative.<sup>98</sup> I believe this "memory content"<sup>99</sup> resembles cinematic forms of representation not just in its conceptual content but also in its "peculiar momentariness."<sup>100</sup> "The film is always happening now,"<sup>101</sup> maintains documentary maker Johan van der Keuken, true to the pioneering theories of Kracauer and Balázs, who are never tired of emphasizing the momentary character of cinema.<sup>102</sup> In historical experience, the film's *now* is combined with a retrospective narrativization of history. Consequently, historical experience can no longer be separated from (hi)storytelling, since in the moment of its inception it is fused with the pre-narrative associations and recollections of the experiencing subject. The fictional narrative of a historical film adds an additional layer to this process. Breyer and Creutz rightly point out

that stories have the power to convey other people's experiences to us and allow us to imaginatively "re-live" them, such that by using imagination and empathy we are able, from the perspective of the narrator or characters, to relate to their experience *as if* we ourselves were having it right now.<sup>103</sup>

Breyer and Creutz argue that although this as-if experience is to be distinguished from the actual experience of historical figures, it could itself become an actual experience for the spectator, especially "if they themselves did not actually experience [*erleben*] what they are reliving and so it does not form part of their own store of experience."<sup>104</sup> The same happens in film: In the moment of historical experience, the film experience, which according to Sobchack is direct and embodied, blends not just with the spectator's cognitive associations, but also with the perceptions of the film's body and with the film's historical narrative. However, the specific form this sudden surprise "by the power of the object"<sup>105</sup> takes in film requires further elucidation. At certain points in a historical film, the boundaries between the film's embodied perception and that of the spectator, between pre-narrative and narrative layers, and between film experience and historical experience are ruptured.

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall attempt to connect this phenomenon to the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* developed by Barthes



in his theory of photography.<sup>106</sup> Barthes defines *studium* as “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity.”<sup>107</sup> This interest is always bound to a particular context, whether one in which photographs are categorized as “political testimony” or one where they are seen as “good historical scenes.”<sup>108</sup> Barthes suggests here a concrete connection to history that the *studium* allows the spectator to participate in; the *punctum*, by contrast, breaks through the *studium*:

This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.<sup>109</sup>

To explain the significance of *punctum* for photography, Barthes draws an analogy to the medium of film. He uses the film theory category of *cache* as a metaphor for a “blind field,” a relative off-screen space, that extends beyond the frame and in which the depicted world continues beyond what is visible in the image or on the screen.<sup>110</sup> Through the *punctum*, we gain imaginary access to this place. We can also fruitfully apply this implicit connection between *punctum* and cinema to an analysis of the relation between film and historical experience, and its applicability is by no means limited to the visual level. In the opening sequence of *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the voice-over switches without warning from the adult Ursula to a much younger speaker. With a soft, surprisingly deep voice, the young Ursula reads with feeling from a book:

And when he went out into the world, he found many wonderful things just waiting to be discovered. Cashmere scarves embroidered with golden flowers, as fine as spiderwebs, carved ivory chests filled with Russian tea, an old violin with a picture on the back ...

Barthes describes the *punctum* of a photograph as “that accident which pricks me”; as a “detail” that “changes my reading.”<sup>111</sup> Both these descriptions apply to Ursula’s voice in the opening sequence of *YEARS OF HUNGER*. The change of voice “pricks” us at a sensuous level while also pointing beyond what is represented in the sound and images. This demonstrates that there is indeed potential to extend the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* from photography to historical films.<sup>112</sup> If the *studium*, as Barthes claims, is “always coded,”<sup>113</sup> then it would make sense to categorize it as a



constructivist-analytical approach to the histosphere, making it an apt mode for perceiving the cinematically modeled figuration of a historical world. Barthes's hypothesis that the *studium* is based on a communicative pact "between creators and consumers"<sup>114</sup> also reveals parallels to certain fundamental parameters of genre studies. For Francesco Casetti, film genres function as "complex negotiating machines" whose purpose is "to solve the confrontation between film and viewer productively."<sup>115</sup> Analogously, a histosphere produces filmic signs that can be decoded by means of the *studium*. The *punctum*, by contrast, pierces the production of semiotic meaning and adds a level of prenarrative, sensuous experience to the perception of a histosphere. Barthes's *noema* of photography, "that-has-been,"<sup>116</sup> converges here with the improbable probability from Ankersmit's theory of historical experience. We *know* that the fiction film is only simulating the depicted history, and yet we *feel* differently: "'It can't be so!,' and yet 'It must be so.'"<sup>117</sup> However, by contrast with Barthes, who admits to having conflated "truth and reality in a unique emotion"<sup>118</sup> under the effect of the *punctum* of a photograph, the historical experience that we have during a historical film remains fictional. While Barthes claims that the photograph leads us to believe that its referent had really existed, in the historical film this false inference is replaced by the presence of the histosphere. The historical film becomes a form of historical experience, in a manner very similar to Balázs's description of the effect of "absolute film":

What matters [...] is merely the optical impression, not the reality represented. Objects lose their substance here because what the films value is appearance. The image itself is the reality that is experienced.<sup>119</sup>

It is this potential that gives historical films their unique intuitive persuasiveness; what matters most is not how factually accurate a film is, but how intuitively believable its aesthetic design is. My hypothesis is that no study of popular conceptions of history would nowadays be complete without considering the intermeshing of aesthetic and historical experience. The following chapters will therefore not simply examine how histospheres model or referentialize historical worlds, but will focus in particular on how they make history sensuously available as lived reality.

## NOTES

1. See Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung*, Berlin 2012, p. 19.
2. See Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992.
3. Sobchack notes that Merleau-Ponty describes the interrelationship between living body and lived world with the term *être-au-monde*, which combines a being-present-to-the-world with a being-alive-in-the-world. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. Thomas Morsch, "Filmische Erfahrung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Körper, Sinnlichkeit und Ästhetik," *montage AV* 19:1, 2010, p. 58.
5. Sobchack (1992, pp. 3–4).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, p. 158.
10. Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, Minneapolis 1993. See also Thomas Morsch, *Medienästhetik des Films: Verkörperte Wahrnehmung und ästhetische Erfahrung im Kino*, Munich and Paderborn 2011, pp. 174, 186.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
17. The term "seeing" should be understood here as synonymous with the film's perception, which also includes hearing.
18. Sobchack (1992, p. 56). Niklas Luhmann's concept of "second-order observation," the observation of observations, can also be applied here. Luhmann correctly observes that, in the case of art, "we may decide to observe a work of art solely in view of its intrinsic observations without observing the artist; it is enough to know or to recognize that we are dealing with artificial, rather than a natural, object." Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, Stanford 2000, p. 56. What this entails for a theory of hystospheres is that a film's intentional gaze should not be conflated with the intentional gaze of the filmmakers.
19. Morsch (2011, pp. 183–184).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Anke Zechner, *Die Sinne im Kino: Eine Theorie der Filmwahrnehmung*, Frankfurt 2013, p. 49.

23. Sobchack (1992, p. 131).
24. Ibid., p. 23.
25. Sobchack draws parallels between the development of cinema and the development of a human being: Analogously to the genesis of camera movement, an infant develops the ability to control the movement of its head and gaze even before learning to speak or walk. See *ibid.*, p. 253.
26. Ibid., p. 169.
27. Ibid., pp. 138–140.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 162. Sobchack describes the film’s body as genderless and devoid of physical features (skin color, figure, age, etc.) However, this body’s perception can certainly be marked by factors such as gender, class, and race. See on this point Katharina Lindner, “Questions of embodied difference: Film and queer phenomenology,” *NECSUS*, autumn 2012: “Tangibility,” <https://necsus-ejms.org/questions-of-embodied-difference-film-and-queer-phenomenology/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
30. Ibid., pp. 133, 138.
31. Ibid., pp. 216–217.
32. Ibid.
33. According to Sobchack, seeing, as a particular mode of grasping and expressing a world, encompasses both the visible and the invisible, and does so always from the perspective of an embodied, situated, seeing subject, whether that be the filmmaker, the film, the spectator, or the film theorist. Ibid., pp. 287–288.
34. Ibid., p. 132.
35. Ankersmit (2012, p. 19).
36. Thiemo Breyer and Daniel Creutz, “Historische Erfahrung: Ein phänomenologisches Schichtenmodell,” in Daniel Creutz (ed.), *Erfahrung und Geschichte: Historische Sinnbildung im Pränarrativen*, Berlin 2010, p. 333.
37. For this reason, Breyer and Creutz speak of a “renaissance” or “revival” of the concept of experience, which has, they claim, never entirely disappeared from the discipline’s self-conception but only temporarily been eclipsed by history’s newfound “literary” status. Ibid.
38. Ankersmit (2012, p. 8).
39. Frank R. Ankersmit, “Sprache und historische Erfahrung,” in Klaus E. Müller and Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Sinnbildung: Problemstellungen, Zeitkonzepte, Wahrnehmungshorizonte, Darstellungsstrategien*, Hamburg 1997, p. 388.
40. Ankersmit (*ibid.*) himself emphasizes the great similarity between aesthetic and historical experience.

41. Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Cologne 2013, p. 38.
42. Ankersmit (2012, pp. 16–17).
43. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
49. On the parallels between historical experience and Kant’s category of the sublime, Ankersmit writes: “Huizinga’s and Meinecke’s suggestion of explaining historical experience in terms of the ‘disappearance of temporal dimensions’ accords neatly with Kant’s idea of the sublime, for the noumenal world to which the sublime affords access—recall Kant’s example of the person awed by the monumental dimensions of St. Peter’s Basilica—is a world not yet structured by the ‘forms of intuition’ [*Anschauungsformen*] of space and time, and this ‘disappearance of temporal dimensions’ points in the same direction. [...] In both cases there is a surprising experience of a reality that presents itself with unprecedented directness and immediacy. In both cases the experience has the character of a suffering (*pathos*) of reality rather than a codification of it in terms of something already familiar, whether that be language, theory, discourse, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, categories of understanding, etc.” *Ibid.*, p. 56.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
51. Ankersmit describes the combination of self-experience and historical experience in the mode of authenticity as “contiguity,” and sees in this another parallel to Kant’s concept of the sublime. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
53. Ankersmit refers here to the work of Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, who observe that historical experience makes the past “touchable and visible,” and once again to Huizinga, who describes historical experience as “touching the essence of things.” See *ibid.*, p. 71; Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, *De vreugden van Houssaye: Apologie van de historische interesse*, Amsterdam 1992, p. 18; Johan Huizinga, *Verzamelde werken 2: Nederland*, Haarlem 1950, p. 56.
54. Thus, “the directness and immediacy of historical experience of the past” is in accord “with the properties (described by Aristotle) of our way of experiencing reality through the sense of touch.” See Ankersmit (2012, pp. 63–68); Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, London 1987; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, Paris 1964, p. 173.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

57. Ibid., p. 98.
58. Ibid., p. 74.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Breyer and Creutz (2010, pp. 334–335). Breyer and Creutz are, however, aware that experience is never entirely captured and absorbed by narrative, and conversely that the verbalization of experience has a surplus of categoriality. See *ibid.*, p. 342.
64. Ibid., p. 349.
65. Ibid., p. 350.
66. See in particular their reference to Rösen's theories. Ibid., pp. 339–340.
67. Ibid., p. 342. Breyer and Creutz do concede that not every form of experience prompts the same need for narration, nor can all experience be converted into narrative in the same way.
68. Breyer and Creutz define the three temporally differentiated levels of historical experience as follows: "(1) The characteristic qualities of *having* an experience [*Erfahrung-Machen*] at the first level (short term) are the novelty, singularity, irreversibility, unrepeatability, and surprisingness of the experience. (2) The second level (medium term) involves, in the sense of *being* experienced [*Erfahrung-Haben/Erfahrenheit*], experiential contents that are constituted in the process of socialization, in the adoption of cultural imperatives and experiential schemas handed down the generations, and in the habitualization of ways of thinking and acting, and that form the interpretive background for the events processed at the first level. (3) Finally, at the third level (long term), elements are incorporated into experience that transcend individual and generational constellations in the store of experience, relating on the one hand to human beings' basic biological and anthropological constitution and on the other to their naturally given environment, both of which can only be culturally transformed to a limited extent and extremely slowly." Ibid., p. 355.
69. While experiences relating to the content of plot/narrative can primarily be located at the first level (short term) of Breyer and Creutz's model, cinematic devices for representing history can be placed in the second level of experience (medium term). The authors' description of this level sounds almost like a description of genre conventions: "At the *second* experiential level, stocks of experience are deposited that involve consolidating repetition, 'medium-term stabilizations of experience,' and the accumulation of experiences that can mutually confirm or revise one another, and are thus likewise subject to (albeit rarely sudden) transformation that brings new experiential qualities with it." Ibid., p. 356.

70. See Bernhard Groß, *Die Filme sind unter uns: Zur Geschichtlichkeit des frühen deutschen Nachkriegskinos: Trümmer-, Genre-, Dokumentarfilm*, Berlin 2015, p. 58.
71. Ibid.
72. Hermann Kappelhoff, *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Realism*, New York 2015, p. 60.
73. Ibid., p. 64.
74. Simon Rothöhler locates the historical film outside the institutionalized discipline of history, and regards it as an innovative mode of access to history: “Knowledge generated outside institutions is the product of an unprofessional curiosity and of an epistemic mode that implicitly goes against official approaches, calls them into question, or in some cases even reveals them to stand in need of revision.” Simon Rothöhler, *Amateur der Weltgeschichte: Historiographische Praktiken im Kino der Gegenwart*, Zurich 2011, p. 8.
75. See Groß (2015, p. 68).
76. Zechner (2013, p. 15).
77. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 2005, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (last accessed May 1, 2020), thesis 5. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 2005, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (last accessed May 1, 2020), thesis 5.
78. Andreas Jacke, *Traumpassagen: Eine Filmtheorie mit Walter Benjamin*, Würzburg 2013, p. 79.
79. Benjamin (2005, thesis 5).
80. See Jacke (2013, p. 80); Benjamin (2005, thesis 17).
81. Christa Blümlinger, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst*, Berlin 2009, p. 19.
82. Ankersmit (2012, pp. 20–21).
83. See Jacke (2013, p. 80).
84. Benjamin (2005, thesis 6).
85. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1957, p. 75.
86. Ankersmit (2012, p. 43).
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Kracauer refers here to Greek mythology, in which Perseus uses the shield of Athena as a mirror in order to battle Medusa without looking at her directly. He understands the film image as an analogous tool that, following the same principle, makes it possible to face up to horrors such as the Holocaust. Kracauer (1997, p. 305).

90. When he speaks of “physical reality,” Kracauer is referring to a film’s connection to a “pool of everyday phenomena” that it has “incorporated.” See Sabine Nessel, *Kino und Ereignis: Das Kinematografische zwischen Text und Körper*, Berlin 2008, p. 48.
91. For Foucault, the mirror functions as the site of a “mixed, joint experience” where utopia and heterotopia coexist. See Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” 1984, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (last accessed May 1, 2020), p. 4.
92. Sobchack (1992, p. 9).
93. Breyer and Creutz (2010, p. 346).
94. Sobchack (1992, p. 9).
95. Jörn Rüsen, *Zerbrechende Zeit: Über den Sinn der Geschichte*, Cologne 2001, p. 82 (hereinafter Rüsen 2001).
96. Ibid.
97. See on this point Kracauer’s *History*, in which he repeatedly draws analogies between history and film. Siegfried Kracauer, *History—the Last Things Before the Last*, Princeton 1995. On the concept of the “ante-room” (*Vorraum*) of history, see Stephanie Baumann, *Im Vorraum der Geschichte: Siegfried Kracauers History: The Last Things Before the Last*, Konstanz 2014.
98. Rüsen (2001, p. 85).
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. In his film *VAKANTIE VAN DE FILMER* (The Filmmaker’s Holiday, 1974) Johan van der Keuken draws the following contrast between film and photography: “The photograph is a memory. I remember what I’m now seeing. But the film doesn’t remember anything. The film is always happening now.”
102. See Kracauer (1997, p. 303).
103. Breyer and Creutz (2010, pp. 345–346).
104. Ibid.
105. Ankersmit (2012, pp. 20–21).
106. On the concept of *punctum*, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981, pp. 26–27 and 40–60.
107. Ibid., p. 26.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., p. 57.
111. Ibid., pp. 27, 42.

112. Although Barthes himself distinguishes between film and photography, he admits to being ultimately unable to keep the two mediums separate. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
115. Francesco Casetti, *Communicative Negotiation in Cinema and Television*, Milan 2002, p. 31.
116. Barthes (1981, p. 77).
117. Ankersmit (2012, p. 43).
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## Modeling and Perceiving

The theory of histospheres posits that historical films simulate historical worlds. According to Jurij Lotman, we perceive these kinds of artificial images of the (or a) world as a “model of an infinite universe,”<sup>1</sup> a figuration that is constantly being amended by historical experience:

The spatial image of the world created by culture is situated as it were between humanity and the outer reality of Nature and is constantly drawn to these two poles. It turns to humanity in the name of the outside world whose image it is, while the historical experience of man subjects this image to constant reworking, striving for accuracy in its representation of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Lying between these poles, a histosphere is at once a model-like representation of a historical world and both a catalyst for and product of the historical experience generated by the film. Much of its power is based on strategies of aesthetic illusion. The first section of this chapter will therefore examine the theoretical concept of figuration and the special relation between cinematic illusion and historical reference. Histospheres make historical worlds sensuously available (at least seemingly so) by constructing audiovisual, spatiotemporal structures out of aesthetically composed, narratively interfused images and sounds. In the second section, I therefore analyze the strategies used by historical films to create filmic spaces and model an internally consistent, temporally arranged historical world. I argue that filmic space is manifested in a dynamic perceptual movement,

whose aesthetic design addresses imaginary historical references in the spectator's memory and thus anchors the living encounter with the space in a field of historical associations that also involves political interpretations and judgments. It therefore makes sense to combine my theoretical reflections on the construction of filmic space with theories of how film models and mediates history. Building on this, in the third section I propose that, for historical films, the film theory concept of *mise-en-scène* should be supplemented by a concept of *mise-en-histoire*: the imaginative referentialization of the historical worlds constructed by a film. The overarching aim of this chapter is to develop a theory of how filmic figurations are already fused with conceptions of history during the *mise-en-scène* process, and thereby enable historical experiences.

### FIGURATION AND ILLUSION

When Monika walks down Kurfürstendamm for the first time in *KU'DAMM 56*, the spectator is flooded with audiovisual details from the 1950s. The stores, the cars, the clothing of passersby, the bombed-out *Gedächtniskirche* in the background: Moving images and sounds are woven into a complex historical world (Fig. 5.1).



Fig. 5.1 1950s flair in *KU'DAMM 56*

Against the backdrop of the linguistic turn, historian Hayden White wrote that

It is obvious that cinema (and video) are better suited than written discourse to the actual representation of certain kinds of historical phenomena—landscape, scene, atmosphere, complex events such as wars, battles, crowds, and emotions.<sup>3</sup>

White's examples emphasize film's unique potential to not just describe a historical world but to synthesize it into an audiovisual figuration out of disparate individual elements. "Figuration" refers here to far more than the mere arrangement and constellation of the film's individual audiovisual elements in time. The concept also implies an "incarnation," a "taking form," of a word made flesh.<sup>4</sup> Unlike in the theater, this process does not unfold in an actor's physically present body; rather, the film produces its own performative body.<sup>5</sup> In the gaze of the film's body, a material world, the film's physical reality, is manifested.<sup>6</sup> As a concept describing how literary works create worlds, figuration is based on a correlation between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience.<sup>7</sup> Philosopher Paul Ricœur defines figuration as "provid[ing] ourselves with a figure [*se figurer*] of the context of life [...] of the world surrounding the relic that today is missing."<sup>8</sup> Narrative allows the historical world to be experienced in time. In his model of threefold mimesis, Ricœur shows how the "symbolic order of extra-textual reality and the worlds created in the fictional medium" enter into a "relationship of reciprocal influence and change."<sup>9</sup> While "prefigurations" require us first to "preunderstand" the semantics, symbolic system, and temporality of human action, "configurations" serve a central mediating role.<sup>10</sup> The "configurational act" produces a historical narrative as an organic whole by arranging its elements in the order of time: "It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole."<sup>11</sup> At the intersection between the world of the text and that of the reader, there finally occurs a "refiguration" "wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality."<sup>12</sup> The act of reading places the text into a relation with the reader's experiences. Ricœur understands refiguration as a process "by which the text unfolds, as it were, a world in front of itself."<sup>13</sup> The central element of his theory, meanwhile, is "configuration," which mediates between "prefiguration" and "refiguration," or as he puts it: "We are following

therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time.”<sup>14</sup>

Applied to the concept of the histosphere, proceeding from a starting point of “prefiguration” (the spectator’s prior knowledge), the “configuration” arranges the film’s various aesthetic elements in time and makes it possible to experience them as a historical world<sup>15</sup>; then, finally, a “refiguration” occurs during reception of the film. In film experience, the spectator’s experiences and memories blend with the audiovisually configured historical world. This results in an audiovisual form of historical experience, the special status of which can also be explained by reference to Ricœur, who speaks of an “*interweaving* reference between history and narrative fiction.”<sup>16</sup> While history (re)constructs the past in the reader’s imagination using methods borrowed from narrative fiction, fiction in turn borrows history’s “reference through traces.”<sup>17</sup>

Histospheres make use of this reciprocal relationship. On the basis of a fiction film’s mimetic and narrative qualities, they construct an audiovisual figuration of history whose historical “reference through traces” utilizes strategies of aesthetic illusion. Illusion is understood here not as an attempt at manipulation that could lead us “to believe something that would not hold up if we were ‘better informed.’”<sup>18</sup> Rather, in illusion we attain “a view of the world that does not simply distort reality, but imaginatively rebuilds it.”<sup>19</sup> Although in historical films we allow ourselves to be playfully transported into historical worlds, we never fully succumb to the illusion.<sup>20</sup> However, this “awareness of illusion” does not disrupt it, “but serves as the framework within which the aesthetic illusion is able to unfold in the first place.”<sup>21</sup> Gertrud Koch concludes from this that film too produces a reflexive relation to the “world of appearances.”<sup>22</sup> The fiction assumes “its own dimension of reality” that “is directed at an empirical artifact that cannot be uniquely determined but is able time and again to assume different forms in experience.”<sup>23</sup> This implies that the reflexive level of the aesthetic illusion affects how we experience and interpret the historical worlds constructed by film. In addition to its immersive, affective, and illusory potential, a histosphere creates a fluid understanding of history that leaves scope for reflection and interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, if (as claimed by Moses Mendelssohn) artificiality creates inner coherence and appears more probable than the actual realities of nature,<sup>25</sup> this would allow us to make another connection to Ankersmit’s concept of historical experience, which (as discussed in the previous chapter) he claims results from the “improbable probability” of a work of art.<sup>26</sup> This creates a feeling

of authenticity, which marks out the fiction as a possible world without perfecting the illusion. This has consequences for our historical consciousness, for our very knowledge that a historical film is an audiovisual figuration of historical worlds opens up deeper levels of reflection. As Koch puts it,

In the aesthetic realm, the world is conveyed by creating worlds. The central focus is not on depicting and describing the world, but on constructing worlds that can contain implicit stances toward the world.<sup>27</sup>

Following the philosopher Stanley Cavell, Koch understands film as “photographic presentations of the world set in motion.”<sup>28</sup> Analogously, histospheres can be described as “photographic presentations of historical worlds set in motion.” Thus, a fundamental condition for films’ construction of historical worlds is that the “fictional space of a filmic world [...] builds on illusion,” since “the illusorily experienced world is recognized not just as fictional but also as worldly [*welthaltig*: ‘world-containing,’ ‘world-encompassing’].”<sup>29</sup> We experience a film’s figuration of history as an illusion of a living historical world that is linked to our empirical world and other worlds. The cinematic illusion stands in a relation of mimesis to the prefilmic world (though without attempting to recreate that world). In historical films, this reference to the prefilmic world also includes the historical past, and so it is necessary to introduce an additional referential and reflexive dimension. The images of the world constructed in aesthetic fiction serve a commentary function, and can “refer to the empirical world in a manner not all that dissimilar from scientific fictions.”<sup>30</sup>

A histosphere thus allows us to make three sorts of hypotheses: (1) about our present-day empirical world, (2) about our conceptions of the historical past, and (3) about history as narrative construction. It also has great intuitive persuasiveness, since “the perception of movement enabled by an objective illusion becomes the signifier of a living presence that cannot be escaped.”<sup>31</sup> A histosphere can thus produce a figuration of a living historical world that we are able to sensuously experience despite its model-like character. This marks a point of connection between the theory of histospheres and the ideas of Lotman, who regards the work of art as “a finite model of an infinite universe [...] the reflection of one reality in another, that is, it is always a *translation*.”<sup>32</sup> Although Lotman is thinking here mainly of textual world constructions, one aspect of his argument does implicitly relate to the specific qualities of film. Based on an

understanding of art as a modeling system, Lotman describes a playful mechanism based on the fact “that the different meanings of an element do not sit rigidly side by side, but ‘oscillate.’”<sup>33</sup> As a possible world, a histosphere is “wholly real,” yet there is also no doubt that it is merely a figuration, a historical “semblant world.”<sup>34</sup>

This hybrid status is especially apparent in the depiction of historical figures, which oscillates between mimetic *imitatio*, that is, mere impersonation, and interpretive embodiment.<sup>35</sup> In the historical world constructed by a film, “the actor’s ‘this-has-been’ and the role’s”<sup>36</sup> are augmented by a third dimension: the mythical image we have of historical figures. Our perceptions and appraisals of the depictions of historical figures and events on screen depend not just on historical discourses but also on social and cultural ones, all of which are in turn influenced by media figurations. This imaginary desideratum, rooted in our socialization and our conceptions of history (some of which are products of media), may potentially be in competition with the performative embodiment of historical figures in film. However, what is at stake here is not mere rhetorical confirmation that the depicted historical figure does not correspond to reality; rather, the tension between the film’s persuasiveness and our critical reflection is part of the “game.”<sup>37</sup> By participating playfully in the modeling of a historical world, we actively contribute to the success of the illusion, without ever really forgetting that it is “only” a film.

Of particular significance for the filmic figuration of historical worlds is histospheres’ referential structure. A historical film’s *Welthaltigkeit*, the degree to which it “contains,” “encompasses,” or “relates to” the or a world, is measured by its imaginary historical referents. These may, like artifacts, buildings, or landscapes, actually exist in reality, but in the moment of reception they are generally absent and thus just as imaginary as all the other elements of the cinematic world. Christian Metz uses the term “imaginary referent” to describe the “piece of (imaginary) reality” from which the spectator assumes the story has been “extracted.”<sup>38</sup> The associated “vague but strong”<sup>39</sup> feeling, similar to Barthes’s “reality effect,”<sup>40</sup> is manifested with particular intensity if we believe we recognize elements of the histosphere as constituents of earlier experiences. The chains of associations thus triggered very often refer to media signifiers of history that take the place of actual historical events, overlay them in our memories, and denote them as historically significant. The theory of histospheres has parallels here with historian Alison Landsberg’s concept of “prosthetic memory”<sup>41</sup>: In both cases, media depictions of historical



worlds make history accessible to wider audiences, and subsequently feel like a personal experience. Most of the “pieces of imaginary reality” to which historical films’ imaginary referents refer follow this pattern and so are themselves elements of a fictional media reality. The imaginary referents of filmic figurations of history are thus also mediatized referents; the past and the historical realities simulated by media can no longer be disentangled at this level. Jean Baudrillard refers to this phenomenon as “hyper-reality.” For him, historical films are not representations of historical reality, but autonomous models that produce an “operational scenario of history.”<sup>42</sup> Baudrillard thus anticipates the historicizing core of histspheres, which do not reproduce the past but themselves produce history as media reality.

### SPACE, TIME, AND FILMIC WORLD

The start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* shows images of border fortifications, no man’s land, and warning signs in rapid succession. It is not yet possible to form a coherent sense of a homogeneous filmic space, but the sequence does model a distinctively cinematic perception of space not bound by rules of central perspective. The “image space”<sup>43</sup> visible within each individual shot functions as a segment of a spatial world accessible to sensuous experience. Slight adjustments of the camera, clouds drifting in the sky, and grass stirring in the wind reveal that these are not static images. The spectator’s gaze takes in focal planes, perspectives, and proportions; it looks for clues to the spatial relations between the individual shots (Figs. 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5).

Based on our visual experience of watching films, we anticipate a spatial structure. The credibility of this space depends not on its historical accuracy but on whether it *feels* right. As Simon Rothöhler puts it,

When it comes to our ability to enter into historical spaces in film, carefully placed details and the general haptic design matter more than historiographic perspectives.<sup>44</sup>

This view is consonant with Oliver Schmidt’s thesis that the spectator, as a perceiving and experiencing subject, “is the link between the filmic space and the conception of a self-contained filmic world.”<sup>45</sup>

However, for a historical world to unfold in an interplay of spatial illusion, narration, and synesthetic experience requires not just a spatial but



**Figs. 5.2–5.5** Image space and perspective in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

also a temporal figuration. In the first moments of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the time of the action appears to be standing still, and the space in which the action unfolds can only be vaguely mapped out. Only when the music briefly falls silent, the narrator dates the events to “late summer 1952,” and the camera pans from the closed-off railway bridge to the river along the border do we get the impression that the filmic world is now opening up so that the narrative can begin. The camera jumps to a lightly wooded area and tilts down, following the refugees emerging from the trees. The interactions between the characters and the filmic world constitute a “space of narrative action.”<sup>46</sup> The refugees always move from right to left. Even when the camera follows the smuggler with a long pan in the opposite direction, fixed visual points like the wood, the bridge, and the border river established at the start allow us to keep our bearings (Figs. 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9). The individual image spaces are connected by the movements in front of the camera as well as the movement of the camera itself, and by the audiovisual montage. The consistent light design and the establishment of an auditive space across shots create continuity.<sup>47</sup> This



Figs. 5.6–5.9 Spatial orientation in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

means the historical world configured by the film is not merely a “space of narrative action” that the characters can move about in, but also a cohesive “filmic space” experienceable by us spectators.<sup>48</sup> The limited number of locations in which the action unfolds is in line with the narrative need for a small, bounded cosmos; however, as a filmic world, this cosmos nevertheless also points beyond itself.

A brief glance at the first few minutes of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is enough to make clear the extent to which a histosphere is also a spatial phenomenon. Similar to Arnheim’s distinction between “film image” and “world image,” filmic space has a dual character: The concept refers, on the one hand, “to the technical act of *constructing space* on screen by means of stylistic cinematic devices (*film image*), on the other to the *depiction of space* as part of a complete homogeneous filmic world (*world image*).”<sup>49</sup> “Space” is an “organizing schema based on the spectator’s perceptual capacity, but at the same time a specific quality ascribed to the perceived world by the spectator.”<sup>50</sup> The filmic world is composed of the sum of individual spatial impressions: “What is experienced are concrete *world spaces*, that is to say,

pieces of the world that are linked together and, as a structure of connected spaces, represent the basis for developing an all-encompassing world model.”<sup>51</sup> This is even truer of histospheres: The world spaces figured by a film are constructed segments of presupposed historical worlds, which are only pieced together in our perception of them and which we augment with our historical and cultural world knowledge. This is in accord with central ideas of the spatial turn<sup>52</sup> in the social and cultural sciences, which according to Schmidt is generally characterized by three tendencies:

(1) Space tends to no longer be regarded as something absolute but as something relational and hence as dynamic and malleable; (2) space tends to be regarded less as a given reality and more as a synthetic product that is only realized in perception; (3) space tends to be regarded as a meaning-bearing aesthetic structure that is lived and experienced by human beings and thus has a fundamentally processual character.<sup>53</sup>

The medium of film can accordingly be understood as “a kind of cognitive and phenomenological *laboratory of space*”<sup>54</sup> in which historical worlds can be spatially and temporally modeled and opened up to synesthetic experience. The perception and form of the resulting “spatial hypothesis”<sup>55</sup> are dependent on aesthetic design. Schmidt therefore proposes

by way of distinction from the narratological term *fictional worlds*, which understands literary or cinematic worlds as systems of counterfactual states of affairs, in the case of film to also speak of *aestheticized worlds*, that is to say, of designed, sensuously experienced perceptual systems.<sup>56</sup>

On this view, the filmic space at the start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is not merely understood in terms of topography or coordinate systems, but is sensuously experienced. Out of the audiovisual elements of the individual image spaces, we assemble an aestheticized world. The movement of the characters and the camera and the composition of the montage allow the image spaces to interact and merge into a living encounter with the filmic space.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as an effect of the figuration of movement, the filmic space “seeks to be perceived in its compositionality as something represented, that is, to be referred back to intention, meaningful structure, and expression.”<sup>58</sup> This remark by Kappelhoff formulates a fundamental condition for conveying historicity in historical films: In order to

be perceived as a historical world, the filmic space must first express itself as such, that is to say, it must be both sensuously available and refer to historical world knowledge.

As well as the illusion of a spatial filmic world, a histosphere also models a sociocultural space that can be assigned to a particular historical time in virtue of “cultural artifacts such as architecture, clothing, everyday objects, language, ways of behaving, specific individuals and events, and music.”<sup>59</sup> The histosphere is by no means neutral or impartial in this process. The filmic figuration of a historical space always presents the space from a particular perspective and in a particular aesthetic, pieces it together in a particular way, and places it in relation to other filmic and historical spaces. Histospheres thus not only construct historical worlds, but also explain, interpret, and comment on them.<sup>60</sup> To give one example, the office of Anna’s factory manager in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* has glass doors and walls, giving a view of a large factory floor. The transparency of the glass panes not only adds another visual layer to the film image but also creates an aesthetic of surveillance that marks the GDR as a totalitarian state. A counterpart is provided by Anna’s parents-in-law’s cramped, densely packed grocery store, which serves as a concrete spatial expression of West Germany’s consumerist market economy and small-minded bourgeois attitudes (Figs. 5.10 and 5.11). Both settings can be understood as a cinematic variety of a chronotope, in which space merges with its conventionalized functions.<sup>61</sup> Filmic space, plot, and historical interpretation are thus expressed in a single, temporally structured experience.



**Figs. 5.10–5.11** East German surveillance and West German consumerism in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

However, it is not just the historical worlds of historical films that are inseparably bound up with a temporal dimension, but also filmic space in general.<sup>62</sup> This interrelationship can be traced back historically: The technical, cultural, and artistic foundations of moving images date from the late nineteenth century, when space was increasingly measured in terms of time. Accordingly, the way films figure and model experientially available historical worlds depends not just on the geometric and physical construction of filmic space, but also the arrangement and realization of that space in time. Kappelhoff describes the film image as a temporal structure “that is spatialized as a perceptual world in the spectators’ physically present seeing and hearing,” taking up Erwin Panofsky’s concepts of the “dynamization of space” and “spatialization of time.”<sup>63</sup> This specifically filmic synthesis of space and time is especially evident in the illusion of movement: “Space itself, not the picture of space in perspective presentation is what we experience here,” as Balázs puts it.<sup>64</sup> The dimension of time allows the spectator, aided by montage and the movement of the camera, to piece the filmic space together and imaginatively move about in it. If this “imaginary movement of the body”<sup>65</sup> through space is understood as not just a visual and aural but also a kinesthetic phenomenon, this marks another point of connection to phenomenological approaches to film. In Sobchack’s theory of film as embodied experience, a central place is occupied by the moving camera as the expression of an intentionality equivalent to a perceiving human consciousness.<sup>66</sup> Only in this perceptual movement, anchored in space and time, can a relative off-screen space be constructed. Koch links this condition to her reflections on filmic illusion:

The camera’s dual function of both producing optical-perspectival image space and constantly opening this space up to an assumed outside through movement creates the illusion that the space extends beyond what is visible. The illusory effect of this perspectivity goes beyond purely inscribing a point of view. For it is not simply the rapid alternation of locations but the possibility, suggested by the movement, of being able to move around the off-screen spaces that creates an illusory surplus.<sup>67</sup>

*SKY WITHOUT STARS* likewise creates the illusion of a filmic space that it is possible to “move around” in. As Anna flees from the border guards, we see long shots and medium close-ups of her crossing the river, interspersed with close-ups of a soldier shooting at her (Figs. 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, and 5.15). The choice of perspective is not limited to point-of-view shots



**Figs. 5.12–5.15** A filmic space in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* in which spectators can “move around”

linked to particular characters. Quite the contrary: No location is inaccessible to the camera, even if it appears to be floating over the water. The physical laws of the “space of narrative action” matter little to the camera. Instead, the individual filmic spaces stand in a narrative chronology in which the filmic world is gradually disclosed through our perception of camera movements and montage.<sup>68</sup> “The work grows step by step into a whole, and as we accompany its progress we must constantly hark back to what has disappeared from direct perception by ear or eye, but survives in memory,” as Rudolf Arnheim writes.<sup>69</sup> A similar form of perception can also be observed in the activity of the historian, who successively studies the available sources and relates them to each other.<sup>70</sup>

In a histosphere, this historiographical method and the film’s perceptual movement are combined: In our perception, we assemble the disparate elements of the film into a historical world that we experience not just with our bodies/senses but also as a discursive system. The aesthetics of the space and the movement through the filmic world are translated into



meaning. This production of meaning depends, *inter alia*, on the principles governing the movement that discloses the filmic world.<sup>71</sup> The tripod shots at the start of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* convey a different experience of space than the shaky handheld shots in the famous Omaha Beach sequence in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* (1998; dir. Steven Spielberg). Both films use classic shot–reverse shot montages and consistent directions of movement. But although the filmic spaces are constructed in a similar way, the way these spaces are experienced differs. While in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* we can calmly observe the characters’ actions in an already-constructed filmic space, in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* the filmic space is constructed by the characters’ movements, which sweep the spectator along with them. To a much greater extent than in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the camera appears to be subject to the physical forces of the filmic world, so that whereas in Kätner’s film the historical world is primarily observed, *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* constitutes a space of extreme physical experience. What this shows is that histospheres do not just illusorily reconstruct historical spaces, but also “use the movement of images to create a spatial experience *sui generis*,”<sup>72</sup> which forms the film’s historical worlds out of its perceptual movement.<sup>73</sup> A histosphere makes us feel as if we are traveling back in time. The illusory experience is often so strong that the end of the film represents not merely a dramaturgical closure, “but, in a broader sense, the possibility to either switch off an entire world—or disseminate it outside [the movie theater].”<sup>74</sup> Put another way: Just as the filmic space is assembled over a passage of time, it disappears again at the end of the film. However, the way the film’s historical world is perceived and experienced leaves traces that are inscribed in our conceptions and interpretations of history.

A special relation between space and time also exists at the level of film sound. To an even greater extent than the moving image, which stands in a relation of similarity to the static single image, sound can *only* be perceived over a passage of time. The specific arrangement of film sound in time plays a key role in cohering the separate image spaces into a homogeneous filmic world. Ordered autonomously alongside the images, sound bridges cuts and creates spatial continuities.<sup>75</sup> One example of this effect is when Anna, following her dramatic escape over the river, meets the border guard Carl Altmann for the first time. The continuous chirping of crickets links the individual shots together into a homogeneous space in which the action plays out. The ambience<sup>76</sup> mediates between depiction and perception: It models the filmic space and infuses it with a mood capable of affecting the spectator emotionally.<sup>77</sup> Sound can also create an off-screen



space of varying sizes.<sup>78</sup> In Anna's parents-in-law's grocery store, at first we can only see Otto Friese (Gustav Knuth) serving a customer outside the entrance. But when we hear his wife Elsbeth (Camilla Spira) talking to another customer at the checkout, we form an imaginary picture of the inside of the shop before we can see it. The world of a histosphere is constructed not just by sight but also by sound. The soundtrack's "instant credibility" makes the illusion of space feel believable.<sup>79</sup> Balázs observed that the particular "timbre" of sound can give us the impression of being in the midst of the depicted events.<sup>80</sup> Noises in particular can give the filmic world substance and a haptic quality.<sup>81</sup> Film sound can also situate the action in a particular historical period.<sup>82</sup> The characteristic chime of the cash register in Otto's store, for instance, can be dated fairly confidently to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> While from individual noises it may only be possible to get a very imprecise sense of where and when a film is set, we will get a clearer idea once multiple sound objects are arranged into complex soundscapes: The whirring, squealing, and clattering of the car, the voices of the passengers, and the crackling PA system at the start of *KU'DAMM 56* allow us to recognize the Berlin subway train.<sup>84</sup> But only in combination with film images can the setting be identified as the 1950s. A histosphere's world is based on an audiovisually configured, perceptually constructed spatiotemporal structure that develops added value through the specific interactions between image and sound.<sup>85</sup> The image spaces constructed by a film and the historical worlds assembled in the spectator's temporally structured perceptions are thus not the sum but the product of visual and aural stimuli.

The relation between filmic space and characters also influences the constellation of characters. While many historical films adopt the single- or dual-protagonist structure that has dominated throughout film history, there has been a tendency in more recent examples toward larger ensembles, allowing the historical world constructed by the film to be explored from multiple perspectives. This can already be seen in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, which augments the traditional structure, based around a single central couple, with other key characters. Anna's frail grandparents on one side of the border and her parents-in-law and son Jochen on the other form a dual structure in which East and West are historicized as a spatial order. There is a tendency away from a classical, "temporally causal, psychologically motivated narrative trajectory directed at compromise" toward a spatially organized structure.<sup>86</sup> This early example heralds the emergence of "a *different logic of narration*," which Margrit Tröhler connects to the

growing trend for films with “plural character constellations.”<sup>87</sup> According to Tröhler, these films are “bound less to individual, binary positions than to relational dynamics, preferring flat or fluid structures, the differentiation of values, and inconclusive negotiation of contradictions.”<sup>88</sup> No satisfactory dramaturgical resolution is achieved in our specific example either; instead, Anna and Carl drift back and forth between the topographical coordinates of divided Germany, without being able to bridge this divide. The third space, the no man’s land between the barriers of the inner German border into which the lovers retreat for a brief time, ultimately proves to be an illusion. While *SKY WITHOUT STARS* only gestures toward plural character constellations, ensembles like that in *KU’DAMM 56* usually have a spatial center that exerts “a *centripetal* force on the narrower and broader circle of its members,” incorporates them into the same heterogeneous constellation, and brings them together at a central location.<sup>89</sup> In *KU’DAMM 56*, one such “chronotope of encounter”<sup>90</sup> is constituted by the Galant dance school, where the characters’ paths are constantly crossing, conflicts play out, and hardships are endured. The spatial dimension of this culminating point is also supplemented by a historical one, for it gradually emerges that the school was confiscated from its previous Jewish owners under the Nazi regime and given to the Schöllack family. *KU’DAMM 56*’s serial structure is one key factor that enables these sorts of “complex narrative forms, which are connected to a broad ensemble of characters.”<sup>91</sup>

Another form of plural character constellation is the *character mosaic*. Many and diverse characters are arranged within a complex narrative structure, but mostly do not know or interact with each other.<sup>92</sup> This sort of constellation can already be found in episodic films like Helmut Käutner’s *IN THOSE DAYS (IN JENEN TAGEN, 1947)*, which is temporally and spatially organized around the changing owners of a single car. In the multilayered construction of a more recent film like *DUNKIRK (2017; dir. Christopher Nolan)*, the spatial dimension comes even more strongly to the fore. The flow of the linear narrative is interrupted by jumps in time and the repetition of the same events from different perspectives. The film’s narrative structure is reorganized based on the characters’ spatial configuration, in the manner of a scientist setting up an experiment. This high degree of artificiality openly declares the simulated historical world “to be an imaginary construction, and the interconnecting narrative plays with ‘relations’ of all kinds—structural, semantic, plastic—thereby heightening the films’ expressivity.”<sup>93</sup> A histosphere is consequently experienced

not just as a historical world but also as a *model*, a *figuration* of such a world. At the same time, plural character constellations often appear “to borrow from the social dynamics and patterns of everyday experience.”<sup>94</sup> Historical films and television shows whose simulated worlds differ especially sharply from the spectators’ day-to-day reality also tend to place particular emphasis on figurations that link the film’s historical world to familiar iconographies and the spectators’ embodied memories.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, by contrast with many biopics and classical historical films, films with plural character constellations often dispense with traditional heroes and develop, as “cultural praxis,” different modes of encounter with the Other.<sup>96</sup> The open historical worlds created by this approach foster a changed experience of history. An intense sense of contingency undermines the experience of determinism that may be engendered by the spectator’s knowledge of history. A plural character constellation allows the depicted historical processes to be explored from multiple perspectives and lived as undetermined, contingent, present events.

#### FROM MISE-EN-SCÈNE TO MISE-EN-HISTOIRE

The inside of a subway car: passengers in long coats, almost all of them wearing hats, the women in skirts, the men in jackets and cotton pants. Spread evenly throughout the space, framed by brass handrails and light brown wood paneling, they stand or sit, reading newspapers or staring mutely into space. A young man is reading an article about an Elvis concert out loud, accompanied by the even whirring, clattering, and squealing of the train and the subtle piano tones of the score. Lamps with domed milk glass covers douse the scene in a diffuse light, which further accentuates the brown and gray tones of the decor and costumes (Fig. 5.16). After just a few seconds, we know that this sequence from the start of *KU'DAMM 56* is set in the past. A historical world is staged for our eyes and ears, which is given particular intuitive persuasiveness by the interactions between the film’s aesthetic operations and our perception.

The way we perceive the simulated historical world in a film is based, first and foremost, on the arrangement and organization of characters in space and the structuring of spatial relations in time: in short, on the *mise-en-scène*, which constitutes the filmic space, organizing “all visible and audible elements, both intraframe and interframe.”<sup>97</sup> The choice of camera angles, the image composition, and the sound design are geared toward the logic of the later montage.<sup>98</sup> The *mise-en-scène* thus directs our



Fig. 5.16 Staging of history in KU'DAMM 56

perceptions both within and between the frames.<sup>99</sup> The effect of a three-dimensional filmic space is created only “through artistically arranged [*inszenatorische*] connections between the visual structures.” The *mise-en-scène* constructs this effect “by means of recessive compositions, sculptural lighting, or alternating camera perspectives.”<sup>100</sup> Although this description is focused on the visual level, we should not forget that filmic space is also shaped by sound.<sup>101</sup> Through the interplay of film image and film sound, the *mise-en-scène* opens up an audiovisual space of events that not only structures the filmic world aesthetically, but also communicates it audiovisually.<sup>102</sup> *Mise-en-scène* thus proves to be an essential concept for the theory and praxis of histospheres. If a histosphere is a filmic figuration of a historical world, *mise-en-scène* is its “sensuously tangible texture.”<sup>103</sup> It oscillates between signifying practice and mediating entity; Ivo Ritzer writes that the *mise-en-scène* “does not relay a fixed meaning from senders to receivers, but rather opens up a discourse between these poles, which in the process of media signification are both constructed and contained within it.”<sup>104</sup> Applied to historical films, this means that in the interaction between artistic arrangement and perception, the *mise-en-scène* configures a historical world while also being part of the form of representation.<sup>105</sup> A histosphere is not just a representation of a historical world, but also a discursive construction and performative act.

Our ability to perceive the historical filmic world organized by the *mise-en-scène* as historically connoted is, in turn, connected to a special process of referentialization. I call this process *mise-en-histoire*. *Mise-en-histoire* referentializes the world formed out of the film's audiovisual figurations in popular historical consciousness and reciprocally links it to the spectators' individual conceptions of history.<sup>106</sup> While the *mise-en-scène* organizes the performative act of staging and the world created by it, and makes this world and act experientially available to spectators, the *mise-en-histoire* establishes a relation to collective and individual conceptions of the historical past. *Experiencing* a histosphere thus involves not just perceiving a historical world constructed by the film, but also the associations triggered by it. The potential historical meanings and references manifested in this process in turn have multiple layers. For instance, the aesthetic design of the figurative surfaces also simulates historical aesthetics, representational practices, and media technologies.<sup>107</sup> In KU'DAMM 56, for example, the colors look slightly faded, reminiscent of old photographs from the 1950s (Figs. 5.17 and 5.18). This reference to historical media not only gestures toward other media signifiers of historicity but also connects to the spectator's own mental pictures, which may be based on media experiences but are not necessarily consciously linked to them. In this way, the *mise-en-histoire* invests a histosphere with a relational temporality and a spatial structure organized within this temporality.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of narrative theory, this schema is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "artistic" or "literary chronotope," which fuses "spatial and temporal indicators [...] into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole."<sup>109</sup> Space and time are interwoven:

Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.<sup>110</sup>

Consequently, in their "correlative combination" space and time generate "a new *tertium* and gain in materiality and plasticity."<sup>111</sup> Bakhtin's reflections are focused on the novel, but can also be applied to film. While *mise-en-scène* comprises the arrangement of characters in space and time, *mise-en-histoire* interweaves them with popular historical narratives. This narrative dimension of histospheres affirms Hayden White's thesis that history is necessarily narrative.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the historical referentiality



Figs. 5.17–5.18 Faded colors in KU<sup>3</sup>DAMM 56 and in a contemporary photograph

of visual and aural elements of film grants us an intentional mode of access to history that interacts with our media-influenced conceptions of history. The notion of a chronotope, referring to a narrative “increase in density and concreteness of time markers—the time of human life, of historical time—that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas” that serve as the “primary point from which ‘scenes’ [...] unfold,”<sup>113</sup> is thus also highly



relevant for historical films and can be understood as the spatiotemporal nucleus of the *mise-en-histoire*, the process of historical referentialization.

The *mise-en-histoire* is also closely interwoven with aesthetic design. When the *mise-en-scène* “tells and shows,” when it creates “content through form,”<sup>114</sup> then there is a particular focus on camerawork. “Lighting, scenery and decoration, costumes and make-up, bodies and objects”<sup>115</sup>—all aspects of the *mise-en-scène* are geared toward the gaze of the camera. As an integral part of the *mise-en-scène*, the camera gives “the arrangement of scenic elements in space its specific effect” and creates “new spatial relations.”<sup>116</sup> The camera synthesizes all the visual elements of the filmic world. The way in which it captures and represents the depicted space and the characters arranged within it determines how we perceive them. In an early scene in *KU'DAMM 56*, the camera tilts up from the floor of the dancehall, accompanied by the soaring orchestral tones of Don Cornell's “Most of All.” Dance teacher Caterina Schöllack (Claudia Michelsen) strides directly toward us between lines of smartly dressed young people. The strict central perspective is underscored by the visual layers stretching back into the depths of the image. When Caterina turns around directly in front of the camera, the film cuts to a reverse angle. A crabbing shot follows her as she makes her way back through the lines to her starting point, interrupted by over-the-shoulder perspectives that link back to the first shot of the sequence. The *mise-en-scène* depicts the dance school as if it were a military drill ground (Figs. 5.19, 5.20, 5.21, and 5.22). In combination with the *mise-en-histoire*, this sets up the way the series will present the 1950s: as a struggle between the restoration of social order and the younger generation's yearning for freedom. To the beat of Cornell's ballad, the sequence's audiovisual choreography explores the characters and space, and casts them into a certain picture of history. Directed toward “the externalization of an inner expression,”<sup>117</sup> the camera constructs a historical world. “By modeling, it delineates, accentuates, interprets”<sup>118</sup> that which lies before it.

The camera structures the perceptions of the spectating subject and prefigures their reception “by seeking to have the pro-filmic gaze coincide with the filmophanic image that is projected or broadcast onto the screen.”<sup>119</sup> This can also be seen in the depiction of the eponymous Kurfürstendamm, Berlin's famous shopping boulevard. At the start of *KU'DAMM 56*, a crane shot lowers us into the historical scenery. The camera then tracks back as we watch Monika walking through the film's constructed 1950s reality: stores with awnings and neon signs in the style of



Figs. 5.19–5.22 Dance class or military drill? *Mise-en-scène* in KU'DAMM



Fig. 5.23 The film's historical world in KU'DAMM 56



the period, advertising pillars and display cases, passersby and sales clerks in authentic costume (Fig. 5.23). The *mise-en-scène* prefigures the histosphere's spatial coordinates, which the spectator assembles in their mind into a coherent historical world. The space of the historical world generated by the film is thus always an interpretation of the spatial arrangement of elements, which in turn is enriched by the spectator's memories and associations. However, we are not simply passively subjected to this intentional perspectivation: On Sobchack's phenomenological theory of film, the way film arranges its various elements is based around a dual structure of seeing and being seen.<sup>120</sup> With the gaze of the cinematic subject, the camera addresses the gaze of the spectator, which perceives the film images both as the presented world and as an intentional point of view on that world.<sup>121</sup> Our perceptions of a histosphere also oscillate between pleurably exploring a depicted past and observing (though no less appreciatively) the arrangement of audiovisual elements itself. Sobchack's concept of a doubled gaze thus also enables a re-perspectivation that casts a new light on historical filmic worlds.

Relation to reality is a significant aspect of both *mise-en-scène* and the historical film genre. For instance, the paratextual information that a film was shot in "original locations" creates a feeling of authenticity; we implicitly believe that traces of a-filmic reality will have been inscribed into its histosphere, which would imply that the use of original locations creates something like a Benjamin-esque aura. However, the reproducibility of the medium of film casts doubt on this.<sup>122</sup> The theory of *mise-en-scène* holds that a-filmic reality merely provides "raw material for the pro-filmic," which comprises "all elements of an image that are situated before the camera and intentionally recorded by it for the purpose of media transmission."<sup>123</sup> This formulation leaves it open whether at least the *unintentionally* recorded elements of film images or film sound should not also be assigned to a-filmic reality. But here too the "camera's ineluctable molding process" takes effect, giving all elements in the "event space" the status of scenery.<sup>124</sup> Put another way: Everything that we see and hear, including in historical films, even what the camera and sound equipment have recorded unintentionally, is per se artificial and synthetic. The indexical connection to a-filmic reality can exist only as interference, as the "noise of the real."<sup>125</sup> Film images thus have a dual status: Firstly, they can be defined as aesthetic images in isolation from anything external to them; secondly, "they are characterized by their reference to an external totality, whose continuous alteration they articulate as duration over time."<sup>126</sup> *Mise-en-scène* and

*mise-en-histoire* are thus based on the same principle: They make “that which is absent medially present on the screen.”<sup>127</sup> However, their referents differ in terms of time: While the referent of the *mise-en-scène* is the a-filmic reality at the time of filming, the referent of the *mise-en-histoire* is an imaginary historical point of time. Two layers of historicity overlap, creating a hybrid form of temporality.

This opens up scope for interpretation concerning the depicted historical location. It is often not possible to identify the filming location from the film images. *Mise-en-scène* transforms places into aesthetic units. The camera’s gaze turns “even a-filmically existing places into scenic elements, by imposing a particular perspective on them.”<sup>128</sup> This means that the history of films’ production is sometimes rather surprising. KU’DAMM 56, for instance, was not filmed in “original locations.” For aesthetic and logistical reasons, the eponymous boulevard had to be moved to a different street, which was transformed into the historical setting by means of set design and postproduction.<sup>129</sup> Even the ruins of the *Gedächtniskirche* were inserted into the background later on. This shows that the feeling of authenticity that creeps over us when we enter into a film’s historical world is more an effect of how the elements are arranged and staged than an indication of an actual indexical link to history, and that histospheres, incorporated into specific social and cultural constellations and their historicity, are the product of a “creative camera” that does not simply reproduce historical images but imprints a particular “vision” on them.<sup>130</sup>

Audiovisual figurations of historical worlds can also be viewed critically. For instance, Fredric Jameson complains of “aesthetic colonization” in which in-depth historical discourses have been replaced by the historicity of an audiovisual style.<sup>131</sup> On this view, a histosphere would be little more than an aesthetic attribute. However, Jameson misunderstands the complex historicity of film described by authors such as Jacques Rancière.<sup>132</sup> Jameson’s overly simplistic attempt to pit “real” history against “fake” history also overlooks the divergence between, and processual character of, different approaches to history. Kracauer, by contrast, sees in the misguided intention to “reproduce” the past in all its complexity a structural parallel between history and “camera-reality,” which are both “partly patterned, partly amorphous.”<sup>133</sup> He says that both history and film challenge their “adepts” to “capture a given universe.”<sup>134</sup> Histospheres unite these two approaches through the combination of *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-histoire*. However, while the concept of “camera-reality” refers solely to the historical point in time at which an image was produced, a histosphere

has twofold access to history: Firstly, it is linked to the time of the film's production by the historicity of the aesthetic design. Secondly, the film's depiction of a historical period also refers to a larger historical referent and its myriad representations in media. A histosphere is thus a kind of puzzle picture in which different layers of the past overlap. At the same time, it conveys an intense feeling of being-in-the-world. The synesthetic quality of the filmic staging gives the simulated historical world a sensuously tangible materiality. For film scholar Anne Rutherford, *mise-en-scène* is the crucial link between cinema's material dimensions and affective potential.<sup>135</sup> As a "synthesizing aspect," *mise-en-scène* connects the filmic staging to "the spectating subject's corporal perception."<sup>136</sup> The resulting "body of media experience"<sup>137</sup> can once again be connected to Sobchack's phenomenological reflections on the film's body.<sup>138</sup> Sobchack describes an incarnated perception, a film's embodied perspective on the filmic world that the spectator can both view from the outside and live through and interoceptively experience themselves.<sup>139</sup> *Mise-en-scène* models the film's perspective and conveys the cinematic space as a "lived space."<sup>140</sup> Building on this process, the historical film produces a living relation to subjective conceptions and popular representations of history through a synthesis of artistic arrangement and modeling, embodied film experience, and *mise-en-histoire*. A histosphere's simulated historical world becomes a lived world: We are put into a mode of embodied, living encounter with history.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I attempted to develop a concept of histospheres based on filmic figurations. The worlds modeled using the devices of film design are already fused with conceptions of history during the *mise-en-scène* process, enabling a living, physically palpable encounter with the past. Histospheres are thus both a catalyst for and product of the historical experiences generated by films. To provide a theoretical underpinning for this thesis, I drew on Paul Ricœur's notions of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration to show how the spectator's experiences and memories blend with the audiovisually configured historical world.<sup>141</sup> On the basis of fiction film's mimetic and narrative qualities, histospheres construct audiovisual figurations of history whose historical "reference through traces" utilizes strategies of aesthetic illusion. We allow ourselves to be playfully transported into historical worlds, but they always remain identifiable as artificial, artistic constructs.

Histospheres therefore create a fluid understanding of history that leaves scope for reflection and interpretation. This allowed me to draw a connection to Ankersmit's concept of *historical experience*, in which he claims that it is the "improbable probability" of a representation of history that makes it believable.<sup>142</sup> It is precisely because we are aware that historical films are audiovisual figurations of historical worlds that we are able to engage in more in-depth reflection. Consequently, in addition to the relation of mimesis in which cinematic illusion stands to the prefilmic world (though without attempting to imitate that world), we must also introduce another referential, and reflexive, dimension. Histospheres thus allow us to make three sorts of hypotheses: (1) about our present-day empirical world, (2) about the actual historical past, and (3) about history as narrative construction. In combination with the enormous intuitive persuasiveness and presence of audiovisual media, they can produce figurations of living historical worlds that we are able to sensuously experience despite or even precisely because of their model-like character.

Based on this and Christian Metz's work, I observed that a historical film's *Welthaltigkeit* (literally, the degree to which it "contains" or "encompasses" a living world or the world) is measured by its imaginary historical referents. Most of the "pieces of imaginary reality" to which historical films' imaginary referents refer are in turn based on media depictions of historical worlds. These depictions make history accessible to wider audiences, and subsequently feel like a personal experience—a phenomenon for which Alison Landsberg coined the term "prosthetic memory."<sup>143</sup> "Referential realism" gives way to a "perceptual realism"<sup>144</sup> constituted by the subject's mediatized experience of history. This makes film part of a new mode of history that draws on an archive<sup>145</sup> of hyperreal histospheres.

To get a full picture of the effects of histospheres, I showed that they also involve spatial phenomena. As world spaces figured by films, histospheres are constructed segments of presupposed historical worlds, which are only pieced together in our perception of them and which we augment with our historical and cultural world knowledge. As well as the illusion of a spatial filmic world, which we experience corporeally and sensuously, histospheres also model sociocultural spaces. The film's historical worlds are integrated into a discursive nexus that shapes, comments on, and interprets them on the basis of the film's perceptual movement. The way we perceive and experience histospheres leaves traces that are inscribed in our conceptions and interpretations of history.

One particular focal point was the intersection between artistic arrangement and historical referentialization. In order to better describe and conceptualize the relevant relations, I introduced the notion of *mise-en-histoire*, based on the film theory concept of *mise-en-scène*. While the *mise-en-scène* describes the performative act of staging, whereby filmic worlds are organized and made available to experience, the *mise-en-histoire* establishes a relation to collective and individual conceptions of the historical past. The historical referentiality of visual and aural elements of film evokes an intentional mode of access to history. These associatively recalled conceptions of history often refer to prior media experiences. Histospheres are thus invested with a relational temporality and a spatial structure organized within this temporality.

By reference to Sobchack's phenomenology of film experience, I observed how our perceptions of a histosphere oscillate between pleasurable exploring a depicted past and observing (though no less appreciatively) the arrangement of audiovisual elements itself.<sup>146</sup> Sobchack's concept of a doubled gaze enables a re-perspectivation that casts a new light on historical filmic worlds. On this view, the feeling of being able to immerse ourselves in a historical world through film is a product of *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-histoire* rather than a sign of any actual indexical connection to history. Linked to the time of a film's production by the historicity of the aesthetic design while simultaneously referring to an imaginary historical referent and its myriad representations in media, histospheres thus function like a puzzle picture in which different layers of the past overlap. The synesthetic qualities of the medium of film give the simulated historical world a sensuously tangible materiality. Sobchack describes a film's embodied perspective on the filmic world<sup>147</sup> that we can both live through ourselves and link to our conceptions of the past. A living relation to history is established through a synthesis of artistic arrangement and modeling, embodied film experience, and *mise-en-histoire*; in the next chapter, I shall explore this relation and its workings in further depth.

## NOTES

1. My concept of "modeling reality" applies Lotman's notion of art as a "modeling system" to fiction film while taking account of the significant differences that exist between the mediums of film and literature, especially with regard to synesthetic sensuous experience. See Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Ann Arbor 1977, p. 210.

2. Yuri [Jurij] M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1990, p. 204.
3. Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *American Historical Review* 93:5, 1988, p. 1193.
4. I am drawing here on the work of literary theorist Erich Auerbach, who derives the concept of "figuration" from Augustine's *figuratio*. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton 2003.
5. See Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992, p. 169.
6. Siegfried Kracauer speaks of film's "reality character," to which "the spectator cannot help reacting [...] as he would to the material aspects of nature in the raw which these photographic images reproduce." Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, p. 158.
7. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Chicago and London 1984 (hereinafter Ricœur 1984), p. 52.
8. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, Chicago and London 1985, p. 184.
9. Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 2011, p. 180.
10. Ricœur (1984, pp. 64–65).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
15. This process is analogous to that of *mise-en-scène*, which I discuss in more depth in the section "From *mise-en-scène* to *mise-en-histoire*."
16. Ricœur (1984, p. 82).
17. *Ibid.*
18. Gertrud Koch, *Die Wiederkehr der Illusion: Der Film und die Kunst der Gegenwart*, Berlin 2016, p. 24.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Koch observes that we are predisposed to certain types of illusion, such as the filmic illusion of movement, and so are not in danger of mistaking them for reality. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
22. Koch is paraphrasing Mendelssohn, who believed that aesthetic illusion affords us privileged access to the truth: "The fiction [*das Erdichtete*] is characterized by a vivid clarity [*Anschaulichkeit*] conducive to understanding; this clarity comes from the fiction's distance from nature." *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

23. Ibid., p. 44. Makers of propaganda films have often attempted to undermine the medium's reflexive openness.
24. Here too I am following Koch, who applies Mendelssohn's theory to film: "Wholly in accord with the thesis (later advocated in psychology of art) that the aesthetic sphere only ever involves partial illusion and that complete deception can therefore be ruled out, Mendelssohn too holds that the aesthetic illusion unfolds its power in the perfection of the faculty of imagination and judgment." Ibid., pp. 52–53.
25. Ibid., p. 52.
26. Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung*, Berlin 2012, p. 43. On improbable probability, see also the chapter "Film/history/experience" in the present volume.
27. Koch (2016, p. 56).
28. Ibid., p. 64.
29. Ibid., p. 75.
30. Ibid., p. 77.
31. Ibid., p. 86.
32. Lotman (1977, p. 210).
33. Jurij M. Lotman, *Kunst als Sprache: Untersuchungen zum Zeichencharakter von Literatur und Kunst*, Leipzig 1981, pp. 82–83.
34. In her illuminating essay on "world constellations," Margrit Tröhler gives the example of children making mud pies, and concludes: "For the duration of the game, this alternative world with its own logic is fully real; it is not a deception, not a phantasm, not an illusion, it is simply a semblant world [*Scheinwelt*], an alternative, possible world." Tröhler here likewise distances herself from the assumption of manipulative deception and, despite rejecting the term "illusion," espouses a similar position to Koch. See Margrit Tröhler, "Von Weltenkonstellationen und Textgebäuden: Fiktion—Nichtfiktion—Narration in Spiel- und Dokumentarfilm," *montage AV* 11:2, 2002, p. 18.
35. See Mattias Frey, "The Authenticity Feeling: Language and Dialect in the Historical Film," 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/authenticity-feeling> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
36. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981, p. 79.
37. Jean-Louis Comolli writes, "The spectacle is always a *game*. It requires the participation of the spectators not as consumers but as players, accomplices, masters of the game, even, if they are also its stakes. The simulacrum does not fool a 'passive' spectator (there are no 'passive' spectators): the spectator has to participate in his own fooling; the simulacrum is the *means* whereby he is helped to fool himself." Jean-Louis Comolli, "A Body Too Much," *Screen* 19:2, 1978, p. 46.

38. Christian Metz, cited in Margrit Tröhler and Guido Kirsten (eds.), *Christian Metz and the Codes of Cinema: Film Semiology and Beyond*, Amsterdam 2018, p. 31.
39. Ibid.
40. According to Barthes, the reality effect is produced by signification of “the real” in which “the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism.” Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in his *The Rustle of Language*, Berkeley 1989, p. 148.
41. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York 2004, p. 2. I explore this aspect of histospheres in more detail later in the present volume, in the section “Prosthetic postmemory.”
42. Baudrillard refers here to Stanley Kubrick’s *BARRY LYNDON* (1975), whose visual design imitates the aesthetics of nineteenth-century paintings in order to represent the eighteenth century. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor 1994, p. 46.
43. Eric Rohmer defines “image space” [*Bildraum*] as follows: “The film image projected onto the rectangle of the screen, however fleeting or mobile it is, is perceived and judged as a more or less faithful, more or less beautiful depiction of part of the external world.” Eric Rohmer, *Murnaus Faustfilm: Analyse und szenisches Protokoll*, Munich and Vienna 1980, p. 10.
44. Simon Rothöhler, “Steven Spielbergs LINCOLN: Wie ein konventionelles Biopic,” *taz.de*, January 23, 2013, [www.taz.de/!5074753](http://www.taz.de/!5074753) (last accessed May 1, 2020).
45. Oliver Schmidt, *Hybride Räume: Filmwelten im Hollywood-Kino der Jahrtausendwende*, Marburg 2013, p. 39.
46. Hermann Kappelhoff defines “the space of narrative action” [*Handlungsraum*] as an a priori given space within which movement “takes on an intentional direction, a sense in the logic of the fictional activity of the protagonists.” Hermann Kappelhoff, *The Politics and Poetics of Cinematic Realism*, New York 2015, p. 28.
47. As Béla Balázs observes, visual and aural strategies to create an impression of continuity ensure the homogeneity of the filmic world: “The director achieves this by having every detail point beyond its frame into another frame that is shown to us in the next montage image. This pointing-beyond is effected through continuity of movement into the next frame, through continuity of an object, a form, that protrudes into the next image. It is often effected through looks and gestures that correspond to the looks and gestures in the next frame. It is very often effected through sound that plays across the frames, through words spoken across the frames.” Béla Balázs, “Zur Kunstphilosophie des Films,” in Franz-Josef Albersmeier (ed.), *Texte zur Theorie des Films*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 217.



48. Rohmer describes “filmic space” [*Filmraum*] as follows: “In truth, the spectator does not have the illusion of the space that was actually filmed, but of a virtual space that they assemble in their imagination using the fragmentary pieces provided by the film.” Rohmer (1980, p. 10).
49. Schmidt (2013, p. 76).
50. Ibid., p. 34.
51. Ibid., p. 10.
52. On the spatial turn, see for instance Stephan Günzel (ed.), *Raumwissenschaften*, Frankfurt 2009; Jörg Döring and Tristan Thielmann (eds.), *Spatial Turn: Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2015.
53. Schmidt (2013, p. 36).
54. Ibid., p. 34.
55. Schmidt (2013, p. 85).
56. Ibid., p. 82.
57. Kappelhoff speaks in this connection of “the figuration of spatial modulations.” Hermann Kappelhoff, “Die vierte Dimension des Bewegungsbildes: Das filmische Bild im Übergang zwischen individueller Leiblichkeit und kultureller Fantasie,” in Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Anne Bartsch, and Jens Eder (eds.), *Audiovisuelle Emotionen: Emotionsdarstellung und Emotionsvermittlung durch audiovisuelle Medienangebote*, Cologne 2007, pp. 301–302.
58. Kappelhoff (2015, p. 29).
59. Schmidt (2013, p. 128).
60. It is this aspect that makes the historical film genre so attractive to those who wish to use cinema as propaganda, for they see in historical films the potential to mold the depicted historical worlds to their own ideas and to subtly integrate new readings of history into the film’s picture of the world. See for instance Rainer Rother’s analysis of the Bismarck films made under the Third Reich: Rainer Rother, “‘Die Geschichte soll als Mythos zu uns sprechen’: Bismarck im NS-Spielfilm,” in Rainer Rother, *Zeitbilder: Filme des Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin 2019, pp. 168–190.
61. On the concept of “chronotope,” see Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin 1981, p. 84.
62. When Michel Foucault describes the twentieth century as the epoch of space, he is deploying a concept of space that also involves a temporal dimension, the spatial arrangement of simultaneity: “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and inter-

- sects with its own skein.” Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” 1984, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (last accessed May 1, 2020), p. 1.
63. Kappelhoff (2007, p. 297), and Erwin Panofsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures,” in his *Three Essays on Style*, Cambridge, MA, and London 1995, p. 96.
  64. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Scotts Valley 2015, p. 140.
  65. Rayd Khouloki, *Der filmische Raum: Konstruktion, Wahrnehmung, Bedeutung*, Berlin 2007, p. 182.
  66. See Thomas Morsch, *Medienästhetik des Films: Verkörperte Wahrnehmung und ästhetische Erfahrung im Kino*, Munich and Paderborn 2011, p. 178.
  67. Koch (2016, p. 34).
  68. Schmidt refers here again to Rohmer. Schmidt (2013, p. 81).
  69. Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1974, pp. 374–375.
  70. Siegfried Kracauer elaborates further on this close relation between history and film. His account of how the historical universe is constituted by historical works that vary in scope and distance is set out in part using film terminology. Siegfried Kracauer, *History—the Last Things Before the Last*, Princeton 1995, pp. 104–138.
  71. See on this point Schmidt: “The use of a handheld camera bound to the path taken by a certain character thus creates a different hodological space than the ‘disembodied camera’ of a rapidly cut action film. The two follow different principles of movement that enable different experiences of space, which may be characteristic of their respective filmic world as a whole.” Schmidt (2013, p. 102).
  72. Martin Seel, “Architekturen des Films,” in Gertrud Koch and Christiane Voss, *“Es ist, als ob”: Fiktionalität in Philosophie, Film- und Medienwissenschaft*, Munich 2009, p. 154.
  73. According to Schmidt, “in a particular reception situation” it is possible to “enter, traverse, and leave” the space of a film “along a particular route determined by the film’s temporal architecture.” Schmidt (2013, p. 103).
  74. Koch (2016, p. 61).
  75. The potential of film sound to create spatial continuity was also already described by Balázs. Balázs (2015, p. 54).
  76. Frieder Butzmann and Jean Martin describe ambience as follows: “A gently humming tapestry of the acoustic atmosphere that constantly surrounds us and otherwise, ‘in ordinary life,’ goes unnoticed, the ambient noise of our surroundings, imposes a sense of realism on the viewer-listeners. The subliminal noises breathe life into the objects that form part of a scene. The scenario passes from the realm of the inanimate and the

- artificial into the realm of what can be experienced, lived, shared.” Frieder Butzmann and Jean Martin, *Filmgeräusch: Wahrnehmungsfelder eines Mediums*, Hofheim 2012, p. 46.
77. See Rasmus Greiner, “Sonic Histospheres: Sound Design and History,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/approaches/sonic-histospheres> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
  78. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York 2019, p. 73ff.
  79. Greiner (2018).
  80. Béla Balázs, *The Spirit of Film*, in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, New York and Oxford 2010, p. 189.
  81. Cf. Michel Chion’s concept of “materializing sound indices,” which give spectators information about the physical constitution of the object producing the sound and the manner of sound production. Chion (2019, p. 112).
  82. See Greiner (2018). Barbara Flückiger refers to sound objects with the potential to define “a place in geographical, temporal, cultural, ethical, or social terms” as orienting sounds. Barbara Flückiger, *Sound Design: Die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films*, Marburg 2012, pp. 305–306.
  83. It should be noted that *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is not a clear-cut case of historical sound design, given that it was made relatively soon after the time when it is set. In the specific example given above, we can assume that at the time of production the cash register used in the film would not yet have been regarded as a historical artifact in the way that it appears to us from a twenty-first-century perspective.
  84. The use of soundscapes as an aesthetic device is a product of New Hollywood cinema that quickly became established in international commercial cinema too.
  85. Cf. Chion’s concept of “added value.” Chion (2019, p. 202).
  86. Margrit Tröhler, *Offene Welten ohne Helden: Plurale Figurenkonstellationen im Film*, Marburg 2007, p. 15.
  87. To more precisely distinguish between different variants of this concept, Tröhler introduces the notions of the group character, the character ensemble, and the character mosaic. The group character was most commonly used in early historical films with a propagandistic hue, such as *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN* (1925; dir. Sergei Eisenstein), to present a cross-section of society, and can be largely ignored for present purposes. More important for post-1945 historical films are the character ensemble and the character mosaic. Tröhler emphasizes that both concepts represent an open-ended mesh of relationships in which there occur “myriad movements and redistributions between social groups, between generations and genders.” *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 209.
  88. *Ibid.*
  89. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

90. Tröhler explains this notion, based on Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84), as follows: "The moment of encounter unites the spatial and temporal destinations of the characters at a central location, constitutes this location as a diegetic space, and collects together the lines of the narrative: The simultaneous and consecutive contiguity of stories and narrative strands creates, in 'chance simultaneity' and 'chance nonsimultaneity,' the foundation for closeness and distance." *Ibid.*, p. 214.
91. Joan K. Bleicher, "Darstellung von Geschichte in Mehrteilern und Serie: Individuelle und kollektive Erinnerungen durch Geschichte in Geschichten," *SPIEL. Neue Folge: Eine Zeitschrift zur Medienkultur* 2:2, 2016, p. 24.
92. Tröhler (2007, p. 387).
93. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
95. See the section "Reminiscence triggers" in the present volume.
96. Tröhler (2007, p. 542).
97. *Mise-en-scène* organizes filmic space by generating "symmetries or asymmetries, statics or dynamics" and "structuring proportions stably or unstably, homogeneously or heterogeneously." Ivo Ritzer, *Die Medialität der Mise-en-scène: Zur Archäologie telekinematischer Räume*, Wiesbaden 2017, p. 67.
98. "What is filmed is intimately related to how it is filmed, which is intimately related to how what is filmed is contextualized. The telecinematic *mise-en-scène* thus operates both paradigmatically and syntagmatically. It decides what the camera records, it decides how the camera records, and it decides how the shots recorded by the camera are combined." *Ibid.*, p. 117.
99. One way in which our perceptions can be directed is by relative proportions. See *ibid.*, p. 67.
100. *Mise-en-scène* "composes into the depths [of an image], creates volume and planes, thus giving bodies their spatial presence, layering what we can see into foreground, midground, and background." *Ibid.*, pp. 79 and 88.
101. Film sound constructs a relative off-screen space, an invisible but palpable cinematic space formed by soundscapes and ambiances as well as by individual sound objects. See also the section "Space, time, and filmic world" later in this chapter.
102. Ritzer notes that *mise-en-scène*, as "artistic [*inszenatorisch*] signifier," is not the form of the medium itself, but rather its "aesthetic structuring." Ritzer (2017, p. 67).
103. *Mise-en-scène* thus represents a performative practice: "A process of articulation that, through the work of production within a system, situates its parts relative to one another," which can comprise "denotative-narrative signification of a particular relation between body and space [...]"

- expressive-representational evocation of affects at the level of fiction and reception, [...] symbolic-connotative signaling of abstract ideas through the spatial arrangement of bodies, or ornamental-decorative presentation of aesthetic forms and patterns.” Ibid., pp. 65–66.
104. Ritzer describes *mise-en-scène*'s medial quality as follows: It is “a signifying communicative entity embedded in a technological medium that occurs historically in varying contexts” and conveys potential aesthetic meanings. Ibid., p. 66.
  105. See also on this point Ritzer's exposition of *mise-en-scène*: “*Mise-en-scène* comprises both what the media assemblage allows us to see and hear in the scenic space and the way in which it allows us to see and hear it in the scenic space. *Mise-en-scène* gives the medium its form of representation by constantly selecting from a repertoire of available methods and structurally accumulating these selected methods.” Ibid., p. 97.
  106. On this construal as a narrative act, *mise-en-histoire* bears similarities to Paul Ricœur's concept of *mise-en-intrigue* (emplotment). See Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, Chicago and London 1984, p. 4.
  107. As well as the specific qualities of historical film stock (definition, granularity, color, contrast, etc.) and the use of historical lenses and sound technology (or simulations thereof), this can also include historical strategies of visual and sound design and the way in which sequences are narratively resolved.
  108. See also Panofsky's remarks on the spatialization of time and dynamization of space. Panofsky (1995, p. 96).
  109. Bakhtin (1981, p. 84).
  110. Ibid., p. 84.
  111. Ritzer (2017, p. 109).
  112. Hayden White, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” *History and Theory* 23:1, 1984, pp. 1–33.
  113. Bakhtin (1981, p. 250).
  114. Ritzer (2017, p. 122).
  115. Ibid., p. 83.
  116. Ibid.
  117. Karl Prümm, “Von der *Mise en scène* zur *Mise en images*: Plädoyer für einen Perspektivenwechsel in der Filmtheorie und Filmanalyse,” in Thomas Koebner and Thomas Meder (eds.), *Bildtheorie und Film*, Munich 2006, p. 16.
  118. Ritzer (2017, p. 94).
  119. Ibid., p. 88.
  120. As noted previously, “seeing” should be understood here as synonymous with all aspects of a film's perception, including hearing.
  121. Sobchack (1992, p. 56).

122. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in his *Illuminations*, New York 2007, pp. 211–244.
123. Ritzer (2017, p. 76).
124. Ibid.
125. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford 1999, p. 14.
126. Ritzer (2017, p. 96).
127. Ibid., p. 76.
128. Ibid.
129. See Tabea Pauli, "400 Meter Ku'damm auf der Richard-Wagner-Straße," *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 25, 2015, [www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/bezirke/charlottenburg-wilmersdorf/dreharbeiten-in-berlin-400-meter-kudamm-auf-der-richard-wagner-strasse/12364976.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/bezirke/charlottenburg-wilmersdorf/dreharbeiten-in-berlin-400-meter-kudamm-auf-der-richard-wagner-strasse/12364976.html) (last accessed May 1, 2020).
130. Balázs (2015, p. 47).
131. Jameson speaks of a film's "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" and criticizes intertextuality as "a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history." Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 2008, pp. 19–20.
132. For Rancière, a film's historicity lies in the "type of plot of which the film consists," in the "function of remembering that it serves," and "in the way it bears witness to the sharing of a common fate." Jacques Rancière, "Die Geschichtlichkeit des Films," in Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Berlin 2003, pp. 232–233.
133. Kracauer (1995, p. 58). Kracauer draws frequent comparisons between the activity of the photographer or filmmaker and that of the historian. For instance, both must select and structure their material, and both refer to a larger referent outside the picture/historical work. See *ibid.*, pp. 53–58.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
135. Anne Rutherford, "Precarious Boundaries: Affect, *Mise en Scene* and the Senses in Angelopoulos' Balkans Epic," in Richard Candida-Smith (ed.), *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection*, London and New York 2006, p. 67.
136. Ritzer (2017, p. 78).
137. *Ibid.*
138. See also the chapter "Film/history/experience."
139. Sobchack (1992, pp. 138–140).
140. Ritzer (2017, p. 79).
141. Ricœur (1984).
142. Ankersmit (2012, p. 43).

143. Landsberg (2004, p. 2).
144. Stephen Prince develops the notion of perceptual realism in his study of digital images: “A perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer’s audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space. Perceptually realistic images correspond to this experience, because film-makers build them to do so. Such images display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, color, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond with the viewer’s own understanding of these phenomena in daily life. Perceptual realism, therefore, designates a relationship between the image and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images and those which are referentially realistic. Because of this, unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic.” These general reflections can also be applied to analog film images and their relation to history. Stephen Prince, “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory,” *Film Quarterly* 49:3, 1996, p. 32.
145. This idea is based on Baudrillard’s thesis that cinema has contributed to the disappearance of history and rise of the archive. Baudrillard (1994, p. 48).
146. Sobchack (1992, p. 56).
147. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–140.

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## Immersion and Empathy

Films are lived as sensuous experiences that almost inevitably elicit emotional responses. For this reason, Béla Balázs understands the medium in terms of a heightening of the capacity for feeling, believing that every perception is infused with emotion.<sup>1</sup> The connection between sensibility and intellect that we can already find in Balázs shall serve in this chapter as the basis for a theory of histospheres as a specific form of living (cinematic) encounter with history. My thesis is that this sort of temporally organized aesthetic encounter is what makes historical films so compelling. In this context, the first section examines the role of aesthetically modeled atmospheres and the moods they evoke. The second section builds on this examination by considering filmic space. A histosphere, I argue, creates powerful, immersive experiences based on a living encounter with filmic space, making it possible to virtually step inside the historical world constructed by the film. Filmic atmospheres and spatial figurations of movement bring us physically and mentally closer to the action of the film. At the same time, we perceive the “film’s gaze” on this world—as lived by another with whom we are able to empathize. Another potent mechanism of perspectivation is film characters, and so the third section focuses on imaginative empathy with the characters who inhabit a film’s historical world. In combination with film experience as a mode of embodied perception, this inner perspective provokes interpretations and evaluations that we can extend to the filmic depiction’s historical references. The aim of this chapter is thus to investigate histospheres as multi-immersive

perceptual spaces that not only model a historical world but also profoundly influence our conceptions and interpretations of history.

### MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

No man's land in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*: Carl Altmann and Anna's son Jochen make their way through the darkness. In order to return the child to his mother's care, the border guard turns illegal border crosser. Darkness and fog obscure the characters' vision. Next to the abandoned railway station stands the carcass of a freight car. The frame is segmented by trees and wooden fences, and rhythimized by rapid shot–reverse shot montages. A combination of filmic signifiers and conventions signals danger (Figs. 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4).

It is not just the visual information that evokes a vague air of menace, but also the dark tonal sequences of the score. The atmosphere permeates everything. Like a “nebulous primal matter” or “aroma,” it envelops all



Figs. 6.1–6.4 Menacing atmosphere in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

the histosphere's forms and structures.<sup>2</sup> Balázs describes the notion of an “anthropomorphous world” as follows:

Every shape makes a—mostly unconscious—emotional impression on us, which may be pleasant or unpleasant, alarming or reassuring, because it reminds us, however distantly, of some human face, which we ourselves project into it. Our anthropomorphous world-vision makes us see a human physiognomy in every phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

What Baláz is saying here, phrased somewhat dramatically, is that cinematic atmospheres are constructions capable of eliciting emotional responses from us. In Ricœurian terms, atmosphere should therefore be understood as part of the filmic world's “configuration,” whereas a mood is only generated by a process of “refiguration” in interaction with the spectator.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as holistic experiences, moods cannot be reduced to their individual elements. Or, in the words of Margrit Tröhler, “mood and atmosphere do *not* issue from the individual object, but from constellations of objects, and thus describe overall qualities.”<sup>5</sup> One such constellation of objects is formed by a film's aesthetic-figurative aspects, which in the case of historical films are also augmented by imaginary historical referents. In an associative network of “memories, thoughts, habits, physiological reactions, and vocalizations,”<sup>6</sup> a histosphere's atmosphere can evoke complexly interrelated emotions and moods<sup>7</sup> of varying magnitudes. As long ago as 1920, Danish director Urban Gad in his book *Der Film* distinguished between the mood [*Stimmung*] that can be produced by certain stylistic devices within a shot and the basic/general mood [*Grundstimmung*] of a film as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Though they do not directly reference Gad, Hermann Kappelhoff and Jan-Hendrik Bakels build on this idea in their concept of the “spectator feeling”:

The spectator feeling is neither an individual unit of affect nor an aggregation of discrete emotions; rather, it is connected to continuous modelings of a complex emotion (a mood, an atmosphere) that unfolds over the course of a film and is founded in aesthetic pleasure.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, even when historical films depict painful periods of history, such as the division of Germany in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the spectator feeling is not wholly negative, but rather ambivalent in nature. The aesthetic pleasure that accompanies the audiovisual modeling of a historical world serves

an entertainment function and is generally regarded positively. The “temporal organization of the living aesthetic encounter with the film” thus forms “the ground, the matrix of the spectator feeling.”<sup>10</sup> As constituents of this feeling, atmospheres do not just comment on and shape the depiction of the historical world, but make painful history bearable and thus available to experience. The spectator feeling has a similar function to Siegfried Kracauer’s example of the shield of Athena, which Perseus uses in the Greek myth in order to battle Medusa without looking at her directly.<sup>11</sup> However, the pleasure we take in historical films and the unique attraction of histospheres are based not in the ontology of film images but on the temporally organized living aesthetic encounter with a film and the mood associated with it.

The distinction between atmosphere and mood is based on an epistemological difference that should not be discounted: While the associative living encounter with filmic atmospheres evokes subjective moods in the spectator, the atmospheres themselves are based on the “general expressive repertoire of cultures” and are thus also “relatively stable at an inter-subjective level.”<sup>12</sup> Media scholar Hans J. Wulff goes so far as to claim that filmic atmospheres “ultimately belong to the semiotic sphere.”<sup>13</sup> In a histosphere, atmospheres are thus not merely part of the configuration of the film’s historical world, but can also be described in the epistemological terms of semiotics. The illegal border crossing in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is assigned to a sphere of secret and forbidden things by cultural codes such as darkness, the forest, and mist, while cinematic conventions such as the fragmented image composition and rapid shot–reverse shot montages create a menacing scenario. However, as Tröhler puts it, “a minimal distance” is needed to decode the signifiers and “become aware of the atmosphere, the mood, the aura in a situation.”<sup>14</sup>

The use of spatial categories that can be observed in Tröhler’s argument suggests that atmosphere and filmic space are interwoven. The neo-phenomenologist philosopher Hermann Schmitz defines feelings as “spatially, but placelessly, poured-out atmospheres,” as illustrated by examples such as an ominous “calm before the storm” or the proverbial “air so thick you could cut it with a knife.”<sup>15</sup> According to Schmitz, these atmospheres have the potential to “physically affect” a subject in a way that goes beyond mere perception.<sup>16</sup> He further argues that the totality of feelings forms a “feeling space” with a structure similar to his notion of bodily space (*der leibliche Raum*).<sup>17</sup> Film atmospheres are likewise constituted regardless of whether spectators engage with them emotionally. If

they do, however, then atmosphere does not just allow the spectator to observe and perceive an emotional mood, but also affects them physically. This dual structure of atmosphere and mood can once again be linked to Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology of film experience.<sup>18</sup> Perceiving a film as a world of pictures and sound and simultaneously as an intentional, embodied perspective on this world gives rise to an experience of reception that alternates between mere cognitive understanding and physically palpable sensation. A histosphere's atmospheres can, accordingly, be understood as semiotically coded readings of the depicted historical worlds and events. They can also allow the moods they produce to be physically experienced. It can be assumed that the associated conceptions of history and intuitive judgments on the part of spectators are highly dependent on the construction of a film's atmospheric dimension.

In an interview, director Fred van der Kooij remarked that filmmakers have at their disposal all the elements needed to create and control an atmosphere,<sup>19</sup> in particular weather conditions and parameters of spatial design such as lighting, color, sizes, and proportions. His list focuses primarily on film images, and needs to be supplemented with elements of sound design too. Ambience in particular plays a key role in constructing filmic spaces and giving them a distinctive impression of reality.<sup>20</sup> Composed of diverse sounds and tones, ambience brings the film image to life and evokes a continuous cinematic world that extends far beyond the boundaries of the frame. In a histosphere, ambience creates an atmospheric impression of a bygone world, for instance through sounds of historic road traffic. The interaction between sound and image creates a holistic overall impression and generates synesthetic added value.<sup>21</sup> Following Schmitz, the resultant intermodal sensory qualities can be understood as "bodily [*leibnahe*] bridging qualities" that mediate between atmospheres and corporal-emotional affectedness.<sup>22</sup> Another way that film can use sound to create a certain atmosphere is through its construction of a space's acoustic qualities. As well as establishing the size of a space by means such as muffled sounds, resonance, or echoes, sound can also convey an impression of a space's material properties.<sup>23</sup> Walking on marble sounds different from walking on a carpet. The sound a material makes is also closely tied to its haptic qualities: A room with a marble floor will tend to feel colder and sleeker than one with a soft, warm carpet. These synesthetic perceptions likewise function as "bodily bridging qualities."<sup>24</sup> This corporal-emotional effect of atmosphere enables us to physically experience the historical spaces constructed by film. As described by Frank

R. Ankersmit in his work on historical experience, this can evoke the feeling of direct contact with history.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, we constantly compare the synesthetic perception of historical spaces' atmospheres with the corresponding imaginary historical referents. Our expectations also depend on a space's function: A train station or airport can be permeated with a melancholy atmosphere of departure, but they can also promise freedom and arouse curiosity about the big wide world.<sup>26</sup> If such a place is deprived of its function, this affects its atmosphere too. The abandoned train station in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* exudes an eerie atmosphere during the night-time border crossing, and this atmosphere also has a historical dimension. The disused platforms and ruined building are filmically constructed traces of the past that attest to the consequences of German division. The physically lived mood produces a cognitive resonance. By being emotionally exposed to the historical world simulated by the film and evaluating the feelings it evokes, we take a stance toward the imaginary historical referent, which will inevitably also affect our conceptions and interpretations of history.

Filmic space also has a historiographical, narrative component. When van der Kooij asks what history the objects in a space have for the spectators, his question concerns the "refiguration"<sup>27</sup> of the historical world. Our personal experiences and memories blend with the perception and experience of the audiovisually configured historical world. Van der Kooij's hypothesis that knowledge of what has previously happened in a space helps determine its atmosphere is of central importance for historical films. The filmic figuration of historical spaces is geared precisely toward this effect.<sup>28</sup> If we know what has previously happened in a space, it will be infused with a corresponding atmosphere and we will start to anticipate what might happen there next. The historical space of the inner German border constructed by *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, for instance, presupposes knowledge about the many people who were killed attempting to cross the border illegally. This results in a menacing atmosphere, which is further intensified by audiovisual metaphors of death and transience, such as the "carcass" of the freight car. This conception of atmospheres is congruent with Martin Seel's "atmospheric appearing":

In the form that they *have*, the objects of this appearing *give* the respective situation a characteristic form, in such a way that this character of the situation—a character co-created by them—becomes intuitable in these objects.<sup>29</sup>



A histosphere integrates objects with a specific associative potential, in particular ones that connect to the spectator's media-generated "prosthetic memories."<sup>30</sup> As a media signifier of history in the spectator's memory, the wreckage of the freight car is not just a general cinematic symbol of transience and death, but also makes reference to the deportation trains of the Third Reich, one of the most common metaphors for the Holocaust's machinery of death. Seel's definition of "atmospheric appearing" formulates a key aspect of histospheres: "While perceiving, we look into how it is, or how it was, or how it could be to exist here and now, or to have existed there and then."<sup>31</sup> Filmic atmospheres help connect histospheres to different levels of the historical past. They give the world constructed by the film its own historicity, which in atmospheric appearing also draws on the spectators' associatively evoked memories and emotions.

Film characters are also part of the audiovisually constructed historical spaces and atmospheres. Moreover, the historical world constructed by a film shapes their physiology, psychology, and actions. On Seel's understanding, atmosphere is "a sensuously and affectionally perceptible (and, in this respect, existentially significant) articulation of realized or nonrealized life possibilities"<sup>32</sup> that are manifested in and through the experience of the historical world constructed by film.<sup>33</sup> On Wulff's view, meanwhile, atmospheres are "emotional qualities" that are "deliberately designed to affectively draw audiences into perceiving an object a certain way" and follow their own dramaturgy.<sup>34</sup> When Carl Altmann and little Jochen reach the small East German town of Broditz in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the scene initially picks up the menacing atmosphere of the previous sequence: In a low-angle close-up, we see a grim-looking Russian soldier with a machine gun. The frame only opens up after the camera tracks back for a few moments and pans to the "House of Friendship," the meeting place of the FDJ (East Germany's youth organization), which is decorated with portraits of Communist politicians Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht. From off-screen, we hear folksy violin and piano music, and the bustle of a busy square. People out on a stroll, a busy cafe, string lights, and a candy stall create a warm, pleasant atmosphere: The scenery is now far more evenly lit, and unsettling shot-reverse shot montages have been replaced with sedate sequence shots (Figs. 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8).

The audiovisual design models a relaxed atmosphere that prompts a reevaluation of the air of menace associated with East Germany until this point. Although atmosphere primarily serves to accentuate the emotional and somatic experience of certain moods, in historical films it also



**Figs. 6.5–6.8** Change in atmosphere in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

contributes to the narrativization of history. The dramaturgy of atmosphere has the potential to steer and direct our perceptions of the historical world constructed by the film at an affective and emotional level, and thus also the conceptions and interpretations of history we derive from it.

Another way in which an aesthetic experience of historicity can be created is through the use of historical film technology and audiovisual conventions. Old-style camera lenses and sound recording methods have their own distinctive aesthetic that helps give a film a historical atmosphere. So too does the choice of film stock: Factors such as photosensitivity, contrast, and granularity leave a specific impression that spectators can intuitively situate within history. The same applies to the colors: Black and white or sepia tones can signify media historicity, while historical color processes such as Technicolor can be dated to particular periods of film history. Jörg Schweinitz observes that “for extended periods (until major technical changes occur once again)” film stock and its technical parameters possess “a distinctive quality that is inscribed into films and has a significant effect on their atmosphere,”<sup>35</sup> and that while contemporary

audiences generally process this distinctive quality automatically, in retrospect the historical film stock appears far more artificial.<sup>36</sup> The atmosphere evoked by the film stock's appearance points directly to the historicity of what is perceived:

The experience of being able to cast a photographic and hence relatively transparent gaze at the world (of the past) oscillates with the historical material filter that permeates the whole atmosphere simultaneously becoming increasingly palpable.<sup>37</sup>

Atmospheres evocative of historical films can shape histospheres in various ways. For instance, the black and white footage, slightly crackling sound, and traditional score of Helmut Käutner's *SKY WITHOUT STARS* lend it the character of a historical document. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the film was made just three years after the time it is set. In Jutta Brückner's *YEARS OF HUNGER*, meanwhile, historical archive footage from the 1950s is spliced into fictional sequences. The camera's observing stance, the electronic music, the main character's way of speaking, and various other details, however, represent aesthetic strategies of New German Cinema. As a result, the fictional sequences have a markedly different atmosphere than the grainy, flickering, and scratched archive footage (Figs. 6.9 and 6.10). This abrupt shift in atmosphere draws attention to the nearly thirty-year gap between the different layers of the film's historicity, thereby opening up space for reflection. The opposite effect is achieved by the slight decoloration of the images in Sven Bohse's *KU'DAMM*



**Figs. 6.9–6.10** Differing material qualities: aesthetics of New German Cinema and archive footage in *YEARS OF HUNGER*

56, inspired by the aesthetic of faded photographs from the period being depicted. Thus, while a filmic space's audiovisually formed atmosphere shapes perception of the historical world constructed by the film and associatively links it to spectators' subjective recollections and media-generated "prosthetic memories," atmospheres evocative of film history add another layer to histospheres that marks out the film itself as a historical document.

### IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Over the sound of rousing beats, a host in a glittery jacket calls contestants in "Berlin's first rock 'n' roll championships" to the dance floor. Glaring spotlights illuminate the well-filled, slightly smoky hall. The camera pans across the cheering audience. A young woman, Monika Schöllack, runs toward us, and we follow her with a crane shot. After a series of rapid cuts, the competition begins. The audience goes wild when the first guitar riffs sound. Monika takes a runup, jumps, and is propelled into the air by Freddy. Transcendent music plays. Monika soars through the air in slow motion (Fig. 6.11).



Fig. 6.11 The moving camera in *KU'DAMM 56*

The moving camera takes my eye, *and so also my consciousness*, along with it: into the image, into the scene of the action. I see nothing from the outside. I see everything just as the actors in the scene must. I am surrounded by the forms of the film and thus enmeshed in its action. I walk with the characters, drive with them, fall with them—even though physically I remain sitting in the same place.<sup>38</sup>

Balázs's euphoric description anticipates the modern concept of "fictional immersion": Under the influence of moving audiovisual stimuli, a large part of the spectators' attention is "drawn away from their environment and directed wholly to the artifact."<sup>39</sup> They are, as it were, "submerged" in a "*stream* of moving images."<sup>40</sup> It is not just film images' captivating illusion of movement that contributes to the immersive effect, but also film sound. Whirls of sound and physically palpable bass tones, like the heartbeat-like sound effect used during Monika's somersault at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*, involve us more strongly in the action of a film at a somatic level. The illusion of movement, the film's use of sound, and the emotional effect of the atmosphere create a "bodily bridging quality."<sup>41</sup> In this way, a histosphere's audiovisual figurations construct a historical world that enfolds us and brings us physically and mentally closer to the action of the film.<sup>42</sup> My thesis is that in historical films this closeness helps the historical past seem less distant too. To explore this thesis in more depth, in this section I shall examine various theories of immersion and look at whether they are compatible with a theory and praxis of histospheres. I combine psychoanalytic concepts with theories of space and the body. My exploration culminates in a multi-immersive model that understands immersion as a constitutive element of the living cinematic encounter with history.

Immersive film experiences are generally classed as the result "of a rapid movement through space" and thus as a function of perception.<sup>43</sup> In these experiences, we feel as though we are being physically transported into the filmic world. However, simply describing the "movie ride aesthetic"<sup>44</sup> underlying such experiences is insufficient for an analysis of cinematic immersion as a component of a histosphere; the immersive potential of empathy also needs to be taken into account.<sup>45</sup> Immersion not only transports us into the historical world constructed by a historical film, but also enables us to sensuously experience and *feel* it. The living aesthetic encounter transcends the limits of naturalistic strategies of representation.<sup>46</sup> Empathy extends not just to characters but also to "inanimate objects such

as colors, shapes, moods, and spaces.”<sup>47</sup> Balázs concurs: “In the film [...] man and background are of the same stuff, both are mere pictures and hence there is no difference in the reality of man and object.”<sup>48</sup> In the dance sequence at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*, we are immersively absorbed not just by the thrilling figurations of movement but by the aesthetically composed atmosphere. The glaring spotlights, whose light is refracted in the haze of the pulsating dance hall, the beat of the music, the shapes and colors of the gaudy shirts and whirling skirts—all these things draw us into the spell of the histosphere (Fig. 6.12). The petticoats and the vintage cars parked on the edges of the dance floor serve as iconic symbols of the 1950s, supplementing the *mise-en-scène* with a *mise-en-histoire*.<sup>49</sup> Our empathetic engagement with the objects, sensations, and moods of the filmic figurations is augmented by associatively recalled historical references; together, they blend into a dreamlike illusion.<sup>50</sup>

To describe this phenomenon more precisely, I shall draw on Christian Metz's psychoanalytic work on cinema and dream. Metz believes that true illusion can only exist in dreams,<sup>51</sup> while in cinema we can always discern a certain “impression of reality.”<sup>52</sup> For Metz, immersive film experience has more in common with daydreams:



Fig. 6.12 Iconic symbols of the 1950s in *KU'DAMM 56*

Just as the spectator knows that he is watching a film, the daydream knows that it is a daydream. Regression is exhausted in both cases before reaching the perceptual agency; the subject does not confuse the images with perceptions, but clearly maintains their status as images: mental representations in the daydream, and in the film representation of a fictional world through real perceptions.<sup>53</sup>

On this view, while watching a historical film we remain certain that the film's historical world is merely an artificial construction, a function of filmic figuration.<sup>54</sup> This certainty—and this is Metz's second thesis—can, however, be overridden in moments of exceptionally intense affective involvement by a temporary state of “paradoxical hallucination” akin to the “brief and quickly passing dizziness that drivers feel towards the end of a long night journey.”<sup>55</sup> Metz considers film to be one such journey:

In the two situations, when [...] the brief psychological giddiness [...] ends, the subject not coincidentally has the feeling of “waking up”: this is because he has furtively engaged in the state of sleeping and dreaming. The spectator thus will have dreamt a little bit of the film: not because that bit was missing and he imagined it: it actually appeared in the *bande*, and this, not something else, is what the subject saw; but he saw it while dreaming.<sup>56</sup>

Via a detour through the realm of dream, the filmic figuration becomes a form of hallucinatory perception. Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of immersion builds on this idea. During reception of a film, the filmic world forms a new frame of reference for the spectator that brings about a recentering: “We are theoretically, emotionally, and mentally transported into a fictional world as soon as the presented objects, beings, and relations create for us their own tangible reference space.”<sup>57</sup> Although this reference space is experienced as a product of dreamlike imagination, it “is not reducible to an internal psychological process,”<sup>58</sup> but is based on a real sensory perception:

The spectator receives images and sounds offered as the representation of something other than themselves, of a diegetic universe, but remaining true images and sounds capable of reaching other spectators as well, whereas the dream flux can reach the consciousness of no one but the dreamer.<sup>59</sup>

Historical films add another element to the mix. The images and sounds of a hystosphere do not just represent a diegetic universe, but through the *mise-en-histoire* are also linked to the imaginary historical referents in our



memory. The historicity derived from remembered associations is projected onto the film's material figurations, which can in turn be sensuously experienced. This interweaving of emotional and cognitive processes with a film's synesthetic affects actually appears to facilitate the "slide" into a state of dreamlike hallucination. The source of the immersive effect thus lies in the interplay between sensory perception and meaning-making reflection, or as Sobchack puts it:

When we sit in a movie theater and perceive a film as sensible, as making sense, we (and the film before us) are immersed in a world and in an activity of visual being. The experience is as familiar as it is intense, and it is marked by the way in which significance and the act of signifying are *directly* felt, *sensuously* available to the viewer.<sup>60</sup>

Sobchack's idea that the immersively intensified perception of filmic figurations makes both significance and the act of signifying sensuously available to the spectator can also be applied to histospheres. We immersively perceive not just the historical world constructed and configured by a film, but also its genesis in a process of refiguration and historical referentialization. The filmic illusions of movement in the dance sequence at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*—the movement of bodies and camera, the montage, the beat of the music—are, on the one hand, direct, immersive stimuli as described in the notion of the "movie ride aesthetic." On the other hand, they also construct specific impressions that in the process of perception coalesce with the film design elements of the *mise-en-scène* to form an imaginary picture of a historical world, which is referentialized by the *mise-en-histoire*.

But what if "films do not offer any worlds or comprehensive world-views, and in terms of their perceptible location within a space-time continuum only ever remain disconnected fragments"? In that case, according to Christiane Voss, the concept of immersion would serve

as the metaphorical linchpin of a utopian promise that has perhaps always been associated with the medium of film: the promise of being able to experience a living and meaningful temporality beyond the bounded horizons of one's own finitude.<sup>61</sup>

For Voss, filmic immersion makes plot into a "temporarily focused matrix" of the spectators' perception.<sup>62</sup> On this premise, the spectators'



multi-immersive engagement refigures the film's audiovisual figurations into an "imaginary index"<sup>63</sup> and links this index to the histosphere's imaginary historical referents, so that the world of the histosphere is experienced as an "ephemeral reality."<sup>64</sup> Perceptions drawing on this multi-immersively generated "imaginary index" bring about a (temporary, imaginary, and necessarily incomplete) recentering of the spectator. The unconscious reassurance that one is physically present in the movie theater is temporarily overridden, though without disappearing completely. As part of a histosphere, the immersive potential of filmic figurations makes us feel as if we are partially leaving behind the place from which we are watching the film, whether that be a movie theater seat or our living room couch, and embarking on a "journey" to a historical world. The key to this phenomenon lies in the construction and experience of the filmic space.

As an audiovisual figuration, space is constituted in the medium of film "out of an affective moment of being-in-the-world, that is to say, out of the specific experience [*Erleben*] of space that a film enables for the spectator."<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the spectator "is so strongly addressed in their bodyliness by the film [...] that they involuntarily respond to the parameters of this space—whether with nausea or kinetic excitement."<sup>66</sup> Space functions as a "cognitive and phenomenological interface between the spectator and the world of the film," while the "lived body" represents the prereflective interface between filmic space and reception space.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, understanding this dimension of filmic immersion once again requires a combination of perceptual and phenomenological theories. Voss augments Sobchack's notion of the "cinesthetic subject"<sup>68</sup> with an emphatically spatial dimension: "In their intellectual and sensory-affective response to the action of the film," the spectator adds to the two-dimensional film image the "third dimension of their feeling body" and thus becomes "a constitutive element of the film's architecture."<sup>69</sup> By contrast with Sobchack, for whom the film's body surrounds that of the spectator while the spectator in turn incorporates the film's perception,<sup>70</sup> for Voss the film's "borrowed body" is "truly a space—a somatic space of meaning" that creates the third dimension "in which the action of the film can be sensuously and affectively embedded."<sup>71</sup> The immersive dimension of the borrowed body's spatialization consists in spectators' regarding "that which we somatically (co-)constitute and at the same time experience [*erleben*] as being directly truthful in this form."<sup>72</sup> Voss's model offers a plausible explanation for the intense impression of a histosphere's bringing history to life. The contiguity of historical world and subjective

perception evokes the feeling of being able to physically touch the past, which closely parallels Frank R. Ankersmit's definition of historical experience,<sup>73</sup> in which the impression of coming into direct contact with the past is accompanied by a "disappearance of temporal dimensions."<sup>74</sup> The film's complex temporal structure overrides the spectator's perceptions of the time in which they are actually watching the film, such that "the borrowed body's response" follows "the fictional passage of time in the constructed film narrative."<sup>75</sup> This strengthens the "living entanglement with the action of the film"<sup>76</sup> while freeing us as spectators from the linear temporal logic of our everyday perception. For instance, the dance sequence at the start of *KU'DAMM 56* does not just represent a leap forward in time; the slow motion shot of Monika's somersault also emphatically alters our perception of time. Immersion thereby embeds both the spatial and temporal structures of the filmic figurations in the borrowed body's somatic space of meaning, allowing us to experience historical worlds through experiencing ourselves.

### IMAGINATIVE EMPATHY

Lost in thought, a young woman stares into space as she peels potatoes, while the score broadens out into transcendent tones. In this scene in *KU'DAMM 56*, the shallow depth of field and the cut from a long shot to a close-up isolate Monika from her surroundings (Figs. 6.13 and 6.14). Hyperrealistically modulated noises and the protagonist's despondent sob lead into a flashback to a painful memory.

"Films articulate a subjective experience of the world [*Welterleben*] that the spectator realizes as a sensation in their own body [*körperliches Empfindungserleben*] and also as a particular way of perceiving the world,"<sup>77</sup> as Hermann Kappelhoff and Sarah Greifenstein write. The world figured out of images and sounds is not perceived "in the schemas of our everyday perception of the world, but in the mode of a distinct, unfamiliar experience [*Erleben*] by another entity."<sup>78</sup> If, however, film experience is "the expression of experience by experience,"<sup>79</sup> then this requires the capacity for empathy and makes it a relevant parameter for a theory of histospheres. We do not merely live the historical world of the film as a sensuous experience; rather, at the same time we perceive the film's perspective on this world—as lived by another with whom we are able to empathize.<sup>80</sup> On the basis of immersion, affect, and empathy, we construct and live a "culturally encoded [...] form of temporal existence."<sup>81</sup> In this



**Figs. 6.13 and 6.14** Aesthetics of memory in *KU'DAMM 56*

process, we often enter into an intimate imaginary relationship with the film character, especially if that character's perception coincides with the film's subjective experience of the world. We see Monika *in* the filmic world while simultaneously gaining an impression of her perception *of* this world. Facial expressions and gestures, close-ups, a slight slow motion effect, and the hyperrealistically amplified noises help foster empathy. This

phenomenon was described early in the history of film theory by Balázs, whose observation that the camera causes us to “identify” with the characters in a film not just spatially but also *emotionally*<sup>82</sup> anticipates the essential features of “imaginative empathy.”<sup>83</sup> Audiovisual design allows us to “imagine what it is like to experience what happens in the fiction film.”<sup>84</sup> In a detail shot, we see Monika trudging through long grass and hear the sound of tweeting birds, rustling leaves, and rumbling thunder. When it starts to rain, she takes a deep breath and begins to relax. The long, drawn-out notes of the score blend with piano tones into an emphatically soaring melody. Monika takes off her wet clothing and begins to dance as if in a trance. The film’s gaze is largely congruent with the character’s implied perception of the world. Panning and tracking shots, the rhythmic elliptical montage, and brief slow motion effects imitate the rapt movements of the dancing body (Figs. 6.15 and 6.16).

The film’s audiovisual operations make it easier for us to empathize with another person’s way of perceiving the world. The imaginative activity combines with our actual sensory impressions into a distinctive experience.<sup>85</sup> However, this does not mean “that spectators must always notice acts of [...] imagining” as such.<sup>86</sup> Instead, we can observe a close connection to immersion: Imaginative empathy “throws” us into the thick of the action. In an immersive process, we enter into the audiovisually configured filmic world. Our emotional responses may mirror those of the characters. But, as described by phenomenological approaches to film, we may also “emote to the events of the film as if [we] had really been witnessing them,” sympathizing with the character from an external perspective but without coming “to feel the same way as the character does.”<sup>87</sup> The philosopher Amy Coplan has coined the term “experiential understanding”<sup>88</sup> for the process of simultaneously sharing in the observed experience of another person and taking their perspective, while also reflecting on that experience from the outside. The dual structure of seeing and being seen underlying this concept was once again anticipated by Balázs:

A film frame shows us not just *what* this spectator sees but *how he sees it*. This *how* is a *characteristic feature*, that is, a feature of artistic design. This how characterizes not just the object, but also the spectator: his “view” of the object and its relation to him. Every view of the world gives rise to a world-view. Every camera perspective expresses an inner perspective.<sup>89</sup>



**Figs. 6.15 and 6.16** Imaginative empathy: Monika's dance in *KU'DAMM 56*

Balázs draws a connection between aesthetic and ideological perspectivation—a process also mirrored in the above-described sequence from *KU'DAMM 56*: In the “how” of viewing and simultaneously being-viewed, we experience Monika's yearning for freedom in our own body, we feel her inner drive to escape the constricting, outdated norms of the 1950s. Imaginative empathy has the potential to “direct and control” our feelings



to some degree, allowing them to be harnessed for very different communicative purposes.<sup>90</sup> For instance, sensuous emotional empathy in combination with historical referentialization can allow spectators to experience historical ideologies. Although in historical films imaginative empathy therefore has the potential to model historical perspectives, we are not forced to accept these perspectives.<sup>91</sup>

Empathy can sometimes manifest itself in a sequence's "specific aesthetic form."<sup>92</sup> The potential of audiovisual form to strengthen our capacity for empathy can also be seen in Monika's dance in KU'DAMM 56: The caressing movements of the camera, the elliptical montage, the soaring music, the whooshing sound effects, and the hyperreal sound of the protagonist's breathing create an immersive effect that heightens empathetic involvement. Aesthetic experience can even trigger a form of empathetic engagement that detaches itself from the specific film character and allows the experiences imparted by the film to be "appreciated for their sensuous pleasures alone."<sup>93</sup> Whether it is the exuberant illusion of movement or a detail like sunrays refracted in the rain, the empathetically felt aesthetic experience during Monika's dance also gives the histosphere an aesthetic quality that can be interpreted retrospectively—under the influence of the reflexively operating *mise-en-histoire*—as a *historical feeling* (Fig. 6.17). Thus, as spectators we continuously alternate between different modes of



Fig. 6.17 Aesthetic experience in KU'DAMM 56

perception “in order to explore the film both fictionally and aesthetically.”<sup>94</sup> Aesthetic experience, imaginative empathy, and historical experience thus fuse into a unified living encounter that combines both cognitive and corporal aspects.

The very idea that we can empathize with historical figures initially seems paradoxical. If we assume that the capacity for empathy is inversely proportional to the temporal, geographic, and cultural distance between the world of the film and the world of our own lived experience,<sup>95</sup> this capacity would be greatly impeded in historical films. But the great success of historical films makes this conclusion improbable. Instead, empathy must be supplemented by a dose of acentral imagining. Similarly to the model proposed by Sobchack, the spectator assumes a dual position from which “they both participate in the action and are confronted by it.”<sup>96</sup> The “inferences and typifications”<sup>97</sup> undertaken in this process are facilitated by genre conventions such as the use of stereotypical character attributes; empathizing with a character in a historical world constructed by a film involves interpreting that character “as a social or sociopsychological type in their milieu.”<sup>98</sup> We have the impression of being able to immerse ourselves in the film’s historical world in a mode of living encounter. Empathy allows us not just to discern a character’s emotional state but also to reflect on these emotions.<sup>99</sup> Combining this character with other characters allows us to construct a “social field”.<sup>100</sup> As Wulff writes, “a character with whom perhaps we ‘primarily’ empathize is juxtaposed with a matrix of other, ‘secondary’ characters with whom we must also empathize.” The “reciprocal perceptions and interpretations of the characters among themselves”<sup>101</sup> mark fictional film as a “construction of a fictional world of social action.”<sup>102</sup> The historical experiences generated by historical films are based on the historical social system constructed by a film and the spectator’s living, empathetic encounter with that system. History is represented in terms of human relations.<sup>103</sup> In *KU’DAMM 56*, Monika’s spontaneous dance in the rain is watched by a group of walkers. Most of them are young men who seem to be enjoying the spectacle, but their leader, a smartly dressed and much older man, looks appalled (Fig. 6.18). Our empathy with the characters gives us a sense of being able to relive the inhibited society of 1950s West Germany from the inside. Empathy also contributes to forming a particular picture of history.

In summary, the phenomenological concept of empathy involves not just “imaginatively adopting a perspective” but also “a bodily [...] resonance.”<sup>104</sup> Kracauer spoke of “kinesthetic responses” to moving visual



Fig. 6.18 Empathy and “social field” in KU’DAMM 56

stimuli<sup>105</sup>; more recent research has sought to link such ideas to scientific studies of physical motor resonance. Neurological experiments have shown that certain neurons in primates’ brains exhibit the same pattern of activity both when watching and when performing an action.<sup>106</sup> Since both visual and aural indications of certain actions can trigger sensorimotor resonance,<sup>107</sup> this would seem to be a role the audiovisual medium of film is especially well suited to play. Although Kappelhoff’s criticism that these sorts of psychological models operate with an empiricism wholly alien to the discipline of film studies is valid,<sup>108</sup> there is no denying that as spectators we can be physically affected by moving stimuli in film, such as during Monika’s dance in KU’DAMM 56. However, it is not “simply the observed *movements*, but specific (sensori)motor *acts*” that trigger a response.<sup>109</sup> Monika’s movements follow a certain pattern; they are part of a structured, expressive dance. The philosopher Hartmut Rosa believes that complex actions, situations, and sense-references of this kind can be grasped or mirrored not just by way of sensorimotor equivalents, “but above all by evoking and shaping *narrative* connections.”<sup>110</sup> Sensorimotor resonance is integrated into a narrative matrix that facilitates imaginative empathy. This means that it is only through telling stories that we become able to adopt complex experiential perspectives.<sup>111</sup> Narrative also allows us to empathetically make moods and atmospheres present to ourselves and



imaginatively corporally apprehend them.<sup>112</sup> For instance, black and white pictures do not just make reference to something old and historical, but also have their own expressive quality, an atmosphere, which represents a certain perspective.<sup>113</sup> The philosopher Susanne Schmetkamp connects the thesis of narrative modeling of experiential perspectives to phenomenological theories:

On this account, empathy involves a process of perceiving a person's specific state, their feelings, and their actions, in particular the way in which they are manifested in bodily expression and from that person's specific perspective. This entails that perspective-taking is not just cognitive but also corporal, inasmuch as it is also always perspectives of bodies, objects, and moods that are *made present*.<sup>114</sup>

This approach is of interest for a theory of histospheres for two reasons. Firstly, the process of making-present implies a historicity that is already inscribed in the medium of film, consonant with Kracauer's and Benjamin's theories.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, the above-described process expresses a crucial shift in the triadic relation between subject, film, and history. While the "*phenomenal* undertone of feeling" creates a resonance "between the spectator's body and the film's body," at a cognitive level there remains an I-You divide that makes the empathizing person aware "that it is not they themselves who has these feelings."<sup>116</sup> In imaginative projection, the spectator wonders "how he himself would have reacted emotionally and how he would have behaved, had he himself been experiencing the events in the film."<sup>117</sup> This combination of imaginative and acentral empathy represents a crucial point of difference from scholarly historical writing. The "objectification and projection of *ourselves-now* as *others-then*" is replaced in the historical film by "subjectification and projection of *ourselves-now* as *wethen*."<sup>118</sup> The tension between imaginative empathy and cognition can "make the spectator reflect on relevance for himself."<sup>119</sup> This self-reflection extends beyond the horizons of the fictional world and gives historical films the potential to substantially influence our conceptions of history.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I analyzed historical films as multi-immersive perceptual spaces, and concluded that histospheres can exert an especially profound influence on our conceptions and interpretations of history if they allow

spectators to physically “live” the filmically modeled historical worlds. This temporally organized aesthetic encounter not only forms the basis for the great popularity of the historical film genre, but also (as a condition for producing an audiovisual history) has a significance that goes far beyond the medium of film.

A particular role is played in this process by audiovisually constructed atmospheres, which allow histospheres to evoke moods and emotions. My investigation showed that the corporal-emotional effect of atmosphere enables us to physically experience the historical spaces constructed by film. Filmic atmospheres evoke a feeling of direct contact with history,<sup>120</sup> our conception of which is augmented by associatively evoked memories and moods. These include media-generated “prosthetic memories.” By being emotionally and physically exposed to the history simulated by the film and reflecting on the feelings it evokes, we take a stance toward the imaginary historical referents of the *mise-en-histoire*. The dramaturgy of atmosphere has the potential to steer and direct our perceptions of the historical world constructed by the film at an affective and emotional level, and thus also the conceptions and interpretations of history we derive from it. I also observed that atmospheres evocative of film history add another layer of meaning to histospheres that marks out the film itself as a historical document.

To provide a theoretical underpinning for my arguments, I examined various theories of immersion and considered whether they are compatible with a theory and praxis of histospheres. Historical films construct atmospheric worlds that enfold us and bring us physically and mentally closer to the action of the film. My thesis is that in historical films this closeness helps the historical past seem less distant, too. Christian Metz’s psychoanalytic approach shows how filmic figurations can, via a detour through the realm of dream, be transformed into hallucinatory perceptions. My analysis shows that these ideas can also be applied to the theoretical concept of histospheres. Our empathetic engagement with the sensations and moods of historical films is augmented by associatively recalled historical references; together, they blend into a dreamlike illusion. The historicity derived from remembered associations is projected onto the film’s material figurations, which can in turn be sensuously experienced. This interweaving of emotional and cognitive processes with synesthetic affects facilitates the “slide” into a state of dreamlike hallucination. As part of a histosphere, the immersive potential of filmic figurations makes us feel as if we are leaving behind the place from which we are watching the film,

whether that be a movie theater seat or our living room couch, and embarking on a “journey” to a historical world. The key to this phenomenon lies in the construction and experience of the filmic space. Christiane Voss’s model of a “borrowed body”—a “somatic space of meaning” in which “the action of the film can be sensuously and affectively embedded”—offers a plausible explanation for the intense impression of a histosphere’s bringing history to life.<sup>121</sup> A film’s complex temporal structure overrides the spectator’s perceptions of the time in which they are actually watching the film and strengthens the “living entanglement with the action of the film,”<sup>122</sup> while freeing us as spectators from the linear temporal logic of our everyday perception. On this view, we do not enter into the historical film’s historical worlds; rather, they enter into us. Thus understood, filmic immersion plays a key part in allowing histospheres to make us feel as though we are physically experiencing the past—through experiencing ourselves.

Atmosphere, mood, and immersion are closely interwoven with concepts of imaginative empathy, which must likewise be considered relevant to a theory of histospheres. On the one hand, empathy allows us to grasp the emotional states of film characters. We can then in turn relate these characters to other characters and to ourselves, resulting in an empathetically experienceable model of a historical social system. Sensuous emotional empathy in combination with historical referentialization can thereby allow spectators to experience historical ideologies. According to Vivian Sobchack, we do not merely live the historical world of the film as our own, subjective experience; rather, at the same time we perceive the film’s perspective on this world—as lived by another with whom we are able to empathize. On the basis of immersion, affect, and empathy, we have the impression of being able to immerse ourselves in the film’s historical worlds in a mode of living encounter. The empathetically felt aesthetic experience gives the histosphere a quality that can be interpreted retrospectively—under the influence of the reflexively operating *mise-en-histoire*—as a *historical feeling*. This also allows us to empathetically make moods and atmospheres present to ourselves and imaginatively corporally apprehend them.<sup>123</sup> My theory of histospheres proved especially compatible with Susanne Schmetkamp’s model of empathy, which is based on an embodied process of making-present and perspective-taking. Particular emphasis is given, first, to the implicit power of film to make the past present; and second, to the crucial shift away from academic historiography. The “objectification and projection of *ourselves-now* as *others-then*” is

replaced in the historical film by “subjectification and projection of *ourselves-now* as *we-then*.”<sup>124</sup> The dynamic relation between imaginative empathy and cognition that histospheres can engender extends beyond the horizons of the fictional world and has the potential to influence our conceptions of history in general: Dimensions of cinematic expression such as mood and atmosphere, in conjunction with processes that produce immersion and empathy, enable imaginative experiences of history with enormous power.

## NOTES

1. See on this point Matthias Hein, *Zu einer Theorie des Erlebens bei Béla Balázs*, Würzburg 2011, p. 21.
2. Béla Balázs, *Visible Man*, in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, New York and Oxford 2010, p. 22.
3. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Scotts Valley 2015, p. 92.
4. For the definition of Ricœur’s terms “configuration” and “refiguration,” see Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Chicago and London 1984a, pp. 53–54, 64–70; and the section on “Figuration and illusion” in the previous chapter of this present volume.
5. Margrit Tröhler, “Filmische Atmosphären – Eine Annäherung,” in Philipp Brunner, Jörg Schweinitz, and Margrit Tröhler (eds.), *Filmische Atmosphären*, Marburg 2012, pp. 13–14. Tröhler also refers here to Gernot Böhme, who locates atmosphere in the relation “between” subject and object, and often speaks in this connection of “impressions” [*Anmutungen*] that affect us emotionally. See Gernot Böhme, *Anmutungen: Über das Atmosphärische*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 8.
6. Hermann Kappelhoff and Jan-Hendrik Bakels, “Das Zuschauergefühl – Möglichkeiten qualitativer Medienanalyse,” *ZfM* 5, 2011, p. 83.
7. According to Greg M. Smith’s “mood cue approach” (as paraphrased by Kappelhoff and Bakels (2011, p. 83)), “continuously, repeatedly feeling a certain emotion results in the formation of a mood coherent with that emotion”; conversely, “mood—as an emotional disposition—subsequently facilitates coherent emotional responses.” See Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, Cambridge 2007, p. 41.
8. Urban Gad, *Der Film: Seine Mittel, seine Ziele*, Berlin 1920, pp. 76, 105. See on this point also Daniel Wiegand, who further clarifies this distinction by coining the terms *Bildstimmung* (picture mood) and *filmische Gesamtstimmung* (overall mood of a film). Daniel Wiegand, “Die Wahrheit aber ist es nicht allein’: Zur Idee der Stimmung im Film nach 1910,” in Brunner et al. (2012, p. 197).

9. Kappelhoff and Bakels (2011, p. 86).
10. Ibid.
11. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, p. 305.
12. Hans J. Wulff, "Prologema zu einer Theorie des Atmosphärischen im Film," in Brunner et al. (2012, p. 119).
13. Ibid.
14. Tröhler (2012, p. 11).
15. Hermann Schmitz, "Gefühle als Atmosphären und das affektive Betroffensein von ihnen," in Hinrich Fink-Eitel and Georg Lohmann (eds.), *Zur Philosophie der Gefühle*, Frankfurt 1993, p. 23.
16. Ibid., p. 26. On this point, Robert Gugutzer writes: "On a neophenomenological view, grief [*Trauer*] is a feeling, that is to say, an atmosphere, which becomes the physical sensation of sadness [*Traurigkeit*] when a person is palpably affected by the atmosphere." Robert Gugutzer, "Hermann Schmitz: Der Gefühlsraum," in Konstanze Senge (ed.), *Hauptwerke der Emotionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2013, p. 306.
17. Hermann Schmitz, *Der Leib, der Raum und die Gefühle*, Bielefeld and Locarno 2007, pp. 47–57.
18. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992, p. 56.
19. Fred van der Kooij in *ATMOSPHÄRE: UNTERSUCHUNGEN ZU EINEM BEGRIFF* (2010; dir. Elisabeth Blum).
20. On ambience, see reference 76 in the previous chapter of this present volume.
21. As already discussed in the chapter "Audiovisual history" (in the section "History as audiovision"), Michel Chion coined the term *valeur ajoutée* to describe the "added value" generated by the interaction between film image and film sound. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York 2019, p. 202.
22. Although Schmitz's examples do not explicitly refer to film, the mechanisms he discusses could certainly be reproduced by cinematic devices. See Hermann Schmitz, "Über das Machen von Atmosphären," in Anna Blume, *Zur Phänomenologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung*, Freiburg and Munich 2005, p. 38.
23. Barbara Flückiger, *Sound Design: Die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films*, Marburg 2012, p. 331.
24. Schmitz (2005, p. 38).
25. Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung*, Berlin 2012, p. 19.
26. See also Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (as discussed in the previous chapter). Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in his *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin 1981.

27. Ricœur (1984a, p. 82).
28. This is in a certain sense a spatial variation on the moment in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927) when the taste of a madeleine dissolved in tea vividly reawakens memories of childhood.
29. One example Seel gives is of a ball that “reminds us of the sound of children who are long gone.” Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, Stanford 2005, p. 92.
30. By “prosthetic memory,” Alison Landsberg is referring to media representations of history that are subsequently recalled as if they were events we had experienced ourselves. See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York 2004, p. 2. I go into this aspect of histospheres in more detail in the section “Prosthetic postmemory” in the next chapter.
31. Seel (2005, p. 94).
32. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
33. My argument is based here on an understanding of “art as experience,” which according to John Dewey (as paraphrased by Kappelhoff and Bakels, who develop the category of “spectator feeling” on the basis of Dewey’s theory) consists in “the conscious experience [*Erleben*] of the undivided unity of a continuous process of emotional modulation unfolding over time.” Kappelhoff and Bakels (2011, p. 80).
34. Wulff (2012, p. 110).
35. Jörg Schweinitz, “Von Transparenz und Intransparenz: Über die Atmosphäre historischen Filmmaterials,” in Brunner et al. (2012, p. 46).
36. Schweinitz speaks of a “peculiar defamiliarization.” *Ibid.*, p. 47.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
38. Béla Balázs, “Zur Kunstphilosophie des Films,” in Franz-Josef Albersmeier (ed.), *Texte zur Theorie des Films*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 212.
39. Christiane Voss, “Fiktionale Immersion,” in Gertrud Koch and Christiane Voss, “*Es ist, als ob*: Fiktionalität in Philosophie, Film- und Medienwissenschaft,” Munich 2009, p. 126.
40. Anke Zechner, *Die Sinne im Kino: Eine Theorie der Filmwahrnehmung*, Frankfurt 2013, p. 49.
41. Schmitz (2005, p. 36).
42. Conversely, Balázs also speaks of eliminating the “spectator’s position of fixed distance: a distance that hitherto has been an essential feature of the visual arts.” Béla Balázs, *The Spirit of Film*, in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, New York and Oxford 2010, p. 99.
43. Robin Curtis and Christiane Voss, “Fielding und die *movie-ride*-Ästhetik: Vom Realismus zur Kinesis,” *montage AV* 17:2, 2008, p. 11.
44. *Ibid.*
45. See Robin Curtis, “Immersion und Einfühlung: Zwischen Repräsentationalität und Materialität bewegter Bilder,” *montage AV* 17:2, 2008, p. 97.

46. Ibid.
47. See Theodor Lipps, *Leitfaden der Psychologie*, Leipzig 1906, p. 196. Above, I have cited the paraphrase of Lipps's theory by Curtis, who persuasively applies them to film. Curtis (2008, p. 99).
48. Balázs concludes that film, like painting, "offers the possibility of giving the background, the surroundings, a physiognomy no less intense than the faces of the characters—or, as in Van Gogh's late pictures, an even more intense physiognomy, so that the violent expressive power of the objects makes that of the human characters pale into insignificance." Balázs (2015, p. 96).
49. On the concept of *mise-en-histoire*, see the section "From *mise-en-scène* to *mise-en-histoire*" in the previous chapter.
50. On the concept of illusion, see the section "Figuration and illusion" in the previous chapter.
51. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1982, p. 107.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 133.
54. Gertrud Koch speaks of "awareness of illusion." See Koch (2016, pp. 51–52).
55. Metz (1982, pp. 103–104).
56. Ibid., p. 103.
57. See Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, Baltimore and London 2001. Here, I have quoted Voss's summary of Ryan's theory. Christiane Voss, *Der Leibkörper: Erkenntnis und Ästhetik der Illusion*, Paderborn 2013, p. 183.
58. Metz (1982, p. 109).
59. Ibid.
60. Sobchack (1992, p. 8).
61. Voss (2009, p. 138).
62. Christiane Voss, "Fiktionale Immersion," *montage AV* 17:2, 2008, p. 82.
63. Ibid., p. 83.
64. Voss notes that "narrative anticipations and flashbacks, intertextual references, and emotional and moral identifications with a film's characters and viewpoints" feed into "our immersive experiences just as much as physical and affective responses to the material, aesthetic qualities of cinematic means of representation." Voss (2009, pp. 135–138).
65. Oliver Schmidt, *Hybride Räume: Filmwelten im Hollywood-Kino der Jahrtausendwende*, Marburg 2013, p. 107.
66. Curtis (2008, p. 95).
67. Schmidt (2013, p. 90).

68. According to Sobchack, the cinesthetic subject simultaneously experiences themselves as a detached observer of the film's audiovisual figurations and as a synesthetically involved participant in the filmic world: "We both perceive a world within the immediate experience of an 'other' and without it, as immediate experience by an 'other.'" Sobchack (1992, p. 10). See also Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley 2004, pp. 53–84.
69. Christiane Voss, "Filmerfahrung und Illusionsbildung: Der Zuschauer als Leihkörper des Films," in Gertrud Koch and Christiane Voss (eds.), *...kraft der Illusion*, Munich 2006, p. 81.
70. "The film's body materially surrounds us as other human bodies never can after we leave the womb." Sobchack (1992, p. 222).
71. Voss (2006, p. 81).
72. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
73. Ankersmit (2012, p. 98).
74. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
75. Voss (2006, p. 81).
76. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
77. Hermann Kappelhoff and Sarah Greifenstein, "Metaphorische Interaktion und empathische Verkörperung: Thesen zum filmischen Erfahrungsmodus," in Malte Hagener and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran (eds.), *Empathie im Film: Perspektiven der Ästhetischen Theorie, Phänomenologie und Analytischen Philosophie*, Bielefeld 2017, pp. 172–173.
78. *Ibid.*
79. Sobchack uses this phrase, coined by Merleau-Ponty, as a definition of film. See Sobchack (1992, p. 3).
80. Here, I am still following Kappelhoff and Greifenstein, who understand the process of empathy as a metaphorical interaction that "relates the experiences lived in our own bodies to modes of experience from other subject positions [than that of the film's gaze]." Kappelhoff and Greifenstein (2017, p. 177).
81. "An *experiential field* in which human beings pretheoretically construct and play out a particular—and culturally encoded—form of *temporal existence*." This quotation comes from Sobchack's reflections on historical epics, which can also be extended to historical films in general. Vivian Sobchack: "Surge and Splendor: A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic," in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III*, Austin 2007, p. 300.
82. Balázs (1998, p. 220).
83. Imaginative empathy is also referred to as "central imagining." The term "acentral imagining," by contrast, signifies that "the spectator need not imagine what is happening on the screen from any specific point of view



- in the fiction”; their reactions can be merely sympathetic or antipathetic. See Margrethe Bruun Vaage, “Empathy and the Episodic Structure of Engagement in Fiction Film,” in Joseph D. Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson, (eds.), *Narration and Spectatorship in Moving Images*, Cambridge 2007, p. 187.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
  85. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
  86. On this point, Vaage remarks: “As sense impression may or may not attract attention to itself, so perhaps may central imagining.” *Ibid.*
  87. *Ibid.*, pp. 187, 189.
  88. Amy Coplan, “Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects,” in Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Oxford 2011, p. 17.
  89. Balázs (1998, p. 220).
  90. Jens Eder, “Imaginative Nähe zu Figuren,” *montage AV* 15:2, 2006, p. 138.
  91. Though this is not to deny that makers of propaganda films have frequently attempted to do just that.
  92. Hagener and Vendrell Ferran (2017, p. 22).
  93. Vaage (2007, p. 198).
  94. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
  95. See Hans J. Wulff, “Empathie als Dimension des Filmverstehens: Ein Thesenpapier,” *montage AV* 12:1, 2003, p. 140.
  96. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
  97. *Ibid.*
  98. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
  99. Vaage concludes from this that “empathy may contribute both to engagement in the fiction [...], to aesthetic experience and appreciation, and sometimes even to self-reflection about the spectator’s real self.” Vaage (2007, p. 187).
  100. Wulff (2003, p. 138).
  101. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
  102. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
  103. See Knut Hickethier, “Zeitgeschichte in der Mediengesellschaft: Dimensionen und Forschungsperspektiven,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 6, 2009, p. 364.
  104. Susanne Schmetkamp, “Perspektive und empathische Resonanz: Vergegenwärtigung anderer Sichtweisen,” in Hagener and Vendrell Ferran (2017, p. 136).
  105. Kracauer (1997, p. 158).
  106. See the discussion of “mirror neurons” in Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Berlin 2016, p. 251.

107. Ibid.
108. Hermann Kappelhoff, *Kognition und Reflexion: Zur Theorie filmischen Denkens*, Berlin 2018, pp. 50–51.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., pp. 266–267.
111. Coplan stresses the role of narrativity, whereby we do not directly adopt a felt mood but instead empathetically take a perspective that allows a separation of self and other. See Coplan and Goldie (2011, pp. 3–18).
112. See Schmetkamp (2017, p. 137). The connection between moods and empathetic engagement again echoes Balázs’s concept of an “anthropomorphous world,” in which “every shape makes a—mostly unconscious—emotional impression on us, which may be pleasant or unpleasant, alarming or reassuring, because it reminds us, however distantly, of some human face.” Balázs (2015, p. 92).
113. See Schmetkamp (2017, p. 141).
114. Ibid., p. 156.
115. As well as the parallels that Kracauer draws attention to in his *History*, the mirror metaphor he adapts from Benjamin is also worthy of note. See Kracauer (1997, p. 305); Siegfried Kracauer, *History – the Last Things Before the Last*, Princeton 1995. On this topic, see also the section “Film experience and history” in the chapter “Film/history/experience.”
116. Schmetkamp (2017, p. 159).
117. Vaage (2007, p. 195).
118. Sobchack (2007, p. 300).
119. Vaage (2007, p. 196).
120. Ankersmit (2012, p. 19).
121. Voss (2006, p. 81).
122. Ibid., p. 82.
123. Schmetkamp (2017, p. 137).
124. Sobchack (2007, p. 300).

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## Experience and Remembering

History and film stand in a close reciprocal relationship not just with each other, but also with discourses of memory and remembering. While historians are frequently confronted with questions about the culture of memory, film studies is dominated by the idea that films are a medium for “storing,” “recording,” or “disseminating” collective memory.<sup>1</sup> Experiential approaches toward the relation between film, history, and memory, by contrast, are largely neglected or marginalized, despite the fact that we perceive film images and memories in a similar way: Both are glimpsed only as they “whizz” or “flash” by,<sup>2</sup> remaining fragmentary yet still possessing a “hyperreal” quality.<sup>3</sup> However, if, as Jean Baudrillard claims, it is no longer possible to disentangle our conceptions of the past and the historical reality simulated by media,<sup>4</sup> this is due in part to a bodily experiential dimension. As Thomas Elsaesser observes, in the age of “living” pictures, history—which once seemed objective—has evaporated, while memory “has gained in status, as the repository of genuine experience.”<sup>5</sup> And so: “What more appropriate instrument to record and preserve memory than sight and sound?”<sup>6</sup> This shift toward embodied experience in the function of recording and preserving memories has also brought a shift in film studies discourse in its wake. Historical films in particular are increasingly understood as a point of intersection between processes of embodied memory and historicization. Building on this idea, the first section of this chapter explores the complex interrelationship between film, body, and memory. As fundamental elements of a

histosphere, I argue, embodied memories make it possible to experience a film's historical world as a physical reality, and add a bodily experiential dimension to the *mise-en-histoire*, which until now has primarily been understood as a reflective process. I elaborate on these ideas in the second section, and combine them with theories of media-generated memories. Histospheres, I shall show, draw not just on existing embodied memories and conceptions of history, but are actively involved in producing personal experiences with identity-forging potential; in a second stage, these experiences are then addressed as memories. In the third section, I examine the workings of one such stimulus-response model, whereby filmic figurations link the film's historical world to the spectator's embodied memories and produce a kind of *déjà vu* effect. I show that forms of experience and memory are not mere effects but constitutive, interdependent processes of histospheres.

### FILM/BODY/MEMORY

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how we as spectators are put into a state of immersive experience and imaginative empathy that structures our perception of the historical worlds configured by film.<sup>7</sup> These worlds are also inscribed with historical references by a film's *mise-en-histoire*.<sup>8</sup> However, whereas immersion and empathy primarily address somatic aspects of film experience, the *mise-en-histoire* is based mainly on constructivist-semiotic connections. One thing that links these two dimensions of histospheres together is the relation between body and memory. To illustrate this by reference to a personal film experience: In my subjective perception of the subway sequence at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*, embodied film experience and memory collided. At the sight of the brass handrails, I reflexively recalled the hard, smooth surfaces that my hand has touched on countless journeys on public transportation. In a moment of synesthetic reminiscence, I could even feel the shaking and vibration of the subway car, breathe the warm, stuffy air, and smell the distinctive electric fragrance of the underground. My unconscious somatic memory immediately passed into *daydream*. While Christian Metz uses this term to describe the simultaneous perception of film and "phantasy,"<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Kracauer distinguishes between two directions of dreaming.<sup>10</sup> The first leads toward the object in the physical reality of the film: "Released from the control of consciousness, the spectator cannot help feeling attracted by the phenomena in front of him. They beckon him to come nearer."<sup>11</sup> The

other direction leads away from the object toward the spectator's own imagined or remembered image worlds.<sup>12</sup> Histospheres behave analogously: Based on our experience of a film, we place ourselves in the film's audiovisually simulated historical world. At the same time, the subjective associations and mental images prompted by the *mise-en-histoire* cause us to drift in thought. This seeming paradox of the dream metaphor is accompanied by the exclusion of the spectator's body from many theoretical accounts, an omission that is impossible to argumentatively sustain. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener rightly point out that "it is only our capacity to perceive the external world" that ultimately allows us "to produce inner constructs of this sort."<sup>13</sup> With the concept of "physical reality," Kracauer introduced a bodily experiential dimension to film perception; on his view, film perception draws on a pool of basic everyday experiences, which are mainly bodily and haptic in nature and thus located at a deeper level of processing than social and political structures. In this section, I shall combine these theories with a phenomenological conception according to which memories are not solely mental states but always also involve our sensory apparatus.

There is also a close interrelation between the physiological embeddedness of memory and the medium of film. The film scholar Heike Klippel draws attention to how in cinema the "mundane and material" have permeated "the mental" to an unprecedented degree and marked out memory as an incontestable, indeterminate site "in which the physical world and mental conceptions are interwoven."<sup>14</sup> On this theory, film functions as an "externalized process of memory," in which the spectator's biography and the film's plot interpermeate.<sup>15</sup> This reciprocal relationship also occurs in historical films; we connect the film's historical world, which has been configured for us to perceive, with embodied memories of basic everyday experiences. A histosphere is thus composed not just of audiovisual figurations, but also of elements of our embodied memory. One example given by Vivian Sobchack in her work on embodied film experience is the enigmatic, perplexing first shot of *THE PIANO* (1993; dir. Jane Campion). Sobchack says that her fingers already "knew" in advance that this shot showed the view through the protagonist's hands (Figs. 7.1 and 7.2).

Thanks to her memories of her own bodily experience, her fingers "comprehended" and "grasped" the image and "felt themselves" as a "potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured onscreen."<sup>16</sup> Sobchack's thesis that her fingers *reflexively* knew what her conscious mind





**Figs. 7.1–7.2** Remembering personal bodily experience: the view through the protagonist's fingers in *THE PIANO*

had not yet *reflectively* grasped<sup>17</sup> implies that she was unconsciously accessing memories of earlier physical-sensory experiences. A film's specific audiovisual configurations trigger the spectator's embodied memory,<sup>18</sup> with haptic and tactile experiences occupying a privileged position in the process. As well as visually depicting surface textures, film can also impart information about the filmic world's material constitution through sound. "Materializing sound indices"<sup>19</sup> like the dull, shuffling steps on the parquet floor in the dance school in *KU'DAMM 56* evokes different embodied memories than, say, the crunching of gravel on pavement. A histosphere's

haptic qualities are gradually pieced together based on synesthetic linkages with the spectator's embodied memories. The reliving of sensuous bodily experiences gives the hystosphere a synesthetic quality through which a "somatic space of meaning" is created.<sup>20</sup> Embodied memories of everyday experiences bleed into perceptions of the filmic world's historicity. When we see the brass handrails on the subway at the start of *KU'DAMM 56*, most of us will probably have an idea, based on experience and memory, of what they feel like. The film's historical world no longer seems quite so unfamiliar if we feel like we have an embodied memory of it. In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the female characters are often shown sewing or folding laundry. These incidental depictions of touching various fabrics, whether a dress made of coarse cotton or fine bedlinen, can awaken in us memories of corresponding haptic experiences (Fig. 7.3).

The medium of this resonance is the skin, which represents less a boundary or dividing line between subject and world than a "semipermeable *membrane* [...] that brings world and subject into relation and makes them mutually receptive and porous."<sup>21</sup> With regards to film's synesthetic



Fig. 7.3 Tactile resonance: fabrics in *YEARS OF HUNGER*

potential, one particularly significant point made by Hartmut Rosa is that the skin is “a dually sensitive and literally *breathing* and *responsive* resonance organ that mediates and articulates the relation between body and world on the one hand and person and body on the other.”<sup>22</sup> The skin reacts not just to physical stimuli from the environment, but also to mental and emotional states.<sup>23</sup> The boundary between purely physical and cognitively driven reactions is fluid. For instance, a high-pitched sound, like a person scratching a blackboard, can prompt a direct, vegetative response such as goosebumps. By contrast, we experience the shiver that runs down our spine when watching a horror film as a reaction to the combination of audiovisual stimuli and narrative relationships. As we empathetically engage with the film characters or situations, we imagine, say, how it would feel if we ourselves were being spun through the air while dancing instead of Monika. In a manner closely bound up with our capacity for empathy, this process also awakens our memories of previous lived or filmic experiences. Media theorist Laura Marks’s analysis of the “skin of the film”<sup>24</sup> expands on Sobchack’s concept of film as embodied experience: By signifying embodied memories, filmic space becomes sensuously available, enabling “contact” between the spectator and the film’s represented objects.<sup>25</sup> Marks uses a similar vocabulary to Frank R. Ankersmit in his definition of historical experience, which he claims creates the impression of “authentic contact” with the past.<sup>26</sup> Filmic spaces’ availability to sensuous, physical experience on the basis of embodied memories can also produce historical experiences of this kind. What Marks describes as the possibility of mediating intercultural experiences<sup>27</sup> could, then, also help bridge the temporal distance to the historical past. Depictions of physical touch are especially well suited to creating a sense of intimacy and familiarity that brings the historical world simulated by the film closer by invoking primordial embodied memories and instincts. Marks draws heavily on Gilles Deleuze (although critics have rightly pointed out significant departures from Deleuze’s thought in her work<sup>28</sup>), but I shall not consider this aspect further here as it would undermine my attempt to connect Marks’s theory to phenomenological approaches to film; for whereas Deleuze’s notion of the “crystal-image” implies film’s desubjectivized *historicity*, phenomenological approaches, including the present study, focus on the subject-bound *experience of history* afforded by film. The potential of historical films to produce historical experiences emerges at the intersection between embodied film experience, memory, and imaginary referentialization. The skin, as in Marks’s work, functions as a metaphor for a

permeable membrane that not only spans the field of interaction between embodied and cognitive memories, but also that between autobiographical and collective memory. Attention was already drawn by Rudolf Arnheim to the interplay between film perception and “memory traces.”<sup>29</sup> Since embodied memory structures film perception as a dynamic matrix, the unceasing production of new experiences also influences and modifies our memories of previous experiences. This continuous configuration and reconfiguration adds a bodily experiential dimension to the *mise-en-histoire*, which until now has primarily been understood as a reflective process. The flights of imagination prompted by a film’s historical references work in tandem with the immediate sensuous experiences while watching the film and the spectator’s embodied memories to help produce a historical experience.

The interplay of sensuous film experience and embodied memory also significantly influences the mode in which spectators experience the film. By contrast with older normative distinctions, Sobchack holds that fiction and nonfiction differ primarily in terms of the spectator’s expectations, experiences, and evaluations.<sup>30</sup> Based on the premise that perceptions of film images generally involve both experiential modes, she sets out the idea of a “documentary consciousness” on the part of the spectator, an embodied, normative mode of experience that in fiction films transforms unreal into real.<sup>31</sup> Taking the example of the actual death of the rabbit in Jean Renoir’s *THE RULES OF THE GAME* (1939), she describes how the sudden, shocking change in our understanding of the film ruptures the cinematic fiction (Fig. 7.4).

For Sobchack, the death of the real rabbit was far more shocking and unsettling than the death of the fictional human character. She ascribes this to the fact that the death of the rabbit ruptured the autonomous and homogeneous fictional space and transformed it into a documentary space.<sup>32</sup> Modal shifts of this sort can also be observed in historical films at points where we become aware of their referential relation to the past while simultaneously feeling the film’s physical reality. This gives rise to a parallel between the effect of a histosphere, which not only comprises an embodied experience but also semiotically produces historical references, and Roland Barthes’s “reality effect,” in which the “very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism.”<sup>33</sup> In an analogous manner, in historical films filmic figurations take the place of historical referents. The embodied film experience does not run counter to the semiotic process but actually reinforces it by



Fig. 7.4 Documentary consciousness: the dead rabbit in *THE RULES OF THE GAME*

making it possible to experience the film's historical world as a physical reality. The imaginative illusion thus usually remains intact while also being given the validation of factual historical authenticity. However, there can be a discrepancy between filmic figuration and historical reference; for instance, if we do not find an actor "believable" in the role of a historical figure. Such cases will seriously undermine our imaginative empathy and immersive involvement.

Sobchack's example of the dying rabbit shows that the shock effect of documentary consciousness is especially strong if the film's fictional depiction is indexically linked to an actual death. Although the route from Renoir's rabbit to the deaths at the inner German border is long and ethically fraught, very similar psychological processes are at work in both cases. The violent death of the two protagonists at the end of *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is even more disturbing if we know that it was not just film characters but also real people who lost their lives in a hail of bullets at the inner German border. Unlike Renoir's rabbit, the actors in Käutner's film were not actually harmed. But despite this, *SKY WITHOUT STARS* is also able to shockingly evoke a feeling of unease that can be understood as a reaction

to a possible violation of ethical norms: Is it wrong to appropriate real-life deaths as an object of entertainment in fictional representations? Debates about filmic depictions of painful periods of history, in particular the question of whether the Holocaust can or should be represented on screen, also revolve around ethical questions of this kind.<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Moldenhauer's reference to an "unease about films that tell stories of the historical past while remaining within the conventional framework of genre cinema"<sup>35</sup> (as discussed in an earlier chapter) describes a similar inner conflict. However, while fictional depictions of historical events do not make the spectator complicit in the suffering of actual victims, Sobchack rightly asks whether the rabbit did not also die for her and her enjoyment of the film. She is far less moved by the death of the purely fictional human protagonist than by the actual death of the animal, for she knows intuitively that the human character Jurieux (Roland Tutain) only dies in the irreal fictional space.<sup>36</sup> It can have a similar moderating effect if a historical figure is played by a well-known actor: We know intuitively that the real person does not die, which can dilute or override the power of the historical reference to the death of an actual historical individual. The shock is diluted by the dual presence of a person as a film character *and* as an actor. We feel that there is "one body too much"; the imagined body of the historical person and the filmed body come into conflict.<sup>37</sup> Matters are different when we primarily perceive the film character, either because we do not know the actor or because they embody the role so convincingly. As Sobchack puts it, film character and historical reference blend together in "the mortal gravity of the filmed event," which "transform[s] the irreality of fictional space into a different ontological order of representation—namely, into the reality of a documentary space suddenly charged with existential and ethical investment."<sup>38</sup> However, the feelings connected to the documentary mode of experience need not be negative. The fact that the fictional historical world references actual historical events and thereby gains an intuitively persuasive "documentary" character can also trigger empathetic excitement and a sense of living involvement, an impression of "authentic contact"<sup>39</sup> with the historical past.

The tension between fictional and documentary modes of experience can generally be ascribed to a prereflective stage of film perception. According to Sobchack, this mode is not reflectively disclosed but physically "felt": It is our body rather than our intellect that recognizes the fundamental existential difference.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, it is unsurprising that

this knowledge is based on experiences linked to physical effects on the body. Whether it be the violent deaths of the rabbit in Renoir's film or the protagonists in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, each of these examples relates to acts of violence and bodily destruction. This triggers a "flash" of recognition<sup>41</sup> in which we are suddenly surprised "by the power of the object."<sup>42</sup> Affects and values erupt out of an existential and cultural knowledge that transcends and contextualizes the homogenizing apparatus of filmic and narrative representation,<sup>43</sup> shifting our focus from aesthetic and narrative aspects to ethical values.

However, the shift to a documentary mode of experience need not be accompanied by a feeling of shock. If the action of the film ceases to hold our full attention, our eyes and thoughts begin to wander.<sup>44</sup> We no longer see the film characters as subjects and part of the depicted world, but instead watch actors at work. If this happens while watching a historical film, we begin to scrutinize its historical accuracy and look for apparent errors by comparing the film with remembered historical references. A special effect can be achieved through the use of historical archive material, which results in a dual mode of spectator experience: at once documentary and fictional.<sup>45</sup> In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, for instance, the difference between the aesthetics of New German Cinema and the grainy, scratchy, flickering archive footage inserted into the film creates a reflective awareness of the relation between the fictional and nonfictional elements.

As with the distinction between the actual death of the rabbit and the fictional death of the character, we already "know" at a prereflective, bodily level of film experience which audiovisual conventions and aesthetic qualities typify documentary and fictional sequences respectively. This division between fictional and documentary modes of experience can also be undermined by audiovisual devices. Ari Folman's animated film *WALTZ WITH BASHIR* (2008) deals with a soldier's missing memories of the Sabra and Shatila massacre that occurred at a Lebanese refugee camp in 1982 in the presence of the Israeli Army. At the end of the film, animated images of the atrocities give way to live-action archival footage of the victims' bloated corpses and the despairing, weeping survivors. This juxtaposition makes us instantly aware of the historical referentialization, retrospectively transcending the boundaries of fictional space and consciousness. This shows that a fiction can be shockingly ruptured not just by extreme situations and events within the action of a film, but also by formal interruptions of the film's montage and visual aesthetics. Even synesthetically generated haptic film perceptions that result from audiovisual activation of



embodied memories can bring about a shift to a documentary mode of experience. However, unlike with shock, this does not create a distance or opposition between us and the film's fictional historical world, but rather expands our imaginative modeling of this world. This sort of connection between activation of embodied memory and the daydreaming described earlier in turn fosters a hybrid fictional and documentary mode of experience that does not undermine our perception of the historical world simulated by the film, but instead acknowledges and further intensifies it as a valid reality.

### PROSTHETIC POSTMEMORY

"In the struggle between history and memory [...] technical images have won."<sup>46</sup> This observation by Elsaesser about popular culture entails both a widespread "mediatization" of individual memory and an increasing blurring of the distinction between private and public images,<sup>47</sup> which would accord greater significance to processes of perception and memory that make spectators into direct witnesses to and participants in historical worlds. The great relevance of memory to our everyday perceptions is also illustrated by a previously discussed sequence from *SKY WITHOUT STARS*: When Anna's gaze fixes on a framed photograph hanging on the wall at her parent-in-laws' home, we intuitively believe that she is remembering something in that moment. We project our memory-infused perception of the world onto the film character. Memory "speaks" to us when we anticipate that the soldier in the picture must be Anna's late husband, Jochen's father. The film is making use here of mechanisms already described by Henri Bergson in his philosophical works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though he did not connect these mechanisms to the medium of film that was emerging at more or less the same time. Bergson writes that "with the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience."<sup>48</sup> Our perception thus consists of "an incalculable multitude of remembered elements" and so is already a form of memory.<sup>49</sup> Just as this model of perception and memory corresponds to a nineteenth-century way of thinking, so too can film be understood as a technical, cultural, and aesthetic legacy of that same period. Furthermore, the historicity of the moment of production inherent in the film image gives the impression, in the words of Stanley Cavell, of participating in an event "that has happened, which I absorb (like a memory)."<sup>50</sup> Though Cavell does not draw a direct connection to



phenomenology here, his reflections anticipate a core element of Sobchack's *Address of the Eye*: In both cases, the position of the camera outside the recorded world adverts to the absence of the spectator. We thus perceive the film as an intentional gaze of another—the cinematic subject, the camera, or the filmmaker.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, films include us in their action, affect us like any other experience, making the filmic world sensuously available to us from the perspective of an embodied, situated cinematic subject.<sup>52</sup> The deep-seated analogies between Bergson's model of *world* perception "impregnated" by memories,<sup>53</sup> Cavell's theory of similarly impregnated *film* perception, and Sobchack's concept of film as embodied experience suggest that the filmic representation of historical worlds and the spectator's historical consciousness correspond especially closely in the experience of remembering. We can infer that in a histsphere, memories resulting from sensuous, embodied film experience intermingle with those "from the world of lived experiences"<sup>54</sup> and mark out the world simulated by the film as a valid historical experience. Alison Landsberg even suggests that

the experience within the movie theater and the memories that the cinema affords [...] might be as significant in constructing, or deconstructing, the spectator's identity as any experience that s/he actually lived through.<sup>55</sup>

This thesis is supported by studies showing that people who lived through the Second World War mix up their own experiences of the war with elements from war films such as *THE BRIDGE* (1959; dir. Bernhard Wicki).<sup>56</sup> But film experiences can enter into our personal memories even if our own biography does not coincide geographically or chronologically with the historical worlds depicted on screen. For instance, as a child of the 1980s, I of course know that I did not live through the 1950s. And yet thanks to films like *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, *YEARS OF HUNGER*, and *KU'DAMM 56* I can have embodied memories of the 1950s that are based on sensuous experience of historical worlds constructed by film. Our immersive, empathetic engagement with films mean that even decades later these memories seem as vivid as moments from our childhood.<sup>57</sup> However, Klippel notes that the intermingling and interpenetration of film and the spectator's memories is not directed toward "discerning a historic truth," but rather presents the opportunity "to attain, from a decentered perspective on the self, a form of knowledge not obtainable through inference."<sup>58</sup> By transposing August Gallinger's concept of "recollective cognition" in this way, Klippel

formulates a fundamental condition for filmic production of historical experience as “self-experience,” which in turn connects directly to the theories of Frank R. Ankersmit.<sup>59</sup> The “authentic contact”<sup>60</sup> with the past described by Ankersmit can likewise be found in the work of Gallinger, who writes that the remembering subject has an “immediate belief in the factuality of their previous experiences [*Erlebnisse*].”<sup>61</sup> As an element of film perception, the process of remembering must consequently be ascribed crucial importance in the production of historical experience. The audiovisual figuration of a historical world is configured by our recollective cognition and refigured by the associative-recollective *mise-en-histoire*. Histospheres draw on two forms of memory: a prereflective, bodily form that is activated while watching a film, and a reflective, historicizing one that allows the film’s historical world to be experienced as such. The first form, bodily memories activated by perceiving a histosphere, is similar in some respects to literary scholar Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. In a study of descendants of Holocaust survivors, she shows that even members of the “generation after” can “remember” the “personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before” even though they know them only through “the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.”<sup>62</sup> She continues:

But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.<sup>63</sup>

This aspect is especially relevant to histospheres, for historical films rely on the medium’s immersive, empathy-arousing potential rather than an embodied narrative performance by parents handing down memories to the next generation. Consequently, cinematic postmemory no longer has any indexical relation to actual traumatic experiences. Instead, the film’s historical world is linked to the spectator’s own embodied recollections and emotional memory.<sup>64</sup> Imaginative empathy with the film’s gaze and the experience of a cinematic subject are again consonant with Sobchack’s phenomenological theory of a doubled address to the spectator.<sup>65</sup> This process of subjectivation and fictionalization is also reflected at the visual aesthetic level, where there comes to be less focus on the experiences of contemporaries and archival footage, and more on their far more popular fictional recreations. For instance, film scholar Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann

observes with regard to depictions of the Holocaust and National Socialism that

since the early 1990s, a visual aesthetic has increasingly emerged that no longer relates directly to historical events but rather to the media images and narratives of those events that have been handed down.<sup>66</sup>

The referentialization of filmic postmemory thereby assumes a form best described using Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory.

The almost unbearable tension during the illegal border crossing, the close, stuffy confines of a West German postwar home in the mid-1950s, the exuberant joy of a rock 'n' roll bar from the same period: I can remember all these things despite not having been alive at that time. Historical films like *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, *YEARS OF HUNGER*, and *KU'DAMM 56* produce embodied memories that in the process of the *mise-en-histoire* are inscribed with historical references and marked as valid historical experiences. Landsberg calls this "new form of memory" *prosthetic memory*; it "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative of the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum."<sup>67</sup> "Prosthetic" refers here to the specific bodily dimension of such memories, to which Landsberg ascribes the properties of *artificial* limbs but which nonetheless have a sensuous, experiential component.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the spectator has a sense of embodied contact with the historical past. The concept of prosthetic memory thus not only bears similarities to Ankersmit's notion of historical experience, but also has the potential to shape conceptions of history and political identities.<sup>69</sup> Landsberg notes that prosthetic memory has been intimately interwoven with the process of commodification since the early twentieth century, which "enables the transmission of memories to people who have no 'natural' or biological claims to them."<sup>70</sup> Historical films have a special capacity to make historical worlds that lie outside our social, cultural, and geographic environment available to experience. Although there are legitimate criticisms to be made about the commodification of popular films, they do allow viewers to develop a ubiquitous historical consciousness based on prosthetic memory. Landsberg explains that "the technologies of mass culture" transform memories into a "portable, fluid, and nonessentialist" good that blurs the boundaries between personal and collective memory.<sup>71</sup> Elsaesser expands this dynamic aspect of Landsberg's theory further. Proceeding from the hypothesis that "in popular cinema collective and individual memory are not only constructed

and assembled, but also deconstructed and worked through,” he proposes the term “parapractic memory.”<sup>72</sup> On his theory, media memory is based on audiovisual errors that, similar to Freudian slips, “take hold in the psyche precisely in virtue of their ambiguity and reveal a truth that could not otherwise be manifested.”<sup>73</sup> Elsaesser’s concept of parapractic memory lends support to the supposition that a living encounter with historical worlds simulated by film not only configures historical experiences and memories, but also produces (constantly refigured) conceptions of history. According to the historian Sylvie Lindeperg, this gives rise to “mirror structures [...] that make reference to earlier filmic depictions through an intertextual play of quotations and counterquotations.”<sup>74</sup> However, if most personal and collective memories and the conceptions of history constructed from them are based on media depictions, then the diagnosis of an “error” becomes essentially obsolete, since our conceptions of the past and the historical reality constructed by media can no longer be disentangled.<sup>75</sup> Despite legitimate criticisms of the rather frivolous use of the term “prosthetic,”<sup>76</sup> I shall therefore take up Landsberg’s theory again and connect it to Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory.<sup>77</sup> Integrating these two approaches enables a better understanding of the role and functioning of memory in filmic histospheres. For instance, the *prosthetic post-memory* activated in film perception is based not on intergenerational transmission of biographical experiences, but on embodied memories of film experiences. In this special form of prosthetic memory, embodied memory and historical referentialization coincide. Histospheres thus utilize two powerful processes of historicization that exponentially reinforce each other through their interaction and the fusion of personal and popular memories.

### REMINISCENCE TRIGGERS

Historical films not only create a multitude of highly subjective historical experiences, but also help bring about more general conceptions of history. The above-described impressions of the 1950s in the analyzed films—the tension of the border crossing, the narrow confines of the post-war home, the exuberance of a rock ‘n’ roll bar—draw on structures of audiovisual stimuli that I shall refer to as *reminiscence triggers*. In combination with our own embodied memories, they allow us to perceive the historical world constructed by the film in a mode of living encounter. This mode is enhanced by what Hugo Münsterberg calls a “certain warm

feeling of familiarity”<sup>78</sup> and tends to be accompanied by positive emotional responses, thereby overcoming experiences of otherness and difference from the world of our own lived experience. Unlike Kracauer’s model of a “flight of associations,”<sup>79</sup> which ultimately leads into the subjectivity of the spectator’s own inner world, the concept of the reminiscence trigger takes more account of the fact that we as spectators recognize our own everyday experiences in historical films. Audiovisually communicated impressions, as well as day-to-day activities such as the unpacking of new shoes at the start of *KU’DAMM 56* or the children’s game of cowboys and Indians in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, have the potential, in Friedrich Nietzsche’s words, to create a “sympathetic resonance”<sup>80</sup> in the spectator’s memory (Fig. 7.5).

The resonating images thus activate tap into primordial experiences such as moments of interpersonal touch, basic sensory impressions, or simple, universally relatable everyday events or encounters. Often, the underlying embodied memories are the result of media experiences. I do not need to have strolled down Kurfürstendamm myself in the 1950s to



Fig. 7.5 A children’s game in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*

be able to remember it. Immersive, living encounters with film induce prosthetic postmemories that I can recognize in other films and that feel like my own memories. Nonetheless, at a reflective level I remain aware of the as-if nature of these postmemories. Sometimes, however, I forget, or do not realize, that these are not my actual memories. An intense yet indistinct feeling of reliving the moment sets in: I have *déjà vu*. This too can be the result of a prosthetic postmemory created by film. Anticipating this point, Béla Balázs explains: “A repetition of the set-up can stimulate the memory of some past experience and produce the well-known psychological effect of ‘having seen it before.’”<sup>81</sup> As a “memory of the present,”<sup>82</sup> *déjà vu* is like the obverse of the historical film, which (especially at the level of meaning production) comprises a making-present of the past, an actualization of the historical-virtual. However, while, say, sequences of historical newsreel footage produce a historical context in virtue of their distinctive aesthetic and thereby make the potential for recognition transparent and reflectively comprehensible, individual shots are far more indeterminate. The building by the jetty and the facade of the apartment block at the start of Jutta Brückner’s *YEARS OF HUNGER* can only be roughly dated to a particular historical period, and are thus almost universally relatable (Fig. 7.6).

It is not just the content of the images, but also their specific formal features—the framing, the lighting, the camera movement—that can trigger a feeling of *déjà vu*, which we subconsciously connect to earlier (film) experiences.

In order to better understand the processes underlying these *déjà vu* effects, Bergson’s model of memory will once again prove helpful. Bergson uses the term “false recognition” to refer to the intense impression of the “already lived,” a “complete reinstatement of one or of several minutes of our past with the totality of their content, presentative, affective, active.”<sup>83</sup> He believes that “the formation of memory is never posterior to the formation of perception; it is contemporaneous with it.”<sup>84</sup> As perception is created, memory forms alongside it, just “as the shadow falls beside the body.”<sup>85</sup> However, “practical consciousness throw[s] this memory aside” for the moment of perception, giving rise to the illusion that “memory succeeds perception.”<sup>86</sup> But if memory also seeps into consciousness in the moment of perception—if, that is, I recall a moment at the same time as living through it—I get a feeling of *déjà vu*. Bergson uses the metaphor of a mirror to draw a fundamental ontological distinction: While perception is “actual,” a physical reality that can be touched, memory is a “virtual”



Fig. 7.6 Universally relatable settings in *YEARS OF HUNGER*

mirror-image.<sup>87</sup> By contrast with Deleuze, who transposes the immanence of the virtual onto the ontology of the film image,<sup>88</sup> here I shall concentrate primarily on a phenomenological interpretation of Bergson's theory, in full awareness that this goes beyond the epistemological limits of his reflections. Embodied film experience as described by Sobchack integrates the virtual images and sounds of a film into our perceptions of "physical reality."<sup>89</sup> This process of connecting virtual to actual enables film experience to elicit a kind of doubling effect in the spectator. However, this is not Bergsonian *déjà vu* in the strict sense—the symptoms are the same: the intense feeling of already having lived through the present moment. But the present moment in question is not the moment of reception. That is, the feeling here is not that of already having seen a *film like this*; rather, in the very moment of perception we feel as though we ourselves can recall the film's events. The embodied film experience overrides the virtuality of the filmic world, allowing it to be experienced in the present and falsely linking it to a vague memory. As Bergson puts it, memory is animated by the film's "sensori-motor elements."<sup>90</sup> Their ability to latch onto a wide range of extra-filmic experiences makes reminiscence triggers ideally suited



to prompting such reactions. A film's audiovisual stimuli and the specific context and atmosphere of a certain sequence are perceived as being identical with an often blurry memory. This phenomenon lies at the intersection between Bergson's concept of memory and Sobchack's concept of film experience.

Bergson describes the self being split into two persons: "one of which appropriates freedom, the other necessity: the one, a free spectator, beholds the other automatically playing his part."<sup>91</sup> In relation to film, Sobchack describes how the spectator sees the film's visible images as a world, that is to say, adopts the film's point of view.<sup>92</sup> Using Bergson's terminology, we could say that we "automatically" play our part in this world. However, on Sobchack's phenomenological account of film experience, we also simultaneously perceive the film as an intentional point of view on the filmic world.<sup>93</sup> This gives rise to another parallel with Bergson's concept of memory: For when we recognize the film's intentional point of view on the depicted filmic world as such, we also observe ourselves—as the spectator-subject that adopts this perspective on the filmic world to at least some degree. The phenomenological constellation of perspectives in film perception stands in constant interchange with our imaginations and memories: According to Klippel,

the picture [...] in the viewer's consciousness, is neither photographic nor from his own memory, it is a new one. It carries a specific "quality of knowledge" and provides him with an aesthetic experience which has a very concrete relationship to the world.<sup>94</sup>

Reminiscence triggers seek to produce a feeling of maximum possible similarity between the film image and the spectator's memory, so that in the moment of perception the spectator has the impression of "false recognition." The more strongly the film's immersive potential fuses the spectator's point of view with that of the film on the historical world it has simulated, the more likely this is to elicit a *déjà vu* effect. Connecting a histosphere's simulated historical world to the spectator's embodied memories not only enables a concrete relationship to the world, but also transforms the aesthetic film experience into a historical experience. This interplay of aesthetic, psychological, and bodily elements forms the phenomenological basis for productive historical knowledge as conceived by Benjamin. Benjamin himself compares the sudden "flashing" of a dialectical image to that of involuntary memory,<sup>95</sup> thereby anticipating the effects



of prosthetic postmemory and reminiscence triggers. As Lena Stölzl writes, “history is not merely represented or repeated, but actively produced afresh.”<sup>96</sup> Stölzl regards this way of understanding history as a challenge posed by the concept of the dialectical image; and it is this status as “history in the making”—history conceived no longer as a finished product but as a work in progress—that enables a “live” encounter with a histosphere in its specific combination of memory and experience.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I investigated how the discourse of media and remembrance has shifted to embodied experience, rather than focusing on the function of storing and recording. With a view to the theory and practice of historical films, I argue that histospheres function as a point of intersection between processes of embodied memory and historicization.

Whereas immersion and empathy primarily address somatic aspects of film experience, the *mise-en-histoire* is based mainly on constructivist-semiotic connections. One thing that links these two dimensions of histospheres together is the relation between body and memory. We connect our perceptions of filmically configured historical worlds with embodied memories of basic everyday experiences. This adds a bodily experiential dimension to the *mise-en-histoire*. The reliving of sensuous bodily experiences gives the histosphere a synesthetic quality through which a “somatic space of meaning” is created.<sup>97</sup> By considering Laura Marks’s analysis of the “skin of the film”<sup>98</sup> and Vivian Sobchack’s concept of film as embodied experience, I identified a further point of connection with Frank R. Ankersmit’s theory of historical experience: Filmic spaces’ availability to physical experience on the basis of embodied memories also enables embodied historical experiences. This can often reduce the temporal and cultural distance to the historical past; the film’s historical worlds no longer seem quite so unfamiliar if we feel like we have an embodied memory of them. At the same time, the unceasing production of new experiences also colors our memories of earlier experiences and modifies them in a continuous process of configuration and refiguration. While watching historical films, there can thus also be modal shifts in which particular actions or stylistic devices can cause the fiction to be ruptured by a documentary consciousness. However, due to their referential relation to nonfilmic events from the past, historical films have always represented a combination of fictional and documentary modes of experience, so that the

imaginative illusion usually remains intact. Histospheres thus have an effect that mirrors Roland Barthes's "reality effect,"<sup>99</sup> with filmic figurations taking the place of historical referents. In addition, the depicted historical worlds are given the validation of factual historical authenticity, which can lead to an expanded imaginative modeling of the constructions of the past that we experience on screen.

Building on this, I argued that histospheres draw not just on existing embodied memories and conceptions of history, but are actively involved in producing personal experiences with identity-forging potential; in a second stage, these experiences are then addressed as memories. To provide a theoretical grounding for these theses, I showed by reference to Bergson, Cavell, and Sobchack how memories resulting from sensuous, embodied film experience intermingle with those "from the world of lived experiences"<sup>100</sup> and mark out the worlds simulated by histospheres as valid historical experiences. The audiovisual figurations are configured by our recollective cognition and refigured by the associative-recollective *mise-en-histoire*. Histospheres draw on two forms of memory: a prereflective, bodily form that is activated while watching a film (which I connected to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory), and a reflective, historicizing one that allows the film's historical world to be experienced as such. However, unlike in Hirsch's account of intergenerational transmission of memories, filmic postmemory does not stand in an indexical relation to the experiences underlying it. The historical worlds produced by films are instead associatively linked to our own embodied recollections and emotional memory. The referentialization of filmic postmemory is best described using Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory. Landsberg does not regard "prosthetics" as synonymous with inanimate artifacts, but rather, as per the theory of Marshall McLuhan, as innervated, artificial extensions of the human body.<sup>101</sup>

By integrating the concepts of postmemory and prosthetic memory, I hope to have contributed to a better understanding of the role and functioning of memory in filmic histospheres. My concept of prosthetic postmemory refers to memories based not on intergenerational transmission of biographical experiences, but on embodied memories of film experiences. In histospheres, processes of bodily memory and historical referentialization thus coincide and mutually complement each other. A historical film's specific audiovisual configurations can even, I argued, trigger the spectator's embodied memories, with haptic and tactile experiences occupying a privileged position in the process. I coined the term "reminiscence

trigger” for one such stimulus–response model, in which filmic figurations link the film’s historical world to the spectator’s embodied memories and produce a kind of *déjà vu* effect. A film’s audiovisual stimuli and the specific context and atmosphere of a certain sequence are perceived as being identical with an often blurry memory. I developed a theoretical account of this phenomenon that combines Bergson’s concept of memory with Sobchack’s concept of film experience. The aim of this account is to show that forms of experience and memory are not mere effects but constitutive, interdependent processes of histospheres. As well as tapping into primordial experiences such as touch, basic sensory impressions, and universally relatable everyday events and encounters, reminiscence triggers can also address prosthetic postmemories engendered by films and allow us to relive them. Connecting histospheres’ simulated historical worlds to the spectator’s embodied memories not only enables a concrete relationship to the actual world, but also transforms the aesthetic film experience into a historical experience. Through their specific combination of memory and experience, histospheres thus enable a “live” encounter with history in the making.

## NOTES

1. See for example Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford 1999; Astrid Erl and Stephanie Wodianka (eds.), *Film und kulturelle Erinnerung: Plurimediale Konstellationen*, Berlin 2008.
2. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 2005, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (last accessed May 1, 2020), theses 5 and 6. See also my discussion of Benjamin’s philosophy of history, whose terminology I apply to film in the section “Film experience and history” in the chapter “Film/history/experience.”
3. See on this point Heike Klippel’s thesis that “the fragmentariness of film images and their memory-like hyperreality” delivers to the spectator a moving past “that they can relive precisely because it is similar to but not in fact their own.” Heike Klippel, *Gedächtnis und Kino*, Basel 1997, p. 172.
4. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor 1994, p. 46.
5. Thomas Elsaesser, “‘One train may be hiding another’: private history, memory and national identity,” 1999, <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2014/12/one-train-may-be-hiding-another-private-history-memory-and-national-identity/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
6. Ibid.

7. See in particular the sections “Immersive experiences” and “Imaginative empathy” in the previous chapter.
8. See in particular the section “From *mise-en-scène* to *mise-en-histoire*” in the chapter “Modeling and perceiving.”
9. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1982, pp. 129–137.
10. For discussion, see Sabine Nessel, *Kino und Ereignis: Das Kinematografische zwischen Text und Körper*, Berlin 2008, p. 45.
11. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997, pp. 164–165.
12. For discussion, see Nessel (2008, p. 45).
13. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Filmtheorie: Zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2007, p. 158.
14. Klippel (1997, p. 166).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
16. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley 2004, p. 63.
17. *Ibid.*
18. See the section “Reminiscence triggers” in this volume.
19. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York 2019, p. 112.
20. This idea can be linked to Christiane Voss’s theory of film’s “borrowed body,” according to which we regard “that which we simultaneously somatically (co-)constitute and experience [*erleben*] as being directly truthful in this form.” Christiane Voss, “Filmerfahrung und Illusionsbildung: Der Zuschauer als Leihkörper des Films,” in Gertrud Koch and Christiane Voss (eds.), *...kraft der Illusion*, Munich 2006, pp. 81, 85.
21. Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Berlin 2016, p. 85.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
24. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham 2000.
25. *Ibid.*, p. xi. Marks refers not just to memories of tactile experiences, but also to “memories of tastes, smells, and caresses that must be coaxed into audiovisual form.” *Ibid.*, p. 243.
26. Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung*, Berlin 2012, p. 19.
27. Marks (2000, p. 243).
28. For instance, in her review of Marks’s later work *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Claire Perkins draws attention to an irresolvable tension that already existed in *The Skin of the Film*: “For Marks the works examined are made for a viewer to feel out and constitute—they highlight

- the act of perception. For Deleuze, the set of movement-images which make up cinema are definitively not addressed to anyone—they are an Appearing.” Claire Perkins, “This Time It’s Personal: *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* by Laura U. Marks,” *Senses of Cinema* 33, 2004, [http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/book-reviews/touch\\_laura\\_marks/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/book-reviews/touch_laura_marks/) (last accessed May 1, 2020).
29. Arnheim implicitly connects this complex process of activating and modifying old memories and producing new ones to a bodily component when he observes that the first measures of a dance will no longer be the same “once we have seen the rest of the composition.” What happens “while the performance is in progress is not simply the addition of new beads to the chain. Everything that came before is constantly modified by what comes later.” Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1974, p. 375.
  30. Sobchack (2004, p. 261). Sobchack’s view accords with that of Gertrud Koch, who likewise advocates a pragmatic, spectator-oriented perspective. See Gertrud Koch, “Nachstellungen: Film und historischer Moment,” in Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Berlin 2003, p. 226.
  31. Sobchack (2004, p. 261).
  32. “For me the rabbit’s onscreen death was—and still is—a good deal *more* shocking and disturbing than the death of the human character. And this, I would maintain, is because the rabbit’s death ruptures the autonomous and homogenous space of the fiction through which it briefly scampered. Indeed, its quivering death leap transformed fictional into documentary space, symbolic into indexical representation, my affective investments in the unreal and fictional into a documentary consciousness charged with a sense of the world, existence, bodily mortification and mortality, and all the rest of the real that is in excess of fiction.” *Ibid.*, p. 269.
  33. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in his *The Rustle of Language*, Berkeley 1989, p. 148.
  34. See Gertrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums*, Frankfurt 1992.
  35. Benjamin Moldenhauer, “Die Lücken, die das Bild uns lässt: Geschichte, Gewalt und Reflexivität in THE ACT OF KILLING und L’IMAGE MANQUANTE,” in Heinz-Peter Preußner (ed.), *Gewalt im Bild: Ein interdisziplinärer Diskurs*, Marburg 2018, p. 391. On this point, see also the section “Historical films” in the chapter “Fiction film and history” in this volume.
  36. Sobchack (2004, p. 270).
  37. “If the imaginary person, even in a historical fiction, has no other body than that of the actor playing him, the historical character, filmed, has at

- least two bodies, that of the imaginary and that of the actor who represents him for us. There are at least two bodies in competition, one body too much.” Jean-Louis Comolli, “A Body Too Much,” *Screen* 19:2, 1978, p. 44.
38. Sobchack (2004, p. 270).
  39. Ankersmit (2012, p. 19).
  40. Sobchack (2004, p. 271).
  41. Benjamin (2005, thesis 5).
  42. Ankersmit (2012, pp. 20–21).
  43. See Sobchack (2004, p. 271).
  44. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
  45. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
  46. Thomas Elsaesser, “Geschichte(n), Gedächtnis, Fehlleistungen: FORREST GUMP,” in his *Hollywood heute: Geschichte, Gender und Nation im postklassischen Kino*, Berlin 2009, p. 181.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. Henri Bergson, *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, London and New York 2002, p. 96.
  49. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
  50. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, MA, and London 1979, p. 26.
  51. See Elisabeth Bronfen, *Stanley Cavell: Zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2009, p. 210, and Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton 1992, p. 56.
  52. Sobchack (1992, pp. 287–288).
  53. Bergson (2002, p. 96).
  54. Bronfen (2009, p. 210).
  55. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York 2004, p. 180.
  56. Tobias Ebbrecht, “Gefühlte Erinnerung: Überlegungen zum emotionalen Erleben von Geschichte im Spielfilm,” in Tobias Ebbrecht and Thomas Schick (eds.), *Emotion – Empathie – Figur: Spielformen in der Filmwahrnehmung*, Berlin 2008, pp. 90–94.
  57. “And yet, again like dreams, *certain* moments from films viewed decades ago will nag as vividly as moments of childhood.” Cavell (1979, p. 17).
  58. Klippel (1997, p. 183).
  59. Ankersmit (2012, p. 56).
  60. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  61. August Gallinger, *Zur Grundlegung einer Lehre von der Erinnerung*, Halle 1914, p. 113.
  62. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York 2012, p. 5.

63. Ibid.
64. This affirms the comparison drawn by Ebbrecht-Hartmann between, on the one hand, the emblematic character, repetition, and production of affect by postmemory and, on the other, “the function of stereotypes in structures of film experience [*Erleben*].” Tobias Ebbrecht, “Sekundäre Erinnerungsbilder: Visuelle Stereotypenbildung in Filmen über Holocaust und Nationalsozialismus seit den 1990er Jahren,” in Christian Hissnauer and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann (eds.), *Medien – Zeit – Zeichen: Beiträge des 19. Film- und Fernsehwissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums*, Marburg 2007, p. 40.
65. Sobchack (1992, p. 23).
66. Ebbrecht (2007, p. 38).
67. The passage continues: “In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history [...]. In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics.” Landsberg (2004, p. 2).
68. Ibid., p. 20. This also marks a point of connection between Landsberg’s work and Marshall McLuhan’s media theory, which defines media as extensions of the human body. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London 2010.
69. Landsberg (2004, p. 20).
70. “What separates prosthetic memory from those other experiences and makes it a phenomenon unique in the early twentieth century is its reliance on commodification. Commodification enables memories and images of the past to circulate on a great scale; it makes these memories available to all who are able to pay. Prosthetic memory, therefore, unlike its medieval and nineteenth-century precursors, is not simply a means for consolidating a particular group’s identity and passing on its memories.” Ibid., p. 18.
71. Ibid., pp. 18–19.
72. Elsaesser (2009, pp. 181–182).
73. Ibid., p. 182.
74. Lindeperg refers to this phenomenon as “echo-cinema.” Sylvie Lindeperg, “Spuren, Dokumente, Monumente: Filmische Verwendungen von Geschichte, historische Verwendungen des Films,” in Eva Hohenberger and Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Berlin 2003, p. 68.

75. See on this point my discussion of histospheres in relation to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the "hyperreal" in the section "Figuration and illusion" in the chapter "Modeling and perceiving" in this volume.
76. Sobchack criticizes approaches that use the concept of prosthetics for being reductive and simplistic, and largely leaving the people (amputees) who actually use prosthetics out of the picture. "As an effect of the prosthetic's amputation and displacement from its mundane context, the animate and volitional human beings who use prosthetic technology disappear into the background—passive, if not completely invisible—and the prosthetic is seen to have a will and life of its own." Sobchack (2004, p. 211).
77. Hirsch (2012).
78. Münsterberg uses this formulation in his theoretical reflections on the effect of advertising texts. Though he was not thinking of film, he does anticipate an important strategy for emotionally involving the spectator. Hugo Münsterberg, *Grundzüge der Psychotechnik*, Leipzig 1914, p. 423.
79. Kracauer gives as an example a story by Blaise Cendrars in which someone sees a cap appear to transform into a leopard. He observes this same phenomenon of spontaneous association in film: "Owing to their indeterminacy, film shots are particularly fit to function as an ignition spark. Any such shot may touch off chain reactions in the moviegoer—a flight of associations which no longer revolve around their original source but arise from his agitated inner environment." Kracauer (1997, p. 165).
80. Nietzsche uses the metaphor of "sympathetic resonance" to describe the rapid sequence and constant flow of moods to which feelings and memories attach themselves. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Cambridge 1996, p. 19.
81. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Scotts Valley 2015, p. 91.
82. Bergson (2002, p. 148).
83. Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*, New York 1920, p. 141.
84. Bergson (2002, p. 144).
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., p. 145.
87. Ibid., p. 147.
88. Deleuze developed the concept of the "crystal-image" to describe this phenomenon. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Minneapolis 1989, 68–78.
89. See on this point Kracauer's discussion of "the redemption of physical reality" in Kracauer (1995).
90. Bergson (2002, p. 133).
91. Ibid., p. 149.



92. Sobchack (1992, p. 56).
93. Ibid.
94. Heike Klippel, "Memory and Cinema," paper presented at the Frontiers of Memory conference, University of London, 1999, [https://www.academia.edu/1721464/Memory\\_and\\_Cinema](https://www.academia.edu/1721464/Memory_and_Cinema) (last accessed May 1, 2020), p. 11.
95. Cf. on this topic Benjamin's notion of *mémoire involontaire*: Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in his *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, Cambridge, MA, and London 2006, pp. 170–212.
96. Lena Stölzl, "Geschichte – Bild – Dialektik: Dokumentarische Historiografie und bildliche Praxis," *Maske und Kothurn: Internationale Beiträge zur Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft 60: Walter Benjamin und das Kino*, 2014, p. 86.
97. Voss (2006, pp. 81, 85).
98. Marks (2000).
99. Barthes (1989).
100. Bronfen (2009, p. 210).
101. McLuhan (2010).

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## CHAPTER 8

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# Appropriation and Configuration

Appropriation, the process of “making (media) products one’s own,”<sup>1</sup> is a much-discussed topic in media and cultural studies. By integrating a film into our everyday lived reality,<sup>2</sup> we situate its “content” at a sociocultural level. It might seem that the film’s audiovisual form and aesthetics are stripped away in this process and play no decisive role in its appropriation. However, in the case of historical films that would oversimplify certain deeper connections describable in the terms of film and historical theory. This chapter will therefore seek to demonstrate that the process of appropriation also irrevocably inscribes the *aesthetic parameters* of a cinematic-historical way of thinking into our historical consciousness.

According to Hermann Kappelhoff, appropriation of audiovisual moving images in the act of reception changes the “*a priori* conditions of understanding, judging, and acting.”<sup>3</sup> This adds a refigurative component to Walter Benjamin’s hypothesis that film is the “paradigm of modern perception.”<sup>4</sup> The figurative potential to represent a simulated historical reality that is interwoven into a histosphere’s audiovisual design<sup>5</sup> can thus already be sensuously disclosed and furnished with historical meaning at a prereflective, corporal stage of reception. Building on theories of the phenomenological relationship between the spectator’s body and the world, the first section of this chapter develops a model of *incorporative appropriation* of history, which I connect to constructivist and cognitive approaches. In the second section, I raise the specific experience of historical films described in the previous section to the status of paradigmatic

core of a historical film genre, which I flesh out based on a phenomenological conception of genre. My systematic account of this genre integrates the theoretical discussion of the distinctive characteristics of historical films from the preceding chapters.

### INCORPORATIVE APPROPRIATION

Films are part of a changing cultural and media system. This means that the appropriation of historical films based on physically experienced histospheres cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall media context, especially the far-reaching effects of digitalization. The ever-growing ubiquity of media technology in day-to-day life is having a profound impact on our lifeworld.<sup>6</sup> We are almost constantly exposed to the vast information flow of the “technosphere”<sup>7</sup> that surrounds us. This affects our understanding of history too. Live reporting on digital television, real-time news websites, and video platforms such as YouTube that are updated with new content every single second make *spectators* of historical events into *participants* in historical dramas.<sup>8</sup> Luke Tredinnick argues that progress in media and communication technology has collapsed the distinction between the present and “the truly historical.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, events such as 9/11 are “already historicized at the very moment that we experience them.”<sup>10</sup> The ensuing virtuality of historical referents supports Jean Baudrillard’s theory of a historical myth: Our conceptions of the past and hyperreal media reality can no longer be disentangled.<sup>11</sup> On this view, history is a remediatization of events that have already been historicized in previous media representations. Since the resulting conceptions of history, just like cinematic histospheres, rest on audiovisual figurations, it can be assumed that the mediatization of the everyday further strengthens our capacity to intuitively experience the historical worlds simulated by historical films. The perceptual similarity between medially historicized present events and historical films can also be explained by reference to the associated processes of memory. Perceiving a constructed media reality that is conveyed as historically significant gives rise to prosthetic memories<sup>12</sup>—personal, embodied memories of the underlying historical events. When they appropriate filmic histospheres’ “operational scenarios of history,”<sup>13</sup> spectators are able to *remember* these experiences, so that they merge with the film’s simulated historical worlds to produce a form of prosthetic post-memory.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, appropriation of the historical worlds

constructed by a film is always also linked to media experiences external to the film.

A further epistemological condition for analyzing fiction films' appropriation of history is that Siegfried Kracauer's and Benjamin's historical positions should be interpreted not just in terms of media theory, but also as aesthetic theories. Bernhard Groß notes that it was "optical media" that "initially made it possible to 'experience' the historical processes of the twentieth century at all."<sup>15</sup> Instead of "reproducing a previous reality," photography and film "were the first to structure access to this reality, which is deemed inaccessible, incomprehensible, and indecipherable."<sup>16</sup> Historical processes became film experience "entirely as if [they] were expressing Kracauer's paradigm of historical realism or Benjamin's 'optical subconscious.'"<sup>17</sup> This implies that historical films use their specific "aids"<sup>18</sup> to disclose "physical reality,"<sup>19</sup> making it possible both to appropriate historical knowledge and develop conceptions of history. The interpenetration of spectator and film results, however, "not in continuity, but in a loose agglomeration of available 'knowledge.'"<sup>20</sup> According to Heike Klippel, this "fusing of disparate elements" is grounded in our perception, which interprets neither the object nor itself, but instead creates "something new."<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the appropriation of historical films does not yield traditional, narratively structured conceptions of history, but rather a new, specifically filmic concept of history that includes the category of sensuous experience.<sup>22</sup>

In order to better understand the appropriation of history via sensuous experience of filmic histospheres, we also need to consider the phenomenological relation between the spectator's body and the world. The philosopher Alphonso Lingis has analyzed the interaction between bodily perception and empathy.<sup>23</sup> Proceeding from an imaginary perspective shift, Lingis infers the existence of a mental body-image that places us in relation to the world.<sup>24</sup> Through this process of incorporation, the world around us is integrated into the inner sphere of our self.<sup>25</sup> The same process is at work in Benjamin's account of the "distracted mass" that is not *absorbed* by the film but, rather, *absorbs* it.<sup>26</sup> In the appropriation of historical films, a histosphere's simulated historical world consequently occupies the role of an external sphere that in the process of reception becomes part of our own inner sphere. Although we know that our body is invisible to the film, we involuntarily place it in relation to the objects and subjects of the filmic world, which we as it were absorb into ourselves. Kracauer understands this form of appropriation as a sort of "blood transfusion"

that allows us to grasp the being and dynamics of the object of our experience “from within.”<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, in historical films we become able to physically experience the materiality of the simulated historical world by sensuously incorporating the underlying audiovisual figurations, thereby opening up new horizons of understanding. Individual experience blends with collective conceptions of history; in Landsberg’s terms, historical memory becomes a portable and nonessentialist good that blurs the boundaries between personal and collective memory.<sup>28</sup> Thus, an individual understanding of history develops not just through the externalization of memory, which migrates into film, but also through its embodied reappropriation in the process of film experience.

Furthermore, the *incorporative appropriation* of filmically constructed representations of history brings about a specific form of reflection, which begins with a very literal inner “mirroring” of historical worlds. Kracauer’s analogy between the cinema screen and Athena’s polished shield, a mirror that makes it possible to behold horrors without turning to stone,<sup>29</sup> can be expanded to myriad historical processes, events, and narratives. In combination with *mise-en-histoire*, the intuitive, sensuous perception of filmic figurations enables a specific mode of access to historiographical narratives and helps produce conceptions of history. Historical films thus make it possible not just to experience historical worlds, but also to reflect on them. Histospheres’ reflective potential is already inherent in the phenomenological concept of the film’s embodied perspective on the historical world and the spectator’s perspective on this perspective, which “appears before our eyes as perceived perception.”<sup>30</sup> “In the movie theater,” Thomas Morsch summarizes, “we don’t just see something, we also see what is seen as an *expression* of an act of seeing.”<sup>31</sup> This implicitly comparative schema extends into the interrelationship between film and history, though without any simplistic rhetoric of right and wrong. The traditional debate about factually accurate and realistic representations of history cleaves to a way of thinking that still takes a film’s ontology to be a reproduction of reality and denies film perception the status of real experience. However, a phenomenological approach to film shows that film experience—produced by synesthetically operating audiovisual stimuli—is just as real as any other experience. A histosphere produces real historical experiences that, as Kracauer puts it, challenge us “to confront the real-life events [a film] shows with the ideas we commonly entertain about them.”<sup>32</sup> When we reflect on the historical world with which we have had a living encounter through film, we refigure and evaluate not just the



interpretations of history resulting from our experience of the film, but also the conceptions of history we had formed prior to watching it. Our historical consciousness, already shaped by audiovisual media, is updated and checked for any contradictions. If I previously knew the 1950s in West Germany as the era of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, in *KU'DAMM 56* I have now also encountered it as a reactionary, patriarchal system whose demands almost drive a young woman to suicide. If my horizons were previously limited to West German history, in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* they are expanded to include the painful chapter of Germany's division. If until now I had only viewed the 1950s in terms of a large-scale history of events, in *YEARS OF HUNGER* I experience history from the perspective of an ordinary German family. Incorporative appropriation of such experiences conveys a sense of what historical lifeworlds were like. It fills the empty space between model-like filmic figurations and the historical references of the *mise-en-histoire* with a materiality that lends histospheres a living, multilayered structure. The embodied and prereflective dimensions of filmic experience of history are thereby combined with interpretative approaches, so that the historical experience produced by film experience can in turn become historical knowledge.<sup>33</sup> If historical experience is understood as an "experience of difference [...] between one's own and the other time,"<sup>34</sup> then this difference between times undergoes a process of interpretation "when it is integrated into an overarching conception of the passage of time that determines the cultural orientation of human ways of life."<sup>35</sup> This interpretive process is already inherent in the referentialization of the *mise-en-histoire*, and is extended by the spectator's *cognitive appropriation*. This can express affirmation, but can also articulate a critical or subversive potential, or even construct a counterhistory. *Immersive experiences*, *imaginative empathy*, and *reminiscence triggers* create a sense of physical familiarity with the film's audiovisually modeled historical worlds. This familiarity is taken up by *incorporative appropriation* and, in conjunction with *cognitive appropriation*, expanded into interpretations of history with powerful effect.<sup>36</sup>

## GENRE CONFIGURATIONS

Fiction films' audiovisual modeling of historical worlds generally draws on a repertoire of conventionalized forms. Iterative strategies for constructing historical spaces and worlds allow us to intuitively experience these spaces and worlds, and imaginatively move around them. Crane and

sequence shots, for instance, can give us the impression of physically diving into the past world simulated by the film, serving both to show the otherness of the historical cosmos and to give us an initial sense of our bearings in time and space. Filmic figurations are also arranged and inter-related in a particular way. As Paul Ricœur would put it, they form a specific “configuration,”<sup>37</sup> and with it histospheres’ audiovisual repertoire. On the basis of immersion, empathetic engagement, imaginary referentialization, and reminiscence triggers, an impression of familiar otherness is created. If genres are a “formal organizational principle with a pool of iterative patterns,”<sup>38</sup> then histospheres can be considered the core of a historical film genre.

Film genres are typically defined as “constructs” or “symptoms of cultural processes, practices, and discourses of textual/media appropriation”<sup>39</sup> that are not “objective” groupings but rather “complex negotiating machines”<sup>40</sup> or “arenas for negotiation.”<sup>41</sup> As an “open-textured”<sup>42</sup> concept, genres have diffuse boundaries, and are able to enter into hybrid constellations and change dynamically. By “reflecting on and discursifying” the “existing sociocultural practices”<sup>43</sup> out of which they emerge, they develop their own historicity. The “active awareness of genre” based on this process allows “the concept of ‘genre’ to serve a key orienting function in both film production and film reception.”<sup>44</sup> In cinematic representations of history, specific genre practices can be observed in the particular aesthetic and narrative configurations that typify costume dramas,<sup>45</sup> historical epics,<sup>46</sup> and biopics, as well as in nationally specific phenomena such as British heritage films. The concept of *Historienfilm* (widely used in the German-speaking world) is normally associated with these particular forms of cinematic representation of history, which necessarily narrows the concept’s scope. My proposal of an expanded genre of historical film, by contrast, gives central place to the historical experiences created by film. This does not require consciously considered knowledge of, or extensive awareness of, the genre. Consequently, the historical film is a “silent” genre, which in both academic literature and popular discourse is only rarely articulated as such.<sup>47</sup>

One of the few attempts at a genre-based definition of historical films was undertaken by Robert Burgoyne, drawing on Rick Altman’s semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach.<sup>48</sup> Central to Burgoyne’s account is the idea that historical films are based on the principle of “reenactment”: The imaginative reproduction of the past allows spectators to “relive” past events.<sup>49</sup> “Reenactment” is the common feature that holds the historical

film genre together across the whole spectrum of aesthetic and structural variations.<sup>50</sup> Burgoyne's approach has some parallels with my concept of the histosphere as the core of the historical film genre. The concept of "reenactment" is likewise based on the idea of a simulated historical world constructed out of filmic figurations. However, the concept of the histosphere has a different theoretical foundation, which, as with my concept of genre, relies less on Altman than on certain fundamental phenomenological and philosophical premises. In the literature, the close connection between history and film genres is primarily considered from a philosophical perspective. According to Ricœur, we engage with the past through narrative, which in turn draws on a broad and variable repertoire of genres.<sup>51</sup> Ricœur compares history with narrative fiction and observes that "what is ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience."<sup>52</sup> Historical and fictional narrations are based on the same "configuring operations" but differ in terms of their "truth claims."<sup>53</sup> It is here, I suggest, that genre comes into play. Analogously to a (written) historical text, a historical film likewise makes a truth claim, based, firstly, on making the past present so as to produce meaning in the here-and-now, and, secondly, on the referential relation to history implemented by the *mise-en-histoire*. Although the precise arrangement is constantly changing in the context of diverging aesthetic and narrative strategies of representation, an aesthetic practice has been established at the heart of historical films that models historical worlds and makes them available to experience. As a genre, the historical film thus comprises a process that not only visually represents history but also refigures it as an experience of a spatially and temporally organized historical world.

Histospheres also utilize semantic processes to create historical experiences, with particular filmic signifiers forming the basis for microlevel communicative processes. Pierre Sorlin suggests that the criterion for membership of the historical film genre should be the use of signifiers that allow us to date the film's setting to a certain point in history.<sup>54</sup> As well as characteristic semantic elements such as "the place and time the action is set, props and costumes, characters and their behavior,"<sup>55</sup> iterative patterns of aesthetic design can also determine a film's "genre-ness." The faded colors in KU'DAMM 56, for instance, do not just refer to aged photographs; they are also a standard convention of historical films that has become established primarily thanks to blockbusters such as *SAVING PRIVATE*

RYAN. The historical film genre is also typified by recurring auditory patterns and aesthetics that parallel these iterative strategies of visual design.<sup>56</sup> Arranged in sound tableaux and soundscapes, noises and music play a key part in modeling a histosphere's historical worlds. For instance, the gently crunching footsteps of passersby mixed with soft violin music and the voice of a woman selling candy characterize the East German town in *SKY WITHOUT STARS* as a safe and homey place. As well as performing functions "that will apply across genres," such as creating a sense of an environment and its spatial qualities, focusing the spectator's attention on particular actions or events, giving information about characters' mental states, or conveying the atmosphere of a particular time, film sound can also perform tasks specific to a given genre.<sup>57</sup> An important role is played not just by similarities to historical audio documents but also by historical sounds modeled by media. Cinematic sound conventions are often preferred to faithful reproduction of actual sound.<sup>58</sup> Sounds are sometimes even "imported" into historical films from other genres. A typical example of this is the gunshots at the start and end of *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, which are closer to the typical sound effects of 1950s Western films than the actual sound of gunfire. These amalgams of genres have the potential to increase our sense of familiarity with the historical world modeled by a film, helping to reduce the distance between the spectator and the historical past depicted on the screen. The arrangement and ordering of audiovisual elements in a histosphere reflect the syntactic level<sup>59</sup> at which a sensuously available historical world is modeled and figured—one of the key hallmarks of the historical film genre.

The debates about genre discussed earlier concentrate mainly on the conventions, iconographies, plots, themes, and characters that define a genre. Against these sorts of primarily semiotic definitions, Barry Keith Grant raises the objection that it is virtually impossible to meaningfully categorize individual genre films without considering the specific type of *experience* we have of them.<sup>60</sup> The theory of the histosphere as the paradigmatic core of historical films, by contrast, is based on a phenomenological understanding of genre that explicitly includes the experience of the historical worlds constructed by film. While Grant speaks of the interdependence between film history and socio-historical processes at the time of the film's production,<sup>61</sup> I am more focused on spectators' living encounters with the films they watch.<sup>62</sup> Historical films, as I have shown in this study, model audiovisual figurations that simulate a spatiotemporal structure in our perceptions that not only illusorily reconstructs historical

spaces but makes these spaces sensuously available as a dynamic, historical lifeworld.<sup>63</sup> Historical references serve to constitute a “perceptual realism”<sup>64</sup> that also draws on the audience’s mediated experience of history. This process constructs a *mise-en-histoire*—an embedding of the film’s historical world in a historical period—that allows us to connect the histospheres constructed by films to our conceptions of history.<sup>65</sup> The resulting impression of an internally consistent, temporally arranged historical world goes hand in hand with a genre-specific, cinematic-historical experience of *being-in-the-world-and-in-time*. The design of historical films utilizes specific affective, situational, and reflective patterns. The perception of a histosphere encompasses aesthetically modeled moods and atmospheres that bring us as spectators physically and mentally closer to the action of the film.<sup>66</sup> As elements of intense, immersive experiences, they help make the plot into a “temporarily focused matrix”<sup>67</sup> of the spectator’s perception.<sup>68</sup> In combination with imaginative empathy with the characters, it is possible for the spectator to live the film’s simulated historical world “from within.”<sup>69</sup> The resulting contiguity of historical world and subjective perception evokes a feeling of being able to physically touch the past. As per Frank R. Ankersmit’s definition of historical experience, the historical film genre thus has the potential to give spectators the impression of making direct contact with past events and worlds.<sup>70</sup>

The historical experience this evokes results in part from complex processes of memory. As fundamental elements of histospheres, embodied memories play a key role in making it possible to experience the film’s historical world as a physical reality, and add a bodily experiential dimension to the *mise-en-histoire*, which was initially understood solely as a reflective process.<sup>71</sup> The historical film could accordingly also be understood as a type of body genre.<sup>72</sup> Histospheres draw on two complementary forms of memory; a prereflective, bodily dimension that is activated while watching a film, and a reflective, historicizing dimension that retrospectively allows the film’s historical world to be experienced as such. Histospheres are also actively involved in creating personal experiences with the potential to forge identity, in which personal and popular memories fuse together.<sup>73</sup> I refer to the filmic figurations that connect a film’s historical world to the spectator’s memories as *reminiscence triggers*.<sup>74</sup> The use of these triggers and the formation of *prosthetic postmemory* not only enable a concrete relationship to reality, but also transform aesthetic film experience into historical experience.<sup>75</sup> The *incorporative appropriation* of filmic depictions of history prompted by synesthetic perception and

embodied memories in turn enables a specific form of reflection.<sup>76</sup> An inner “mirroring” of the historical worlds fills the empty space between the *mise-en-histoire*'s historical references and the histosphere's model-like filmic figurations with self-reflexive experiences that lend the resulting conceptions of history a living, multilayered structure. This capacity to generate historical experiences through a complex interplay of audiovisual design and film experience is the distinctive feature that marks out historical films as a genre in their own right.

Like other genres, certain social functions can be attributed to historical films. For Francesco Casetti, genre films serve a storytelling function; they help “to give the audience new stories which will join the stories or the discourses which already circulate within the social space.”<sup>77</sup> Against the backdrop of the social apparatus provided by historical writing, historical films help determine which narratives enter popular historical consciousness and are given particular prominence. *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, for instance, attempts to establish the division of Germany as a central issue of the period. *YEARS OF HUNGER* explores the social implications of suffocating petit bourgeois life in the fledgling West Germany, while *KU'DAMM 56* focuses on the oppression of women and the yearning for freedom expressed in the rock 'n' roll movement. At a political level, these films can be regarded as “cultural expressions” that not only have “social diagnostic value”<sup>78</sup> but are also always unstable sites of strategic and political significance.<sup>79</sup> How a historical film functions, what stories it tells, and the way in which it tells them thus also reveal something about the political circumstances and discourses at the time of its production. One common strategy for genre films to achieve contemporary relevance is to model crises and problems similar to those encountered by the spectators in their day-to-day lives.<sup>80</sup> These sorts of connections to and models of contemporary issues can also be found in historical films, as part of the historical worlds they construct. Whether it be the dramatically failed attempt to form a border-spanning patchwork family in *SKY WITHOUT STARS*, the unbearably narrow-minded petit bourgeois mores in *YEARS OF HUNGER*, or the family torn apart by the war and its political consequences in *KU'DAMM 56*, genre films often deal with paradigmatic forms of private, family, and social life and project them onto generic situations and events. This ability to connect to social issues is often combined with genre film's “bardic function”.<sup>81</sup> By repeatedly addressing painful conflicts and traumas, historical films help society to process the historical events and ruptures underlying them. For instance, while *SKY WITHOUT STARS* understands the

division of Germany as a cruel imposition that tears families and lovers apart, in *YEARS OF HUNGER* and *KU'DAMM 56* the largely unquestioned and repressed legacy of National Socialism is negotiated at the microlevel of familial ties and relationships.<sup>82</sup> Kracauer regards this sort of modeling and mirroring as one of the main social functions of historical films.<sup>83</sup> On this view, the historical film genre not only serves a “ritual function”<sup>84</sup>—nostalgically making the past present—but also actively shapes and steers ongoing social discourses.

The historical film genre is also interwoven with plurimedial iconographies and audiographies. On the basis of interactions between generic structures that cut across different media, it is possible to “observe and analyze complex (inter)medial and (inter)cultural processes of exchange.”<sup>85</sup> For instance, Felix Zimmermann’s study of historical experiences in recent video games proceeds from the phenomenological premise of sensuously available “historical atmospheres” (*Vergangenheitsatmosphären*) that extend bodily space to the space of virtual worlds.<sup>86</sup> Within the framework of game studies, Zimmermann is describing a very similar dimension of historical experience to that proposed for historical films by the theory of histospheres. As well as these transmedial connections between different theories, we can also consider specific plurimedial constellations at the level of representation. In *KU'DAMM 56*, for instance, the portrait of Elvis on the cover of the *Spiegel* magazine is both a historical reference and a point of connection to pop cultural image discourses (Fig. 8.1).

As a news magazine, the *Spiegel*, for all its striving for topicality and currentness, also uses strategies of historicizing storytelling, sometimes deploying similar generic structures to historical films. Moreover, in the wake of the *Spiegel* affair,<sup>87</sup> the magazine was long regarded as a subversive publication, and this reputation is used in retrospective films like *KU'DAMM 56* to reinforce the rebellious image of certain characters. The use of plurimedial codes relating to “contemporary history and social classifications” encompasses not just the visual level but also the soundtrack.<sup>88</sup> The rock 'n' roll music in *KU'DAMM 56* points far beyond purely cinematic associations. Bill Haley’s global hit “Rock Around the Clock,” which Freddy’s band plays at the wedding of Monika’s sister Helga, is presented as synonymous with the young rock 'n' roll fans’ attitude to life. The song marked an important milestone in the plurimedial marketing of pop music, which explicitly also includes film. After “Rock Around the Clock” helped *BLACKBOARD JUNGLE* (1955; dir. Richard Brooks), a drama centered on the younger generation, to great success, a Hollywood film based around





Fig. 8.1 Plurimedial constellations: Elvis on the cover of *Spiegel* in *KU'DAMM 56*

Haley's hit was rushed into production. *ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK* (1956; dir. Fred F. Sears) played a pivotal role in the worldwide breakthrough of rock 'n' roll as a pop cultural phenomenon. Intermedial references like the *Spiegel* cover and Haley's hit thus not only expand histospheres to include cultural and social discourses, but also embed them in a "complex social network,"<sup>89</sup> thereby marking out historical films as not just a genre but part of a plurimedial constellation capable of forming and constituting history. According to sociologist Manuel Castells, in today's "network society" geographical proximity matters less than relational proximity,<sup>90</sup> which genres help to produce. The way in which the dominant processes and functions in plurimedial networks are organized also significantly contributes to the dissemination of films. A historical film's potential influence will be realized "to the extent that the film is plurimedially disseminated— orally, textually, or visually."<sup>91</sup> Sabine Moller infers from this that the significance and reach of a film rise in proportion to the quality of the networks in which it is embedded, and so also the probability that it will "shape collective processes of memory."<sup>92</sup> Plurimedial networks thus not only play a key role in the dissemination and appropriation of individual historical films, but also contribute to the refiguration of historical consciousness.



## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have developed a model of *incorporative appropriation* of history, building on theories of the phenomenological relationship between the spectator's body and the world. I concluded that the process of appropriation also inscribes the aesthetic parameters of a cinematic-historical way of thinking into our historical consciousness. This shapes a specific historical film experience, which then in turn serves as the paradigmatic core of my proposed concept of a historical film genre.

The theories of *mise-en-histoire*, imaginative empathy, and prosthetic postmemory set out in the preceding chapters showed that the appropriation of historical films gives rise to a new, specifically filmic concept of history. A histosphere's simulated historical world occupies the role of an external sphere that in the process of reception becomes part of our own inner sphere. We are able to physically experience the materiality of the simulated historical world by sensuously incorporating the underlying audiovisual figurations, thereby opening up new horizons of understanding. Individual experience blends with collective conceptions of history, making historical memory into a portable and nonessentialist good that blurs the boundaries between personal and collective memory.<sup>93</sup> The *incorporative appropriation* of filmically constructed representations of history develops an incredible power, capable of affirming, overriding, or calling into question existing ideas of history.

The preceding chapters showed that an aesthetic practice has been established at the heart of historical films that models historical worlds and makes them available to experience. Following on from this, the second section of this chapter sketched an account of the historical film genre in which histospheres serve as the constitutive core. As a genre, I argued, the historical film comprises a communicative process that not only visually *represents* history but also *refigures* it as an experience of a spatially and temporally organized historical world. This results in an intense feeling of *being-in-the-world-and-in-time*. *Mise-en-histoire* in turn allows filmically constructed histospheres to be combined with our existing conceptions of history, referring to extra-filmic configurations of knowledge in a way that makes them immediately present to the spectator. As per Frank R. Ankersmit's definition of historical experience, the historical film genre can thus give spectators the impression of making direct contact with the past.<sup>94</sup> Incorporating conventions of other genres into the construction of histospheres increases our familiarity with the filmically modeled historical

worlds. The historical film genre is also interwoven with plurimedial iconographies and audiographies, giving rise to generic structures that cut across different media. On the basis of its communicative practice, the genre can be assigned certain social functions: First, historical films help determine which narratives enter popular historical consciousness and are given particular prominence. Second, by addressing painful conflicts and traumas, historical films help society to process the historical events and ruptures underlying them. Historical films thus actively shape the development of contemporary ideas and discourses of history. In combination with histospheres' unique potential to make the depicted historical worlds physically experienceable, this gives the genre considerable power and influence.

## NOTES

1. Andreas Hepp, "Kommunikative Aneignung," in Lothar Mikos and Claudia Wegener (eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung: Ein Handbuch*, Konstanz 2005, p. 68.
2. Ibid.
3. Cf. Kappelhoff's concept of the "*poiesis* of cinematic seeing"; Hermann Kappelhoff, *Kognition und Reflexion: Zur Theorie filmischen Denkens*, Berlin 2018, p. 10.
4. Detlev Schöttker, *Konstruktiver Fragmentarismus: Form und Rezeption der Schriften Walter Benjamins*, Stuttgart 1999, p. 244.
5. As Gertrud Koch writes, "*Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*": a phrase that literally means the "shot is the shot," but also plays on the ambiguity of the German *Einstellung*, which can refer both to a positioning or framing of something, and an attitude or stance toward it. Gertrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums*, Frankfurt 1992, p. 9.
6. Friedrich Krotz speaks of a "mediatization of the everyday," which he describes as a wide-reaching social process. See Friedrich Krotz, *Die Mediatisierung kommunikativen Handelns: Der Wandel von Alltag und sozialen Beziehungen, Kultur und Gesellschaft durch die Medien*, Wiesbaden 2001, p. 33.
7. Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic 'Presence,'" 2016, <https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/2-1-sobchack/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
8. Luke Tredinnick, "The Making of History: Remediating Historicized Experience," in Toni Weller (ed.), *History in the Digital Age*, London and New York 2013, p. 41.

9. Ibid., p. 56.
10. Ibid., p. 56.
11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor 1994, pp. 46–47.
12. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York 2004.
13. Baudrillard (1994, p. 46).
14. Since our postmemory, activated by film perception, is no longer based on intergenerational transmission of our parents or grandparents' actual biographical experiences, but on experiences created by media—that is to say, on prosthetic memory—there is a convergence of embodied memories and historical referentialization. See also the section “Prosthetic postmemory” in the previous chapter.
15. Bernhard Groß, “The Relationship between Film and History in Early German Postwar Cinema,” 2018, <https://film-history.org/issues/text/relationship-between-film-and-history-early-german-postwar-cinema> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. By this, Benjamin means photographic devices and operations such as “lenses” and “enlargements,” which he says disclose the “optical unconscious” just as psychoanalysis does the “instinctual unconscious.” Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” *Screen* 13:1, 1972, p. 7.
19. Kracauer’s “redemption of physical reality” is based on this specifically filmic way of structuring and perceiving the world. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997.
20. Heike Klippel, *Gedächtnis und Kino*, Basel 1997, p. 188.
21. Ibid.
22. According to Thomas Elsaesser, “where once it was something one read about, one drew lessons from or tried to leave behind, inspected through stone monuments, written documents and other signs,” history now “appears to exist in suspended animation, neither exactly ‘behind’ us, nor part of our present.” Thomas Elsaesser, “‘One train may be hiding another’: private history, memory and national identity,” 1999, <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2014/12/one-train-may-be-hiding-another-private-history-memory-and-national-identity/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
23. Alphonso Lingis, “Bodies that Touch Us,” *Thesis Eleven* 36:1, 1993, pp. 159–167.
24. Lingis gives the example of a situation in which we are standing facing a friend, and argues that we conceive analogously of perspectives such as that of a sequoia looking down at us. Ibid., p. 162.
25. Ibid.

26. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in his *Illuminations*, New York 2007, p. 239.
27. Kracauer (1997, p. 297).
28. Landsberg (2004, pp. 18–19).
29. Kracauer (1997, p. 305).
30. Thomas Morsch, *Medienästhetik des Films: Verkörperte Wahrnehmung und ästhetische Erfahrung im Kino*, Munich and Paderborn 2011, p. 15.
31. Ibid.
32. Kracauer (1997, p. 305).
33. Here I am following Jörn Rüsen, who formulates matters more generally: "Through interpretation, historical experience becomes historical knowledge." Jörn Rüsen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Cologne 2013, p. 41.
34. Ibid., p. 38.
35. In modern societies, this means integrating the perception of difference between times into a "historical idea of change [...] already conceived of as meaningful." This historical orientation also extends to people and their inner lives, "for 'world' of course also refers to the human beings living in that world and producing meaning through their engagement with it." Ibid., pp. 40–41.
36. See on this point the sections "Immersive experiences" and "Imaginative empathy" in the chapter "Immersion and empathy" and the section "Reminiscence triggers" in the previous chapter.
37. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Chicago and London 1984 (hereinafter Ricœur 1984), pp. 64ff.
38. Ivo Ritzer and Peter W. Schulze (eds.), *Transmediale Genre-Passagen: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 1–2.
39. Peter Scheinpflug, *Genre-Theorie: Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2014, p. 8.
40. Francesco Casetti, *Communicative Negotiation in Cinema and Television*, Milan 2002, p. 31.
41. Angela Keppler and Martin Seel, "Über den Status filmischer Genres," *montage AV* 11:2, 2002, p. 65.
42. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 147–148.
43. Ritzer and Schulze (2016, p. 8).
44. Jörg Schweinitz, "'Genre' und lebendiges Genrebewusstsein: Geschichte eines Begriffs und Probleme seiner Konzeptualisierung in der Filmwissenschaft," *montage AV* 3:2, 1994, p. 113.
45. Fabienne Liptay and Matthias Bauer (eds.), *Historien- und Kostümfilm*, Stuttgart 2013.
46. On the specific aesthetic form of the historical epic, see Vivian Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical

- Epic,” in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III*, Austin 2007, pp. 296–323.
47. In *Handbuch Filmgenre*, for instance, the standard German reference work on film, there is not (yet) a chapter on historical films. Marcus Stiglegger (ed.), *Handbuch Filmgenre*, Wiesbaden 2018, <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-3-658-09631-1> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
  48. Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film*, Malden, MA, 2008, p. 7. On Rick Altman’s theory of genre, see Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London 1999.
  49. Burgoyne (2008, p. 7).
  50. Burgoyne specifically mentions the epic, the biopic, the war film, and the topical film. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.
  51. Ricœur (1984).
  52. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
  53. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, Chicago and London 1984, p. 3.
  54. Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, Oxford 1980, p. 20. Sorlin’s view is broadly compatible with Altman’s semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach. See Altman (1999).
  55. Malte Hagener, “Der Begriff Genre,” in Rainer Rother and Hans C. Blumenberg (eds.), *Die Lust am Genre: Verbrechergeschichten aus Deutschland*, Berlin 2011, p. 16.
  56. Rasmus Greiner, “Filmton, Geschichte und Genretheorie,” in Ivo Ritzer and Peter W. Schulze (eds.), *Transmediale Genre-Passagen: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden 2016, p. 185.
  57. Birger Langkjær, “Making Fictions Sound Real – On Film Sound, Perceptual Realism and Genre,” *MedieKultur* 26:48, 2010, pp. 13–14.
  58. See Greiner (2016, p. 185).
  59. Hagener (2011, p. 16).
  60. Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, London 2007, p. 116.
  61. Grant is primarily referring to the youth protests in the period around 1968, when the film he is analyzing, *BONNIE AND CLYDE* (1967; dir. Arthur Penn), was made.
  62. This experience is, in turn, closely related to processes of genre formation and differentiation. See Ritzer and Schulze (2016, p. 8).
  63. See the chapter “Modeling and perceiving” in the present volume.
  64. Stephen Prince, “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory,” *Film Quarterly* 49:3, 1996, p. 32.
  65. See the section “From *mise-en-scène* to *mise-en-histoire*” in the chapter “Modeling and perceiving.”
  66. See the section “Mood and atmosphere” in the chapter “Immersion and empathy.”
  67. Christiane Voss, “Fiktionale Immersion,” *montage AV* 17:2, 2008, p. 82.

68. See the section “Immersive experiences” in the chapter “Immersion and empathy.”
69. See the section “Imaginative empathy” in the chapter “Immersion and empathy.”
70. Frank R. Ankersmit, *Die historische Erfahrung*, Berlin 2012, p. 56.
71. See the section “Film/body/memory” in the chapter “Experience and remembering.”
72. Unlike in Linda Williams’s examples of porn films, horror films, and melodramas, however, this body genre is not articulated through the manifestation of certain fantasies on the female body, but rather through an initially genderless incarnation that occurs in the integration of subjective embodied memories into film perception. See Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44:4, 1991, pp. 2–13.
73. These experiences are likewise addressed as memories by film.
74. See the section of the same name in the previous chapter.
75. See the section “Prosthetic postmemory” in the previous chapter.
76. See the section “Incorporative appropriation” in this chapter.
77. Casetti (2002, p. 30).
78. Morsch (2011, p. 11).
79. See Hagerer (2011, p. 14).
80. See Casetti (2002, pp. 30–31).
81. On this point, Casetti writes: “[Genre film] helps to deal with some issues concerning a community, re-proposing them to the public attention with each story (bardic function).” *Ibid.*, p. 31.
82. In *YEARS OF HUNGER*, the young protagonist Ursula is critical of the repression of Nazi-era crimes and, relatedly, of current events like the remilitarization of West Germany and the Communist Party ban. She encounters resistance as a result, especially at school. Her left-wing father increasingly succumbs to social pressure. In *KU’DAMM 56*, Monika (likewise a member of the younger generation) learns that her mother’s dance school only came into her family’s possession after it was seized from its Jewish owners by the Nazis. Because of this crime, Monika’s father does not return. Instead, he creates a new socialist identity for himself in the East, and also starts a new family there.
83. Kracauer refers here to Greek mythology, in which Perseus uses the shield of Athena as a mirror in order to battle Medusa without looking at her directly, so as to avoid being turned to stone. Kracauer understands the film image as an analogous tool that makes it possible to address horrors such as the Holocaust. See Kracauer (1997, pp. 305–306).
84. Casetti (2002, p. 31).
85. Ritzer and Schulze (2016, p. 2).
86. Felix Zimmermann, “Digitale Spiele als historische Erlebnisräume: Ein Zugang zu Vergangensatmosphären im Explorative Game,” master’s

- thesis, University of Cologne 2018, <https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/8286/> (last accessed May 1, 2020).
87. On the *Spiegel* affair, see Horst Pöttker, “Meilenstein der Pressefreiheit – 50 Jahre Spiegel-Affäre,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)* 29–31/2012), July 10, 2012.
  88. Christoph Metzger, “Genre und kulturelle Codes im Film,” in Josef Kloppenburg (ed.), *Das Handbuch der Filmmusik: Geschichte – Ästhetik – Funktionalität*, Laaber 2012, pp. 447–448.
  89. Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka (eds.), *Film und kulturelle Erinnerung: Plurimediale Konstellationen*, Berlin 2008, p. 7.
  90. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, vol. 1 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Oxford 2000.
  91. Sabine Moller, *Zeitgeschichte sehen: Die Aneignung von Vergangenheit durch Filme und ihre Zuschauer*, Berlin 2018, p. 42.
  92. *Ibid.*
  93. Landsberg (2004, pp. 18–19).
  94. Ankersmit (2012, p. 56).

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- Years of Hunger (Hungerjahre); dir. Jutta Brückner; Federal Republic of Germany 1980.

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## Refiguring Historical Consciousness

“Culturally orienting the way people live by interpreting experiences of the past is a creative, active human endeavor,”<sup>1</sup> writes historian and cultural theorist Jörn Rüsen. In line with this view, by way of conclusion I shall examine the relationship between historical films and theories of historical culture. At the heart of my discussion is the thesis that appropriation of histospheres in spectators’ reception has a refigurative effect on our historical consciousness. This thesis extends Benjamin’s theory that film “cinematographically revises the everyday”<sup>2</sup> to our day-to-day engagement with history. On this view, the historical experiences generated by films augment the conceptions of history we have acquired from written accounts and sources with a physical-sensory dimension.<sup>3</sup>

Rüsen defines historical consciousness as a productive activity that constructs conceptions of history as an “experience of the past” through a “symbolizing appropriation of the world.”<sup>4</sup> The core of this process is “the mental practice of *narrating*,” which reveals the way in which historical thinking interprets the experience of time.<sup>5</sup> Although this may appear to be a language-centered process, it also includes “pre- and metalinguistic elements such as feelings or mental images.”<sup>6</sup> As multi-immersive, empathy-guided experiential fields, historical films are directly relevant to these theoretical reflections. In historical films, historical experience is constituted out of a living, sensuous, synesthetic encounter with an audio-visually configured historical world. By making the past present in this way, “history” becomes a key cultural factor that enables the production

of meaning in the here-and-now. This study has primarily considered *how* these sorts of specifically filmic experiences of history could be theoretically grounded and has developed an account based around the notion of the histosphere, which models divergent historical worlds out of audiovisual figurations. The term “figuration” refers not just to the arrangement and ordering of a film’s individual audiovisual elements in time, but also to the “incarnation” of a cinematic body with which we empathize, so that we are thereby able to illusorily experience the film’s historical world. In our perception, we assemble the disparate elements of the film into a historical world that we experience not just with our bodies/senses but also as a discursive system.

Of particular significance for the filmic figuration of historical worlds is histospheres’ referential structure. The world spaces simulated by a film are constructed segments of presupposed historical worlds, which we augment with our historico-cultural world knowledge. The *mise-en-histoire*, which referentializes the filmic world’s audiovisual figurations in popular historical consciousness, does not, however, merely draw on our individual conceptions of history, but also influences those conceptions. Thus, while the *mise-en-scène* organizes the filmic world created by the performative act of staging, and makes this world and act experientially available to spectators, the *mise-en-histoire* establishes a reciprocal relation to collective and individual conceptions of the historical past. A synthesis of artistically arranged modeling, embodied film experience, and *mise-en-histoire* both refreshes the content of our historical consciousness and refigures its formal structure. According to Paul Ricœur,

the narrative function, taken in its full scope, covering the developments from the epic to the modern novel, as well as those running from legends to critical history, is ultimately to be defined by its ambition to refigure our historical condition and thereby to raise it to the level of historical consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

This remark is based on the thesis

that the unique way in which history responds to the aporias of the phenomenology of time consists in the elaboration of a third time—properly historical time—which mediates between lived time and cosmic time.<sup>8</sup>

Ricœur's "historical time" is an experienced time that stands in relation both to the subject's biography and to historical references. Below, I interpret the historical film as a valid modern expression and agent of historical time. If historical consciousness is understood as a constellation of factors such as layers of coding, figures or types of meaning-making, interlinkages of temporal levels, perceptual and interpretive operations, and modes of processing, then the historical film represents a synthesis of these factors.<sup>9</sup> The historical worlds constructed by films are coded as manifestations of social memory that we can explore in the mode of personalized experience. A film's histosphere connects the depiction of the past to our understanding of the present and expectations of the future. Perceptual and interpretive operations are interfused and mediated by strategies for generating embodied experience, immersion, and empathy. By bringing the past to life and making it present, a histosphere shifts our historical consciousness toward processes of physical and emotional involvement. Retrospective observation is replaced by the impression of a *vivisection* of history, an operation on a living organism.

One key factor for this kind of transformation of historical culture through media is the interplay between historical consciousness and memory. As a means for situating oneself relative to the world and other people, memory is a "source of the self" necessary for the formation of identity and subjectivity. Historical consciousness functions as "a culturally shaped state of this source."<sup>10</sup> It attaches to "the productive character of memory" and expands it by "systematic acquisition of historical experience" and "systematic application of reflective interpretive schemas."<sup>11</sup> This interdependence between historical consciousness and memory can be summed up in the words of Rüsen:

The powers of memory disclose the living character of historical consciousness, while the temporal horizons of historical consciousness, and their unfolding into different dimensions of perception, interpretation, and orientation, make it possible to address the experiential depth and latitude of various mental domains and activities of memory and remembering.<sup>12</sup>

This kind of interplay between historical consciousness and memory is also manifested in historical films. Immersive perception of histospheres produces prosthetic memories: media-induced memories that we recall as embodied experiences. These prosthetic memories are linked to our historical consciousness through the process of the *mise-en-histoire* and

embedded in a historical context. The resultant prosthetic postmemories<sup>13</sup>—artificially generated historical experiences—are thus likewise a product of the interplay between memory and historical consciousness. As recollections of historical experiences produced by films, prosthetic postmemories represent a new form of historical appropriation. If we understand history as a construction of the present, as an interpretive appropriation of the past, it stands in opposition to memory. Or, as Rösen puts it, “while memory makes or keeps the past present, history places it at the remove of a temporal difference.”<sup>14</sup> Historical films do both: By constructing a historical world, they transform episodes of the past into present events. At the same time, they historicize the anachronistic experience attained in this manner and connect it to our historical consciousness, thereby changing it from within. This potential is based on a combination of two modes of remembering that is specific to film. Rösen observes that memory can be “involuntary and responsive” or “deliberate and constructive.”<sup>15</sup> The reminiscence triggers integrated in the audiovisual design of a historical film prompt spontaneous or “unbidden” memories that come to us contingently and are essentially receptive. This process of remembering is unconscious, and our response to the stimuli is primarily physical. The *mise-en-histoire*’s referentialization, by contrast, is a productive act of remembering. By means of associative references, the world of a histosphere is embedded in our conceptions of history. Together, these two forms of memory make a substantial contribution to transforming our historical culture. The parameters of a cinematic-historical way of thinking—a combination of physical-sensory experience and associative reflection—are irrevocably inscribed into our historical consciousness, keeping it open and alive.<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

1. Jörn Rösen, *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Cologne 2013, p. 223.
2. Christian Schulte, “Laboratorium Film. Krise, Technik und neue Physis bei Walter Benjamin,” in: *Maske und Kothurn. Internationale Beiträge zur Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft*. vol. 60, Göttingen 2014, p. 66.
3. Robert Burgoyne argues that this sort of ontological shift in our historical consciousness is indeed taking place. He attributes the wave of historical films since the mid-1990s to a rising demand for sensuous historical experiences. See Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*, Minneapolis 1997, p. 105.

4. Jörn Rüsen, "Einleitung: Geschichtsbewusstsein thematisieren – Problemlagen und Analysestrategien," in Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Geschichtsbewusstsein: Psychologische Grundlagen, Entwicklungskonzepte, empirische Befunde*, Cologne 2001, p. 7 (hereinafter Rüsen 2001).
5. Ibid., p. 9.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, Chicago and London 1985, p. 102.
8. Ibid., p. 99.
9. For a breakdown of historical consciousness into permutations of individual factors, see Rüsen (2001, p. 2); see also Bodo von Borries and Andreas Körber, "Jugendliches Geschichtsbewusstsein im zeitgeschichtlichen Prozess – Konstanz und Wandel," in Rüsen 2001, pp. 317–404.
10. Rüsen (2001, p. 7).
11. Rüsen (2013, p. 232).
12. Rüsen (2001, p. 5).
13. See on this point the section "Prosthetic postmemory."
14. Rüsen (2013, p. 225).
15. Ibid., p. 230. Rüsen elaborates: "In summary, the two modes [of memory] can also be contrasted as follows: One mode, the receptive, harnesses the power of the unconscious; the other, the productive, sets against it the power of enlightenment. The former is prereflective [unvordenklich], the other reflective [nachdenklich]. The two modes of memory are, of course, closely interwoven; neither can be conceived without the other. Together, they make up what we can call the 'form' [Gestaltung] of the culture of memory; for 'form' [Gestalt] is both a prior impression and the result of an activity." Ibid., p. 231.
16. To empirically measure the refiguring effects of historical films on our historical consciousness, further studies with a focus on the spectator would be needed, like the qualitative interviews conducted by Andreas Sommer. According to Sommer, the findings of his study show that "historical fiction films" are "constituents of our conceptions of history that deserve to be taken seriously." He concludes "that the perspective on and evaluation of a historical event given by a film can also be adopted by the spectator." Andreas Sommer, *Geschichtsbilder und Spielfilme: Eine qualitative Studie zur Kohärenz zwischen Geschichtsbild und historischem Spielfilm bei Geschichtsstudierenden*, Berlin 2010, p. 257.

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- Lulu & Jimi; dir. Oskar Roehler; Germany, France 2009.
- The Marriage of Maria Braun (Die Ehe der Maria Braun); dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder; Federal Republic of Germany 1979.
- The Miracle of Bern (Das Wunder von Bern); dir. Sönke Wortmann; Germany 2003.
- The Missing Picture (L'image manquante); dir. Rithy Panh; France 2013.
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- The Piano; dir. Jane Campion; Australia, New Zealand, France 1993.
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- Rosemary (Das Mädchen Rosemarie); dir. Rolf Thiele; Federal Republic of Germany 1958.
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- Sources of Life (Quellen des Lebens); dir. Oskar Roehler; Germany 2013.
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