

**EXPLORING CULTURAL MEMORY THROUGH POLITICAL  
ECONOMY—MANUFACTURING HISTORY IN THE DOCUMENTARY  
*THE BATTLE FOR HITLER’S SUPERSHIP (2005)***

**Juliane C. Bockwoldt (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)**


**Abstract:** *This article suggests supplementing Astrid Erll’s framework for analysis of memory making media with key insights from Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model. An analysis of the documentary The Battle for Hitler’s Supership that portrays the story of the German battleship Tirpitz, which the British Royal Air Force sunk in Tromsø in 1944, will illustrate the benefits of this approach. The combination of a formal analysis with an examination of the structural conditions that predispose the medium’s appearance provide valuable insights into how and why a specific dominant message that is conveyed by the documentary emerges. I show that the political economy behind the TV production has an impact on the documentary’s content and form and argue that the evolving narrative not only depicts a story about the specific events of November 1944 but also about current national self-perceptions and self-presentations.*

**Keywords:** *documentary; cultural memory; propaganda model; meaning potentials; World War II; Tirpitz.*



**Figure 1.** The camera looks up to the bow of a battleship (Quinn 2005: 0:00:03); screenshot taken by the author.

Nordlit 42: *Manufacturing Monsters*, 2019. Digital object identifier: <https://doi.org/10.7557/13.5010>.

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## **Introduction**

The screen is filled with darkness that gradually recedes and reveals the bow of a ship. The ship appears massive as it is depicted from below, indicating the perspective of a viewer at ground level. Four low-pitched accords accompany this image and underline a menacing character.

These are the first seconds of the British documentary *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* (Quinn 2005) that recounts the story of the German battleship Tirpitz. These seconds already set the tone for what Astrid Erll (2008) refers to as an antagonistic rhetorical mode of memory-making: black and white, good and evil, big and small—a mode that is retained throughout the entire documentary.

In this paper, I analyse the documentary *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* with an eye on how the battleship Tirpitz is constructed as a stand-in for Nazi Germany. I show how the ship is framed as monstrous and how this framing matters not only for an understanding of history, but also for discourses on contemporary conflicts. In the beginning, I address the first seconds of the above-mentioned opening sequence in detail, then I analyse an interview scene that constructs the perception of an evil enemy, and finally I examine an outstanding cross-clipping sequence that reveals the tone and the ideological position of the documentary as a whole.

I take recourse to the analytical framework of Astrid Erll (2008) that distinguishes between intra-, inter- and pluri-medial levels. Specifically, I focus on how pluri-medial dynamics might be affected by the structural conditions behind the medium, meaning by those who hold power, capital and authority to predispose processes of production, distribution and reception. To achieve this and add a critical dimension to Erll's (2008) framework, I combine her work with Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (Herman/Chomsky 2002 [1988]) that introduces a series of filters that guide news media production and coverage. Their model is primarily designed to analyse the political economy of, meaning the structural conditions behind, news media. In the following article, I demonstrate its applicability to another genre, the war documentary.

I suggest supplementing Erll's (2008) experiential, mythical, antagonistic and reflexive rhetorical modes and levels of analysis with an emphasis on the political economy of cultural expressions. Such a development of Erll's approach to media analysis has to my knowledge not been attempted before, and that is why an application of it to this historical documentary can be particularly valuable.

The antagonistic mode of rhetoric, meaning that two parties oppose each other, in the opening sequence is created by using music, cutting and footage selection. The opening sequence of the documentary mediates the antagonistic theme of the overall narrative, but what are the reasons for the antagonistic theme in the documentary? Which conditions based on ownership and authority behind the medium predispose the reproduction of a dominant narrative of World War II in this documentary? What implications does this predisposition hold for an understanding of British political and moral position during and after World War II, and for the United Kingdom's standing in current world politics?

The presentation of historical events in popular media is not only about what happened in the past, but also about how the presented parties might want to be seen in contemporary situations and conflicts. Marita Sturken, for example, addresses the

important question that, if history is overwritten by fiction, then fiction is the source of what audiences remember about historical events:

[...] [T]he relationship of mass culture to memory has often addressed concerns about how popular culture and mass media can co-opt memories and reconfigure histories in the name of entertainment—what has become known, for better or for worse, as the ‘Spielberg style’ of history, in which simplistic narratives are deployed to evoke particular empathetic responses in viewers, and through which memory texts are fashioned (Sturken 2008: 75).

What Marita Sturken describes here is what I explore with the example of the documentary *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership*. I analyse three specific scenes to determine if the combination of Erll’s analytical approach with Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model offers new and unexpected insights.

### **Combining Theories**

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky developed the propaganda model in *Manufacturing Consent* in 1988. They state that every mass mediated news coverage needs to go through five ‘filters’ to become a part of a mainstream media discourse. The first filter is about ownership and refers to that many mass media belong to few large media conglomerates. The second filter depicts that companies that are funding medial representations will want to profit from the medium’s success. The support by experts in the field that is reported about is part of the third filter. The fourth filter is about strategies to discredit critical voices towards the promoted mass-mediated message. Finally, the fifth filter addresses the framing of an evil other, originally communism, that is accepted by the audience and that can function as antagonist (Herman/Chomsky 2002 [1988]: 3–31).

According to Herman and Chomsky, most US news items emanate from companies bound by economic goals and incentives. These news items are dependent upon factors such as advertisements, authentication and legitimisation by accepted experts. These factors often shape the narrative in correspondence with accepted and hegemonic frames. Most representations that gain status within the mass media system and within public discourse have to satisfy these filters. The aim of the propaganda model is to test “the performance of the mass media of the United States” (Herman/Chomsky 2002 [1988]: lix)—not without highlighting that their model could potentially be adapted to phenomena in other mass-media environments.

Other mass-media environments could be, for instance, historical feature films or historical documentaries that deal with past events. This is where the question of authentic presentation of historical events and the medial presentation of individual and collective memories becomes significant. Film and cultural memory are tightly interconnected (Erll 2008) and it is therefore important to examine the political economic background for the medial representation of historical events.

Carl Plantinga observes that “nonfiction moving pictures [...] have no unitary ideological effect, central function, or singular purpose, but a multitude of effects and purposes, depending on use, context, audience and other factors” (1997: 4). Following this thought, I argue that this multitude of effects and purposes might be predisposed by

the production processes and by the pluri-medial networks that frame reception and the position of the film in discursive environments.

Matthew Alford (2011) establishes a 'Hollywood Propaganda Model' where he applies Herman and Chomsky's five filters to the Hollywood genre. Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka introduce the term *Erinnerungsfilm* (2008), memory movie. They write that a movie is not an *Erinnerungsfilm* in itself, but rather is part of a network of cultural and media dynamics that selectively frame certain films as historically relevant and others as not.

As a specific form of the *Erinnerungsfilm*, the war movie has the implied fictionality and creative freedom on its side while it can play with different strategies of "documentariness" (Corner 1999: 36), meaning strategies derived from the documentary genre. In contrast to this, the genre of the war documentary is primarily inscribed with assumptions about truth, facts and authenticity. At the same time, however, this genre also draws on narratives and cinematographic patterns of fictional movies. In the words of Edward Branigan (1992),

[a]lthough somewhat surprising, we will discover that the purest instance of a narrative scene may be found in the classical documentary film which seeks to make the past immediate for the spectator by compressing and reducing the levels of narration (xiv).

While the main interest of narratologists such as Branigan is an immediacy between medium and viewer, film scholars also address the aspect of affect connected to the documentary genre: "Like the dramatic film, the documentary wants you to feel and care deeply about the events and people of the past" (Rosenstone 2006: 74). Similarly, Bill Nichols (1991) describes a difference between the plot in fiction as a world of imagination and the propositional world of a documentary. Documentaries do not differ from fiction films in their constructedness as texts, but in the relation between the representations they make and a preceding real world.

Some documentaries make strong use of practices or conventions, such as scripting, staging, reenactment, rehearsal, and performance, for example, that we often associate with fiction. Some fiction makes strong use of practices or conventions, such as location shooting, the use of non-actors, hand-held cameras, improvisation, and found footage (footage not shot by the filmmaker) that we often associate with non-fiction or documentary (Nichols 2010 [2001]: xi).

Additionally, Nichols states that "[a]t the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world" (Nichols 1991: 111; emphasis in original). In contrast to fiction, the documentary form works with conventions that call for evidence drawn from historical sources (ibid.: 117) such as files, footage and original artefacts (Jones 2012: 204). Documentaries often make claims about historical truth, but should, according to Jill Godmilow and Ann-Louise Shapiro, rather engage the audiences "in a discussion about ideological constructions buried in representations of history" (1997: 83) to reflect about histories.

Moving back to the framework of Astrid Erll, the intra-medial perspective focuses on various ‘rhetorics of collective memory’. Erll (2008) divides these rhetorics into an experiential, mythical, antagonistic and reflexive mode (390). The medium’s formal elements create these modes of rhetoric. This implies that the formal elements are crucial for establishing memory-making potentials of a medium. For example, a documentary might employ elements like the selection, editing and compilation of original, contemporary and fictional footage, support the narrative by means of music and sound effects, or use rhetorical tools such as a narrator’s voice to invite certain memory-making potentials.

When examining the inter-medial constellations of a medium, the focus is on the cross-references, interrelations and reciprocal influences between the medium under scrutiny and various other media. Intertextuality (Brunow 2015: 145), recognisable elements, and received narrative figures and tropes can contribute to an impression of authenticity—a feeling of familiarity and realism of the depicted events. A specific representation seems to neatly align to what we know, or believe we know, about the mediated past, and thus makes it more easily digestible and understandable through reliance upon specific inter-medial references. This inter-medial level also guides and predisposes reception by connecting the intra-medial meaning potentials to certain discursive frames that then tacitly guide and facilitate the activation of these potentials.

At an intra- and inter-medial level, a medium builds up potentials for meaning (Erll 2008: 395). According to Erll, these potentials are then selectively activated, negotiated, or possibly subverted in and through situated processes of reception (2008: 396). To increase acceptability with mainstream audiences, a medium’s intra- and inter-medial levels need to correspond to established narrative patterns—the often-hegemonic frames of a genre. Berthold Molden’s statement can support this hypothesis:

In terms of memory studies, hegemony is built by prioritizing some memories over others according to the specific power constellations of a given society. There is no one history because every historical event can have different meanings, can be ignored, or interpreted from radically different perspectives (2016: 128).

Hegemonic cultural expressions systematically invite dominant meaning potentials through specific formal means. Formal means that may express dominant antagonistic modes of rhetorics in documentaries that supposedly deal with true events.

Memory potentials can be identified at an intra- and inter-medial level. Only a pluri-medial level of analysis, however, enables insights into how these potentials are negotiated, channelled, disseminated, or suppressed. Erll proposes that a pluri-medial network is needed to understand the position of a medium within a specific discourse and its actual impacts as a memory-making medium. The cultural reception of a medium is the key for its memory potential to become actualised. It needs reviews in magazines, special features on TV, educational packages and merchandise strategies, among other measures, to “lead reception along certain paths, open up and channel public discussion, and thus endow films with their memorial meaning” (Erll 2008: 396).

There are a few issues that Erll’s framework does not sufficiently account for. For instance, it lacks attention to affect in media analysis. Therefore, in addition to Erll’s

analytical levels, the authenticating strategies identified by Sara Jones are also of importance. Jones distinguishes between two major trajectories of authentication in film: “[...] the first relating to the referentiality of events and objects, and the second to the affective response of the viewer” (Jones 2012: 196). These authenticating strategies can be found in documentaries as well as in fiction films. Within the referential strategy, the use of familiar pictures, sounds and stories helps to form the narrative and to create an authentic appearance. On the one hand, monochrome footage might be seen as mediating the representation of an authentic past. Such footage has characteristics that audiences with a certain genre competence might perceive as authentic. On the other hand, re-enacted footage, shot with a shaky camera and coloured with a sepia filter invites connections with what we might know from early war journalism. “[...] [R]e-enactments are an example of experiential authenticity: the images are felt to be authentic even where they are not originals” (Jones 2012: 205). Such tools are deployed at an inter-medial level, where the references between media are highlighted and contribute to producing a medium’s memory-making potentials (Erlil 2008).

### **Analysing Three Forms of Constructing Evil**

It is said (Asmussen/Åkra 2015 [2006]; Quinn 2005) that Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during World War II, called the German battleship Tirpitz ‘the Beast’ and defined her destruction as objective with highest priority for the British Royal Air Force. This phrase is used prominently in *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership* and it functions as an important narrative device when constructing Tirpitz as evil in the first seconds of the presentation. The position of the person where the quote allegedly emanates from holds prominence and authority—Churchill is mostly recognised by the audience as an important historical figure. His utterance might therefore be accepted as true and trustworthy.

I start with the historical background on the documentary’s major theme—the Tirpitz. Commissioned on 25 February 1941, the ship operated mainly in Northern Norwegian waters and was a major threat to the Allied convoys between Murmansk and the United Kingdom. After various Allied attacks against the ship, and long repair stops in the Kåfjord close to Alta, the Tirpitz was moved to the Sandnessund close to Tromsø. This is where the British Royal Air Force destroyed it with Tallboy bombs on 12 November 1944 (for a detailed account, see for instance Asmussen/Åkra 2015 [2006]).

The documentary *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership* portrays a story of Tirpitz. The paratextual frame of the documentary, meaning the genre category, the selection of footage, and the appearance of eyewitnesses, lets the viewers assume that they are watching a reliable representation of past events (on paratextual frame, see Nichols 2010 [2001]: 20; on genre expectations, see Quinn 2013: 289). Authenticating strategies in this documentary help to mediate a coherent and believable story about a real past event to audiences (Jones 2012: 196). Looking more closely at how a narrative with a classic evil main adversary is constructed, I trace the formal elements through which *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership* manufactures an ultimate ‘other’. An other that can be presented as a virtual enemy with insurmountable features based on historical events (Der Derian 2009 [2001]).

I show how the formal and referential cinematic strategies described above pull the audience to an accepted, uncritical narrative about World War II. The authenticating

strategies and the rhetorical tools for the selection and compilation of images, the convincing use of speech, sound and music contribute to creating this historical documentary's specific memory-making potential (Erlil 2008) of an uncritical World War II narrative. The antagonistic rhetorical mode (ibid.) creates a particular, ideological bias to this nationalistic memory-making potential and to the different elements of 'anti-ism' (Herman/Chomsky 2002 [1988]).

Eyewitnesses from the British, Norwegian and German side provide their observations on Tirpitz in various interview surroundings in this documentary. Jones (2012) writes on the use of eyewitnesses in documentaries in general:

[Their] testimonies are embedded in the film in a particular way that creates further links between past and present, and which is likely to generate a specific emotional, physical and cognitive response in the viewer (197).

Therefore, eyewitnesses can also serve as a referential authenticating strategy in a documentary, as well as an affective one. In particular, I explore the staging of one eyewitness further, and investigate how stylistic elements in *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* create the impression of opposing an evil other in this scene.

The interview scene I chose for this paper is especially significant because of the documentary's introduction of the eyewitness that recalibrates the relation between what the viewer sees, and the information that the viewer receives. The eyewitness mentioned here is a former member of the Norwegian resistance, Terje Jacobsen. He appears twice in the documentary.

How do music and sound effects support and strengthen the setting, and help to create the main narrative of the documentary with the Tirpitz and Nazi Germany as the monster that has to be fought? Is it true that music has become a pedagogic commentary to point to the narratives most important moments (Larsen 2013 [2005]: 172)? What role does text play in the eyewitness scenes, by the interviewee and by the narrator?

Expository documentaries rely heavily on an informing logic carried by the spoken word. In a reversal of the tradition emphasis in film, images serve a supporting role. They illustrate, illuminate, evoke, or act in counterpoint to what is said (Nichols 2010 [2001]: 107).

Before the first sequence with the eyewitness Jacobsen (Quinn 2005: 0:14:20–0:15:11), battleships are shown at sea and the British narrator speaks about the Allied convoys that require protection from the German battleship Tirpitz. This presentation claims the significance of the convoys for the outcome of the war and emphasises the menace posed by the battleship. On an inter-medial level, a visual style resembling original war footage reminds viewers of World War II reports that create an impression of authenticity and that visually support the statements made by the narrator. The narrator announces: "The mere threat of the Tirpitz was tying up much of the whole [British] fleet".

The next scene is filmed from below something that seems to be a tower on a construction site and moves down to ground level in a shaking manner. The sky behind the tower resembles dawn or dusk light (see figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The sky behind the tower resembles dawn or dusk light (Quinn 2005: 0:14:24); screenshot taken by the author.

What little light there is comes from behind a person and makes only its contours visible between the buildings and structures. The narrator states “Churchill had been outmanoeuvred [...]”. The person is observed from below. The camera work is shaky and sometimes parts of structures cross the view. It seems like the viewer is observing from a hiding place. Against the light, it is visible that the figure is wearing a hat and a coat. The person bows their head slightly. The camera angle changes and the viewer can recognise the person as a man. The narrator introduces the man with “Spies like Terje Jacobsen risked their lives every day.” After this sentence, the camera observes Jacobsen while he is disappearing behind the barely lit structures. Similar to the first sequence of the documentary when the screen gradually reveals a big ship, the documentary here again works with contours that slowly become visible, employing darkness and light to indicate opposition, and spoken words by the narrator to anchor the scene (on relation of text and image, see Barthes/Heath 1977: 156). The presentation of Jacobsen relies on cinematographic patterns from fiction films genre such as spy movies, with the camera filming from a supposedly hidden position, a meeting set ‘at dawn’, and the depicted person’s old fashioned, dark clothing. The eyewitness who experienced the actual event, but who the viewer sees in his late 80s, mediates the impression of time and the passing of time; he embodies a connection between past events and present day to echo Jones.

The sound is remarkable during this scene: A *basso ostinato*, a permanent low-pitched recurring melodic pattern lies under a gentle melody of a melancholic wind instrument and the approaching footsteps of what emerges as Jacobsen can be heard. This principal structural element of the music composition mediates a menacing atmosphere that supports the hidden position of the camera perspective. The function of the music is to emphasise the presence of a potential threat, in this case Nazi Germany in the 1940s (on function of music in general, see Helseth/Maasø 2008: 80). On the one



hand, the music in this scene works as a referential authenticating strategy that corresponds to familiar musical patterns known from the motion picture genre mediating suspense. On the other hand, the music, combined with the images and the narration, invite the audience to feel a yet to be revealed threat, to be seen by some vaguely defined evil (on music in documentary in general, see Jones 2012). These observations point to additional insights that an approach combining Erll's concepts with a focus on the evocation of affect can bring.

The next scene is an interview, where the aforementioned Jacobsen is sitting in what appears to be a basement with lighting from a small door behind him (see figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Terje Jacobsen is sitting in what appears to be a basement with lighting from a small door behind him (Quinn 2005: 0:14:45); screenshot taken by the author.

It is dark in the room except behind the man where the stairs he is sitting on seemingly lead to the light. The wall behind Jacobsen looks old. He is wearing a shirt and tie under his coat, and fine black shoes that reflect the bit of light from the door behind him. His hands are lying in one another. The camera is filming from below up to Jacobsen and towards the light. The Norwegian speaking of Jacobsen can vaguely be heard under the voice-over, as is practiced in every interview sequence of non-English speaking interviewees in this documentary. The voice-over of Jacobsen has a slightly smoky, rough and elderly sound, fitting to the bold role of the spy that he is mediating. Jacobsen's name and 'Norwegian Resistance' appear at the bottom of the screen in a faded newspaper typewriting style. Jacobsen's voice-over says:

One day some men asked me to come to a secret meeting. I met three people and they asked me 'Are you willing to join the resistance?' At the time, I was living 20 kilometres away from Tirpitz. I would get up early every morning and go down to the fjord to watch her. Sometimes, I would stay there all day.

The introductory sentence of the documentary's narrator is rather dramatic, while the content of the text of Jacobsen himself is less surprising: a spy who observed the Tirpitz, and stayed there for a while. The description by Jacobsen of "go[ing] down to the fjord" might evoke an aesthetic impression. The active movement from one level 'down' to another depicts a certain engagement of the spy and his commitment to the cause. However, the little content of his comment seems to be compensated by his dramatic introduction, the staging of his entry to the scene and by the composition of the interview scene.

After the interview, the camera films Jacobsen outside and leaving the scene. The camera remains in a hidden place. Jacobsen is again walking against the pink light of the sky, with a bowed head. The viewer can faintly hear his steps on metal, while the narrator states that in 1942, Norwegian spies sent an urgent message to the United Kingdom and reported that the Tirpitz was ready to depart for the convoys. Following this message, the British Royal Navy abandoned a convoy heading to Murmansk and German submarines and planes attacked it. When the Tirpitz arrived, the attack had already ended. Within the documentary, this attack seems to have the role of a justifying narrative because it is the main occasion where the Tirpitz, though indirectly, was responsible for the death of many British citizens. After this story of the attack, the Tirpitz is not only a symbolical threat but has become a real target for revenge. The story can work as "evil deed" (Pötzsch 2013: 130) that justifies both the attacks on the battleship and the acceptance of about 1000 dead soldiers on the wreck of the Tirpitz after the last attack.

According to Jones (2012), the combination of both strategies, the referential and the affective one, is what makes the documentary appear authentic. In addition, Owen Evans emphasises the importance of the connection between authenticity and affect: "It is the careful orchestration of these melodramatic elements [...] that creates what we might call an authenticity of affect [...]" (2010: 173). Even though he refers to the motion picture *Das Leben der Anderen* (Henckel von Donnersmarck 2006), his observation retains relevance to this documentary. The concepts describing fiction films can also be used to analyse documentaries because of the inherently narratological framing of past events applied in both genres (see Nichols 1991). To gain acceptance and to attract wider audiences, documentaries and fiction films often do not challenge established patterns of good and evil and frame 'the other' in lighting, music and by visualizing and narrating terms like 'the Beast' in opposition to the positively connoted 'us'. These media draw upon both referential and affective authenticating strategies to re-tell and strengthen hegemonic narratives that might prepare the way for arguments on a contemporary and global scale about participation in conflicts and military intervention based on a civil duty.

Stylistic elements such as mystic music, a camera angle from a hidden perspective, and the support of the secret atmosphere by a dawn-like coloured sky, which might be familiar from fiction film, were combined and help to portray the narrative of Terje, the spy. This scene featured the real Terje Jacobsen. Aged over 80, he climbs down into a barely lit bunker at dawn, wearing a coat, to say one paragraph about his position during World War II. Even though this interview situation is implausible, the documentary's producers decided to stage Terje to illustrate the situation of the Norwegian resistance in historical times. These elements do not correspond with Jacobsen's current life situation

in a rational way, but invite us to identify with the presented story, accept the framed good and bad, and experience the event with the eyewitness. Terje Jacobsen also has the function of an expert (Herman/Chomsky 2002 [1988]: 19–25) who testifies the truth of the reported events. His personal report strengthens the claim for authenticity of the documentary's narrative and contributes to the dominance of the generated meaning potential.

This scene with Terje, the spy, in *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* invites the audience to feel like a confidant of the secret activities the eyewitness was a part of more than 70 years ago. On an intra-medial level (Erll 2008: 390), the stylistic tools described above, establish an experiential rhetoric of collective memory. The audience receives historical information filtered through the experiences of the expert, Terje Jacobsen. At the same time, an intimacy between spy and audience is invited that charges the representation with affective value.

The second part of my investigation on this documentary concerns the hypothesis that the documentary itself has an overall antagonistic mode of rhetoric of collective memory (Erll 2008: 390) on several levels. On a superficial level, Winston Churchill is the protagonist and the Tirpitz is the antagonist; man against machine that points to an imbalance of powers. The ship as emotionless and overwhelming enemy incorporates the inhumane other as mighty antagonist. The sympathy of the audience is systematically directed to the human, to the known 'us', and against the unknown, evil 'other', the machine. As I mentioned at the start of this article, the overwhelming character of the battleship emerges immediately in the initial seconds of the documentary. The camera looks up to the bow of a battleship; a perspective that makes the (human) audiences feel small and weak when confronted with the size of the ship (see figure 1) when the screen is filled with darkness that gradually recedes and reveals the bow of a ship. Within three seconds, the viewer reaches an understanding from being literally 'in the dark' to knowing the reason for the darkened screen—the massive ship. The literal darkness on screen resembles the metaphorical darkness of National Socialism and Fascism that is made to appear threatening, on the advance and potentially all-embracing, but then moves away. The light pushes aside the darkness, and the diffuse menace gets the recognisable, defined shape of a ship—a machine—which is a concrete enemy that can be discovered, seen and attacked. On the one hand, evil appears as eerily menacing without concrete source, musically illustrated when revealing the contours of the ship in the opening sequence. On the other hand, evil becomes discernible as something material that can be targeted and ultimately destroyed.

Like the viewer, Churchill is opposed to this monstrous battleship in the overarching narrative of the documentary. The music supports this message by four dark accords that are repeated several times when the battleship is introduced from 0:00:00 to 0:00:25 (Quinn 2005). This dark music has the function of creating a menacing atmosphere and a mood that helps to illustrate its evil throughout the introduction (on music's function in film, see Iversen/Tiller 2014: 46f.). The narrator's speech is not yet required in this situation. Image and music both mediate an overshadowing evil that the viewer learns to identify as a huge ship.

Thus, on a deeper level, the antagonistic mode of rhetoric is established as a dominant frame that tacitly colours all other depicted people, settings and events. Churchill is

brought forth as the democrat of the common people who does not want to bear the burden of war but is forced to do so, facing the evil threatening to devour the world. On the opposing side, we see the Tirpitz and Hitler, the Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, representing the full strength of technical and social power of National Socialism, linked to an antagonist that apparently has all the odds on his side. This narrative is supported in various ways throughout the documentary. One occasion is the opening sequence of this documentary that works as a transit from the world of the spectator to the world of the film.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 4.** The introduction of Hitler (Quinn 2005: 0:00:30); screenshot taken by the author.

The introduction of Hitler and Churchill (Quinn 2005: 0:00:30–0:00:38) makes the relationship of these two understandable to the viewers. Hitler is walking from the left to right, accompanied by a group of his officers. He is wearing his uniform and is easily recognisable by his body language, mimic and moustache. The soldiers on his left are standing in a row and he passes them. The camera perspective is from an angle at breast height, which enables Hitler to seem taller. The group of soldiers, guided by Hitler, is walking towards the light. The scene mediates a picture of power, strength, military efficiency and unity—resembling a well-functioning machine rather than a group of human beings.

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<sup>1</sup> On opening sequences in contemporary American and British war films, see Pöttsch 2012.

In contrast, Churchill is depicted in civilian attire as he crosses a street from the right to the left. He is accompanied by his wife, Clementine, who is walking one step behind him. There is no entourage of soldiers accompanying him and he is presented as the common, average person. He is wearing his characteristic coat and hat, not a uniform. His body language and slightly crooked position makes him easily identifiable. Churchill is not surrounded by his officers and he is instead presented as a tired yet determined man who has to face the threat on a mission to protect the so-called free world.



**Figure 5.** The introduction of Churchill (Quinn 2005: 0:00:35); screenshot taken by the author.

The presentation of these opposing characters points to ideological differences between an individualistic conservative liberal democracy with values such as family and the burden of office as central tenets, and a machine-like national body of National Socialism that seems powerful and insurmountable.

The visual presentation of these two historical figures is supported by the auditive arrangement of the scene. The music changes when Hitler and Churchill appear on the screen. Both men apparently move towards each other and the music gets a forward-pushing, cascading tone. The text spoken by the narrator, who is identifying them as Hitler and Churchill, anchors the images (on relation of text and image, see Barthes/Heath 1977: 156). Picture, music and text interplay on intra- and inter-medial level and mediate a strong impression of the relations of power and of strength between Hitler and Churchill.

### **Emerging Meaning Potentials**

This short analysis of selected scenes from the documentary *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* shows various elements that contribute to dominant meaning potentials and the principal antagonistic mode of collective memory. I am interested in how an

eyewitness expert, satisfying the third filter of the propaganda model, and footage from the 1930s–1940s are atmospherically arranged to identify and intra- and inter-medially present a form of undisputed evil in the documentary's narrative that answers to the fifth filter established by Herman and Chomsky.

What structural conditions behind the documentary that correspond to the filters for mass-mediated messages presuppose this presentation of the World War II event? Apart from the definition of the positions during World War II, what is more interesting here are implications that the documentary's narrative can be seen to have for contemporary attitudes, actions and perceptions of states on a global arena. What picture of the Allied forces does the documentary mediate and why is this relevant for today?

The documentary *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* was jointly released by Channel 4 International, Channel 5 [2002–2011: Five], The History Channel and NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk [Northern German Broadcasting]) in 2005, in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. Channel 4 and Channel 5 are part of the same network, are largely commercially self-funded, and have a public mission (Catterall 2013). The History Channel functions commercially and is owned by A&E Networks (Taves 2001). NDR is a public and regional German channel (*NDR* 2005 [1991]). Tigress Productions, which has made many documentary films, produced *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* (Tigress Productions 2018). Piers Gibbon, an award-winning narrator in television programmes, gave his voice to the documentary (Gibbon 2018). Its director James Quinn is known for various television documentaries for British channels. He works as a lecturer, author and creative director (*SIDF* 2015).

In which way do these structural conditions regarding ownership and distributing channels that form the base for this documentary production predispose the formal patterns that I described above? Most of the producing channels finance the film commercially by selling productions and time for commercials. To make a film—including a documentary—attractive for the media market, it needs to correspond to accepted conventions, narrative patterns and popular medial representations (Marich 2013 [2005]). Hence, the expectations of the intended audience need to be fulfilled. These expectations are grounded in the channel's programme and in its broadcasting patterns, and the audience's general knowledge about World War II. The audiences who choose this channel because of its characteristic outlook may be attracted by a certain genre of programmes—a genre that recounts established and accepted narratives about history and about the status of the participating parties. Furthermore, audiences might expect a particular flow of affect from threatened underdog to winner, which is reminiscent of basic Hollywood scripts. The stylistic elements of the documentary, which are well known from motion picture genres, invite audiences to affectively engage with the narrative, and not to rationally question it. Suspense, emotion, identification and alignment with people and topics that the programme portrays seem to direct the narrative towards accepted patterns defined by a mnemonic hegemony of Churchill being the moral underdog fighting the ultimate enemy.

One remarkable narrative pattern appears on several occasions in the documentary: The British do not surrender to an apparently insurmountable antagonist, but make use of their virtues such as endurance, optimism and effectiveness to take actions and change their destiny. The strategy to give the British the image of the underlying only enlarges their victory in the end.

The above-mentioned scene involving the former member of the Norwegian resistance Terje Jacobsen shows the tools with which the makers of *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* invite the audience to identify and align with the spy by fulfilling the 'expert-filter' of the propaganda model. The music in the introductory scene of Hitler and Churchill provides reading instruction to audiences regarding antagonistic mode of rhetorics by clear formally created 'anti-ism', in terms of how the situation of two opposing parties, Hitler and his war machinery against Churchill and civilians, should be understood.

The dominant meaning potentials in these examples seem to be clear: the war machine of Nazi Germany and Hitler is presented as one uniform unit; an inhumane and invincible machine-like enemy. Opposite to this enemy, Churchill and the civilian British army face the battle reluctantly. As the liberal hero and family man, Churchill invites the narrative to draw on a David and Goliath story, pulling the sympathy of the viewer to the underlying 'David' Churchill.

Formally, this narrative of the leader as a common man is constructed by the selection of footage and its arrangement, and by affective and referential authenticating strategies that are applied by music, cutting and recognisable patterns, as I showed above.

The targeted audiences of this documentary are rather limited—a specific group interested in World War II events. Still, the documentary's paratextual frame (Genette 1997) and thereby its pluri-medial network creates an environment that can nourish the medium's memory potential. The documentary's ownership and distribution channels facilitate memory potentials for interested audiences. The documentary's well-known director and narrator contribute to the film's appearance as a trustworthy and fact-based articulation. The accessibility of the documentary channels such as Channel 4 makes it potentially widely accessible, possibly increasing its range of address beyond the immediately envisioned core group.

The observations above show that Herman and Chomsky's filters can be applied to this documentary: the ownership by among others the private company Channel 4 proposes an alignment with economic profit by advertisements in breaks during and after the screening and by size and segment of the targeted audience. Adequate experts such as Terje, the spy, testify to and confirm the truth value of presented events and support the authentic appearance of the documentary. The narrative is constructed stringently with the help of old footage, eyewitness reports and the narrator's commentaries, which leaves little space for questions and an ambiguous interpretation of the narrative. The last filter from the 1988 model, described as 'anti-communism', but here more generally interpreted as 'anti-ism', is definitely satisfied in this documentary, creating a monstrous 'other' of the Nazi German battleship Tirpitz and its master, Hitler.

## **Conclusion**

The analysed scenes support accepted historical narratives of the Norwegian resistance that was in hiding because of an evil threat to the world, National Socialism and the battleship Tirpitz, and of the British population led by Churchill who had to fight an over-powerful enemy.

In this case, the structural conditions of the documentary's production, distribution and reception represent a part of a media complex. This media complex of influential

owners impacts on which histories are produced, how they are mediated, who has access to them, and how they will be received in the public discourse.

Although several potentials of meaning for different audiences can be created, there is often one established dominant meaning potential (Pötzsch 2013: 134) that needs to be examined with a critical view. In *The Battle for Hitler's Supership*, the two authenticating strategies of affect and reference, as well as an antagonistic mode of memory-making, help to create a good versus evil narrative, 'us' versus 'them'. The narrative is structured around the image of an emotionless machine directed against the common British—and Churchill, their reluctant leader. One might stretch this thought to 'Nazi German autocracy versus British liberal democracy'.

Additionally, the conditions of a documentary's production, distribution and reception are of importance when analysing a medium's potential influence and purpose. Putting the spotlight on the affective strategies that are used in a medium, be it documentary or fictional movie, might provide insights in its meaning potentials for influence and the goals of its message. Consequently, the inclusion of elements of political economy in media analysis can be crucial. Questions of ownership, funding, expertise, and handling of reception can point to possible reasons explaining the relentless creation of mnemonic hegemony on the formal level of any medium.

Potential impacts of the memory-making potential of *The Battle for Hitler's Supership*, however, are limited. The pluri-medial networks (Erll 2008) within which the production is embedded are restricted to the respective channels where the documentary and others of its kind are shown. Nevertheless, this documentary embraces and celebrates established narratives, and might therefore contribute to and strengthen hegemonic discourses about World War II.

As Molden writes: "Hegemony thus establishes one particular narrative as a quasi-natural universality and delegitimises alternative forms of reasoning" (2016: 126). The rhetoric in the selected sequences of *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* are part of this 'quasi-natural universality'. The representations of good and evil in this documentary are accepted by the audiences, they do not contradict what intended audiences already expect. They confirm opinions and strengthen the non-nuanced division into a moral protagonist and an ultimate evil antagonist. The representations in this documentary also invite the audience to accept 'necessary wars', as Churchill and the British society had to fight during World War II. This mnemonic pattern for the past event might function as a lens for current conflicts and prepare the audience to accept contemporary military actions against a (medially) framed evil.

The 'anti-ism' in *The Battle for Hitler's Supership* is distinctive and the selection and compilation of footage, sounds and music, and the narrator's text establish an antagonistic mode of rhetoric. A critical examination of created 'anti-isms' in a documentary can contribute to a more differentiated look on the constructed modes of rhetoric and allow questioning of the dominant meaning potentials of film, and media in general.

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## Biographical Note

Juliane C. Bockwoldt is a PhD candidate in Media and Documentation Studies at UiT researching the mediation of the story of the German battleship Tirpitz in British, German, and Norwegian documentary and exhibitions. Research interests are in cultural memory, visual anthropology, museology, and polar history.

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