

Flagging up History

The Past as a DVD Bonus Feature

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Introduction: “A Singular DVD Experience”

Only 13 years on from its introduction, digital versatile disc (DVD) technology is an established part of our mediascape and Blu-Ray is close on its heels, becoming the most rapidly adopted technology of 2009. Box-office figures are now regularly matched, or even eclipsed, by DVD sales and rental figures. Partly as a result of these technologies, media in general are “increasingly experienced not as fleeting moments but as consumer commodities and physical objects in domestic spaces” (Kompore 2006: 353). Following on from video, DVD and Blu-Ray technologies are more than merely alternative methods of film distribution. As a more robust technology than VHS (originally Vertical Helical Scan; now Video Home System), whose products are prone to degrading over time, digital discs have not only prolonged the life of a film far beyond its theatrical release, but also enabled the proliferation of so-called “ancillary” material around the films themselves. Drawing on a heritage that stretches back to an earlier technology in the form of laser discs (and in particular to the format of the Criterion Collection, which included directors’ commentaries and privileged an auteurist approach to film analysis), extra features such as “making of” documentaries have become a standard, if not mandatory, element of DVD and Blu-Ray sets; so much so that most popular reviews of films in these formats include appraisals of the bonus features in addition to critiques of the films themselves. Bonus features constitute what Barbara Klinger refers to as “an instant built-in and changeable intertextual surround,” which is the source of both “meaning and significance” for viewers (2006: 72). As a result, our experience of a film in these formats is unlike that of watching it in any other medium, including seeing it on broadcast television or in the cinema (Kompore 2006: 346). But if DVD and its bonus materials have changed our experience of film, how have they impacted our experience of history on film?

The present chapter explores this question by focusing on the 2007 special edition DVD box set, released in the US, of Clint Eastwood's diptych *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. *Flags of Our Fathers* tells the story of US Navy Corpsman John Bradley and of the other men who feature in Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph of the raising of the American flag on Iwo Jima during the battle for this island in the Pacific arena during World War II. *Letters from Iwo Jima* represents this conflict from the perspective of the Japanese. These two films have been characterized by Robert Burgoyne as "metahistorical," on the grounds that they interrogate the nature of history – the first examines the nature of iconic historical images and the second provides a visual history where almost none exists (Burgoyne 2008: 46). As a result, some of the issues associated with the configuration of history on film are made explicit in their bonus features. DVD technology facilitates engagement not only with the films, but also with a range of historical texts, both written and visual, which contextualize the films and situate them within the broader framework of World War II history. "Behind the scenes" features reveal production processes and practices and facilitate a deeper involvement with how the past is constructed on screen. Such information may have been available to film aficionados interested enough to seek it out in the past, but now it is concentrated into one package and made accessible to a wider audience.

Aaron Barlow argues that DVD technology has allowed films to become "fixed in boxes" rather than lost to time (Barlow 2005: xi). DVDs most certainly allow for the preservation of film, but they also facilitate the fluid circulation of a number of different versions of the same film. *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* appear variously as single discs with no extra features, as double disc editions with some extra features added, as high definition (HD) DVDs, and, finally, on Blu-Ray. Although the films themselves remain essentially the same and there is currently no director's cut available, each version is accompanied by its own marketing materials and positioned in a slightly different way. The 2007 release of the films in the US was a special five-disc commemorative edition containing not only both films, but also three discs of extra material, one entirely devoted to historical documentaries on the battle for Iwo Jima. The extras therefore exceed the running time of the films and are a large part of what distinguishes the viewing experience of films in this format from that of television or cinema. Klinger suggests that it is the special edition box set in particular that gives the consumer "the sense that he or she owns not only the film but also its history" (2006: 82). The 2007 special edition presents the collector not only with the production histories of the films, but also with a collection of visual and written histories about the battle for the island. The box set promises to deliver both films and history as a "singular DVD experience."

Taken together with the packaging, this material forms a particularly rich layer of textual information, which intersects with, and occasionally contradicts, the films. In order to fully understand how historical films such as these configure a relationship with the past, it is vital to consider how they are situated both by

and within this complex array of textual material. These texts not only extend the pre-release promotional drives of the films, but also involve the consumer in the construction of their historical and cultural worth. For the purposes of my chapter, I have divided the analysis of this intertextual surround into three sections. I will begin with a brief discussion of how the packaging of the set presents it as a collectable historical artifact, before moving on to an exploration of how history is deployed within the bonus features. Finally I will examine how the production process is characterized as a form of historiography, with the cast and crew situated as historians.

Packaging the Past

Films are part of an elaborate mediascape that includes a complex latticework of interrelated and sometimes competing texts. This is of particular importance for the historical film. Historical films are part of numerous iterations of the past, both written and visual. Some of these texts are crystallized within the packaging and bonus features of the DVD special edition box set. John Caldwell identifies a resemblance between extra features and the traditional press pack or Electronic Press Kit (EPK), previously supplied to journalists by film studios and television broadcasters to promote their product. The DVD set is therefore seen by Caldwell as a way for producers to bypass the press and engage the consumer “directly,” in a dialogue about the “artistry, quality and cultural significance” of their product (Caldwell 2008, 161). Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus similarly describe the DVD as “the ultimate example of media-industry synergy,” on the grounds that the promotional nature of bonus features ensures that the marketing for the film or television show is “collapsed into the product itself” (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2005). While such approaches are useful in identifying shifts in the relationships between consumers and various aspects of the media industry, as well as in highlighting the marketing tropes at work in these features, they are limited in terms of an understanding of the intricate textual relationships between the films and this material.

I will therefore be considering the packaging and bonus features on these discs as *paratexts*, demonstrating how they position the films within a carefully constructed framework, which outlines the contribution of *Flags* and *Letters* to the history of the conflict on Iwo Jima. In a recent study of the welter of material that surrounds the release of a film or television series (including promotional material, spoilers, posters, and even fan-produced texts), Jonathan Gray has demonstrated how Gerard Genette’s literary concept of paratexts is particularly useful for analysing mediated texts. Genette characterizes paratexts as a set of “productions” that frame a work (of literature), enabling it to be received and understood by its audience; this includes the cover and the title page, the preface(s), the table of contents, and the notes, for example. This material constitutes “a zone not

only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy” (Genette 1997: 2), in which particular readings of the text may be privileged in order to meet with authorial or industrial interests. Gray stretches this definition so as to include any text that “constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text” (Gray 2010: 6), emphasizing that, as interfaces between text, audience, and author or industry, paratexts are as important as the text itself. They envelop and expand a text “in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world” (Genette 1997: 1).

Because Eastwood’s films deal with a very particular moment in World War II, various histories of this conflict are central to how *Flags* and *Letters* are *presented* and *made present* through the paratextual surround of the box set. From the American perspective, the battle for Iwo Jima is one of the most well documented of any throughout World War II. Sustained in no small part by the power of Joe Rosenthal’s photograph and the patriotic fervor that accompanied its release in newspapers on February 25, 1945, a great deal of material, both factual and fictional, has been produced in the US about the conflict on Iwo Jima. In contrast, from the Japanese perspective, this was one small battle overshadowed by the greater calamities of 1945, which included the incendiary bombings of Japan’s major cities and the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. During the American occupation of Japan after 1945, references to the war (and especially to the atomic bomb) in the press or in official histories such as school textbooks were actively discouraged by the US administration. With thousands struggling to survive in the shattered cities, the postwar years in Japan were difficult both on a national and on an individual scale. Consequently it can be argued that World War II as a whole was such a traumatic event that obscuring and forgetting it became the preferable option for the Japanese (Trefalt 2003: 1). It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that, despite the fact that commemorative ceremonies are held annually on Iwo Jima, the battle itself does not feature largely, if at all, in Japan’s official histories of World War II. The absence or presence of a usable past in both popular culture and hegemonic histories determines how the paratextual information for both films is configured and how it, in turn, defines the roles of the films within history.

This is evident before either film has even been viewed. The packaging informs the consumer not only about the contents of the films, but also about how they should be approached. Bearing in mind that, for those who do not purchase this product, the packaging may be one of the few textual encounters that they have with the films, this packaging is also of particular importance in outlining the premise of the films and in demonstrating their aesthetic approaches. In the case of *Flags* and *Letters*, it signposts how history will be reconfigured by the filmmakers and establishes what is at stake in their representation of the past. Unlike historical artifacts such as photographs or documents, DVD and Blu-Ray discs do not “embody their own histories by showing age” (Klinger 2006: 75). In the case of historical films on DVD, the aesthetics of aging has to be created for

them and they have to be made to resemble relics of the mediated past they are re-presenting. The special edition of these two films is packaged in a burnished tin box, to reinforce a resemblance to a historical military artifact from World War II.

The image on the cover shows Joe Rosenthal's photograph above that of a lone Japanese soldier, in silhouette on a beach. Marita Sturken notes that "national stories are often mediated through specific camera images" (1997: 20); and this is particularly true of Joe Rosenthal's photograph. One of the most reproduced and instantly recognizable images in the world, the photograph here works as a paratext that references a specific version of the American national story of this conflict; one that is concerned with masculine courage and unity. The coloring of the photograph (which was originally in black and white) implies a different interpretation of this story. The color palette does not, however, depart from the faded aesthetics of combat photography of the period and therefore maintains the illusion that the box is an artifact of World War II.

In contrast, the image beneath the photograph carries no such burden of information. It balances the photograph of the flag-raising, providing a visual record of the Japanese presence on the island. Concealed in an elaborate network of tunnels and bunkers, the Japanese on Iwo Jima were an elusive presence; unless Japanese soldiers were dead or taken prisoner, American combat photographers rarely succeeded in capturing them on film. Photographs that the Japanese themselves may have taken are lost for the most part – along with over 12,000 Japanese bodies, which, to date, have not yet been recovered from the island. For the Japanese, records of the events on Iwo Jima are literally and figuratively buried on the island. The negotiation between the pressure of history and its absence is evident throughout the paratextual surround of both films.

Just as these images encode the set as an object of historical value, the text on the packaging reinforces the status of the DVDs as objects of cinematic value. The text utilizes a discourse of distinction and situates the set as an object that would make a valuable addition to a connoisseur's library. The special features are therefore emphasized here as being as significant as the films themselves, calling attention to the wealth of material that is unavailable in other DVD sets and positioning the consumer as a film aficionado, eager for information. None of this is particularly unusual in a media-saturated environment where hype has become routine; but it is important to look past the familiar hyperbole to analyze how such paratexts frame the films and their relationship to the past before the box has even been opened.

Part of this framework includes instructions on how to view the films, as well as cues for the appropriate emotional responses. Described by the text on the back of the box as a "moving tribute" to all the soldiers who fought on Iwo Jima, the films are said to "open the heart of war" and reveal the "souls" of the soldiers on both sides of the battlefield. This not only establishes the tone of the films, but also signposts their approach to representing this conflict. The battle will be refracted through the individual experiences of the soldiers (referred to as "heroes") and will include the previously "untold" stories of the Japanese for a more balanced

approach to history. What is at stake in this double package is the aim to persuade the consumer of the product's ability to reveal and restore accurately aspects of history. This illustrates what Thomas Elsaesser terms a "postmodern hubris, namely, the faith that the cinema can redeem the past, rescue the real and even rescue that which was never real" (Elsaesser 1996: 166).

Regardless of whether or not the films fulfill this brief, the paratextual information in the packaging of the special edition stakes a claim, made on their behalf, to the restoration and representation, for both American and Japanese soldiers, of the true story behind Joe Rosenthal's photograph. The films themselves are in fact more nuanced in their relationship to history. *Flags* in particular suggests that "truth" is an elusive concept and addresses the artifice that underlies official histories. There is therefore a tension between these paratexts and the texts themselves, one that illustrates that, although the two are intrinsically connected, the relationship between them requires analysis in order for us to excavate the strata of meaning that can accumulate around the films before they have even been viewed. While paratexts such as this one may complicate a film's actual relationship to the past, others illuminate in turn some of the difficulties inherent in representing the past on screen, and therefore they illustrate some of the issues with filmic historiography itself.

History in the "Making of"

The three hours plus of extra features provided in the special edition set of these films cater for a desire for "insider" knowledge that has gained a particular currency in film cultures. No longer the province of the extreme film enthusiast, the circulation of such information has become a central part of what Klinger characterizes as a "feedback loop" between the industry and its audience (2006: 73). While it cannot be denied that there is an element of promotion to all the extras on these discs, they also strategically place the films within an array of specific historical texts. As a result, the extra features invite the audience to recognize and evaluate the relationship between history and the two films, appealing to that sense of historical awareness suggested by Vivian Sobchack, who notes that "popular audiences have become involved in and understand the stakes in historical representation, recognize 'history in the making' and see themselves not only as spectators of history, but also as participants in and adjudicators of it" (Sobchack 1996: 7).

The wealth of visual histories, both factual and fictional, drawn from the US perspective of the conflict is used in two distinct ways in the bonus features of *Flags*. First, it is deployed to authenticate the film's representation of the past, by focusing attention on the resemblance between the film's footage and that of archive footage. In "Words on the page," one of the "special features" or extras of the *Flags* box set, visual effects supervisor Michael Owens notes that the goal was to make the films "look like war footage, or war correspondent footage." In both

films, the combat scenes on the island are filmed in desaturated, monochromatic tones. The choice of color palette aesthetically exploits the black volcanic sand on the beaches of Iwo Jima, but it also creates a resemblance to combat photography of the time, including the photograph of the flagraising. As a result, the combat scenes in the film can be seamlessly integrated with archival footage from the battle itself.

While actual footage from the war is interwoven throughout the extras in the form of photographs or moving images, two documentaries are featured independently on a separate disc. The first of these is Milton Sperling's 1945 documentary *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*. This documentary is an example of both history *on* film and film *as* history, in that it not only contains combat photography from Iwo Jima but also illustrates how this footage was used at the time. Produced for the US Government Office of War Information, it resonates with patriotic fervor and situates Bill Genaust's film footage of the flagraising photographed by Rosenthal as if it were the moment of victory on the island (the battle for Iwo Jima actually continued for almost a month after the flagraising on Mount Suribachi).

Some of the same combat footage is recycled in the second documentary, *Heroes of Iwo Jima*, produced for the History Channel in 2006. The inclusion of these two documentaries enables the viewer to draw a parallel between war correspondent footage and the film's representation of the battle, recognizing the recreations of some of these scenes (such as the image of the dead marine half-buried by sand, or an aerial shot of a tank flame-thrower) within the films themselves. Linda Hutcheon suggests that the very function of paratexts is to "make space for the intertexts of history within the texts of fiction" (Hutcheon 2002: 83). Hutcheon here is referring to paratexts such as footnotes or epigraphs within written historical fiction, but bonus features function in much the same way. The adage that "you can't footnote a film," often cited as an objection to the medium by historians who favor written accounts, is challenged through extra features such as these, which have a similar objective to the footnotes of a written text. This paratextual material both leverages a space for history within the text of *Flags* and defines the film's role within history. As Gene Hackman claims in the voice-over to *Heroes of Iwo Jima*: "This wasn't Hollywood. It was war." *Flags of Our Fathers* is encoded as history, as documentary. It is, allegedly, not "Hollywood."

This introduces the second way in which visual histories are deployed in the extra features of *Flags*. As Pierre Sorlin notes, "fiction and history react constantly on one another, and it is impossible to study the second if the first is ignored" (Sorlin 2001: 38). The behind-the-scenes features for this film therefore also need to address the fictional representations of this conflict. A paratext of "Hollywood" as untruthful and guilty of the worst kind of visual excesses is invoked in this case. Allan Dwan's 1949 film, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, starring John Wayne, is frequently alluded to as the classic exemplar of a particular kind of jingoistic "Hollywood" history. Somewhat ironically, this film includes scenes from Sperling's documentary; and it also features the three surviving flagraisers, in yet another iteration of the events on

Mount Suribachi as markers of its own authenticity at the time. Wayne featured in a slew of patriotic films during the course of the war, transforming his image from laconic cowboy to heroic military man. Vincent Casaregola argues that, more than any other actor, Wayne embodies the “face” of World War II, finally establishing himself as the “quintessential American soldier” through his portrayal of Stryker in *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (Casaregola 2009: 4). In “Words on the page,” however, screenwriter Paul Haggis states that Clint Eastwood specifically did not want “some sort of John Wayne ‘rah, rah, let’s go kill some more Asians’ in the film” and that, in contrast, his mandate was to “tell the truth.” *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and Wayne’s iconic image are reconfigured here as layers of paratextual information, which are used to delineate *Flags of Our Fathers* from fictional representations of this battle.

Delbert Mann’s film *The Outsider* (1961) is also referenced. Dismissed by Eastwood in “Six brave men” (another special feature of the *Flags* box set) as not a “bad little film,” *The Outsider* never attained the status of *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and has slipped into relative obscurity. It is better described as a social drama than as a war film, in its low-key approach to the story of Pima Indian Ira Hayes – who was one of the flagraisers, played here by Tony Curtis with his skin artificially darkened by make-up and his hair heavily stylized. Although casting Caucasian actors in ethnic roles is no longer as common as it once used to be in Hollywood, *Flags* is offered up as a film with more integrity because “we had the audacity to get a real North American Indian [Adam Beach]” to play Ira. Eastwood does not mention the fact that Beach is not a Pima Indian, but a member of the Saulteux Canadian First Nations. “This is not Hollywood” is a recurring mantra throughout the extra features. In this way, Hollywood’s own history and the patriotic films it made about this conflict form a paratext invoked in contrast to *Flags*, while the visual history of the conflict itself becomes a touchstone for authenticity and verisimilitude.

Despite claiming to be “not Hollywood,” the films are, of course, products of the film industry. Other paratexts are consequently pressed into service to indicate that this particular history is in the hands of Hollywood producers and directors who can be trusted to “get it right,” as Haggis puts it in “Words on the page.” Like John Wayne, both Clint Eastwood and Steven Spielberg (who produced the films) have their own iconic status within the film industry, which is referenced throughout the extra features in order to evoke a different aspect of Hollywood film history. In Eastwood’s case, his reputation as a no-nonsense director with a penchant for quick shoots and candour is frequently alluded to. Spielberg’s presence as producer on a film like this inevitably recalls *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a film that not only reinstated World War II as a financially viable subject for filmmaking, but also set a new standard for the depiction of combat, attaining an iconic status of its own thanks to its representation of the Normandy landings on D-Day. When Haggis indicates that working with Eastwood and Spielberg means that there is “obviously” a “level of verisimilitude” to be expected, it is this paratextual information that he is referring to. While the extra features

create a distinction between *Flags* and previous films encoded as “Hollywood” and positioned as lacking real historical substance, the paratextual information associated with Eastwood and Spielberg is, paradoxically, required to verify that the films will comply with a different cinematic standard of authenticity.

In contrast to *Flags*, the bonus features for *Letters* have to compensate for the absence of a substantial visual history. Documentaries and archival footage are replaced with segments from the world premiere of the film in Tokyo in November 2006 and from a press conference that followed shortly after. The inclusion of these two events not only extends the promotion of the film beyond its cinematic debut but also suggests that the release of the film was in itself a significant event, a moment that saw history “restored” to the Japanese. As Kazunari Ninomiya (who plays Saigo) says at this event, “it took 61 years for this truth to come out.” The film is positioned as breaking a 61-year silence to tell the “truth” about what the Japanese experienced on Iwo Jima.

The commemoration and memorialization of World War II in Japan is highly problematic. Questions about what should or should not be acknowledged and remembered are hotly debated, both within the country itself and beyond its borders. As a member of a defeated army, the figure of the soldier poses a particular problem. Memorialization of the soldier involves at least some degree of acknowledgment of the aggressive militarism that characterized the Japanese regime in this period of history. While there has been much debate concerning the acknowledgment of the victims of Japanese aggression (particularly in China and Korea; but also in Japan itself, in the controversy on the so-called “comfort women”), Beatrice Trefalt points out that very little has been written about the role played by the Japanese soldier in the war, or on the impact of the conflict on the male population (2003: 8). Commenting on the release of the film in Japan, Ken Watanabe describes it as an opportunity for its Asian audience “to reflect on a history that many are trying to forget.” *Letters from Iwo Jima* is represented as having the power to restore the memory of this battle and of the men who fought it for subsequent generations still struggling to come to terms with this period of their history. Eastwood, on the other hand, states that it was important that “this history be told”; a comment with particular resonance, considering the American regime’s active suppression of the past during its occupation of Japan.

In addition, images from the film itself are used to fill the vacuum left by the absence of a significant archive. A feature entitled “Images from the frontlines – The photography of Iwo Jima” does not contain any archival images, but consists instead of a montage of a number of stills from *Letters*, overlaid by the evocative piano theme of the soundtrack. While the montage signifies the lack of a visual history, it also inadvertently exposes the limits of fictional representation. To shore up the gap between archive and fiction, images from the film are encoded as combat footage from the “frontlines,” and the process of making the film is therefore subtly equated with the battle itself – a trope that is continued elsewhere in the bonus features and to which I shall return.

History consequently has a very specific function in the extra features. In the case of *Flags*, aspects of the history of the film industry are integrated with aspects of the history of the conflict on the island, and both are presented as equally important in creating a framework for the film. The extra features for *Letters* address a gap in cultural memories and official histories of Japan. In the absence of archive footage, the release of *Letters from Iwo Jima* appears as a historical event in itself. Ultimately the films are encoded as “not Hollywood” but history. The audience is invited to participate in the construction of the historical worth of the films. The consumer is thus situated not only as a film connoisseur, but also as the curator of historical panoramas. Ironically, the iconic Hollywood status of Eastwood and Spielberg is used to infuse the films with integrity.

The “Making of” as History

Just as the films are presented to us as historically significant, so the production process becomes characterized as a form of historiography and the filmmakers are endowed with the status of historians. In contemporary understanding, historiography is not considered a neutral and dispassionate recording of past events; it is conceived of as “the act of imposing order on the past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation” (Hutcheon 2002: 63). The bonus features of *Flags* and *Letters* reveal the strategies involved in arranging information about the past in order to generate meaning through the medium of film. The ability of the cast and crew to reconstruct the past faithfully is underwritten by an emphasis, all throughout the extra features, on historical research. From Eastwood through to the writers, the director of photography, and even the casting directors, historical research is highlighted as an intrinsic part of the production processes. George Custen refers to the notion of “spectacular” research, used as a valuable tool in the marketing arsenal of the historical film (Custen 2001: 71). However, to consider the emphasis on research in the bonus features as merely another marketing trope is to overlook its potential for illuminating the ways in which film imposes order on the past and creates meaningful histories.

The bonus features for *Flags* are arranged in such a way that, when viewed in sequence, they chart the production history of the film, from the writing of the book that inspired it to the addition of digital effects in post-production. The arrangement of the features in the *Letters* box set follows a similar trajectory – although, as previously mentioned, these features replace historical documentaries with events from the preliminary marketing of the film. Exploring this trajectory reveals some of the processes through which the films approach and arrange history. It is important to note from the outset that a sense of reverence for the generation that fought this war on both sides is evident, as it inevitably informs how both features excavate meaning from the past. This strikes a dissonant note between the films and the paratexts, as the films attempt to deconstruct heroism and to

expose the ordinariness and individuality of the men who fought in this war. The extras suggest a particular reading of the films: one based on an undisguised admiration for the soldiers who fought in the battle for Iwo Jima. It is possible to suggest, therefore, that these paratexts undermine the films' ability to disassemble the myths and the stereotypes that have accreted around Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph; they subtly reinforce them instead.

This sense of reverence is evident from the outset, in the creation of both scripts. The title of one of the extras, "Words on the page," shows that visual histories are not the only form of history present in these extras themselves. In both films, strategies of representing the past are as much influenced by written documents as they are by archive footage. The extra features make these connections explicit, as they highlight some of the issues in translating historical data from the page to the screen. *Flags of Our Fathers* is based on an eponymous book by James Bradley, the son of one of the flagraisers. The book is a product of Bradley's own need to impose meaning on a collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, and letters relating to Iwo Jima and the war – a collection found after his father's death. Speaking in "Words on the page," Bradley relates how, in attempting to find the answer to why his father never spoke about his experiences on Iwo Jima, he uncovered stories that "were so incredible" that he felt they had to be written down. Much of his work is thus based on oral histories, and the book negotiates the relationship between personal memories and larger historical events. Bradley collects these disparate narratives into a coherent and totalizing account of the battle. Central to this representation of the past is the notion that the experience of the individual soldier can provide the key to understanding historical conflicts.

Serving as a paratext for the film, the book is infused with an undisguised sense of reverence and admiration for the generation of soldiers that fought this war: "After spending five years researching their lives, the boys certainly seem like heroes to me" (Bradley and Powers 2006: 353). While the act of recording these experiences in writing is regarded as vital for their preservation, Bradley suggests that the medium of film has the power to re-animate them: "I'm so proud Steven Spielberg purchased the story and Clint Eastwood brought these six guys back to life." Bradley's presence in the extra features therefore endorses the adaptation of written history onto the screen and reinforces the notion that film can indeed rescue the past.

For screenwriter William Broyles, one of the main issues in translating Bradley's "Words on the page" to the screen was to isolate and concentrate so many narrative threads into one film. With only a few hours at best to tell its story, film necessitates the synthesis of complex histories into narratives about a limited number of individuals. Paul Haggis was brought on to assist Broyles with the adaptation. The result was a script that focuses on "Doc" Bradley, but that also touches on the stories of the other flagraisers. While Bradley's book follows a conventional linear structure, Broyles and Haggis split the narrative between three temporal zones: the conflict on the island, the bond drive that followed the

flagraising, and the present. On screen, the fragmentation of the narrative across time zones illustrates vividly how the past impacts the present – particularly in the case of traumatic memories, which haunt the three surviving flagraisers (this takes the form of flashbacks). While film cannot match written history's ability to deal with multiple perspectives on the past, the moving image is particularly effective at translating the emotional affect of battle and its impact on the men who live through it. Despite these differences, however, both the book and the screenplay privilege memories of the individual in order to explore the history of the battle for Iwo Jima.

Letters follows suit, despite the fact that screenwriter Iris Yamashita faced completely different challenges. This film is inspired by *Picture Letters from the Commander in Chief*, a collection of letters from Tadamichi Kuribayashi, who commanded the forces on Iwo Jima. Only a few of these letters were written from the island itself, and not much written history exists about this conflict from the Japanese point of view. This script had therefore to be constructed “from scratch,” with some fictionalized characters, on the basis of “second-hand” accounts from people who “probably weren't there” – as Eastwood puts it in the *Letters* box set special feature “Red sun, black sand: The making of *Letters from Iwo Jima*.” Nevertheless, both films are concerned with the relationship between individual memory and public histories, and their central means of organizing the past is distilling the chaos of battle into the individual perspectives of a few soldiers.

Any concern regarding the potential loss of complexity or lack of concrete historical references is compensated for in the extra features through emphasis on one of the medium's key strategies for creating meaning from history, namely the capacity of film to invest the past with emotion. The actors are central to the ability of film not only to re-animate the past but also to invest it with emotional resonance. Because actors literally re-embody the past, their preparation for their roles and their experiences during the production process are characterized as giving them unique insights into history. Just as the war is refracted through the eyes of the individual soldiers, the filmmaking process becomes filtered through the experiences of the actors who play in the extra features. The production of the film is thus identified as a meaningful activity that can impose order on the past in its own right.

The members of the American cast are described as “experts” on the flagraisers and provide detailed biographies of them. The interviews are mostly conducted on set, with the cast members in uniform. The period costume and set dressing create a sense of contemporaneity between actors and flagraisers. Montages of family photographs of the men in their prewar years enhance the sense of intimacy already evident in the actors' narratives about the characters they play. Their research included contacting surviving family members; Jesse Bradford, for example, spoke to Rene Gagnon's son about his father. The illusion of comprehensive historical knowledge and of personal connections to the past is created through the actors' ability to empathize with the men they play onscreen.

In the case of the Japanese cast, emphasis is placed on recovering the past rather than on re-presenting biographical information. In “The faces of combat: The cast of *Letters from Iwo Jima*,” Eastwood notes that none of the actors knew anything about the battle, “because they don’t teach it in their schools and they don’t talk too much about it” in Japan. In contrast to the cast of *Flags*, which had a wealth of oral histories to draw on, the cast of *Letters* is obliged to “listen to the voices of the voiceless spirits,” as Ken Watanabe suggests in “11/16/2006 Press Conference at Grand Hyatt Tokyo” (another bonus feature of *Letters*). In the absence of a tangible, accessible past, the Japanese cast is forced to adopt more unusual research methods. Watanabe, for example, visits the grave of Kuribayashi and also consults the props department (whose members are regarded as experts on account of their own research) for detailed information on the kinds of weapons Kuribayashi might have carried. Through these explorations, the Japanese actors “discovered all the Japanese history and it was amazing” (Yumi Takada, casting associate in “The faces of combat”). It is this “amazing” research that underwrites the ability of the cast and crew to restore history faithfully and to “deliver this movie to the world” (Ken Watanabe, “Press Conference”).

Regardless of this difference in emphasis, both casts exhibit signs of the same sense of veneration that pervades the rest of the production. Actor Joseph Cross (Franklin Sousley) speaks for the cast of *Flags* in “Six brave men” and states that “we all feel a huge sense of responsibility” in doing justice to these “American icons, American heroes.” Ken Watanabe goes even further, stating that “we felt as if we could give up our own lives to make this film” (“Press Conference”). Watanabe’s comment underlines the way in which the processes of making the films become subtly aligned with the processes of making war. “Six brave men” segues seamlessly from the historical biographies of the flagraisers to information about the actors on set, conflating the past and the present and suggesting a direct correlation between the experiences of the actors and the men they play. For example, actor Barry Pepper, who plays Mike Strank in *Flags*, relates in this segment how Ryan Phillippe, who plays “Doc” Bradley, actually took on the role of the medic for the cast, thereby creating a “brotherhood” between the actors and connecting them to “how that relationship would work in the field.” In turn, Pepper, who plays the sergeant who had the most combat experience of the flagraisers, is identified as the “veteran” who takes care of the rest of the cast, because of his experience on *Saving Private Ryan*.

The conflation of the filmmaking process with the battle itself is even more explicitly framed in the extra features of *Letters*, where actor Tsuyoshi Ihara (who plays Baron Nishi) states in the Tokyo Press Conference that, just as veterans find it difficult to verbalize their experiences of combat, so he cannot talk about his experiences of making the film. The subtext here is that the actors were so dedicated to their roles and the production crew was so committed to an authentic re-creation of Iwo Jima that Ihara suffers from something equivalent to a veteran’s traumatic memories as a result. Such “promotable facts,” as Klinger

refers to them (2006: 73), are regular tropes to be found in the “making of” paratexts of most war films; but their importance in situating the actors as people with privileged access to moments in history has largely been overlooked.

These paratexts suggest that the actors have “first-hand” experiences of the “struggle for Iwo Jima,” as Ken Watanabe puts it (“Press Conference”). For both casts, these experiences are distilled into particular moments, which are described as enabling them to access emotional truths about the past directly. For the cast of *Flags*, such a moment is the re-creation of the flagraising, which warrants its own extra feature, “Raising the flag.” In the film itself, the three surviving flagraisers are forced to re-encounter or re-enact the flagraising repeatedly. One episode takes place at Soldier Field in Chicago, where the three are asked to climb a papier-mâché mountain, to re-enact the flagraising while “pretending” that their dead friends are with them. “Hey,” says the Bond Tour organizer when the men are incredulous about this, “that’s showbiz!” In contrast, the film’s own reconstruction of this moment is identified within this feature as a numinous, almost sacred experience for the actors. The reconstruction is distinguished from the previous “showbiz” or “Hollywood” versions of the event through the emotional resonance it has for the actors. It had an “electric energy” and was “something special” according to Barry Pepper, while actor Joseph Cross (Franklin Sousley in the film) states that the moment “happened like it happened” in the past.

The cast of *Flags* had the Bill Genaust film of the flagraising to study; by contrast, for the cast of *Letters* there are no visual histories to confirm that it “happened like it happened.” Nonetheless, a moment in which the soldiers listen to a song about Iwo Jima, sung for them by school children on the radio, is described by Ken Watanabe in “The faces of combat” as “incredible,” in that everyone on set felt “like they had been carried back in time.” Despite the lack of concrete historical evidence, the suggestion is that film has the ability to capture and record the essential spirit of a moment lost to time. In both cases emotion is regarded as an unquestionable means of access to the past, which suggests that it has a vital role to play in filmic historiography.

While the description of such moments feeds into the mystique of the filmmaking process, it also lends the actors the moral authority required for them to re-embody this history. The actors’ research into their characters and their ability to portray them realistically becomes synonymous with their having insightful historical understanding. Even if, as Watanabe qualifies in “Red sun, black sand,” what they went through on set is only “one hundredth” of the actual experience of combat, by suggesting that the emotional resonance of their experiences gives them direct access to the past, the actors situate themselves within this paratextual material as the intermediaries between past and present, literally metabolizing the past and investing it with meaning. In this context the actors assume a role that echoes Pierre Nora’s conceptualization of a “new” historian, whose work “is entirely dependent on his subjectivity, creativity and capacity to re-create” (Nora 1996: 13).

Although it is suggested that the films offer direct access to the past through the actors, the paratextual surround also draws attention to the medium that frames their performances. As Klinger (2006) notes, the film industry recognizes the value of trivia in creating a sense of “mastery” in the consumer over the film texts, and a great deal of this kind of information is consequently provided about the physical sets and locations – for both films. The production design crew’s attention to recreating the “look” of this particular period in history through its research is particularly emphasized. This suggests that the past can be re-created through a myriad of surface details, from the correct kinds of number plates on vehicles to a volcanic beach in Iceland, resculpted so as to create a facsimile of Iwo Jima’s beaches. The actors could “not help but be affected by” the physical environment created in this way, which made them feel as if they “were really experiencing it” (Ryan Phillippe and Benjamin Walker respectively in the extra “Making of an epic”). As has already been noted, in the case of these films, the resemblance between the battle sequences in particular and archival footage is held up as a marker of authenticity; and “photorealism” sets the standard that the design and the visual effects departments aim for in both films.

However, the hypermediated nature of the battle scenes in particular is emphasized in the extra features, and this creates awareness – not only of the iconic footage that is referenced, but also of the way in which this footage is reconfigured with the help of contemporary digital techniques of filmmaking. According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who coined the term, hypermediacy “acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 300). The bonus features that deal with visual effects literally make visible the techniques required to represent past conflicts in contemporary film, giving the audience access to a highly specialized and technical area of filmmaking. Individual shots are carefully broken down in order to reveal the creation of a virtual Iwo Jima through digital compositing. Mount Suribachi is revealed as a digital creation, every bit as much of an artificial construct as the papier-mâché mountain that the three surviving flagraisers climb in the film itself. One completely digital sequence involving an aerial bombing run on the island is painstakingly deconstructed and made to illustrate how each digital layer is added to “leverage” the believability of the sequence, as Michael Owens refers to it in “Visual effects.” Hypermediation relies on an awareness of the medium or media at work in its creation (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 34). The act of leveraging believability is thus paradoxically based on awareness about the lever. This awareness is fostered through the extra features. Part of the pleasures of subsequent viewings of the films is the very acknowledgment, caused by this information, of the representation of the past as a skillfully mediated construct.

In characterizing the production process as a form of historiography, the bonus features provide some insights into how and why the films recreate the past in the way they do. Although the packaging promises “both sides of battle,” these

features reveal that the approach to imposing order on the past is the same in both films. The making of special features for both *Flags* and *Letters* reveals that the reverence with which John Bradley reconstructed his father's actions in the war saturates both films. Underpinning this reverence is an unmistakable sense of nostalgia, not only for the generation that lived through World War II, but for the war itself. This was a war in which – unlike in America's involvement in more recent conflicts – “it was so obvious what we were fighting for,” argues Ryan Phillippe in “The making of.” The experience of the Japanese soldier is in turn reconceived as a “noble journey to oblivion” by Tom Stern in “Red sun, black sand.” While such paratexts suggest particular readings of the films, this impression should be balanced against the fact that they also accentuate what Linda Hutcheon refers to as the “intense self-consciousness” involved in reconstructing the past in the present (2002: 68).

The craft of filmmaking is ultimately celebrated as a form of thorough historical research in the bonus features. Nevertheless, rather than suggesting that film offers uncomplicated access to the past, bonus features highlight the gap between past and present and invite the audience to engage with some of the processes through which the medium negotiates this breach.

Conclusion: Acts of Showing

According to Marnie Hughes-Warrington, “theories of reflexivity celebrate historians and historical filmmakers who do not simply show history but also alert us to their acts of showing” (2007: 139). Viewers of historical films, according to Hughes-Warrington, may have “more sense of historical films as representations” than happens in any other historical medium (3). I have argued that this is, in part, facilitated by the “acts of showing” made visible in the extra features of DVDs. The paratextual surround of historical films foregrounds their construction and, although Klinger argues that this serves a promotional purpose by preserving the mystique and power of film production, it also creates an intense awareness of the processes through which the past is recreated in this medium. As a result, some of the old objections to representing the past on screen are diluted by the paratextual material available in the extra features. History on film has been criticized for presenting a discrete, isolated narrative, which organizes the perspective of the past around individuals. While it is certainly true that both *Flags* and *Letters* present a version of war that is filtered through the experiences of individual soldiers, the historical material offered in the bonus features points to alternative interpretations, which contextualize the events within the bigger framework of World War II. So, although histories of various kinds (fictional, factual, visual, and written) are literally “flagged up” by the bonus features in order to authenticate the films and define them, they also open the films up and present them as part of a network of interrelated texts, rather than as detached and closed narratives.

Emphasis on factual research is balanced against the introduction of emotion into the representation of the past. Rather than being seen as detrimental to historical representation, emotion is regarded as essential in closing the temporal distance between the events of the past and the present. Focusing on the actors' processes gives latitude to the idea that "the empirical is but one way of thinking about the meaning of the past" (Rosenstone 2001: 65). Much of the research emphasized in the bonus features stresses the importance of re-creating the "look" of the past, which feeds into notions that, for the historical film, "mimesis is all" (57). The idea of the representation of the past as nothing but a superficial "look" should nevertheless be balanced against the inclusion of the material illustrating the hypermediated nature of this mimetic construction, which draws attention to its nature as an artificial reconstruction of the past in the present and makes this awareness central to the experience of history on film. Contemporary digital technologies are celebrated as offering historical filmmakers innovative methods of breaching the distance between past and present. Rather than making us view the resurrection of the past on screen as a form of postmodern hubris, the juxtaposition of historical material with alternative representations of it has instead the potential to foreground "the postmodern epistemological questioning of the nature of historical knowledge" (Hutcheon 2002: 68).

Films in general and historical films in particular have always functioned within a network of intertextual relationships. The relationship between texts and paratexts is both slippery and interchangeable: representations that are also texts in their own right become paratexts for subsequent mediations. DVD technology facilitates the concentration of some of these texts into a paratextual surround, which introduces the films as part of a larger historical network and also makes them present as material objects that can be owned and placed onto the shelves of collectors, alongside other texts. All of this intimately involves the audience in the construction, evaluation, and preservation of the films' historical worth. As a result, the consumer is invited not only to interpret the role of history in the making of these films, but also to evaluate the role played by the films within history.

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