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It is a defining feature of war stories that issues of memory and history strangely intersect. War stories are often the stories of individual soldiers. However, due to the peculiar nature of their content relating to major collective endeavors, suffering and sacrifice, these stories quickly adopt major significance for the self-perception and self-legitimation of collectives. Initially published as memoirs, or historical novels written by men directly involved in the events under consideration, many of the tales are subsequently adapted to screen. As movies “based on true stories,” they reach far greater audiences and become important instruments for the social construction of any given collectives’ commonly accepted imaginaries of shared pasts. Individual histories of war are thus turned into inherently prescriptive war history, “a collective sense of war [that] becomes a pattern of thought, a hard-wired set of expectations and desires that constrain the very ways we think about war,” as Guy Westwell (2006: 5) puts it.

What – to use Astrid Erll’s terminology – turns a film about war memories into a *memory-making film* with relevance for individual and collective historical self-perception? (Erll 2008) How are individual war memories transposed into what Jan and Aleida Assmann (2008) term *cultural memory*? And what role does historical truth play when eruptive and erratic traumatic memories meet memory politics? This chapter approaches these questions with reference to Clint Eastwood’s two movies about the battle for the Japanese island of Iwo Jima during World War II – *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (both 2006). It argues that besides

functioning as a clear articulation within U.S. historical discourse concerning the events, *Flags of Our Fathers* in particular, resembles a contemplation over memories and representations of war in general. Before approaching this subject, however, some preliminary theoretical and methodological clarifications become necessary.

Mediamemory/Memorymedia

How do societies remember their pasts? What are the interrelations between individual and collective memories? What role does film play in commemorations of events long gone? Is the past a construct or can it be revealed as it actually was? In the following essay, I approach such questions and prepare the discussion of Eastwood's movies with reference to Jan and Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory and Astrid Erll's methodological considerations regarding the potential impacts of film on memory cultures.

Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish between two forms of collective memory – *cultural* and *communicative* memory. Cultural memory refers to an institutionalised, “external dimension of human memory” that consists of collectively sanctioned representations of past events (Assmann 2002: 19).¹ It is inherently prescriptive, “stable and situation-transcendent” and functions as a discursive frame impacting processes of individual and collective identity formation (Assmann 2008: 11). Communicative memory, on the other hand, is “non-institutional” and “lives in everyday interaction and communication” (ibid). It is the memory of small groups and shows a low degree of institutionalisation. Cultural memory is formed through processes of archiving and canonising² and heavily depends on mediation, while communicative memory entirely relies upon direct contact with witnesses who have been involved in what is to be remembered.³ As such, the war stories circulating

amongst groups of veterans originate and reproduce a form of communicative memory, while a war memorial, a war museum, or a war film insert an additional layer of mediation disrupting the direct contact to witnesses. Through these processes of archiving and canonising, the mediated content acquires a stable character – it becomes inherently prescriptive cultural memory establishing the discursive frames for individual as well as collective memory practices.

I perceive communicative and cultural memory not as clearly divided, but as coexistent and frequently overlapping. Both are medial externalisations of human memory, merely distinguished due to their varying degrees of mediation and institutionalisation. Both forms of memory are interconnected through processes of translation and negotiation, which constantly redraw the boundary between them. Aleida Assmann speaks about a “politics of memorizing and forgetting” and points out that “the transition between lived individual memory and artificial cultural memory is ... problematic as it entails the danger of distortion, reduction, and instrumentalisation” (Assmann 2003: 15).⁴ Eastwood’s two movies under consideration in this chapter constitute thorough comments on precisely such memory politics connecting individual, communicative, and cultural forms of memory concerning the battle on Iwo Jima.

How, then, can the role of film in memory processes be conceptualised? Ever since the publication of Bordwell and Carroll’s edited volume *Post-Theory* (Bordwell and Carroll 1996), it has become something of a truism to state that a movie analyst cannot simply unearth *the* effect of a particular film. Varying forms of spectatorship and divergent contexts of reception have to be taken into account to avoid the impression of assuming a determinant impact of, for instance, a cinematic gaze or apparatus on audiences. Naturally, this also applies to studies aiming at investigating

the intricate relations between film, memory, and history. Not every film conveying historical material has an impact on historical discourse and not every fictitious invention of past, present, or even future events remains without such effects. It is, in other words, more than the content of a particular film, its representational strategies, or the stated intentions of its director and production team that make for its “constitutive impact” on political discourse and practice (Neumann and Nexon 2006: 14). What then constitutes a memory-making movie? What transforms a historical narrative into cultural memory?

Astrid Erll suggests two methodological moves concerning an analysis of memory media. She suggests a shift of focus “from high culture to popular culture and ... from time-bound media of storage ... to space-bound media of circulation” (Erll 2008: 389-398). In other words, attention is redirected towards representations which are not necessarily elevated and stored over a long period of time, but which are massively conveyed to, and consumed by, mass audiences over a rather short period of time. Consequently, the impact of these representations follows from continual processes of actualisation of particular contents and their continuous activation in and through particular socio-cultural contexts. Drawing on the well-established distinction between text, intertext, and context (Stam 2002: 203) Erll proposes three different levels of analysis to approach the discursive impact of films about historical events; *intra-medial*, *inter-medial*, and *pluri-medial* (Erll 2008: 390-396).

The *intra-medial level* of analysis invites close readings of a film’s text and asks for instance for the technical and narrative means applied to create plot structures, limit perspective, or achieve authenticity and truth-effects. For instance, how do *Flags* and *Letters* employ montage techniques? How do the films focalise events? What role

does voice-over play? At an *inter-medial level* the intertextual dimension of a film becomes the object of scrutiny, i.e. focus is directed towards how a particular work “dynamically orchestrate[s] pre-existing texts and discourses” within and across medial confinements (Stam 200: 203). Do *Flags* and *Letters* remediate competing accounts of the battle? Do they employ original historical footage and to what effect? How do Eastwood’s films relate to the war genre? The intra and inter-medial levels discussed above do not by themselves transform a film’s historical content into cultural memory. To achieve such memory-effects a third, contextual level has to discursively activate this content.

Astrid Erll argues that a movie’s intra-medial and inter-medial characteristics merely entail “a potential for memory-making” (Erll 2008: 395). These inherent potentials have to be actualised through a film’s embedding in *pluri-medial constellations* – “tight network[s] of other medial representations (and medially represented actions) [that] prepare the ground . . . lead reception . . . open up and channel discussion, and thus endow the films with their memorial meaning” (Erll 2008: 396). How have *Flags* and *Letters* been received at the box-office and by critics? Are the movies read as articulations relevant for the historical discourse surrounding the events on Iwo Jima? Is there continued public and scholarly interest in their content? Are the films continuously screened, or put to educational purposes? Focus on the contextual, pluri-medial dimension of films about history brings to light processes of archiving and canonisation, which make for the film’s discursive impact. This impact transforms a film about history into a medium of cultural memory.

At this point, the question arises why focus should be directed towards feature films rather than towards documentaries when assessing the impact of movies on historical discourse. Sturken asserts with reference to Hollywood docudramas that

“films . . . retain a powerful cultural currency; they provide popular narratives . . . that supersede and overshadow documentary images and written texts”(Sturken 1997: 23). Also Erll makes explicit that fictional media such as novels and feature films have an impact on cultural memory, as they “possess the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations” (Erll 2008: 389). According to her, these effects arise independently of the factual accuracy of the depicted events. Jan Assmann provides an argument in a similar direction when asserting that historical material stored and conveyed as cultural memory is “not of interest due to the objectivity of its account . . . but due to its *foundational significance*” (Assmann 2002: 76).⁵ In correspondence with Erll and Sturken, he perceives of the impact of historical narratives as less dependent on factual accuracy than other factors. However, in contrast to them, Jan Assmann dedicates considerable attention to the mythological elements in collective images of shared pasts, rather than to their mediation and integration into societal contexts ensuring their continuous circulation and discursive impact. For the present chapter, this mystical element inherent in cultural memory becomes of interest. The heroism of the men presented in Eastwood’s movies is not due to the actual endeavors in battle of the depicted individuals, but emerges as bereft of its historical basis – a mystification, a mere spectacle, however, with significant influence on collective attitudes and self-perception.

To achieve truth-effects and assert a significance for historical discourse, memory-making feature films often employ paratextual markers. Opening statements or tag lines, such as “based on an actual event” or “based on a true story” constitute claims to authenticity and truthfulness of the depicted incidents. At the same time, however, they enable a solemn dismissal of any critique questioning their historical

accuracy. “Based on” as such functions as a disclaimer repudiating scholarly critique with reference to the fictitious character of the account, while “true story/actual event” effectively reasserts its significance and constructs an inherent connection to a preceding real. Consequently, as McCrisken and Pepper put it, “historical films should not be seen as transparent windows onto the past but as ideologically contradictory, textual mediations whose forms and representational strategies produce, and are produced by, ever shifting power relations” (McCrisken and Pepper 2005: 8).

Through claims to authenticity and through their integration into pluri-medial networks memory-making films give rise to what Landsberg refers to as “prosthetic memories” – second order memories of events one has not experienced oneself, but which nevertheless assert a significant influence on historical discourse and self-perceptions (Landsberg, 2002: 144).⁶ *Flags* and *Letters* provide precisely such prosthetic memories in relation to the battle on Iwo Jima.

War Between Memory and History: Flags of Our Fathers

Erll and Wodianka assert that “the memory-making film does not exist as a symbolic structure in itself, but has to be constituted in, and through, social systems.” (Erll and Wodianka 2008: 5). This section asks whether Eastwood’s movies about the Iwo Jima battle are memory-making films and, if so, what constitutes them as such. Are *Flags* and *Letters* received as more than fictionalised accounts of a battle long gone? How can their discursive impact as memory-making films be conceptualised? Eastwood’s *Flags* sets out to retell the story behind the famous photograph taken by Joe Rosenthal showing six U.S. servicemen raising a flag on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. The film is based on a book of the same title written

by James Bradley (Bradley and Powers 2000), the son of one of the flag raisers. He compiled interviews with veterans and other material to reconstruct the event and its political aftermath. Eastwood's *Letters* tells the story of the battle on the island from the perspective of the defending Japanese soldiers. This second film predominantly focuses on the battle and is inspired by the book *Picture Letters From the Commander in Chief* (Kuribayashi 2006), a collection of illustrated letters to his family by the Japanese general Kuribayashi who was in charge of the defense of the island.

At an intra-medial and inter-medial level, Eastwood's screen adaptations reveal their inherent potential to acquire the function of memory-making films. Their theme, narrative strategy, and reliance upon historical documents such as eyewitness accounts or original footage as sources make *Flags* and *Letters* relevant for contemporary U.S. historical discourse. Eastwood remediates historical documents and the preceding books to create convincing images of the battle for the tiny volcanic island and its political aftermath. In *Flags*, for instance, the precise filmic reenactment of historical footage – such as a photograph of President Truman in his office looking at a painting depicting the raising of the flag together with the involved soldiers, original documentaries covering the landing operation on Iwo Jima, or the image of the flag raising on Mount Suribachi itself – has the effect of creating historical relevance and maintaining an impression of authenticity. These potentials inherent in *Flags* and *Letters* intra- and inter-medial dimensions to function as memory-making films are activated through their embedding in pluri-medial networks ensuring the continued circulation, availability, and discursive impact of Eastwood's work. Viable sources to assess these impacts are, for instance, performance at the box office or the reception by critics.

Flags and *Letters* performed reasonably well at the box office. At a combined cost of 74 million \$ the two movies brought in roughly 174 million \$ worldwide. Due to its low production costs of 19 million \$ *Letters* stood for the lion's share of these revenues.⁷ The presented number indicate that the movies reached a considerable audience both in the U.S. and abroad, in particular Japan. Their contents have been widely accessible to audiences over a considerable period of time and continue to be available.

Both movies were enthusiastically received by critics. Many reviewers favourably distinguished *Flags* and *Letters* from previous films about World War II. Morris, for instance, sets them up against the Hollywood war genre when distinguishing them from the "World War II-glorification industry ... [springing] up from the likes of Spielberg, Hampton Sides and the late Stephen Ambrose" (Morris, 2007: 99). Clearly situating *Flags* and *Letters* within a pluri-medial constellation implying the movies' relevance as memory-making films, Morris goes on to assert that they form "a sort of revisionist diptych, a radical re-imagining of the Second World War and repudiation of the Spielbergized version of the war that has dominated the American imagination ever since the release of *Saving Private Ryan*" (Morris 2007: 97). Also Hunter in the *Washington Post* compares *Flags* to other contemporary Hollywood reenactments of major World War II battles and praises it for its soberness in dealing with a potentially aggrandising moment of U.S. war history. He states that

The movie [*Flags*] shows the same high degree of technical accuracy in terms of weapons and uniforms as "Saving Private Ryan" and "Band of Brothers" But Eastwood has a different

agenda: While “Private Ryan” gave us battle as narrative – defining us and them, taking us through tactical maneuver and the search for fire superiority, then climaxing in battle's victory – Eastwood conjures battle as weather ... There's no coherence or satisfying wind-up ... his set-piece battle starts and then it stops; there's no “climax” where a gallant major leads troops up a draw and flanks the enemy (Hunter 2006).

This quote indicates a reception of the battle scenes in *Flags* as more realistic than in competing movies. It is interesting to note that precisely the lack of narrative elements providing battles with a certain plot structure is here acclaimed as improving a realism, that significantly increases the weight of Eastwood's representations on historical discourse.

Foundas provides an argument in the same direction and considers Eastwood's movies on Iwo Jima a “stripping-away of mythology” and calls them a “morally complex deconstruction of the Greatest Generation” (Foundas 2006). Directly relating *Flags* and *Letters* to U.S. historical discourse and issues of memory, he further states that, “what Eastwood really does is [to] call into question an entire way of reading history” thus emphasising the same revisionist potentials regarding remediated imageries concerning World War II as does Morris (Morris 2009) or Rozen, when he remarks in relation to *Letters*: “It took Eastwood, a bona fide American icon, to break through years of Hollywood war-movie clichés and build a bridge to the other side.” (Rozen 2009).

More than one reviewer connected Eastwood's Iwo Jima movies to present day political issues. They attested to the timeliness of *Flags* and *Letters* in

commenting upon implicit propaganda in the U.S. concerning the war in Iraq,⁸ and in raising “pointed questions about how war heroes, and wars, are packaged and sold.” (Ansen 2006). As Corliss observes in *Time Magazine*, “the movie [*Flags*] is about the real theater of war: how a battle campaign morphed into a public relations campaign and, implicitly, how later generations of politicians have used symbols to sell a war” (Corliss 2006). This theme, Turan suggests in the *Los Angeles Times*, “resonates most pointedly today” (Turan 2006).

One scene in particular clearly reveals how *pluri-medial networks* constitute a socio-political context that determines the reception of *Flags*. When the U.S. fleet leaves for Iwo Jima, soldiers mass on deck to witness the low passing of fighter planes between their vessels. One of the soldiers falls over board and a group of young men is depicted laughing and joking at him, obviously assuming him to be in no peril. Until one of their comrades suddenly comprehends the situation and brings it to the point by stating the obvious: “They won’t stop. They can’t.” A sobering expression spreads on the faces of the young men as they watch their fellow soldier drift out of sight, while the huge armada uninterruptedly continues on its way. “So much for ‘no man left behind’,” is the final disenchanting remark of a young man before a cut ends the sequence. This last sentence is interesting precisely because it does not make sense in an isolated World War II discourse. In this war the question of leaving anyone on the battlefield, or not, was not a prominent issue – in today’s wars, however, it is.

As Wong points out, after September 11, 2001 “[a]n increased emphasis on bringing back KIAs [killed in action] seems to have swept over the US military.” (Wong 2005). The commitment to “leave no man behind” is part of the warrior ethos – four principles guiding U.S. soldiers’ behavior in battle (Burlas 2004). In 2003,

under the aegis of Donald Rumsfeld, the ethos was included into the army's official soldier's creed – a set of beliefs and codes of conduct included in all military training, and important for all U.S. military personnel. The process culminated in the issue of a “warrior ethos dog tag”⁹ to be worn together with a soldier's identification tag (Wong 2005: 613-614). As a consequence, even though the commitment to leave no man behind has been present to a varying degree throughout all wars conducted by the U.S., after 2003 it “change[d] from an unwritten norm to a codified statement” known and binding to every single soldier (Wong 2005: 614).

It is remarkable that the young World War II soldier in *Flags* critically quotes a phrase he cannot be particularly familiar with in this context. In addition, as pointed out in many discussion forums concerning the scene in Eastwood's film, the statement is not entirely true.¹⁰ In each armada, the U.S. navy deployed special vessels to pick up personnel and equipment that had fallen overboard. Taking this into consideration, it becomes apparent that the meaningfulness of this scene cannot be assessed on the basis of what Erll terms an intra-medial level – the discourse constituted by the movie itself. However, when taking the socio-political context into account within which Eastwood's movies operate, the sequence makes sense. When received by today's war movie audiences, who have been primed on genre movies such as *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001, John Moore), *Black Hawk Down* (2001, Ridley Scott), or *We Were Soldiers* (2002, Randall Wallace), which all invoke the warrior ethos and explicitly emphasise the intrinsic commitment of military leaders to bring all their boys home – dead or alive – this recontextualised remark unfolds its disruptive potentials. *Flags* critically targets a Hollywood movie discourse, that became a factor even in news broadcasts concerning the present-day war in Iraq. In a chapter with the telling header *Saving Private Lynch*, Andersen for instance illustrates some of the intertextual

connections between the news story constructed around the faked rescue of Private Jessica Lynch and the widely received military mantra to "leave no one behind" emanating from parts of contemporary Hollywood (Andersen 2006: 237-238).

Flags and *Letters* matter as articulations within U.S. historical and political discourse. The potentials inherent in their contents, representational strategies and inter-textual references concerning a major World War II battle are subsequently activated through the movies' embedding into pluri-medial networks, which effectuate their impact as memory-making films. *Flags* and *Letters* have been extensively and positively reviewed. They are widely read as providing a sober and historically correct image of the battle on Iwo Jima convincingly debunking myth and propaganda. This makes them objects of growing scholarly interest, too. The present anthology, for instance, can be read as both confirming evidence of, and as a means to actively reproduce, the function of *Flags* and *Letters* as memory-making films.

Beyond Mimesis: War, Memory, and History in Flags of Our Fathers

Having established *Flags* and *Letters* as memory-making films with relevance for U.S. historical discourse regarding the battle for Iwo Jima, I will now turn my attention to the role memory plays in the first of the two movies. In other words, the way *Flags* itself constitutes cultural memory is not the primary concern of this chapter, but how translation processes interconnecting individual, communicative, and cultural forms of memory are staged in the movie. Do memories provide access to factual preceding pasts? Are the communicative memories of witnesses more reliable than politically sanctioned and massively mediated cultural versions of it? What roles do uncontrollably erupting traumatic memories play? Can past wars (and the past in general) adequately be represented at all?

Already in the opening sequence *Flags* establishes the fleeting boundaries between past and present as one of its major themes. A nightmarish dream sequence shows a U.S. soldier in World War II uniform stumbling through a barren volcanic landscape. He hears distant voices of wounded comrades crying for help and desperately attempts to locate them, but to no avail. The camera zooms in on the young soldier's face and a cut leads the audience to an old man awakening from a nightmare in today's USA. This sequence, which can be read as a prologue, establishes the varied and intricate interconnections between past and present as a pivotal point of Eastwood's first movie on the Iwo Jima battle. It asserts the significance of often uncontrollable and haunting individual memories of past experiences and introduces what Schubart in this volume refers to as "traumatic time" as a contrast to commonly accepted and culturally sanctioned imageries of a shared past.

This opening scene makes apparent that Eastwood's *Flags* not only critically comments on generic Hollywood reenactments of World War II but also offers a contemplation of what it means to commemorate and represent the past in more general terms. It can be argued that the movie consistently ponders the relation between individual, communicative, and cultural memory, and that it can be read as a testament to the impossibility of accurately representing past events.

Essentially, *Flags* is about the social life of an image. The movie sets out to tell the tale(s) behind the making of the famous photograph by Joe Rosenthal showing six Marines raising "Old Glory" on Mount Suribachi on February 23, 1945. This image became an icon of U.S. victory. Its various remediations and reenactments as, for instance, paintings or monuments played a major role in the Seventh War Bond Drive to ensure the financial assets necessary to continue the war effort. In spite of the fact

that it was later accused of being a set-up, the image continues to assert its powerful presence even today (for instance in form of the official Marine corps war memorial).

The raising of the flag on the fifth day of the battle was, and on some occasions still is, perceived as the moment of U.S. victory on Iwo Jima. However, the fighting went on for another thirty days and as the voice-over by Severance, a U.S. captain, remarks in *Flags*: “Within a few weeks from when that picture was taken half of the men in it were dead.” The remaining three men were shipped off to the United States and came to serve on the Seventh War Bond Drive. Touring the country, holding speeches and again and again reenacting the flag raising event, they became celebrated war heroes and living icons of what was widely perceived as victory. The men themselves, however, retained different memories of the events on the tiny volcanic island and had an image of themselves and their deeds distinct from the official version. In many ways, *Flags* sets out to provide the story behind the story of the flag raising. It questions and challenges established historical truths and directs attention towards the discrepancies and tensions between individual memories and their political instrumentalisation.

Flags exemplifies processes of translation and negotiation where the flag raisers’ individual and communicative memories are transferred into inherently foundational cultural memory serving the political purpose of raising funds for a continued war effort. In the process of storing, remediating, and circulating the photograph, historical facts as well as individually varying accounts of what actually happened became of minor significance. This is nicely illustrated in *Flags* when Bud Gerber from the treasury department, who is responsible for organising the Seventh War Bond Drive first meets John ‘Doc’ Bradley, Ira Hayes, and René Gagnon – the three surviving flag raisers. During the ensuing conversation, he is informed that one

person in the picture had been misnamed, that the flag raised by the three men was a replacement flag, and that the event happened on day five of a 35 day campaign. Bud Gerber's reaction is indicative of the decreasing influence communicative group memory exerts on the emergent memory politics surrounding the picture: "I don't give a shit! You raised the flag and that's the story we are selling boys." Some time later he explains the intrinsic logic behind the instrumentalisation of memories for political purposes

People in the streets, they took a look at that picture and it gave them hope ... It said we can win ... we *are winning* this war... we just need you to dig a little deeper ... But you [John, Ira, and Rene] don't want to take that money. You want to explain about this person and that flag ... If we admit we made a mistake that will be all everyone will talk about and that will be that.

In other words, historical facts and the individual memories of the three men retain little significance. The image matters as myth. Not its objectivity or historical accuracy but its capacity to simplify complicated issues, to engage and motivate is presented as crucial. As Severance puts it in a voice-over: "Every one who saw that picture believed it meant victory. That's all they wanted to know. Victory!"

Eastwood crystallises these processes into the idea of the three surviving soldiers as heroes. Their individual recollections of traumatic experiences are drowned in the publicly reproduced spectacles of heroism and victory. *Flags* illustrates how their communicative memories of sufferings, pain, and death are dissected, mediated, and selectively archived to become cultural memory. With their

iconised hero-selves turning into the medium of a message utterly foreign to them, the individuals behind the façade constantly struggle to bring their own experiences into correspondence with the officially represented historico-mythical idea of the events on Iwo Jima.

“I can’t take them calling me a hero,” Ira Hayes at one point says during the bond tour and bursts out in tears. His statement clearly reveals the vast discrepancy between public representation and individual recollections of war experiences. Hayes is celebrated as a hero, but at the same time retains his own memories of less heroic incidents. “All I did,” he continues, “was trying not to get shot. Some of the things I saw done ... Some of the things I did. They weren’t things to be proud of.”

To drive home these inherent contradictions between communicative and cultural forms of memory, Eastwood employs a peculiar form of montage to interconnect three different time lines in the movie:¹¹ the first is a frame story set in today’s USA; the second is the narrative of events immediately before and after the flag raising, stretching from training in Camp Tawara in 1944 to Ira’s return to the battlefield during the war bond drive; and the third time line are the sudden disparate flashbacks of Doc Bradley and Ira Hayes.

The frame story is about John Bradley’s son, James Bradley, who begins to retrace his father’s wartime experiences after the latter had died from a heart attack. It is largely composed of interviews with veterans¹² and scenes showing James Bradley writing. The frame story repeatedly interrupts and intersects the realistic reenactments of battle and bond tour, constantly commenting upon and annotating the presented images. These disruptions of a linear story line work against a complete immersion of audiences into the universe of the movie. A typical sequence starts with a dwelling medium shot on James Bradley and an interview partner. A cut then leads the

audience back in time to a reenactment of the story told. The comments of the veteran, however, are not interrupted through the cut but repeatedly continue as a voice-over. By these means, Eastwood provides the veterans who had been involved in the battle with the privileged position of a quasi-omniscient narrator of, and commentator on, the events depicted in the movie. This technique allows their voices to guide audience perception and can be read as an efficient strategy to reinstitute a form of communicative memory – the voices of direct witnesses – as determinant of historical narratives.

This is nicely illustrated in a scene where Ira, Doc, and René inspect the papier-maché mountain they are supposed to climb at the Soldier Field celebratory event, while a voice-over by veteran Severance ponders on the feelings of the individual soldiers: “Your [James Bradley’s] dad and the others knew what they had done and what they had not done ... It was hard enough being called a hero for saving someone’s life. But being called a hero for putting up a pole...?”

Through the frame story, the idea of heroes and heroism as constructs of cultural memory in opposition to communicative recollections is established as the core of Eastwood’s first film on the Iwo Jima events. James Bradley is put into the position to assert this in the end of the movie through his comments on a scene where his father and other young American soldiers swim in the sea on Iwo Jima after the flag raising event: “Maybe there are no heroes ... Heroes are something we create, we need. A way for us to understand the incomprehensible ... If we truly wish to honor these men, we should remember them the way they really were.” This sentence seems to imply that the communicative memory of the veterans might retain a true image of the events and the persons involved in them.

The assertions made so far open up for the question as to whether Eastwood's work rests on the implicit assumption that individual recollections of past events stand in a closer relationship to historical truths than the mediated cultural version of it. Is his movie an attempt to renegotiate and retranslate a defining moment of U.S. war history by setting communicative memories up against a cultural one to construct a new master narrative of the events based on different sources?

Two arguments can be provided against such a reading; firstly, Eastwood presents individual memories as inherently traumatic and uncontrollable and, secondly, he consistently raises doubts concerning the reliability of communicative group memories as alternative historical sources.

Firstly, the reenactments of battle and bond tour are not only interrupted by a constantly recurring frame story but also by sudden, disparate and chaotic flashback scenes which provide access to what Schubart in this volume terms "traumatic time." These scenes are focalised through either Ira Hayes or John 'Doc' Bradley and provide access to the horrible things they had experienced on Iwo Jima. In contrast to communicative recollections, these suppressed memories cannot be actively brought to emerge, but break forth uncontrollably when triggered by external events. Therefore, they acquire a fleeting and haunting character that defies representation as cultural memory.

In *Flags*, Eastwood brings forth these traumatic pasts to disrupt the perfect spectacle of the bond tour. The camera eye might, for instance, zoom in on Doc Bradley watching red hot strawberry sauce melt away an ice-cream remake of the flag raising, or on Ira's face while climbing a papier-maché remake of Mt. Suribachi, before a subsequent cut brings the audience back to the traumatic time of battle and shows some terrifying incident the soldiers had to witness. By these means

intrinsically haunting and suppressed individual memories are brought to question and counter both communicative and cultural memories concerning the events on Iwo Jima and, indeed, concerning war in general. The unrepresentability of trauma becomes indicative of the unrepresentability of war.

Secondly, the internal logic of *Flags* also deconstructs the reliability of communicative group memories as valid sources for historical accounts in showing their deep engraving in various forms of mystification and self-deception. The associative combination of the story told by a veteran, Gust, concerning the overarching strategic significance of the battle on Iwo Jima, with the life stories of Ira Hayes and Rene Gagnon can be read as indicative of this intention.

In an interview with James Bradley, Gust tells the audience that “this island [Iwo Jima] saved a lot of lives.” The actor then lowers his gaze seemingly to avoid the eyes of the enquiring Bradley and repeats with lower voice as if attempting to reassure himself “... a lot of lives.” Subsequent sequences then show, firstly, Ira Hayes speaking at the Congress of American Indians where he claims that “because of the war White men will understand Indians a lot better and it’s going to be a better world” and, secondly, Rene Gagnon, who tries to take advantage of the job offers he had received during his time as hero of the bond tour. All three scenes can be read as examples of individual attempts to provide meaningfulness to the sacrifices and sufferings endured on Iwo Jima, and become indicative of the impact of war myths on individuals. As such, Ira’s conviction and Rene’s hopes mirror the belief of Gust in the military necessity of the attack. Eastwood then goes on to tell the further life stories of Ira Hayes and Rene Gagnon. Ira is depicted as continually suffering under the same racism against Native Americans as before the war, and Rene is ultimately forced to accept the truth of him being “yesterday’s hero,” as the voice-over comment

by James Bradley puts it. Ira dies poor and wretched while Rene “spends the rest of his life as a janitor.”

This crushing of the hopes Ira had voiced at the Congress of American Indians and the consistent failure of Rene to cash in on his status as a hero of Iwo Jima directly comment upon the assumption by veteran Gust that “this island saved a lot of lives” effectively revealing it as just another layer of mystification. As for instance Morris points out, the military significance and strategic importance of the Iwo Jima battle is a debated issue (Morris 2005: 107). Eastwood’s associative combination of Gust’s belief in the historical importance of the battle with the failed life stories and frustrated expectations of Hayes and Gagnon can be read as a conscious undermining of the historical discourse providing the sacrifice and sufferings endured by the men throughout the battle on Iwo Jima with retrospective justification. Instead, and in particular through the presentation of the Japanese perspective on the events in *Letters*, the battle is made to emerge as meaningless slaughter where good and evil, heroes and villains, truth and myth, memory and trauma, are all meshed together to create an indistinguishable whole. “We like things straight and simple: good and evil, heroes and villains,” Severance proclaims in a voice-over. Viewed together *Flags* and *Letters* consistently deny us this certainty.

In the end, it appears that neither individual, nor communicative, nor cultural forms of memory are about historical truth. *Flags* lets all forms of memory emerge as equally mystified and unreliable reconstructions of the past. Taking this idea into consideration, it can be argued that what is up for debate in Eastwood’s movies is not only a particularly aggrandising version of an important moment in U.S. World War II history but the issue of representing wars in general.

This said, the question emerges if the battle on Iwo Jima, or indeed any battle, ever can be represented as it actually took place. I argue against this position. It is impossible to represent past wars as they actually took place – to overcome and nullify the gap between event and its later representation – precisely because there is no univocal event any such master narrative could ever be based on. The only thing there is are multifarious and often competing individual and collective recollections and reconstructions of it, which are all based on different perspectives, selection processes and determinant implicit assumptions. As Bleiker points out, representation is inherently aesthetic (Bleiker 2001: 509-533). Rather than achieving a complete mimesis of a preceding real it is about making productive the necessary discrepancy between represented and representation.

Eastwood's Iwo Jima project constitutes precisely such an aesthetic approach to representing the past. Instead of privileging and objectifying one particular perspective, Eastwood undermines and disrupts any narrative constructed around the event. As such, the communicative memory of involved soldiers is made to counter official culturally mediated versions of the battle and is itself challenged by traumatic revenant memories, a U.S. perspective is destabilized and questioned through the introduction of a competing Japanese point of view, and historical footage is unveiled as framed and deeply engrained in politics and mystification.

Instead of replacing cultural memory with a supposedly more accurate or authentic communicative memory, Eastwood's *Flags* (in combination with *Letters*) plays out the various forms of memory against each other. This deliberate unwillingness to align to one particular historical narrative, to privilege one particular account, reinstitutes audiences as active producers of meanings out of texts which appear deliberately open and composed of many different voices. Instead of

immersing the viewer in a mere spectacle of sight and sound claiming “to give you the real thing,” Eastwood deliberately challenges the spectator and precludes any settling on one particular master narrative.

This conscious problematising of historical representation is beautifully illustrated in the end of *Flags*. Accompanying the end credits are black and white photographs taken during the battle in 1945. Seemingly merely applying this form of remediation to create an “ultimate authentication effect”¹³ (Erl 2008: 150) – to ultimately confirm the closeness of the filmic reenactment to the preceding original – the thoughts presented in this chapter invite a different reading of why Eastwood chose to include this historical footage. In the context presented above, rather than underlining the successful mimicry of *Flags*, this material serves to raise awareness of the movie as a reenactment. The original photographs in the end remind the viewer of the fact that the movie itself is a construction, a reenactment engrained in perspective and consciously composed. At the same time, the story told regarding the doubtful truth-value of Rosenthal’s flag raising image casts significant doubts over the validity of photographs as historical sources. As such, instead of reconfirming each other’s proximity to preceding historical events the reenacted images of the movie and the original war footage challenge, question and comment upon each other. In the end it remains up to the audience to combine them into one of various possible meaningful wholes.

Conclusion

In war movies, issues such as the inherent constructedness of the past, the unreliability of individual as well as collective memories, or the inaccessibility of traumatic pasts often remain undercommunicated and tend to be drowned in mind-

blowing attempts to exactly recreate the carnage of battles long gone. Applying Bleiker's terminology to an analysis of film it can be claimed that, in traditional war movies such as for instance *Black Hawk Down*, a *mimetic* approach to representation claims precedence over an *aesthetic* one (Bleiker 2001: 511-514). In other words, it is not the inevitable gap between representation and represented that becomes the focal point of war films, but the conflation of the two and the eradication of the gap becomes the unstated aim. More often than not, war movies are commended for representing past battles as they actually took place, to retain complete memories of the event and to reveal and convey history as it actually happened.

Flags and Letters reveal a different perspective on this issue. In spite of the fact that both movies effectively function as memory-making films with documentable impact on U.S. historical discourse, in particular *Flags* also contemplates the question of memory and commemoration in general. Representations of the past emerge as unreliable and deeply engrained in mystification and perspective. As such, instead of simply providing audiences with an allegedly more accurate representation of the battle on Iwo Jima, Eastwood productively plays out different versions of the event against each other. This strategy of contrasting individual with cultural forms of memory, and of contrasting a U.S. and a Japanese point of view, serves to activate audiences and to incite critical thinking. Instead of passively receiving a ready-made and objectified version of the past, spectators must struggle in a landscape littered with different and competing fragments of a past that more resembles a shattered mirror refracting strangely deformed and disparate images. In Eastwood's two Iwo Jima movies the war and the past in general acquire a fleeting character. They appear multivocal, polyphonous and, ultimately, dependent on the eye that sees.

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Notes

¹ All translations from German are by author. The German original reads:

“Außendimension des menschlichen Gedächtnisses.”

² See for instance Aleida Assmann (2008: 97).

³ Erll and Rigney point out that all memory is dependent on some form of mediation.

They postulate a shift of focus in memory studies “from ‘sites’ to ‘dynamics’” implying a remediated character of all forms of memorising. See Erll and Rigney (2009: 3). In my understanding communicative memory is distinguished from cultural memory through its degree of mediation and availability to wider audiences.

⁴ The German original reads: “Der Übergang vom lebendigen individuellen zum künstlichen kulturellen Gedächtnis ist ... problematisch, weil er die Gefahr der Verzerrung, der Reduktion, der Instrumentalisierung von Erinnerung mit sich bringt.”

⁵ The German original reads: “Ihr Interesse verdankt sie nicht der Objektivität der

Darstellung ... sondern ihrer *fundierenden Bedeutung*.”

⁶ See also Rikke Schubart “Eastwood and the Enemy” in this volume.

⁷ Numbers accessed at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418689/business> (*Flags*) and <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0498380/business> (*Letters*) 6 May 2009.

⁸ See Morris 2007 or Brian D. Johnson, “So Guys, Let’s Count up the Oscars,” *Maclean’s*, October 30, 2006. Available at: ProQuest (accessed 6 May 2009).

⁹ Critics pointed towards the increased aggressiveness of the warrior’s ethos compared to the post-Vietnam soldier’s creed. See for instance Fisk (2006) or Baxter (2006).

¹⁰ See for instance: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0418689/faq#.2.1.3>.

¹¹ Glenn (in this volume) identifies six intersecting time frames in *Flags*. Only the three mentioned here are of direct relevance to my enquiry.

¹² All the interviewed veterans are played by actors.

¹³ The German original reads “einen ‘ultimativen Authentisierungseffekt’.”