Introduction: War and Memory

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This introduction situates the articles in this journal issue within recent scholarship about war and memory. The plethora of available terminology is addressed, tracing memory studies back to the rediscovery of Maurice Halbwachs’s theories of collective memory and its growth from the late 1980s, particularly in Holocaust Studies. The importance of studying war and memory now is highlighted, drawing attention to the current European and global tensions that have their roots in earlier twentieth-century conflicts. Brief synopses are offered of the issue’s articles, which discuss First World War novels; Lee Miller’s concentration camp photographs; 1960s Italian television programmes about the Holocaust; the Norwegian ‘Heavy Water Raids’; and post-1989 *Rough Guides* to Poland.

Keywords: First World War; Second World War; memory studies; Holocaust studies; collective memory; nostalgia; visual cultures

This special issue, ‘Arts and Artefacts: Memory and Guilt in Twentieth-Century Europe’, focuses on the representation across Europe of the two global conflicts of the twentieth century, seen through a variety of cultural artefacts—novels, photographs, television series, films and guide books. The readings engage with the development of the theories of memory which emerged as combatants and civilians alike attempted to process the traumas of total war. The creative arts have huge power to shape contemporary and retrospective narrative interpretations, not least because they mostly do not pretend to be official narratives. Symptomatic personal experiences stimulate empathetic audience and readership responses by evoking similar memories. The essays herein dovetail interestingly with other recent special issues of the *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, notably ‘Veteran Identities: One Hundred Years of the First World War’ (6 (4), 2013), ‘Silenced Mourning’ (7 (1), 2015), ‘Art, War and Truth’ (7 (2), 2015), ‘Assessing the Legacy of the Gueules cassées: from Surgery to Art’ (10 (1), 2017) and ‘The Recovery and Commemoration of War Dead from post-Colonial Contexts’ (10 (4), 2017): memory is tacitly invoked in the guise of mourning, truth, legacy and commemoration. This issue brings forward memory as an important framework that, in its many and diverse forms, enables us to see more clearly the construction of particular narratives of conflict.

The history of Europe in the twentieth century was bound up with war and its memory. Jay Winter (1995: 1) put it succinctly in his seminal *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*: ‘the chequered recent history of European integration makes even clearer the need to recall the bloody history of European disintegration.’ Wartime entails a heightened affective response due to unfamiliar and extreme events; Eviatar Zerubavel (2003: 28) sees times of conflict as having a heightened degree of memorability. We might, perhaps, consider representations of conflict as a bewildering constellation of flashbulb memories (Páez et al., 2009; Isurin, 2017: 26–27) the term evokes the classic ‘caught in the act’ moment of early films, notably those of Frank Capra such as *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and refers to the visceral memory of particularly shocking news. The assassination of John F. Kennedy and the 9/11 attacks are classic examples. Interpretative activity about war has seen a spike with the centenary of the First World War; the act of remembering is stimulated by major anniversaries. The end of four years of heightened commemorative activity seems a pressing time to look again at the memories of both world wars. Those brutal conflicts have been vital in shaping the intervening century, implicated both in the solidifying of the European Union and contemporary threats to its stability. National and transnational European identities, both political and cultural, demand ongoing reassessment in this light (Joas, 2003; Bottici and Challand, 2013).

**Theorizing memory**

While memory is a familiar term in daily life, it is worth pausing to think about the mechanics of how it happens. Memory is an ongoing work of self-positioning and representation, which is consequently a useful way of situating cultural texts. Representation can be broken down into a number of functions, illustrated by separating out the constituent parts of the word:

RE | PRESENT | ATION[[1]](#endnote-1)

Firstly, memory is represent-ation: the act of representing events, objects and people as we understand them; the particular choices of language, metaphor and other rhetorical devices, and the situation of these within societal structures and frameworks to create a coherent narrative. We tell stories about ourselves to understand our place in the world, and interpretation is always present (Allan, 1993). Remembering, as Paul Connerton summarises (1989: 27) is ‘not a matter of reproduction but of construction.’ Secondly, memory is an act of re-presentation. When we pause and turn to reconsider past events, we are presenting them again to ourselves, our interlocutors, or the audience for our creative artefact, and situating our memories against a range of contemporary understandings. As Edric Caldicott and Anne Fuchs (2003: 13) argue, ‘memories are not static representations of past events but “advancing stories” through which individuals and communities forge their sense of identity.’ Finally, memory is an act of re-present-ation: a paradoxically doomed attempt to make the object, person, or event tangible in the present once again. For Anne Whitehead (2009: 126), this is ‘an activity of reconstruction in the present rather than the resurrection of the past’ (see also Cubitt, 2007: 79–80; Luhmann, [1997] 2012: 162); Paul Ricoeur (1988, 3: 144–147), via R.G. Collingwood, describes this as ‘re-enactment’. While certain facts can be verified, as soon as we reflect on the hows, whys and wherefores of history, we are reliant on representations: verbal testimony, written accounts, and other material forms of memory. Jones (2007: 53) argues that ‘history is simply social memory objectified in certain material formats’. Representation is also a work of selection, and memory is inexorably linked with forgetting (Connerton, 2008; Stone and Hirst, 2014; Plate, 2016). This is just as vital in constructing usable historical narratives.

In writing about memory we are immediately faced with the problem of terminology. Should we write about social memory (Fentress and Wickham, 1992; Misztal, 2003), cultural memory (Erll, 2011), communicative memory (Assmann, 1995), collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Wertsch, 2002), transactive memory (Wegner et al., 1985), popular memory (Johnson and Dawson, 1982), public memory (Bodnar, 1992; Phillips, 2004) or postmemory (Hirsch, 1997; 2012)? This brief list barely scratches the surface of memory terminology across the humanities, sciences and social sciences. By 2002 Roediger, Marsh and Lee were able to count 256 different kinds of memory (see also Tulving, 1985; 2007; Olick et al., 2014). Key terms remain contested, even evasive in their definition (Winter and Sivan, 1999: 1; Wertsch, 2002: 30; Cubitt, 2007: 13).[[2]](#endnote-2) Each term has its merits: social memory avoids collective memory’s suggestion of a false totality, a potential pitfall which also applies to public memory; cultural memory gives primacy to cultural products but suggests, perhaps, a separation of these from other factors; postmemory might be confused with other provocations about the deaths of memory and history (Fukuyama, 1992; Nora, 1996; Huyssen, 2003). This is before we start, even, to think about iterations of the term memory. While the root term understandably takes precedence, highlighted in the titles of key journals such as *Memory*, *Memory Studies*, and *History & Memory*, we might also think about remembering (Wertsch, 2002; Misztal, 2003), remembrance (Winter, 1995), commemoration (Ziemann, 2013), or memorialisation (Niven and Paver, 2010). All of these point to memory as ongoing work, which we see as crucial; Wertsch (2002: 17) notes that ‘instead of talking about memories we “have,” the emphasis is on remembering as something we do.’ The final three terms mentioned highlight the dialogic aspect. Memory is performed socially: the verb commemorate comes from the Latin *com memorare*, to remember together.

Collective memory has become a key term, if not the key term, in the development of memory studies. The early twentieth-century French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a follower of Emile Durkheim, was instrumental in developing theories about memory as necessarily social. His key work *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (*The Social Frameworks of Memory*, 1925) puts the interaction between memory and social space to the fore: ‘it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories. [...] The groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them’ (Halbwachs, 1992: 38). For Halbwachs, without recourse to existing narrative, epistemological and political frameworks, memory cannot take place. His work on collective memory has had an enduring impact since being rediscovered in the ‘memory boom’ of recent decades (Nora, 1996). Fentress and Wickham (1992: ix) point to both his foundational position and a key conceptual problem: ‘an important problem facing anyone who wants to follow Halbwachs in this field is how to elaborate a conception of memory which, while doing full justice to the collective side of one’s conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorized collective will’ (see also Whitehead, 2009; Bernecker, 2010). Individual memories are dialectically linked with social structures, and the significance of the term can often be found in the sphere of institutional, even ideological memory. The emergence of collective memory facilitates the analysis of the shifting power relations between individuals, historians, governments, and the ever-expanding media conglomerates of late capitalism. The continuing importance of the term is emphasised by the wealth of recent work on the subject, including a major reader (Olick et al., 2011).

War studies and memory studies are inextricably interlinked. The ‘memory boom’ has come as we move from remembering the wars via individual testimony to understanding them in more abstract terms. The past decade has seen the deaths of the last surviving veterans of the First World War, while veterans of the later conflict dwindle with the passing of each Remembrance Sunday. Operating on the cusp of memory and forgetting, Holocaust Studies has been vital in the development of memory studies, as subsequent generations have struggled to come to terms with the genocide enacted on their families, nations and race. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1991) was a key cultural text; Yael Zerubavel’s *Recovered Roots* (1995) was a key critical text in parsing the connections between memory and Jewishness, and the subject continues to be revisited in new contexts (Rosenfeld, 2015; Shandler, 2017). Marianne Hirsch (2001: 9–10) sees the Holocaust as an exemplary site of what she terms ‘postmemory’, which ‘most specifically describes the relationship of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents. [...] It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus the memories—of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one’s own life story.’ Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2009: 151) argue for the importance of Holocaust Studies in Memory Studies in ‘foregrounding [...] embodiment, affect and silence’ (see also Huyssen, 2003: 99; Erll, 2011: 10–11; Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 37–38). The continuing importance of this intersection is illustrated by Hilditch’s, Perra’s and Cole’s essays, which look at photographs from 1945, Italian television series from the 1960s, and guidebooks to Eastern Europe from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Cole speaks specifically to the collapse of the Soviet Union and allied states in Eastern Europe, which also necessarily contributed to a thoroughgoing reconsideration of European narratives.

The health of an area of study can be seen in publication and organisational activity, and memory studies continues to thrive. Three major journals, *Memory Studies*, *Memory*, and *History and Memory* are (broadly speaking) affiliated with the social sciences, sciences and humanities respectively. *Memory Studies* is the most recently founded and theoretically orientated, and its pages regularly include lively debates about the shape and direction of the field. The editorial statement opening the first issue (Hoskins et al., 2008) continues to be revisited (Vermuelen et al., 2012) in a variety of forms. A range of handbooks, research companions, readers and collections have appeared in the last ten years (Erll and Nünning, 2010; Kattago, 2015; Sebald and Wagle, 2016), some of which (Olick et al., 2011; Tota and Hagen, 2016) have received attentive responses in the journal by way of review symposia (Belvedresi et al., 2014; Blustein et al., 2017), which in turn were replied to thoughtfully by the editors (Olick et al., 2014; Tota and DeNora, 2017). Journal articles on the subject are too numerous and diverse to survey effectively; the three aforementioned journals filled sixteen issues in 2017. There is no shortage of recent monographs (Hudson, 2017; Irwin-Zarecka, 2017; Isurin, 2017; Berger, 2018; Montez, 2018), along with ongoing major book series such as Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford University Press) and Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies. Jeffrey Olick, Aline Sierp and Jenny Wüstenberg, all influential voices, have recently pushed the area further forward with the founding of the Memory Studies Association, launched in 2016 (Olick et al., 2017); Wüstenberg’s work has focused on institutionalisation (Wüstenberg, 2016; Dutceac Segestan and Wüstenberg, 2017; see also Radstone, 2008).

**Why memory now?**

One key reason for memory’s importance now is that we have lived through a significant change in memory technologies. The facility of archiving online means that the need for individuals to remember appears to be diminishing. No longer is an internal ‘storehouse of memory’ (Locke, 1997 [1690]: 147) necessary for individuals, who have a significant proportion of the world’s accumulated knowledge available at their fingertips via smart devices. In introducing their recent special section of *Media, Culture and Society*, Keightley and Schlesinger (2014: 747) emphasise the continuities with existing social systems, noting that ‘while digital media allow new articulations of memory to emerge and provide new resources for developing consensus around a shared past, their potentialities exist in a terrain already marked and structured by powerful institutions, social systems and dominant ideologies.’ However, the development of social media and the impact of on demand services have led to the audibility of a wide variety of voices and a change in the way we engage with each other and the past (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009; Hoskins, 2017).

The democratisation of the means by which information is published has impacted globally. Competing memory communities, who ‘promote their own narratives and fight for their recognition in the public realm’ (Arnold-de Simine, 2013: 18) are now able to share information in spheres which remain relatively unregulated. We have already seen the revolutionary potential of social media in the Arab Spring of 2010-12 (Bruns et al., 2013, Bebawi and Bossio, 2014). However, the corresponding heightened sense of the multiplicity of possible interpretations has perhaps been a contributory factor in the recent refrain of ‘fake news’. With the democratisation of communication comes the increasing spread of deprecated points of view or, sometimes, simply falsehoods and outlandish conspiracy theories. The assumption that the necessary work of selection performed by media organisations also necessarily hides something crucial is increasingly used to disparage and undermine versions of events with which a particular audience or interest group does not agree: when recall does not chime with official versions of events, too often the assumption is that the record is wrong, rather than the memory. The subjectivity of memory, however, can only be pushed so far: while there are always multiple “correct” interpretations, there are certainly also wrong ones. One explanation is offered by Suzanne Küchler (2012: 58), who posits that ‘At stake in the concerns over social memory today is arguably not the question of memory’s socialising capacity, but its relation to object worlds under conditions when objects have ceased to fulfil the mediatory function, granting subjects proprietary rights to resources.’ Silke Arnold-de Simine (2013: 12) is one of several commentators to note the shift in museums towards being ‘forums for memory communities and for the communicative memory of eyewitnesses to historical events’, to a space for contesting official narratives on behalf of ‘minorities who find it difficult to make themselves heard.’ A careful line needs to be trodden between legitimate contest, in the interests of recovering previously silenced and marginalised voices, and contest in the service of pernicious falsehood.

**Arts and Artefacts**

The essays in this collection demonstrate the continuing importance of the Second World War in memory studies, while also showing ways beyond this. Andrew Frayn’s essay sees the developing disenchanted prose response to the First World War in the 1920s as part of an ongoing process of social remembering. Discussing his preference for a term indicating process and broad social negotiations, Frayn demonstrates that social memory is never unchallenged and always in process. Via a series of key case studies, the essay charts the gradual shift through the post-war decade from the dominance of the heroic and chivalric mode of early post-war fiction to the brutal satire of Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* (1929). The essay also highlights the need to create a usable past in conditions of economic hardship. As Frayn points out, later writers and artists drew on ways of remembering the First World War in their interpretation and representation of subsequent conflicts. The key role of Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (1929), better known in the anglophone world by A.W. Wheen’s translated title *All Quiet on the Western Front*, is an early example of the internationalisation of memory which became increasingly significant after the Second World War.

The end of the latter conflict led to the need to confront horrors even greater than those experienced in the ‘war to end war’. However, these were not horrors resulting from military service, but inflicted on civilian victims. The revelation of conditions in the concentration camps was a shocking moment in European history and, as we have discussed above, one which has played a significant role in defining memory studies. An early witness was the American photographer Lee Miller, whose photographs of Buchenwald and Dachau have become iconic. Lynn Hilditch’s essay considers these images, while describing Miller’s failure to persuade the British edition of *Vogue* to publish more than a single image. The American edition published a larger selection, pointing to the importance of space and distance in decisions about what material might be acceptable. Countries which were extensively scarred by the bombing of civilian targets preferred to celebrate victory rather than confront the horrors that led to it. The photograph is often seen as offering faithful reproduction, although Susan Sontag (2003) points out that photographs are often staged. Hilditch describes the specifics of that staging in Miller’s work, which expresses the extreme nature of the horror of the concentration camps, seen as unrepresentable by recourse to traditional realist forms, by using surrealist and fragmenting techniques. In a context of increasing internationalisation a global audience saw this horror through the eyes of a select number of survivors and witnesses.

The relationship between visual culture and the Holocaust also underlies Emiliano Perra’s essay on representations in Italian television. The variation in conflict narratives across Europe happens in the interstices between individual and national responsibility. Perra outlines how the war years were themselves for Italy a source of division and fragmentation. He traces the post-war shifts in Holocaust memory in Italy, focusing on the shift from centre-right to centre-left politics in the 1960s which led to a greater willingness to discuss the issue. Two programmes produced by the state television company RAI in 1965 demonstrate a very early example of the internationalisation of Holocaust memory, and provided the Italian establishment with the opportunity to distance the country from responsibility for the event. The use of both witnesses who remembered the conflict, and witnesses drawn from the post-war generation in *The Day of Peace* (*Il giorno della pace*) is an early example of communicative memory.

The recreation of the experience of the witness is key in Tonje Sorensen’s essay which focuses on three different recreations of the ‘Heavy Water Raids’, acts of sabotage by the Allied powers and the Norwegian resistance. Sorensen demonstrates that the three forms of remembering, a film, a museum and a mountain trail all privilege accuracy and authenticity. At the same time her essay demonstrates, in important ways, the contradictions implicit in these acts of re-creation. However determined the creators are to achieve authenticity, extending even to the use of veterans in re-enactments, the context can never be recovered. The individual who is remembering, whether stimulated to recall an actual memory or relive a transgenerational memory is always re-living, rather than living. Her essay also underlines the way in which artefacts of memory, even when they place a high premium on authenticity and are situated in a comparatively uncontroversial context, nevertheless convey a message which is to some extent ideological.

‘Memory tourism’, highlighted in Sorensen’s account of the saboteur trails, is also to the fore in Tim Cole’s account of the highlighting of a forgotten Jewish presence in Poland in editions of the Rough Guide published during the 1990s. Cole’s essay illustrates the importance of the concept of ‘forgetting’ in the creation of collective and social memory. The essay provides a fitting conclusion to this issue. Reminders of the Jewish presence in Poland provide examples of the process of ‘double erasure’, highlighting the fact that memory is always in process and that this is often a very political process. The Holocaust, the subject of three of the essays included here, continues to have a sometimes controversial significance and its remembering, rather than the event itself has become an important element in post-Cold War European politics.

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The understanding of history and, perhaps particularly in the current political climate, past conflicts remains vital for national and international narratives and development. ‘The war to end war’ (Wells, 1914) which ended a century ago did no such thing. We live in a time of world-wide tension, in the Far East, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas, and the role played by memory in these tensions is evident. The questions of guilt which manifest themselves in the continuing debate about the assimilation of refugees from the war-torn Middle East and Africa should be, but in the British public sphere are rarely, considered in terms of colonialism’s pernicious impact. The essays in this collection illustrate the reshaping of the past as media technologies develop. They also implicitly counsel against the dangers of nostalgia. As the appetite for aestheticised and/or idealised versions of past eras shows no sign of being sated, epitomised by ITV’s *Downton Abbey*, AMC’s *Mad Men*, or the sanitised grime of the BBC’s *Peaky Blinders*, we must strive harder to remember and communicate the grinding day-to-day discomforts undergone by many, if not most. Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies begin their special issue of *Memory Studies* on ‘Nostalgia and the Uses of History’ with the brisk assessment: ‘Nostalgia is always suspect.’ Their view that ‘Nostalgia is both the bittersweet side-effect of modernity and a potential cause of a deadening hostility to the changes modernity brings’ rings ever more true (Atia and Davies, 2010: 181), although other studies have explored its possible benefits (Keightley and Pickering, 2012; Cheung et al., 2018). The essays in this issue illustrate the importance of understanding the ever-changing shape of memory in the continuing crises that confront European nations. The recurring question of identity manifests itself in recent flashpoints such as the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum of 2016, whose consequences seem doomed to become known as ‘Brexit’, and the attempts to declare independence for Catalonia. Memory plays a crucial role in the formation of identity in all its manifestations: civic, cultural and ethnic. While the passing of this particular tranche of activity commemorating the First World War will inevitably see some tailing off of analysis, we must not forget that the memory of modern conflicts remains with us on a day-to-day basis in language and politics.

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1. This construction is inspired by the typology in the title of Hassan (1971). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This is in part due to the humanist focus. A rather different picture emerges in scientific studies of memory, which tend to be found in the *Memory* journal. While attempts continue to be made to bridge the gap between sciences and social sciences/humanities (Nalbantian et al 2011), it remains a thorny problem. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)