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‘D-Day 2004: Passing the Torch to History?’, in Katharina Hall and Kathryn N. Jones (eds), *Constructions of Conflict: Transmitting Memories of the Past in European Historiography, Culture and Media* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 223-240

‘I just come and have a peep at him to make sure he hasn’t gone anywhere’.¹ Charles Carter was one of the thousands of British veterans of the D-Day landings who converged on Normandy in June 2004 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the largest amphibious assault in military history. In common with many other of these elderly pilgrims, a priority for Carter was to perform a personal act of remembrance at one of the military cemeteries dotting the hinterland of the invasion beaches. So he laid a wreath on the grave of his friend Harry Perry, killed in the ferocious fighting of the battle of Normandy, tenderly paying his respects to a comrade who fell at his side the best part of a lifetime ago. Throughout northern France, veterans criss-crossed the serried ranks of white tombstones, some tottering with sticks, others pushed in wheelchairs and yet others walking with martial mien and remarkably spry for their years, each pausing occasionally in intense and private contemplation before the grave of an individual friend or fellow unit member. Yet this was also a social occasion, as the veterans caught up with former comrades and drank late into the night with members of the local population who fêted them as heroes. Indispensable, too, were visits to the beaches and landing grounds where the old soldiers recalled in blazing sunshine what they had done and suffered there decades before. Some were eager to share their stories of terror and sacrifice, while others were more reticent, either from natural reserve or lingering trauma. Classic British under-statement was much in evidence. Reflecting on the seemingly endless headstones marking lives terminated at lamentably tender ages, Peter Ford, a 47 Royal Marine Commando veteran making his first return to Normandy since 1944, remarked ‘I know it has been said before, but it is quite a hard thing to take in’.²

The returning veterans constituted the spiritual core of the anniversary commemorations, but their poignant observances were surrounded by a host of less elevated forms of remembrance. Memorabilia manufacturers had churned out souvenirs in every conceivable form. One commentator catalogued tea towels, t-shirts, thimbles, lighters, coasters, ash-trays, key-rings, penknives, paperweights, shoehorns, rucksacks, tankards, teacups and commemorative coins, ‘a sourly impressive amount of laminated plasticky tourist dreck, ...

¹ Jamie Wilson, ‘Keeping the Flame of Memory Alight’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 2004, p. 7.

² Wilson, p. 7.

red, white, blue and gaudy'.³ This was eagerly consumed by the hordes of tourists that thronged to participate in the marking of the anniversary. Battlefield tourism has long become a substantial business in Normandy, with an estimated 1.5 million people a year traversing the beaches and cemeteries and the 'slow-rotting carcasses of gun emplacements among the sedge and dogwort'.⁴ The focal point of the sixtieth anniversary naturally precipitated a spike in tourist numbers in 2004, with hotel rooms booked solid throughout the region and far beyond, in many cases several years in advance. The tourism infrastructure has become ever more elaborate and sophisticated from year to year, as museums and memorial sites proliferate. So, for example, the sleek and stylish Juno Beach Centre, opened in 2003, offers innovative multimedia perspectives on the landing of Canadian troops and on Canada's role in the Second World War more generally.⁵ Despite the honourable, even scholarly, intentions of many of these memorial endeavours, they testify to the thoroughgoing and large-scale commodification of D-Day remembrance.⁶

Many tourists in 2004 came in family groups, some with relatives who were veterans and others more abstractedly curious, their interest often piqued by filmic representations, especially Steven Spielberg's 1998 Oscar-winning epic, *Saving Private Ryan*. Yet there was a further identifiable genre of visitor, in the form of a 'grotesque medley of historical re-enactors' – 'car enthusiasts, costume fetishists and unhinged military wannabes' – who paraded through the streets 'to the bemusement and disgust of real veterans and serving officers'.⁷ Re-enactment was a bizarre transnational phenomenon, with participants from across Europe and North America staging parachute jumps, reconstructing landings on the beaches, building fortifications and digging foxholes. Their idiom of 'living history' entailed an obsessive concern with authenticity, with revisiting the precise locales in which the units they were representing had operated and with using as much original weaponry and kit as possible.⁸ Re-enactors wrote of the thrill, the 'real sense of history', they experienced as they walked in formation through the Normandy countryside: 'It could have been 1944 the way it

³ Euan Ferguson, 'On the Beaches', *Observer*, 9 May 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/may/09/secondworldwar.euanferguson>> [accessed 20 October 2009] (para. 1).

⁴ Ferguson, 'On the Beaches' (para. 7).

⁵ See <<http://www.junobeach.org/>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

⁶ For the pre-history of this phenomenon, see Sam Edwards, 'Commemoration and Consumption in Normandy, 1945–1994', in *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration*, ed. by Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pp. 76–91.

⁷ Tristram Hunt, 'One Last Time They Gather, the Greatest Generation', *Observer*, 6 June 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/jun/06/secondworldwar>> [accessed 20 October 2009] (paras 45 and 46).

⁸ For a sense of this, see the photographs and captions of 'D/505 at the Greatest Generation Memorial Exhibit' <<http://www.504th.freeseerve.co.uk/smeexhib.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

looked'.⁹ Although clearly in part purely recreational, re-enactors also conceived of their efforts as a tribute to the men who had originally fought in the invasion. At times, the distinction between veterans and re-enactors might even become somewhat blurred. On the anniversary of D-Day itself one group participated in a seven-mile march into Arronanches for the official ceremonies, and later received an unexpected bonus: 'At the end of the day we were lucky enough to by chance be reviewed by the Queen as her motorcade left the town, and as always she had a brilliant smile and waved as she passed'.¹⁰ Some re-enactors even harbour serious aspirations to take over in due course the role now played by veterans in the commemorative ceremonies, and thus to transform imitative homage into a form of prosthetic, performative memory.¹¹

There were extensive formal ceremonies throughout northern France, involving political representatives from almost all the European combatant powers including for the first time the Federal Republic of Germany and Russia. This gesture of inclusivity reflected a sincere desire to draw a definitive line under war-time and Cold War antagonisms. Yet there was brute political calculation here too, as the invitation to Russian President Vladimir Putin also aimed to soothe ruffled feathers in Moscow following the eastward expansion of the European Union in May.¹² Moreover, each speech refracted the historical events of D-Day through a different prism of national identity and contemporary political imperative. United States President George Bush had insistently invoked the myths and symbolism of the Second World War over previous years in his efforts to bolster support for American foreign policy in the 'War on Terror' and specifically for the invasion of Iraq.¹³ He was apparently forewarned by French President Jacques Chirac that explicit reference to the controversial Iraq war would be unwelcome during the commemorations, but his folksy speech nonetheless recycled staple tropes of 'good war' mythologising and thereby implicitly reinscribed the virtue of America's cause in past and present.¹⁴ Chirac's speech contained mixed messages.

⁹ Rob M., 'Gold Beach 60 Years On', Northwest Historical Association <http://www.nwha.org/news_3Q2004/news_page10.html> [accessed 20 October 2009] (paras 12 and 14)

¹⁰ M., (para. 15).

¹¹ I adapt here a concept from Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Re-enactment is further discussed in Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 105-23.

¹² Andreas Langenohl, 'State Visits: Internationalised Commemoration of WWII in Russia and Germany', *Eurozine*, 3 May 2005 <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-langenohl-en.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

¹³ David Hoogland Noon, 'Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 7.3 (2004), 339-65.

¹⁴ Maja Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 236.

In part it seemed to embody an effort to repair the damage done to Franco-American relations over Iraq, with its invocation of the United States as ‘our eternal ally’ and reassurance that in its current ‘time of trial’ ‘France stands side by side every man and woman in America’.¹⁵ Yet some observers detected a pointed rebuke in the reference to their joint wartime defence of ‘a certain ideal of mankind, of a certain vision of the world – the vision that lies at the heart of the United Nations Charter’.¹⁶

These commemorations were dissected extensively across the mass media. For several months beforehand the British quality press had foreshadowed the anniversary with sophisticated commentary that not only recalled the actual historical events but also reflected thoughtfully on the changing nature of commemoration through the decades since 1944.¹⁷ Similarly, the tabloids were replete with stories about the planning of the commemorations, with much venting of spleen at the bureaucratic mishaps and botched security arrangements that were allegedly imperilling the trips of individual British veterans. Many newspapers produced special souvenir editions in June, with facsimile reprints of their original D-Day covers. The veterans themselves were lauded as national heroes, their old-fashioned values and virtues being mobilised in counterpoint to the flaws and failings of later generations or the contemporary nation. The prevailing tone was robustly and insistently patriotic, and suggestive of the enduring centrality of the ‘finest hour’ of the Second World War in British collective memory and national identity.¹⁸ The French press similarly marked the anniversary comprehensively, but with quite different emphases, reflecting alternative contemporary political anxieties. In the shadow of the Iraq imbroglio, commentators were markedly reluctant to lavish unqualified praise on the past myrmidons of Anglo-American military might. Instead there was much airing of the dark side of liberation in the form of French civilian casualties and a relativising stress on how much more significant the war on the eastern front had been to the final defeat of Nazism. There was also a palpable tendency to make Franco-German reconciliation the most important story to emerge from the commemorations, as contemporary amity and unity was – in a somewhat strained fashion – projected back on to the past, and this too effectively stole the limelight from the former

¹⁵ ‘President Bush, President Chirac Mark 60th Anniversary of D-Day’, White House Press Release, 6 June 2004 <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040606.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009] (para. 8).

¹⁶ ‘President Bush, President Chirac Mark 60th Anniversary of D-Day’ (para. 6).

¹⁷ For example, David Smith, ‘Once More unto the Beach’, *The Observer*, 21 March 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/mar/21/secondworldwar.davidsmith>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

¹⁸ Martin Conboy, ‘A Tale of Two Battles: History in the Popular Press’, *Media History*, 13.2/3 (2007), 257-71.

Allied combatants.¹⁹ The print media, therefore, clearly did more than simply report on the anniversary; it was a significant vector of memory in its own right, contributing to the commemorative jamboree.

The same was true of British television which devoted considerable programming to the anniversary, as an integral part of a wave of productions broadcast through 2004 and 2005 to mark the passing of sixty years since the closing stages of the war. Of course, the day of ceremonies in Normandy was given full coverage on both rolling news and mainstream terrestrial channels. The centrepiece of the BBC's programming was a lavish drama-documentary co-produced with French, German and American broadcasters, simply entitled *D-Day*, which was transmitted on the evening of 6 June. This mixed archive footage, oral testimony, dramatic reconstruction and computer-generated imagery to tell the story of the day through the eyes of a range of individual participants from all of the combatant nations. *Destination D-Day: The Raw Recruits* was another BBC production, filtering the experience of June 1944 through the contemporary fad for 'reality television', in which a group of young British men underwent a four week mock-up of 1940s army training for the invasion, interspersed with inspirational advice from genuine D-Day veterans. These programmes were complemented by activities on other platforms, such as the BBC 'People's War' project, which incorporated an extensive website, the collection of testimony from participants in the war and a programme of national commemorative events and celebrations.²⁰ Many of these initiatives had an inherently multi-media character, as the example of *D-Day* illustrates, produced as it was in tandem with a major exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in London and accompanied by a commemorative book.²¹

Collectively, these discourses constituted a dense and diverse field of memory work ripe for analysis. In this collision of authentic personal remembrance, debasing commerce, ersatz heritage experience, jostling political capital and multi-media spectacle, the D-Day commemorations perfectly encapsulated the complexity of a particular contemporary moment of Second World War collective memory. Moreover, one very prominent trope in the journalistic coverage of the commemorations made a particular claim about the nature of this conjuncture. Repeatedly, these commemorations were interpreted as marking some sort of transitional act of closure over the wartime past, and a definitive turning point. So, for

¹⁹ Nathan Bracher, 'Commémorations du Jour-J 2004: Les Jeux de la Mémoire et de l'Histoire', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 29.1 (2007), 105-36.

²⁰ James Chapman, 'Re-Presenting War: British Television Drama-Documentary and the Second World War', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10.1 (2007), 13-33.

²¹ Dan Parry, *D-Day: 6.6.44. The Dramatic Story of the World's Greatest Invasion* (London: BBC Books, 2004).

example, writing in *The Guardian* Jonathan Freedland opined that ‘yesterday’s day of ceremony represented a passing of the torch – out of the aged hands of living memory and into the grasp of history’.²² It was easy to understand what animated such sentiments. On the one hand, there was the poignant fact that the returning veterans were ‘now in the late autumn of their lives’: their ranks were much thinned from previous commemorations and the age and frailty of many meant that this was likely to be the last major anniversary in which surviving witnesses could participate actively in any significant number.²³ On the other hand, the notion of closure was obviously also nourished by the political inclusivity of the formal ceremonies. The German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder voiced this sentiment when he proclaimed that D-Day 2004 testified that ‘the post-war period is finally over’.²⁴ There is manifestly some truth in these observations, but Freedland’s reading of the wider significance of these events is in other respects problematic and warrants further interrogation.

It is unfair to expect even sophisticated journalism to incorporate all the intricate conceptual nuances of academic scholarship; these are, after all, discourses with distinct purposes and audiences. But, nonetheless, positing a stark opposition between ‘memory’ and ‘history’ does entail a regrettable over-simplification. This move generally involves privileging one of the terms: either proclaiming the superiority of authentic, spontaneous and organic memory over the dry scholasticism of history or vaunting disciplined and disinterested scholarly inquiry over fallible and distorting mnemonic machinations. It is altogether more plausible, however, to render permeable the distinction between the two, rejecting both memory’s ‘arrogance of authenticity’ and history’s ‘arrogance of definitiveness’.²⁵ Although each has its individual dynamic, grammar and conventions, both generate ‘heavily constructed narratives with only institutionally regulated differences between them’.²⁶ Certainly, the two remain distinct enough to be said to inter-relate. Academic historiography would be a fairly vain activity if it did not, at least on some occasions, impact upon the meanings attributed to the past in the wider social world. Yet it is itself profoundly conditioned by understandings prevailing beyond the academy: the historian, ‘like any other citizen, is influenced by the dominant memory, which may

²² Jonathan Freedland, ‘Sixty Years On, D-Day Veterans Pass Torch into Hands of History’, *The Guardian*, 7 June 2004, p. 1.

²³ Freedland, p. 1.

²⁴ Freedland, p. 1.

²⁵ Allan Megill, ‘History, Memory, Identity’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 11.3 (1998), 37-62 (p. 57).

²⁶ Natalie Zemon Davies and Randolph Starn, ‘Introduction’, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 1-6 (p. 2).

subconsciously suggest interpretations and areas of research'.²⁷ Competing formulations seek to encapsulate this relationship, from Emily Rosenberg's insistence that history and memory are 'blurred forms of representation whose structure and politics need to be analyzed not as oppositional but as interactive forms', through Marita Sturken's proposition that they are 'entangled', to Jay Winter's argument that they are 'braided together' in the processes of 'collective remembrance'.²⁸ Since history and memory interpenetrate and overlap, the notion of a discrete watershed between them is at the very least overdrawn.

In truth, even invoking 'memory' and 'history' as undifferentiated terms risks falling prey to conceptual imprecision. This is particularly true with the former, since to conflate the 'living memory' of participants and witnesses with 'memory' per se is most unhelpful. The recent scholarly flourishing of 'collective memory' – together with its near synonyms such as 'cultural memory' or 'social memory' – reflects a desire to coin a capacious umbrella term to connote the whole field of representations of the past within a given social community. Defined broadly, collective memory encompasses both living memory and academic historiography and a whole host of other forms of cultural representation besides, including political rhetoric, literature and film, and museums and memorials. It connotes not a collective mental capacity but rather a field of contestation, 'the intersubjective outcome of a series of ongoing intellectual and political negotiations ... constantly subject to challenges and alternative interpretations'.²⁹ Processual, unstable, partial and never unitary, it is quintessentially performative: 'There is no such thing as memory; there is only the activity of remembering'.³⁰ So, while it is an undeniable fact that in due course the living link with the past will be severed, it would be a mistake to equate this with a terminal point in collective memory. After all, the complexities and multiplicity of the discourses of memory in play during D-Day 2004, so many of which were divorced or distant from the experiences of actual veterans, suggests that it is unlikely to cease to matter once the wartime generation passes on.

²⁷ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 4.

²⁸ Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 5; Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 5; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 6.

²⁹ Thomas Berger, 'The Power of Memory and Memories of Power: The Cultural Parameters of German Foreign Policy-Making since 1945', in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. by Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 76-99 (p. 83).

³⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 20.

This is not to imply that it will remain resonant and prominent for all time, but simply to point out that there is no direct dependent relationship here. Barbie Zelizer has underlined the contrasting dynamics between the two modes, asserting that ‘unlike individual memory, the power of collective memory can increase with time, taking on new complications, nuances, and interests’.³¹ Others concur that collective memories commonly ‘transcend the time and space of the events’ original occurrence’, taking on ‘a powerful life of their own, “unencumbered” by actual individual memory’.³² This, so Wulf Kansteiner has argued, is the case in contemporary American society with the Holocaust, which has become part of the fabric of ‘disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory’.³³ It is true that the agency of veterans was important in the dramatic upsurge in the scale and vigour of D-Day remembrance that occurred from the fortieth anniversary in 1984. A generation that had long been sceptical about memorialising its own efforts in the war shifted its ground as it entered old age, perhaps conscious that the window of opportunity for active personal participation in commemoration was closing, perhaps simply because temporal distance had cast the tumultuous events of this past in a fresh perspective.³⁴ To an extent this might problematise Zelizer’s observation, in so far as it suggests that individual memory too can grow or undergo dramatic reconfiguration through time. Yet in a wider sense it underscores the fact that collective memory rarely evinces a straightforward linear trajectory. Moreover, since it is extremely difficult to isolate individual filaments in collective memory, it is at least arguable that the shift in veterans’ consciousness was itself a product of the wider pressures that precipitated a generalised upsurge in Second World War remembering in these years, rather than being a prime mover behind it.

Of course, the conceptual literature on collective memory is itself not unitary and offers diverse productive resources with which to meditate on the significance of the D-Day commemorations.³⁵ For example, Freedland’s claim might be fruitfully recast with reference to Jan Assmann’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory. For Assmann, the former is everyday and informal communication about the past, ‘characterized by a high-

³¹ Barbie Zelizer, ‘Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12.2 (1995), 213-39 (p. 217).

³² Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, *History and Theory*, 41.2 (2002), 179-97 (p. 189).

³³ Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning’, p. 189.

³⁴ Nick Hewitt, ‘A Sceptical Generation? War Memorials and the Collective Memory of the Second World War in Britain, 1945-2000’, in *The Postwar Challenge: Cultural, Social, and Political Change in Western Europe, 1945-58*, ed. by Dominik Geppert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 81-97.

³⁵ For a recent survey see Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

degree of non-specialisation, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganisation'.³⁶ Such memories form and circulate within specific communities – in this context, that of veterans or other participant-witnesses – and are highly dependent upon direct lived experience. For this reason communicative memory has a 'limited temporal horizon', extending roughly for three generations or about eighty years.³⁷ Cultural memory, in contrast, refers to more formalised and heavily mediated practices of collective remembering within wider social groupings, to 'that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge ... each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity'.³⁸ 'Cultural memory consists of objectified culture – that is, the texts, rites, images, buildings and monuments which are designed to recall fateful events in the history of the collective. As the officially sanctioned heritage of a society, they are intended for the *longue durée*'.³⁹ There is obvious mileage in thinking about the 2004 D-Day ceremonies as marking a point at which broader forms of cultural memory began to predominate over the communicative memory of the dwindling band of veterans, a process which in due course will lead to a decisive supplanting. Yet the two forms of memory clearly always interpenetrate and overlap, as with the actual participation of old soldiers in formal observances. Indeed, Assmann has conceded that 'the commemoration of the dead represents a special case', occupying 'an intermediate position between spontaneous communicative memory and elaborate cultural memory'.⁴⁰ The overriding point here, however, is that when read in the context of this literature, journalistic commentary on the transitional dimension of memory is rather impoverished conceptually.

By the same token, the more general assertion about imminent closure incarnated a peculiar amnesia about how often before endeavours have been made to declare the post-war era – what might be termed the 'long Second World War' – at an end.⁴¹ Despite evincing an unwonted sensitivity to the historical evolution of commemoration, journalists seldom noticed that the very claim about this being the last anniversary that would prominently

³⁶ Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125-33 (p. 126).

³⁷ Assmann, p. 127.

³⁸ Assmann, p. 132.

³⁹ Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning', p. 182.

⁴⁰ Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 16.

⁴¹ This term is adapted from Richard J. B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War, 1945-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993).

feature veterans had also been advanced about 1994.⁴² More generally, commentators' willingness to take Schröder's oft-quoted proclamation at face value overlooked the fact that this was very far from the first time that a German with cultural authority had sought to will such a state of affairs into existence. The definitive end of the war era had previously been proclaimed by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in the mid-1950s when the last German prisoners of war returned from the Soviet Union and in the mid-1960s by Chancellor Ludwig Erhard.⁴³ The notion of moving on from the past – in American President Ronald Reagan's words, putting 'history behind me' – was prominent in the rhetoric surrounding the Bitburg controversy in 1985, and in the mid-1990s, as the last Soviet troops withdrew from Germany, the press once more declared 'only now is the war over'.⁴⁴ In Japan, similarly, a conservative government in 1956 declared 'the end of "*sengo*" – the postwar period reflecting the direct result and impact of the war' – though this self-interested effort to close off continuing contestation about its legacy manifestly failed.⁴⁵ That this impulse should figure (albeit as only one thread in a complex web) in the collective memory of Axis powers burdened with the responsibility for aggression is not surprising. Yet it was not restricted to them, since it recurred in other countries compromised by aspects of their wartime behaviour: witness French President Georges Pompidou's notorious efforts in 1972 to promote a post-Gaullist forgetting of Vichy with his vain plea that the time had come 'to draw a veil over the past'.⁴⁶ Some of these claims were not entirely without validity, as they captured or effected shifts in how some aspect of the war's legacy was predominantly engaged. Yet in broader terms what is more striking is how, for all the ubiquity of this trope, the 'long Second World War' has proved remarkably resistant to calls for its transcendence. Ongoing contestation in collective memory of the war within and between nations, together with the ever more elaborate infrastructure of commemoration, should perhaps make us cautious of falling prey to the siren allure of this satisfying formulation.

⁴² Marie-Hélène Joly, 'War Museums in France', in *Recollections of France: Memories, Identities and Heritage in Contemporary France*, ed. by Sarah Blowen, Marion Demossier and Jeanine Picard (New York: Berghahn, 2000), pp. 33-51 (pp. 33-4).

⁴³ Wulf Kansteiner, 'Losing the War, Winning the Memory Battle', in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. by Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 102-46 (p. 110); Regula Ludi, 'The Vectors of Postwar Victim Reparations: Relief, Redress and Memory Politics', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41.3 (2006), 421-50 (p. 434).

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. xiii; Robert G. Moeller, 'War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany', *American Historical Review*, 101.4 (1996), 1008-48 (p. 1046), quoting a front page headline in *Die Zeit*, 9 September 1994.

⁴⁵ Yukiko Koshiro, 'Japan's World and World War II', *Diplomatic History*, 25.3 (2001), 425-41 (p. 427).

⁴⁶ Rousso, p. 123.

This said, it must be admitted that the same trope of closure has also become prominent in the scholarly literature on Second World War collective memory. In the early 1990s aftermath of the Cold War, Richard Bosworth argued that the ‘long Second World War’ was drawing to a close as its geopolitical consequences were reversed or undone and its history was normalised. For decades after 1945, he averred, particular readings of the Second World War had served as a kind of moral and political touchstone in all the major combatant countries, setting the parameters of political and cultural debate and exerting an overwhelming ethical force. Yet these had now begun to lose their totemic power, as evidenced by the demise of consensus and collectivism in Thatcher’s Britain, the re-emergence of vigorous conservative nationalist readings of the past in Germany and Japan, and the disintegration of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ myth in the crumbling Soviet Union. Historical debate would of course continue, but its parameters had decisively shifted as once sacrosanct interpretations were demolished and hitherto inadmissible views openly canvassed, and these were both indicative of a disconnection of the history of the war from ethical and political concerns.⁴⁷ In retrospect, Bosworth’s stimulating argument cannot stand. While certain central post-war myths were indeed on the wane and the character of meditation on the conflict was changing as the contemporary political landscape shifted, the war manifestly did not drift out of our consciousness or cease to engage political and ethical passions. The unprecedented scope and intensity of the cycles of fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary commemoration in the 1990s and 2000s suggests, on the contrary, that the post-Cold War years in fact witnessed a dramatic upsurge in the visibility of the war and its assumption of countless fresh meanings and valences.⁴⁸ Diverse factors were in play here, including generational change, geopolitical shifts, the rise of new politics of identity, regret and restitution and the globalisation of Holocaust consciousness. Their collective impact suggests that Bosworth mistook what was, at least in some cases and some respects, the end of a chapter for the end of the story.

Scholarly claims about imminent closure have, however, resurged in the present century. In his landmark history of contemporary Europe, Tony Judt proclaimed that the releasing of Cold War shackles had enabled a fuller coming to terms with the wartime past through ‘painful public debates’ across the continent, finally banishing the necessary myths of

⁴⁷ Bosworth.

⁴⁸ Martin Evans, ‘Memories, Monuments, Histories: The Re-Thinking of the Second World War since 1989’, *National Identities*, 8.4 (2006), 317-48.

reconstruction.⁴⁹ In the process, very uncomfortable sentiments had been voiced, most recently with the re-emergence of energetic discourses of German victimhood and suffering. Yet for Judt all this signified ‘a kind of closure. Sixty years after Hitler’s death, his war and its consequences are entering history. Postwar in Europe lasted a very long time, but it is finally coming to a close’.⁵⁰ The question of what might constitute closure in collective memory raises some thorny methodological and epistemological issues. The fact of salient representation alone does not necessarily help us, since representations have to be consumed in particular ways and to achieve resonance in order to be transformed from potential into actual cultural memories. By the same token, absence and silence can be more meaningful, more indicative of profound ethical significance or trauma, than insistent but banally commodified presence. Judt’s point is certainly not that the Second World War is on the cusp of being entirely forgotten, since he is acutely conscious of the centrality of aspects of it in contemporary culture: ‘As Europe prepares to leave World War Two behind – as the last memorials are inaugurated, the last surviving combatants and victims honoured – the recovered memory of Europe’s dead Jews has become the very definition and guarantee of the continent’s restored humanity’.⁵¹ Yet he seems to imply that recent mnemonic ferment constitutes a last gasp of contestation, as Europe has achieved a more profound engagement with the crimes and murky ambiguities of the war and the selective amnesia that followed it. What Judt seems to characterise as closure is the triumph of history over memory, as historical disclosure facilitates a salutary transcendence of the war-time past: only once it has been fully understood can one ‘put it aside and move on’.⁵²

There is much to commend in Judt’s nuanced and insightful discussion of modern European memory. Yet his differentiation of history from memory - the former nobly contributing ‘to the disenchantment of the world’ and the latter ‘inherently contentious and partisan’ – is problematic by the criteria being employed here.⁵³ Moreover, it is easy to make the case that contemporary Europe is very far from moving on from the Second World War. Not least, the eastward expansions of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 have precipitated an ongoing and multifaceted debate about the mnemonic basis for a putative common European identity. ‘The future of European solidarity’, Timothy Snyder wrote in 2005, ‘depends on a rethinking of the immediate European past’, and the elaboration of narratives

⁴⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007 [2005]), p. 10.

⁵⁰ Judt, p. 10.

⁵¹ Judt, p. 804.

⁵² Judt, pp. 829-30.

⁵³ Judt, pp. 829-30.

that more fully confront the suffering inflicted on eastern Europe by the west in the Second World War, and the fact that 1945 inaugurated communist subjugation there rather than liberation or European integration.⁵⁴ For eastern Europeans ‘to believe that they are full partners in Europe’ will require the west further to rewrite some of its own post-war foundation myths.⁵⁵ Efforts by the European Union to prescribe a respectful attitude to the Holocaust as the cornerstone of a common memory have generated considerable resentment in the east, since this move threatens to marginalise other instances of suffering that might equally figure as part of the European story.⁵⁶ While the accession states felt obliged to sideline their historical grievances during the process of convergence, achieving membership has allowed them to unleash their ‘memorial militancy’, to resist efforts to draw a line under the Second World War and to insist that their perspectives are accommodated in ‘a more *heterocentric* European mnemonical vision’.⁵⁷ This surely heralds the opening of yet another fresh chapter rather than arrival at some kind of terminus. Hence Richard Ned Lebow’s recent prophecy that ‘the politics of memory will be a salient feature of the European landscape for many decades to come’.⁵⁸

The anniversary of D-Day was again celebrated in elaborate fashion and with marked political contestation in 2009. The British government had intended that the sixty-fifth anniversary should be low key, initially refusing to make available public funds to assist veterans’ travel and proposing that only a junior minister should represent Britain in Normandy. A storm of public protest rendered this plan untenable, however, and eventually Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Prince of Wales both made the trip to France. Rancorous ill-feeling persisted in the popular press, however, over the alleged refusal of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to extend an invitation to the Queen. Sarkozy was accused of attempting to make political capital out of the commemorations, seeking to boost his own electoral fortunes by ensuring that no other foreign dignitaries would share the limelight with

⁵⁴ Timothy Snyder, ‘Balancing the Books’, *Eurozine*, 3 May 2005 <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-snyder-en.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009] (para. 9).

⁵⁵ Snyder (para. 9).

⁵⁶ Claus Leggwie, ‘A Tour of the Battleground: The Seven Circles of Pan-European Memory’, *Social Research*, 75.1 (2008), 217-34.

⁵⁷ Maria Mälksoo, ‘The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 15.4 (2009), 653-80 (p. 656 and p. 673) (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ Richard Ned Lebow, ‘The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe’, in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, pp. 1-39 (p. 36).

American President Barack Obama.⁵⁹ The notion that this would be the last commemoration attended in significant numbers by actual veterans was the dominant theme in press coverage.⁶⁰ Manifestly, the march of time ensures that this claim is more likely to be true now than it was in 2004, and earlier in the year the Normandy Veterans' Association preemptively announced its intention to disband its central structures after D-Day 2009 owing to its dwindling membership.⁶¹ Yet individual veterans will continue to mark the anniversary in France and at home for as long as their health permits, and at a moment when the last few veterans of the First World War have only just passed away, it should be evident that the voices of direct witnesses will not be stilled for some time.⁶² More broadly, the political heat generated in the antecedent disputes about participation and the intensity and extent of the pageantry, again underline how D-Day as a mythical and inspirational moment of sacrifice and liberation is still very much alive. It may be that one day it will cross over into a realm of desiccated history, becoming a mere antiquity devoid of ethical, political and moral resonance, but this has certainly not yet come to pass.

⁵⁹ Matthew Campbell, 'Sarkozy Hijacks Longest Day', *The Sunday Times*, 31 May 2009, p. 25; Andrew Sparrow, 'Brown to Take Part in D-Day Events in U-Turn over Anniversary', *The Guardian*, 20 March 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/20/d-day-u-turn>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

⁶⁰ Euan Ferguson, 'Old Soldiers Return for Their Final D-Day', *Observer*, 7 June 2009, pp. 2-3.

⁶¹ John Bingham, 'D-Day Veterans to Sound Last Post on Normandy Beaches', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2009 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/defence/5416835/D-Day-veterans-to-sound-last-post-on-Normandy-beaches.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

⁶² Compare also the pertinent observations about collective memory of the First World War in Dan Todman, 'The Ninetieth Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme', in *War Memory and Popular Culture*, pp. 23-40.