



Experience, Memory and Media: Transmitting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in 19th and 20th Century Europe. Mannheim: AHRC-DFG Research Group 'Nations, Borders, Identities: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in European Experiences and Memories' and University of Mannheim., 11.10.2007-13.10.2007.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (January, 2008)

Experience, Memory and Media: Transmitting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in 19th and 20th Century Europe

The experience and memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars had an enduring influence on the collective memory of all European nations and regions and have given them an international dimension. Since the summer of 2005, the Anglo-German project Nations, Borders and Identities - the main convenor of the conference - has been analysing the experience and memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars across Europe, paying particular attention to issues of national transfer. The project concentrates on France, England and Ireland, Austria and Prussia, Poland, and Russia. The aim of the conference, which the NBI project group organized in cooperation with the University of Mannheim, was to discuss this research in a broader European context. The main focus was on the transmission of experience and memory through the various media which constituted their material dimension. Along with the University of Mannheim, the German Research Foundation, the Centre for French Studies at the Free University of Berlin, the Foundation of the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, and the Heinrich-Vetter-Stiftung in Mannheim sponsored the event.

The conference began with introductory addresses from the two principal organisers, KAREN HAGEMANN (UNC Chapel Hill) and ERICH PELZER (Mannheim). They presented the aims and agenda of the NBI project and the conference and stressed the European dimension of both. They aimed to cross borders between nations and

disciplines as well as the experiential communicative and cultural memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. ALAN FORREST (York) and ETIENNE FRANÇOIS (Berlin, FU) reflected on theoretical and methodological approaches to the experience and memory of the wars in the first session. For combatants, Forrest emphasized, the wars invariably comprised a tangle of shared and highly individualistic experiences. He also underlined the difficulty of identifying a common 'soldier's experience'. Each soldier's war followed its own timetable depending on the campaigns he was involved in and was marked by personal peaks and troughs. Though wars were mostly written about in national terms, it remains difficult to produce a national history of experience. Explaining why the wars might be understood as an exemplary lieu de mémoire, Etienne François pointed to the strong emotional resonance of these wars, the potent range of images that they generated, their imbrications in the construction of modern national identities and the persistent conflict and debate surrounding their memory. These factors, he suggested, ensured that the shift from 'communicative' memory to 'cultural memory' did not weaken the evocative power of the wars, but rather strengthened and amplified its range and impact. He proceeded to explain their position as a site of shared and entangled European memory, highlighting the paradoxical process through which national memorialisations of the war drew on a strikingly similar set of

symbols.

Experiences and Memories in personal writings during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were the subject of the second panel. MARIE-CECILE THORAL (York) began with an examination of French soldiers' diaries and carnets de route. While the daily writing of such accounts meant that the content was often rather dull, they could convey the immediacy of the war experience through reporting events as they happened. These diaries and journals also constituted important raw material for the elaboration of individual and collective memories of the war as soldiers drew upon contemporaneous sources to bolster the veracity and authenticity of their memoirs. CATRIONA KENNEDY (York) also discussed soldiers' personal writings - letters, journals and diaries - produced during the wars. Her paper explored the range of literary genres and texts that soldiers drew upon in their narratives, from the picaresque and the Gothic novel to the bible and the battle dispatch. Such texts, The next two papers considered retrospective accounts of soldiers' war experiences. LEIGHTON JAMES (York) questioned the distinction between experience and memory, and proposed instead that letters, diaries and memoirs should be understood as points on a continuum of narrated experience. Focusing on three aspects of Austrian patriotic war rhetoric - the demonization of the French, an appeal to German patriotism and the propagation of a 'valorous manliness' - James considered how far such discourses shaped Austrian officers' narratives of their war experiences. PHILIP DWYER (Newcastle, Australia) focused on French military memoirs, focusing on texts within the evolving market for published personal narratives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Memoirs, Dwyer argued, were an influential medium through which veterans helped shape the past and were, in turn, influenced by contemporary views of the wars. In his comments on the panel, HORST CARL (Giessen) noted the importance of the relationship between time and narration that emerged in each of the four papers. They all questioned the sharp distinction between experience and memory, and emphasised instead how both operate within a shared social framework.

The third panel on 'Collective memory in historical Novels' began with a paper by LARS PETERS (Berlin, FU) on narrative imaginings of masculinities in the nautical novels of the nineteenth-century British author Frederick Marryat. Historical novels, Peters proposed, constituted not only one of the most important media for the British memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, but were also a vital means of propagating emerg-

ing models of masculinity in the nineteenth century. KIRSTIN SCHÄFER (Berlin, FU) considered the relationship between image and text in French memory of the wars. Visual culture, she argued, played a critical role in the French memory, which continued the privileged position that visual propaganda had obtained under the Napoleonic regime. MARIA SCHULTZ (Berlin, FU) examined gender images in Napoleonic war novels published in Germany and Austria. She indicated how representations of national masculinity and femininity in these novels clustered around a select group of male and female figures and archetypes. While representations of women remained relatively static across the *longue durée*, Schultz pointed to a shift in the constructions of masculinity at the turn of the century. In her comment, ASTRID ERLI (Bergische Universität, Wuppertal) reflected how we might test the importance of particular media of memory, and proposed that we should consider the processes of 'remediation', through which meanings, narratives and images of the past are recycled and reproduced across different media.

The theme of 'Collective memory in Literature' was continued in the fourth panel. BERNHARD STRUCK (St Andrews) began by focusing on images of France and Poland in German travel reports written during the wars in order to explore perceptions of the occupied territories and of national borders, as well as the prevalence of nationalist consciousness in such accounts. The travelogues, he argued, tended to downplay French/German conflict and did not describe a sharp national border between the nations but rather a long, overlapping Franco-German zone. For most of this period, it was not the French who were perceived as the enemy, but the war itself. RUTH LEISEROWITZ (Berlin, FU) explored the memory of Russian heroines of the 1812 campaign as presented in historical novels, which reached a wide audience. In the two decades after the end of the wars heroines could still be remembered as playing a proactive role. Over time however the images were played down in favour of a more traditional representation of feminine roles. In his study of nineteenth-century memoirs by British soldiers and sailors, DAVID HOPKIN (Oxford) emphasised the importance of folktale motifs in these narratives. Storytelling, he noted, was an important part of soldiers' and sailors' everyday life, providing not only entertainment but also practical lessons for dealing with dangerous authorities and situations. Folktales thus provided a shared language through which they could communicate difficult experiences. In his comment, GEORGE S. WILLIAMSON (Alabama) underlined

the very different types of media discussed by the panel and the need to remain alert to how various generic conventions shaped both the experience and memory of the wars.

On the second day of the conference attention turned from the literary to the visual. Rolf Reichardt (Gießen) opened the fifth session on "Experience, memory and visual Representation" with his examination of British caricatures dealing with the threat of invasion by the French. Both French and British artists engaged in a propaganda war. While the former presented invasion as a response to English aggression, English caricaturists conflated the Revolution and the Terror. MARINA PELTZER (Gießen) examined little-known Russian caricatures. These images were meant to represent the triumph of the Russian people over the rapacious French, who were equated with hungry beasts. Illustrating the transnational nature of caricatures, Peltzer showed that images were copied and repeated across Europe. DAVID O'BRIEN (Illinois) sought to test the applicability to Napoleonic paintings of Pierre Nora's thesis that self-conscious history disciplines and disrupts collective memory. Art historians have analyzed the propagandistic messages of such paintings, but their impact on collective memory has not been widely discussed. These paintings did become important lieux de mémoire in France. From the outset they drew upon collective memory to legitimize the regime by equating Napoleon's achievements with those of classical and national figures. In her comment, MARY SHERIFF (UNC Chapel Hill) recapped the importance of visual media for analysing the memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and sought to relate this to acts of consumption. The viewing of caricatures, which were affordable to a wider range of people, appeared to represent a more intimate act than seeing large-scale history paintings in galleries.

The sixth session focused on "Memories and cultural practices". It started with a presentation by COLIN WHITE (Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth), who talked about the conception and planning of the British celebration of the 200th anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar in 2005. White suggested that high attendances at many of the celebratory events demonstrated that the figure of Nelson was a cultural phenomenon and noted that, unlike Napoleon, Nelson appears to be a relatively unproblematic. GUIDO HAUSMANN (Trinity College Dublin) examined material memory in Russia. Taking as his examples the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and the Icon of the Smolensk Virgin, he illustrated the continuing importance of the Patriotic War of

1812 in Russian collective memory. In contrast to earlier conflicts, the material memory of the 1812 war was much more widespread. Low literacy rates meant that there was increased emphasis on the architecture as a means of expressing collective memory. JAKOB VOGEL (Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin) analyzed different forms of commemoration in France and Germany and highlighted the general evolution of the memory after the generation that had experienced the wars at first hand passed away. He described the commemorations of the fiftieth and hundredth anniversaries of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Germany and France and stressed the different political settings caused by the outcome of the Franco-German war of 1870-71. MARGARETTE LINCOLN (National Maritime Museum, London) returned to the issue of material culture. However, unlike Hausmann's focus on the monumental and religious, Lincoln drew attention to everyday-life. She posed the question of how popular, decorative objects represented everyday British life during the Napoleonic wars. Kitsch, she argued, encouraged a sense of Britain as a maritime nation. JÄRN LEONHARD (Freiburg) sought to provide in his comment a framework for discussion by proposing a four-part typology through which to examine the structures of collective memory. The first part focused on agency. What role did institutions such as the state or church play? The second part asked what mechanisms and strategies can be identified behind popular culture and to what extent memory was embedded. The third questioned the function of collective memory. For example, what aspects determine the economics of memory? How is legitimacy established? Finally, how can the impact of collective memory be measured?

The third day started with the final panel on "Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Feature Films". WOLFGANG KOLLER (Berlin, FU) showed how the turbulent social and political situation in the Weimar Republic was addressed through films on the Napoleonic era. The crisis of defeat and the myth of a national "renewal" provided a suitable vehicle through which to present ways of dealing with the current troubles facing Weimar. The right dominated movie production and used films to project an image of martial masculinity that fitted with their political outlook. The link between the social and political context in which a film is produced and filmic representation was reinforced by JAMES CHAPMAN (Leicester). He argued that films are more about the present than the past and indicated that film history has generally identified two separate strands. The first focuses on the filmic representation of historical events, while the second examines

the history of the film itself, its production and representation. He suggested that both approaches needed to be combined.

In the Final Roundtable discussion the contributors sought to bring together the rich store of ideas raised during the course of the conference. KAREN HAGEMANN (UNC Chapel Hill) opened the debate by summarizing the aims of the conference. She emphasised that memories often say more about the period of their production than about the remembered past, that memories were everywhere sites of contestation, and finally, that gender seems to have played a continuous role in the construction of memory. It created order and hierarchies and formed in the interplay with other categories of difference the often fractured and changing identities of individuals and groups. She also referred back to Leonhard's four-part typology as a potentially fruitful framework through which to approach the study of collective memory. Taking up her points, RICHARD BESSEL (York) asked important questions about the subject of the conference. If, as many of the contributors suggested, memory is about the present then what was the actual object of enquiry? Was it the Napoleonic Wars or the cultural history of various European nation-states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? This naturally led to questions about the link between experience and the media and the extent to which historians should analyse the history of the media rather than the message. Finally, he pondered the role of religion. He wondered how important religious world views had been for contemporary and near-contemporary perceptions of the conflict. If early memories had been refracted through the lens of religious belief, then how had memory changed in an increasingly secular world? JANE RENDALL (York) pointed out that although the conference had covered a great many media, several still had been neglected. Theatre, poetry and ballads, newspapers, rituals and sermons could all be included as media of memory. She also raised the question of remediation and the fluidity of the various media. She emphasised that many contributors dealt with the interplay of text and media. Moving on to national identities she perceived a note of caution in many papers that had suggested that national identity might not be the only framework through which to view differences. MARY SHERIFF (UNC Chapel Hill) underlined in her comment the question of remediation and the fluidity of the various media. She stressed again that visual images had a much wider impact than many printed texts. She also pointed to the importance of other visual media such as the theatre and opera. Hans-

JÄRGEN LÄSEBRINK (Saarbrücken) summarized four major points that for him had come out of the conference. First, he stressed the 'mediatic revolution' that had taken place since the Napoleonic Wars. The spread of literacy and the development of new technologies had multiplied and reshaped the basis of cultural and collective memory. Second, he advocated the practice of intermediality. Historians tend to investigate a national context and compare later. The challenge, however, is to examine the various media and pursue the connections between them, rather than regard them as self-contained. Third, he pointed to the profound influence of classical rhetoric, which reached a highpoint in the Napoleonic era. Napoleon's own self-memorialization was a mixture of classical rhetoric and the new language of the Revolution. This mix had an enduring influence on the later representations of the period. Finally, he stressed the need to examine the inter-cultural dimension of the wars. He suggested that national grand narratives could be submerged into an inter-cultural dimension, and pointed out the seeming paradox that, despite the conflict, the period from 1792 to 1815 was also characterised by increasing interest in foreign lands.

The NBI conference in Mannheim highlighted the role of different media in constructing collective memory. It also demonstrated the importance of an 'intermedial' and transnational approach across different disciplines. The event was a stimulating start for necessary further transnational and interdisciplinary research. The results will be published in a volume of the new Palgrave series 'War, Culture and Society, 1750 - 1850'.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW:

MARIE-CECILE THORAL (University of York): War Writings: French Soldiers' Diaries as a Source for the History of War Memory

CATRIONA KENNEDY (University of York): Reading, Writing and Fighting: British Soldiers' Reading and the Experience of War, 1793-1815

LEIGHTON JAMES (University of York): 'The Whole Man': Austrian Officers' Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

PHILIP DWYER (The University of Newcastle): Private Reminiscing, Public Remembering: Military Memoirs, Veteran Culture and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

LARS PETERS (FU Berlin, Centre for French Studies): Warrior Sailors and Heroic Boys: The Narrative Imagining of Masculinities in Popular British Historical Novels on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

KIRSTIN A. SCHÄFER (FU Berlin): Text and Image: The Napoleonic Wars in French Historical Novels and their Illustrations

MARIA SCHULTZ (Berlin School for Comparative European History): Archetypes from the Past: Gender Images in German and Austrian Historical Novels on the Napoleonic Wars

BERNHARD STRUCK (University of St. Andrews): France and Poland in the Travel Reports of German Travellers during and after the Napoleonic Wars

RUTH LEISEROWITZ (Berlin School for Comparative European History): Female Heroism: Gender Images in Russian Memoirs and Historical Novels of the "Patriotic War" of 1812

DAVID HOPKIN (University of Oxford): The Soldier's Fairytale: Oral Tradition as an Expression of Soldiers' Experience and Vehicle for Memory' of the French Wars

ROLF REICHARDT and MARINA PELTZER (University of Giessen): Transnational War of Images in Caricatures against Napoleon: The British and the Russian Case

DAVID Oâ BRIEN (University of Illinois): Napoleon and his Wars in European Historical Paintings

COLIN WHITE (Royal Naval Museum): The Immortal Memory - Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of Nelson and Trafalgar

son and Trafalgar

GUIDO HAUSMANN (Trinity College, University of Dublin): The Wars of 1812 in Russian Material Memory

JAKOB VOGEL (Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin): The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in French and German Celebrations of the 50 and 100 Years Anniversaries

MARGARETTE LINCOLN (National Maritime Museum, London): The Wars as Kitsch: The Napoleonic Wars in Everyday Life

PUBLIC EVENING LECTURE: NAPOLEON AND HIS LEGACY IN EUROPEAN MEMORY by STEVEN ENGLUND (American University of Paris)

WOLFGANG KOLLER (FU Berlin): Heroic Times: Gendered Images of the Anti-Napoleonic Wars in German Feature Films of the Interwar Period

JAMES CHAPMAN (Leicester University): British Cinema and the Napoleonic Wars

ROUND TABLE: EXPERIENCE, MEMORY AND MEDIA â REWRITING THE HISTORY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY AND NAPOLEONIC WARS IN A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

RICHARD BESSEL (University of York)

JANE RENDALL (University of York)

HANS JÄRGEN LÄSEBRINK (University of the Saarland)

MARY SHERIFF (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

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Citation: Karen Hagemann. Review of , *Experience, Memory and Media: Transmitting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in 19th and 20th Century Europe*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

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