**Witnessing and affect: altering, imagining and making spaces to remember the Great War in modern Britain**

This chapter uses non-representational theory to examine the way in which the popular memory of the Great War (1914-1918) in contemporary Britain is an emotional engagement formed through a process of ‘witnessing’ the past. This mode of public connection with the conflict has been criticised by some scholars for its reliance on representations in the media. However, such assessments obscure the emotive bond with the war’s remembrance that has been formed from the cessation of hostilities to the present day. In the aftermath of the Great War, vast cemeteries and imposing monuments were built across the former battlefields; this commemorative landscape was replicated across Britain, as cities, towns and villages saw the erection of local memorials. National sites of memory at the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey were also constructed as a response to the scale of death. These sites of remembrance became significant for the bereaved as places of pilgrimage whilst national commemorative activities imbued these locales with meaning for wider society. A century after the outbreak of the war, these spaces of memory remain central in the recollection of the war dead. However, with the passing of the last of the veterans, the conflict is now removed from ‘living memory’ and alternative spaces of remembrance have been formed for contemporary society.

Since the 1990s, a new wave of memorials to the ‘Pals Battalions’, ‘Footballers Battalions’ or specific individuals have accompanied an expansion of the museological display of the war. These sites of memory have been constructed by a society which is chronologically distant from the direct experience of the war as a means of maintaining the emotional significance of the conflict in the present day. As such, these arenas are instructional spaces; they are used to create ‘witnesses’ through informing current generations about the importance of a war fought a hundred years previously. To act as a witness, places moral, social and political obligations onto the individual through an emotional connection, as they are required to bear the burden of memory and to testify to its significance. Therefore, this chapter will examine the way in which contemporary British society is asked to serve as ‘witnesses’ to the conflict through a detailed assessment of the structure and content of these new spaces of remembrance. In this manner, the emotional connection to the war is regarded not as a barrier to understanding, nor as a simple consumption of representations, but as a dynamic process which creates meaning.

**Emotion and affect: witnessing the Great War**

The war of 1914-1918 and its remembrance has become a contested issue for historians, politicians and the media in Britain (see Bond 2002). These debates have focused on the contemporary meanings and purpose of a conflict fought at the outset of the twentieth century. Whereas scholars have highlighted the persistence of a ‘social memory’ of the war that focuses on pity, suffering and loss, revisionist historians have asserted notions of advancement, development and victory as key characteristics for Britain in this first global conflagration (Todman 2005). This disparity is often assessed to be the product of the conflict’s emotive representation within popular culture, in memoirs, novels, film, television and drama from the 1920s to the present day (after Hanna 2009). These accounts have been critiqued for their clichéd assessments of the war that do not advance beyond the affecting image of official incompetency or the atrocious conditions of the battlefields that are aptly reflected in the perceived ‘mud, blood, rats and gas’ of the Western Front (see Corrigan 2003). In contrast, historians have demonstrated that the conflict can be considered as a success, with high levels of morale at home and at the front, an unprecedented level of mobilisation within industry, the economy as well as wider society and tactical advances throughout the four years of war (Sheffield 2002; Williams 2009). In this assessment, this ‘forgotten victory’ has been obscured by the writings of disillusioned officers in the 1920s such as Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) or Robert Graves (1895-1985), politically motivated representations on television and film from the 1960s such as *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) and formulaic novels and dramas during the 1990s such as *Regeneration* (Barker 1991) or *Birdsong* (Faulks 1992). By analysing these media, the ‘popular memory’ of the conflict in Britain is frequently assessed as deficient for its reliance upon emotional imagery and reactions (see Badsey 2001).

However, this obscures the way in which emotional responses have structured the remembrance of the war and still persist within British society. Indeed, to speak of ‘the trenches’, ‘no man’s land’, ‘going over the top’, Gallipoli, the Somme, Passchendaele or Ypres serves to automatically conjure a strong affective response based on notions of the pity, suffering and trauma of the war (Wilson 2013). To analyse these attitudes and the popular memory of the war as based solely on media representations prevents the assessment of how practices of memory are organised, performed and ordered within society (see Wertsch 2002). Therefore, non-representational theories that move beyond a focus upon the media provide an alternative means of engagement with the ‘popular memory’ of the war (see Thrift 2008). Rather than assume that representations are vapidly consumed by individuals, groups and communities, the remembrance of the war can be more accurately regarded as organised and performed for affect and effect (see Lorimer 2005). In this approach, the role of the witness is paramount within non-representational theory (Dewsbury 2003). Whilst the function of the ‘witness’ is firmly established within a legal context, the place of the witness within Judeo-Christian culture reveals a focus on active participation (Ricoeur 2004: 264-265). The ‘witness’ in this context is not an objective recorder but a figure whose perception is acknowledged to be specific in time, individual in scope and singular in experience (after Lyotard 1988: 26-27). What is significant about the witness is their role towards the event; the manner in which their attitudes, ideas, values and identities are formed in relation to the action with which they have engaged (Thrift 2000). To study the ‘witness perspective’ requires an analysis of action and agency not passive consumption (Thrift 2003).

If the popular memory of the war is regarded as a ‘series of becomings’ (after Deleuze and Guattari 1988), where the remembrance of the past is performed and reinterpreted in response to representations rather than derived from them, then the role of the witness in commemoration can be explored. By examining the development of memory within Britain from the Armistice to the present day, the effect of such actions can be assessed as a means of forming identities (after Black 2004). National, regional, political, familial and moral notions of self and community are constructed through the performances of memory in relation to the conflict. Undeniably, these acts have been altered and conditioned by the operation of power within society but the nature of the role of the witness as a specific engagement ensures that it can be both the function of authority but also the centre of resistance (after Smith 2006). In essence, the place of the witness revolves upon the notion of testimony. Witnessing can call the individual to testify to their experiences and to recognise their effect whilst witnessing can also reduce the individual to an observer functioning solely as the bearer of knowledge (Dewsbury 2003). This latter can be observed to constitute a ‘passive witnessing’ and the former an ‘active witnessing’. Both roles demand that the individual should bear the burden of memory. The difference between the two positions is that the latter requires the witness to testify as to the effect of this responsibility in the present; to ensure that the act of witnessing has purpose beyond notions of knowledge and awareness (Dewsbury 2003). The creation of this witness perspective in Britain, from the initial post-war period to the commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of war in 2014, demonstrates the way in which emotion and affect have transformed spaces of commemoration.

**Post-war performances of memory**

The ‘battlefield of memory’ that has formed with regard to the First World War has been fought over since the signing of the Armistice in November 1918. The denouement of the conflict in November 1918 was marked by debates regarding how such a war, that wrought the deaths of over 700,000 individuals from Britain, could be remembered. With such a vast scale of mourning, the commemoration of the conflict was organised as a state-led initiative. Whilst this has been observed to be the only recourse by the national government to the recruitment and conscription of a ‘civilian army’, it was also undertaken as a means to ensure a degree of control over the witnessing of the conflict for wider society (see Cannadine 1981). Therefore, an official committee of civil servants and appointed architects formed under the organisation of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) envisioned the war as a sacrifice for God, King and Empire and relayed this perception through a grand memorial landscape of monuments and cemeteries across the former battlefields (Heffernan 1995). In Britain, the harnessing of private grief for public service was evidenced in the construction of the Cenotaph located at the heart of government in Whitehall and the interment of the ‘Unknown Warrior’ in Westminster Abbey (Gregory 1994). Alongside these national memorials, local memorials to the service and sacrifice of the dead were erected by veterans, businesses and subscriptions to local societies on village greens, town squares or besides the busy city thoroughfares to act as the focal point dedications to the nation (see Gaffney 1998). With the development of a two minute silence from the first anniversary in 1919 and the use of poppies as a marker for remembrance from 1921, the commemoration of the war dead in Britain was effectively nationalised as a public witnessing where testimonies were noticeably absent (see King 1998).

Despite the state organisation of this witnessing, the local and national points of remembrance proved to be popular. Through the actions of individuals in response to these structures the act of witnessing forged a sense of place. Sites such as the Menin Gate, located in the Flemish town of Ieper (Ypres), unveiled in 1927 as a dedication to the over 55,000 ‘missing’ soldiers who died in the area with no known grave, became a significant site of remembrance through these performances of witnessing. The memorial book at the site (CWGC Reports, 1936), records a consistently high number of individuals from Britain attending the monument:

August 1928: 14,864

August 1929: 15,174

August 1930: 13,814

August 1931: 13,416

August 1932: 9,063

August 1933: 11,390

August 1934: 11,150

August 1935: 12,015

August 1936: 18,832

In this ‘battlefield pilgrimage’ the conception of the memorial landscape as a particular sense of place can be observed (Lloyd 1998). The cemeteries, memorials and monuments of the former battlefields, envisioned initially as the evocation of national and imperial endeavour, began to be observed as the place of personal and familial connection. Visitors to these locations would trace the name of a loved one upon the memorial or regard the headstone as their particular site of memory and mourning. Sir Fabian Ware (1869-1949), founder of the IWGC, reflected upon this process just as the memorial landscape had been completed, “...around them is steadily growing up the feeling of intimate public and individual ownership...” (Ware 1928: 3). The same process of imbuing memorials with ‘public sentiment’ can be observed at a local level within Britain as attachments to these places of commemoration by the bereaved and grief-stricken are formed through usage and engagement (after Connelly 2002; Stephens 2007). In the example of the northern English town of Clitheroe, donations from the public provided the capital necessary to acquire the grounds surrounding the medieval castle upon which a sculpture of a British soldier was commissioned from the artist Louis Frederick Roslyn (1878-1934). The piece, cast in bronze, is of a solemn soldier, with his head bowed as a mark of respect for the dead and was finally unveiled in 1923 and became the centre of the town’s commemorative activities and for local people to grieve (see Moriarty 1995).

The spaces of commemoration for the conflict developed in the aftermath of the war are places of witnessing that encompass official objectives but individual concerns. This is significant as frequently the memorials and monuments to the war are interpreted as fixed points, which control ideas about the conflict and the soldiers and civilians who experienced its effects (Bushaway 1992). Contrary to this approach, these sites of memory function as a means through which individuals, groups and communities place themselves in relation to the past and the present. This demonstrates the continuing role of these war memorials and monuments in society to the current day (see Iles 2008). Tours to the battlefields in France, Flanders and Turkey remain highly popular within contemporary society whilst campaigns to preserve and protect local war memorials attract considerable support (Iles 2003). Through this process, the memorials and commemorative practices have been maintained within Britain as not merely a demonstration of nationalism but also as a means to bear witness to personal, community, national and historical trauma.

**Modern memory of the First World War in Britain**

The post-war memorial landscape across the battlefields and the commemorative sites in Britain provided a space for witnesses to the war. However, with the passing of time and the deaths of the veterans of the conflict, this act of witnessing has been performed within new sites as a means of testifying for alternative purposes. This was notably observed with the opening of the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Mesen (Messines), near Ieper (Ypres) in 1998 (Graham and Whelan 2007). This commemorative space served to ensure the witnessing of the conflict as a shared cultural trauma as a means of reinforcing the contemporary reconciliation process (Iles 2006). The creation of this new site of mourning reflects the alterations that have occurred since the 1990s in Britain as other means and methods of remembrance have been formed through commemorative sites. This process has occurred at a particular juncture within the remembrance of the war as the last of the veterans have passed away resulting in a sense of the war slipping from ‘living memory’ (see Dyer 1994). However, what can be discerned in this process is the manner in which new acts of witnessing have altered the perception of the war. What is distinctive about this role of the witness is the way in which this commemorative act is used to build connections to the present.

The recent development of new spaces of memory to commemorate the First World War can be most clearly observed with the development of memorials to the ‘Pals Battalions’ (see Furlong *et al*. 2002). These military units were raised in the ‘rush to the colours’ during the outbreak of war in August 1914; their particular mobilisation in which they enabled men of the same town or profession to serve together enabled the cultivation of morale and camaraderie. However, this also resulted in catastrophic consequences for communities if the battalion suffered heavy losses in engagements such as Gallipoli (1915) and the Battle of the Somme (1916) (see Moorhouse 1992). In the 1980s, the rise of local and family history encouraged the interest in these battalions whilst popular representations of the ‘pals’ in the wider media emphasised the emotional connection to the past (after Winter 2000). These accounts frequently highlighted the trauma of the deaths of friends whilst serving in the trenches and the grief of their families on the home front (see Wheelan 1982). This connection to the ‘Pals Battalions’ led to the development of new memorials in Britain and on the former battlefields in France and Flanders to cement the association between past and present. For example, one of the first of this new commemoration was the memorial to the Liverpool and Manchester Pals at Montauban on the Somme was erected in 1994. Taking the form of a simple memorial stone, the cap badges of the Liverpool and Manchester regiments are carved alongside the inscription:

To the glorious memory of the Liverpool and Manchester Pals who as part of the 30th Division liberated this village 1 July 1916.

The campaign for the memorial was developed during the early 1990s, after the work of determined local historians to promote the history of those who had served in the war from the Merseyside area (Maddocks 1991). Funds were raised from the area, designers were commissioned and the land was purchased without assistance of the official bodies responsible for the maintenance of the memory of the war. The work was undertaken in the belief that the ‘pals’ from the north-west region of England were a ‘special breed’ and that the sacrifices of those from the two great industrial cities had not been sufficiently regarded (Maddocks 1999: 150). Visitors to the site were, therefore, called upon to witness the war as an expression of regional identity. Such uses of witnessing the past to serve the interests of present identities can also be observed in the construction of other monuments to the Pals Battalions that have been erected within the past two decades. For example, after the death of the last remaining veteran of the ‘Barnsley Pals’ passed away in the early 1990s and the revival of local interest in the unit’s history, a campaign was launched to build a memorial through public donations. The village of Serre on the Somme was chosen and a black granite tablet was unveiled in 1998 within the Sheffield Memorial Park, a site which was initially inaugurated as a commemorative space in the 1930s.

The Sheffield Memorial Park is evidence itself of this new wave of commemoration as it has become the site of memorials constructed within the past twenty years (after Gough 1998; 2001). Pals battalion memorials were erected here during the 1990s as regions within Britain sought to establish their connection to the conflict. One of the most prominent examples of this process was the commemoration of the ‘Accrington Pals’ (Jackson 2013). This unit was one of the first to be the subject of a dedicated local history assessment which encouraged the construction of a memorial, funded by local townspeople from Accrington in north-west England, which was placed in Sheffield Memorial Park in 1991 (see Turner 1987; 1998). The memorial, built in the distinctive red brick from the Accrington area, is dedicated to all members of that battalion who were killed during the Battle of the Somme. Focused on the tragedy of the Battle of the Somme, which saw devastating losses and casualties on the first day of operations, these memorial sites evoke an emotional response to the trauma of the war (Dunkley *et al*. 2011). This, however, constitutes an active witnessing as visitors to the areas are required to testify to the loss and significance of these deaths from their own locale. Such processes can be observed with the 2006 unveiling at Sheffield Park of a memorial plaque to the Burnley Pals which was specifically stated as an act of witnessing:

We are all very proud to see the memorial unveiled in tribute to these brave men. Around 300 to 400 Burnley soldiers were killed on the Somme, and this plaque is a fitting tribute to their sacrifice (Anon 2006).

Such affective points of association to the past enable the representation of both regional and national identity within Britain. This can also be observed with the unveiling in 2007 of a Celtic cross monument to Scottish soldiers who died during the Battle of Passchendaele (1917) which was erected at the Frezenberg Ridge with funding from the Scottish Government. The cross was intended to mark the distinctive contribution of Scotland’s soldiers at the front. This can also be noted in the sculpture of a Welsh Dragon tearing at barbed wire, which was erected in 1987 near Mametz Wood in the Somme Valley in memory of the 38th (Welsh) Division. This unit which was comprised largely of Welshmen from the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the South Wales Borders who suffered large-scale fatalities during the Somme offensive and the sculpture is intended to ensure the acknowledgement of the specific deaths of soldiers from Wales (Gough 1998).

Such emotional and affective engagements with the past are also evidenced in the new memorials to the Pals Battalions which have been unveiled in Britain from the 1990s as new associations to the First World War are constructed. Recent tablets, friezes and sculptures in towns and cities such as Manchester, Bradford, Preston and Chorley have sought to draw attention to the emotional trauma of the war (see Wilson 2013, 8-10). These memorials are usually placed in distinct locations within the urban landscape; town centres where volunteers gathered in August 1914, streets where the soldiers paraded before being sent for training or railway stations where fond, and possibly final, farewells were exchanged between loved ones (after Tarlow 1997). The emotional intensification of these sites provides further evidence of how such sites are used by communities. For example, the Liverpool Pals Memorial was unveiled at Liverpool Lime Street Railway Station in August 2014; these bronze friezes, depicting the separation and loss wrought by the war on the city’s populace, were located where soldiers would have departed for the front lines. The chairman of the Liverpool Pals Memorial Fund, organised after the new millennium to raise donations for the commemorative artwork, Lt Col (Retd) Anthony Hollingsworth reiterated the evocative place of the friezes and their function for civic and wider society:

“One hundred years ago to this day, these would-be Pals lined the streets of Liverpool and St George’s Hall to enlist. By 10am on that first morning the first battalion had formed. By September 7, three full battalions had formed. We want to ensure the Pals’ story is remembered and becomes part of the fabric of this city and beyond” (Jones 2014).

The location of these memorials to the Pals Battalions at sites of trauma and tragedy emphasises the sense of loss associated with the war but also reinforces a sense of place for contemporary communities (after Dawson 2005). This is particularly observable in the commemoration of the Pals Battalions associated with football teams from Britain and with the advent of the centenary of the conflict these specific connections have been strengthened (see Wilson 2014). Memorials to ‘Footballers Battalions’ have been constructed in France and Belgium over the past decade. For example, the Contalmaison Cairn on the Somme was unveiled in 2004 to commemorate the losses suffered by the ‘Sporting Battalion’, a unit raised in Edinburgh and largely comprised of footballers from Hearts of Midlothian Football Club. The public funds raised for this memorial was designed to ensure that Scottish materials and Scottish craftsmen could mark the deaths of Scottish soldiers who died during the assault conducted as part of the first day of the Battle of the Somme (McCrae’s Battalion Trust 2014). In 2010, the Footballers Battalion (17th Middlesex Regiment), recruited in 1914 from the ranks of professional football clubs, were commemorated near the village of Longueval on the Somme where they also suffered significant losses during the battle. In the last few years, West Ham Football Club (in 2009) and Portsmouth Football Club (in 2014) have both unveiled memorial plaques at their grounds to remember the deaths of their players during the First World War. These poignant reminders of young lives cut short before establishing their careers as players serves to reinforce the sense of loss and tragedy associated with the conflict of 1914-1918. Such associations were also present in the construction of a memorial to Walter Tull (1888-1918), the professional footballer who became an officer in the British Army during the First World War (Vasili 1996). This structure, placed outside Northampton Town’s Sixfields Stadium, Tull’s last club before being posted to the battlefields, is inscribed with a call for visitors to witness how a man ‘rendered breathless in his prime’ can be regarded as a symbol of a struggle for equality. National, regional, cultural and political identities are thereby constructed through the performances of witnessing at these sites.

Such acts of witnessing are also present in the recent museum exhibitions launched to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the war (Whitmarsh 2001). From February 2014, the Museum of Lancashire (2014), based in Preston, offered an opportunity to experience the ‘sights and smells’ of the front lines in their display ‘Lancashire at War’. In this immersive exhibition, visitors were guided through recreated trenches, replete with artefacts of the war, to enable individuals to grasp the physical experiences of the battlefields (see Winter 2012). This manner of museological engagement has been an increasing feature of First World War exhibitions since the development of the Imperial War Museum’s (IWM) ‘Trench Experience’ in 1989 (Epsley 2008). This particular display enabled the visitor to walk through the trenches before a raid was launched on the enemy’s lines; the heavy artillery fire, darkness and confined space was included to facilitate the understanding of the past for present-day visitors (Borg 1991).

Following this development, institutions such as the Museum of the Manchester Regiment (2014) in Ashton or the Royal Engineers Museum (2014) in Gillingham have constructed their own ‘trenches’ within displays as an educational device. This approach has been employed by a number of regional museums in response to the advent of the centenary. In the south Wales town of Porthcawl, the local museum opened its own ‘Trench Experience’ in April 2014 which utilised the timbers of a house from the last century to recreate a ‘life-size’ trench exhibition with artefacts donated by local townspeople linking the trenches to the homefront and the past to the present (Porthcawl Museum, 2014). The Staffordshire Regimental Museum (2014) in Whittington renovated their outdoor trench display with the approach of the centenary. The initial display was constructed in 2002, but adjustments were made in 2014 to ensure that the exhibition represented a more ‘realistic’ demonstration of life during the First World War. Further trench recreations in local and regimental museums such as the York Castle Museum (2014), the Museum of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment (2014), the Wycombe Museum (2014) or the Saltash Museum and Local History Centre (2014) highlight the significance of witnessing this specific experience of the war for contemporary audiences. The performances of visitors to these ‘trench experiences’ constitutes an active witnessing, as whilst dislocated from the reality of industrialised warfare, the physical and emotional engagement with the environment of ensures a sense of place is formed for visitors. This witnessing is inevitably particular and restricted, but it is through these performances that exhibitions acquire meanings and values for their audiences (see Smith 2007). Indeed, such was the close association between visitors and the ‘trench experience’ at the IWM that fears were expressed within the media after plans for the museum’s 2014 refurbishment were unveiled that this ‘resource’ would be lost (see Kennedy 2014).

The recent development of museums representing the history and experience of the First World War have been part of wider commemorative practices which have developed to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the conflict in Britain. These national and local initiatives have seen the creation of permanent and temporary spaces of remembrance to engage and inform current society with the conflict of 1914-1918. One of the more prominent memorial acts was undertaken by the Guards Museum (2014) in London to build a memorial garden at the institution with the support of Flanders House in London, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain (Memorial Garden 2014). Entitled ‘Flanders Fields, 1914-2014’, the garden has been formed through the use of soil from the battlefields in Flanders which was collected in sandbags by British and Belgium schoolchildren and solemnly paraded through London (Anon 2014). The procession of earth and its part in the landscaping of the garden was intended as a highly affective and symbolic act to honour the lives and deaths of British soldiers and the ongoing relationship between Britain and Belgian. The emotional nature of this new space of memory was noted by the Curator of the Guards Museum as they described how this seemingly ‘sacred earth’ would remain ‘in sight of the main drill square from where so many guardsmen marched away never to return’ (Anon 2014). Officially opened in November 2014, the memorial garden’s unveiling by Queen Elizabeth II was attended by dignitaries and served to instil a sense of witnessing the past to inform the present. Indeed, Major General Edward Smyth-Osbourne, the General Officer Commanding the Household Division stated:

The Guards fought in almost every battle of the First World War. This memorial garden stands proud testament to their achievements in what Winston Churchill called ‘the world crisis’, and is testament to the traditions that we all strive to live up to today (HM Govt. 2014a).

This value of witnessing as a civic duty is embedded within the recent commemorative activities associated with the marking of the centenary of the war. New spaces of commemoration have been constructed as instructional locales where the values and ideals of the past can inform and invigorate contemporary society. This is evidenced in the Government-led programme announced in August 2013 to construct paving stones in the villages, towns and cities of those awarded the Victoria Cross during the First World War. The highest military decoration for valour in the face of the enemy was awarded to over 600 individuals during the conflict, including individuals from Britain and those from other nations who fought for the British Army. The objectives of the campaign within Britain appear to rely upon affect to ensure engagement from local communities (HM Govt 2014b). The stated aim of the project was to:

* honour their bravery
* provide a lasting legacy of local heroes within communities
* enable residents to gain a greater understanding of how their area fitted into the First World War story

The public virtue of witnessing the commemoration of the Victoria Cross winners is emphasised in this campaign as contemporary society is emotionally engaged with the service and sacrifices of their forebears. A similar process was enacted with the candlelight vigil within churches across Britain and the promotion of ‘Lights Out’, a movement to switch all lights off in homes except for a single candle, to mark the anniversary of the declaration of war on August 4 2014. A temporary space of commemoration was created in this activity which brought individuals and communities together within a collective act of remembrance. Inspired by the phrase attributed to the British Foreign Secretary Lord Grey that the ‘lamps were going out all over Europe’, this memorial practice also forged a sense of witnessing that was divorced from testimony. Marking and recognising the passing of an event offered no means of reflection or sense of place only the notion that such witnessing was conducted as a ‘service’ or as ‘recognition’.

This passive witnessing was most evidently displayed in the installation placed around the moat surrounding the Tower of London from July to November 2014. This piece, entitled *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, saw the planting of over 800,000 ceramic poppies to mark the deaths of British and Commonwealth servicemen during the war. The spectacle attracted vast numbers of visitors and drew attention across the media for the way in which it evoked a sense of gravity and significance amongst observers. However, the space of the artwork placed the individual into the role of a passive witness; called upon to recognise the scale of death and drawn into this emotional engagement the witness is required to make no testimony and to claim no association. The temporary nature of the installation further demonstrated how the official marking of the centenary of the war in Britain has rendered the position of the witness into that of the neutral observer. However, the response to this installation from visitors demonstrates how the role of the witness can subvert the organisation of memory. The outcry over the dismantling of the artwork, campaigns to ensure its survival and the way in which a sense of place was formed in response to the piece, transformed the field of ceramic poppies just as the commemorative landscape of the Western Front had been altered from its initial conception as a statement of national power to an intimate portrayal of loss and bereavement. To serve as a witness to the conflict places the individual in a particular relationship to the past; it is the performance of this act of witnessing that transforms representations and creates the ‘popular memory’ of the war rather than the representations themselves which transform public memory.

**Conclusions**

What has marked the remembrance of the war since the Armistice has been the individual acts of witnessing that have shaped the relationship between the historical event and the society that honours it. Through an engagement with non-representation theories, which privilege the performances, actions and responses of individuals, groups and communities, rather than the representations that are presumed to structure actions, the manner in which the remembrance of the First World War has been enacted across Britain can be examined. The passing of the last veteran and the commemoration of the centenary of the advent of the war has not dimmed the emotional effect of the conflict. Contemporary society still performs an emotive act of witnessing the past as a process of forming a sense of place and identity. Whether regional, national, moral or political, the witness can associate and define themselves through a connection with the conflict through an act of testifying. The recent memorials that commemorate particular ‘Pals Battalions’ enable an expression of regional identity, whilst museum displays provide an emotional engagement with the physical conditions of the war. Whilst the acts of witnessing can be both active and passive, requiring visitors to recognise the effect of the war through an act of testimony or serving as a neutral observer and bearer of memory, these acts still constitute a sense of becoming. Rather than dismissing the emotional nature of this commemoration as inaccurate ‘myths’, it can be regarded as a vital means by which a relationship to the past is understood.

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