Battlefield monuments and popular historicism: a hermeneutic study of the aesthetic encounter with 'Waterloo'

Mark Gilks

Published online: 25 Feb 2021.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 220

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Citing articles: 1 View citing articles ↗

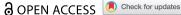# Battlefield monuments and popular historicism: a hermeneutic study of the aesthetic encounter with 'Waterloo'

Mark Gilks

Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent, Brussels, Belgium

ABSTRACT

Focusing on the case of the tourist visiting battlefield monuments at Waterloo, this article explores how war is historicized in the public imagination through the monumentalization of objects. The argument is two-fold. Firstly, drawing on Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is argued that 'tradition' is constituted in the aesthetic encounter between tourist and monument (as subject and object); such encounters are therefore understood as the genesis of historical meaning. Secondly, through a critique of Gadamer's notion of ontological structures of meaning, it is argued that the tourist is phenomenologically implicated in the constitution of historical meaning, emphasizing the agency of the historical observer more than Gadamer allows for: Objects become monuments through the monumentalizing gaze of the tourist. To empirically illustrate these processes, the author ethnographically explores the experience of battlefield tourist and presents his own dialogue with war-tradition at Waterloo. As such, this study contributes a theoretical account of how war is historicized at the phenomenological level, which has broader sociological implications for understanding how war discourses originate and are sustained in the public imagination.

1. Introduction

The walls of Saint Joseph's Church in Waterloo are lined with plaques commemorating the 'fallen'; each engraved stone reads as a slight variation of the following: 'To the memory of the officers [...] who fell in the Battle of Waterloo, 18 June 1815 [...] and of 18 non-commissioned officers and 112 privates of the same corps, who also fell on that memorable day'. When I left the church, one of my two fellow visitors asked the other what they thought. 'It's moving', they replied, presumably referring to the empathy felt for the mourning family, friends, and comrades who mounted the plaques in the years following the battle. This short response captures a general problem that has endlessly troubled philosophers of history, namely: How is it that history 'moves' us? How is the historical object constituted in the imagination? More specifically: How do objects become monuments – matter that conveys meaning, engraved stone that nostalgically evokes emotion and historical 'knowledge'? Through the case of battlefield tourism at Waterloo, my aim is to show, in answer to these questions, how war is historicized

CONTACT Mark Gilks ✉ mhgilks@gmail.com 📧 Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent, Boulevard Louis Schmidt 2a, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

through the monumentalization of objects; I aim to elucidate how the tourist, as lay historian, encounters and imagines – and thereby constitutes – the tradition of war.

To do so, I draw critically on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics. Gadamer's theoretical concern is with how 'tradition' is 'handed down' and how consciousness is thereby historically 'effected'. Basing his theory in the *aesthetic*, Gadamer explores how the meaning of an artwork is transmitted to the spectator. He argues that in the aesthetic encounter, subject and object are mutually constituted and that it is in this unity that the ontology of meaning is 'disclosed' – a position which undermines both objectivist and subjectivist accounts of meaning. Furthermore, 'tradition' – by which I take him to mean *historical meaning* – is hermeneutically constituted; like the mutual relationship between word and phrase, the subject is both *produced by*, but also *produces*, tradition.

Using this theory to examine how the tourist perceives battlefield monuments at Waterloo, I explore how historical meaning is constituted in the aesthetic encounter between tourist and monument (as subject and object). My argument is two-fold: Based on a conventional reading of Gadamer, I argue that the aesthetic encounter is productive of historical meaning and that such encounters can therefore be understood as the locus of history. I then argue, through a critique of Gadamer's ontological conceptualization of meaning, that the tourist is fundamentally implicated in the production of historical meaning; although it is true that they 'inherit' tradition, and that their consciousness is thereby historically effected, it should be emphasized that 'tradition' is fundamentally contingent on the tourist's historicizing gaze. For an object to become a monument it requires continual monumentalizing, and the agency of the tourist, I argue, is fundamental in this process.

Methodologically, this study is rooted in a Heideggerian/Gadamerian phenomenological revision of hermeneutics and its application to the understanding of social action.[1] This study is, therefore, both phenomenological and hermeneutic: *Phenomenological* in the sense that the subject and object are understood as mutually constituted in the aesthetic encounter, and *hermeneutic* because the focus is on how history is 'written' (metaphorically as well as literally) in the dialogical encounter with war tradition. This phenomenological-hermeneutic approach facilitates exposing the historicity of *being* (Gjesdal 2014), which in this case allows me to study not only how the tourist is *effected by*, but also how they *effect*, the 'tradition' of war. As such, 'history' is understood not as objective entity, but as that which results from the process of interpretation, while the interpreter (in this case the tourist/lay historian) is understood as fundamentally situated within the 'history' which is simultaneously the object of their gaze. Thus, the meanings associated with historical events (i.e. 'Waterloo') and historical individuals (i.e. 'Napoleon' and 'the Duke of Wellington') are understood as constituted in the hermeneutic process of interpretation. It is the result of these processes which I conceptualize as *historicization*. The aim is therefore to examine the role of the tourist (as lay historian) in the historicizing process.

To illustrate these logics empirically, I ethnographically present aspects of my own ('historical') experience at Waterloo's battlefield monuments. The aim is not to focus on the particular content of *my* aesthetic encounter with war-tradition – which is necessarily idiosyncratic and partial.[2] Rather, I aim to offer an illustrative example and interpretation of how the encounter with 'tradition' unfolds in historical consciousness. This empirical aspect is meant as a grounding for the theoretical arguments stated above.

The main contribution of this article is to provide a phenomenological-hermeneutic framework for understanding how war is historicized through the monumentalization of matter. Although not the focus, this critical approach has broader sociological implications: It becomes clearer, for instance, how war discourses are contingent on subject-object encounters and how militarized social structures are more broadly contingent on *active spectatorship*. More specifically, this work contributes to literature on battlefield tourism, especially in terms of tourist experiences (Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011; Biran, Poria, and Oren 2011; Stone 2020; Miles 2014; Cf., Uriely 2005), and how war museums mediate historical narrative (Winter 2013; Apor 2014; Jaeger 2017) and memory (Kavanagh 1996; Arnold-de-Simine 2013; Bull et al. 2019). With only a few notable exceptions (e.g. Pearce 1994; Cf., Dudley 2010), this literature generally overlooks how 'history' is phenomenologically constituted in subject-object encounters, and I am not aware of any studies in critical military studies (broadly conceived) which apply Gadamerian hermeneutics to understand the link between militarized 'history' and material encounters with 'tradition'.[3] Gadamerian hermeneutics, I argue, has much to contribute to these debates.

I proceed in four sections. The following section reconstructs Gadamer's hermeneutics. Section (3) then ethnographically presents the author's own historical experience at Waterloo. Section (4) interprets this experience and argues that the aesthetic encounter can be understood as the genesis of historical meaning. The final section then critiques Gadamer's notion of *ontological meaning* and emphasizes the agency of the tourist.

2. Gadamer and historical consciousness

In the philosophy of history, the traditional problem of how the past effects the present presupposes a 'gap' in time between past and present; the challenge then becomes to find a solution to how this gap could be 'bridged' in 'historical experience'.[4] What is the tourist *experiencing* when they experience 'Waterloo'; and how is this experience possible? Despite commenting that the concept of experience is 'one of the most obscure we have' (Gadamer 1960, 341), Gadamer does offer an answer to this question through his theory of hermeneutic consciousness.[5] Through a reconstruction of Gadamer's philosophy of experience, this section offers a framework for understanding the processes through which the historical site is monumentalized in the historical imagination. The following section then illustrates these processes ethnographically.

Gadamer's hermeneutics is positioned against what he characterizes as a flawed understanding of historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is not only directed towards the historical object, Gadamer argues, but also at the 'effect' of the historical object on consciousness itself. Consciousness is *historical* not only because it is 'aware' of the historical entity, but because consciousness itself is historically 'effected and determined' (Gadamer 1960, xxx, 299). To be sure, there is nothing new in this idea by itself (which has a long legacy in critical Germanic historiography). Building on Heidegger, Gadamer's contribution, however, is to articulate how consciousness is historically effected at the phenomenological level (indeed, Gadamer's theory can be understood as an account of how present experience is itself fundamentally *historical*). To understand Gadamer's hermeneutics, then, it is necessary to zoom in on the phenomenological processes of how historical meaning emerges in consciousness. Presenting the problematic through the notion of *aesthetic experience*, Gadamer asks how an artwork can be experienced as *meaningful*: What is the source and

nature of the meaning experienced by the viewer/spectator? (In this study, I apply this problematic more broadly to historical objects/monuments.)

Gadamer's theoretical opposition is what he characterizes as *subjectivist theories of aesthetic experience*, theories which portray either the artist or the spectator (or both) as intuiting the full meaning of an artwork. Such conceptualizations of experience, Gadamer argues, cannot account for how tradition and heritage are conveyed through the object, nor how our immediate experience of the object is historically effected. 'The appeal to immediacy,' Gadamer writes,

> to the instantaneous flash of genius, to the significance of "experiences" (*Erlebnisse*), cannot withstand the claim of human existence to continuity and unity of self-understanding. The binding quality of experience (*Erfahrung*) of art must not be disintegrated by aesthetic consciousness (Gadamer 1960, 83–84)[6]

Whatever a meaningful object (artwork/monument) means, it is not fully contained in the artistic expression or the aesthetic experience of that object. It is as such that Gadamer's hermeneutic statement that 'the meaning of a text goes beyond its author' (Gadamer 1960, 296) can be understood. Neither the soldiers who fought and 'fell' at Waterloo, nor the commemorating family, comrades, and friends who mounted the plaque in the church in the years following 1815, nor the tourist who is now 'moved' by it, could comprehend the full meaning of the plaque as a monument.

To overcome the subjectivist limitation, Gadamer conceptualizes meaning as an *ontological structure* (Gadamer 1960, 112; Cf., Davey 2013, 47). This approach allows him to move beyond the notion of aesthetic genius and to account for the historical nature of experience and for how tradition is 'handed down' through time. Because it is *ontological*, meaning is conceptually detached from the experience of both spectator and artist. In Gadamer's words, 'the understanding of tradition does not take the traditionary text as an expression of another person's life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou' (Gadamer 1960, 352). Hermeneutically, the object of study is therefore not the intention of the author or the experience of the spectator but the *text itself* (Gadamer 1960, 365). The author never knows the extent of the meaning they are producing because that meaning is not determined until it has been interpreted by the spectator; but the spectator cannot grasp its full meaning either because it is constantly *coming-into-being* as it is (re-)interpreted. Thus, the 'work of art [or in my case, thewar monument] consists in its being open in a limitless way to ever new integrations of meaning' (Gadamer 1964, 98, Cf., 1960, xxviii; 86). This is what it means for an object to possess an *ontological structure of meaning*; meaning is conceptually detached from immediate psychological experience. As such, the ontology of the object – its 'sheer being there (Dasein)' – reveals the 'depths and the unfathomability of its meaning' (Gadamer 1993, 72, 76).

Despite this depth and unfathomability of the object of experience, however, its meaning does occur *in* the world. To elucidate this point, Gadamer relies on several abstract concepts and stretched metaphors (a strategy which might make the methodological individualist queasy, but which I want to suggest is nevertheless insightful). The object (i.e. its *ontological structure of meaning*) 'rises up' into consciousness (Gadamer 1960, 112) and 'discloses', 'reveals', or 'presents' itself to the world in experience (Gadamer 1960, 482). 'Waterloo', then, is not an objective historical entity, and certainly not an expression of military genius; nor is it

an objective experience of this or that soldier, merely waiting to be discovered by the historian. 'Waterloo', rather, is that which emerges in historical consciousness as a result of the interaction between tradition and spectator, between 'monument' and gaze. As such, to understand the historical entity, the analytic focus is on the interaction between subject and object (tourist and monument) and on the processes through which (historical) meaning 'rises up'.

Gadamer characterizes the interaction between tradition and spectator as an *aesthetic encounter*. When the spectator (the tourist) encounters the meaningful object (the plaque), the 'tradition' of the plaque is not pre-given and static but depends on how it is understood by (i.e. how it 'moves') the observer.[7] As such, subject and object do not mean anything independent of one another; it is through the aesthetic encounter, rather, that subject and object are mutually constituted. Indeed, this is what makes Gadamer's hermeneutic theory phenomenological. The sentiment of being 'moved' by the plaque and the plaque itself cannot be clearly distinguished in experience in that they cannot exist independently of one another; for the engraved stone to be a *meaningful plaque* it needs to be historically experienced as such, and for the historical experience to exist as consciousness it needs to be constituted by the plaque, such that plaque and subjective experience are fundamentally entangled. Gadamer puts it in the following terms:

> When a work of art [/a war monument] truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning [...] The work is [...] an *event* that "appropriates us" into itself. It jolts us, it knocks us over, and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn, as it were (Gadamer 1993, 71)

An implication of the ontological approach is that, prior to 'rising up' into consciousness, meaning is only *potential* – as if there were a reservoir of potential meaning (so to speak) which exists in what Gadamer terms the 'hermeneutic universe'. He illustrates this with an interesting example: It should be admitted, he claims, that an ancient image of the gods displayed in a temple, not primarily intended for aesthetic pleasure, and which is now on show in a museum, 'retains, even as it stands before us today, the world of religious experience from which it came; the important consequence is that its world still belongs to ours. What embraces both is the hermeneutic universe' (Gadamer 1960, xxviii). The mystery of this observation is that present experience is somehow *effected* by what is 'retained' in the object. Gadamer describes this process (similar to what might be understood as nostalgia) as a 'fusion of horizons'.[8] The viewer's own horizon of experience is fused with the horizon of the object; in Gadamer's example, the *aesthetic experience* of the religious symbol as *object-of-art* is fused with the *religious experience* of the religious symbol as *holy-object*, creating a fusion of the two worlds of experience – a process which, for Gadamer, amounts to *the* condition for the possibility of historical understanding.

Applied to the case of the church plaque depicting the 'fallen' soldier, for example, the fusion is between three primary horizons, namely, the visitor's experience of the war monument, the experiences of the commemorating family, comrades and friends who mounted the plaque, as well as the experience of the 'falling' soldier himself. This fusion, which generally theorizes the process of transcending historical-diachronic time, is the phenomenological essence of historicization in the hermeneutic sense. In this case, for

instance, historicization occurs through monumentalizing and Romanticizing the 'falling soldier'.[9] To 'fall' in battle is more than a euphemism for death; 'falling' is a cultural metaphor which captures a legacy of heroicizing and glorifying the 'soldier' by abstracting from his private suffering and depicting his death as a civic sacrifice.[10] The *fusion* in this case, therefore, is the entanglement of biological suffering and death with the triumph and defeat that has become – and is continually *becoming* – 'Waterloo' (and as I suggest below, the tourist's embracing and contesting of these notions is a form of agency which is (re-) productive of historical meaning). This example illustrates how the consciousness of the tourist is historically effected by the war monument, and how meaningful historical experience is that which results from the fusion of distinct worlds of experience.

Perhaps Gadamer's most illustrative metaphor of how 'tradition' emerges in the encounter with the object is of a Platonic dialogue. Like in a real dialogue, the spectator asks questions of the historical object, and the answer received depends on the question asked, and the next question in turn depends on the answer given – and so on, dialogically back and forth, meaning is *brought-into-being* between subject and object. Of course, the object does not speak in a literal sense, but the aim of the metaphor is to show that experience cannot happen without questions being asked; questions, Gadamer says, 'break open' the meaning of a text (Gadamer 1960, 357), and the aesthetic encounter is therefore linguistically constituted. Applying the dialogical metaphor to the present case, it is the questioning of the tourist that 'breaks open' the meaning of the monument and thereby keeps alive the tradition of war.

For Gadamer, it is only by understanding these hermeneutic logics of experience that the notion of a 'gap' between past and present can be rejected (more on this below). Thus, hermeneutics is not meant as a methodology but 'as a theory of the real experience that thinking is' (Gadamer 1960, xxxiii). This thinking is historical not only in the sense of being directed towards the 'past' but in the sense of being itself 'effected' by that 'past' through the (re-)presentation of tradition. Having reconstructed the basic elements of Gadamer's theory in relation to the experience of war monuments, the next section explores these logics empirically; the final two sections then return to theoretical considerations and develop the main arguments.

3. Ethnographic illustration: aesthetically encountering 'Waterloo'

To explore how war-tradition is hermeneutically kept alive in the popular historical imagination, this section ethnographically presents the author's own aesthetic encounter with war monuments at Waterloo. Before proceeding, I offer two methodological preliminaries concerning case selection and the interpretation of 'experience'.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. 'Waterloo' as a case study

In seeking to illustrate the hermeneutic processes of historicization, I have selected the case of 'Waterloo' for two main reasons. Firstly, 'Waterloo' is unrivalled in its historical prominence as a destination for battlefield tourism. As Seaton writes:

> Waterloo was, and remains, the only discrete European battlefield to achieve lasting, world-wide tourism status. No other battle attracted comparable public attention or detonated such an immediate spate of visitation—so immediate, in fact, that it started while the battle was actually taking place (Seaton 1999, 130)

The otherwise unremarkable town of Waterloo, situated on the southern side of the Sonian Forest, about sixteen kilometres south of Brussels, has been a popular tourist destination ever since 1815. The trajectory of this *monumentalization* has been highly significant for modern European history (and therefore for the historicity of the European tourist). In the immediate aftermath of the battle, and throughout the nineteenth century, 'Waterloo' was politically and culturally mythologized (Keegan 1989, 103) and even sacralized (Seaton 1999) in European (and especially British/English) society. Geopolitically, the battle attained mythical status as the defining event of Europe in the decisive defeat of Napoleon, and as heralding an era of 'peace'.[11] As an historical symbol, 'Waterloo' has in turn had profound cultural influences, notably on English society (Colley 2003) and identity (Pears 1992). Although the relative socio-historical significance of 'Waterloo' for the late modern historical spectator has been eclipsed by twentieth century wars, 'Waterloo' remains, even today, a contested and unsettled event (Shaw and Toremans 2017). The battlefield tourist is therefore at the forefront of these ongoing historical contestations (Winter 2013).

This historicization of 'Waterloo' is particularly visible at the battlefield site where (material) monumentalization began in earnest after the battle.[12] Here, I list just a few prominent developments (Cf., Seaton 1999). The first major act of monumentalization occurred in 1823–6, when a forty-metre-high canonical hill was raised on the battlefield, with a 22 ton lion cast from captured French cannon mounted on top. This Lion's Mound, which can be seen from miles away, has fundamentally altered the visual horizon and ensured that the site is forever elevated. In 1855, the church at Waterloo (which I describe in the opening paragraph) was rebuilt with the aid of a British government subsidy, transforming it from an architecturally modest temple into an iconic shrine commemorating the 'Battle'. Next, in 1911, a purpose-built rotunda was erected beside the Lion's Mound to house a 110 metre-long panoramic painting of the war scene.[13] Today, these monuments are complimented with several modern museums, each treating different aspects of the battle; these include a Memorial Museum, offering a 'battlefield experience', Hougoumont Farm museum, reconstructing the 'battle within the battle', Napoleon's Last Headquarters museum, the Wellington Museum, Mont-Saint-Jean Farm, a museum dedicated to the medical aspects of the battle, and the Tourist Office Museum, also featuring exhibits about the battle. This brief description of contemporary Waterloo gives a sense of the unprecedented scale of monumentalization that has taken place.[14] As I show below, these monuments, created through particular processes of site management, constitute the 'tradition' which in turn constitutes the historical experience of the battlefield tourist.

The second reason for selecting 'Waterloo' has to do with my historical positionality as author. My double bias – firstly as a Briton and secondly as a former soldier – facilitates an existential proximity to 'Waterloo' which is ethnographically advantageous to illustrate the hermeneutic logics of historicization (the reader might replace 'Waterloo' with another example to which they are more existentially proximate). The ethnographic aim, however, is not to focus on the content of my own encounter (which is necessarily idiosyncratic (Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood 2011)), but rather to offer an example of how the encounter is more generally constitutive of historical consciousness.

3.1.2. Interpretation of experience

My encounter with 'Waterloo' is presented below as a *reflective* stream of consciousness. I recorded these experiences in a notebook while visiting the various monuments in February 2020 and then processed these notes in the subsequent days into the prose offered below. I should note that when I visited Waterloo I was already familiar with Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, and my explicit intention was to capture these hermeneutic logics of my own experience through introspection and to examine how the 'event' became phenomenologically and hermeneutically constituted in my consciousness. The 'experience', therefore, is not 'naïve' but theoretical (to the extent that the dichotomy is valid); it is inquisitive of its own hermeneutic structure (hence the hermeneutic reflectivity). Furthermore, it should be noted that this 'experience' (as presented below) is in no sense a 'reproduction' of the actual stream of experience I *had* – or rather that I *was* – during my battlefield visit; any articulation of lived experience is necessarily a *reduction* and an *interpretation* of an ultimately ineffable flux of consciousness (Weber 1903, 169). Through hermeneutic reflectivity, however, my aim, as an historical observer, is to isolate the 'writing' of history within my consciousness.

3.2. An ethnographic encounter

Was walking through the Sonian Forrest to Waterloo as enchanting for Wellington's army as it is for me, I ask myself? I too am a Briton, and although the landscapes appear somewhat familiar, the sense of adventure and the foreignness seem to prepare me emotionally for a meaningful experience.

After buying a ticket from the tourist office which grants entry to all six battlefield museums, I begin back at the church that prompted this research. Even as a secular viewer, the presence of the church-scene is 'moving'. Thick with tradition, one cannot ignore the sense that this building has been meaningfully interpreted over and over by previous visitors; it is the nostalgic and somewhat inexplicable sense of being in the presence of past generations, a mysterious feeling of tradition 'rising up' into consciousness. That the plaques commemorating the battle are mounted along the walls of such a symbolic building is itself significant; the plaques (as symbols of tradition) are mounted upon another traditional symbol, the church – tradition layered upon tradition, creating multiple depths of meaning and therefore the possibility for multiple depths of interpretation.

The plaques 'speak' not only explicitly through the engravings but also as an entire symbol. The very presence of carved stone represents a powerful symbolic act on behalf of past generations with whom I am in dialogue. The fact that someone would engrave stone in acts of commemoration is itself monumentalizing of war; and it is these acts, and the emotions they provoke, which is in part the object of my historical experience. Somehow, it is as if their grief and honour for the 'fallen' is transposed in time and constitutive of my historical consciousness. The sense that I am navigating a world of objects that they constituted is to be in communication with these historical figures.

The engravings themselves articulate more specific experiences – although in a Romantic language that is somewhat foreign, full of high abstractions such as 'glory, 'gallant', 'valour', 'service', and 'falling': One officer, a thirty-two year-old colonel, for instance, 'fell gallantly at the head of his regiment on the plains of Waterloo'; another, a captain who is described as 'an ardent, a superior, and a noble spirit', 'fell in the field of glory in a distinguished charge'; many others 'bravely fell'; more humbly, some officers were simply 'killed'. I also encounter those

who mounted the plaques: Some by comrades, 'by the surviving officers of the regiment' 'in testimony of the valour of their deceased brethren in arms'; some by family, such as an 'affectionate brother'; and another 'by a mourning and an attached friend'.

I am in dialogue with these shadows – a dialogue between myself (as tourist), the commemorating comrades/family/friends, and the soldier himself. The dialogue begins with several questions: What does it mean to 'fall gloriously'? How is this a consolation for death? Later in the day I would get somewhat of an answer: At Napoleon's final headquarters, now a relatively insignificant museum on the other side of the battlefield, I will learn that even Napoleon 'fell' on that 'memorable day' – *falling*, therefore, not necessarily implying medical death, but the death of an Ego. Furthermore, some also apparently 'fell' from a greater height, depending on whether the individual was an 'officer' or a mere 'man'. If I am to 'understand', my historical imagination therefore needs to overcome not only the 'high' abstractions but also the explicit hierarchy between humans.

My understanding is expanded when I encounter within my experience the guilt of patronizing the abstractions they valued and lived by. Entering into dialogue with these objects and fusing my horizons with these historical subjects demands an empathic move on my part. I recognize, however, that this act of empathy (which is certainly not impartial) is to validate the historical 'event' and its 'actors' – in this case, the Battle, the Falling Soldier, and the Mourning Commemorator; it is *they* – perhaps those who initially historicized this Event – who are allowed to 'speak' and constitute my historical experience – while countless others remain silent, bequeathing no objects for me to aesthetically encounter.

After the church, I visit the cluster of monuments/museums which is now the epicentre of the tourist experience located on the battlefield site. The cluster includes the Lion's Mound, the Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo, and the Memorial Museum. My first stop is the Panorama. I stand on the elevated platform in the centre of the purpose-build rotunda and look in all directions at the carnage (as the artist imagined and rendered it in 1911). The panorama is a literal fusion of horizons; I can see what the soldier atop this hill might have seen in a cross-section of time – albeit via the artist's imagination; men and horses disembowelled clutter the landscape, smoke and fire, cannons, charging cavalry and clashing regiments of soldiers, all frozen in time. This visual horizon is complimented by the ambient sound of battle, softly emitted by speakers surrounding the panorama. Although the monument's 'message' is unclear (there is no curatorship to guide interpretation), the scene becomes lodged in my imagination, a datum for my historical understanding. Indeed, this snap-shot is now (as I write this) what I visualize when I recall the claim I would later hear that 'Waterloo' was a 'critical juncture' which 'changed the destiny of a continent'; this is that juncture, crystalized in my mind.

Next, I climb the 226 steps to the top of the Lion's Mound. The horizon-dominating artificial hill provides panoramic views over the 'battlefield' and offers the opportunity to compare the panorama *then* and *now* – the 'historical' and the contemporary. Is it *meaningful*, I ask myself, that two hundred years ago, on this particular patch of ground upon which my eyes are now lain, thousands of men ran around killing one another? I find the experience at the top, however, rather un-monumental: The barren farmland is now diced with motorways, and the scene offers no explicit articulation of tradition. Again, there is no curator's assistance with how to interpret the scene. For me, at least, the barren fields by themselves evoke little historical meaning; my horizons are simply my own.

If the Panorama and the Lion's Mound lack curator input, however, the Memorial Museum, inaugurated in 2015 and built underground, underneath the Mound and the Panorama, is starkly the opposite. As one enters it is clear that this museum is explicitly intended as a narrative-setting, historicizing, monument of 'Waterloo'. The museum consists of an hour-long trail which winds first through a context-setting, 'educational' section, situating the battle geopolitically, historically, and culturally, then through an equipment section filled with manakins and weapons, and finally reaching the centre-piece which is a cinematic reconstruction of the battle. Before starting, the included audio-guide encourages the spectator to 'select your soldier', a simulated first-hand perspective from which the story will be told – implying that there is no objective experience and no objective story, but only the various perspectives of those who were there on that 'memorable day'. The spectator is in dialogue with this soldier, encouraged to empathize and enter their horizons of experience.

The museum is rich with visual cues that aid the tourist in placing themselves in their chosen soldier's shoes. After beginning with an introduction to the historical period, the viewer's consciousness is filled with traditional detail: Uniformed manakins reveal the compromise made between the utilitarian task of killing and the embellishment of military insignia and objects; rifles and muskets are displayed in cabinets detailing technical mechanisms which again are designed not only to kill but to aesthetically please. Compared with the relatively utilitarian contemporary aesthetic of war, the Napoleonic and Georgian eras seem incredibly Romantic; maybe we can be forgiven our nostalgic Romanticization of such genuinely aestheticized war tradition. The result is that my memory is furnished with intricate detail, from stirrups to helmets, ready to re-create in my imagination the war scene in all its complexity in any future act of historical thinking.

Near the end of what seems to be intended as a history-through-objects is the immersive, 3D, cinematic experience of the battle. Faced with charging cavalry, swinging swords, firing muskets, as well as a peer-view of Napoleon and Wellington orchestrating the battle, the film aims, through immersing the viewer in close-up perspective of the war scene, to triangulate various experiences of the battle. Faithful to the Romantic trope that only those who were *there* know what war is really like,[15] the 'event' is constructed through the soldiers' own horizons of experience. 'Objectivity' is presented in the form of intersubjectivity as the best answer to what actually 'happened'. Throughout the film, battle is portrayed as horrific but also necessary, captured best in Wellington's famous Dispatch words which serve as the dramatic closing lines: 'Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won' – words which anticipated a disillusionment culture made possible by the focus on personal and Romanticized expectations of war-experience.[16] There is a hint at the senselessness of it all, but at the same time the story is told as if it were a preordained narrative, a necessary part of *our* history. Slightly shell-shocked as I leave, it feels like 'history' has been rammed into my consciousness through the exploitation of my senses.

The focus on the *experience* of the soldier at the museums does not diminish the old historiographical narrative of *Waterloo as that great event of modern history*, however. This is portrayed most strikingly at Hougoumont Farm, a kilometre or so across the 'battlefield' from the Memorial Museum. For the military historian – a role the tourist is encouraged to assume – it was a crucial battle outpost in 1815, the decisive epicentre of the battle; it is now a museum outpost which tells the story of the 'battle within the battle'. The museum centres around an extravagant and dramatic cinematic experience in one of the barns. 'There are places', the

opening lines dramatically state, 'where the destiny of an entire continent is in play'. If the other museums lack narrative, this one leaves little to the imagination; the noise and light position one not as interlocutor but as mute spectator. The climax of the 'battle within the battle' is the 'closing of the gates' (the battle within the battle within the battle), where, at the last minute, British soldiers prevented French soldiers from breaching the fortress – a counterfactual eventuality that would have apparently changed the course of history. 'There are acts of courage', we are told, 'that turn men into heroes'; and 'there are moments that mark the imagination for centuries to come'. The gate which was closed is portrayed as the critical juncture of world history, and the *eventfulness* of this moment is presented as indubitable. The film ends with a somewhat patronizing proposition that 'There is a duty to remember those who make history'. This museum is certainly the most vulgar historicism of all the battlefield monuments at Waterloo; exploiting sensibilities through historiographical tropes, the narrative of the 'past' is highly dramatized.

4. The aesthetic encounter as the locus of history

I could not willingly dispossess this 'historical experience'; when I now consider the historical meaning of 'Waterloo', my mind automatically re-cognizes what was presented to it on this battlefield visit – the panorama, the violence, the critical juncture, the 'fallen', etc. Evoking both intricate aesthetic detail as well as deeper narrative structure, 'Waterloo' has become deeply *historicized* in my consciousness. Returning to primarily theoretical considerations, this section interprets the historiographical significance of such experiences and the implication for how 'tradition' is kept alive in the public imagination; drawing on Gadamer, I argue that the aesthetic encounter is the locus of history in the sense that it is the genesis of historical meaning. In the following section, I then critique Gadamer's ontological conception of meaning and argue that the tourist is more implicated in (and therefore 'responsible' for) this historical (re-)production than Gadamer's theory allows.

To understand the merit of Gadamer's hermeneutic historiography, it might be useful to position it against the caricature of *history as objective entity*. On this view, 'Waterloo' was a clearly delineated temporal-spatial *event*. As such, the job of the historian – both professional and lay (i.e. tourist) – is to somehow 'retrieve' this event from the past, that is, to bridge the gap between past and present, and to thereby acquire 'accurate' historical knowledge. By this approach, the knowledge that is 'obtained' is often understood as a 'representation' which to some degree approximates the original event. *History*, then, is the epistemic approximation of the event, while professional and disciplined history (as well as the curatorship of museums and monuments) is such knowledge advanced through methodological refinement and *truer* representation.

Gadamer's approach is starkly opposed to this view, not only methodologically, but epistemologically and even metaphysically. The object of study is not so much the entity (i.e. the 'objective' historical 'event'), but rather the process, i.e. the 'writing' of history. As such, the historical entity is constituted in the historical process. Thus, 'history' is not 'retrieved' from the past but hermeneutically constituted through the interpretative process as subject interacts with object. This process was evident in my own subjective encounter with the objects as detailed above. When visiting Waterloo, I was not somehow retrieving history from the past through some mysterious act of intuition; 'Waterloo', rather, was being hermeneutically and phenomenologically constituted ('written') in my consciousness as I encounter the

'tradition' that has been 'handed down'. This is the phenomenological process underpinning what Winter (2013) describes as the contestation of history at war museums.

The aesthetic encounter itself is preceded and characterized by the *openness* of the subject. I arrived at Waterloo with what Gadamer (1960, 294) refers to as 'fore-conceptions' of meaning – notions of Waterloo's historical significance (Cf., Crane 1997). My own fore-conceptions of 'Waterloo' (which I noted above) were manifest throughout the course of my dialogue with each of the objects I encountered. Each spectator's own dialogue would likewise follow a particular 'script', such that the 'history of Waterloo' would be uniquely 'written' in as many ways. Even if someone were entirely ignorant of 'Waterloo', they would still have some fore-conception of the significance of war tradition in general which would predispose them to particular experiences. Due in part to these different starting positions, but also to the differing courses of dialogue, aesthetic encounters with meaningful objects and the resulting historical experiences are therefore radically idiosyncratic. Historical consciousness, therefore, is not objective but hermeneutic.

The process though which 'Waterloo' came to have a particular meaning for me is evident in the course of my dialogical encounter. My fore-conceptions were followed by an initial aesthetic encounter where the objects 'spoke' to me; I then asked more questions, and the dialogue – the writing of history – continued back and forth in my consciousness. The historical meaning of 'Waterloo', as I currently understand it and am 'moved' by it, cannot be separated from these encounters. Furthermore, this historicizing process is also ongoing as I reinterpret my historical 'memory' each time I think of 'Waterloo' against the background of new experience. Sociologically, any social/political articulation I were to make about Waterloo (including this one) would, as a discursive speech act which has constitutive effects on broader discursive narratives, have its genesis in the aesthetic encounters and the process of interpretation described above. Although not my methodological focus here, this points towards the link between the phenomenological and sociological levels of historical meaning, and shows how broader historical narratives are contingent on individual encounters.

Zooming in on the phenomenological process, the encounter should be understood as mutually constitutive of subject and object. Rather than beginning by conceptualizing a timeless and objective historical entity that a subject physically encounters and then somehow intuits its historical significance from an impartial and timeless position (thereby bridging not only the gap between past and present but also the gap between a detached subject and a meaningful object), from the phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective the focus is on how, in the aesthetic encounter, the subject both constitutes and is constituted by the object (where the subject is understood as *historical consciousness* which is *of* the given historical object). For Gadamer, 'tradition' is 'disclosed' in this historical consciousness. As such, historical thinking is not just *of* history, but is itself *historical*. 'Real historical thinking', Gadamer writes, 'must take account of its own historicity'; 'Only then', he continues,

> will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the *object as the counterpart of itself* and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, *a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding* (Gadamer 1960, 299 emphasis added)

When I (as subject *open* to meaning) stand before the plaque (as meaningful object), an experience occurs in which the subject and object are mutually constituted (i.e. neither can exist independently of the other); my subjectivity does not just *contain* the object but is *of* the object, and the object exists – in this phenomenological sense – only *in* and *through* my subjectivity. I am arguing that this encounter is the locus of history because it is here that historical meaning is generated.[17] That is, any ideas that I now possess about 'Waterloo', and any discourses that I subsequently express about it, are fundamentally rooted in my aesthetic encounters with 'tradition'. As I possess it, 'Waterloo' is not an objective idea, but is being continually written *by me*, in the course of *my experience*. To understand how Waterloo is historicized, therefore, it is necessary to focus on the phenomenological processes which constitute historical discourse.

From this theoretical perspective, *time* plays a particular role. Rather than posing the problem as a 'gap' which is somehow bridged by historical intuition, Gadamer rejects such framing of the problematic altogether and argues that it is time itself that offers the possibility for historical knowledge: Time is the 'supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted' (Gadamer 1960, 296). Temporal distance, as Paul Ricœur observes in reference to Gadamer, transforms 'an empty space into a field of energy' (Ricœur 2002, 250). It is in this notion of time that the phenomenological synthesis of subject and object produces historical experience. Temporal distance, then (in Gadamer's words) is 'a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us' (Gadamer 1960, 296).

It is through these processes – through the simultaneous fusions of subject and object as well as past and present – that one's present experience is 'moved' by 'tradition' – processes which, for Gadamer, underscore the historicity of *being*. As such, 'history' is continually being 'written' as historical meaning is *brought forth* through the ongoing aesthetic and dialogical encounters – a logic particularly visible through the case of the battlefield monument. In the next section, I explore the role of the historical observer in *bringing forth* this historical meaning (a role which remains ambiguous in Gadamer).

5. The monumentalizing gaze: critiquing Gadamer's notion of ontology

So far, I have examined how war is historicized through the tourist's aesthetic encounter with battlefield monuments; I have argued that the aesthetic encounter is the locus of history. This final section examines the agency of the tourist in the production of historical meaning. Through a critique of Gadamer's central notion of *ontology*, I argue that the historicization of war monuments is fundamentally contingent on the tourist's monumentalizing gaze. I develop this argument by scrutinizing a tension between ontology and subjectivity at the heart of Gadamer's theory, a tension which has profound implications for the way the historical observer and historical meaning is understood.

This tension is as follows. On the one hand, *meaning* clearly has a pivotal subjectivist component for Gadamer. Gadamer acknowledges, for instance, that '[t]he historical life of a tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted' (Gadamer 1960, 398); the reader does not exist, Gadamer writes, 'who, when he has his text before him, simply reads what is there. Rather, all reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends' (Gadamer 1960, 335). Applying this hermeneutic logic to

understanding the historicity of the social world, Gadamer concedes that '[t]radition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves' (Gadamer 1960, 293–94). Indeed, the idea that the spectator is *active* in the constitution of 'tradition' is entailed by the logic of the hermeneutic circle underpinning Gadamer's historiography: Just as word and phrase must be understood in relation to one another, so momentary experience must be situated within tradition, for it is both *effected by* and itself *effects* that tradition (Gadamer 1960, 291–93) – hence the hermeneutic understanding of historical consciousness. This reasoning seems to empower the historical spectator and would point towards an analysis of the subjective constitution of tradition.

On the other hand, however (and this following dyad of the tension is the main thrust of Gadamer's hermeneutics), historical meaning is fundamentally *ontological*, i.e. it is neither objective nor subjective – a dichotomy the logical validity of which is methodologically diminished from the phenomenological perspective. History, rather, 'determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation' (Gadamer 1960, 300). Indeed, art and tradition even seem to bear their own force on history, independent of human interest: 'If art is not the variety of changing experiences (Erlebnisse) whose object is filled subjectively with meaning like an empty mold, *we must recognize that "presentation" (Darstellung) is the mode of being of the work of art*' (Gadamer 1960, 115 emphasis added). In this passage, it seems to be implied that meaning presents *itself* in the world, independent of the spectator's act of *bringing-forth*.

This ontological approach (as opposed to subjectivist approaches) has the clear advantage of accounting for historical continuity. An unapologetic subjectivist account of history would be closer to that espoused by Oakeshott, who argues that:

> The distinction between history as it happened (the course of events) and history as it is thought [...] must go; it is not merely false, it is meaningless. The historian's business is not to discover, to recapture, or even to interpret; it is *to create and to construct*. Interpretation and discovery imply something independent of experience, and there is nothing independent of experience. There is no history independent of experience (Oakeshott 1933, 93 emphasis added)

In terms of his critique of objectivity, Gadamer is in agreement with Oakeshott (as we saw above). He diverges, however, when it comes to the *role* of subjectivity. The problem, for Gadamer, is that when history is understood as radically subjective, where the spectator has complete freedom 'to create and to construct', it is hard to account for continuity of historical meaning, i.e. 'tradition'. For Gadamer, the artwork (/war monument) exists within a hermeneutic universe which determines the scope of possible historical interpretation – hence the human subject is 'effected and determined' by these hermeneutic conditions (Gadamer 1960, xxx, 299).

Although it is important to account for the continuity of historical meaning, however, this methodological approach[18] cannot account for the sense of freedom we have when we aesthetically encounter and enter into dialogue with an object of 'tradition' (as was clear from my experience presented above); neither can it account for variation and contingency in the production of historical discourse, that is, for the creative interventions that subjects make into the resources of the hermeneutic universe. The underlying philosophical weakness of Gadamer's theory is that he seems to simultaneously

hypostatize 'tradition' (Jauss 1970) and to negate the validity of subjective experience by decoupling meaning from existence (Gilks 2021). The result is that the subject (in this case the tourist) is subsumed under the hermeneutic logics of ontological structures of meaning, thereby reduced to an empty vessel to be filled with historical discourse; as such, agency is implicitly negated and the human is understood fundamentally as an manifestation of inauthenticity.[19]

My contention is that an approach which focused instead on the *historicizing subject* – rather than on some quasi-external ontological force – could better make sense of the hermeneutic processes of historicization. Although 'tradition' certainly bears its weight on the continuous present, it should not be forgotten – to paraphrase William James (1890, I, 297) – that the subject *goes out to meet* that 'tradition'.[20] Ultimately, it is the subject's monumentalizing gaze which transfigures the object into a monument, a monument which thereby manifests historical meaning. Merleau-Ponty recognized the importance of the gaze when he observed – as if he was critiquing Gadamer – that:

> I am the only one who brings into being for myself […] this tradition that I choose to take up or this horizon whose distance from me would collapse were I not there to sustain it with my gaze (Merleau-Ponty 1945, lxxii)

Thus, the (historical) perceiver necessarily occupies an existential stance *in* and *towards* the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945, lxxiv).[21] It is these existential conditions – which are subsumed under Gadamer's ontology – which represent the fundamental condition for the possibility of historical meaning and historical continuity.[22]

This existentialist priority of historicization is evident in the aesthetic encounter with the war monument. As Sebald observes, reflecting on his experience at the Panorama of Waterloo: 'No clear picture emerged […] Only when I had shut my eyes, I well recall, did I see a cannonball smash through a row of poplars' (Sebald 1998, 126; Shaw 2017). This image, which for Sebald was furnished by his reading of Stendhal's portrayal of the battle, illustrates the *agent's* endowment of meaning onto a lifeless war scene depicted in oil on canvas. This logic was also clear in my own encounter described above, in which the *meaning* of each monument depended on *my* appropriating the object into myself, allowing myself to be fused with it, and thereby allowing the object to constitute my existence for that period of time. Acknowledging this existentialist logic (which underpins the hermeneutic logic), what is methodologically significant is less the ontological structure of meaning which manifests in the object than the spectators monumentalizing gaze, in which the subject and object are united and through which meaning is *brought forth*.[23]

To conclude this section, we might say that in Gadamer, the *gaze* is missing. Without understanding this gaze we will not understand the logics of how 'tradition' (i.e. historical continuity) is fundamentally contingent on the phenomenological production of historical meaning, and thus how spectatorship – far from being 'naïve' and innocent – is not only complicit but also validating. Methodologically, this debate comes down to where one places the emphasis in the dialectic between 'tradition' and spectator – between ontology and subjectivity. I have emphasized the latter, suggesting that the (interpretative) gaze constitutes a form of agency through the act of *bringing forth* and embodying historical continuity.

6. Conclusion

Focusing on the case of a tourist visiting battlefield sites at Waterloo, this study has explored the logics of how historical meaning is phenomenologically and hermeneutically constituted. Building on Gadamer, I argued that the aesthetic encounter between subject and object is the genesis of historical meaning. Through a critique of Gadamer's prioritization of *ontology*, I then argued for a methodological focus on the monumentalizing gaze of the spectator/tourist. I have sought to show that 'history' is not something waiting to be discovered but is that which emerges in *historical experience*, and that the 'monument' is not an objective artefact but rather the entity which is elevated and transfigured through *historical thinking*. Furthermore, these hermeneutic processes of historicization – which happen *in* and *through* time – are forever ongoing; even as I revise this paper for publication, the 'historical' meaning of *my* 'Waterloo' is evolving as the 'monuments' which populate my horizons shift against the background of my entire being.

In closing, I offer two sociological reflections: Firstly, I have focussed on the explicit articulation of historical meaning in the spectator's consciousness who actively seeks an historical experience of war at battlefield monuments. Usually without regard, however, we encounter such monuments in the course of our everyday lives. Although I am unsure whether Gadamer's hermeneutics could account for these *implicit* encounters, such encounters undoubtedly also effect (to some degree) our historical consciousness through subconscious means. A phenomenological theory of how this is so might draw on Gadamer's notion of the aesthetic encounter. Secondly, my concern has been with the phenomenological constitution of historical meaning, but it seems to follow from my claim (that the spectator's encounter is the locus of history) that broader societal discourses of war are also ultimately contingent on such encounters. Bridging the phenomenological and sociological levels of analysis on these two points would be insightful for understanding how militarized discourses are sustained in the popular imagination.

Notes

1. Gadamer's critique of hermeneutics sits prominently at the beginning of a modern trend of sceptical and critical historiography (Skinner 1990). For the philosophical context of Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Malpas (2014; see also Thompson 1981, 36–70). My focus is on Gadamer rather than Heidegger (Gadamer's doctoral supervisor) because the former, as I show below, offers a more developed and systematic theory to account for the aesthetic encounter generally, as well as the dialogical nature of this encounter specifically (which is central to my empirical analysis) (Cf., Heidegger 1950).

2. As well as being a Briton, I previously 'served' in the British military for several years (and even read a novel about Waterloo during this time (Cornwell 1990)). I suggest in the methodology section below, however, that by using my own historical and cultural predicament to exemplify the hermeneutic logics of historicization, this *bias* in fact becomes a methodological advantage (in an auto-ethnographic sense). Indeed, it is this *existential entanglement* with the historical entity that I aim to scrutinize.

3. Although Gadamer has had a profound impact on interpretative methods in social science (Sherratt 2006, 100–115; Outhwaite 2014), this influence seems to be indirect and mediated;

unlike other twentieth-century critical continental philosophies, there seems to be little explicit and systematic application of Gadamer's hermeneutics to empirical issues.

4. Classic attempts to 'bridge the gap' include Dilthey's notion of 're-experiencing' (Dilthey 1910, Selected works, volume III:68–74, 234–37) and Collingwood's notion of 're-enacting' (Collingwood 1945, 282), for example (see Jay 2005). I discuss Gadamer's own response below.

5. Gadamer presents his outline of experience (Erfahrung) in Part II, Section 4 of his Truth and Method.

6. The two German terms for 'experience', Erlebnis and Erfahrung (for which there are no simple English translations), were central to debates on the nature of experience in Germanic literature in the late nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. Erlebnis is usually translated as 'lived experience' while Erfahrung has connotations of learning, a journey and cumulative experience (Gadamer 1960, 53–61; 341; Cf., Jay 2005, 11–17).

7. The extent to which the observer makes an active contribution to the meaning thereby 'disclosed' versus the extent to which they are merely passive recipients of this meaning is a tension at the heart of Gadamer's theory which I explore in the final section.

8. 'Horizon' is a phenomenological notion derived originally from William James' (1890, I, 260) notion of 'fringes', which is a conceptualization of the hazy boundaries of experience; Gadamer's novel contribution to this concept is to speak of a fusion of (historical) horizons.

9. By 'Romanticism' in relation to war I am referring to a cultural legacy, originating in the nineteenth century, of representing war as an 'ultimate experience' (Harari 2008, 299) and an heroic adventure (Ramsey 2016) – representations which persist in contemporary British culture (Paris 2000).

10. In his study of the myths which sustained and responded to the violence of the First World War, George Mosse traces what he calls 'the cult of the fallen soldier' back to the French Revolution and to the 'nationalization of death' and the cultivation of nationalism as a civic religion (Mosse 1990, 36–37; 101). As has been recently shown, however, this 'cult of the fallen' has roots in classical Greek antiquity: Even as early as pre-Classical Greece, battle-mutilated corpses were represented as the 'beautiful dead', representations which were also exploited for civic purposes (Arrington 2014, 26). Indeed, this classical legacy is clearly visible in modern war monuments, as Mosse (1990, 102) recognizes. In the notion of the 'fallen soldier', therefore, the individual becomes collectivized and even abstract, and a 'timeless stereotype of the ideal warrior' is asserted (Mosse 1990, 105; Arrington 2014, 275–79). Thus, death (in the medical sense) and the horror of war is transcended; indeed, as we see below, even Napoleon 'fell' at 'Waterloo' (although he died six years later).

11. As Samuel Hynes (1990, 427) notes in the context of the First World War, the ultimate monument is perhaps the emergent historical narrative, i.e. the 'Myth' (Cf., Fussell 1975; Mosse 1990).

12. Since my focus is on the physical aesthetic encounter, I am primarily interested in material (as opposed to cultural) monuments/representations of 'Waterloo'. Material and cultural monuments are, of course, often coextensive, but I limit myself to cultural symbols insofar as they are manifest at the battlefield site, and not, for instance, representations of 'Waterloo' in literature and art – about which there is an extensive literature (e.g. Shaw 2002; Ramsey 2016; Cox 2014).

13. For an interesting analysis of this monument, see Shaw (2002, 71).

14. This site monumentalization is facilitated by the fact that the 'battlefield' (of Waterloo) is a clearly delineated concept which maps onto a geographically discrete area – which is not the case for later, more technologized, 'battlefields' (Ryan 2007, 249–50).

15. Harari describes this theme as one of the master narratives of late modern (Western) military experience (Harari 2008, 240).

16. Disillusionment not as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, but as the traumatic shattering of illusions premised on romantic expectations of war (Harari 2005).

17. Indeed, all historical meaning is constituted in such encounters (broadly conceived). For a similar argument, see Pearce (1994, 27) – although she does not rely on Gadamer's hermeneutics.

18. I believe I am offering a generous reading of Gadamer in that I take his theory of *ontology* to be a conceptual strategy rather than a metaphysical theory of meaning. I acknowledge that he is ambiguous on this: In his forward to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer claims, for instance, that his approach avoids implying anything metaphysical, although he accepts that 'the tradition of metaphysics' nevertheless 'remains close' (Gadamer 1960, xxxiii).

19. There is perhaps a distinction to be made between *authenticity* and *agency* (i.e. if one can be an *inauthentic agent*). Furthermore, if to be an *agent* in the world is to *bring-forth* meaningful structures, then there is no necessary incompatibility between agency and historical continuity. Such debates, however, enter treacherous conceptual and metaphysical ground which is beyond the remit of this discussion.

20. James is not here referring to tradition, but speaking about the possibility of experience more generally; it cannot be denied, he writes, that there is an '*active* element in all consciousness' – a 'spiritual something' within the Self (James 1890, I, 297). It is this 'spiritual something' which I am trying to articulate and which I am arguing makes possible the *bringing forth* of historical meaning.

21. The phrase *being in and towards the world* is a translation of Merleau-Ponty's *être au monde*; as Donald A. Landes notes in his footnotes to his translation of *Phenomenology of Perception*, by using the French proposition *à* (rather than *dans*) Merleau-Ponty 'introduces a rich collection of relational modalities, including "direct towards," "in," "into," "with," "at," and "belonging to," all of which should be heard in his *être au monde*' (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 493, note 22).

22. For a similar conceptualization of 'tradition' to that advance here, see Handler and Linnekin (1984), who argue that tradition is not an objective property but a symbolic process of assigning meaning (Cf., Smith 1982; Shoham 2011).

23. For an analysis of the 'performativity' of the tourist gaze, see Urry and Larsen (2011).

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

ORCID

Mark Gilks ⓘ http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2898-7508

References

Apor, P. 2014. "An Epistemology of the Spectacle? Arcane Knowledge, Memory and Evidence in the Budapest House of Terror." *Rethinking History* 18 (3): 328–344. doi:10.1080/13642529.2014.890371.

Arnold-de-Simine, S. 2013. *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Arrington, N. T. 2014. *Ashes, Images, and Memories: The Presence of the War Dead in Fifth-Century Athens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Biran, A., Y. Poria, and G. Oren. 2011. "Sought Experiences at (Dark) Heritage Sites." *Annals of Tourism Research* 38 (3): 820–841. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2010.12.001.

Bull, A. C., H. L. Hansen, W. Kansteiner, and N. Parish. 2019. "War Museums as Agonistic Spaces: Possibilities, Opportunities and Constraints." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25 (6): 611–625. doi:10.1080/13527258.2018.1530288.

Colley, L. 2003. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*. London: Pimlico.

Collingwood, R. G. 1945. *The Idea of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1994).

Cornwell, B. 1990. *Sharpes Waterloo*. London: HarperCollins.

Cox, J. N. 2014. *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years*. Cambridge Studies in Romanticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crane, S. A. 1997. "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum." *History and Theory* 36 (4): 44–63. doi:10.1111/0018-2656.00030.

Davey, N. 2013. *Unfinished Worlds: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics and Gadamer*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Dilthey, W. 1910. *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Edited by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Vol. Selected works, volume III. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2002).

Dudley, S. 2010. "Museum Materialities: Objects, Sense and Feeling." In *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, edited by S. Dudley, 1–19. London: Routledge.

Dunkley, R., N. Morgan, and S. Westwood. 2011. "Visiting the Trenches: Exploring Meanings and Motivations in Battlefield Tourism." *Tourism Management* 32 (4): 860–868. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2010.07.011.

Fussell, P. 1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2013).

Gadamer, H.-G. 1960. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic (2004).

Gadamer, H.-G. 1964. "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics." In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, edited and translated by D. E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press (2008): 95–104.

Gadamer, H.-G. 1993. "Gadamer in Conversation with Carsten Dutt." In *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, edited and translated by R. E. Palmer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (2001): 33–85.

Gilks, M. 2021. "Aesthetic Experience and the Unfathomable: A Pragmatist Critique of Hermeneutic Aesthetics." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. doi:10.1093/aesthj/ayaa042.

Gjesdal, K. 2014. "History and Historicity." In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, edited by J. Malpas and H.-H. Gander, 299–309. London: Routledge.

Handler, R., and J. Linnekin. 1984. "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious." *The Journal of American Folklore* 97 (385): 273–290. doi:10.2307/540610.

Harari, Y. N. 2005. "Martial Illusions: War and Disillusionment in Twentieth-Century and Renaissance Military Memoirs." *The Journal of Military History* 69 (1): 43–72. doi:10.1353/jmh.2005.0023.

Harari, Y. N. 2008. *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heidegger, M. 1950. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, edited and translated by J. Young and K. Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2002): 1–56.

Hynes, S. 1990. *A War Imagined*. London: Bodley Head.

Jaeger, S. 2017. "Visualizing War in the Museum: Experiential Spaces, Emotions, and Memory Politics." In *Visualizing War: Emotions, Technologies, Communities*, edited by A. Engberg-Pedersen and K. Maurer, 165–182. New York: Routledge.

James, W. 1890. *The Principles of Psychology*. vol. I. New York: Henry Holt and Company (1910).

Jauss, H. R. 1970. "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory. Translated by Elizabeth Benzinger." *New Literary History* 2 (1): 7–37. doi:10.2307/468585.

Jay, M. 2005. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kavanagh, G. 1996. "Making Histories, Making Memories." In *Making Histories in Museums*, edited by G. Kavanagh, 1–15. Making Histories in Museums. London: Leicester University Press.

Keegan, J. 1989. *The Illustrated Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme.* Subsequent ed. New York: Viking Adult.

Malpas, J. 2014. "Introduction: Hermeneutics and Philosophy." In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, edited by J. Malpas and H.-H. Gander, 1–9. London: Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1945. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Translated by Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge (2012).

Miles, S. 2014. "Battlefield Sites as Dark Tourism Attractions: An Analysis of Experience." *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 9 (2): 134–147. doi:10.1080/1743873X.2013.871017.

Mosse, G. L. 1990. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oakeshott, M. 1933. *Experience and Its Modes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Outhwaite, W. 2014. "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences." In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, edited by J. Malpas and H.-H. Gander, 486–487. London: Routledge.

Paris, M. 2000. *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000.* London: Reaktion.

Pearce, S. M. 1994. "Objects as Meaning; or Narrating the Past." In *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, edited by S. M. Pearce 19–29. London: Routledge.

Pears, I. 1992. "The Gentleman and the Hero: Wellington and Napoleon in the Nineteenth Century." In *Myths of the English*, edited by R. Porter, 216–237. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ramsey, N. 2016. *The Military Memoir and Romantic Literary Culture, 1780–1835.* London: Routledge.

Ricœur, P. 2002. "Temporal Distance and Death in History." In *Gadamers Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, edited by J. Malpas, U. Arnswald, and J. Kertscher, 239–255. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Ryan, C., ed. 2007. *Battlefield Tourism: History, Place and Interpretation.* London: Elsevier.

Seaton, A. V. 1999. "War and Thanatourism: Waterloo 1815–1914." *Annals of Tourism Research* 26 (1): 130–158. doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00057-7.

Sebald, W. G. 1998. *The Rings of Saturn.* Translated by Michael Hulse. London: Harvill Press.

Shaw, P. 2002. *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination.* Hampshire: Springer.

Shaw, P. 2017. "Missed Encounters: Stendhal, Sebald and the Return of Waterloo." *Interférences Littéraires/Literaire Interferenties* 20 (June): 13–27.

Shaw, P., and T. Toremans. 2017. "Waterloo and British Romanticism." *Studies in Romanticism* 56 (3): 309–319. doi:10.1353/srm.2017.0013.

Sherratt, Y. 2006. *Continental Philosophy of Social Science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shoham, H. 2011. "Rethinking Tradition: From Ontological Reality to Assigned Temporal Meaning." *European Journal of Sociology* 52 (2): 313–340. doi:10.1017/S0003975611000129.

Skinner, Q. 1990. "Introduction: The Return of Grand Theory." In *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, edited by Q. Skinner, 1–20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, M. E. 1982. "The Process of Sociocultural Continuity." *Current Anthropology* 23 (2): 127–142. doi:10.1086/202797.

Stone, P. R. 2020. "Dark Tourism and "Spectacular Death": Towards a Conceptual Framework." *Annals of Tourism Research* 83 (July): 1–4. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2019.102826.

Thompson, J. B. 1981. *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Uriely, N. 2005. "The Tourist Experience: Conceptual Developments." *Annals of Tourism Research* 32 (1): 199–216. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2004.07.008.

Urry, J., and J. Larsen. 2011. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0.* London: Sage Publications.

Weber, M. 1903. *Roscher and Knies: The Logical Problems of Historical Economics.* Translated by Guy Oakes. New York: Free Press (1975).

Winter, J. 2013. "Museums and the Representation of War." In *Does War Belong in Museums? The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*, edited by W. Muchitsch, 21–41. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.