A free public conference to discuss how society produces, presents, and consumes history beyond official and elite versions of the past.

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Conference Abstracts

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Session 1- Practicing History Beyond the Academy

- Hilda Kean: Critical Public Histories: the role of public historians in the social construction of knowledge

This presentation takes as a starting point the dictum of Raphael Samuel that ‘history is not the prerogative of the historian …. It is rather, a social form of knowledge; the work in a given instance, of a thousand different hands’…’ Accordingly the parameters of Public History are determined neither by the established discourses of ‘History’ - nor by the infrastructure of quality assurance frameworks as exists today in British higher education. Instead, there is a tendency towards trans-disciplinarity and the drawing of concepts and practice from geography, archaeology, anthropology, art, and memory studies. While historians such as Carolyn Steedman or Joanna Sassoon have creatively de-bunked the notion of the supremacy of archives (as opposed to the historian) in the relationship between materials and written outcomes, nevertheless this notion is still strong within conventional academic history. However, if an aspect of Public history is the involvement of people in creating their own histories – rather than simply being the presentation of a given idea of history by academically trained professional historians to ‘the’ public in accessible ways - this means using the material that is available generally to people. This includes ‘material’ in the form of memory and that existing outside public archives, such as family heirlooms or local landmarks or through the discussions of online communities. Public historians should value both new ways of creating meaning and the material that people have within their own homes that might enable them to create links between the past and the present and to create their own histories.

- Andrew Flinn: Histories ‘too important to be left just to professional historians’. Workers’ libraries, archives and museums- yesterday and today

This short paper will examine something of the history of independent working class history-making institutions in the UK including the miner’s libraries, the Marx Memorial library, the Working Class Movement Library and the National Museum of Labour History. It will explore the motivation behind the establishment of such bodies, often a reaction against the lack of workers’ histories in national archives and museums as well as recognition of the significance of history as a resource for organisation and political education, and the determination to carve out an independent space to preserve and tell these histories away from the traditional academic environments of the professional historian. The paper will then describe in brief some of the changes and evolutions these institutions have undergone over the years, responding in fluctuations in the strength of interest in labour movement and working class histories and the necessary challenges of negotiating accommodations with mainstream heritage bodies and professionals. Finally this paper will examine where these bodies stand in respect to other contemporary initiatives, often making use of the possibilities offered by new digital technologies and the web in the continued struggle to articulate new radical, working class perspectives and histories.

- David Ellis: Taking Control of the Past: Grassroots Activism, the Academy and the Community History Movement in Urban Britain, 1970-1990

The community history movement empowered working-class communities to produce their own histories for consumption by the local community. Using oral testimonies and local people’s writings, community history groups wrote the histories of a diverse range of communities, from 1970s Durham mining villages to gay and lesbian Brighton in the 1950s. Community history groups were influenced by the History Workshop movement’s efforts to recover “hidden histories.” However, advocates of community history criticised academic historians for controlling the production of history and for restricting the consumption of history to narrow university-based audiences. Community history groups believed writing history should be a collaborative process. Contributors were treated not as passive sources of information about the past but as active participants in community history projects. The histories were made widely available locally and feedback from the local community was incorporated into follow-up projects. The movement was part of a broader mobilisation in urban Britain over the issue of popular participation in politics and culture after 1968. Community history groups emerged from, and participated in, community action campaigns over housing and planning. The past, like local public services, was to be put under ‘community control.’ The groups used community histories to build community solidarity in support of local campaigns. The paper will examine the works of community history groups like Centreprise in Hackney and Queenspark in Brighton, and the writings of activists Stephen Yeo and Ken Worpole. The movement is a case study in how “unofficial histories” have been produced, consumed and used to support political causes and allows us to historicise ideas surrounding public engagement. Academic historians can learn from the community history movement’s democratic approach to historiography. It offers a model for enabling public participation in the production of history and offers guidance to historians on how to engage meaningfully with the public.
Session 2a- Recovering Forgotten Pasts

- **Alison Ronan**: ‘Recovering’ forgotten women in the anti-war movement in Manchester 1914-1918.

This paper starts a process of restoration. It takes as a starting point the astonishing anti-war feminist networks that were activated in Manchester and the North West after the declaration of war in 1914 and questions how these non-conformist, socialist and suffragist women have been effectively ‘airbrushed’ from the city’s history and, to a large extent, from the history of resistance to the War. In particular it will examine the largely forgotten work of the Manchester branches of the Women’s International League, local branches of the No Conscription Fellowship and the short lived but energetic North West Women’s Peace Crusade in 1917. Examining the complex, overlapping webs of protest reveals geographical pockets of neighbourhood activism and resistance. Central to many of these campaigns was the feisty pacifist and feminist reformer, and Manchester’s first woman councillor, Margaret Ashton (1856-1937) who, along with a number of equally committed women, ensured that these campaigns were underpinned by feminist and pacifist/socialist values and influenced by the pre-war women’s trade union movement, suffrage and women’s rights activism. Almost as a symbol of these women’s ‘eradication’ Ashton’s 70th birthday portrait, commissioned in 1925 by C.P Scott was rejected by the City Fathers because of her pacifism and only re-hung in 2006, after a number of years in the Women’s Union of the University but languishing latterly in the City Art Gallery depository.

- **Kaveri Qureshi**: Punjabi soldiers in the world wars: citizenship and the uses of forgotten history

This paper delves into the uses of history and examines how the enlisting of Indian soldiers – particularly from Punjab – into the British Indian army during the first and second world wars has been memorialized and remembered in contemporary Britain. This issue has become particularly salient in light of the politics of the so-called ‘war on terror’ or ‘new imperialism’, which Paul Gilroy and Vron Ware argue has heightened tendencies towards militarism in British society. Using case studies from the public sphere – remembrance day events, TV documentaries and army recruitment fairs – I argue that Britain’s Punjabi communities have been organizing in order to weave themselves into the national tapestry by memorializing and remembering the role played by Punjabis in the first and second world wars – iconic to the national fantasy, using this forgotten history to demand recognition from the state and stake a claim for citizenship. In the context of the ‘new imperialism’, however, it is not equally possible for Sikh and Muslim Punjabis to argue for their inclusion on the terms of militarized citizenship, and the various chords within the diaspora seem to be increasingly disharmonious, effacing their composite and shared colonial history.

- **Mark Barnard**: The breaking of a taboo or promotion of victimhood? The changing parameters of a German Erinnerungskultur in the wake of Jörg Friedrich’s Der Brand (The Fire) since 2002.

1.4 million tons of bombs fell on more than 1,000 German towns and cities between 1940 and 1945. By the end of the war, the bombings had claimed the lives of at least 500,000 civilians, left seven and a half million people homeless and destroyed innumerable irreplaceable medieval buildings and artefacts. Yet, according to German author Winfried Georg Sebald, it never crossed the threshold of German national consciousness or played any appreciable part in the discussion of the internal constitution of West Germany. That was, however, until the appearance of German historian Jörg Friedrich’s 2002 publication The Fire. Selling 25,000 copies within a few months of publication, The Fire not only represented the country’s first comprehensive depiction of the Allied bombing campaign between 1940-1945, it also provoked numerous assertions and counter-claims that a ‘certain silence’ and former ‘taboos’ have now been broken. Whilst Hamburg and Dresden are perhaps by-words for the bombing campaign, there has been little examination of how the raids were remembered in other towns and cities from the perspective of the generation who had experienced the Second World War as children and adolescents. Focussing on public perceptions of the bombing war in Darmstadt, Hanover and Düsseldorf, this paper examines, in English, the impact of the 60th anniversary of the bombing campaign in the wake of Friedrich’s The Fire on cultural memory. It questions official assertions that there have never been ‘taboos’ or any silence concerning the bombing war. Conversely, it contends that Friedrich has been instrumental in filling a perceived historical void concerning the former unarticulated experiences of the ‘Feuerkinder’ (fire children) and fostering a greater acceptance of the Germans as victims within ‘unofficial’ German historical and cultural discourses. Whilst recognising ‘unofficial histories’ can be exploited for partisan purposes, this paper concludes that a selective ‘Erinnerungskultur’ (remembrance culture) also brings closure by facilitating a more comprehensive and ongoing ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ (coping with the past). Offering an absorbing and informed debate about how German victimhood is being presented among local historians and the media, given the interdisciplinary nature of the study, this paper endeavours to make an original and credible contribution to the fields of ‘People’s History’ and cultural memory studies.
**Katy Beinart**: Market Research (or) Unravelling the Idealized Specter – artists producing history in the public realm

As site-specific art practice has evolved from an individual response to the environmental or historical conditions of a site to a more collaborative practice and the idea of the community as site, artists working in the public realm can increasingly be seen as acting as amateur historians, collecting and re-presenting marginalised histories as ‘public art’. Miwon Kwon argues that the role of artists working with communities has become prey to what Chantal Mouffe calls ‘a closed system of differences’, leading to what Bruce Robbins refers to as an ‘idealised specter’ of community. This can generate, it is argued, a ‘mythic’ homogeneity in that difference, and complex relational processes, become subsumed in the desire for communal coherency. This paper explores ways in which artists working with ‘unofficial histories’ in the public realm might instead provoke difference, unravelling identities and questioning coherence. I argue that this might productively redefine concepts of community and the artist/community relationship to more effectively promote and examine a ‘politics of difference’. Drawing on my recent collaborative art practice with Rebecca Beinart, which combines investigations into our family history and forms of exchange which collect other’s family histories, this work examines how oral history and testimony is collected and used by artists working in the public realm. Using an auto-ethnographic approach which proposed a form of exchange, we resurrected The Darling Salt Pans & Produce Co., (our great-grandfather Woolf’s business) and traded ‘Memory Preservation Salts’ (harvested from the salt pans in Western Cape, South Africa) for memories, stories and objects from passers-by in Brixton Market, London. Whilst the resulting collection of narratives could be seen as constructing a ‘biography of place’, the process of negotiating and collecting these narratives revealed more about the specific histories of site and place. This then generated a secondary and perhaps more important series of exchanges on belonging: the right to tell and collect history; post-colonialism; gender and race.

**Kylo-Patrick R. Hart**: Constructing the ‘Unofficial’ History of HIV/AIDS: Self-Representation in AIDS Documentaries

During the first decade of the AIDS pandemic and beyond, the ‘official’ history of HIV/AIDS, as constructed and communicated by media professionals of all kinds (including print journalists, broadcast journalists, photographers, and many others), readily emphasized an “us” (general population) versus “them” (guilty villains) dichotomy pertaining to the range of individuals who are potentially at risk. In this regard, gay men and intravenous drug users were continually demonized as villains in this health crisis who were to be blamed for AIDS and undeserving of sympathy in relation to their suffering. In contrast to such offerings, the ‘unofficial’ history of HIV/AIDS was constructed, at least in part, by featuring actual individuals with AIDS in documentaries that were created through their own direct participation, in dramatic contrast to media offerings made by cultural “outsiders,” as a meaningful form of alternative representational production. In this presentation, I will explore the phenomenon of self-representation in the AIDS documentaries Fast Trip, Long Drop; Life and Death on the A-List; and Silverlake Life: The View from Here. In the process, I will demonstrate how these alternative sorts of media offerings—which involve the creation of images from within the communities of individuals affected most substantially by the pandemic—resist the ‘official’ tendency to focus on ‘society’s victims’ and turn them into ‘media victims’ as well, instead achieving a more fulfilling sense of accuracy, authenticity, and representational legitimacy in relation to the trajectory of HIV/AIDS and appearing to lay claim to a greater truth about the history of the AIDS pandemic as a result.

**Melissa Bliss**: Hidden Histories: Common land and squatting in Hackney

As an artist I have developed the practice of collaborative community guided walks to reflect aspects of a local area. The walks mimic the traditional guided tour, with a group walking together round a defined route and stopping at number of points to hear something of interest. However at each point the speaker is a different person who meets us or emerges from the group to speak, generally about a personal story. This structure encourages conversation and discussion among people on the walk. The presentation will examine the collaborative community guided walk as a means to reveal and present histories in the context of a specific walk that took place in Hackney, east London in July 2011. The London Fields area has undergone a recent wave of gentrification, with a rapid change in the built fabric and population. But a generation (25–40 years) ago this area was well-known for the large number of squats. Stories about these squats have entered into local folklore. Since then many of the squatted buildings have been rebuilt for housing or sold to developers. The walk, entitled Hidden Histories: Common land and squatting in Hackney, took in places that were squatted for individual and communal housing, public events (like the Lido swimming pool), businesses and a current squat café. It was attended by a large number of people, many of whom used to squat in the area. As the walk progressed it became a place of reminiscence for people looking back to their younger selves. There was also a confrontation with current shop keeper in Broadway Market, the heart of the commercial gentrification. The walk was part of the Hackney Fringe Festival which was of the wider Olympics cultural offering. The author proposed the walk to the Festival as a (oblique) protest against the Olympics.
• **Rosa Ainley:** *Poetics of the Ordinary*: Writing 2 *Ennereale Drive*: unauthorised biography

2* Ennereale Drive: unauthorised biography* (Zero 2011) is a memoir of a 1920s house in northwest London and some members of the family that lived there, and others who didn't. The book sets up and explores architectural narrative and its place in the construction of social, political and personal histories. It analyses the everyday lived experience of housing design through the prism of family narrative, disturbing the boundaries of the imaginary and the real. Observations on the architectural and social history of suburban development of the period are intercut with personal histories: remembered, imagined and fictional. In the process, I am creating another version of memoir, neither family history nor novel, although employing strategies and tropes of both. The book employs a variation on Gaston Bachelard’s 'topoanalysis', the 'systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives'. It recovers the overlooked uniqueness of the everyday, re-presenting it from an altered perspective. 2* Ennereale Drive* charts territory between documented evidence, personal and cultural memory, and association and emotional response; it explores the process and technologies of archiving – what's retrievable, what's 'lost', what's catalogued/accessable. A series of picture texts punctuate the text, straddling the promises of promotional brochures of interwar property developers and speculative housebuilders and selective, contestable narratives of family. I question the veracity accorded to 'documents' produced across institutional, public and private contexts in interdisciplinary practice that allows, to paraphrase Rosi Braidotti, the theorising of fictions and the fictionalising of theory, delivering me to this point of exploring non/fictions – and blurring the distinctions between them. The presentation will consist of readings from the book – which has been described as a poetics of the ordinary – foregrounding representations of histories with critical commentary on the writing process.

• **Morgan Daniels:** *Who is a biting satirist?*

In his major work on the legacy of the 1920s Amazonian 'rubber boom', *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man* (1987), the anthropologist Michael Taussig ruminated on the way in which 'the heavy tone and mystical authority of the official voice of the past is brought down to earth and familiarized with gentle and sometimes saucy wit.' These words have informed much of my recent research on a quite different subject – the effects of broadcast satire in postwar Britain on its main subjects, meaning politicians. The first part of this paper uses this research to make the case for humour as having radical potential, as something which, as Taussig describes, plays with the mysterious authoritative presence of authority, making for a subsurface current of knowledge that cumulatively offers a quite 'other' history of officialdom. What also seems crucial, however, is the role of historical research into humour. For my attempts to stress comedy's role in political meaning-making have, ironically enough, required a conscious (mis)appropriation of 'official' materials – letters from MPs, Cabinet minutes, *Hansard*, and so on. This is surely analogous to joke-work itself, especially satirical joke-work, whereby the well-trodden is reconstellated to sometimes startling effect. Part two of this paper, then, is concerned with the writing of history, and how, like humour, it can all too easily slip into a small-conservative key, reifying regardless of intent. Perhaps in order to de-rail the (admittedly very convincing) 'official voice of the past', we need to be aiming for a sort of satirical mode of history? Indeed, consider the words of Ludwig Feuerbach: *Who is a biting satirist? The one who studies the sources/ From which evil emanates and then displays them to the public*. This sounds much like the historian's job, doesn't it?

• **Catherine Feely:** *From Dialectics to Dancing: Reading, Writing and the Experience of Everyday Life in the Diaries of Frank P. Forster, 1934-8.*

On May 21st 1935, Frank Forster used his diary to record a proposed programme of reading on 'correct thinking', or the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism. Five months later, Frank mused that this reading had marked a true 'turning point' in his life. In reflecting on this particular reading experience, Frank distinguished between the 'large questions, questions of politics, of morals' and 'small everyday questions'. His recent reading, especially of Joseph Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, apparently gave him the confidence to connect the two, and to attempt to practically apply dialectical materialism to the latter as well as the former. Forster, a casual builder's labourer in his mid-twenties, was not alone in finding Dietzgen's philosophy inspirational. His diaries, however, are unique in recording the various and sometimes bizarre ways in which he attempted to apply 'Dietzgenian logic' to the experience of daily life and, particularly, to the pursuit of women. For instance, in one entry in September 1935, Dietzgen is cited as the inspiration for the taking up of dancing in order 'get some experience of sexual association, 'Dietzgenian logic' to the experience of daily life and, particularly, to the pursuit of women. For instance, in one entry in September 1935, Dietzgen is cited as the inspiration for the taking up of dancing in order 'get some experience of sexual association. This paper argues that Forster used his diary to translate his theoretical reading into a form that was more immediately meaningful and practical for him. Far from remaining abstract, the philosophical works which Forster read were mixed with various forms of popular psychology to create an eclectic life philosophy, an individual form of 'self-help'. Forster's diaries, in recording his reading simultaneously with other daily activities – particularly his attendance at political meetings and classes, cinema and dance hall attendance and conversations with women – allow us to trace how his struggle to connect theory to practice was reflected in his day-to-day experience. These notebooks, filled with notes of Frank's 'reading and other activities' should be examined as physical products of his reading experience, as the process of his understanding made material.
The Collective Memory Project: Responses to Eugenics in Alberta, Canada

The Collective Memory Project: Responses to Eugenics in Alberta is an exhibition of contemporary art and archival visual culture that examines the history and legacy of eugenic thought in the province of Alberta. Presented by The Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada, this art show is a continuation of a larger project that addresses the lack remembrance of sterilization, institutionalization, and the unequal distribution of personhood in Canadian society. This history is largely unknown to the Canadian public and has presented an on-going challenge to traditional means of research and advocacy. Due to the highly personal and medical nature of eugenic surgeries, feeder-institutions and review boards, much of the archival materials from this history have either been destroyed or remain under FOIP protection. Research methods and political engagements have had to adapt to these barriers that would otherwise too easily let the history of eugenics fade from memory. It has therefore become necessary to construct a ‘living archive’ out of the intangible engagements of scholars, activists and eugenics survivors. Treating memory as a continually negotiated practice rather than a static ordering of facts, the project provides an intriguing case study of challenging and reforming history through collective remembrance. Juxtaposing historical documents with contemporary art, new taxonomies and significations are constructed through temporal intermingling. Communities too are interwoven through art originating from otherwise isolated groups, including the incarcerated, the disabled and the geographically disparate across the country, creating a new archive of coalitional documents and actions. Drawing from Rob Wilson’s definition of collective memory as a cognitive metaphor that crystalizes agency, The Collective Memory Project seeks to engage its public in an exercise of memory as a political and historical act.

As part of ‘Stories of the World’, a project at the heart of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, a group of young people (aged 14-24) are curating their own public exhibition at Durham University Oriental Museum. Exploring British relations with China between 1500 and the present day, ‘Made in China: Experiences and Exports’ will be unique in combining the Oriental Museum’s internationally significant China collections with archival material, archaeological evidence, historical recreations and oral history testimonies. The exhibition will be defined by an inter-disciplinary approach between collections and techniques, both in its curation and actual display, and aims to challenge the visitor’s perception of the past through its concentration on personal narratives and interpretations (both historical and contemporary) whilst encouraging them to form their own. In doing so, it will bring the interpretations of young people, source and Diaspora communities, and the general public together with those of museum professionals, historians and creative artists, to offer new ways of exploring heritage collections and their wider historical significance. Can we understand historical porcelain better by making porcelain ourselves? How can archival collections provide valuable human narratives and illuminate the historical significance of museum pieces? How can the gap between academic research and public engagement be bridged? This paper will explore the challenges involved in such an undertaking, whether when dealing with potentially contentious topics (such as the Opium Wars) or when combining the competing interpretations of different groups and events. It will examine the use of academic, artistic and sensory means to historical understanding, and the challenges faced when presenting complex historical narratives to the widest possible audience. It will also consider the role of museums in widening participation and public engagement, whilst highlighting the importance of an inter-disciplinary approach across heritage collections and academia to enhance historical understanding.

2007 witnessed the delivery of a significant number of projects and public events in Britain, aimed at commemorating the 200th anniversary of the parliamentary abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. A deeper understanding of the slave trade and its abolition also coincided with a wider acknowledgment of the achievements of people of African descent in the UK and internationally. Looking at my role as originator and curator of the Trading Faces online exhibition (www.tradingfacesonline.com), the paper will offer an opportunity to share with colleagues the experience of researching the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in British performing arts, focussing on the dialogic approach adopted for the curatorial practise, and the purpose of creating an online educational tool for historical engagement and communication outside the academic setting. In particular, with regards to the curatorial approach, a number of issues intrinsic to this subject area will be explored, including the ‘intangible’ quality of the heritage of performance, cross cultural and inter-generational consultation practice, and public engagement. The African practice of ‘Orature’ - which implies a circularity of knowledge and a creative exchange between the performers and the members of the audience - will be referenced in the analysis of the theatre productions which will support the paper to illustrate the nature of black performance as a ‘total artistic act’ and a form of cultural and political resistance.
Jerome de Groot: ‘You tell me at least you’ve been smoking your own cigarettes!’: smoking, pastness and memory in historical film and television

In the opening sequence of Red Riding Trilogy: 1983 (Anand Tucker, 2009) corrupt policemen gather around to discuss their plot. The men are smoking cigars – smoking, in early 21st century British television culture, being a de facto index of recent pastness, something the Red Riding trilogy of films (2009) plays on throughout. Smoking in historical television from Life on Mars (BBC1 2006-2007) to Eric and Ernie (BBC2 film, Jonny Campbell, 2011) is deployed very specifically as an aesthetic adjunct and contextual indicator (particularly after the 2007 smoking ban in England). Smoking as a sign of historical – bodily – difference is also heavily fetishised in Mad Men (HBO, 2007-). During Hunger (Steve McQueen, 2009), Michael Fassbender’s Bobby Sands smokes constantly. In the context of a film about the denial of bodily appetite the deployment of smoke and cigarettes as something signifying the inhalation but not digestion of something insubstantial but significant clearly points the importance of such motifs. Smoking is something which reveals different habitual behaviour and bodily pastness (as a prop pointing out historical difference, as something taken into the body); smoke wreathes the figures in these images, either as smog in offices or individually produced exhalation, and gives an impression of age, unmoving (or unmoved) time, of a certain vagueness of light that might trope nostalgia. It textures the films with something seen and not seen. This paper will consider the way that smoking indicates pastness, look at the reification and fetishisation of the habit in contemporary culture, and use the work of Derrida, Marx and Sande Cohen to attempt to articulate how smoking in historical fictions outlines a position of dissidence and mourning.

Tom Perchard: Hip hop samples jazz: dynamics of cultural memory and musical tradition in the African American 1990s

Sampling is the extraction and collaging of snatches of pre-existing musical recordings, and since hip hop’s beginnings in the late-1970s the technique has been central to that style’s methodology and identity. Early scholarly work on hip hop – published in the mid-1990s by American writers like Tricia Rose, William Eric Perkins and Kyra D. Gaunt – tended to consider sampling as a historically significant practice, one through which the music’s producers constructed memorials to, and continued the traditions of, earlier African American music. But more recently this view has been challenged: in his book Making Beats (2004) Joseph Schloss contends that creative pragmatics, and the search for raw materials, have always been more important to producers than any cultural-historical concerns. In this talk I’ll explore these issues by way of an examination of hip hop in the early-1990s, and specifically the uses that many groups – most notably Gang Starr and A Tribe Called Quest – were then beginning to make of jazz recordings from decades past. Making reference to contemporary interview material, I aim to establish how, between the opposition of tradition and pragmatism, hip hop artists variously, and often simultaneously, described and enacted both continuations of and wariness towards an African American musical heritage.

Debra Ramsay: ‘The #1 Second World War franchise for the next generation’: Videogames, popular culture and the history of World War II

The computer and videogame industry is the fastest growing sector of the entertainment industry and is an integral feature of the contemporary mediascape. Of all conflicts, World War II has dominated videogames since the start of the industry in the 1980s. It is particularly prevalent in the First Person Shooter (FPS), generating large-scale franchises such as Medal of Honor (DreamWorks Int, EA Games, 1999-present) and Call of Duty (Activision, 2003-present). The description of the latter by Bobby Kotick, Activision’s CEO, as ‘one of the most viewed of all entertainment experiences in modern history’ is not mere marketing hyperbole, as this franchise generated $3 billion in profits for the publisher at the close of 2010. Despite the massive online audiences and markets these games command, the First Person Shooter is frequently dismissed as having nothing to offer the history of World War II. Historian Niall Ferguson, for example, admits to ‘hating’ them (New York Magazine, 2006). Focusing particularly on Call of Duty: World at War, I examine the specific kind of historical engagement offered by the First Person Shooter and illuminate how this differs from other forms of visual media. I consider World at War as a simulation which reduces World War II to its basic components - contested spaces and weaponry. Demonstrating that dismissals of the FPS are based on surface readings of visual content and do not take the complexities of actual gameplay into account, I investigate how World at War facilitates connections to aspects of war memory and history obscured by other mediated representations of World War II. Ultimately my goal is to answer the following question: if World War II is so suited to the First Person Shooter, what is the First Person Shooter doing for the history of World War II?