

## Postcommemorative

### Editorial

*Postcommémoratif*

*Redactioneel: Postcommemorative*

### Philippe Mesnard

Translator: Bronwyn Haslam

---



#### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/2977>

DOI: 10.4000/temoigner.2977

ISSN: 2506-6390

#### This article is a translation of:

Postcommémoratif - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/2969> [fr]

#### Publisher:

Éditions du Centre d'études et de documentation Mémoire d'Auschwitz, Éditions Kimé

#### Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2015

Number of pages: 4

ISSN: 2031-4183

#### Electronic reference

Philippe Mesnard, "Postcommemorative", *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire* [Online], 121 | 2015, Online since 01 October 2016, connection on 04 February 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/2977> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.2977>

---

# POSTCOMMEMORATIVE

→ Philippe Mesnard,  
head of the editorial board

**W**hy *postcommemorative*? One may be weary of these post theories, which since the 1980s have not ceased drumming into us that there is an after and that we are already in it. So why launch this neologism? As Marianne Hirsch has underlined, the post also functions like a *post-it* that reminds you of tasks to accomplish: poststructuralism, postmodernism, postmemory.

With 2015 closes a year punctuated by moments related both to the Second World War – the “liberation” of the camps in general and of Auschwitz in particular (27 January 1945) – and the Armenian genocide (24 April 1915). To which are added the battle of Waterloo (18 June 1815) and the Srebrenica massacres (11 July 1995). The previous year was also heavy with the twentieth anniversary of the Tutsi genocide, the seventieth of the Normandy landings, and of course, of the beginning of the 1914-1918 World War, which mobilized the fall entirely. **THE COMMEMORATIONS ARE MATCHED TO MONUMENTS. WHAT REMAINS OF THE COMMEMORATIONS ONCE THEY ARE OVER** and, with one after another, we become used to them? The event past, do these key dates still unlock the meaning that we wanted to fit them with at great expense? Primo Levi already answered this question thirty years ago. Let’s listen to him:

I am ready to accept a certain share of rhetoric; it’s indispensable to living. We need monuments and celebrations and, etymologically, *monumento*, monument, has the same root as *ammonimento*, admonition. But there needs to be a counterpoint [...] that’s what I’ve tried to achieve.

Beyond the requirements of political representation to which they seem to be subordinate, monuments and commemorations respond to the need to mark out the spaces where we evolve and which suffer today from an acute lack of markers. But it would be deluding

ourselves to believe that this would be enough to know where we are and where we’re going, all the more so in a Europe today experiencing its fragility. When many European territories have waking dreams of separating or of separatism, it would be wise not to let ourselves be deceived by the consensual image of commemorations of past disasters. The “highly symbolic” undertaking of the Ring of Remembrance in the Notre Dame de Lorette cemetery, inaugurated with pomp and circumstance by François Hollande on 11 November 2014, is a flagrant illustration of these memorial lures. Inside the ring, on magnificent panels giving off copper reflections, are the names of 579,606 soldiers, all nationalities combined, dead on the front at Nord-Pas-de-Calais during World War I. This “all nationalities combined”, as Annette Becker quite rightly underlines, remains a historiographic absurdity. Because the vast majority of these soldiers, even if life on the front quickly exhausted them, remained motivated by the desire to skewer the enemy, or to believe that they could, for the glory of their homeland.

The *postcommemorative*, to be effected already even as the ceremonies are still in full swing, would bring the counterpoint evoked above by Primo Levi. Rather than combining memories into just one, which would resemble nothing if not a consensual platitude – a current trend – too distanced from the life of societies, **IT WOULD BE BETTER TO MAINTAIN THESE MEMORIES IN THEIR DIFFERENCES AND TO LINK THEM IN A DYNAMIC AND MULTIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP**, to take up Michael Rothberg’s term. The multidirectionality of these relationships should then be understood not only as the observation of the workings of the memories between themselves but as having a stake in an ethical project where the diversity of European identities could come about, without imagining that they could all merge together. Beyond the ostentatious pretensions of its rulers, Europe is a vast memorial laboratory in which the play and the stakes of identities are worked by the relationships of its societies – not reducible to just one – to their respective pasts. ■

Translation: Bronwyn Haslam