

War, Cinema, Prosthetic Memory and Popular Understanding: A Case Study of the Korean War

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Many returned soldiers recollect their wartime experience as the highlight of their lives. The phenomenon may be sourced to the nostalgia that springs from the soldier's dissatisfaction with the post-war present, as Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase suggest (1989).¹ Or, it may stem from the powerful emotional charge that soldiers experience during wartime when ordinary lives intersect with great events. Samuel Hynes has identified the latter and the sense of hyper-meaning it engenders as the spur that prompted veterans, including what he calls the 'one-book men,' to put pen to page (1998: xiv). The veterans' memories of the Korean War, however, neither fit Shaw and Chase's explanation, nor had the outcome suggested by Hynes. This is the case even though US veterans of the Korean War were deeply embittered by their post-war treatment by the US government; and, most assuredly, they were aware that the conflict in which they were engaged had international ramifications. Instead, until the last couple of decades, the stance of many Korean War veterans has been to avoid any reference at all to that war or to their own involvement in it.

In this essay I explore the function of cinema in influencing popular understandings of the Korean War. I argue that, until very recently, the national and individual narratives drawn on that war experience functioned in a 'memory void' (Irwin-Zarecka 1989) whose most notable characteristic was the absence of the veterans' own voices, neither

¹ Stephen Garton (2004) suggests that there are limitations in applying this view of nostalgia to the war recollections of Australian diggers from the Great War.

heard through a veterans' organization nor asserted by outspoken family members.² In the aftermath of other, more typical, twentieth century military conflicts, 'memory activists,' to use Carol Gluck's term (2007), have occupied the arenas in which national and personal narratives of the war were formed and re-contested. By and large, the motivation for such memory activism was the commitment to keep at the forefront of public discussion the recognition that veterans had made great sacrifices for the nation and therefore were entitled to respect and compensation, a campaign that has been led strongly by the families (Franklin 1993; Clarke 1979). In marked contrast, only in the last couple of decades has the tenor of official policy and national discourse shifted to incorporate the Korean War and to pay homage to its veterans by recognizing in them the highly valorized qualities of the US fighting man (Keene 2011).³ Against this post-war landscape, Hollywood cinema played a particular role. Films about the Korean War used a set of plots, characters and symbols that offered a powerful explanatory possibility. Narrative and plot can serve as the container that gives shape to fragmentary, and often inchoate, public and private recollection, while providing the templates of meaning and the language with which to evaluate the wartime past.⁴

The first two parts of my discussion lay out briefly the conjunction of circumstances that transformed the conflict in Korea into the 'forgotten war' and then examine the parallels with other wars in which the articulation of public and private memory has been similarly complex. The third part of the essay examines the notion of cinema as the enabler of 'prosthetic memory' (Landsberg 2004) and the uses and the shortcomings of this concept in understanding official and vernacular US memory of the Korean War. While offering no omnibus solution to the matter of war, memory, cinema and popular understanding, the essay concludes with some suggestions for possible directions in future study.

Korea as the 'forgotten war'

In his classic study of war and literary memory, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, Samuel Hynes excludes the Korean War, even though nearly as many US

² Families have provided the drive behind the POW–MIA (Prisoner of War–Missing in Action) movement and, combined with the Vietnam Veterans' organizations, have made the Vietnam veteran a recognized figure on the US political landscape.

³ It is ironic perhaps that the uncovering of battle atrocities by US soldiers in Korea has coincided with those soldiers' inclusion in the pantheon of national military commemoration.

⁴ Keith Tribe (1977) examines the transitivity between history and memory and the role of historical films in the process.

soldiers died in combat in Korea as did later in Vietnam. For Hynes the conflict in Korea ‘came and went without glory and left no mark on American imaginations’ (1998: xiii–xiv). The fact that John Wayne never made a Korean War film, even though in celluloid, and in life, he came to stand for the all-’American’ war hero, and ‘screen-fought’ in nearly every US conflict at home and abroad, is perhaps part-proof of Hynes’s claim (Edwards 1997: 25). The Korean War was not included in the history curriculum studied in US schools, and until 1985 there was no specific Korean War veterans’ organization to function as the key advocate on the veterans’ affairs.⁵

Perhaps not surprisingly, the sobriquet most commonly used by returned soldiers and commentators in referring to Korea has been that it was the ‘forgotten war.’ Typical descriptors evoke the same quality: ‘the invisible,’ ‘the unknown,’ ‘the no-name war’; ‘the war that nobody wanted’; and even ‘the war that never was’ (Edwards 2000: 27–39).⁶ Despite the ubiquitousness of these tags, a far better concept to encompass the complex nature of the war’s absence from national commemoration and public discourse is Iwona Irwin-Zarecka’s notion of a ‘memory void.’ She employs the term in her analysis of how, in Poland, the memory of the historic presence of Jewish culture has disappeared, even though for centuries Jews had been a part of the Polish nation. The memory void is not a negative vortex. Unlike a planetary black hole that sucks matter and material into oblivion, Irwin-Zarecka’s void is a space in which parts of the past have disappeared to be replaced by competing pieces of information. As a consequence, when we attempt to understand ‘historical silences’ we are ‘forced to listen to a great deal of noise’ (2007: 115). To apply these ideas to understanding the Korean War, then, I am suggesting that Hollywood cinema has been a major source of the ‘noise’ associated with explanations of the veterans’ part in the war.

Why was the Korean War forgotten? Or to theorize the question more precisely, why had the arenas and agencies of memory articulation which, among others, Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper have identified as the places where war memory is forged and contested, not functioned for the Korean War (Ashplant *et al.*

⁵ The founders of *Graybeards*, the newsletter of a section of Korean veterans, have emphasized that they found dispiriting the ignorance of many school children, including their own offspring, about Korea. See also Fleming and Kaufman (1990) and Edwards (1997: 22–23). The Korean War Veterans’ Association was founded in 1985, three decades after the end of the war (Norris 2003: 26–27).

⁶ Even in the fine, scholarly study by John Bodnar (1996) there is no entry for Korean War in the index and only a brief reference to it in the text.

2004: 16–32)?⁷ And why, in official and private narratives of the war, were the original recollections of that experience consigned to a ‘memory void’ to be replaced by different pieces of information that connected up into a different narrative. In answering these questions, other wartime examples in which the articulation of post-war memory has been similarly complex can shed some light.

Southern Irish veterans of World War One who had been volunteers in the British Expeditionary Forces were extremely reticent later about it; they were chary of being found out of step with the intense nationalism of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Fein. Rather than risk the possibility of community disapprobation, these old soldiers simply suppressed the memory of their earlier pro-British involvement and spoke no more about that part of their lives (Leonard 1997). A similar example comes from the *Malgré-Nous*, French citizens in Alsace and Moselle conscripted into the German Army in World War Two. Despite what they saw as their lack of choice as military draftees, the stories of the *Malgré-Nous* have never been part of the national narrative of victimhood associated with the German occupation of France. As a consequence, until quite recently, these French citizens of Alsace and Moselle have kept quiet about their lives during World War Two (Thatcher 2011).⁸

The example of the Algerian War is highly germane as well. The French veterans organization, Fédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants d’Algérie-Maroc-Tunisie (FNACA), has used various strategies in a vain attempt to overcome their invisibility by reinserting the war event and their own part of it into the French national imagination. Antoine Prost (2000) and Martin Evans (1997a) offer complementary analyses of the process and the reasons for the veterans’ lack of success.⁹ For Prost, the ‘social framing’ of individual and collective memory is the decisive factor. He sets the ‘un-remembered’ Algerian War and its veterans and victims within the dense landscape of French war memory and the plethora of constituent groups vying to foreground their own stories. He also highlights the teleological power of chronology whereby the war for Algerian

⁷ They argue that war memory is always in a state of contestation between families, veterans’ groups and the state and, one could add, literary and cinematic producers.

⁸ The Bordeaux trial in 1954 of the perpetrators of the massacre at Oradour found that fourteen of the twenty-one German SS responsible were Alsatian conscripts, a fact that counteracted the notion of Alsations as German victims (Prost 2000: 174–75).

⁹ Interestingly Evans (1997b) notes that the French veterans have tried to apply some of the strategies of the US Vietnam veterans’ organization that have been so effective in creating the image of the Vietnam vet as a distinctive figure on the US political and cultural landscape. See FNACA’s own website for details of its activities (Fédération Nationale 2005).

independence has been occluded by the looming presence of World War Two and the powerful national myths it generated. In Prost's view, underlying the lack of support at home for France's military intervention to stop Algerian independence was a transfigured discourse about World War Two victims and perpetrators. For many French citizens, the image of Algerians resisting the French Army resonated with the powerful and recent example in which Frenchmen and women in their own homeland had been honoured as patriots and national heroes in recognition of the terrible depredations they suffered in resisting the Nazi occupiers.

Prost's social framing offers much when applied to the Korean War. In a similar way, World War Two and the victorious GI provided the foil for the US soldier in Korea. In the Pacific War, US soldiers, well nourished, properly equipped and free citizens of a democracy, routed the evil Japanese and freed the down-trodden denizens of Imperial Nippon. In Europe, the US GIs came as liberators from the New World, bringing with them a refreshing vitality and the certainty of victory.¹⁰ Unlike these larger than life figures, the US soldiers slogging it out on the Korean Peninsula cut poor figures. They were immured in a war that at the ceasefire left Korea divided almost exactly as it had been three years before, when the fighting had begun.

Martin Evans identifies four constituent elements that determine the valence of a particular war in public perception and recall (1997). It is useful to assess the working of these factors when applied to Korea. Firstly, in Evans's template, remembered wars tend to possess a 'temporal coherence.' That is, there are clear chronological boundaries to delineate the start and the end of the conflict. In Algeria this was not so. Similarly, in Korea, the war was never declared, remaining officially categorized as a 'Police Action.' The political reasoning behind this was that it allowed President Truman to bypass the US Congress and commit troops to South Korea thereby avoiding the possibility that the Congressmen would vote the war down. For veterans, the

¹⁰ Not just in the Hollywood version. European cinema immediately after the war depicted the US GI, well nourished and fully equipped, as an emissary from the future. In Rossellini's 1945 *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome Open City*), Pina the virtuous and long-suffering heroine plaintively asks Don Pietro whether *americani* really exist. And in *Paisà* (1946) Rosellini tracks the contact between Americans and Italians; in one episode the US soldiers' boots are the point of contact between the GI and the young boy from the Naples slum. Such portrayals continued in later films as well. In *La notti di San Lorenzo* (1982; *The Night of the Shooting Stars*), for example, the Taviani brothers' message could not be clearer: the half of the village who head off to find the GIs, the agents of New World health and virtue, are saved; the villagers too fearful to leave the old life in the village are destroyed.

ramifications of this decision were considerable: it complicated the award of combat medals and left veterans resentful that the headstones placed over the US dead in combat on the Korean Peninsula could indicate only name, rank and date of death. After some protest, the word 'Korea' was permitted, but 'Korean War' was proscribed (Piehler 1995: 157).¹¹

Among the historians of the conflict, disagreements about exactly when the war began have fuelled the division between the so-called 'orthodox' and the 'revisionist' historians. The former argue that the war began with the arrival of North Koreans across the 38th parallel in 25 June 1950, in an aggressive act that provoked the despatch of UN forces. Revisionist scholars, most notably the University of Chicago historian, Bruce Cumings, argue that the conditions for the civil war began in response to the partition of the nation in August 1945 (2005: 237–67).

Much like the Algerian War, too, there is no hard and fast agreement about when the Korean conflict ended. The haggling over an armistice began in mid-1951 but was not finalized until mid-1953. And even then the signatories were the USA, for the UN forces, and China for the Communist forces. The key adversaries, North and South, signed no agreement with each other. With the intense militarization in North and South, both Korean nations have galvanized their populations by using the threat of war, which in both places is at the core of national identity and the nation state. The USA has never left Seoul and, in the same way, China and the Soviet Union continued their involvement with Pyongyang. Most importantly of all, perhaps, there was no clear winner. Despite three bloody years of conflict the dividing line between North and South Korea barely shifted.

Evans and Prost both underline the absence of sacralized battlefields as a notable factor in the public oversight of the Algerian war. Korea is similarly bereft. With no Verduns and no terrain to equal the Somme—many of the bloody Korean combat confrontations took place north of the 38th parallel—Korea has lacked the sites of memorial commemoration where over decades public memory could coalesce. Although the South Korean government has created war memorials in Seoul and Pusan, they have never been successful in attracting the non-Korean visitors that the monuments and cemeteries have enjoyed on the western front in the Great War or as have the combat sites in World War Two.

¹¹ Australian veterans from Korea have also complained bitterly that the official designation as a 'police action' has denied them the combat medals that have been the automatic right of Australian veterans from other wars. For Australia's part in the war, see Trembath (2005).

In a very important sense, however, the Korean War is unlike the Algerian War. The Korean conflict has not lacked a ‘consensual imagery,’ a factor that Evans and Prost regard as fundamental in public memory formation. Indeed the solidity of the image of the Korean combatant has dogged the Korean veterans’ movement. Just as World War One conjures up a muddied soldier in the trenches, and a khaki-clad and helmeted GI in a jeep epitomizes World War Two, the Korean War evokes the figure of a prisoner of war: emaciated, defeated and—when mediated through Cold War fears—likely to be untrustworthy, and possibly even brainwashed to be a communist sympathiser.

The most notable feature of the Korean War was the high proportion of soldiers who were taken into captivity. Between 1950 and 1953, some 7,100 US soldiers became prisoners of war. In those desperate conditions, the death rate for US prisoners was thirty eight percent, nearly four times higher than that of their counterparts in World War Two (Davis 2000: 7).¹² In general, the POW is a problematic figure for official military discourse and in the popular perception of military events. Prost catalogues the dispiriting fact that during World War Two French POWs were always distrusted by French veterans who suspected that their POW comrades had preferred surrender to combat.¹³ The prisoner of war is the antithesis of the fighting man: the POW is defeated, weak, emaciated and dependent for survival on the enemy. As well, captivity is a feminizing process: the transformation from soldier to prisoner involves the loss of body mass and the consignment to serve the rest of the war sealed off from combat behind barbed wire. In a masculinist military ideology the imprisoned can retain the soldierly mien by escaping; and, in war literature and cinema, narratives of escape constitute a whole genre. Perhaps the quintessential example is Jean Renoir’s movie *La grande illusion* (1937). As the career French officer, the aristocrat Captain Boldieu states: ‘just as the tennis court is for playing tennis, and a horse is for riding, a prisoner of war camp is for escaping from.’ And this is exactly what the heroic group of ordinary

¹² In the first months of captivity the ratios were much higher. Between 25 June 1950 and 27 July 1953, 1,789,000 US troops were sent to serve in Korea, of whom some 34,000 were killed, 103,000 wounded and more than 8,000 were reported unaccounted for. In the course of the war, of the 7,000 US servicemen captured, almost 3,000 perished. Of Koreans, three million were killed, five million were left homeless in the South, and half a million civilians in the North met their deaths as a result of US bombing (Young 2001; ‘US Military Korean War Statistics’ 2010).

¹³ Though undoubtedly victims of the war, French POWs, unwelcome in the established associations of returned soldiers, eventually formed their own separate veterans’ organization (Prost 2000: 173). Australian POWs returning from Japanese captivity were often accused of being ‘quitters.’

French soldiers, interned as POWs of the Germans, proceed to do.¹⁴ That it was impossible for foreign POWs to escape in North Korea in no way lessened the popular imperative that they should have done so.¹⁵

In the case of US POWs, it was not simply a matter of representation. Their identity and integrity in North Korean captivity was compromised by the fact that, for whatever reason, a good number of them were drawn into the sorts of activities that had been rare in previous wars. The American Monitoring Service picked up more than 250 broadcasts made by American POWs praising communism and castigating the capitalism of their homeland. Many signed Peace Pledges and wrote articles that named the USA as the prime cause of the war. This behaviour caused consternation at home and was a source of embarrassment to families and veterans after the war. On their return to the USA, every POW was interrogated on the ships that brought them back. Many were passed through two and three levels of interrogation panels and, once back on home soil, rafts of files were passed on to the FBI to collect further testimony. In some cases, FBI agents were still dogging certain individuals well into the 1970s.¹⁶ The fear was that in a cold war of ideologies, communists were easily able to ‘brainwash’ US prisoners.

The daily press during and after the war referred to US soldiers as suffering from ‘give-up-itis,’ a condition described as a contagious tendency to quit and die under fire. And it was attributed to the weakness of the society in which these men had been raised.¹⁷ The responsibility for this supposedly lamentable state of affairs, so many claimed, was a combination of the soft life of youth after 1945 and their having been emasculated by an overbearing ‘Momism.’ As a popular book of the time explained, the ethos of the spineless sissy had become predominant with the ‘electrification of the American home’

¹⁴ Jay Winter (2001) notes that *La grande illusion* was the first choice of French war veterans for films to be placed in a French museum to World War One.

¹⁵ It is important to point out the material differences between US prisoners in North Vietnam and those held in North Korea. US POWs in Hanoi were predominantly flyers, older than the general cohort of US soldiers in Vietnam, well educated and had occupied senior positions of command. Equally importantly, many were blessed with outspoken and assertive families who had access at officer levels to the military hierarchy. The Korean veterans were younger and their educational levels were low; in fact many had joined up in 1950 because the military offered the only jobs available. Carrying no clout at home, their families were poor and unused to speaking out. For detailed biographies of the ex-POWs among these men, see the interrogation reports cited in the footnote below.

¹⁶ See the files archived in the Records of the Office of Judge Advocate General (Army) (1995).

¹⁷ In one strand of the debate about the causes of these cultural shortcomings, responsibility was sheeted home to single mothers who had raised boys to be sissies. See Robin (2001), especially chapter 8.

(Wylie 1955: 199). With household appliances replacing housework, mothers in the USA had become obsolete. Left with no activities in which to expend pent up female energy, women found relief by interfering in the lives of their children, especially the young males (215).¹⁸

Eugene Kinkead, in an article in *The New Yorker* from 26 October 1957, alerted readers to what he warned was ‘something new in American history.’ The Korean conflict had brought the ‘wholesale breakdown of morale and the wholesale collaboration with the captors’ (Kinkead 1959: 10). In previous wars, according to Kinkead, no matter the ‘rigors of the camps,’ a ‘respectable number of prisoners’ managed to escape. Thus, the failures of US prisoners in Korea demonstrated the breakdown of the ‘entire cultural pattern, which produced these young American soldiers’ (1959: 15).¹⁹ His concerns were echoed strongly within the military. After much analysis based on the information collected from the hundreds of interrogations of returning Korean POWs, Eisenhower in 1955 introduced a Military Code of Conduct. It laid down five principles of behaviour for soldiers in captivity, the first two being: try to resist; and try to escape.²⁰

Many returning US prisoners from Korea resented their treatment in the mandatory interrogations they experienced on the homebound journey. Not surprisingly, too, others were embittered by the lengthy clearance procedures they endured before back pay and service pensions were paid. Even more painful, if the POW’s own accounts are any indication, was the general indifference to their wartime travails, at the worst bordering on mistrust, that too often characterised their reception at home. Confronted with such a dispiriting state of affairs, a great many ex-POWs and repatriated veterans simply chose a strategy of self-preservation. They spoke as little as possible about the Korea war and their own part in it. These ex-POWs attempted, often at the expense of their future mental wellbeing, to excise from memory that part of their lives that constituted Korea.

¹⁸ Wylie’s book struck a deep chord. Adam Zweiback points out that it was reprinted twenty times between 1942 and 1955 (1998: 348). The need to explain the dissatisfaction of suburban women in the USA prompted Betty Friedan to write *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Friedan’s feminist solution to obsolete housewifery and motherhood was to urge women to use their energy to leave home and seek paid work in the public domain.

¹⁹ Reputable psychologists and various committees of professionals within the Department of Defense denied there had been brainwashing; but these expert opinions did little to assuage popular belief that communists possessed sinister powers of mind and thought control. Also, the scientific denials of brainwashing had the perverse effect of highlighting the supposed poor calibre of the men themselves as the reason for their failure.

²⁰ The others were: make no ‘deals’; love your (compatriot who is) brother; establish seniority and follow it. For discussion of the significance of these ‘first principles’ of combat and captivity, see Mayer (1957).

Instead they tried to take up the threads of their pre-war lives as though their Korean sojourn had never happened.²¹

Cinema as prosthetic memory

Within the void surrounding the reticence of the returned Korean veterans, it is interesting to look at Hollywood's potential to construct a coherent popular memory of the war.²² Alison Landsberg has coined the term 'prosthetic memory' for what she posits is a new form of cultural memory (2004).²³ In it the 'new technologies of mass consumption' have enabled the creation of affective experience that can create a 'bodily memory,' even though its possessor has not lived through the original event. Landsberg surveys a range of enabling modalities, including the contemporary museum and the historical reenactment, but in this essay the application of the concept to historical cinema is relevant. The phenomenon of reinscribed memory is not new. Several decades ago, Roland Barthes identified the circular process whereby subsequent memories are laid down and reinscribed over existing ones (1975). Film theorists have long known, too, that the viewer's exposure to the screened experience carries a powerful emotional charge. Almost all cinemagoers (and, indeed, it is one of the addictive qualities of the medium) experience the out-of-body transcendence that occurs when the viewer's own self is engulfed by the events on the screen and, unshackled from the quotidian realm, left free to share the highs and lows of life with the movie characters.²⁴ Cinema viewing is a somatic experience engaging the sense of sight and sound and frequently—in happiness, horror and sexual arousal—the body's autonomic, physical response. These bodily experiences take place in what is sometimes called 'transferential space,' but more straightforwardly can be understood as the transformation that occurs when

²¹ Carlson (2002) interviewed these reserved and reticent men with skill and sensitivity and teased out many of their life testimonies. In the foreword to a book co-written with a US POW in Korea (Bassett & Carlson 2003), Carlson pulls no punches in describing these ex-prisoners as the 'most maligned victims of all American wars' and that after the treatment they have received they are legitimately suspicious of the motives of those who profess interest in their wartime experiences. See also my discussion of the trauma engendered by self-censorship (2011).

²² It is interesting to note that FNACA approached the great French film director Bertrand Tavernier to make *La guerre sans nom* (1992) that draws on the first person oral testimonies of their members. It is hard to know if the film achieved the hoped-for objective of increasing the understanding of the veterans' wartime contribution and their place in the national wartime narrative.

²³ See also Landsberg's analysis of an embodied Holocaust memory unhooked from the survivor memories of the living (1997).

²⁴ Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) plays with the notion of the possibility of the viewer crossing the boundaries between real life and the fictional world on the screen. And it was exactly to prevent this slippage between the real and the imagined that Bertold Brecht employs techniques of distanciation in order that the audience will understand that the stage offers exemplars of life and political choices that must separately be achieved by the viewer's own struggle in the real world.

watching a movie brings an epistemological shift in personal subjectivity or political and social understanding. This is when the viewer's own previous knowledge intersects and is transformed by the new knowledge from the world on the screen. For the individual experiencing it, a private epistemological transformation may be pleasurable but is not necessarily so. Alistair Thompson has reported the unease of Anzac veterans from the Great War when their own privately recollected wartime experiences did not accord with Peter Weir's 1981 depiction of Australian soldierly life in *Gallipoli* (Thompson 1994: 25).

Landsberg's 'prosthetic memory' includes the ideas above but as well suggests that new memories, what I have tagged as the outcome of a cinema-derived epistemological shift, can circulate widely and become part of the 'personal archive of experience' of a great many individuals who have not themselves seen the film, or any other modality of memory generation. She offers the example that the modern technologies of mass media have created a new, shared (prosthetic) memory of 'American'-ness that has been a positive force in easing the incorporation of a series of new immigrant and African-American cohorts into the 'American' nation. Perhaps Landsberg is overly optimistic in concluding that because the new, shared memory is not anchored in the ownership of any particular ethnic group or generation, prosthetic memory has the potential to create a more open and inclusive society.²⁵ Without diminishing the originality and usefulness of her prosthetic paradigm, it is probably closer to the mark to see prosthetic memory as a generic process that might as equally serve propagandists and xenophobes as those who aspire to inclusivity and internationalism.

Before applying some of these ideas to Hollywood's depiction of the Korean War, it is worth noting that there were not a great many films made about the war.²⁶ This in turn may have strengthened the impact of those films that did circulate, as fewer versions reduced the competing cacophony within the 'noise' that filled the memory void surrounding the Korean War. I examine only two of the best known Korean War movies

²⁵ For Landsberg's optimism about the possibilities of the process, see the epilogue to *Prosthetic Memory* (2004: 141–55).

²⁶ David Slocum has identified 91 films (2006: 6). Edwards notes that no more than three dozen films were made during the war and probably no more than 100 have been made about the conflict. These figures are in stark contrast with the more than 500 movies made about World War Two between 1940 and 1945, and the great number made during the early 1950s, exactly while the Korean War was being fought (Edwards 1997: vii).

with a view to seeing how they might construct, whether as prosthesis or not, a popular understanding of the Korean conflict.

Without a doubt, Frank Sinatra is the best-known Korean War veteran for his portrayal of the hero in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), the film directed by John Frankenheimer that was a box office hit when released and subsequently has retained a popular, if not cult, following. The story in broad brush is widely known even by those who have not seen the movie and, in an effect that accords with Landsberg's theory, *The Manchurian Candidate* has become a term in the lexicon of Cold War language. The Sinatra-figure and his travails are compressed in popular discourse to stand in for the potential consequences in the struggle against sinister communist forces. As Major Bennett Marco, Sinatra played the repatriated ex-POW who is plagued by flashbacks of disturbing incidents. Finally he figures out that his fragmentary memories are of a shocking event that indeed occurred during the communist brainwashing sessions that he and his unit endured in a POW camp in Korea. By sheer strength of will Sinatra's character has held on to his pre-war identity, at the core of which is loyalty to 'America' and the US Army. He realizes that the communist goons in his nightmares have also programmed his POW buddy, Sergeant Raymond Shaw, in order to turn him into an automaton bent on killing the US president. Sinatra sets out on a desperate quest to find Shaw and abort the communists' malignant mission. The strength of the Sinatra-character's patriotism and determination is there for all to see when he spurns a sexual dalliance with Eugenie Rose Chaney (played by Janet Leigh) because it might deflect him from his patriotic task.

Shaw's mother, played by Angela Lansbury, is a domineering 'Mom,' an exemplar of the type that supposedly had jeopardized the US family in the 1950s. Lansbury's character has hatched a diabolical scheme intended to ensure that her son is recognized as a Korean War hero, which then will aid her master plan to place her second husband—a downtrodden weakling who parrots Senator Jo McCarthy—in line for nomination as US president. In an extraordinary development, it is revealed that Lansbury's Mom-figure is actually a secret Communist agent who has masterminded the assassination of the President by the brainwashed veteran so that Shaw's stepfather will take over the White House. With Shaw's mother exercising the real power, the communists will be in command. In a suspense-filled finale Sinatra's Marco finds Shaw

in a box high above the national political convention, the sights of his high-powered rifle focussed on the president and his party on the podium far below. When the fateful shot is fired, however, instead of assassinating the president, Shaw's mother and her husband fall dead on the stage. The reassuring message, presumably, is that in the end patriotism will override brainwashing. An equally valid reading may be that the only way to be free of evil, overbearing Moms is to shoot them. In either case, the audience is relieved that the two ex-Korean POWs have survived the horror of being brainwashed and returned to rid the USA of its implacable communist enemy.

In a different, but equally well-known, vein is the 1959 combat film *Pork Chop Hill*, directed by Lewis Milestone. Based on a true wartime incident, it was made with the cooperation of the US Department of Defense. The field commander, played wonderfully by Gregory Peck, leads a small infantry unit ordered to hold Pork Chop Hill that is besieged by a teeming force of Chinese soldiers. The US soldiers have been ordered on this mission even though it has no military importance except that holding off the Chinese Army in some way or another will help the US negotiations in Pyongyang. The soldiers under Peck's command (as will any fair-minded viewer) consider that they are being carelessly abandoned to slaughter. Predictably, Gregory Peck's character is a patriotic soldier and a commander with integrity. He obeys the orders that he has been given. Folksy and honourable, he keeps his men on track even though they, and he, know that they are in a fatal predicament.

The movie tracks individual responses to the danger. The US unit is constantly bombarded with Chinese radio broadcasts, from male and female broadcasters, urging them to give up and cross the lines to join their class brothers. There is a black GI who gives signs of unpatriotic intentions: self-interest in survival rather than unswerving commitment to combat. His behaviour suggests that the communists' radio appeal has found its mark. He hides in the scrub and it seems that he is preparing to cross into enemy territory. Peck as commander pulls him back into line and magnanimously gives him another chance to show his patriotism by putting his life on the line for his country. The African-American rises to the occasion and fights fearlessly in a terrible Chinese onslaught. But the whole incident is unsettling. The subtext of the narrative signals that probably when Peck turns his back or is too tired to be vigilant, this African-American GI will be off across the lines to join the Chinese. Although it is impossible to know

what might have been the effect of the political context at home on both the director and the contemporary viewer, at the time of the film's release, the FBI and the Judge Advocate General were still combing through the files of ex-POW repatriates, collecting extra oral testimonies from returned veterans with a view to prosecution.²⁷ Another archetypal character, and probably also instantly recognizable, is the Japanese-American 'retread' from World War Two. We learn that he is one of the Fighting 42nd. The only Japanese-American unit permitted in World War Two, they went on to be ferocious and highly distinguished fighting men. In *Pork Chop Hill* he is fearless, patriotic and utterly reliable in combat and in command. An additional underlying message of the film, that most likely would have been picked up by the US audience, emphasises the valour of the World War Two veteran in contrast with what is highlighted as the wavering uncertainty of the US soldier in Korea.

Conclusion

Certainly, cinema offers stories that explore 'central issues of popular experience and consciousness,' as Peter Sjolyst-Jackson points out in a study of British and Norwegian films about the Second World War (2004). It is also the case that cinema narratives are containers for the organization of private memory. Landsberg, with her notion of 'prosthetic memory,' however, goes further. She argues that film is a modality of mass communication with the power to create collective memories that are unhooked from the process of screen viewing. All of this is clearly useful, and intuitively makes a good deal of sense. I have flagged the ways in which the memory void caused by the documented reticence of ex-Korean POWs may provide a space for the articulation of popular messages about the Korea War that are derived from cinema. There are, however, real and insurmountable theoretical drawbacks if this approach to cinema and popular understanding is thought to constitute the whole explanation.

The relationship between popular film and social memory is complex and hard to disentangle. Sue Harper raises this point in relation to British films during World War Two (1997: 163). However, her concerns, mostly with memory, take her away from

²⁷ This is not the place to go into detail, but it would be misleading not to point out that of the 2,281 intelligence reports on individuals marked in 1954 as possible collaborators, and, therefore needing further attention, in the end only 192 men were charged with serious offences. Of those only 68 were dishonourably discharged. Trauma and tribulation, however, were experienced by all those men and their families. Whether innocent or not, they were subject to the abrasive intrusion of official surveillance and heavy-handed scrutiny (Keene 2011).

what I see as the core problem. She is unhappy with the tag ‘popular,’ which she suggests is too close to notions of ‘folk’ memory and also to Foucault’s idea that the adjective signifies narratives suppressed in the hegemonic discourse. Harper’s preference is for ‘mass memory’ because she can then refigure her concern to ask about the ‘precise relationship between commercially successful films and the mass audience’s sense of national identity and interest’ (1997: 164–66). Her methodological response to this important question, however, is to take an empirical approach that looks at British film attendance with the presumption that it will provide insight into which films drew large audiences, from which she can conclude that their filmic messages had broad appeal. As useful as this may be, it in no manner reconciles the main problems: the gap between knowing the story of the film, and even the surrounding contemporary events and how many people were in the audience, but having no certainty about what it is exactly that the viewer took from the film; and what of that she may have incorporated into her own fund of personal understanding.

In critiquing a set of essays on World War Two and national cinemas, Jay Winter (2001) suggests that film studies can learn from literary history, a field in which it is recognized that the two elements—reading and reception—are at the core of the literary-historical enterprise. And, in order to approach the impact of cinema in any degree, it is equally necessary first to deconstruct the film’s message and then take the second step of decoding the meaning of the message as it is received. Winter’s observations are apposite, including the fact that the consumer’s decoding of cinema is central, even though it is extremely complex to carry off correctly. The same phenomenon that makes the movies such a rich medium for personal experience also makes difficult any assay into film reception. Individuals bring their own frames of meaning to each film viewing. And each reviewing, including of the same film, is a fresh experience because the framing process itself is discursive and in a constant state of formulation. The latter may be prompted by the unfolding experience of everyday life or by the epistemological shift that was brought by the previous exposure to the film.

Two possible strategies suggest themselves in confronting the unreliability of popular understandings derived from cultural and cinematic representation. The first is to be meticulous in the terms that one uses within the analytical process in order never to lose sight of their specific limitations. For example, the researcher must be wary of any

slippage from a discussion about the themes within a film's content into any straightforward conclusion about the incorporation of these themes into collective memory. Second, as a way of uncovering the connection between exposure to narratives and the representation of events and the epistemological shift such exposure has caused, it may be useful to draw on autobiographical reflection. Oral testimony, for example, can offer a good deal when individuals are encouraged to reflect on their own subjectivity over time and on what they may see as the catalysts of change. Here, the Korean War offers interesting terrain. Particularly notable, and of immense interest to the scholar of individual and collective mentalities, is the work of an historian like Lewis Carlson (2002) who has meticulously collected the testimonies of hundreds of Korean veterans. Even more, Carlson has provided them with the space in which to recall not just the three years of their war service in Korea, but to ruminate on the effect of these experiences on the long span of the remainder of their lives.²⁸ While this can never provide absolute proof, when sensitively used with careful analysis, it may be possible to at least approach the subjectivity shifts in veterans' memories and draw some conclusions about their connection to a larger change in public memory and discourse.

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²⁸ As well as recording oral histories, Carlson has facilitated the publication of several powerful memoirs by Korean veterans. Notable in this outstanding group is the memoir of Clarence Adams (2007), which Carlson and Della Adams, the daughter of Clarence Adams, have compiled. In a narrative unencumbered with sentimentality or self-justification, Adams reflects on his life before and after Korea, including twelve years in China and his family's experiences after returning to the USA.

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