The Lost Decade?
The 1950s in European History, Politics, Society and Culture

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Edited by

Heiko Feldner, Claire Gorrara
and Kevin Passmore

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INTRODUCTION

CLAIRE GORRARA, HEIKO FELDNER
AND KEVIN PASSMORE

This volume of essays explores the social, political and cultural legacies of a decade which has, until relatively recently, received scant scholarly attention.[1] For Nick Thomas, in his lively review essay "Will the Real 1950s Please Stand Up?", this can be attributed to the fact that the decade has "something of an image problem […] and has suffered from an identity crisis for some time" (Thomas 2008, 227). This "image problem" is connected, for Thomas, both with the often invidious comparison made with the 1960s, a decade associated with "rebellion, sexual revolution and social upheaval" (Thomas 2008, 227), and with popular imaginings, albeit in a British context, of the 1950s as a "golden age" of stultifying but ultimately satisfying conformism and prosperity. Sandwiched uncomfortably between the horror of the war years and the "revolution" of the 1960s, the 1950s appear as "an interim period between the decades standing on either side, and in particular as a kind of antechamber to the social upheavals of the 1960s" (Thomas, 2008, 228).

Yet, as Thomas' review article and contributions to this volume demonstrate, reductive preconceptions of this "lost" decade are being challenged. Such changing perspectives are due in part to a general shift away from a "decade" orientated analysis of the post-war period. The value of such a segmented approach is unclear when one looks at longer-term social, cultural and political trends. As historians, cultural commentators and literary critics have come to reappraise the post-war period, broader transnational and transcultural connections have surfaced.[2] These implicitly undermine a perception of formative years, such as the 1950s, as "contained" periods and throw up the extent to which processes of change germinate over a much wider time frame, drawing on both continuity and rupture with the past. Certainly, as a number of contributions to this volume attest, placing the 1950s solely in relation to the decades that immediately preceded and succeeded them can lead to distortions. It can be equally, if not more productive, to consider these years in a longer time

span, that of 1947-1989, when the fall of the Berlin Wall generated, symbolically and literally, a paradigm shift in geo-political relations.

In tandem with such a questioning of a "decennial" approach to the 1950s, scholars are now placing these years in a far more internationalist frame.[3] In this volume, contributions consider country-specific developments but all, to varying degrees, draw on comparative and transnational debates. This broadening of horizons incorporates European nations' interactions with America, as the model and exporter of a certain brand of popular culture in the 1950s, and also with their colonial territories in a climate of growing clamours for independence. As H.R. Kedward notes in his illuminating chapter on "re-rooting the French Resistance", the war in Algeria, and the national debates on the French army's use of torture, would come to shape French collective self-perception in the 1950s as much as any interactions with European partners or America. In this enlarged framing of the 1950s – both temporally and geographically - what comes to the fore is a sense of contradictions. By this, we mean a period in which the "old" and the "new" co-existed; which looked back to pre-war and wartime traditions and legacies but also looked forward to new concepts and ideas. The latter would offer templates for change which would be eagerly welcomed across national borders, political affiliations and cultures. The 1950s can, therefore, be conceived of as years of reassessment and experimentation when "old" models were re-evaluated and "new" models were "road-tested", to be either developed or rejected.

An important intervention in this dynamic scholarly re-examination of the 1950s, this volume adopts a multi-faceted approach. In developing such a research template, it confirms the case that a "decade" is an arbitrary way of chopping up the past, even if people often perceive decades as having particular characteristics that condition their behaviour and impact on how the past is remembered. As part of the agenda to broaden the scope of analysis and counteract reductive perceptions, the volume will analyse the 1950s in relation to three broadly defined areas: historiography, politics and society and culture. Chapters on European and transnational topics, such as the circuits of literary translation, European liberalisation or cross-border responses to the partitioning of Europe, are featured alongside studies of particular national debates and dilemmas, such as the question of "mastering the past" in German culture and society or the roots and consequences of the Lysenko affair in France. However, what emerges from all three parts of the volume is a vision of the 1950s as a decade which was to have a profound impact on post-war European identities in two key respects: as a time of accelerated European

intellectual exchange and as a time of fertile receptivity to the "new", variously formulated and contested across and within national borders.

European Exchanges

Contributors to this volume present the 1950s as years of transformative intellectual exchange across borders and ideological divisions, as well as within a given national culture. Nancy Jachec, in her chapter on the reception of the Société Européenne de Culture's (SED) address to intellectuals in 1952, discusses the ways in which key cultural organisations, such as the SED, attempted to mobilize European intellectuals in support of intellectual exchange and debate. As she demonstrates, the SEC, like other cross-border European organisations for intellectuals, was committed to offering opportunities for constructive dialogue between Western and Eastern European intellectuals and steadfastly refused to close channels of communication. For Jachec, the 1950s were "a vital period for organised activity for [intellectuals]" (87). In a similar vein, Brian Neve investigates the careers of American blacklisted filmmakers who came to Europe following their condemnation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Like Jachec, Neve focuses on the ways in which cross-cultural dialogue was developed, often under challenging circumstances, and how a Hollywood diaspora of writers, actors and directors brought with them a cinematographic style and left-wing engagement that left its mark on British and French film production. In particular, he discusses the 1950s work of Jules Dassin, Joseph Losey and Cy Endfield and the use of *film noir* as a genre that became a mobile carrier of American popular culture into Europe. This Hollywood diaspora helped nurture what Neve sees as "the sense of change late in that decade [1950s], as the respective New Wave emerged, and new critical positions and notions of cinema were developed" (223). In a rather different context, that of the British armed forces, Hilary Footitt in her contribution highlights the 1950s as years of linguistic exchange. She explores the official discourse on Russian as a "language of war" which brought about unexpected opportunities for over 3,500 servicemen who volunteered to follow intensive Russian language courses in preparation for a possible war with the USSR. Footitt's close analysis of the contexts and motivations of the programme, as well as the teaching corps who were integral to it, reveals how young British servicemen were exposed to a Russian language, literature and culture which bore little relation to contemporary life in Soviet Russia. Yet, these cultural

encounters would play a formative role in these men's individual and collective development.

From intercultural exchanges in the spheres of literature, cinema and education to enriched debates within country-specific traditions, other contributions to the volume trace transformative exchanges within a given national context. In her study of the Lysenko affair in France, Louise Lyle considers how Soviet agronomist Trofim Denisovich Lysenko's ideologically motivated attack on evolutionary biology was received in French communist circles. She analyzes too the debate's connections to French modes of evolutionary thought that dated back to the nineteenth century and were indebted to the work of Lamarck. Providing a close reading of the fiction of writer and former resister Vercors from the 1950s, Lyle identifies the ways in which attitudes to the Lysenko affair were often a barometer of an author's attitudes to Stalinism and French communism. The affair in France exposes the extent to which ideological concerns in the 1950s could be imposed on scientific phenomena. In his chapter on East German historiography, Heiko Feldner shares Lyle's concern to trace the impact of ideology on the relationship between politics and science. From three interrelated perspectives – Foucault's analytics of power, Žižek's theory of ideology and Marx's critique of capital – Feldner demonstrates that there is no reason to make the repression of scientific practice into the lynchpin from which to write the history of East German historiography in the 1950s. The story of a heroic battle between two principles, leading to liberation in 1989 as its implicit goal and happy ending, is an imaginary tale. The historic failure of East German historiography, he argues, did not consist in compromising the standards of scientificity in the name of political conviction, as its liberal critics would have it, but in obfuscating the traumatic dimension of political change, i.e. in obscuring what it would take to build a society that really broke with the matrix of capitalism. Lastly from a German perspective, Christian Haase explores models for European integration via the perspective of West German foreign policy journalists and above all the shifts in position of Erich Friedlaender. As Haase contends, Friedlaender's trajectory, from supporting a model founded on the legacies of German dominance in Europe to one that embraced "Atlanticist" values of free trade, liberal consensus and international law, is emblematic of an era. These were years of flux in West Germany and ultimately provided the frame for an astonishing transformation as "newly imported ideas and traditional concepts combined and coexisted" (113) to enable a new democratic Western elite to emerge.

Looking Forwards – and Backwards

Contributors to this volume also conceive of the 1950s as years when new ideas and new concepts were under scrutiny, as well as understandable attempts to reassess or take stock of the recent past. In his chapter on the *nouveau roman*, Edmund Smyth emphasises how the 1950s in France heralded the advent of a new cultural aesthetics. This was intended to challenge the literary orthodoxies of realism and Sartrean engagement in support of a modernist rethinking of narrative form and purpose. In a close reading of Marguerite Duras' *Moderato Cantabile* (1958), Smyth draws attention to the 1950s as a decade that "saw the flourishing of a renaissance in the arts generally in France" (186) and a "broadly-based cultural reawakening which extended to all areas of intellectual and artistic activity […]" (186). Matthias Zach similarly looks to the innovation of the 1950s in French artistic production, in this case the plethora of new literary translations of Shakespeare which gave young French creative writers the opportunity to develop their own voice. For Zach, the 1950s were a "motor for French cultural development in general" (169). Zach contrasts this to the case of West and East Germany in which there was little legitimate room for renewal of Shakespeare translation and a strong connection to past traditions. This notion of an ambivalent German cultural connection to the "new" is also explored in the contribution of Francis Graham-Dixon on German pictorial art of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Like Zach, Graham-Dixon grapples with the many and often contradictory ways in which German intellectuals and cultural producers attempted to project into the future, whilst reengaging with past traditions. For Graham-Dixon, responses to the humanist tradition, in both East and West German art periodicals, provide compelling evidence of critical and popular anxieties surrounding German artistic production in the aftermath of war. In the West, German artists strove to respond to the "cautious liberalisation" promoted by the Western allies and, in the East, to the call for "rapid de-individualisation" endorsed by their Soviet counterparts. What emerges is a picture of German art as "the litmus paper for a country in shock" (166) and where the humanist project was appropriated in very different ways to suit divergent ideological agendas.

This notion of West and East German communities struggling to adapt to the ideological imperatives of the "new" is also to the fore in the contribution of Gabriele Eckart which reflects on the portrayal of the 1950s in GDR fiction published before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Eckart traces patterns of representation in the work of Anna Seghers, Christoph Hein and Wolfgang Hilbig. In the case of Seghers, Eckart

examines her doomed attempts to present, in meaningful form, the dream of a truly classless and democratic society in her fiction of the 1950s. In the work of 1980s writers Hein and Hilbig, Eckart assesses their increasing preoccupation with questions of political, and then social, justice. In illuminating counterpoint to the contribution of Heiko Feldner, Eckart traces the fictive reworking of key historiographical debates in *Horns Ende* (1985) by Hein, stressing the extent to which East German creative writers considered the implications of the erosion of scientific practice under the guise of new or "progressive" ideological practices. Lastly, the conflicts, contradictions and anxieties of "mastering the past" in West and East German society and culture are analysed in the chapter by Helmut Peitsch. Peitsch provides a subtle reading of the ways in which the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been understood and conceived of in the post-war period in both states and in three specific contexts – literary criticism, academic scholarship (history) and by the Protestant Church. By closely contextualising and historicising the term, Peitsch teases out the evolving debates on German guilt and suffering that have crystallised around the term and coloured discussions of German memories of the Second World War. He concludes by advising readers to consider the wisdom of American historian, Alon Confino who warns against "impos[ing] present-day moral expectations of what should have been remembered on what actually has been remembered" (134).

Re-rootings

As Helmut Peitsch's chapter and others attest, the 1950s remain a decade able to accommodate a number of readings. These readings range from affirmations of productive European exchange and renewal to more muted assessments of the spectre of the past. Indeed, it is with this image of a decade of multiple interpretative possibilities that this introduction will end. For if, as Nick Thomas contends, the 1950s have an "image problem", it may be because a singular fixed image is not appropriate. What a last grouping of contributions to this volume suggests is the need to think more in terms of pathways and trajectories or, as H.R. Kedward eloquently terms it, "re-rootings". In the case of Kedward, this is related to the legacies of the French Resistance which tended to be refracted in these years via the twin functional myths of Gaullist (national) resistance or Communist martyrdom and sacrifice. The innovation of Kedward's contribution is to "re-root" such early debates and representations of the Resistance via the "individual" (and the region) and, in one case, the tragic story of Limousin resistance leader Georges Guingouin. By focusing on

the "esprit" of the Resistance into the 1950s and early 1960s, Kedward demonstrates how memories of the Resistance were mobilised to defend a notion of individual justice and, increasingly, to support a human rights culture. As the ferocity of the Algerian war and the anti-torture campaign climaxed, it was a "spirit" of resistance that enabled such a set of individual and collective experiences to offer a "moral legacy which knew no national boundaries" (73). In a common spirit, Kevin Passmore "re-roots" discussion of the 1950s via the work of Norman Davies and Eric Hobsbawm and a Whig interpretation of history anchored in a belief in "gradual progress". Yet, for Passmore, both historians also viewed the decade in a far more expansive historical context and assimilated the 1950s "into a longer-term division of Europe lasting from 1947-1989" (33). For both, the division of Europe, cemented in the 1950s, would be a diversion from the march of European and world history. As Passmore concludes, perceptions of the 1950s very much depend on perspective, experience and location – a golden age for some but brutalising for others. Indeed, it is from this acceptance of the centrality of one's cultural positioning that Richard Vinen opens the volume. Vinen's chapter provides a provocative analysis of why and how historians have approached the 1950s and the blind spots that exists in the very formulation of a "lost decade" – "where did you leave them?" he asks. As he astutely notes, the public perception of these years has been shaped by a generation of historians, politicians and public figures for whom these years were an "undramatic decade" (9), paling into insignificance compared to their colourful personal memories of the 1960s. Yet, if consideration of the 1950s is "re-rooted" away from this generation, and a focus on Western Europe, a very different set of stories emerge. In these alternative contexts, the 1950s sit centre-stage, above all for those living in Eastern Europe and those in colonised territories undergoing the brutalities and mass civilian displacements of the wars of decolonisation. As Vinen predicts, new studies of the 1950s that explore such alternative narratives may well cause us to reflect on deeply ingrained assumptions about the "stability" of post-war Western Europe. From this perspective, the 1950s are not so much a "lost" decade as an era with the potential to question received histories of the post-war period.

To conclude, this volume hopes to enlighten readers about a decade that has never been "lost" but perhaps "misplaced" in the popular and scholarly imagination. With the coming of a new century, academics, writers and commentators seem now equipped with sufficient critical distance to see what these years brought to longer term developments shaping contemporary European identities. This volume makes no claims

to exhaustivity and would have been enriched by further contributions on the relation of European nations to their colonial territories, as well as more sustained analysis of the view of the 1950s in Eastern Europe. That said, the editors of this volume believe that the contributions grouped here provide ample evidence of the exciting enterprise at stake in reassessing years that were, according to theatre critic Michael Billington, both "dramatic and traumatic: the era when we could feel the ground beginning to shift beneath our feet" (Billington 2006, 6). It is these seismic shifts with which we live into the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 This has changed in recent years with the publication of studies on Britain, such as Hennessy (2006) and Kynaston (2007).
2 Richard Vinen contests even the notion of a "post-war" in his contribution "Where did you leave them? Historians and 'losing the 1950s'". As he notes, Europe, following the Second World War, was already fully embarked on a bloody series of wars of decolonisation that began in the late 1940s and would end, for most, in the 1960s.
3 See for example, Kristin Ross's ground-breaking study of France in the 1950s, which investigates the relationship between France and Algeria in the 1950s and early 1960s (Ross 1996).

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PART I:

HISTORIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER ONE

WHERE DID YOU LEAVE THEM? HISTORIANS AND "LOSING THE 1950S"

RICHARD VINEN

Abstract

This chapter will try to explain why historians and others find it so hard to fit the 1950s into a broader explanation of the post-war period or the twentieth century. It points out that the 1950s are overshadowed by two adjoining decades that are seen as times of particular excitement and change. It also points out that a particular generation – that was formed, in Britain, by the Butler Education Act, the post-war baby boom and the Robbins Report – has a particularly powerful influence over how the post-war years are perceived. This is a generation for which the 1960s assumed special importance and for whom, consequently, the 1950s are seen as a time of insignificance. A generation which thought of itself as rebellious was uninterested in a decade that was associated with a certain kind of consensus. A generation that took prosperity for granted did not feel the need to investigate the reasons for that prosperity. Finding the lost decade means, moreover, to move away from western Europe. Outside Europe things obviously looked differently – no-one from Indochina or Algeria would have much trouble in telling us what significant event happened in 1954. Equally, east Europeans had a very different perspective on the decade – de-Stalinization was probably the most important change to happen in the whole history of the Soviet Union and its client states. Most Czechs would be very surprised to hear that English people who remember what they were doing when they heard of Kennedy's death cannot remember anything about Stalin's death. Generational change is also important in this context. The 1950s were particularly disliked by those whose identity is rooted in the 1960s, but they were often an object of veneration to those young people who themselves reacted against the 1960s (nothing that Sid Vicious did shocked the cultural establishment more than recording a version of Eddie Cochran's quintessentially 1950s song *Somethin' Else*).

What does it mean to talk of a "lost decade"? Clearly the 1950s are not lost in the way that the history of, say, an extinct Amazonian tribe who have left no written records might be lost. Most people would have no difficulty in summoning up images of the 1950s: hula hoops and milk bars. Equally, historians know a great deal about the 1950s. Archives have been opened and doctorates written on, for example, "Butskellism" (Kelly 2003) or Poujadism (Souillac 2007). There is, however, a curious disjuncture between specialized academic work on the 1950s and the general image of the decade, even its image amongst professional historians. It is significant, for example, that most general accounts of twentieth-century history would probably mention Butskellism and Poujadism only to make assertions that most experts would regard as being wrong. There is, furthermore, little general sense of the 1950s as having a particular kind of historical significance and they are less often taken as an interpretative framework than, say, the 1930s or the 1960s. Preceding and succeeding decades are seen in global terms. Any historical work on the 1930s – whether it focuses on American dance halls or the rise of Nazism – is largely about the impact of the Wall Street Crash. Any work on the 1940s is about the Second World War. Any study of the 1960s is largely about the Vietnam War, which is seen to pervade everything from Japanese student radicalism to the changes in the American economy. Any history of the 1970s has to take account of the Arab/Israeli war of 1973and the consequent rise in the oil price. Work on the 1950s, by contrast, often takes place in isolated boxes. A conference on "1956", for example, would probably receive proposals relating to the Suez crisis, the origins of rock and roll, Khruschev's "Secret Speech" and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The authors of these papers would almost certainly refer to entirely separate historiographies.

The 1950s is also seen as an undramatic decade. On the left, people who came of age in the 1950s were uncomfortably aware that they lacked the heroic causes that had mobilized those who had been born ten years before themselves. In 1958, Françoise Giroud, born in 1916, wrote that those ten years younger than herself had not been moulded by the Spanish Civil War, Munich and the Occupation as her own contemporaries had been. Claude Nicolet, born in the 1930, seemed to accept this verdict on his generation: "I have always envied those amongst my elders who were awakened by the political exaltation of the Resistance … we are a generation abandoned by history" (Nicolet 1959, 328). Historians, at least political historians of the west, sometimes talk about this as being a decade of political conservatism, but this conservatism is itself seen as a kind of political vacuum – something that lacked the sinister glamour of right-

wing politics in the inter-war period. Furthermore, the conservatism that triumphed in the 1950s was often the kind that later right-wingers did not wish to celebrate. British Thatcherites were hostile to Macmillan and uncomfortable with the second Churchill administration of 1951 to 1955. French Gaullists regard the whole period from de Gaulle's failure in the legislative elections of 1951 until the end of the Fourth Republic in 1958 with disdain.

Any attempt to sum up the 1950s also runs up against two awkward divisions. The first of these is that between western Europe and the rest of the world. The 1950s was a period during which western Europe, or at least its industrialized and democratic parts, turned in on itself after the traumas of the Second World War. Decolonization broke links between Europe, Africa and Asia. The Cold War did not have the global dimension that it was to acquire in the later years. Indeed, it sometimes seemed that there was a clear separation between the brutal, but limited, hot wars being fought in Korea, Indochina and Malaya and the nuclear standoff between the great powers that overshadowed Europe. The international bodies that dominated the 1950s – Nato, the Warsaw Pact, the Common Market and the Cominform were largely or exclusively European. However, any study of the capitalist countries during the 1950s also has to allow for the influence of the United States and this brings us to another kind of division: that between the popular culture that became so important in the 1950s and the kind of issues – diplomatic, political and economic – with which historians are more used to engaging.

Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise* (1985) reveals something about the reasons for the academic neglect of the 1950s. It is set on an American university campus dominated by two disciplines: Hitler Studies and Elvis Studies. This seems to sum up some of the clichés about the 1950s and, in particular, about the way in which it is overshadowed by the preceding decade. The 1940s are about Europe, violence and politics; the 1950s are about America, consumerism and popular culture. It is striking that historians of America are more at home with the notion of the 1950s than historians of Europe. The book titles of American writers – *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s* (Cassidy 2005), *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (Shapiro 2006), *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films* (Noonan 2005) – all indicate a concern with popular culture. They also indicate a concern with a certain kind of America – often the very kind that was depicted in popular culture. When American historians say the "fifties", they usually mean suburbia, consumption and housewives. They rarely mean race, poverty or rural America.

The fact that the 1950s are perceived largely in terms of culture rather than politics raises problems about periodization. The death of Hitler in 1945 marks a clear break. The death of Elvis in 1977 does not. The Elvis of the 1970s, a good old boy who had been appointed as an honorary federal marshal by Richard Nixon so that he could carry his gun across state lines, was a very different person to the young man who had seemed, to parts of respectable America in the 1950s, to threaten sexual morality and racial segregation. For that matter, the posthumous Elvis – admired by English punk rockers and by the young Bill Clinton – stood for something that Elvis had never represented in his own lifetime.

There is a sense, indeed, in which the 1950s is a cultural symbol rather than a historical period. Mary Caputi has argued that the 1950s is an "American metaphor" and that: "The 1950s can no longer be reduced to a mere ten-year interval whose significance can be captured in historical narrative, for its impact reaches far beyond chronology" (Caputi 2005, 1). The 1950s might be said to have escaped from time. They stand for a certain self-conscious display of innocence that also goes with the celebration of American life (Caputi sees this celebration as being particularly associated with Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980s – and the Reagan presidency certainly illustrated the blurring of lines between the world of entertainment and the world of politics).

The "American metaphor" travels across space as well as time. There is, in short, a sense in which the 1950s happens in different countries at different times. This is particularly true because the decade was often presented as one of modernization (Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-Communist Manifesto* was published in 1960) and consequently as representing an era through which, eventually, all countries would pass. Modernization/Americanization became one of the great themes around which studies of Europe in the 1950s revolved. Laurence Wylie's celebrated study of a village in the Vaucluse was almost as much about his own American origins as it was about rural life in Provence (Wylie 1957). France, indeed, became an object of fascination partly because it seemed a kind of testing ground – a place that was obviously archaic in terms of social structure, industrial organization and bureaucratic heavy-handedness, but that was also, as a democratic and capitalist country, more-or-less destined to adopt American models. The first individual country study to be conducted on western Europe by the Harvard Center for International Affairs concerned France and involved a seminar that was convoked in 1959-1960 (Hoffman 1963, vii and viii). French sociologists themselves assumed that modernization meant America and Michel Crozier's studies of France's "blocked society" were

heavily influenced by his visits to America – which began with a student grant that took him to the New School for Social Research in 1947 and finished with a visiting fellowship at Princeton in 1959 (Crozier 2002).

The notion that every country would eventually pass through its own "fifties" as it moved towards an American version of modernity raises all sorts of questions. The American image of the fifties is associated with prosperity, a certain sort of "apoliticism" (one built on an assumption that every normal person shares some important values) and a rather clean-cut version of youth culture. Some historians argue, however, that Britain never passed through such a stage. Peter Hennessy begins his history of Britain in the 1950s by quoting Jonathan Miller's remark that "in Britain the 1930s lasted until the 1960s" (Hennessy 2006). Gareth Stedman Jones goes further back and suggests that it was only really events of the early 1960s (the Lady Chatterley trial and the advent of the Beatles) that ended a kind of long Victorian age in Britain, and that "there was more similarity between the 1870s and the 1950s than there is between the 1950s and now" (Stedman Jones 2001, 103-124). Both these remarks, of course, beg further questions. The 1950s are overshadowed in Britain in part precisely because the British sixties seemed to generate such a strong and distinctive national culture (Michel Winock has referred to the 1960s as "les années anglaises"). Similarly one might argue that some of the features that might be identified as characteristic of 1950s prosperity in much of continental western Europe – widespread use of motor cars, suburbanization, advertising and even television – had actually begun in Britain in the 1930s.

As for France, there were some ways in which it passed through its "fifties" in the mid 1960s. It was during this period, after the convulsions of the Algerian War, that France appeared to find consensus and prosperity. It was during the 1960s that French political scientists talked most about "apoliticism", or, at least, about a decline in political extremism (Charlot 1970). It was also during the 1960s that sociologists, such as Crozier, who had been so influenced by their visits to America in the 1950s, began to acquire an influence. De Gaulle – having been the French Churchill in his earlier career – seemed to have become a French Eisenhower by 1965; he himself commented, with chagrin, on the lack of heroic causes in his country. France acquired something that began to look like an American version of popular culture during the 1960s. This was the decade when France discovered the joys of the motor car (Roger Nimier and Françoise Sagan were probably more famous for their James Deanesque driving than for anything that they wrote), television and the beach. It was during the 1960s that the rather insipid pop music of "salut

les copains" flourished – before "youth culture" came to mean something very different in 1968.

If "modernization" was simply defined as something that could be measured in terms of statistics about GDP, then it would be simpler to date the point at which other countries reached the level of development that America had reached in, say, 1955. Yet, in fact, of course, even people who wrote about the economy in the 1950s did so largely in terms of culture – no-one could think about the American economy without also thinking about what people watched on their new television sets or even what their teenagers did on the backseats of their father's cars. This, in turn, means that the "fifties" never had a fixed value. Most obviously, the fifties was defined in contrast to the decade the succeeded it. LSD, Vietnam and Jim Morrison were the things that made the 50s seem "innocent". However, even the sense that innocence needs to be defended or celebrated hints at a certain kind of knowingness. Equally, the fact that the 1950s is so tied up with particular kinds of cultural icons means that those icons have often been manipulated in later years in ways that changed their meanings.

Nothing epitomizes this possibility for changed meanings more than that supreme symbol of 1950s America: Disneyland. The Disney company had been founded in 1923 but it expanded quickly after the Second World War and Disneyland was founded in California in 1955. Disney was closely associated with American triumphalism. Walt Disney was a founder member of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and appeared as a friendly witness in front of the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (Barrier 2008, 200); visiting foreign dignitaries were often brought to Disneyland. However, Disney is a global brand that has survived beyond the 1950s and expanded its empire beyond the United States. In 1990, it established Eurodisney outside Paris. One of the funniest moments in Mazarine Pingeot's autobiographical novel *Bouche Cousue* (2005) concerns the moment when François Mitterrand – the epitome of an "old European" world of high culture, Realpolitik and self-conscious dignity (he had once refused to meet Ronald Reagan on the grounds that he was "rereading Lamartine") – was summoned by ex-president George Bush senior (then visiting Europe with his grandchildren) to have lunch at the restaurant in Eurodisney.

The American "myths" springing from the 1950s were not, however, always as clear-cut as they seemed at first glance. The very fact that such myths so often related to the world of entertainment meant that they always went with a certain sense of their own artificiality, and sometimes with an inbuilt possibility for irony or double meanings. The most

important Disney productions were bathed in the optimism of the 1950s, but Art Spiegelman's Maus (the cartoon holocaust survivor) is obviously a distant relative of Mickey.[1] Eventually Disney itself developed Pixar partly to produce cartoon films that treated the American dream in a more distanced and potentially critical fashion.

The potential contradictions of the "knowing innocence" with which the 1950s are often portrayed are illustrated by the television series *Happy Days*. This was aired by ABC from 1974 to 1984 and set in a suburb of Milwaukee. The music and clothes of the series identify it clearly as a work set in the 1950s, but the action actually takes place from 1955 until 1965 – this is meant to be the "gentle America" that came after Korea and McCarthy but before Vietnam. The very fact that it was being presented for a post-Vietnam audience gives the script a knowing quality: there is a scene in which a group of boys attend army medicals and one of their fathers expresses the hope that his sons will never have to fight in another war. The whole series is based on the single running joke that lies in the fact that the world that it portrays seems so unreal – it is no accident that the most durable legacy of the series should be the phrase "jumping the shark cage", which is used, especially in the very uninnocent world of American advertising, to describe a claim that has been pushed so far as to become implausible.

Where do historians stand in all this? In one sense, the answer is nowhere. The whole image of the 1950s is of a decade that is, in some way, particularly outside history. This was a sense that developed during the 1950s itself. Writers in the aftermath of the Second World War contrasted the apparent peace and consensus of their own epoch with the violent disagreement of earlier periods. When Daniel Bell wrote *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1962) he explicitly contrasted his own era with the 1930s. Lewis Namier, a protégé of self-consciously pragmatic politicians such as Harold Macmillan and Lord Boothby, was very much associated with a certain end of ideology – he famously dismissed statements of political belief as "flapdoodle". In 1953 Namier wrote:

> Some political philosophers complain of a 'tired lull' and the absence at present of argument on general politics in this country: practical solutions are sought for concrete problems, while programmes and ideals are forgotten by both parties. But to me this attitude seems to betoken a greater national maturity and I can only wish that it may long continue undisturbed by the workings of political philosophy (Colley 1989, 93).

Namier might have approved of an unideological age in itself but he did not approve of it as an object of study for historians and it is notable that, having written important essays on international relations in the 1930s, he never sought to study the contemporary period during the 1950s. The divide between the study of history and the study of the present was reinforced in the 1950s by the rise of new disciplines. Sociology and political science were seen as the correct lenses through which to view contemporary developments and this meant that historians were ever less prone to look at such things. History often, indeed, seemed to define itself in opposition to sociology and political science. The former was concerned with change; the latter with stability. The former studied societies that were, in some way, problematic; the latter studied societies that were seen as "mature". Even the new discipline of "war studies" fitted into this dichotomy. The first British department in this subject was founded by Michael Howard at King's College in the 1950s. Howard was a historian, but drew a distinction between his historical work – focussed on the period up to 1945 – and his interest in "war studies" largely focussed on a more theoretical approach to questions of nuclear deterrence. Indeed the creation of a department of War Studies was partly a response to the explosion of the first hydrogen bomb in 1952 (Howard 2006). The hydrogen bomb was a supremely non-historical weapon and contrasted in this respect with the atom bomb. The atom bomb had fitted in with Trotsky's remark about war being the "locomotive of history". It had brought an end to the Second World War in Europe and contemplation of its use certainly had an effect in Korea. The hydrogen bomb, however, did not locomote. It had no past, because it had never been used in anger, and it had no future, because humanity seemed unlikely to survive its deployment. Hydrogen bombs could not be understood through historical analogy. They could only be approached through the abstract world of game theory and contemplation of mutually assured destruction.

There was a geographical distinction too. Social sciences were most applied to case studies in the United States. Europe, by contrast, was the setting for everything – from the Renaissance to Auschwitz – that was properly the province of the historian. Curiously, the growing power of America may actually have contributed to this Eurocentrism of historians. Partly, this was because American history faculties themselves were still staffed largely by patrician East Coast Anglo Saxon men who were happy to believe that the study of their own past meant the study of Europe. It was also because the needs of the Cold War created a particular incentive for American elites to understand European conflicts of the recent past (it is no accident that Henry Kissinger began his career with studies of

Castlereagh, Metternich and Bismarck), and also, perhaps, to keep the European cultural elite happy. No two men epitomized the Eurocentrism of the historical profession better than AJP Taylor and Hugh Trevor-Roper. Taylor never set foot in the United States and briskly dismissed America on the grounds that it had "no food, no architecture and no history". Trevor-Roper visited Harvard in the 1950s but disliked the place and continued to insist that the proper subject for historians was European culture. The irony of both men's position was that their own debates were partly conducted in the pages of *Encounter* (Trevor-Roper 1961, 86-96), a magazine funded by the CIA in order to channel the energies of the European intelligentsia. There was also a strong sense that both men's studies stopped in 1945 – with the famous last sentence of Taylor's *English History, 1914-1945*[2] or with Hugh Trevor-Roper's account of Hitler's suicide (Trevor-Roper 1947). Both men did contemplate taking their work further. Taylor toyed with writing a history of England that would go up to 1965 and Trevor-Roper talked about writing about the "last days of Stalin". Both men, however, abandoned their projects. Taylor, at least, seems to have done so in part because he simply could not believe that a world dominated by American power could be a proper subject for a historian – indeed he later regretted that he had not ended his history of England in 1941, on the grounds that the entry of America into the Second World War marked the real end of English history.

The 1960s changed the historical profession. It expanded quickly, especially in America, it became less Eurocentric and it engaged with social sciences. Curiously, however, this did not break down the barriers that had prevented the 1950s from being an object of serious study. If anything, indeed, it probably made the barriers more impassable. Partly this was a matter of generation. The people who poured into the profession during the 1960s had been born in the 1940s, and especially during the post-war baby boom. For them, the 1950s lay in a kind of blind spot; it was a safe but dull and featureless landscape that was tied up with memories of their own schooldays. Geoff Eley (born in 1949) wrote of his own life, and those of his contemporaries, as: "journeys through the safe but dispiriting social and cultural landscapes of the long postwar" (Eley 2005, 173). Sheila Rowbotham (born in 1943) ends an autobiographical account of constrained provincial upbringing with her meeting a young man in a leather jacket who amuses her with an anarchistic comment: "At least there were a few discerning spirits in Yorkshire. It was 1960" (Heron, 1985, 210).

There was also a sense in which the most exciting developments of the 1960s tended to take historians away from the contemporary period

altogether. The most prestigious journals in the world were the French *Annales* (founded in 1929) and the British *Past and Present* (founded in 1952). Both had, at first, been designed to blend study of the distant past with that of more recent events and, indeed, with the present. However, by the 1960s, both journals were strongly identified with work on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – indeed, fashionable Marxists who wanted to explain the "Origins of the Present Crisis" in the Britain in the mid 1960s went back to the English Civil War (Perry Anderson 1964). There may have been a specific institutional reason for this reticence about the recent past. *Past and Present* had been heavily affected by the split in the British Communist party that followed the Soviet invasion of Hungary; *Annales* had been heavily affected by the Vichy regime and the German occupation. Looking away from the recent past was a way of avoiding both these issues. In addition to this, the most important of the influences from the social sciences that affected history came from anthropology and, since anthropology seemed particularly suited to the understanding of pre-industrial societies, it lent further impetus to the study of early modern history. Peter Burke has argued, both with reference to himself and to Keith Thomas, that postings to non-European countries during National Service in the 1950s encouraged some British historians in the 1960s to engage with anthropological approaches to early modern societies (Burke, Harrison and Slack 2000, 1-30). It never, however, seems to have occurred to Burke or Thomas that there might be interesting work to be done on their own fellow conscripts or on the circumstances that caused such people to be sent to Malaya and the West Indies in the first place.

During the mid 1960s it sometimes seemed as though the study of history had come to revolve around a sharp dichotomy. On the one hand stood the study of the recent past (epitomized by the foundation of the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 1966). This was taken to mean in large measure the study of the two world wars and the various forms of inter-war crisis. It tended to revolve around rather conventional questions of diplomacy and politics and it tended, partly because historians of the recent past were keen to distinguish themselves from "mere journalists", to revolve around intense attention to particular documents. On the other hand stood the more glamorous world of the *Annales* and *Past and Present* – a world associated with a more sweeping approach to longer runs of history and with an interest in certain kinds of theoretical approaches. The famous, or notorious, general article about history published by Keith Thomas in 1966 was notable for its defence of broad theoretical approaches and for its disdain for fetishism of the archives but it was also

notable for the implicit attack on historians of the recent past – the main target for Thomas was AJP Taylor (Thomas 1966).

There were some straightforward reasons why contemporary historians tended to stay stuck on the pre 1945 period. For quite large numbers of historians who became influential in post-war America, the Second World War and Nazism represented the sharpest imaginable break in European history because, as Germans Jews, they had left Europe in the 1930s – sometimes coming back with the American army in 1945. Not surprisingly, such historians were often interested in Germany before 1933, the world in which they had grown up, and often felt compelled to work on Germany between 1933 and 1945. Post-war Germany (post-war Europe in general) held less interest for them and some seem to have regarded the Germany of the 1950s (when people who had been adults under Nazism were beginning to enjoy the fruits of economic growth) with active distaste (Gay 1999).

The sheer availability of documents was another reason for the focus on the period before 1945. The defeat of Nazi Germany opened up the archives of the Third Reich but also opened up the archive of the Soviet Communist party in Smolensk, which the Germans had captured and which provided much material for Sovietologists (Fainsod 1958), and the German archives on which Robert Paxton based his studies of Vichy France (Paxton 1972). The archives of the victorious powers were also opened, albeit in a more controlled and limited way, to official historians. Indeed writing official histories of the Second World War was itself a major industry for quite a time – one that was said to employ a quarter of all professional historians in America in 1945. Michael Howard (1974), WN Medlicott (1952) and MRD Foot (1984) all spent much of their time writing official histories. AJP Taylor was a kind of anti-official historian – he drew much of his information from published primary documents that were edited by his more establishment-minded colleagues – though he usually drew conclusions from them that were the opposite of those that suited the authorities.

More generally, historians during the Second World War often provided government departments with advice. William Langer of Harvard recruited American academics to the research and analysis section of the Office of Strategic Services. Leonard Krieger later wrote that the veterans of the OSS were “the one identifiable cohesive group among the American historians of today” (Novick 1998, 302). Hugh Trevor-Roper worked for British intelligence – work that provided him with the basis for his *Last Days of Hitler* (1947).