Gough\_ Congested Terrain: Contested Memories 2017

Paul Gough, ‘Congested Terrain: Contested Memories. Visualising the Multiple Spaces of War and Remembrance’, in James Wallis and David Harvey, (eds.) *Commemorative Spaces of the First World War: Historical Geographies at the Centenary,* Ashgate, 2017, ISBN: 9781138121188

‘Stasis’ is widely accepted as the pre-eminent condition of the conflict on the Western Front; a war of congealment, fixity and stagnant immobility fought from defensive earthworks that were intended to be temporary but quickly became permanent.

In the battle zones a new spatial order emerged. Beyond the superficial safety of the front-line parapet was No-Man’s-Land; a liminal, unknown space, a ‘debateable land’ that could not be fully owned or controlled. Far beyond lay a green and unspoilt distance, a ‘Promised Land' that was forever locked in an unattainable future. This was the domain of imperial development and potential exploitation.

This chapter explores the spatiality of conflicts on the Great War battlefield, and draws on the work of several British artists, cartographers and surveyors who attempted to explore and lend visual form to the chaos. Through the act of mapping and drawing they attempted to systematize the outward devastation, whereby trees would become datum points, emptiness was labelled, and the few fixed features of the ravaged land became the immutable co-ordinates of a functional terrain, a strategic field, where maps where predicated as much on time as of place.

This is the first book to bring together an interdisciplinary, theoretically engaged and global perspective on the First World War through the lens of historical and cultural geography. Reflecting the centennial interest in the conflict, the　collection explores the relationships between warfare and space, and pays particular attention to how commemoration is connected to spatial elements of national identity, and processes of heritage and belonging. Venturing beyond military history and memory studies, contributors explore conceptual contributions of geography to analyse the First World War, as well as reflecting upon the imperative for an academic discussion on the War’s centenary.

This book explores the War’s impact in more unexpected theatres, blurring the boundary between home and fighting fronts, investigating the experiences of the war amongst civilians and often overlooked combatants. It also critically examines the politics of hindsight in the post-war period, and offers an historical geographical account of how the First World War has been memorialised within ‘official’ spaces, in addition to those overlooked and often undervalued ‘alternative spaces’ of commemoration.

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