

Pre-workshop comment

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I aim here briefly to set out my responses to the theme of this workshop, specifically from my perspective as a specialist in French Renaissance (16th/early 17th-century) studies, but with a view to broadening that perspective out somewhat to address the policy implications of potentially shared concerns and methods.

Anyone working on materials from a time no-one remembers engages in a peculiar kind of cultural memory. If texts from the recent past convey memories and emotional states in ways that are never obvious or transparent, this is *a fortiori* the case for texts from the distant past, which are inevitably even more foreign to us. Nevertheless, texts from this distant past have key roles to play in cultural memory: they give us vivid impressions from the past, even if we can never know if we understand these as they were understood at the time of their production, and they have their own futures or afterlives, generating their own memories. In this field, then, LCS works, often through traditional methods (philological research, close reading) but also informed by present-day theory, to uncover as much as possible of a cultural memory of the past that would otherwise remain lost and inaccessible.

What is the policy relevance of LCS research into materials from the distant past? LCS researchers in such areas, as in others, contribute to present-day European social and intellectual culture. For instance, they make major contributions to cultural industries revolving both 'heritage' figures, such as Shakespeare or Molière, and by making lesser-known figures and artefacts known to a wider audience through performances, exhibitions and websites. To sustain and indeed build capacity in such research requires policy in support of activity.

LCS research on ancient, medieval and early modern periods inevitably has modern-day resonance in diverse fields and, consequently, has the potential for providing insights into present-day policy in a correspondingly wide range of areas. For example, LCS research into religious extremism and violence within texts surrounding the wars of religion – including, for instance, the first article of the Edict of Nantes, which specifically demands that memory of the civil wars be suppressed – can provide a helpful historical counterpoint to our current ways of thinking about such problems. But a list of possible research topics relevant to present-day policy is less important than a recognition of the principle that LCS research gives unique insights into the past which in turn give us ways of thinking about the present.

In terms of the four issues identified for discussion, possible examples of contributions from French Renaissance studies might include interdisciplinary work by the social historian Natalie Zemon Davis which has revealed how materials in the archives are rhetorically constructed like fiction and indeed research into Renaissance travel writing, in which writers and ghost-writers visibly reconstruct memory through fictional means ('The truth of memory'); the preservation of memory in printing and manuscript, in libraries and archives of the Renaissance and the present day ('Regimes of memory'); the perspective on trauma resulting from the French wars of religion, not least in Protestant poets and historians writing after sometimes many years after the events they witnessed ('Trauma and memory'); how best to deal with memories of violence and trauma, as seen in the first article of the Edict of Nantes, already mentioned ('The politics and ethics of memory').

Position paper

Link between 'remembering and forgetting' and the forthcoming workshop on electronic textuality: does the ever-increasing digitisation of culture constitute a form of forgetting, in the sense that it leads to a loss of human memory in favour of electronic memory? Who owns memory and culture? (google?)

Is there too much emphasis in LCS on trauma/anxiety/suppression of memory, etc., and not enough on the 'pleasure principle' – ie lit & cult as objects designed to elicit pleasure? What are the consequences for memory studies if pleasure as opposed to trauma becomes the focus and what will the policy implications be (!)?

Is literature a privileged means of 'archiving' memory, both personal – ie of an individual's experiences and sensations – and collective?

Is 'future memory' a helpful concept for LCS, ie how do texts predict their own futures or after-lives or reception, or fail to control these?

To what extent do memorials of all kinds constitute a means of forgetting?

To what extent do new forms of collecting information electronically lead to remembering and/or forgetting?

How will our own current archival processes contribute to future memory?