

## Position paper

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Like many LCS scholars, I come to memory studies via the back door. Predominantly literary-historical and cultural-historical, my own research in recent years has engaged, to some extent, with cultural memory. This is mainly thanks to three areas of interest:

1. My teaching on the Cultural Memory MA at the IGRS. I've been lucky enough to teach close to my research interests: specifically on borders – the Italian north-eastern borders, in particular – understood broadly as fault-lines, Bakhtinian chronotopes where issues of national, cultural and ethnic identity come together in tragic collision courses. It is in this context that I've recently become acquainted with a number of memory theories and positions, particularly as concerns the importance of landscape and place (understood as cities, rivers, seas, borders, and also monuments, museums and heritage sites) in characterising nations, an issue carrying wider implications towards shaping a communal European identity.
2. My participation in the European thematic network ACUME, led by the University of Bologna, between 2002 and 2006. This interdisciplinary and comparative network relied on the cooperation of 25 EU and 6 non-EU partners, from different disciplines and backgrounds, in order to explore the concept of memory in a comparative framework and in relation to the issue of culture both within and across European nations.
3. Last but not least, my very close involvement with the Centre for Cultural Memory Studies – allow me to spend a minute to illustrate this (please take a flier back home with you). This is a new venture of the IGRS which we will be launching on 5 February 2010 with a large conference on 'Transcultural Memory'. The past year or so has seen some heightened interest in memory studies and, at the IGRS, we're very proud to provide our own take on this by launching this forum of discussion designed for memory and literary scholars, historians, cultural critics, artists, etc. -I'm particularly interested in this being a **very inclusive** venture. Within this forum, we intend to organize, help organize and host a wide programme of seminars, conferences, workshops and screenings, in collaboration with academic and non academic partners. Please take a look at our snazzy website designed by Ricarda – accessible from the IGRS home site and at <http://igrs.sas.ac.uk/research/CCM.html>.

The question I'm interested in developing today branches out from all of the above. It also has implications for the issues identified for discussion: the truth of memory, regimes of memory and politics/ethics of memory. Firstly, I need to contextualize it briefly. I work in Italian studies. Memory is a relatively recent, if growing, area of interest within Italian studies, essentially stemming from relatively recent historiography (Luisa Passerini, Renzo De Felice, John Foot) intent on revisioning received readings of the Second World War and the Resistance in Italy. In other words, recent historiography has been questioning 'the truth of history' and, in so doing, questioning 'the truth of memory', and the uncertain boundaries between the two, throwing up issues of the politics and ethics of memory.

Furthermore, for students of my generation, memory is inextricably bound up with the social, regional and micro-historical readings of the school of the *Annales* – esp. Le Roy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg's 'evenemential history' in *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980), Piero Camporesi's comprehensive approach, ranging across anthropology, folklore, popular religion, medicine and history, the hermeneutics of myth of Karol Kerényi and the structuralist mythography of Jean-Pierre Vernant. Located, if you will, at the intersection of memory with more 'traditional' disciplines such as anthropology, history, literary studies, all these approaches are intrinsically bound to a first-hand experience of documentary and bibliographical sources. In short, they are heavily reliant on the archive.

A crucial question emerges here: how does one reconcile the 'old' and the 'new'? How does one build bridges between memory studies and more traditional disciplines, first and foremost with history, and history's own research methodologies? (My emphasis here is on 'building bridges' as I'd like this tension to be seen not in oppositional terms, but rather in a discursive, dialogical fashion.) If I may quote from one of my masters, Ezio Raimondi: 'the past rather than an authority becomes, in the modern era, a sort of ghost, a spectral force, a hidden energy which re-emerges through quotations. These ghosts encroach upon our certainties, our gratification or the compromises we contrive with the present'. It seems to me that how we reckon with the force of the past is one of the challenges of our era. How we bridge this gap will also help us bridge the gap between 'self' and 'other' in a postcolonial perspective, the transition between cultural homogeneities to diverse, hybridized and even fragmented discourses. It will help us bridge the gap between old and new technologies of cultural transmission across time.

In short, I'm interested in exploring the question: how do we negotiate between different modes of engagement with the past (myth, memory, history...)? How do we reconcile relics with simulacra? Is this a valid question? Is this a question we should be asking at all?