

Pre-Workshop comment

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'Cultural memory' has emerged as a serious field of study over the last 10-20 years in reaction to the pace of global change and the inability of theory to offer coherent social and philosophical solutions to the major contemporary issues confronting the post-Communist world: postcolonial poverty, war, neo-liberal imperialism, migration, the shift of power from West to East and now the financial crisis. It has also arguably stemmed from an increasing disillusionment with the playful, ironic off-shoots of postmodern philosophy leading instead to the desire to look to the past to explore the causes of current ills, to validate the origins of ethnic groups, to construct social identities through reference to shared cultural legacies, to make sense of social diversity in a multicultural environment and to reveal the constructions underpinning myths of nationhood. For Europe in particular, the advanced age of the survivors of World War II and the growing realisation of its delayed impact on the post-war generation as they in turn reached maturity has caused the traumatic legacy of that tragic upheaval to be scrutinised in ever greater detail: its long-term effects on children and grandchildren, its relevance to some of the horrors of today's world (genocide, torture, mass-migration, religious tyranny and so on).

At the same time, the return to the past has been accompanied by an increasing scepticism towards the capacity of historical narrative to offer an adequate representation of the truth. One of the durable legacies of postmodernism has been to explode the myth of referentiality formerly vested in the archive, to peel away the multiple, intertextual layers on which factual assertions are based, laying bare their relativity and levelling out their claims to authoritative status. The blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction has broadened the range of genres lending themselves to close analysis and has caused the study of literature, personal testimony, documentary materials, photographic images and contemporary artefacts to become fused in individual research projects. In this way, the processes whereby memories are institutionalised and embodied in cultures, sustained and embellished over time through the exercise of power have themselves become objects of study. From this perspective the study of literature has paradoxically been made more not less relevant through its capacity to fulfil a historiographical, metafictional function whereby it explains itself and deconstructs the historical processes it represents.

The current state of the study of cultural memory is therefore that it entails the analysis of multiple types of text, extending well beyond that of 'literature' *per se* and that it does so from at least four different perspectives. These perspectives simultaneously engage different fields of knowledge and different methodologies. Broadly speaking they comprise the study of...

- the individual in relation to the past: making sense of the past as a means of establishing personal identity – the quest for selfhood in a confused age marked by trauma and displacement. *Object of study*: autobiography/auto-bio-fiction/diaries and correspondence (eg after Proust... Levi, Moravia, Modiano, Sebald, Ernaux, Hoffman, Darrieussecq, Ndiaye etc. etc. with primary reference to Bergson, Ricœur, Kristeva, Freud, Derrida, Deleuze, Halbwachs, Heidegger...and ultimately Aristotle). *Methodology*: establishing a philosophical equation between concepts of being and their translation into literary [*sic*] text, thereby calling into question the nature of truth, the relationship between fact and fiction, processes of recall and identity construction over time. *Approach*: the close study of text and intertext, narratology, language and style;
- the relationship between personal and public/private and 'official' memory. This may involve the comparison between personal testimony and historical text and inevitably raises issues of the position of the individual in relation to history. *Object of study*: literal comparison between archival material and literary/personal representation of the past in text and/or literary texts whose focus is on that relationship (eg typically Duras/Resnais *Hiroshima mon Amour*, Sebald *Austerlitz*, Smith *White Teeth* etc + authors such as Modiano and Semprun and the others mentioned above). *Approach*: intertextual comparison between archive and literary/fictional representation with reference to Hayden White and 'new' historicism;
- the temporal interaction between space, place and cultural community, the legacy of the past, space and place as a means of compression in the perception/recall of space and place over time. *Theoretical points of reference*: Benjamin, Heidegger, Lefebvre, Nora (more recently Massey etc.

etc.) and exemplified *inter alia* by Maspero's *Roissy-Express*, Pamuk's *Istanbul*, Perec's *Espèces d'Espaces*, Pemberton's *For Ever and Ever Amen*, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Forster, Banville, McEwan... Particular points of emphasis: monuments and monumentalism, the construction of space and place through text. Approaches: study of the relationship between monuments, museums, artefacts, place and text, of text itself as monument and of texts about the relationship (classically Sebald's *Austerlitz* but also Butor's *La Modification*, Duras's *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, McCarthy's *No country for old men*, *The Road* etc. and a million others);

- the role played by literature, related text and architecture in the construction of community and nation and the political exploitation of culture in the maintenance of an 'invented' past. Again, Nora is an obvious point of reference and literary works such as Kadare's *The File on H.* explore the incorporation of epic into cultural capital which can then be used for political ends (cf Giraudoux). In addition to the study of literary text, this perspective incorporates approaches derived from cultural studies such as discourse analysis and secondary data such as interviews, enabling the impact of text on culture over time to be studied empirically as well as from a purely theoretical point of view.

It can be seen from the above that the study of cultural memory goes to the heart of the relationship between fact and fiction, the individual, history and society, war and its aftermath, Europe's colonial legacy and our understanding of current world events. As far as Europe is concerned, it should enhance the capacity of situated individuals from different European backgrounds to reconcile past and present through the close analysis of diverse texts, employing a variety of methodological principles and approaches. It can and should form the basis for integrated, inter-disciplinary curricula drawing on history, social science, psychology, philosophy, performance studies, arts and humanities in ways which redefine the boundaries of current research and its qualitative evaluation.

Position paper

Cultural memory has emerged as a serious object of scholastic study over the last 10-20 years. This development has arguably come about in response to the pace of global change and the inability of theory to offer coherent solutions to the major contemporary issues confronting the post-Communist world: postcolonial poverty, war, neo-liberal imperialism, migration, the shift of power from West to East and now the financial crisis. It also reflects an increasing disillusionment with the playful, ironic off-shoots of post-modern philosophy, invoking the desire to look to the past to explore the causes of current ills, to validate the origins of ethnic groups, to construct social identities through reference to shared cultural legacies, to make sense of social diversity in a multicultural environment and to reveal the constructions underpinning myths of nationhood. For Europe in particular, the advanced age of the survivors of World War II and the growing realisation of its delayed impact on the post-war generation as they in turn reached maturity has caused the traumatic legacy of that tragic upheaval to be scrutinised in ever greater detail: its long-term effects on children and grandchildren, its relevance to some of the horrors of today's world (genocide, torture, mass-migration, religious tyranny and so on).

At the same time, *'le temps d'un retour'* (pace Resnais, 1963) has been accompanied by an increasing scepticism towards the capacity of historical narrative to offer an adequate representation of the truth. One of the durable legacies of postmodernism which has found such a powerful echo in the works of, for example, Sebald and Modiano, has been to explode the myth of referentiality formerly vested in the archive, to peel away the multiple, inter-textual layers on which factual assertions are based, laying bare their relativity and levelling out their claims to authoritative status. The blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction has broadened the range of genres lending themselves to close analysis. The study of literature, personal testimony, documentary materials, photographic images and contemporary artefacts have become fused in research projects which focus as much on inter-textual relations as on individual creations. The fundamental questions concerning the relationship between memory and history posed by great works of art such as *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) remain unanswered today. Yet in the meantime, historical analysis has taken a cultural turn in its quest to meet the moral and methodological challenges thrown down by the legacies of the past.

The processes whereby memories are institutionalised and embodied in cultures, sustained and embellished over time through the exercise of power have themselves become objects of study. Against this backdrop, literature's capacity to fulfil a historiographical, metafictional, reflexive function has made its study more, not less relevant (Hutcheon 1988).

The current state of the study of cultural memory is therefore decentred and diverse. It entails the analysis of multiple types of text, extending well beyond that of 'literature' *per se* and does so from many different perspectives. Broadly speaking these can be summarised reductively as follows:

1. **the individual in relation to the past** *viz.* making sense of the past as a means of establishing personal identity. This process entails a quest for selfhood in a confused age marked by trauma and displacement. Its object of study is autobiography/auto-bio-fiction/diaries and correspondence (eg [after Proust...] Levi, Moravia, Modiano, Sebald, Ernaux, Hoffman, Darrieussecq, Ndiaye with primary reference to Bergson, Ricœur, Kristeva, Freud, Derrida, Deleuze, Halbwachs, Heidegger... and ultimately Aristotle). Its methodology: the establishing of a philosophical equation between concepts of being derived from past experience and their translation into literary [*sic*] text, thereby calling into question the nature of truth, the relationship between fact and fiction, processes of recall and identity construction over time. Approach: the close study of text and intertext, narratology, language and style.
2. **the relationship between personal and public/ private and 'official' memory.** This may involve the comparison between personal testimony and historical text and inevitably raises issues of the position of the individual in relation to history. The *topos* normally entails a literal comparison between archival material and literary/personal representations of the past in filmic and/or literary texts whose focus is precisely on that relationship (eg typically Duras/Resnais, *Hiroshima mon Amour*; Sebald, *Austerlitz*; Smith, *White Teeth*; Modiano, *Dora Bruder*; Semprun, *L'Écriture ou la Vie* and many others). Approach: intertextual comparison between archive and literary/fictional representation with reference, for example, to Hayden White and 'new' historicism [*sic*].
3. **the temporal interaction between space, place and cultural community.** This *topos* involves studying the legacy of the past through the compression in the perception/recall of space and place over time. Theoretical points of reference: Benjamin, Heidegger, Lefebvre, Nora (more recently Massey etc. etc.) and exemplified *inter alia* by Maspero's *Roissy-Express*, Pamuk's *Istanbul*, Perec's *Espèces d'Espaces*, Pemberton's *For Ever and Ever Amen*, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Forster, Banville, McEwan... Particular points of emphasis: monuments and monumentalism, the construction of space and place through text. Approaches: the study of the relationship between monuments, museums, artefacts, place and text, of text itself as monument (classically Sebald's *Austerlitz* but also Butor's *La Modification*, Duras's *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, McCarthy's *No country for old men*, *The Road* etc.).
4. **the role played by literature, related text and architecture in the construction of community and nation.** This theme often involves studying the political exploitation of culture which aims to sustain the myth of an 'invented' past. Again, Pierre Nora is an obvious point of reference and literary works such as Kadare's *The File on H.* (1981) which explore the incorporation of oral epic into a cultural capital which can then be used for political ends. In addition to the study of literary text, this perspective incorporates approaches derived from cultural studies such as discourse analysis and secondary data such as interviews, enabling the impact of text on culture over time to be studied empirically as well as from a purely theoretical point of view. When applied to recent literary texts this approach can include 'real-life' data derived from fieldwork with which the literary text can be seen to be in 'dialogue'. In this respect, a new sociology of literature can be said to be emerging, one which allows the literary text to be studied in conjunction with other forms of cultural artefacts from the past.

It can be seen from the above that the study of cultural memory goes to the heart of the relationship between fact and fiction, the individual, history and society, war and its aftermath, Europe's colonial legacy and our understanding of current world events. As far as Europe is concerned, it should

enhance the capacity of situated individuals from different European backgrounds to reconcile past and present through the close analysis of diverse texts, employing a variety of methodological principles and approaches. It can and should form the basis for integrated, inter-disciplinary curricula drawing on history, social science, psychology, philosophy, performance studies, arts and humanities in ways which redefine the boundaries of current research and its qualitative evaluation.