

Pre-workshop comment

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My approach to cultural memory

My research to date has included work on theories of memory as well as analyses of literature and film. My perspective tends to be informed by psychoanalytic theory – I am currently exploring Laplanchian approaches to film – and I have also written on memory studies and on the rise of memory as a cultural and academic phenomenon.

The truth of memory: fact & fiction

My grounding in psychoanalytic theories has tended to inform my perspective in this area. I am interested in the truths rather than the truth of memory – and am currently writing a paper on this topic for the 'Memory and Truth' conference in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, to be held later this month.

Regimes of memory: spaces, texts, objects, bodies

With Katharine Hodgkin, I edited a volume with this title and have, over many years, argued that memory needs to be understood, *inter alia*, as a regime. I am interested, that is, in the cultural injunction to remember, as well as in what this injunction may foreclose on or screen.

Trauma and memory

In my writings on trauma and memory in the journals *Screen*, *Cultural Values*, *Paragraph*, *Continuum* and elsewhere, I have been developing an approach to film and literature that contests 'trauma theory' as developed in the work of Caruth and Felman. My most recent project – a Laplanchian reading of *Caché* – develops this work further. I am currently also writing a chapter of my book on Akerman's *Demain on déménage* and looking elsewhere.

The politics and ethics of memory

In my essay on this topic in *Paragraph* I explored the question of the ethics of memory in relation to the injunction to witness, arguing that witnessing may involve the witness./scholar in a power relation that is rather at odds with the ways in which memory research has conceived of itself. My research in this area has stressed the fantasy components of witnessing and the power invested in trauma analysis.

Position paper

Trends in memory research

One trend discernible in this field is the rapid institutionalization of memory *research* into memory *studies*. As I argued in my essay 'For *and* against memory studies' in the first issue of the *Journal of Memory Studies*, this rapid institutionalization brings with it opportunities and risks. On the one hand, memory research, which has fast developed into an interdisciplinary field, is rapidly becoming a subject area in its own right with its own designated courses and text books. This can mean that concepts and theories that have purchase and have proved productive in one discipline are imported across subject areas rather speedily. Memory research is often accused, for instance, of deploying concepts and theories best suited to the analysis of individuals, for the study of texts and practices,

and collectivities and groups. In part, these speedy importations can be seen to be the result of the transportation of terms developed within disciplinary research into the interdisciplinary field of memory research and then, in the riskier third stage, into something called 'memory studies'. But memory's meaning is not a constant – the term designates different processes within different fields, and one task for memory studies is to begin to engage with the different understandings and uses of the concept of memory within discrete disciplines including psychology, literary studies and history.

The institutionalization of memory studies has occurred not only in the UK but also in many other national contexts. Memory is now a key interdisciplinary concept, for instance, across Europe, Australia and the US. But this international rise of memory studies is also quite revealing, for a close look at memory research in different locales reveals differences in orientation, intellectual history and political engagement. At the same time, influential *theorists* of memory are claiming that memory itself (rather than its academic study) is now best conceptualized as *transcultural* as well as *transnational* – see the *Transcultural Memory* conference organized by Goldsmiths and the IGRS, in February 2010. So, while memory theory emphasizes the dissolution of cultural and national borders, memory theory is itself more culturally and nationally bound than has yet been acknowledged.

Truth of Memory

I come at the question of memory's truth through the concepts of recognition and authorization as well as through those of propping and prompting. Different recognizing authorities operate different criteria for the recognition of memory's truths and grant authority to memories on the basis of their accordance with those criteria. This can be seen through a comparison of the 'truth criteria' operated by history, the law and religion, for instance. Memory's strict accordance with historically verifiable actuality may play a greater role within one institution than it does within others, and the affective and emotional truths of memory may carry greater weight where accordance with historical actuality is foregrounded to a lesser degree. If we turn our attention to literature, film and screen culture then we find that questions of form and genre – significant in other domains – bring themselves more obviously to our attention.

Where the transmission of memories is concerned, recent theories help us to think about the ways in which memories that do not accord with historical actuality, or that are not authentic, may nevertheless enable the recognition and authorisation of the experience of their rememberers or of others to whom those memories are transmitted. Hence, what triggers or prompts memory may have a complicated relationship with 'truth' and actual experience may be propped on memories that do not accord with historical actuality.

Regimes of Memory

The institutions and discourses through which memory is recognized, authorized and legitimated or de-legitimated constitute significant nodes in the production of regimes of memory but the concept of regimes of memory, introduced and defined in my coedited and authored book *Regimes of Memory* (Radstone and Hodgkin 2003) aims to signal, also, that memory discourses are, like all discourse, enmeshed with the production and exercise of power, as well as themselves being produced within networks of power/knowledge. Much memory research produced within the humanities has emphasized the liberating potential of remembering. Remembering is theorized within trauma theory, for instance, as the route out of entrapment by unremembered but captivating past experiences. Oral history, too, has emphasized the importance of gaining access to lost or silenced memories in order to work against the dominance of only those histories that have gained authority through their linkage with victory and the mobilization of force. A perspective grounded in memory as regime can destabilize those certainties by reminding us that discourses always operate through processes of subjectivization and one of the tasks of memory research is to reveal those processes in their relation

with the micro-politics of subjectivity as well as the broader fields of cultural, political and other discursive constructions of 'truth'.

The study of memory as regime can also alert us to the discursive constructions through which memory research and memory studies come into being. Far from being a purely academic pursuit, memory discourses travel between cultural, academic and other domains and one of the tasks for memory research is to understand better how memory as it has been constituted within academia may be forged through regimes that it might, on reflection, wish to resist.

Trauma and Memory

Trauma studies is by far the fastest growing and most controversial area of memory research. Prompted not only by the weight and seeming inescapability of historical suffering but also by developments within theory, studies of trauma research have had a profound influence on research across the social sciences and humanities as well as within psychology, psychiatry and the neurosciences. In my published works I have pointed to five problems with the trauma theory that has become dominant across the social sciences and the humanities. First, the distinction that trauma theory draws between victims and perpetrators speaks to, is drawn from and gives sustenance to a dangerously Manichean universe. Second, the power that trauma theory invests in analysts and academics is drawn from and diminishes those about whom it theorizes. Third, trauma theory's analyses of texts are too narrow. In place of readings that might study the multiplicity of reading positions and identifications proffered by texts – identifications with perpetration, for instance, as well as with suffering – trauma theory assumes that trauma texts will only be taken up from the position of the witness. Fourth, trauma theory adopts a literalist position, assuming that films or novels that are, on their surface 'about' historical catastrophes are only and definitively about those events. And finally and relatedly, the scope of trauma theory is narrow – focusing almost exclusively on texts that are on their surface about personal or collective trauma instead of asking how personal or collective historical trauma might mark *all manner* of genres of texts. In my own work I have been developing a new approach to the terrain designated as trauma research. By looking 'elsewhere' at texts that would not fall within the remit of trauma theory and by looking differently, through the theory of, amongst others, Jean Laplanche, I have been writing a new theory of the relations between culture and personal and historical catastrophe, to be published as *Getting Over Trauma*.

The Politics and Ethics of Memory

If we take to heart the insights provided by studying memory as regime and if we focus on the more problematic aspects of trauma theory, then it follows that the ethics and politics of memory inscribed within memory research – that remembering is a 'good' and that to bear witness is inherently ethical – might themselves require some rethinking. As memory research develops, it is beginning to reflect on its own perspectives, subject positions and politics, and these reflections will no doubt reveal the complex ways in which memory research is itself implicated within rather than simply a counter to the burdens of history that bear down upon those who are often its 'objects' of study.