

New Directions and Challenges in Cultural Memory Studies: Past, Present, Future

Veranstalter: Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Justus-Liebig University Gießen; Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform, Goethe University Frankfurt

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Bericht von: Jarula M.I. Wegner, Institute for England and America Studies, Goethe University Frankfurt

With memory studies now a fixture of the interdisciplinary research landscape, the two-day symposium „New Directions and Challenges in Cultural Memory Studies: Past, Present, Future“ engaged critically with the development of the field and the current state of research, while also indicating future directions. As a collaborative endeavour between the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus-Liebig University Gießen and the Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform (FMSP) at Goethe University Frankfurt, the symposium brought together researchers working in memory studies from both universities, as well as associates and partners, to generate dialogue on individual projects and the state of the field. The symposium included five sections showcasing current projects by PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers, plus a roundtable discussion with ASTRID ERLI (Frankfurt am Main) and ANDREAS LANGENOHL (Gießen) and a keynote lecture by Astrid Erll. The events covered recent developments and new challenges in this interdisciplinary field, while also serving to strengthen the institutional bonds between two Hessian universities that have emerged as strongholds of memory studies research.

The section on „Memory and Reconciliation in Postcolonial and Postsocialist Contexts“ analysed the public and cultural negotiations of memory occurring in the context of struggles over colonial, imperialist and totalitarian pasts. KAYA ALICE DE WOLFF (Tübingen) highlighted the struggles for recognition of the genocide on Herero and Nama in Germany's postcolonial media cultures. The lack of recognition, De Wolff argued, presents at least a threefold challenge

as it is aggravated by asymmetrical postcolonial relations between Germany and Namibia, the under-privileged position of Herero and Nama within Namibia's political landscape and a 'postcolonial dilemma' in international law. For (German) memory studies to undertake the process of working through the various challenges, she suggested, it would have to become postcolonial. HANNA TEICHLER (Frankfurt am Main) analysed performances of reconciliation in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In a close reading of the staging of Canadian Prime Minister Harper's apology, Teichler pointed out how the binary 'master identities' created in TRC discourse have become fuzzy, acquiring both transnational and transcultural traits. NIKOLA BAKOVIĆ (Gießen) described how a sculpture dedicated to First World War Marshal Stepa Stepanović in Čačak (Serbia) became a site for negotiating personal interests and discussing political concerns in the tension between grassroots movements and official/state-sanctioned memory culture. Overall the section indicated that past regimes engender demands for recognition and reconciliation, thereby causing present-day disruptions.

„Memory and Film“, the next section, investigated private and public sites of entanglement of film and remembering. NADIA BUTT (Gießen) highlighted the centrality of houses, and the notion of home, in Pakistani television dramas. The private living space functions as a conduit for an idealised past, to curate the past or as a landscape of different kinds of memory. In the characters' engagement with it, the house develops a life of its own and becomes a threshold between the private, the community and the nation. CHRISTINA JORDAN (Gießen) focused on the active endeavour to produce collective memories in the case of *A Jubilee Tribute to the Queen* by The Prince of Wales. The highly staged memory products aim at exhibiting continuity, Jordan argued, fashioning the royal family as an ordinary, loving family, thus collapsing public and private realms. The documentary form illustrated memory's remediation, with the act of remembering itself becoming an object of representation. ERIN HÖGERLE (Frankfurt am

Main) analysed film festivals in their function as part of the 'memory industry', as she termed it. More specifically, the CAAM (Center for Asian American Media) film festival originated from a political objective to create awareness of Asian Americans in national discourse. The festival's various programmes, Högerle noted, manifest forms that counter forgetting, denial and censorship while, simultaneously, negotiating sponsorship and popular demands. As a mass medium, then, the papers showed films as depictions of memory work that themselves function as objects of memory, thereby becoming entangled in complex negotiations of cultural memory and identity.

The section on „Memory and Transnational Literature“ analysed developments towards transnational and transcultural contacts, multiple cultural forms and contexts. SAYMA KHAN (Frankfurt am Main) indicated the parallel and, in parts, diametrically opposed development of partition narratives in Urdu and English from Pakistan's perspective. While the treatment of partition narratives had gradually receded in Urdu literature, Khan argued, in English language literature it has increased, moving towards transnational negotiations. In a close reading of two recently published graphic novels, EVA JUNGBLUTH (Frankfurt am Main) demonstrated the ways in which public memories are interwoven with private ones in content and form, enabling the return of forgotten or suppressed figures to public discourse. Transnational actors, Jungbluth indicated, are forgotten due to their continued disruptive crossing of borders and categories. MARIA ELISABETH DORR (Frankfurt am Main) demonstrated memory studies' potential to reveal and think through blind spots in possible-world theory, which, she argued, relies heavily on memories in reader perception. Cultural memories regulate the possibility of narrative-reader convergence concerning the written text and, all the more so, the gaps and what a text leaves unsaid. All three papers demonstrated that the movement towards transnational and transcultural connections offers the potential to travel and connect, while simultaneously creating the challenge of transcending established frames of recogni-

tion without thoughtlessly collapsing spaces.

The section on „Memory and Institutions“ highlighted the continued importance and frictions created through locally, nationally and internationally operating institutions in the construction and circulation of memories. DORA KOMNENović (Gießen) traced the process of discarding and weeding in Croatian and Slovenian libraries following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. While there was a semblance of normality in most libraries, Komnenović argues, there was an 'organised oblivion' of books that contradicted new personal and national agendas, relating to both anti-communism and inter-ethnic conflicts, while individual and artistic activism, on the other hand, returned some works to the public. Comparing Dubravka Ugrešić's novel *The Ministry of Pain* with Miljenko Jergović's essay collection *Historijska Čitanka* (History reader), MIRKO MILIVOJEVIĆ (Gießen) noted the critical, ironic engagement of authors with the present through 'Yugo-nostalgia'. Employing a mode of reflective nostalgia, Milivojević argued, these authors sought ways of transcending the current state of dominant memory narratives and competing nationalisms, while acknowledging the multiple challenges in doing so. YINGJIE ZHANG (Frankfurt am Main) combined translation theories with the concept of transcultural memory to analyse the various travels of John Rabe's diaries, a German NSDAP member based in Nanking at the time of the massacre, who helped save Chinese civilians. Through acts of translation, she argued, the diaries' meaning has become dislocated and transcultural aspects become retroactively nationalised. This section showed that institutions, such as museums and libraries, become entangled in changing memory agendas that become particularly evident in times of political transitions, reorientations and national memory conflicts.

The section on „Memory and Digital/New Media“ focused on the pedagogic use of museum installations and social media as modes of remembrance. SOPHIE-CHARLOTTE OPITZ (Frankfurt am Main) analysed Shai Kremer's exhibition „Connecting Narratives“ (2015) in its employment of photography for reflective, interactive and educational

artworks. The exhibition turned the museum into a 'thinking space' that encouraged visitors to connect photos to other photos, to other sites (of war) and, finally, to the museum space itself to engage visitors with the process of tracing borders. ANA LÚCIA MIGOWSKI (Gießen) presented research undertaken with WILLIAN FERNANDES ARAÚJO (Porto Alegre) demonstrating users' complex engagement with Facebook's application „Look Back“ introduced in 2014. The algorithmically navigated app sought to recall users' most exciting moments, a function celebrated by some and scorned by others. Their research showed that users were aware of the algorithmic mechanisms, with widespread rejection appearing to have caused its eventual cessation. Digital/New Media, the presentations showed, do not necessarily lead to opacity and capitulation but can enhance modes of reflection, interaction and activism.

In a roundtable discussion, Astrid Erll and Andreas Langenohl reflected on the development of memory studies from the vantage point of the symposium's specific location. In 1997 the *Sonderforschungsbereich Erinnerungskulturen*, or Collaborative Research Centre on Cultures of Memory, was founded at Justus Liebig University Gießen. Almost twenty years ago this research centre set out to intensify and broaden the study of memory, emphasizing above all „the plurality of cultural memory“¹. While it appeared almost revolutionary in the 1990s to argue for memory cultures in the plural instead of culture in the singular, and also conceiving the centre on a broad interdisciplinary scale, these innovations are now accepted or even expected fixtures of memory research in Giessen, Frankfurt am Main and beyond. The discussion demonstrated the decisive shift and expansion of cultural memory studies from its originally sociological conception, built on Maurice Halbwachs' theory, to other disciplines. The particularly historicizing conception of the SFB was part of this move, which, it was argued, should be pursued again today, with memory studies encouraged to make more connections to neighbouring disciplines, such as heritage studies, folklore studies and ethnography. Since

it remains an interdisciplinary and multi-perspective endeavour, the roundtable participants suggested that the field remains dynamic and thus should continue to provide foundations for the creation and continuation of research clusters. Still, as Astrid Erll noted, the field is far from fully institutionalised, lacking, for example, its own research association, which could be one step towards strengthening its position. Equally, work in memory studies in Germany still struggles to find a disciplinary base, thus providing early career researchers in the field with an additional challenge in positioning their research.

In her keynote lecture „New Directions and Challenges in Cultural Memory Studies: Past, Present, Future“, Astrid Erll discussed how cultural memory had been researched in the past, how it is studied today in different disciplinary, national and regional contexts and how it might be explored in the future. In the history of memory studies, she discerned three different stages of development. In the first stage in the early twentieth century, Erll argued, memory studies was conceived in various locations by researchers coming from different disciplines. While Maurice Halbwachs reflected on social frames of remembrance, Aby Warburg mapped certain artistic formulas that travelled across time and space and Walter Benjamin launched a philosophical critique of historical thought, to mention only a few. Yet these early avant-garde thinkers did not exchange their ideas. In the second stage, beginning in the 1980s, cultural memory studies developed in various places with interdisciplinary projects. Notable figures include Pierre Nora, a representative of French *nouvelle histoire*, Aleida and Jan Assmann, who conducted interdisciplinary research on cultural memory in Germany, and Saul Friedländer, a key figure of Holocaust studies in the United States. Only in the third stage, since around 2010, Erll argued, has memory been conceived of as travelling „continually moving across and beyond such territorial and social borders.“² In this stage then, concepts of transnational

¹ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, translated by Sara B. Young, Hampshire, 2011, p. 49.

² Astrid Erll, *Travelling Memory*, in: *Parralax* Vol. 17, No. 4 (2011), pp. 4-18, here p. 10.

memory (Andreas Huyssen), cosmopolitan memory (Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider), multidirectional memory (Michael Rothberg) and connective memory (Marianne Hirsch) emerged, theorising memories in their travelling and connecting functions. Finally, Erll indicated various factors that may shape future research on cultural memory (such as the need to 'provincialize European memory', the shift to a study of future-oriented memories, and the idea of 'transregional memory') as well as research pragmatics (beyond the challenges of international and interdisciplinary research she highlighted the increasing intersections between memory theory and practice).

„New Directions and Challenges in Cultural Memory Studies: Past, Present, Future“, organised by Research Area 1 of the GCSC in Gießen and FMSP with the Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre, served as a representative symposium in this regard. It brought together researchers from various disciplines and continents to present, discuss and reflect together on the current state of cultural memory studies and the study of culture more broadly, as part of the GCSC's tenth anniversary year. It sought to further strengthen networks and exchange between research centres in order to continue the tradition of the *SFB Erinnerungskulturen* initiated in the last century to pursue a „thorough historicization of the category of memory“³, building on existing foundations and extending the work on cultural memory. The event was organized and conducted by Jelena Đureinović (Gießen), Paul Vickers (Gießen) and Jarula M. I. Wegner (Frankfurt am Main).

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Introduction: Michael Basseler (Giessen) and Jelena Đureinović (Gießen)

Panel 1: Memory and Reconciliation in Postcolonial and Postsocialist Contexts

Discussant: Pavan Kumar Malreddy (Frankfurt am Main); Chair: Jelena Đureinović (Gießen)

Nikola Baković (Gießen) „Bronze of Contention: Remembering Marshal Stepa Stepanović in Čačak (Serbia)“

Hanna Teichler (Frankfurt am Main) „Of binaries and transgressions – memory studies, performance theory and Canada's Roadmap to Reconciliation“

Kaya Alice de Wolff (Tübingen) „Memory Conflicts in Postcolonial Media Cultures: Struggles for Recognition of the Genocide on Herero and Nama in the Public Media Discourse in contemporary Germany“

Panel 2: Memory and Film

Discussant: Senta Siewert (Frankfurt am Main); Chair: Jarula M. I. Wegner (Frankfurt am Main)

Eva Jungbluth (Frankfurt am Main) „Visual Memory Tropes in Graphic Narratives“

Nadia Butt (Gießen) „Memory and Media: 'House' as a Realm of Memory in Pakistani Television Drama“

Erin Högerle (Frankfurt am Main) „Film Festivals and the Memory Industries“

Keynote Lecture

Astrid Erll (Frankfurt am Main) „New Directions and Challenges in Cultural Memory Studies: Past, Present, Future“

Panel 3: Memory and Transnational Literature

Discussant: Joanna Rostek (Gießen); Chair: Jarula M. I. Wegner (Frankfurt am Main)

Sayma Khan (Frankfurt am Main) „Reading South Asian Partition Literature across linguistic and temporal distance“

Maria Elisabeth Dorr (Frankfurt am Main) „Collapsible spaces and distant storyworlds in (trans)cultural memory studies“

Panel 4: Memory and Institutions

Discussant: Paul Vickers (Gießen); chair: Jelena Đureinović (Gießen)

Dora Komnenović (Gießen) „Discarding a Common Past: The «Cleansing» of Croatian and Slovenian Libraries in the 1990s and Beyond“

Mirko Milivojević (Gießen) “(‘Yugo’)nostalgia and cultural memory – towards alternative

³ Erstantrag to the SFB Erinnerungskulturen 1997, p. 11 cited from Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, Hampshire, 2011, p. 49.

past(s) and present?“

Yingjie Zhang (Frankfurt am Main) „One man’s memory of WWII that links the West with the East: John Rabe and his diaries“

Panel 5: Memory and Digital/New Media

Discussant: Astrid Erll (Frankfurt am Main);

Chair: Paul Vickers (Gießen)

Sophie-Charlotte Opitz (Frankfurt am Main)
„Framing Remembrance – Encountering Memory: A Case Study on Conceptual War Photography and its Strategy to Educate Memory Practices in Museums“

Christina Jordan (Gießen) „A Prince Producing Memories? The Active Production of Collective Memories in Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden and Diamond Jubilee“

Ana Lúcia Migowski (Gießen) and Willian Fernandes Araújo (Porto Alegre) „‘Looking Back’ at memories on Facebook: Remembering and being remembered by digital technologies“

Roundtable discussion *Challenges and New Directions in Cultural Memory Studies?* featuring Astrid Erll (Frankfurt am Main) and Andreas Langenohl (Gießen)

Chairs: Paul Vickers (Gießen) and Jarula M. I. Wegner (Frankfurt am Main)

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