

Handbook Seminar
“Performing Memory”

Weimar, 20 and 21 October 2005

For further information please visit www.uni-weimar/medien/europa/lehre+

Jun.Prof. Dr. Sonja Neef

sonja.neef@medien.uni-weimar.de

Introduction

This seminar will inquire into cultural strategies enabling us to deal with the past today. Rather than considering the past as a pre-given object to be reconstructed from the point of view of the present, we will focus on what is called “cultural memory.” “Memory” (*Erinnerung, mémoire, herinnering*), as opposed to what in German is called “Gedächtnis,” takes its basis in a subject rather than in documental media. Memory has been alleged to break down under stress and trauma. It has difficulties to come to expression, and yet it must take a medial shape, or *performance*, in order to be communicable. As a subjective activity, memory is closely related to bodily sensations: to images, sound, and smell. However, when experiences are shared by social, political, national, racial or sexual groups as “shared history”—as the *Shoa* is for whole Europe and beyond—they may effect a public or “cultural” memory. The aim of this seminar is to explore the performative forces of European art projects dealing with the *Shoa*.

Organization of the seminar

The seminar is organized in two parts:

The first part takes place on 20th and 20st October and will have the format of a workshop in which we will discuss some of the key-concepts of the current debate on cultural memory: performance and performativity, (in-)narratability, trauma, and amnesia. These concepts will be framed in different public spaces: the museum, the archive, and the memorial. To achieve progress on these concepts, we will work with a series of academic articles which you are requested to prepare in advance. Each article will be accompanied by focus questions intended to help you to get grasp of the concepts in question. You are requested to prepare these questions carefully so that you can perform an advance of knowledge through your ideas in the workshop. A reader will be available in the Limona-Institute-Library by September 1. Students coming from abroad can contact Prof. Liz Bachhuber.

The second part takes place in January and will have the format of a plenum in which you get the opportunity to present your own artistic or academic work inspired by the academic concepts elaborated and discussed in the workshop. The idea is to come to a dialogue between arts and science, to enact concepts of cultural memory in word, image, sound, or smell and thus to contribute simultaneously to academic scholarship. Art, thus seen, becomes a mode of conceptual discourse.

For preparation, read at least the “basic”-articles of each session as well as the case studies of at least one of the sessions which you chose according to your own interest.+

Program
including guidelines for preparation

October 20th: The Past Now

1st session: Performance and Performativity

9.00-11.00

The concepts of performance and performativity have been intensively discussed in the last two decades, since what one can call the “performative turn.” Albeit these twin-concepts are closely related to each other, they need to be distinguished carefully. For the matter of this seminar on cultural memory, it is important to understand that the concept of performativity offers a model focusing on the performance of an act-like, singular event rather than on ‘representation’ of a pre-given content. Historical events can not be ‘re-presented,’ in the sense that they can+literally not be made present. Even though historical events are absolutely singular and thus not to repeat, they become meaningful in the present only as they are quoted as a citation of the past in the present. Present and presence, thus considered, do no longer constitute a stable unity.

Jacques Derrida has offered a profound theory of the concept of performativity in his famous essay “Singular Event Content” in which he analyzes John L. Austin’s theory of performative speech acts. For a deeper investigation of the concept, I highly recommend this essay. Derrida has explained the conception of performativity in two short and clear chapters on the declaration of independence of the United States.

Questions:

- Think through the way in which the signature is a performative.
- collect the statements Derrida makes on “performativity” and formulate a definition
- Focus on the relationships between the twin-concepts ‘presence’ and ‘present,’ ‘representation’ and ‘performance,’ ‘iteration’ and ‘singularity.’
- How are these twin-concepts organized in the opening of Jessica +Durlacher’s novel “The daughter”?

Readings:

- Starter: Jessica Durlacher, ch. 1+2+
- Main dish: Jacques Derrida: + “Unabhängigkeitserklärungen” (+English?) (dt. 2000, S. 9-19)
- Optional: John L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*
Jacques Derrida, *Signature Event Content*

2nd Session: Memory in the Archive

11.00-1.00

The archive, as an age-old cultural institution, is currently booming as a source of inspiration of artists and scholars in different disciplines. For the purposes of this seminar, it has an equally crucial position. The word 'archive' literally comes from *archeion* and means the official hall where authentic documents are certified, preserved and stored for the future. The archive bewares the past like Noah's 'Ark' salvaged the inheritance of manhood and mammals. The human brain has often been compared with an archive understood as a place where information is selected, saved or erased. Such a psychological model is developed by Sigmund Freud in his famous essay "Notiz über den Wunderblock" in which Freud exemplifies the children's toy of the mystic writing pad to understand the operations of human memory.

Questions:

- Try to see how Freud describes memory as a layered medium. What does Freud indicate by "memory-traces" (*Erinnerungsspuren*) and by "permanent traces" (*Dauerspuren*). The basic operations of memory are perception, storing and erasing.
- Make the move from Freud to Derrida who claims that the archive "produces as much as it records the event". (1995: 17) What does Derrida indicate with the term "archivization"?
- What does it mean that the archive makes two temporalities-past and future-+ slide into each other.

Readings:

- Freud, Sigmund. (1925). „Notiz über den Wunderblock.“ Volume III, p. 365-369.
+Freud: Mystic Writing Pad
- Derrida, Jacques (1995) "Exergue" in *Archive Fever*, p. 1-23

2.30-4.00

Arnold Dreyblatt is an American, Berlin-based artist and composer who links the use of electronic media and sculptural space in posing questions on the storage of collective and individual memory.

Questions:

- Think through the concept of memory and archive in the work of Dreyblatt as analyzed by Fechner-Smarsly.
- Follow the move from Freud's *Wunderblock* to Dreyblatt installation of the mystic writing pad.
- For discussion: Sabine Müller-Funk: Speicherglas; Arnold Dreyblatt: T-Project+

Readings:

- Fechner-Smarsly, Thomas. "Catastrophe, Memory, Archive. Arnold Dreyblatt's Media- and Archiv-Supported Work in Cultural Remembrance/Katastrophe, Gedächtnis, Archiv. Arnold Dreyblatts medien- und archivgestützte Arbeit

an der kulturellen Erinnerung.“ in: Arnold Dreyblatt. *Aus den Archiven/From the Archives*, S. 17-31. Saarbrücken: Kehrler.
- Dreyblatt, Arnold, *The Wunderblock*, 2000, S. 36-39.

Optional:

The literature on the archive is endless. For those of you interested in a more profound engagement with Derrida's idea of the archive, I recommend Freud's „Jenseits des Lustprinzips.“ Volume III, p. S. 213-329, on which *Archive Fever* is based. Eric Ketelaar in a series of articles further develops the derridean concept of 'archivization' as 'archivalization,' adding another syllable enclosing the concept of "value" into the concept of the archive, to emphasize that choices made in archiving are highly dependent on cultural values. For a Foucaunian approach to the archive I refer to Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Rumoren der Archive. Ordnung aus Unordnung* and for a more general overview to Jürgen Fohrmann, "'Archivprozesse' oder über den Umgang mit der Erforschung von 'Archiv'. Einleitung."

3rd Session: The Memorial

4.00-6.00

The memorial—unlike most museums and archives—is an authentic place where true events really happened. the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and the *Gedenkstätte Buchenwald* in Weimar are such authentic places. The magic force of the memorial is grounded on the logic of performativity, for one goes there to seek a recurrence of historical events, but what one encounters then qualifies rather as a non-event as it is constituted by absence, by an intervention which *does not* happen. However, the immense force of such non-event is grounded in the idea of presence, of a possible future which has not come true. The experience of loss of this other future, along with the knowledge about its possibility, turns into an act of mourning constituting cultural memory of the Holocaust. The desire to participate in this public ceremony is precisely the incentive for millions of people to visit an authentic location.

Questions

- The monumental memorial seems to offer a perfect remedy for the always threatening collapse of memory. How does Huyssen construct the relation between 'memory' and 'monument'?

Reading:

Andreas Huyssen: "Monumental Seduction," p. 191-207

Additional:

'The' classic text on the memorial rhetoric of space is Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*+

October 21st: Speaking out the unspeakable

Memory risks to break down easily under stress and trauma. Traumatic (Holocaust) experiences have difficulties to come to expression, and yet they must take a medial shape, or *performance*, in order to be communicable. Holocaust reports, if authentic, often risk being unreadable. Conversely, if they make its reading all too easy, they are in danger of being inadequate. In literature, the genre of Holocaust-narration has cultivated linguistic paradoxes of speaking out the unspeakable. For example, Raymond Federman's novel on a man who makes a plan to write down his Holocaust-experience but does not overcome the preparatory stage of his plan, residing in calculating how much pasta it would require to realize his project. Visual artworks such as (documentary) photography, on the other hand, seem to have the potential to effect authenticity through what is presented as shocking truth. This second conference day is dedicated to the specific modes of different media to "speak out the unspeakable".

4th Session: Memory's Opposites: Amnesia and Trauma

9.00-11.00

Questions:

- How does trauma relate to memory?
- Focus on how Van Alphen conceptualizes "trauma", and which strategies he discusses for overcoming trauma.
- How does Van Alphen explain the difficulties of giving rise to subjectivity?

Reading:

Alphen, Ernst van. 1999. "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma". In: *Acts of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, p. 24-38. Hanover (NH), London: UP of New England.

Additional:

Huysen: "Introduction" in *Twilight Memories*, p. 1-36 +?

5th Session: Memory between Image and Narrative

11.00-1.00

Traumatic (Holocaust) experiences are difficult to incorporate into narrative memories, for narratives of memory would require structuring events in time and thus become the "master" of history rather than the object suffering the traumatizing events. W.J.T. Mitchell, in *Picture Theory*, explains these difficulties of memory by offering the concept of "image-text," arguing that to the concept of memory would be both textual and pictorial.

Questions:

- In how far is slavery a “prevention of memory” according to Mitchell?
- In which sense is memory textual according to Mitchell?
- In which sense is memory pictorial according to Mitchell respectively Hirsch?
- Mitchell’s focus is not on Holocaust experiences, but on slavery. Can we deploy the concept of “imagetext” for Holocaust experiences without ignoring the very specific quality of each of these historical framings?
- Which are the surplus values and the dangers of (documentary) photography used for purposes of cultural memory, as discussed by Marianne Hirsch?

Readings:

Mitchell, W.J.T. 1994. “Narrative, Memory, and Slavery” in *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. p. 183- 213

Hirsch, Marianne. 1999. “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy” in *Acts of Memory*, p. 3-23.

6th Session: Memory in the Museum

2.30-4.00

Like the archive and the memorial, the museum is a prominent institution where cultural memory is produced. The task of the museum has traditionally be seen in the work of the *curator*, the one “taking care” for objects by preserving and storing them, to save them for the future. However, like the archive, the museum does much more than that. The museum collects and selects object, according to Pomian, the museum makes invisibilities visible, and, most importantly, it exposes and explains objects by framing them in an authoritative discourse, as Mieke Bal stresses in her now classic book *Double Exposures*. In doing so, the museum—again: like the archive—is as much involved in a politics of memory as in a politics of amnesia.

Questions:

- Is there, according to Huyssen, an “escape from amnesia”?
- If so, which strategies does the museum the museum follow to prevent us from forgetting?
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Readings:

- Starter: Raymond Federman, “Penner Rap” p. 104-105 (Engl!+)
- Main dish: Andreas Huyssen: “Escape from Amnesia. The Museum as Mass Medium” in *Twilight Memories*, p. 191-208.+

Closing Session: Performing Memory

4.00-6.00

Questions:

- how does Neef distinguish the main operations of the museum from those of the archive
- What does “musealization” mean? Link this concept back to the term “archivization” as discussed in the section on the archive.
- Think through the performative dimension of “exposition” as Neef discusses relying on Mieke Bal’s museum’s theory.
- Re-think the initial question of this workshop focusing on the relationships between the twin-concepts ‘presence’ and ‘present,’ ‘representation’ and ‘performance,’ ‘iteration’ and ‘singularity.’

Readings:

Sonja Neef: „Authentic Events. The Diaries of Anne Frank and the Alleged Diaries of Adolf Hitler.“

Additional:

I recommend reading as much as you can on Mieke Bal’s museum’s theory. Her main book on this subject is *Double Exposures*, but she also has a series of important and much-discussed articles. Famous is her article “On collecting”.

Evaluation

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