SOCIAL MEMORY

Fall 2012

4 credits course

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Class: Monday 1.30- 5.10
Office hours: Tuesday and by appointment

Course description
This course explores the growing field of memory studies, the roots of our interest in memory and the role it plays in contemporary society. Memory is multivalent and omnipresent, part of the politics of regret that marks our political culture, the commemorative drive of the last century and the ubiquitous nostalgia for the past. The overwhelming presence of memory in public discourse and science has altered significantly the way we remember, forget or imagine our past. But this obsession with memory has also led some to question its conceptual relevance in social sciences. The course proposes thus a critical appraisal of memory studies based on the premise that the study of memory provides an excellent opportunity for engaging in a genuine interdisciplinary endeavor. It starts by defining the field of research at the intersection of history, anthropology, sociology and psychology and examines the emergence of ‘memory’ as an object of study within these disciplines, focusing on the interplay between individual and collective memory. In the second part it presents a series of case studies that expose the processes through which individual memories are shaped by larger collectivities, the cultural construction of trauma and the ways in which symbols, practices, spaces and objects become means to articulate and legitimate personal biographies, collective identities and memory projects.

Learning outcomes
Upon completion of the course students should: a) gain knowledge of various theoretical and empirical approaches to memory in historical and social sciences b) develop an interdisciplinary approach to memory by bringing together the conceptual and methodological tools of the respective disciplines in concrete case studies c) assess and refine their working definition of memory, becoming aware of the advantages and limitations of current approaches d) be able to develop adequate methodologies for approaching ‘memory’ in their empirical research e) learn to formulate research questions and articulate an empirically-based argument in writing.

Course Requirements
This course is based on weekly lectures and seminars that rely heavily on students’ contributions and discussions of the assigned readings and films screened in class. Additional readings related to the films will be provided during the course. Students have to prepare class presentations based on the readings and their own examples, and they should be actively involved in every class. They are encouraged to work on case
studies related to their own research or be ready to engage with a specific topic from the field of memory studies for the final paper. The final grade is based on class participation (10%), student presentations (30%) and a research paper (60%).

**Recommended readings and readers (available in the library)**

**Week 1. The Emergence of Memory Studies**


**Week 2. From Collective to Social Memory**


**Week 3. Memory and History**


**Week 4. Memory as Cultural Transmission**


**Week 5. The Critics of Memory: Theoretical & Methodological Challenges**


**Week 6. The Politics of Memory: Paradigms**


Week 7. The Ethics of Remembrance


Week 8. Trauma and its Critics


Week 9. Autobiographical Memory: from Individual to Social Remembrance


Week 10. The Media of Memory


Week 11. The Memory of Loss (and the Loss of Memory)


Week 12. Nostalgia
