Past in the Present: Collective Memory, Politics and Culture

Seminar Leader: Dr. Irit Dekel
Times: Monday 10:45-12:15
       Wednesday 10:45-12:15
Email: i.dekel@berlin.bard.edu

Course Description
This course examines the interrelations between the ways the past is represented and acted upon, culture and politics. The focus will be on civil society initiatives rather than on state-orchestrated commemoration. We will draw on cases from modern European (specifically German) memory politics after WWII. The central question the course addresses is how collective memory is a social phenomenon that enacts the past but is always embedded in present politics and culture. We will then look into the different 'sites' of studying collective memory, from social agency, identity construction and cosmopolitanism to sites of memory, their aesthetics and architecture, tourism and consumption. We will proceed by focusing on specific sites of remembrance such as memorials, ruins, museums, trials, testimony and oral history. In class and in assignments we will discuss theoretical texts as well as memorial sites, exhibitions, works of art and archival materials. We will conclude by examining three recently created sites of remembrance that combine in their history as well as in their form and utilization various modes of memory work: The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, and its relations to the newly opened Sinti and Roma memorial and the memorial to homosexuals, all in the center of Berlin. In our reading we will discuss social and personal experience and performance of social memory through the writing of Halbwachs, Connerton, Freud, Alexander, Olick, Hirsch and others.

Course Requirements and Assignments
Students are expected to come to class having done the readings assigned for that session, and prepared to participate in class.

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

1. One midterm paper, proposing a framework for the term paper, based on assigned readings. (30%)

The midterm paper’s goal is to formulate a research question and locate it within existing cases and literature on the topic. 4-5 pages long; Due 23:59 25.10.13

2. Participation in weekly sessions (20%)
Each student will be required to give a short presentation at opening of class on assigned reading; summary and discussion questions will be submitted to class via email before class. Please view them as writing/thinking exercise, not as a finished product, and use them to respond with your own questions, criticism and new ideas they suggest.

3. Final paper based on the mid-term’s question and enlarging its scope 8-10 pages (50%) Due 23:59 20.12.13

Course outline

* Required reading

2.9-4.9.13
1. Collective Memory: Introduction


* Sigmund Freud from Totem and Taboo pages 84-89 in the Collective Memory Reader

9.9-11.9.13
2. Uncovering Memory: Studying Collective Memory


* Olick Jeffrey, Vinitzky-Seroussi Vered and Daniel Levy 2011 Introduction to the Collective Memory Reader, Oxford UK.


16-18.9.13
3. Social Agency


* Reading Anna 2011 “Identity, memory and cosmopolitanism: The otherness of the past and a right to memory?” European Journal of Cultural Studies 14(4) 379–394
*Emanuel Sivan, 1999 “Private Pain and Public Remembrance in Israel” in Winter and Sivan 1999 (Eds.) War and Remembrance

23-25.9.13

4. Unclaimed Experience: Identity and Trauma


*Alexander Jeffrey “Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity” Chapter 1: “Toward a theory of cultural trauma”


2.10.13

5. *Freud Moses and Monotheism

*excerpts from Assmann Moses the Egyptian

14-16.10.13

6. Embodiment and Representation
In this meeting we will discuss the exhibition “After Images: Art as social Memory”


*Ricour, Paul ”Memories and Images” pp. 44-55 in his Memory, History, Forgetting

21-23.10.13

7. Sites of Memory

* Aleida Assmann from Canon and Archive Pages 334-338 in the Collective Memory Reader

* Hirsch Marianne “Objects of return” 203-226 in her The Generation of Postmemory

Midterm paper due 23:59 25.10

28-30.10.13

8. Times and Narratives of Memory

* Eric Hobsbawm from “Introduction: Invented Traditions” 271-274 in the Collective Memory Reader

* Eviatar Zerubavel 2003 excerpts from Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past. Chicago U.P.

* A. Dirk Moses Stigma and Sacrifice in the Federal Republic of Germany Source: History and Memory, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007), pp. 139-180

4-6.11.13

9. Memorials and Monuments


* Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz 1991 “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past” AJS Volume 97 (2) 376-420

* Dekel, Irit “Ways of Looking: Transcending Time and Space through photography at the Holocaust Memorial, Berlin”. Memory Studies 2(1), 71-86.

11-13.11.13

10. Ruins and voids


* Till Karen E. 2005 “Haunting, Memory, Place” 5-24 in her The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


* Confino Alon 2006 “Traveling as a culture of remembrance” in his Germany as a Culture of Remembrance
18-20-11.13  
11. Museums


* Susan A. Crane 2000 *Museums and Memory* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Chapter 1 Susan A. Crane “of Museums and memory”

25-27-11.13  
12. Trials


2-4.12.13  
13. Traveling and transcultural memory

* Susannah Radstone 2011 “What Place Is This? Transcultural Memory and the Locations of Memory Studies” Parallax 2011.

* Astrid Erl 2011: Travelling Memory, *Parallax*, 17:4, 4-18

9-11.12.13  
14. Material Culture, Nostalgia, recycling


* Lucy Norris  2008 “Recycling and Reincarnation: the Journeys of Indian Saris” Mobilities, Volume 3 (3) 3415 – 436
Final paper due 23:59 Friday, 20.12