ESF Exploratory Workshop on Mediating the past: Memory practices between social cohesion and fragmentation

Braunschweig (Germany), 14 – 16 March 2012

Convened by: Felicitas Macgichrist and Geert Jacobs

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② Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, Belgium
The European Science Foundation (ESF) is an association of 72 Member Organisations devoted to scientific research in 30 European countries. The Mission of ESF is to provide a common platform for its Member Organisations in order to advance European research and to explore new directions for research at the European level. Through its activities, the ESF serves the needs of the European research community in a global context.

The main objectives of ESF for the years 2006-2010 (extended to 2011 and 2012) as defined by its current Strategic Plan are to promote Science Strategy and Science Synergy, paving the way for initiatives across disciplinary and geographic boundaries in the European Research Area (ERA).

The Exploratory Workshops scheme is one of the key instruments of the Science Strategy “pillar”. Each year, ESF supports approximately 50 Exploratory Workshops across all scientific domains. The focus of the scheme is on workshops aiming to explore an emerging and/or innovative field of research or research infrastructure, also of interdisciplinary character. Workshops are expected to open up new directions in research or new domains. It is expected that a workshop shall conclude with plans for follow-up research activities and/or collaborative actions or other specific outputs at international level.

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**ESF Exploratory Workshops:**

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**Main Objectives of the Workshop:**

‘Memory’ has become a powerful concept in the study of contemporary human life. The ability to remember and draw elements of the past into the present enables us to plan the future. Tensions between the memories of diverse social groupings play a significant role in the sense of exclusion and inclusion within and among societies. Different patterns of memory practices across Europe lead to different forms of social cohesion/fragmentation. Yet, despite the large number of studies across a range of disciplines, surprisingly few empirical studies have investigated how interpretations of the past are actually mediated and engaged in specific everyday and institutional settings. This question is increasingly important, given the widespread perception that today’s world is constantly changing at great speed. The world appears ever more interconnected, diverse and fragmented. It no longer affords a single master narrative of the past. This in turn threatens the long-held political desire to define a stable shared ‘national’ memory, and opens up a myriad of alternative memory practices. Today’s societies are shaped by conflicts between attempts to stabilise cultural memory and practices of destabilising cultural memory.

Memory studies has embraced heterogeneity and controversy, investigating for instance the contradictory joint construction of family memory. Exciting steps have been taken by interview studies which have identified tensions between family and official memories. Nevertheless, empirical studies observing how people perform or ‘do’ memory by reconstructing the past in naturalistic, real-life settings are still very rare. Calls made since the 1990s for research which investigates the practices of interacting with collective memory objects have as yet remained largely unanswered.

The main objective of this three-day workshop is thus to bring together for the first time experts from memory studies and linguistic ethnography to explore how to open up ‘memory practices’ as a substantive field of enquiry. The former have expertise in the dynamics and mediation of memory; the latter in how language and interaction figure in struggles over meaning, processes of inclusion and exclusion and the mediation of social cohesion and fragmentation.
**Workshop Agenda**

Since remembering is impossible without mediation, our focus is on how students and teachers, journalists, other media workers, artists, etc. and also the general public in their capacity as news consumers, internet users, cinema-goers, etc. engage with officially legitimised versions of history.

**Participants are invited to discuss how their own research relates to some or all of the following research questions:**

- Which dynamic memory practices map the fault lines of contemporary socio-cultural configurations across Europe (e.g. in conflicting memories of migration and diversity; among generations, minority and majority groups, states and nations, the local and the national, European regions, etc.)?

- How do these memory practices figure in everyday practices and perceptions of cohesion/fragmentation in general and inclusion/exclusion and/or misrepresentation in particular?

- Which specific innovative methods utilizing new technologies (e.g. video-supported observations, computer-assisted ethnography) could (i) provide new insights into situated memory practices, and (ii) enhance the impact which humanities-based memory research can have on public or political debates?

**Further objectives of the workshop are to:**

- sketch the contours of a new field emerging from what could be called a paradigm shift from a traditional focus on relatively static cultural ‘products’ and ‘representations’ to dynamic and heterogeneous cultural ‘processes’ and ‘practices’,

- establish a network of expert EU scholars with shared interests across disciplines,

- develop a clear focus for high-impact breakthrough research on memory practices, i.e. a research agenda for those issues which should be consolidated to have the highest breakthrough impact on both scholarly and public debates, and

- establish the groundwork for future collaborative actions

Delegates will be able to prepare, in advance of the workshop, by reading a selection of papers on the issues, methods and theories touched upon in the presentations and working groups. This Reader will be made available at least one week before the Workshop.
PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

Tuesday 13 March 2012

Afternoon Arrival
8pm Informal drinks; dinner and snacks also available (Siebenschläfer Bar, Scharrnstrasse 22, 38100 Braunschweig, www.siebenschlaefer-bar.com)

Wednesday 14 March 2012

10.00-10.10 Welcome by Conveners
Felicitas Macgilchrist (Georg Eckert Institute, Germany)
Geert Jacobs (Ghent University, Belgium)

10.10-10.20 Welcome by Director of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research
Simone Lässig

10.20-10.40 Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)
TBA (Standing Committee for the Humanities, SCH)

10.40-11.00 Participant introductions

11.00-11.15 Coffee / Tea Break

11.15-12.30 SESSION 1: Memory Studies

11.15-12.00 Title tba
Andrew Hoskins (University of Glasgow, UK)
Led by Felicitas Macgilchrist (Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany)

12.00-12.45 Discussion

12.45-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15.30 SESSION 2: Practices

14.00-14.40 Memory Practices: Remembered pasts, Former presents
Endre Dányi (University of Lancaster, UK)
Felicitas Macgilchrist (Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany)

14.40-15.30 Discussion
Led by Leon Barkho (Jönköping University, Sweden)

15.30-16.00 Coffee / Tea Break

16.00-18.00 SESSION 3: Linguistic Ethnography

16.00-17.00 Linguistic ethnography: Understanding practitioners’ perspectives
Geert Jacobs (Ghent University, Belgium)
Daniel Perrin (Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland)

17.00-18.00 Discussion
Led by Kornelia Konczal (Polish Institute Berlin, Germany/Poland)

19.00 Dinner
Thursday 15 March 2012

09.30-12.30  SESSION 4: Memory Conflicts
Parallel Working Groups:

09.30-11.15  Memories of conflicts: Narration of trauma and guilt in Lithuanian borderline areas
Jurga Jonutyte (Vytauto Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania)

09.30-11.15  Digital memories of the Holocaust: Jewish identity in Belgrade
Nevena Daković (University of Belgrade, Serbia)

Alexanda Binnenkade (University of Basel, Switzerland)

11.15-11.30  Coffee / Tea Break

11.30-12.30  Discussion

12.30-14.00  Lunch

14.00-17.00  SESSION 5: Cultural Memory and Social Change
Parallel Working Groups

14.00-16.00  Memory work, professional vision and expertise
Tom Van Hout (Leiden University, Netherlands)

14.00-16.00  The cyclicity of news: How memory motivates news practice
Colleen Cotter (Queen Mary University of London, UK)

14.00-16.00  Watching contemporary history: Methodological explorations
Sabine Moller (University of Flensburg, Germany)

16.00-17.00  Discussion

17.00-17.30  Coffee / Tea Break

14.00-17.00  SESSION 6: Memorias Urbanas

17.30-18.30  Memorias Urbanas: Art and Memory
Juan Garaizabal (Memorias Urbanas Project, Spain)

19.30  Dinner

Friday 16 March 2012

09.30-12.00  SESSION 7: Follow-up activities

09.30-12.00  Discussion of follow-up activities and future plans

12.00-18.00  EXCURSION

12.00-18.00  Excursion to Berlin: Memorias Urbanas Art Project
Including simple lunch

18.30  End of Workshop and departure from Berlin
Objectives of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

The main tasks of the **ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)** are:

- to encourage interdisciplinary work through the independent evaluation of collaborative research proposals emanating from the scholarly community;
- to identify priority research areas and to play an integrative and co-ordinating role by creating links between research communities which in the Humanities are often small and fragmented.
- to contribute to the development of the ESF science policy agenda and to provide expert advice on science policy actions at the European level in the field of its responsibilities.

The Committee is well aware that the ESF is the only European Agency where the Humanities have a place next to the other sciences and where European projects are reviewed, developed and subsequently operated.

The Committee considers it all the more important to be heard as the voice of the Human Sciences in Europe and to continue pleading for a more prominent place for the Humanities in the European landscape.

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