

Futures of Memory Workshop Report

On Wednesday 15 February, a group of PhD students from the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies held a one-day interdisciplinary workshop on the 'Futures of Memory' at the University of Leeds. The workshop acted as a follow-up to the joint symposium on [Transnational Cultural Memory](#) held at King's College London in September 2016. With the aim of providing a critical and convivial setting for postgraduates to discuss their research, the event contributed to a broader debate about the future directions of memory studies.

The workshop brought together 15 PhD students and three keynote speakers from a range of institutions and disciplines, including Utrecht University, St. Andrews, University College Dublin, Oxford University, University College London and the University of Leeds. The speakers represented disciplines as varied as English Literature, German, Geography, History, Fine Art, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Film Studies. The intimate format enabled an environment in which participants were able to present their work and benefit from feedback and discussion.

Professor Ann Rigney, Convenor of Utrecht Memory Studies, opened the workshop by asking participants to think about what we mean when we talk about the 'futures of memory', and her opening remarks challenged participants to contemplate what they want from memory studies as a discipline. Rigney articulated the importance of critiquing and developing our existing frameworks and expanding our repertoire of case studies and points of reference. Drawing attention to the fluidity of memory, she suggested that memory is changing in character and that memory studies as a field should thus reflect this. Whilst memory studies as a field was largely initiated following the event of the Holocaust and in conjunction with our contemporaneous understanding of historicity, this understanding has to an extent developed and changed throughout the twenty-first century.

Susanne Knittel and Kári Driscoll, from Utrecht University, gave a keynote lecture on 'Memory after Humanism', which is the subject of their forthcoming issue of Leeds-based critical theory journal *Parallax*. This talk brought together discourses of posthumanism, animal studies and memory studies, in which they asked the question: what would a posthumanist memory studies look like? Highlighting the exclusionary mechanisms at work in the assumed humanist foundations of memory studies, they asked who or what can be an agent of memory under the current configuration. Their lecture was opened up to colleagues across the Faculty of Arts and the broader postgraduate community and provoked an engaging and critical discussion.

Each postgraduate panel consisted of speakers giving short position papers, followed by an extended period for discussion and feedback. The panels brought together new and developing trajectories of the field and included 'Rethinking the Archive', 'Empathy, Affect and Ethics', 'Critical Feminisms and Masculinities', 'Postcolonial and non-Western Memory Cultures', and 'Traumatic Geographies: Nation, Place and Space'. Professor Rigney, Dr Driscoll and Dr Knittel participated throughout the day and attendees benefited from their involvement and feedback. The workshop created a space for critical feedback and productive discussion focused on multi-disciplinary responses to the future of the field. In addition, it also enabled us to foster a collaborative postgraduate and ECR network of emerging memory studies scholars both at Leeds and beyond.

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