Northern Memory and Identity

University of Oulu, 2015
Cultural Memory Studies

Kuisma Korhonen
University of Oulu, 2015
(Cultural) Memory Studies

- Memory Studies or Cultural Memory Studies – a rapidly growing multidisciplinary field:
- Warwick Centre for Memory Studies
- Memory Studies at McGill
- The Centre for the Study of Cultural Memory at University of London
- The journal Memory Studies
- Memory Studies: Palgrave Mcmillan Book Series
Multidisciplinarity of Cultural Memory Studies

• Historiography
  – History of Ideas
  – Family History
• Archaeology
• Psychology
  – Psychoanalysis
  – Trauma Therapy
  – Cognitive Studies
• Neuroscience
• Philosophy
• Literary Studies
  – Life Writing
• Cultural Studies
• Art Research
  – Art History
  – Cinema Studies
  – Theatre Studies
  – Musicology
• Cultural Anthropology
• Sociology
• Women’s Studies
• Linguistics & Philology
• Human Geography
Methodological Pluralism

• Cultural memory studies – not a discipline, not even so much a field than *dialogue* between different disciplines, each with their own methodology

• Openness to various theoretical and methodological paradigms: dialogue between empirical brain research, psychoanalysis, historiographical research, anthropological field study, literary hermeneutics, etc.
Cultural Memory?

• Do we need the word "cultural memory" – why "history" or "tradition" is not enough?

1) How does culture affect individual memory?
   – "Memory" as literal

2) How do cultures "remember" the past?
   – "Memory" as metaphorical – elements of individual cognition are transferred into cultural analysis
   – The dangers and possibilities of the metaphor: might lead to false analogies, but also enables us to see new connections
## Jan Assmann: levels of memory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Memory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner (neuro-mental)</td>
<td>Inner, subjective time</td>
<td>Inner self</td>
<td>Individual memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social time</td>
<td>Social self, carrier of social roles</td>
<td>Communicative memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Historical, mythical, cultural time</td>
<td>Cultural identity</td>
<td>Cultural memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual and Communicative Memory

- Memory of the body – memory as neuromental process
- Sense of inner self and individual memory
- Trauma, repressed memories
- Oral tradition: witnessing, testimony
- Memories told (and not told) in family and community, habits, codes of behaviour
- History of language
Cultural Memory

- Material memory: archeological evidence, architecture, relics, museums, photographs, etc.
- Written memories: all written texts as material traces; confessions, memoirs, autobiography, life writing
- Institutional memory: rituals, archives, historiography, museums, monuments, street names
- Mediatized and fictional memory: popularized documents, historical fiction (novels, films, comics etc.), internet pages, computer games, etc.
- The Past as fantasy – Middle Earth...
History vs. Cultural Memory?

• Traditional questions of historiography:
  – what events really happened?
  – why did they take place the way they did?
  – how it really was?

• Questions of Cultural Memory Studies:
  – how do cultures and individuals ”remember” and ”forget”?
  – how do people understand their relation to the past and temporality?
  – How do different cultural institutions of recollection affect the way an individual or a collective understands his/her/its own identity?
Roots of "Cultural Memory"

- Henri Bergson – human temporality (durée) vs. objective time
- Sigmund Freud – repressed memories, trauma, mourning, "screen memories"
- Emile Durkheim – relation between individual and community
Roots: mémoire collective

- **Maurice Halbwachs** (1877-1945)
- French philosopher and sociologist
- Developed the notion of *collective memory*
- ”Frames of memory” – how different social groups hold different visions of the past
- An individual memory is always already social, affected by one or several different frames of memory – it is at the intersection of collective influences
Individual memory?

• Are there not individual, private sensual memories?
• Halbwachs: But how can we know what they mean without collective frame (language?)
  – Childhood memories affected by stories running in family, memories of travels affected by things we have heard and read, etc.
• Psychology and neuroscience: memorization is connected to language learning
1980’s: ”new cultural memory studies”

- Postmodern criticism of historiography
- The ”narrative turn” in social sciences
- Feminism: focus on the personal experience
- Trauma studies, Holocaust studies
- Cultural history and ”microhistories” (Annales-school)
- Pierre Nora – Les lieux de mémoire, ”realms of memory”: physical places and monuments, but also symbolic ”places”: literary works, rituals, etc.
Memory as Process

• "Memory" – not just store of imprints left by private experience, but a process where we structure our experiences within some larger collective frames of signification
• Not a passive container, but a continuously changing process
• Individual memories are affected by the very act of recollection
• "Cultural memory" is continuously evolving at the intersection of different discursive powers
  – Layered nature of tradition, different social formations offering their vision of time and memory
  – Ideological battles over "the past"
Narrative

• Individual narratives – collective narratives
• Postmodern society: ”death of Grand Narratives” (F. Lyotard)?
• Is history or life just a sequence of contingent events, open to different emplotments by historians? (H. White)
• Or is there some ”prefigurative narrativity” in history and life itself? (P. Ricoeur)
  – Human acts motivated by the way people see their place in some already existing cultural narratives
  – ”Narrative identity” – life as a story
From National to Transnational Memory

- Whereas Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* was tied to national memory of France, the more recent research has concentrated also on *transnational* or *travelling* memory.
- What meaning does cultural memory have for people in diaspora?
- How do rituals and formats of cultural remembering travel from one nation to another?
- How does global media (novels, movies, TV) affect to cultural memory?
Connective memory

• Andrew Hoskins: before remembering took place in the "scarcity culture": there were only few traces of the past left, so they had to be enriched by fiction
• Today we live "post-scarcity culture" – WWW records and transmits endless flow of memories
• From cultural memory we are moving to "connective memory" that use media like Facebook ja Instagram, and where postmodern "Internet tribes" share memories across borders