The Texture of Memory

Course Description:

Memory is essential to our understanding of ourselves, of our collective past and present and our existence as humans. But how does memory work? Which parts of our brain are responsible for our memories? What happens when these parts do not function? Can memory be manipulated? What role does memory play for the formation of identity? These are some of the questions we will address in this seminar. We will begin with learning about the general mechanisms of memory formation in the brain. We will take these findings to examine our own experiences and memories. From there we will proceed to study examples of individual, collective, and cultural memory from a variety of disciplines. We will learn how these memories are shaped and how they, in turn, shape us.

Objectives:

1. Learn general mechanisms of memory formation in the brain
2. Identify the circumstances under which vivid long term memories are formed
3. Explore the accuracy of memory
4. Develop an interdisciplinary model of memory
5. Examine the relationship between memory and narrative
6. Explore relationship between collective and individual memory
7. Explore how memory contributes to the formation of cultural identity

Required Texts
Frederick Douglass: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.
Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony. The Recovery of Tradition.

Readings (on Blackboard)
Arnold-de-Simine, Silke. “A New Type of Museum? and “Empathy and Its Limit in the Museum”
Alaida Assmann. “Transformations between History and Memory”
Burke, Peter. “History as Social Memory”
Bindas, Kenneth J. “Re-Remembering the Segregated Past: Race in American Memory”
Crane, Susan. “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum”
Draaisma, Douwe. “Reminiscences” and “The good son: A conversation with Oliver Sacks”
Galdos, Susan. “More than a Feeling”
Halbwachs, Maurice. Collective Memory (excerpt)
Hayashi, Robert. “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar Historical Site”
Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki and James D. Houston. Farewell to Manzanar (excerpts)
Joyce, James. “The Dead”
Macknik, Stephen L.; Martinez-Conde, S.; Blakeslee, Sandra. Sleights of Mind (excerpt)
Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire”
Proust, Marcel. Remembrance of Things Past (excerpt)
Schacter, Daniel. In Search of Memory (excerpts)
Wagener, Anthony et al. “Building Memories: Remembering and Forgetting of Verbal Experiences as Predicted by Brain Activity”
Young, James. The Texture of Memory (excerpt)

Films:
Nolan, Christopher. Memento
Hitchcock, Alfred. Marnie, Spellbound

Methods of Evaluation:

Attendance and participation (20 % of final grade)
Assignments (20 % of final grade)
(Research) Project (35% of final grade)
5 Short papers/ (25% of final grade)

Active participation and regular attendance are required. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade. Students are expected to actively engage in discussions and to complete all reading assignments prior to the class meetings in which they will be discussed. Note taking/annotating will be stressed

Assignments: there will be regular assignments that should be posted on blackboard prior to class meeting. The assignments will be evaluated as check + (5 pts.), check (3 points) or check – (1point). Each missing assignment will receive a zero.

Short papers: these short papers (700-900 words) will give you the opportunity to further engage with the course material. They are also designed to improve your writing and thinking. The topic for each paper will be distributed at least one week in advance of the due date.

Project: this project should reflect the relationship/interplay between the neurological basis of memory and its societal/collective component. Students will present their
projects in class at the end of the semester. Topics should be chosen in consultation with the instructors.

Here are some suggestions:

- a creative work (a memorial, a video, a fictional text, design of a museum exhibition) which is accompanied by a short discussion of the different kinds of memories it addresses
- an analysis of the works of art we have read/seen: what is the function of memory in this work? what kind of different memories are at work?
- history and collective memory: examine a historical event and its representation in the press at different times in history or geographical locations (for example: the march on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr, Hurricane Katrina)—what kind of memories are shaped?)
- interview different people about their memories of a specific event—analyze them in terms of differences, detail (sound, smell) etc.—what kind of collective memory emerges from these recollections?

Schedule

Jan 13 Introduction

15 I. Recalling Memories
Discussion: “flash bulb” memories

20 Discussion: music and memory
James Joyce, “The Dead” (BB)
Susan Galdos “More than a Feeling” (BB)

22 Discussion: smell and memory
Marcel Proust, excerpt of In Search of Lost Time (BB)
“The Nose, an Emotional Time Machine” (NY Times)
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/05/science/05angier.html?_r=0
1st short paper due

Feb 3 Discussion: false memories
M. K. Johnson: “Psychology of False Memories”
http://mechanism.ucsd.edu/teaching/w07/philpsych/johnson.falsememories.pdf
Elizabeth F. Loftus: “Creating False Memories”
http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm
Elizabeth F. Loftus: “Our Changeable Memories: Legal and Practical implications”

5 Discussion: manipulating memory
2nd short paper due

10 Discussion: suppressed memory
Daniel Schacter: “How the Past is Lost,” “Forgetting Abuse” (BB)

12 Discussion: Alzheimer’s Disease

17 Visit of MRI facility
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnetic_resonance_imaging
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional_magnetic_resonance_imaging
Anthony Wagener et al: “Building Memories: Remembering and Forgetting of Verbal Experiences as Predicted by Brain Activity” (BB)

III. Memory and Self
19 Discussion: Amnesia
“Amnesia and the Self that Remains When Memory is Lost”
3rd short paper due

24 Discussion: Memento

26 Discussion: autobiographic memory
Douwe Draaisma: “Reminiscences” and “The good son: A conversation with Oliver Sacks” (BB)

March 2-8 Spring Break

10 Autobiographic memory and The Life of Frederick Douglass

IV. Collective Memory
12 Maurice Halbwachs: Collective Memory (excerpt, BB)
4th short paper due
Pierre Nora: “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoir” (BB)

Peter Burke: “History as Social Memory” (BB)
Alaida Assmann: “Transformations between History and Memory”

Silke Arnold-de-Simine “A New Type of Museum? and “Empathy and Its Limit in the Museum” (BB)

5th short paper due

Robert Hayashi: “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar Historical Site” (BB)
Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston: Farewell to Manzanar (excerpts, BB)

Kenneth J. Bindas: “Re-Remembering the Segregated Past: Race in American Memory” (BB)
http://www.theglobalist.com/african-americans-african-immigrants-differ/
Mukoma Wa Ngugi: “African in America or African American?”
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/jan/13/race-kenya

V. Cultural Memory

April 2
Excursion: Fleming Museum (Civil War Exhibit)
Susan Crane: Crane, Susan. “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum” (BB)

7
Discussion of exhibit and Crane article

9
James Young, “The Texture of Memory” (excerpts, BB)

14
Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony

16
Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony

21
Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony

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“Virtual Iraq” (The New Yorker)
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/05/1908050519afa_fact_halpern?currentPage=all

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Conclusion