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Memories of the Future 29-30 March 2019

Keynote Speakers' Abstracts

Stephen Bann (Bristol)

Back to the Avant-Garde?

Embedded in the discourse of European Modernist art is the notion of the 'avant-garde'. Deriving initially from the momentum generated by the French Revolution, this term had almost lost its political signification by the end of the nineteenth century, but received in its place a broader cultural mission. Typified initially by the Italian Futurist movement, the 'advanced' art of the Western world ultimately abandoned its agitational character, but did not relinquish its claim to centrality. As late as 1970, Clement Greenberg could claim: 'the avant-garde is left alone with itself, and the full possession of the "scene"'. Yet precisely around that date the forward-looking rhetoric typical of the historical avant-garde encountered a challenge. Generally equated with a shift to 'Post-modernism', the new artistic idioms of the 1970s and 1980s were in effect increasingly engaged with historical themes and backward-looking postures that predated the hegemony of the 'avant-garde'. This was the case with rising American painters such as Marden and Twombly; new European movements like Italian Arte Povera (Kounellis and Paolini in particular); and the onset of new occasions for thinking 'outside the box', such as the exhibition, 'A New Spirit in Painting' (1981). Having myself contributed both to the rediscovery of the Modernist avant-garde in the 1960s/70s, and to the ensuing development of a 'post-modern' consensus, I will look again at the stakes involved in this confrontation.

Rebecca Goldman (Goldsmiths, University of London)

The Flexible Present: Non-Linear Temporalities, Politics and 'Pre's

This paper approaches the topic of memories of the future through a focus on the present. Beginning with Raymond Williams' understanding of the present as 'live', 'active' and 'flexible' (Williams 1977: 128), I argue the present is a temporality capable of expanding and contracting, stretching and condensing. If this is the case, I consider what such an understanding of the present implies for the relations between pasts, presents and futures. Does the present incorporate the past and future? Is there something distinctive or excessive about the past and future? If the notion of memories of the future suggests non-linear temporality, what does a concentration on the present bring to multi-directional times? I address these questions by examining the 'pre' of presents; drawing on theories of pre-emergence (e.g. Williams 1977), pre-emption (e.g. Massumi 2005, Amoore 2013) and prehension (e.g. Whitehead 1929), I explore the present in terms of a simultaneous 'just-beforeness' and 'just-afterness'. While these are not synonymous with the past and future, they offer, I suggest, some productive ways to think about the significance of temporality and its entanglement in ethics and politics.

Biography

Rebecca Coleman is Reader in the Sociology Department, Goldsmiths, University of London, where she researches and teaches across sociology, media and cultural studies and feminist theory on topics such as visual sociology, bodies and materiality, temporality and especially presents and futures, and inventive methodologies. Recent publications include a special issue of *Sociological Review* on 'Futures in Question: Theories, Methods, Practices' (co-edited with Richard Tutton, 2017), and a special section of *Theory, Culture and Society* (co-edited with Liz Oakley-Brown, 2017). Her current research, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, is called Mediating Presents: Producing 'the now' in Contemporary Digital Culture.

Anna Reading (King's College, London)

A Future Memory Manifesto

In 1905 George Santayana wrote, 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'. Yet, despite all our archiving, recording, witnessing, remembering, memorialising, commemorating, and studying of looking back, humankind seems condemned: humanity and the planet are riven with wars, genocides, forced migrations and the daily extinctions of global warming. What then is the future of Memory Studies? Can you imagine a future way of studying memory that makes a difference? Perhaps we are condemned not because we remember too little but because we have forgotten to imagine the future.

This keynote proposes a Future Memory Manifesto – as an honest provocation to dialogue – not as a prescription. I explore how understanding the political economy of memory – how mnemonic labour accrues as mnemonic capital – highlights the importance of understanding the labour of the imaginary and capital of the future. I argue for innovative ways in which memory scholars can and should make use of disruptive methods - the utopian method and arts-based methodologies. I argue for an uprooting of memory work and Memory Studies from the soil of neurotypical human normalcy to an approach that grows from the insights of mnemonic neurodiversity with an openness to the full range of human senses. I argue for an extension of the growing emphasis on socially engaged and collaborative activist memory work into peaceful memory work. I argue for decentring the canon through non-Western approaches to the study of memory; and I argue for recognition of memory beyond human memory, including the rights of memory for non-human persons. What would you include in a Future Memory Manifesto? And, importantly, what mnemonic language might you craft and put to work?

Biography

Anna Reading is Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries at King's College, London, UK. She is Director of the Arts and Humanities Research Institute and the REACH Space at King's. She is the author and editor of numerous books including *Gender and Memory in the Global Age* (2016), *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles* with Tamar Katriel (2015), *Save As...Digital Memories* with Andrew Hoskins and Joanne Garde-Hansen, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (2002), *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media* with Colin Sparks (1999), *The Media in Britain* (with Jane Stokes) (1999) and *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism* (1992). She is the author of seven plays produced in theatres in India, Poland, the UK and the US. She is the joint Managing Editor of the journal *Media, Culture and Society*. Some of her recent socially engaged memory work *Moving Hearts: Exploring the Right to Belong* can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/wVHFnnbFW1g>.