

CALL FOR PAPERS

POLISH-GERMAN POST/MEMORY: AESTHETICS, ETHICS, POLITICS

Conference to be held at Indiana University (Bloomington), April 19-21, 2007

Organizing committee:

Prof. Justyna Beinek, Indiana University (conference chair)

Prof. Bill Johnston, Indiana University

Prof. Kristin Kopp, University of Missouri, Columbia

Prof. Joanna Nizynska, Harvard University

Conference description

In the aftermath of the fall of the communist government in Poland and of the Berlin Wall in Germany, historians of both countries have brought new perspectives for examining post-war Polish-German history, particularly the flight and expulsion of Germans from Polish lands. These new perspectives have their counterparts in literary treatments of and references to the separation of Poles and Germans as well as the publication of numerous memoirs by those who experienced the atrocities of the war and the post-war events. The result has been a re-examination of this period of Polish-German relations which has contributed to a public debate over the meaning of this shared history. In the course of this debate, established notions of guilt and innocence, fact and fiction, justice and forms of redress are all contested.

This interdisciplinary conference addresses how this history has been configured over the course of the postwar period.

Although we understand the flight and expulsion of the Germans as a historical event, in organizing this conference we wish to consider the types of meta-narratives that have shaped Polish-German cultural and political relations. What traces of these events can be found in the cultural memories of two nations with such complicated pasts more than sixty years after the end of the war? How have these memories affected Polish and German self-narratives? How have they been mobilized to affect one nation's imagination of the other? What kinds of cultural exchanges have memories of these events stirred? What is their cultural status and what are the mechanisms of their manipulation for political gain? How do the major discursive tropes of *presence* and *absence* enter into the memories and post-memories of people, places, and times? How do memories of the flight and expulsion differ from "post-memory" and how does the social position of the one who remembers affect the process of remembering and forgetting?

We are interested in the ways Poles and Germans have configured and politicized their respective histories of traumatic events. What, politically and culturally, was at stake in promoting certain paradigms of cultural memory at various moments in postwar history? What aesthetic, ethical, and political strategies were employed in transmitting specific social constructions of cultural memory to subsequent generations?

In the expectation that the analysis of these issues will influence discussions in trauma and memory studies as well as other fields addressing German-Polish history, we plan to use the conference as the starting point for an edited volume of essays.

To share in this exploration of the culture of memory (and the memory of culture), we invite the participation of scholars working on literature, film, and performance as well as on the material culture, cultural studies, politics, ethics, and religion. We seek papers on the following topics:

Presentation Topics:

I. Memory in/as Objects: Material Culture

- circulation of objects: e.g., flea markets with their promotion and circulation of things post-German in Polish culture (including Hitleriana)
- collecting: the culture and ethics of private and institutional collecting
- co-habitation: “things post-German” in Polish homes

2. Memory as Representation: Literature, Film, Photography, Theater, Performance

- how do artists use appeals to memory/post-memory to position themselves and their work at various moments in the postwar period?
- artistic memories and artistic post-memories (including artistic dialogues, e.g., Gunter Grass with Stefan Chwin and Pawel Huelle)
- family albums (e.g., Christa Wolf)
- staging memory, re-creating the unknowable
- (post) memory and the imagination

3. Memory and Time

- what was at stake for German and Polish families in assuring that certain constructions of memory were passed on to subsequent generations?
- how do victims remember? How do their children and grandchildren? How does the memory pass through generations? How does the family story translate into the public sphere?
- how do the survivors’ children create their post-memory (e.g., how do they deal with the gaps in the story)? How do they represent this post-memory?
- what are the tropes of this representation (e.g., the notion of the “trace,” which is often applied to the Gdansk school of prose)

-what are the dynamics of post-memory? What shapes it? What creates it in the Polish/German context?

4. Memory and the City: The Creation of Space

- the positions of Gdansk, Szczecin, Kolobrzeg etc., on the cultural maps of Poland and Germany
- the tourist industry; tourism as a sign/aspect of (post-)memory
- how has memory/post-memory been mobilized to promote tourism?
- the urban markers of memory and the identity of the city
- imaginary cities (e.g., the re-creating of German cities like Breslau in Polish mystery novels)

5. Memory and Politics: Memory as Symbolic Capital

- memory and the state (e.g., the institutionalization of memory and identity formation)
- memory as political capital (e.g., what's at stake in presenting a historical event as a foundational trauma?)
- official memory vis-à-vis unofficial memories (institutionalized memory vs. private memories)
- the sanitation of memory and its effects during communism (Poland and DDR)
- divided memory in divided Germany
- memory and (post-)memory in the EU

6. Memory and Healing

- redemptive/compensatory/therapeutic narratives and their function in Polish and German culture (including political problems arising from redemptive narratives)
- the presence and preservation of "good memories;" where are they?

7. Extending the Paradigm: Polish/German discourse and Academia

- what is the theoretical/ethical/political/critical value of the discussion of Polish-German issues; what can other disciplines learn from this?
- what is the future of Polish/German memory?

Abstract submission

The conference organizers seek abstracts of 250 words to be submitted electronically together with a resume to: Justyna Beinek (jbeinek@indiana.edu), Bill Johnston (billj@indiana.edu), Kristin Kopp (koppkr@missouri.edu), and Joanna Nizynska (nizynska@fas.harvard.edu). The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2006; the results of the review process will be announced by October 1, 2006.