



TRAUMA STORIES

Memory and Representation in the Humanities and the Sciences

New College, University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh)

Date: September 2-4, 2009.

Location: New College, Edinburgh.

Deadline: January 31, 2009.

Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words and a 100-word bio to trauma.stories@ed.ac.uk. Panel proposals are also welcome.

Organizers: Mary Cosgrove (German), Peter Davies (German), Hannah Holtschneider (Jewish Studies), Linda Tym (English), Kamran Rastegar (Islamic Studies).

The aim of the interdisciplinary conference is to identify and, where necessary, question disciplinary assumptions about trauma and memory and their representation in a variety of subjects by encouraging cross-disciplinary exchange.

Within the Humanities and Sciences there exist very diverging understandings of what constitutes »trauma« and the validity of »memory«. We are interested in hearing about the different »stories« of trauma and memory that emerge in specific subjects and disciplines. The concept of »trauma stories« is thus deliberately paradoxical and challenges assumptions concerning the idea that trauma, as an event that is external to the individual affected by it, cannot be narrated or represented in language.

The idea that memories of trauma transfer from the individual to the collective level has enjoyed wide currency in the Humanities recently, particularly in theories concerning the inexplicability of historical and natural disasters, and it is often underpinned by powerful ideological claims. How do such theories harmonise with the evidence from psychology and cognitive neuroscience that show traumatic memories, as expressed by the individual, are often highly inaccurate? One main question thus concerns the distinctive »stories« that different disciplines »tell« in order to establish a traumatic object of enquiry.

In our cross-disciplinary context, the concept of the »story« thus goes beyond the fictional tale to encompass disciplinary representation generally. What do literary scholars, psychologists, historians mean when they speak about »trauma« and »memory«? Where does their understanding of the object of enquiry most converge/diverge?

Paper proposals are welcomed which address critically the representation of trauma and/or memory in a particular discipline or across disciplinary boundaries, or which problematise or identify controversial areas in the representation of trauma and/or memory. Studies of individual authors/theorists/texts are also welcome if they address the issues in question. List of disciplines (non-exhaustive): Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, Psychology, History, Philosophy, Film Studies, Religious Studies, Human Cognitive Neuroscience.